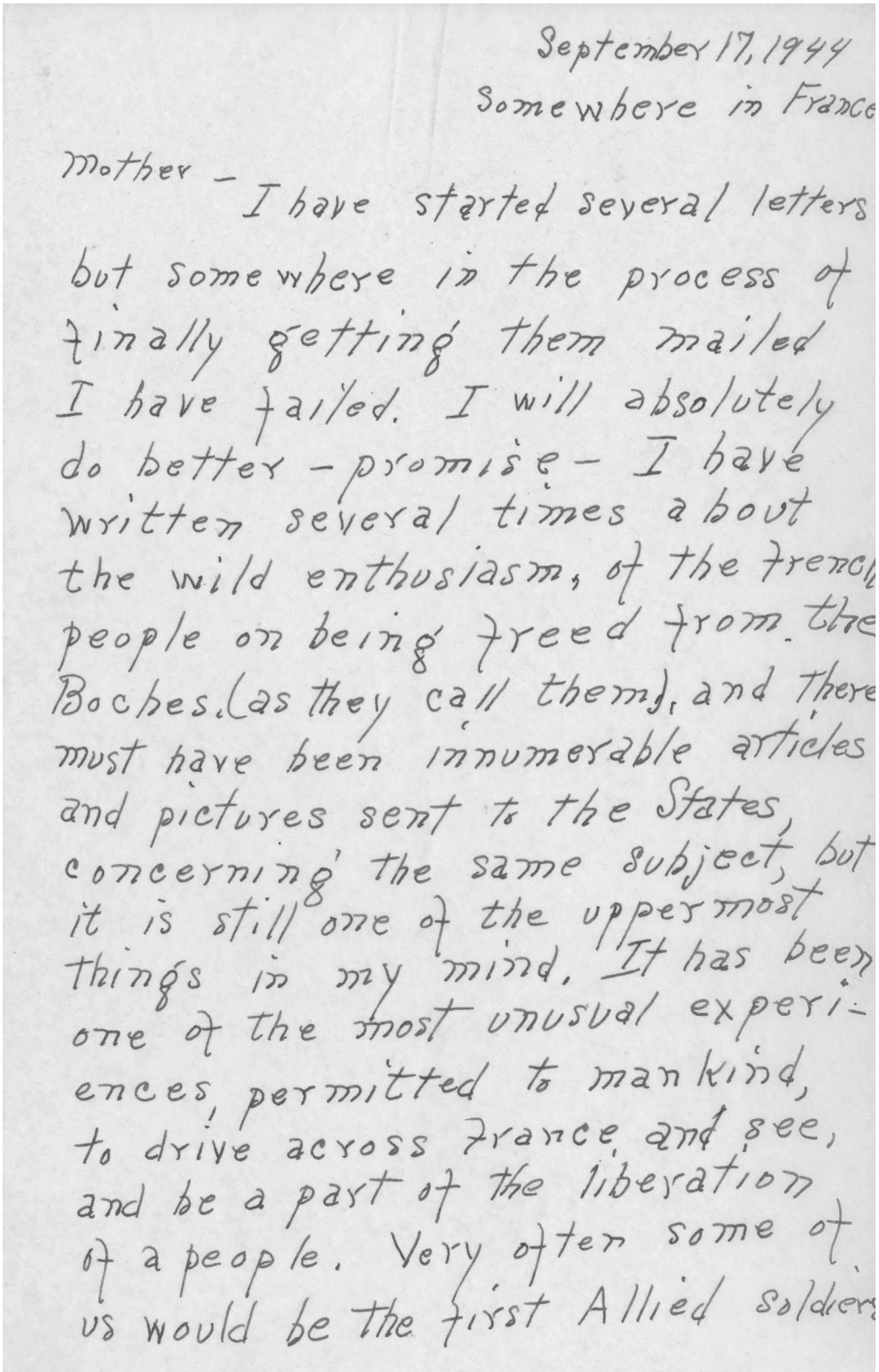
Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page One

State Historical Society of Missouri



September 17, 1944
Somewhere in France

Mother - I have started several letters but somewhere in the process of finally getting them mailed I have failed. I will absolutely do better - promise - I have written several times about the wild enthusiasm, of the French people on being freed from the Boches. (as they call them), and there must have been innumerable articles and pictures sent to the States, concerning the same subject, but it is still one of the uppermost things in my mind. It has been one of the most unusual experiences permitted to mankind, to drive across France and see, and be a part of the liberation of a people. Very often some of us would be the first Allied soldiers

