

From Harry S. Truman to Bess Wallace, December 14, 1918

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Near Verdun, Camp La Baholle

Dec. 14, 1918

Dear Bess:

It is a dark, unwholesome French day and I am frankly homesick and very, very lonesome. Christmas is approaching and I can't possibly see those I want to and I do so wish I could. I can't even send you a present that I'm sure you'll get, not even a cablegram. This devilish place is about seven kilometers from Verdun in a patch of woods. The sun hadn't shone in I don't know how many days nor does it look as if it ever intended to shine again.

I guess it will though and I know it's shining in U.S.A. and at Nice.

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I am so glad you are a general. I shall always expect you to outrank me in our household and there is never any prospect of my ever being anything in the military line beyond a captain, although had the war continued, which God forbid, I should eventually have had another promotion. You tell Fred and May that I would have appreciated the major's leaves and the compliment very highly but I'd never have worn them. All promotions ceased in the A.E.F. on November 11, 1918, the greatest day in history. Personally I'd rather be a Battery commander than a brigadier general. I am virtually the dictator of the actions of 194 men and if I succeed in making them work as one, keep them healthy morally

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and physically, make 'em write to the mammas and sweethearts, and bring 'em all home, I shall be as nearly pleased with myself as I ever expect to be until the one great event of my life is pulled off, which I am fondly hoping will take place immediately on my having delivered that 194 men in U.S.A. You'll have to take a leading part in that event you know and then for one great future. I've almost come to the conclusion that it's not intended for me ever to be very rich, nor very poor, and I am about convinced that that will be about the happiest state a man can be. To have the finest girl in all the whole world (and to make the statement without fear of contradiction) to share my joys and troubles, mostly joys I'm hoping, to have just enough of this world's goods to make it pleasant to try for more, to own a Ford and tour the U.S.A. and France perhaps, although I've nearly promised old Miss Liberty that she'll have to turn around to see me again, and still have a nice little country home to be comfortable in- well that's really not a hard fortune to contemplate. Maybe have a little politics and some nice little dinner parties occasionally just for good measure. How does it sound to you? Just its contemplation has almost cured me of the blues.

You know when I was a kid, say about thirteen or fourteen, I was a tremendous reader of heavy literature like Homer, Abbott's Lives, Leviticus, Isaiah, and

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the memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte. Then it was my ambition to make Napoleon look like a sucker and I thirsted for a West Point education so I could be one of the oppressors, as the kid said when asked why he wanted to go there. You'd never guess why I had such a wild desire and you'll laugh when I tell you. It was only so you could be the leading lady of the palace or empire

or whatever it was I wanted to build. You may not believe it but my notion as to who is the best girl in the world has never changed and my military ambition has ended by having arrived at the post of centurian. That's a long way from Caesar, isn't it?

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Now I want to be a farmer. Can you beat it? I'm hoping you'll like the rube just as well as you would have the Napoleon. I'm sure the farmer will be the happier.

Today was our regular inspection day and I had to inspect Pete's battery and Salisbury inspected mine. Pete looked over Salisbury's. The Chief Gorilla gave me a very nice clean bill of health and of course I gave Pete one. You've no idea how scared some of these men get when a Captain stops in the inspecting process and asks him a question. Most of 'em would rather go over the top than talk on inspection day. I used to be that way myself but since I've got to the

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point where I do the questioning it seems real funny and I can't understand why I was ever afraid. I asked one man in line why he had no pistol and he swallowed about three times and finally succeeded in saying No, sir! I found out that he was a replacement from the S.Q.S. and he'd been told that all the Captains of our Baty were hard boiled cookies and he'd better step straight. My Irish aren't afraid of me nor the Colonel either. In fact they some times are very nearly disrespectful to him when he acts ludicrously they laugh at him. I rather admire 'em for it.

You are probably bored stiff by this time but I am writing you just as I feel today. I do wish I could see you Christmas Day. I'll be thinking of you as I usually am anyway. I hope to have a better present for you next Christmas than the one I tried to send you this one. Keep on writing to one who thinks of you.

Always, Harry

Harry S. Truman Capt 129 FA American E.F. France