JILL TO AL FEBRUARY 21, 1942

Hotel Stoddard
La Crosse, Wisconsin

Saturday nite
My darling -

This is the ski weekend you heard so much about -- and it's been so much fun so far that it makes me all the more sad that we can't share these simple (well - they are simple, next to bars, movies and the competitive labor market) joys together.

The weekend is really a lot more elaborate & weekend-ish than I had expected. For one thing, La Crosse is 400 miles from Chicago, compared to the place we went to last weekend, which was only 90. We left at 4 yesterday -- Friday afternoon on - joy, oh joy! -- the Burlington Zephyr. I take back everything I said about the Western trains -- this one was the tops. We got here about 8 last night - ate & went to bed. There are 5 of us -, Betz, Swish her sister & 2 boys. Jim McElroy & Doug Carroll. They were really going alone 1st - being wonderful skiers - but we girls kind of homed in on them.

And guess what! The train went thru Rockford. I felt like jumping off the train when I saw the barracks. Well, I know where I'll spend the succeeding weekends.

Today's skiing was swell. The hills are really lovely around here & the one that has the tow on it is just swell.

I hope this letter gets to you - considering I don't know your company or anything.

Darling, I hope you're well and relatively happy. It's sort of stupid for me to say a lot of comforting things - or issue enjoinders to be brave etc. - You don't need them and, in a way, I'm not in a position to say them. After all, I am a girl & unfortunately we still - & probably will have it very easy indeed. And, in a way, I feel guilty having a good time without you - altho I know you wouldn't have it so. I'll write more when I'm surer of your address & am less chilled. Just wanted to say hello....Your Loving Jill

JILL TO AL FEBRUARY 25, 1942

The University of Chicago Wednesday
Chicago, Illinois 9:30 nite

Darling -

I'm writing this in an awful hurry because I want it to get out tonite. I just spoke to Vic - been calling them all night - and found out where you are. I've really been awfully worried - well, maybe worried isn't the right word but I can't think of anything else to describe the awful hollow feeling inside me. When I heard you'd left Camp Grant Saturday I felt just awful. I would have never gone skiing had I known you would be taken away in such short notice. You yourself assured me that you'd be around Chicago for just weeks - and I had no reason to believe otherwise. So forgive me for my ill-timed trip (incidentally, I did tell you I would probably go).

I wrote you from La Crosse Saturday to Camp Grant but don't suppose you got it.

Not much new. Job same except they are threatening me with all kinds of reprisals if I'm late again. So this week I'm getting up at 7:15 regularly & walking to the LC. - remindful of those Mondays & Wednesdays when we used to brave the storms together.

Please, darling, write me as soon as you get this letter - well, after the day's maneuvers are done, anyway. I love you and miss you so much. Maybe if & when you're settled on the coast or somewhere, we can be together again.

And please, darling, believe me. I really think you're the only man in the world I'll ever love. No, I haven't been seeing other men - except at a distance. This just arises out of a deep inner conviction.

Hey - my birthday was yesterday. Remember?

All my love,

Jill

and I'm so glad you're here. For a while I actually thought they'd shipped you to Tokyo!

JILL TO AL FEBRUARY 26, 1942

Coronet Magazine
Chicago

Al dearest --

Am enclosing letter from Gosnell which I opened several days ago because, if it was important enough, I thought I could wire you about it. Well, it isn't..

Still no word from you. Of course this is 8:40 A.M.--I just got to the office--aren't I good?--so I couldn't very well expect there to be. But I do wish you'd write soon. I've been very worried--as you may well imagine. Even after the relief of hearing that you were safe at camp not an impossible distance from here last night, I was still sufficiently disturbed to let the awful Truman *[Jill's cat, n.b.]* climb in with me. (Diana was with her mother and I was with my gnawing pain of Al-missing).

