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Image 1:

Feb. 4, 1944

Dear Mother, Dad, and Grandpa,

I have a few minutes free time this morning so I am writing this letter. I don't think I would mind the training, etc., nearly so much if it weren't so terribly cold here. And besides the rainy season is starting. I don't think there is a more miserable place in the country. I always thought of Georgia as being hot. When you walk into the barracks it is colder than it is outside. I sent my field jacket, a woolen shirt, and a tie to the cleaners last night, and I won't get them back until Monday. It's hard to be without a field jacket when it's cold, but it was so dirty I had to send it for I was afraid it would not pass inspection. This morning I have on my summer underwear and 2 suits of woolen underwear (2 tops and 1 bottom), a woolen shirt, and then my fatigue clothes. An I am still shaking like a leaf.

I appreciate all your words

Image 2:

of encouragement, and I try to talk myself into liking it, but I am afraid it isn't of much use. I just don't like to live a life where I can't do anything on my own. We have the evenings free but after I finish cleaning everything and straightening everything up there is no time left. We have to march to our meals. Even eating is regimented. For example, after chow last night I missed mail call at 6:30 because I had to rush back to the barracks to get my clothes to take to the cleaners. The tailor shop is only open at certain hours on Monday and Thursday and if you don't get your things in then, you are out of luck. Then I had to get a haircut – there were 2 chairs and dozens waiting. I got a pretty fair haircut though. It is just short, not a butch. My hair was very long again. Remember, I had a short haircut in Dayton 2 days before I went into the Army. Then I had one while you were in Columbus¹ 2 weeks ago. My hair grows awfully fast.

Those weekends in Columbus were perfect. I wish I could see you now. I liked Fort Hayes much better, and because I had more freedom. I could be down

Image 3:

(3) Feb. 4, 1944

town in a few minutes, could see shows, and above all, could sleep in a warm barracks. Everything is so crude here. I wish the latrines were in the barracks. Instead, it is in a separate building.

As I said before, it was wonderful to be with you so many times in Columbus. I only wish I could have come home. Mother, you said so, and I had heard that if you were at Ft. Hayes 14 days, you could get a weekend pass. I didn't ask for one because often boys did and they were turned down. Some good home cooking would have done me some good though. And how wonderful it would be to sleep in my own bed.

After I had my haircut last night, I came back and started putting my initials and last 4 numbers ^{of} my social security number on my soiled clothes so I could send them to the laundry.

¹ Unclear whether Epstein is referring here to Columbus, GA, which is immediately outside Fort Benning where he is writing from, or Columbus, OH where Fort Hayes is located. Since he just reported to Fort Benning in January 1944, the reference to "weekends" makes Columbus, OH more likely. During World War II, Fort Hayes served as a reception center for recruits entering the Army.

Feb. 5th, 1944

The whistle blew yesterday morning just as I was in the middle of

Image 4:

the above sentence. It is now Saturday evening, and this is the first chance I have had since then to continue this letter. As I told you over the phone, passes were given out for tonight and tomorrow. We were dismissed at 2 o'clock this afternoon and do not have to be back in the barracks until 1 A.M. Tomorrow. We will be free all day until 1 A.M. Monday morning that is the day – the day when our 13-week cycle starts. Passes could only be given out to 80 men or 1/3 of the 240 in the company. I do not even want a pass. I am perfectly content to relax and take it easy. In the first place, I would have to walk quite a distance to catch a packed (and from what I hear it really is packed) bus to Columbus. Then what would I do when I get there? If I want to go to a movie, I can go to the theater on the post. They get the movies before the civilians do and they are uncensored. I may go tomorrow to see Dick Powell and Mary Martin in "[Happy Go Lucky](#)". I didn't go anywhere tonight. I am writing this letter in the day room where I have been listening to the radio and catching up on my reading.