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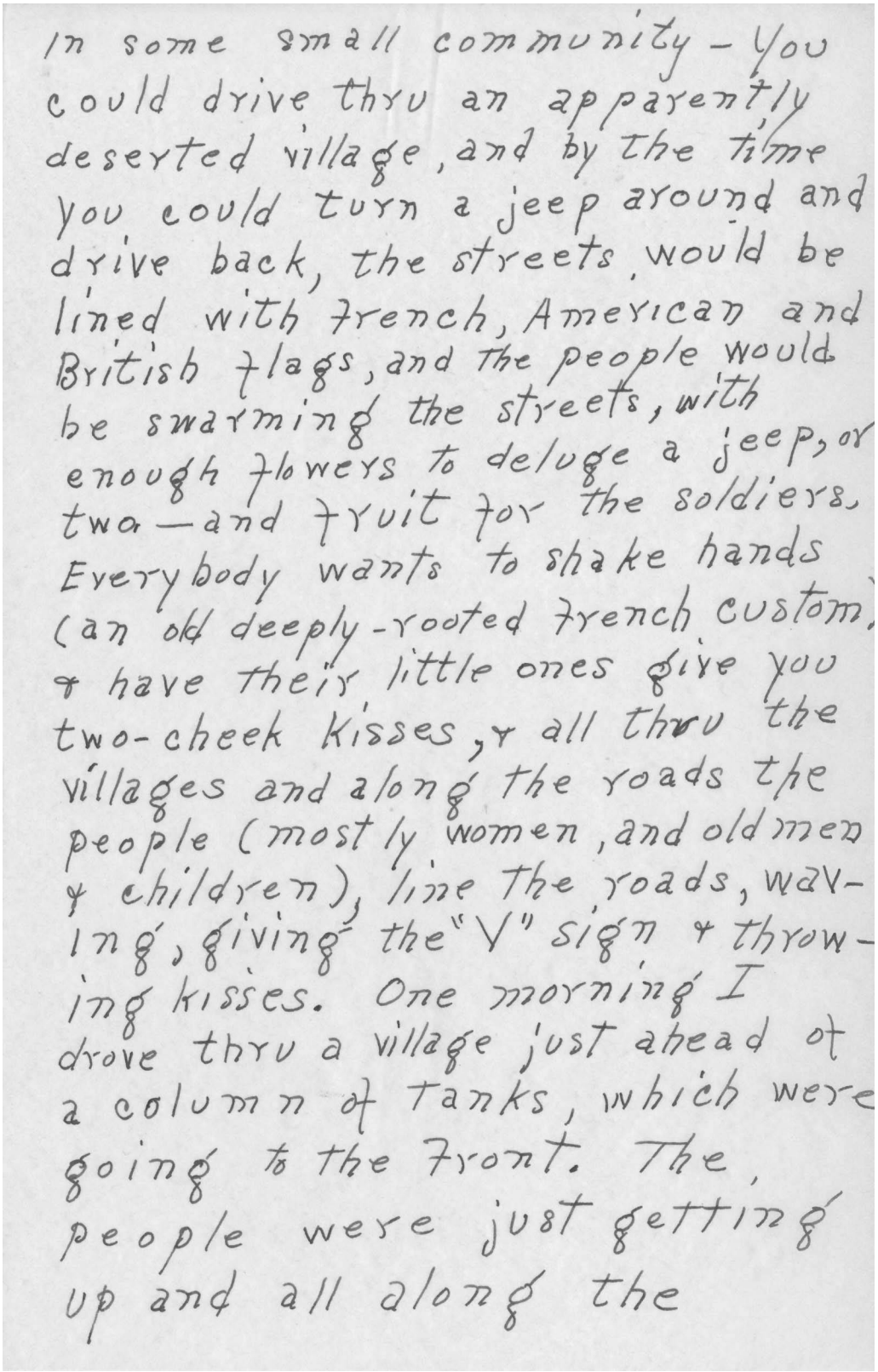

in some small community – you could drive thru an apparently deserted village, and by the time you could turn a jeep around and drive back, the streets would be lined with french, American and British flags, and the people would be swarming the streets, with enough flowers to deluge a jeep, or two – and fruit for the soldiers. Everybody wants to shake hands (an old deeply-rooted french custom) & have their little ones give you two-cheek kisses, & all thru the villages and along the roads the people (mostly women, and old men & children), line the roads, waving, giving the "V" sign & throwing kisses. One morning I drove thru a village just ahead of a column of tanks, which were going to the front. The people were just getting up and all along the