Say, how's about my coming to visit you the first weekend you don't have to devote to sharp practices and maneuvers? I don't know exactly where Paris is, although the last time I saw it... Well, skip that. Really, darling, I want to see you so much. Couldn't I come down next weekend or the weekend after? I can take a sleeper if the distance is under 1000 miles, which I'm sure it is.

More later. And WRITE! Your Jill

JILL TO AL FEBRUARY 27, 1942

Coronet Magazine

Chicago

Dearest--

I feel a little silly tossing off these reams of unanswered mail--a little like a character in one of these epistolary short stories, where the plot starts out with a letter headed 'darling' and ends up with "dear Sir". Who knows, by next week, I too may be writing "Mr. deGrazia", following it with a stiff and very formal note.

I'm enclosing another letter from the Office of Emergency Management, this one unopened. And I really don't have time to say much, this being on office time, except to put in another request for some word from you. Really, if you are seriously intending to end what I had come to consider---and what ever gave me that idea?--a rather enduring affair, you couldn't be more clever about it. At this distance, your silence is unbreakable. I can shed no tears, break no vases, offer no reasonable rebuttals, nor shriek with rage. All I can do is write--unanswered letters. One more request: how about calling me after Jack Benny on Sunday night? Collect, of course. I've thought about calling you, but discussion with an omniscient fellow in the cigar store downstairs convinced me otherwise. He said that I wouldn't be able to get you, even if it were person-to-person.

I've measured the distance between Chicago and Paris (Tenn.) on the office Atlas with my little pica rule, and it doesn't seem very far. About 390 miles by air to Nashville, which is about 100 miles from Paris. I imagine there are through trains, and certainly through planes to either of these two places. So, whenever you say...

Darling, I'll love you always, a fact which makes me increasingly unhappy as your silence persists.

Jill
You're probably fully healthy by now. Do you want any good books -- or some not so good? Mens sana and all that ...

HE had just turned into his twenty-second year, healthy, fast food for the slavering Army. Seventy-three days after Japanese airplanes had dismembered the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, Draft Board Number 9 of Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, USA, called upon this specimen to go redeem the National Honor. It was simple. Send him a piece of paper in curt summons; the postman enjoys delivering it: 1235 Addison Street, the two-story grey stone house, the one with the not always amiable black dog.

The day was February 19, 1942, downcast skies, the temperature freezing. On the same day, a tentacle of the giant Japanese octopus was reaching in to partially destroy Darwin, Australia; another tentacle even touched India. He arose before dawn, leaving the warm body of his girl Jill slumbering upon their jouncy bed in the little room in back. (It was a sign of the times that unmarried young lovers might sleep together in a respectable family setting.) He bent down to kiss her one last time. The black dog by the bed wagged his tail limply; no low whistle to get him up. The two young brothers were sleeping in the front bedroom; their call to arms would come one day, unlikely as it appeared just now.

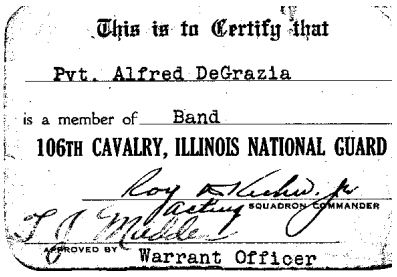
His mother, more dutiful than his consort, fried him bacon and eggs, made toast, poured him juice and coffee; they had agreed that she would not provide anything so special as waffles or hash. His father had preceded him to the washroom, where the son, soon to become EM #3631-9558, now shaved. It was considered that seeing the soldier off to war was a man's job -- said with a smile; the Dad wouldn't have it otherwise. Little else was said.

His father walked alongside him up the cold pavements, north on Herndon, then over toward Clark Street. The ragged City was looming up, shaping itself out of the dark, about to lurch heavily into the War Effort. A clutch of types slouched disconsolate about the premises of the Draft Board. Soon they had to pile into a trolley car. Then off they went, past Wrigley Field: "Home of the Chicago Cubs," with an electric hiss and metallic clanking. Dad was left standing.

