

LIFE



EAR MUFFS

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FROM HIS QUARTERS IN ENGLAND, CAPTAIN DICK DAVISSON, NAVIGATOR FOR A GROUP OF FLYING FORTRESSES, WRITES A LETTER TO HIS GIRL BACK HOME IN GRAFTON, W. VA.

Dear Martha

AMERICAN SOLDIER IN ENGLAND WRITES TO HIS GIRL AT HOME

A young American in England recently sat down to write a letter to his best girl at home. For him the last few weeks had been rough going. Navigator for a group of Flying Fortresses, he had led missions over Kiel, Rheims, Oschersleben and Paris. Against a blue sky he had seen the black smudges of ack-ack and the bright streaks of orange flashing from the

wings of Focke-Wulfs. He had known the violence and terror of war.

But as he wrote, all this faded from his mind. In imagination he was back home in Grafton, W. Va., reliving the years of his boyhood. Once more he saw his home by the railroad tracks, the university with its great, tall oaks and the Monongahela valley, beautiful

in the fall with the red sumac bright on the ground.

The soldier's name was Captain Dick Davisson, and the girl he wrote was Martha Jean Kuhn. On the following pages LIFE prints the letter and illustrates it with LIFE pictures. Although written by one boy abroad to one girl in the U. S., it describes the things at home which all soldiers everywhere miss the most.

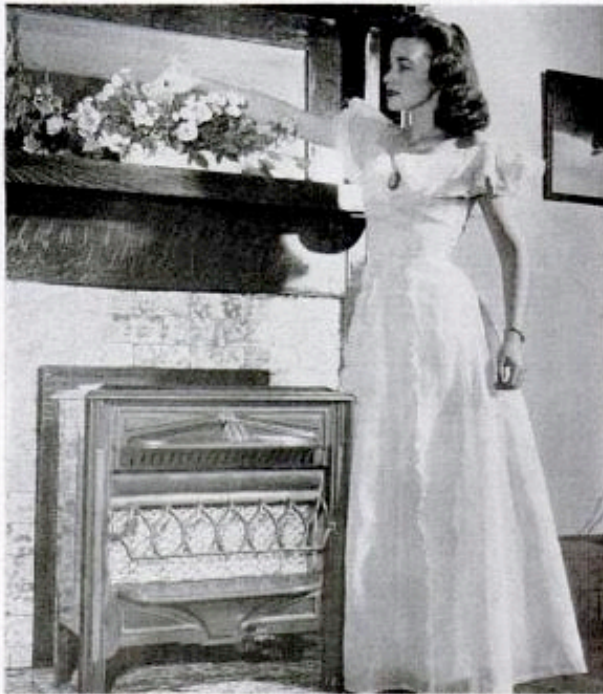
SOLDIER'S LETTER (continued)



IN HER BED AT NIGHT MARTHA JEAN KUHN REREADS THE LETTER SHE RECEIVED FROM CAPTAIN DICK DAVISSON IN ENGLAND. SHE IS 19 AND LIVES OVER A DRUGSTORE AND GROCERY



MARTHA LIVES ALONE WITH HER MOTHER; HER FATHER AND BROTHER ARE IN ARMY TOO



TO BUCK UP HER SPIRITS SHE WEARS PARTY DRESS WHICH DICK PARTICULARLY LIKES

Dear
Martha

Here I go again with absolutely nothing in the way of news, but I wanted to tell you how much I miss you.

It won't be long now. Since my last letter I have gotten within five missions of finishing my combat duty over here—what we call our operational tour. Remember how Sul and Doggie and I back in Grafton were itching to get into combat as soon as we could? Well, that's what I wanted and I sure

got it. But now that I can see the end in sight—only five more trips over enemy country—I can't help thinking about the future.

That, of course, is where you come into the picture. I kick myself mentally for not having married you before this, and am tremendously grateful for the day I met you. I think of you all the time and wonder what you are doing. When



AGAIN SHE REREADS THE LETTER. SHE IS STUDYING BANKING AT NIGHT SCHOOL, BUT WOULD LIKE TO BE A NURSE. DICK PLANS TO REMAIN IN THE ARMY AFTER THE WAR IS OVER

you're down in the dumps, do you still put on that white organdy dress with the black dots? Does it still remind you of me?

When I get home the first thing I want to do is see you and my folks. I have an awful lot to tell you about what's happened to me and there's a whole lot more I want to hear from you, including what's happened

to Sud and Doggie and all the rest of our old gang.

I may be able to wrangle a 30-day pass and maybe we could go over to the university at Morgantown. God, didn't we have fun there! You've no idea how often, sitting around in England in the rain and the cold, I've thought of that drive over there. Then, if we got home in time, I'd like to take a walk with you,

like we used to during vacations, out across the new bridge over the Tygarts Valley River and back into town along Riverside Drive. Then at night we might drive out to Wonder Bar with its juke box and the garden in back, where they keep the lights nice and dim. It is on top of a hill, remember, and so peaceful you can sometimes see a rabbit sneaking through the shrubs.



