

From Harry S. Truman to Bess Wallace, January 11, 1919

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Camp La Beholle, near Verdun, France

Dear Bess:-

This is a nice rainy Saturday night, and instead of going down to Captain Jobes' for an evening's entertainment at penny ante I am going to make an attempt at a letter to you. You know I have a nice boy in my Battery whose name is Bobby (I have three Bobbys, every one of 'em as fine as boys can be) and once in a while he brings me a letter that he doesn't want any second lieutenant nosing into, and it's always addressed to just Dearest and I feel like an ornery, low-down person when I read them-sometimes I don't, I just sign 'em up and let 'em go. But if that girl doesn't wait for that kid I know she's got a screw loose. He doesn't write a thing silly but he's all there and I hope she is too. What I started out to say is that I'd like to write you a real silly, mushy

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letter that would honestly express just exactly what I feel tonight but I have command of neither the words nor the diction to do it. Anyway, I had the most pleasant dream last night and my oh how I did hate to wake up. Of course I was in U.S.A. parading down some big town's main street and I met you and there was a church handy and just as casually as you please we walked inside and the priest did the rest, and then I thought we were in Paris and I woke up in a Godforsaken camp just outside of old ruined Verdun. You've no idea how often and constantly that last part is a daydream with me. It seems that Sam is never, never going to take us home so that priest can be met. We just live from one inspection to the next. You know these regular army colonels and lieutenant colonels who've had their feet on the desk ever since the argument started are hellbent for inspections. Some of 'em haven't been

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over here but a month or two but they can come around and tell us who went through it exactly and how we did not win the war. Some of 'em are nuts on horse feed and some are dippy on how to take care of harness and some think they know exactly how many ounces of axle grease will run a gun wheel to kingdom come and back. One important little major who had evidently read somebody's nonsensical book on how to feed a horse came along the other day and wanted us to feed the horses oatmeal, cooked! and we don't get enough to feed the men for breakfast half the time. Then another one wanted us to shake all the chaff and dirt out of the hay and give it to the horses and if the horses wouldn't eat the dirt, why we must put salt on it so they would--and we haven't got the salt. A lieutenant colonel was here today who said they were both crazy and we'd better feed oats and hay as usual, which is exactly what we intended to do anyway. This

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peacetime soldering is an awful bore and anybody who wants to do it is certainly off in his upper works.

In addition to inspections and more inspections we have to keep our Batteries from going to pieces. Two of my kids were caught asleep on guard last night and I gave 'em the privilege of going before our summary court and getting a fine maybe or taking what I'd give them. They

seemed to prefer the latter. Now what do you reckon I'm going to make those poor boys do? Why, clean out stables all Saturday afternoon and Sunday and wash the muddiest, dirtiest wagon I can produce on Sunday afternoon for four weeks. I reckon that ought to impress them that an armistice isn't peace, don't you think? One of 'em is one of my Bobbys, too, and another one is a nephew of the present Grand Matron of Missouri. The better I like 'em, the meaner I have to be to them just to show 'em that I'm impartial. You've no idea how

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I hate to call a man down. I'd almost rather take a beating than tell a man how good for nothing he is when he's done something he shouldn't. Two of my men overstayed a pass I gave them to Verdun the other day and I talked so mean to them when they came back that one of 'em cried and I almost let him off without any punishment. If we stay in this place much longer, I'll either have a disposition like a hyena or be the dippy one. If there's one thing I've always hated in a man it is to see him take his spite out on someone who couldn't talk back to him. I've done my very best not to jump on someone under me when someone higher up jumps on me, because I hate the higher-up when he does it and I'm sure the next fellow will hate me if I treat him the same way. Anyway I can't jump all over a man for doing something that I'm sure I'd have done myself if I'd had

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the opportunity and been in his place. Justice is an awful tyrant. Just to show how she works I took all the privileges away from a fellow for a small offense and gave him a terrific calling down and I had to do it four times more when I found out that four more were offenders in the same way. One of 'em was a man I particularly like too and I know he thinks I'm as mean as Kaiser Bill.

We went for a road march yesterday all hitched up and when I got out in front of a battery again and gave 'em right by section, column left and marched off down the road. I felt real important. You've no idea what a feeling it is to look back and see a battery of four guns and a lot of caissons and wagons and a rolling kitchen and one hundred and eight odd men coming along behind you and know that they're yours for the time being and that they start and stop when you say so and will shoot

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a lot of destruction for you if you'll only direct it right. But I'd feel as if I were doing more good if I were following that mule I told you of. I would like to march down Grand Ave. just once though at the head of my Irish Battery just to see what it would be like in an honest to goodness form.

The mail orderly just brought me the two copies of "Life" Fred sent me. I certainly do appreciate them. They are excellent numbers I know just from a slight glance through them and they'll amuse me for a week and then the battery until they're completely worn out. Please thank him most sincerely for me.

I am enclosing another picture of me made by Capt. Patterson. This one looks more like me and except for a contorted eye caused by the glasses it's all right. I had to lean over to keep the light from making my eyes white.

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I'm afraid this letter will be an awful bore to you but I've just kept thinking of something I wanted to say to you and I've said it. I'm awful glad the S.O.S. didn't steal your roses and I'm glad you like them. The projectile that comes out of one of 'em has a sound all its own and it isn't a pleasant one when you're at the business end.

I hope you are entirely well by now. Remember me to all the family, especially your mother, and keep writing.

Yours always, Harry
Harry Truman
Capt Bty & 129 FA
American E.F.