

March 1, 1945

Dear Dad,

I seemed to have received the good news all at once from all sides. First from my wife and then from a letter from you and then from a cable from all of you. I can't tell you how happy I am about it. No kidding! It seems strange, my being a prospective father, but I guess it's true and very wonderful. And you a grandfather! How do you like that? And Granddad and Grandnan Rankin great-grandparents! I'd give a million to be able to get home in time, - and (I hold my breath and knock like mad on wood) maybe I may. If we can just keep pushing the Kraut like we're doing now, almost on the dead run, it shouldn't be many more months or even weeks before that great day, V-day, comes, and then with a few breaks, - well, I'm hoping for the best, but at the same time I'm being prepared for disappointments. But let's just hope there won't be any. You were right in your letter when you say I dream of home and Billie a lot, for I really do. However, I've yet to become homesick so it affects me physically. My appetite hasn't waned, and I welcome the old sack every time I have a chance to hit it. We are kept busy enough to take care of those two desires without any trouble at all.

I just wrote a long letter to Billie telling her most of the news. However, something came up today which might be of quite a little interest. A few days ago I led my platoon up on to a hill, in the process we wounded and killed a few Hienies (about 4). On the top of the hill as we were going over on the forward slope to dig in, we received a little direct fire from a couple of tank several hundred yards to our front before they pulled to the rear. On the hill we cleared a few dugouts and in the process, I found a German pistol .38 calibre, called by G.I.'s a "P-38", in excellent condition and new. Well, today Battallion headquarters received word from Regiment, from Division, from Corps, from Army, and so on up that Stephen Early, who seems to be President Roosevelt's personal secretary who is an old-time member of the 80th Division, wanted a German weapon from his former outfit as a souvenir from them. Well, as you can tell by now, it's my P-38 that is being sent to him with my name and the story of how I got it. I don't know if the gun will ever reach him, and, if it does, if anything will ever come of it, but what the heck, I'm willing to take a chance. By the way, the serial number of it is 7833.

Right now we are sitting still catching our breath while a few armored outfits are pushing along strong and fast out to our front.

Well, Dad, I must close if I want to get this off with the out-going mail. I'm getting along fine; I'm in the best company in the regiment which has been acknowledged by every one including our Battalion commander and also our regimental commander, and I consider my platoon the best in the company -- they're a damn good bunch of boys. None of them call me "Lieutenant" up here on the front, it's too dangerous for me so, I have them all calling me Pete, and we get along swell.

Say hello to everyone, and give my love to Mom and Billie and tell Billie I think of her every minute.

Your devoted son,

Peter

P.S. I hope it's a boy.

Letter from Peter Goodspeed to his daughter Marfy Goodspeed, 2004

Dear Marf - Here is my recollection of the episode with a german "88" anti-tank missile (the "88" refers to the diameter of the missile which translates to a diameter of about 3 1/2 inches).

To the best of my memory, we were billeted in a small town, Ruppertsberg, I think, or Albenheim (ref: my letter to my parents, dated April 8, 1945). My platoon took over a farm house, which unknowingly to us, was built on a hillside. (We arrived after dark.) Most of the men and myself occupied the basement, which was actually the first floor when observed from the back.

Some time later that night, we heard someone outside on the street yelling "we're moving out". This seemed somewhat unusual, in as much as I, a platoon leader, would be given the order from my Company Commander (Bill Beisner). I went upstairs to the first floor and out to the street, trying to find out where this order came from. While outside, there occurred a large explosion from the house we had just vacated. After I determined we were not moving out, I went back to the house to find out the damage and if my men were alright.

At first sight, the house seemed okay, until I went back to the "basement". It was utter chaos. All the german farm houses were built of stone and the walls were 2 to 3 feet thick. A german tank a good 800 yards back fired at the house, sending a 88 round thru the outside wall and thru two or three interior walls. Rocks and stone were scattered all over the basement. At first I could not recognize where I had been sleeping, until I spotted my bed-roll and backpack, covered with debris. Then I noticed right where my head was, the 88 round had come to a rest and was lying on the floor covered with dirt & straw. At first it was too hot to pick up and carry. Later I was able to handle it, but it was much too heavy to keep as a souvenir. I wondered what would have happened to me and my men if there was no false order to "move out", and we were all in the house when it was hit. I hate to think.

PS. My men were okay for the most part as they also went up to find out what was going on.

Extract of Taped Conversation between Peter and Marilou Goodspeed and Marfy Goodspeed on Memorial Day, 2004.

Dad—"you know that round 88 that came into—when I was sleeping in that house. I would not have been alive if some dumb sap, thank heavens for him, had yelled "Hey, we're moving out, we're moving out!" I thought, that was rather strange, because I was the officer. If we were moving out, I've got to be told that by my company commander. And so I went upstairs to find out what was really going on, and that's when Bam! that shell hit the building. But whoever got that idea that we were moving out—I don't know who it was. When the shell hit the building it was kind of distracting."

Marfy—"Maybe it was your guardian angel, Dad."

Dad—"Yeah."

Mom—"Someone was looking over you."

Dad—"But I thought, gee what a great souvenir. That round was bout this big [6-8 inches in diameter] around, and after it cooled off awhile, I thought I'll put it in my back pack. I didn't go more that five miles with that thing and I thought this is ridiculous! I threw it away."

COPY

THE WHITE HOUSE

H. W. L. Goodspeed WASHINGTON

March 29, 1945

Dear Mr. Goodspeed:

I just received your most interesting letter of March twenty-third. It arrived the first day of my return to the office, after completing my assignment to Supreme Allied Headquarters in France.

Before I left France, a Major of the 317th Infantry came to my office in Paris and presented me with two German pistols -- P-38's -- which he said had been captured by that Regiment. The presentation was made in the name of Colonel Henry Fisher, Commanding the 317th Infantry, and the officers and men of that Regiment. The pistol was accompanied by a letter in which Colonel Fisher said, "Will you accept, on behalf of our COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF and yourself, the enclosed weapons, captured by this unit from the German Army in the vicinity of Bitburg, Germany."

In accordance with Colonel Fisher's request, I did present one of the weapons to the President. It is the weapon which your son referred to in his letter to you. At least the serial number is identical -- 7833.

The President now has acknowledged receipt of this weapon to Colonel Fisher and has ordered that it be given a place of prominence in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park along with the other war trophies that have been presented to him since World War II began.

I think your son will be interested to know these facts. I am glad that you wrote because we know now that your son captured the weapon and something of the circumstances which attended its capture. To make his story a part of the record, I am attaching your letter to the copy of the letter from ~~Colonel~~ ^{Colonel} Fisher and the President's note of thanks. All of these will be made a part of the library records at Hyde Park.

As an old doughboy of the 317th in World War I, I want to tell you it gave me an unforgettable thrill to visit that Regiment in Germany. I am convinced that the 80th Division and the 317th is adhering to all the traditions and high standards of its name sake of the last war. And, doing so under circumstances far more terrible than we had to face in the Argonne in '17 and '18. One reason for this conviction is that every officer and every man in the Division feels just as your son does -- that his is "the best company in the Regiment" and that his "platoon is the best in the company" -- that they are one and all "a damn good bunch of boys."

My son was wounded in Germany recently, serving with the M Company of the 259th Infantry, 65th Division. He is now convalescing in a hospital somewhere in England.

I hope and pray with you that this war will soon be over --
that your boy will be returned safely to you; that neither he
nor his children ever again will be called upon to fight another
war.

With all best wishes, I am

Very sincerely yours,

Signed -- Stephen Early
Secretary to the President