Whereas the Recruit, now riding the streetcar, was pulling himself together as a soldier, getting into the mood, the role, the act. How do you behave -- unsurprised, uneager, unashamed, not too sympathetic, unaggressive, not too much of a groupie, not snappishly for or against orders, not ideological, not up front, not a laggard -- exhibiting little of your education, loves, travels, workaday life, or any military experience:

Military experience! Last year his 106th Cavalry Regiment had gone South -- old friends, their horses had just been taken away, someone told him, the large black big-bellied steeds, from their riders, from Johnny Dearham, Jim Cowhey, Frenchy

1941. The 106th Cavalry regiment. The Black Horse Troop. Al is first from the right. He played the trumpet in the band.



This is to Certify that

Pvt. Alfred DeGrazia

is a member of Band

106TH CAVALRY, ILLINOIS NATIONAL GUARD

SQUADRON COMMANDER

APPROVED BY Warrant Officer

Certificate of Service in the 106th Cavalry Regiment.

Duvall, Bassdrum Beck, hey, guys, how're the shit-kickers in the hot swamps? Hadn't learned much, ridden some, gentleman's outfit, but not gentlemen, just nice guys with a plain spacious club at the Armory off Chicago Avenue near the Lake. He had been too busy with his rag-bag of jobs and getting into Jill's pants and playing around with her to spend much time drinking and card-playing or even riding with the gang; then he went off to Columbia University Law School and had to quit, so the Black Horse Troop had gone South without him.

There were a dozen or so recruits in the trolley car, and shortly they paused to pick up another gang. All were ordered off at the

southern end of the Loop and led over to a dilapidated building. It was an area where small loft businesses and marginal enterprises might hold a losing grip on the Chicago economy. He had actually worked only a few steps away for a couple of months just recently, with Franklin Meine and Harold Hitchens and the rest of the crew that was revising *Nelson's Encyclopedia*, and these characters would in a few minutes be arriving at work unknowing of his fate. He felt a pang of nostalgia, one of his weaknesses.

As the rookies entered and approached the decrepit elevator shaft, a sign greeted them with: "Civilians only! All others walk up." He tried sarcasm: "Now you guys know what you're in for!" and they laughed; they knew, alright. So up the iron stairs they trudged to where a lot of men congregated, and they turned over their identity slips to some clerks who were continually hollering out names, and he met one of his students, from East Chicago, that's where he had been teaching American Government, at Indiana University there, last semester. The teacher had disappeared from the scene, but not before the Dean had given him a little tea party, sending him off as a hero; the faculty and staff felt just fine at making this sacrifice on behalf of the War Effort. He said ironically to his former student, "Well, now you can see the practical side of American Government."

They rode out to Camp Grant together, a couple of hours from the City, so the man came to feel better, but that was the last seen of him. The Lake View draftee was used to High Mobility, and would have much more of it -- "the last I saw of him was..": it will match thousands of encounters to come, companies, battalions, boat loads, landing party loads, visiting parties, gangs on leave, detachments, friendlies, allies, enemies, co-belligerents, crowds of faces of all degrees of cognizance, as expendable as ammunition.

They spent much of the time with their clothes off, bundled in their arms, and holding an envelope that they were told would be more important than themselves before long, because it would become "Your Record!" and there would be nothing but the Guardhouse for them without that folder. And the dog-tags that soon come their way: what religion? (he answered "Catholic" because he wasn't told he could say "non-sectarian");what blood type? "B" the Army told him

after drawing his blood -- the Army thinks ahead: what are the last two things you will ever need? A blood transfusion and a prayer in your cultic jargon. And then the woolen khaki uniform, complete from the overseas cap to the high-laced thick shoes, none of it fitting him well, no stitch of distinction, badge, medal, stripe, unit affiliation, nothing -- just quintessential General Issue, the perfect G.I.