Dick's parents slice a ham, his favorite dish



Dad's room home is two-storied yellow brick



Dick shares his room with older brother Bob



Ma talks through window with Dick's mother



Hot bath with soap



Dick's friend Ray Shaw



Two engines chug past front door of Dick's house

What I miss most at home are a lot of little things—like hamburgers and hot baths and ice cream. From over here these little things add up to some bigger things. You probably know what I am trying to say and how much it means to me to see our house and the

trains passing by, and to sit beside Mother in church.

There's nothing I would rather have this very moment than one of Ernie's big hamburgers and a good hot cup of real American coffee. Can you still get sirloin steaks? Better save me one if you can. And a

short shot of bourbon wouldn't go badly with it. Or a beer that's really cold instead of this tepid English stuff which is enough to make you sign the pledge. And you can count me in on a double chocolate malted at Malone's Drug Store, where I used to work as a



Martha shows a friend her letter from Dick



Poolroom where Dick went for hamburgers, beer



Martha walks where she used to walk with Dick



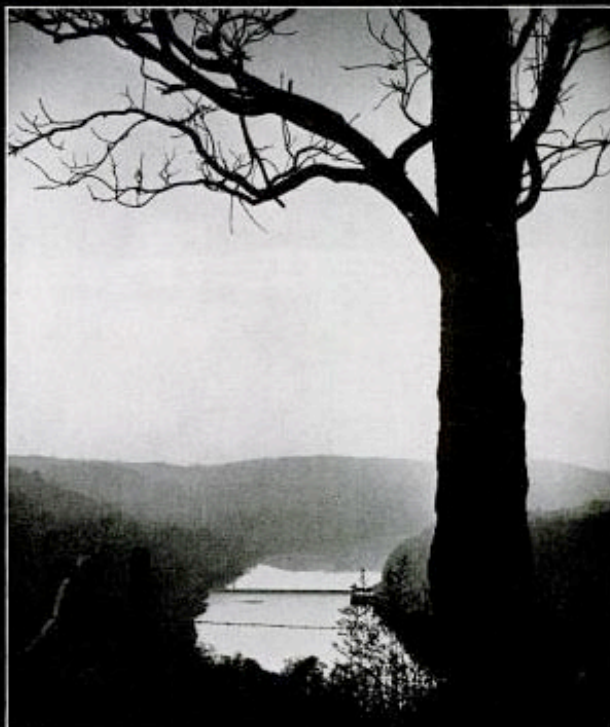
Double malted milk



Hamburger at Ernie's



Grafton First National Bank, where Martha works



On the Morgantown road in the Monongahela river

soda jerk. I wonder if Ray Shaw is still working there? But most in the world, I would like to wake up in my own room, in my own bed and, without dressing or walking to a cold intrine, I would take a hot bath in the midst of good workable American plumbing, with

a bacon-and-fresh-eggs breakfast afterward (no powdered eggs, thank you). For dinner I would have Mother's old specialty—baked ham, baked beans and the best potato salad in the world. That was the dinner we used to have when our relatives came to visit on Me-

morial Day. Remember how all the Grafton school kids marched in the parade up to the national cemetery to hear the speeches and decorate graves? We skated on the sidewalk in front of the cemetery. Later, of course, we began spending our spare time in the poolroom.

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SOLDIER'S LETTER (continued)



GREAT CLOUDS OF WHITE AND BLACK SMOKE HANG PERPETUALLY OVER THE RAILROAD YARDS AT GRAFTON, W. VA., COVERING ALL THE BUILDINGS WITH A HEAVY SOOT

When we were kids Bob and I used to play in the vacant lot beside our house. That's where the West Side football team played Maple Avenue every Saturday afternoon, and that's where Dad gave Bob and me our only whipping after we broke the windows out of 12 steam engines lined up near-by on the tracks. I imagine the engines and the roundhouse and the turntable are all pretty busy now, making Grafton dirtier than ever.

What a contrast clean Morgantown is to dirty Graf-

ton! I remember the ride over there, how the road winds all the time till you get up on the top of Nigger Mountain. In the fall there are neatly stacked shocks of corn and buckwheat straw and the woods are bright with reds and yellows. Then you suddenly come on the Monongahela River in the valley to your left and you are in Morgantown.

Do the Betas still sit around the fire with the girls from the Delta Gamma house, and is Mrs. Severn still

having a tough time being housemother and keeping the lights on in the won room? I wonder about these things. They may seem silly but they are important.

Well, Iverson has just challenged me to a game of checkers and I must give him his nightly thrashing. Keep well and write soon and someday all these things will come true again.

All my love, Dick

THE ROAD FROM GRAFTON TO MORGANTOWN PASSES THROUGH HILLY COUNTRYSIDE OF NORTHERN WEST VIRGINIA, DOTTED IN THE FALL WITH GRAZING CATTLE AND HAYSTACKS





THE WEST VIRGINIA BETAS
SIT WITH THEIR GIRLS IN
FRONT OF A BIG LOG FIRE