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September 17, 1944

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
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). I 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
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 payoff 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 and discomfort. It isn’t too soft but one becomes accustomed to the rough parts and 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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Don't do so if you can help it. I don't except for you & the family. It is apparent now that Germany can't stand a great deal more. I 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
  No matter
}