The medical examination caused no trouble; the shots were a pain -- smallpox, typhoid, tetanus vaccinations, blood samples for syphilis and blood-types -- and a couple of guys got sick and vomited; sore in the arms and feverish, nobody was feeling too well. Many of them had been the honored guests of sending-off parties, and had drunk themselves sick the night before. And nearly everybody, of course, was smoking cigarettes by the pack. Not to mention that the stuff dumped upon your metal plate at mealtime was not gourmet cooking or even fast food.

As Our Hero glumly edged through the chow-line, he heard a cheery bellow, "Al de Grazia!" and looked about; it was Tom Stauffer, stalwart and relaxed, a Big Intellectual on Campus camouflaged in fatigue greens, nestling a huge pot between his long legs and peeling potatoes; they laughed, exchanged a few words, and that was the end of him.

Without regard to the misery and stupor of the newcomers, uncaring of their hangovers and agonized heads, their custodians administered to them beautifully designed and pretested examinations, whose scores would affect their placement in the infinite variety of Army jobs, from rifleman to electronic technician, and determine whether they might apply for Officer Candidates School.

The psychiatrist, like the rest, was handling men fast, a couple of questions and then if the guy seemed to be a nervous wreck or claimed to be a creep or a homosexual or congenital criminal, they put him aside, examined him later and maybe sent him away to bother the rest of society.

When our recruit was beckoned into one of the dozen cubicles, the psychiatrist within asked, is there anything in the way of medical information you have not yet provided, or have you any other kind of

problem -- you know, "Problem!" -- that is bothering you? The Recruit ponders for a moment, and said, well, I don't know what's to be done about it, but I worry a little with this trick shoulder of mine; it slips out of joint easily, I might dislocate it while thrusting a bayonet, or maybe in hand-to-hand combat. The medic looks at him as if he had found the prize nut of the day, but then says it would not matter and passes him along hurriedly. He probably had a good story to tell at mess.

It wasn't an hour later that the draftee, now Private in the Army of the United States, found himself standing at a desk before an Assignment Corporal, who put soldiers onto their Army career path -- headed for extermination, or for a cushy seat in the Quartermaster Corps, and who would it be but Stanley Beves, a student from the correspondence courses in politics that he offered through the University of Chicago this last year, who just now cannot talk politics but is delighted -- he got a good grade, and, with a glance at the long line waiting behind this recruit, told him that he, Stanley, was assigned permanently to Camp Grant, where life wasn't bad, and, then, remarking the Recruit's proficiency as a musician, with experience in the administration of bands, he said, "I can get you into the Camp Grant Band. Would you like to be assigned to Camp Grant?"

Just imagine, the recruit told himself, fast as lightning, you can be at a great place, near home, living with pussycat, doing some of the things you are best at, terrific!, but then he said, "Well, I'm in the War now. This wouldn't be much of a war. I wouldn't feel right. How can I get a little closer to the action. How can I get to where I can become an officer after a while," and Stanley, instead of berating him for a fool and assigning him forthwith to the Camp Grant Station Band for the Good of the Country, looks at him with a slightly envious regard, yet a friendly look, and says that he could probably get into officer's training soon enough from where he would be sending him; he labeled him as "Branch Immaterial", and put him down for shipment with a gang of other guys, saying, wryly, "It's a secret where."

It was the last time that he would see Stanley. The Recruit knew little about the army or war, yet thought he might control everything -- he had a streak of megalomania. Still, he felt less proud than dismal as he walked away from Stanley's desk and its promise, for he

remembered that he was in love, hence, as soon as he could, he called, home, there to learn from his kid brother Vic that Jill had gone off on a skiing trip with some friends to La Crosse, Wisconsin, whereupon he felt jealous and neglected. She had spoken of it longingly. Still, she should have stayed with the folks and worn black for a couple of days anyhow, he wanted to tell the world -- but he never told anybody of such thoughts anyhow, anytime, never.