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Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Three

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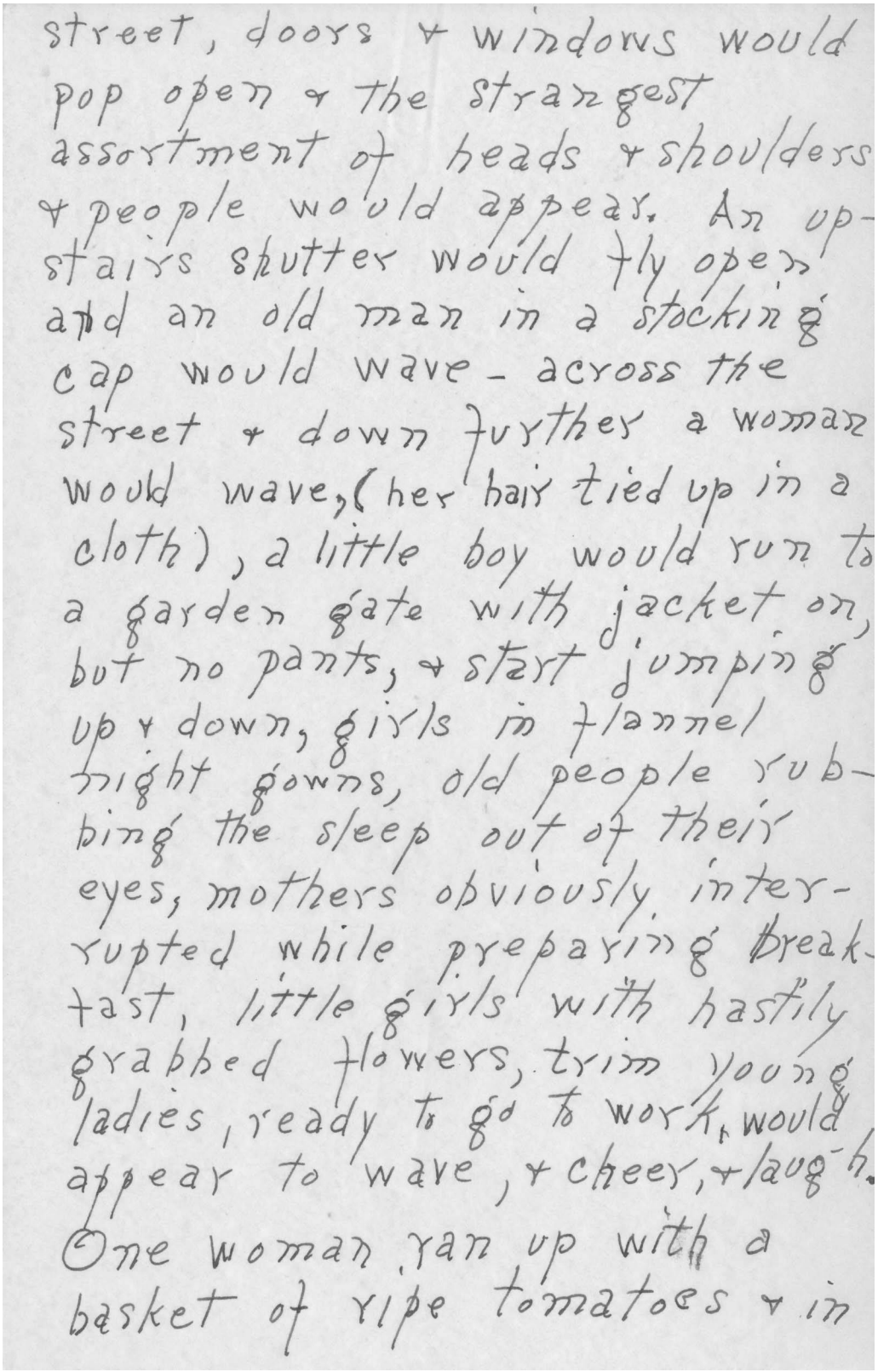

street, doors & windows would pop open & the strangest assortment of heads & shoulders & people would appear. An upstairs shutter would fly open and an old man in a stocking cap would wave - across the street & down further a woman would wave, (her hair tied up in a cloth), a little boy would run to a garden gate with jacket on, but no pants, & start jumping up & down, girls in flannel night gowns, old people rubbing the sleep out of their eyes, mothers obviously interrupted while preparing breakfast, little girls with hastily grabbed flowers, trim young ladies, ready to go to work, would appear to wave, & cheer, & laugh. One woman ran up with a basket of ripe tomatoes & in