He groused about the barracks grounds, itching and scratching in his new Army uniform; it had been tossed to him piece by piece at the warehouse. His civilian clothes had been sent home; the Army was insistent upon this; the U.S. Mails obliged. Tomorrow, he reflected, will tell me where I'll be and it will be a real army camp where I'll be enjoying the experience of a new gang of guys, and then afterwards I would arrange to see her somehow. So the day and the night passed, and the germs of tetanus, small pox and typhoid made his arms hurt, while a fever disturbed his sleep.

The next morning he knew that he was heading toward the Southland: his mimeographed Special Order, tucked in his folder, told him so. A railroad took them there, a clumsy troop train hitched onto a freight train, powered by a steam locomotive. There was track all around the USA in those times, up every alley and byway. No longer was so much of it overgrown and rusting. You could still get anywhere and nowhere by train -- with most Army camp sites located in Nowhere -- and every rusty tank-car, flatcar, boxcar, and battered coach was employed, every rail shining pridefully with use. He merged now into a roaring obstructive nuisance such as blocked the roads in those war days when an overpass was rare. As his car banged over the crossings he well remembered waiting inside a bus at one and then another of them, going to and from the classes he taught at Indiana University, those times when he was impatient to get home to the Midway and cursing the hundred-car conglomerates screeching and rattling by. He had changed places, but it was from the frying pan into the fire. Ugly, ugly, too, foul upon all the senses, uglier than battle!

AL TO JILL FEBRUARY 24, 1942

My only darling,

You were very inconsiderate to take off on a pleasure trip the day I gave up my rights as a citizen, freeman, and happy lover. It was such a moment for a token gesture of attachment. As matters turned out, it didn't make much of a practical difference, since I couldn't get leave to see you, but the fact of your deliberate action was painful to me. I realize, however, that I am in no position to make demands and hereby renounce any expectations implied in past agreements. If I felt you were splurging your id because of our engagement, I would be very sorry for you and myself.

So much for a page as dismal as the weather here. The skies spit on us day after day, splattering red mud on our disconsolate, stooped forms and adding to the nostalgia of everyone in the camp. Camp Tyson is new, with all the evil connotations of the word. No books, no service club, no established routines in many cases, no communication with the outside world. Paris is the nearest town. For the cost of a bus trip one can get the variety a new kind of monotony affords. He can pay twice as much for a theatre, gape at women, & pick up a girl at a price. He can walk on cement, see seniles, admire babies and jostle civilians.

For four weeks our battery is confined to post, going through a so-called stiff training period. After that, we can get week-end leaves. Chicago is too far for a one and a half-day leave and I won't be able to come to Chicago except on leave. However, there is a fair chance of my leaving here after a month for officers' training school for the Adjutant's General Office and, of course, always the chance of an unexpected transfer order coming out of Washington. There is nothing hard about it all but much that is wearying and dull. Men sit on their bunks, light cigarettes, and agree silently when someone says, "Here we sit, waiting for the war to end." Then the whistle blows and we learn about keeping our noses clean, and something about first aid. When all is done, we resume our passive state, known in the

Army as "As you were!", spoken in threatening, harsh, and clipped tones.

The archetypical gang hanging around the barracks stoop at Camp Tyson, Paris Tennessee, waiting for chow call. Our man is on the second step.

Recruits at Camp Tyson, Tennessee. Our man with a fag

There is a brighter side. We eat enough and there is a definite attempt to treat the drafted men as human and capable of some degree of reasoning. The problem presents itself of draftees being more intelligent and better educated than the non-coms, though not as well trained. It is at once a joy and a horror to hear our sergeant talk. I have never, so help me, heard the English language butchered so finally and completely. The man is a rara avis and he only uses one or two swear words.

And the men oh the men. The comic strips don't do them justice. In my barrack are the Brooklynites of song & fable, the West Side Chicagoans who carry with them the aura of the Behind the Yards district, all with a sugar icing of Comanche Indians and Minnesota Swedes. Inevitably there is a Brooklyn Jew who is a dialect artist. And there are Irishmen, Italians (some very good-looking ones, too) and some real Western types. The Balloon Barrage is getting only above-average IQs, as shown by the general army test given us. All in all, the men get along with each other very well and I have seen hardly any

friction either horizontally or vertically in the army hierarchy. Right now, I can hardly write because that damned Oklahoman next to me and I are laughing so hard at some joke about 2 men trying to get in the same foxhole.