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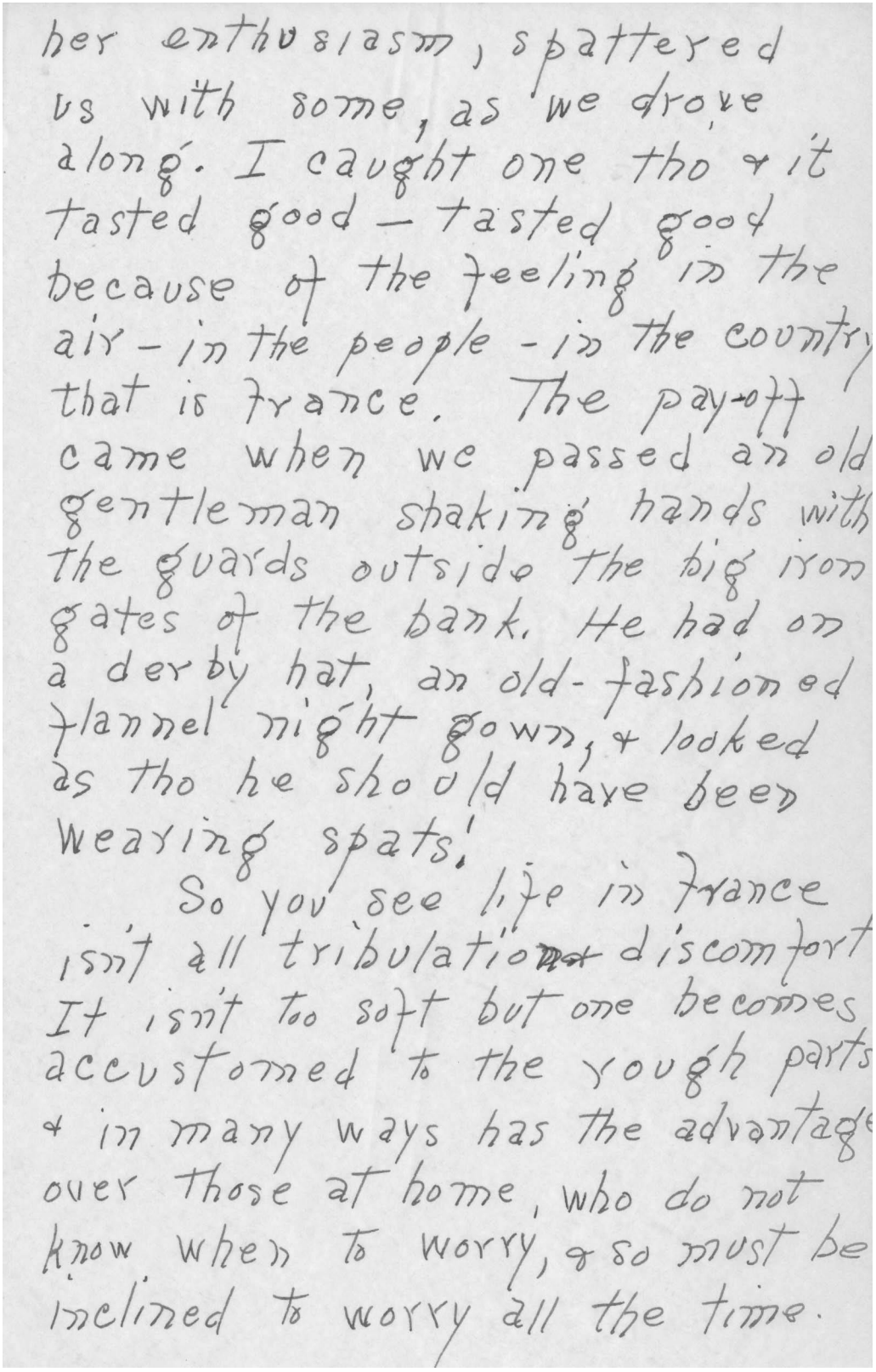

her enthusiasm, spattered
us with some, as we drove
along. I caught one tho & it
tasted good — tasted good
because of the feeling in the
air - in the people - in the country
that is France. The pay-off
came when we passed an old
gentleman shaking hands with
the guards outside the big iron
gates of the bank. He had on
a derby hat, an old-fashioned
flannel night gown, & looked
as tho he should have been
wearing spats!