All in all our situation is not impossible or even serious. Our basic premise is our love. From there we can work. I hope that you are capable of the adjustments necessary and I think you are. You may be the wife of an army officer but that isn't bad, not unbearably bad. I'm sure you love me enough (in your unique way) to even love the complicating environment which embroils me. Please keep your eyes on the future rather than a weekend on skis, if you can. You will be happier. Presumably, both of us in regretting parts of our life histories will not project the same regret-causing acts into the future.

--Oh hell, quit this generalizing, soldier boy. Tell the girl you love her and only the prospect of being with her sometime soon makes you above the level of a Kitchen Police.

Send me Johnny's address, darling, and write me soon, like a good girl. I'll write in two days.

Yours in passionate memory,

Al
Next day - Wednesday, I think
Dearest,

We worked like dogs today. We drilled in the morning and cleaned out our barracks. We cleaned our rifles and what a job that was. We exercised until the sergeants got tired. Despite your opinion of my physical condition, you will probably be pleased to hear that I am in very good physical shape relative to most of the men here. They were puffing, panting, and squirming with soreness but I merely feel good after all that. So you see. You let the inevitability of logic deceive you (1. He doesn't exercise, 2. he is soft.) Anyhow, the day has been too healthy to bear. I'd rather be soft and civilized. I'm not trying to compensate for any feelings of weakness in my youth.

More about the balloon barrage. Several battalions have already been sent out. Two are in Seattle, one in San Diego, one in Panama. Chances are this outfit & myself, if I stick, will be sent to Frisco or N.Y.C. Not bad, eh? Then you can come and live with me. I wouldn't invite Truman *[see: Jill's letter, Feb. 26]* to live in Paris, such a hole it is.

You are so lovely & so sweet that I think this hill-billy will call his Jill-filly next Sunday at 8 and -- --, you had better be there waiting. Collect, too.

Again yours,

Al

Enclosed February 25, 1942

Dear Al,

Received this & am forwarding it to you. Also am enclosing the $ for the key.

Al Somit

AL TO JILL FEBRUARY 27, 1942

Dearest Jill

Your letter came awhile ago and I was thrilled by what you said, though yesterday I was enraged and bitter over your fair-weather song in your La Crosse letter. I had read it after staggering out of the battery kitchen, twelve hours of the hardest work imaginable, - washing and tossing around aluminum cans the size of bathtubs without rest, and then later, along with your letter was a letter from the Civil Service Comm. talking about jobs at $2600-5600.-- Would I like one? Would I like one!

I am now on permanent KP every other day, not for insubordination, though I could many a time slip into that. It is hard to hold my temper at some of these goofs parading around

here with stripes on their shoulders. The reason, mind you, for being on KP, the dirtiest and toughest job in the camp is because I don't need the training the other ones are receiving. That I don't, but I would rather be bored & have more time to myself. Oh well, this won't last too long I hope. Chances are pretty good for packing my tent & stealing away in another three weeks -- just imagine -- out of the ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- hole here in that short time. How lucky I would feel if it happened! But I'm waiting till then to start feeling lucky. *[The numerous dashes denote Al's refurbished, recollected vocabulary.]*

But to you, my darling, I will be very sweet & gentle. I need it and you - the gentleness & the one to whom to be gentle.

I want you to have fun, but don't rub it in. Just as I want to be sympathized with, but I don't want to be mothered or pitied or doctored. That is the extent of my interaction. Except, of course, that I want to love you very much & do despite this or that distance. Believe me, only the army could do it.

Take care of yourself and I'll do the same.

Love,

Al

(Later: and more love after receiving your last letter. Will reply right away)

End of February 1942 letters