So you see life in France
isn't all tribulation ~~not~~ discomfort
It isn't too soft but one becomes
accustomed to the rough parts
& in many ways has the advantage
over those at home, who do not
know when to worry, & so must be
inclined to worry all the time.

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Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Five

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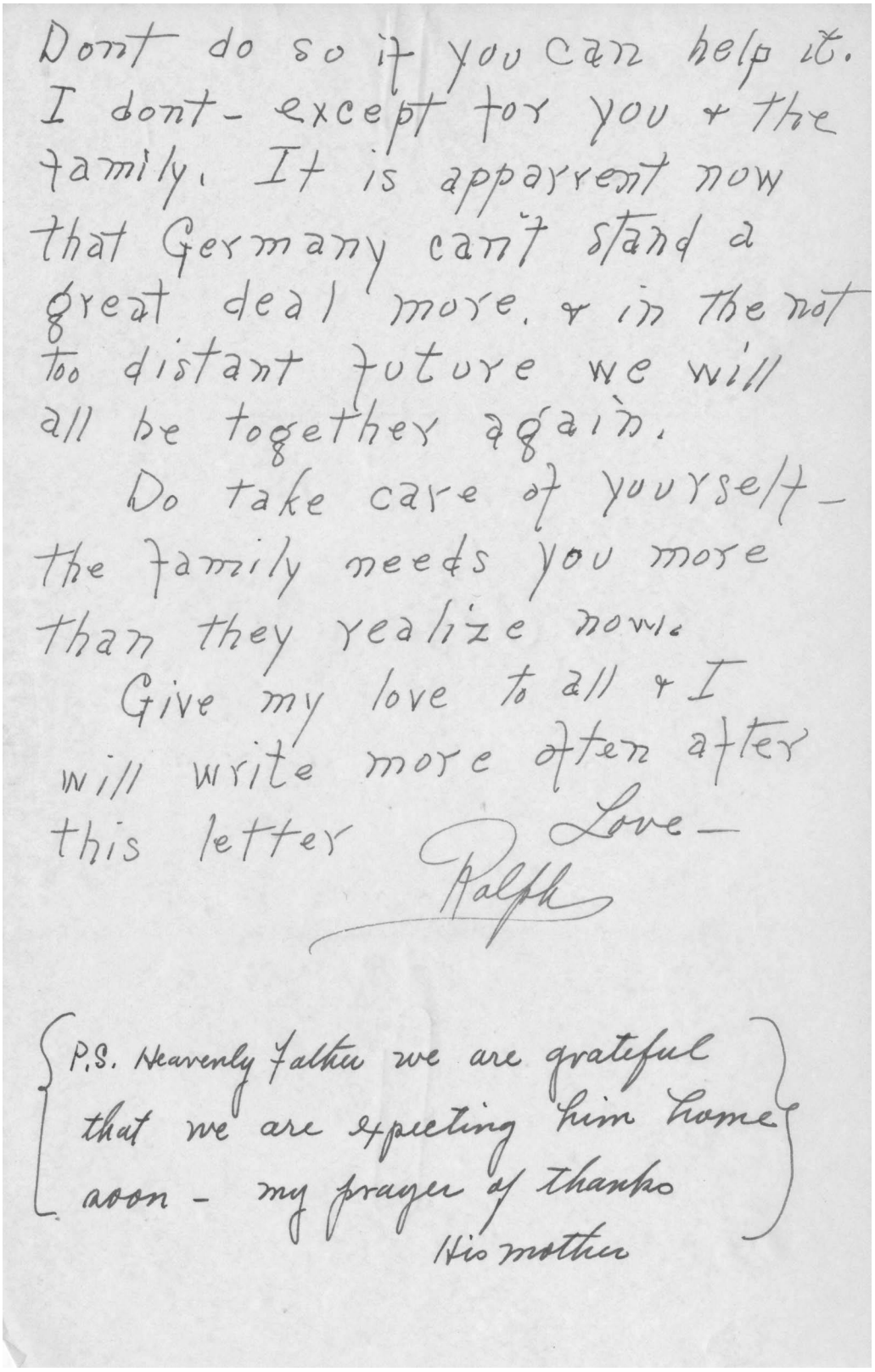

Dont do so if you can help it. I dont - except for you & the family. It is apparrent now that Germany cant stand a great deal more. & in the not too distant future we will all be together again.

Do take care of yourself - the family needs you more than they realize now.

Give my love to all & I will write more often after this letter

Love -

Ralph

{P.S. Heavenly Father we are grateful that we are expecting him home soon - my prayer of thanks

His mother}