Image 5:

Although a radio would be well, I don't think I would have very much time to listen to it here. It probably wouldn't be mine for very long anyhow. During the last cycle some of the boys had their radios stolen. To curb this, everyone who has a radio is required to turn in its serial number, make, etc., so that if it is stolen pawnshops, etc., can be checked. They cannot be connected when not in use. Although I believe that we are allowed to keep them on the shelves above our bunks, it seems to me the best place is the foot locker. Mine is getting pretty full.

Feb. 6, 1944

I went to bed about 10:00 last night. I was too tired to stay up any later. Weekend passes are good from the time you are dismissed on Saturday until 1 o'clock Monday morning. They are pretty rare. However, if you come down here, I imagine

Image 6:

that I could get one. They must be applied for a week in advance. There are a lot of things that might interfere with a weekend pass such as K.P., guard duty. Also if you get two gigs (Army term for demerits) in one week you are confined to the company area for the weekend. Incidentally, K.P. lasts about 15 hours. On Sunday there are 2 shifts however. And guard duty is 2 hours on and 4 hours off from 7 in the evening until 7 in the morning, I believe. It is that way until the cycle starts. After that we only walk 2 hours and then we are through. That is one break anyway, because at most places it is a 24 hr. duty 2 hrs. on and 4 hrs. off. I will have guard duty pretty soon because it is done in alphabetical order, and they are on the B's now. For K.P. they start with the W's and work their way backwards.

We worked hard all Friday night getting ready for Saturday mornings inspection. The only thing we didn't have to do was scrub the floor. When the cycle starts I think that will be required.

The rifle has to be cleaned thoroughly. It was a dry

Image 7:

Feb. 6, 1944

(7)

inspection, and every bit of grease used in preserving the rifle had to be removed. In order to do this the whole rifle has to be taken apart and put back together again. As it happened almost everyone was giggered for having rust in the rifle bore. I was included in that group. However, they never told us how to remove the rust. The rest were giggered for having grease on the rifle. Naturally, they couldn't let us go through our first inspection with a perfect record. They can get you for anything: unclean rifle, dusty shoes, clothes not pressed, tie not tied properly, bed not made properly, shoes not placed together under the bed, clothes not buttoned or hung in approved manner, things not arranged on the shelves correctly (incidentally, nothing can be placed on the shelf besides G.I. equipment except a picture and a radio, and those must be taken down for inspection. Food, papers, magazines, etc., must be placed in the foot locker. This foot locker is

Image 8:

similar to the steamer trunk we use on our trips. It must be placed against the wall. The barracks bags must be placed, or rather tied, on a rack on the wall in the approved manner. There are dozens of other things we must keep in mind, for everything in the Army must be done in the prescribed manner. If not, it is just too bad.

Yesterday we were given an orientation lecture by the chaplain, and the commanding officer of the 6th 1st Bat.² This C.O. is a colonel. He stood at attention the whole time, and I thought that the buttons would surely pop off his shirt. He reminded me of the officer in ["The Army Play By Play"](#) whose chest stuck way out and who wheezed every time he gave a command. They had the same type in ["This Is the Army."](#)

After that we were dismissed at 2 o'clock. That won't always happen, however. There are 4 platoons in the company and the 1st platoon was given detail work yesterday afternoon. The work will be rotated from one platoon to the other.

We were told that our basic will be plenty tough, and that if in the 1st 2 or 3 weeks we get too tired on a march or something like that,

Image 9:

(9) Feb. 6, 1944

we will be permitted to drop out of line. However, they warned that basic will be no easy thing. The 1st hike is 2 ½ miles, then 5, 7 ½, 10, and 20 miles. I don't know how many hikes we must take, but they are pretty numerous. I don't see how I will ever make it, especially with a heavy pack on my back. However, everyone else has to go through it. I wish I were about 6 ft. tall and weighed about 175 pounds.

I washed out my fatigue clothes yesterday with Ivory soap. I tried, but I couldn't get any soap flakes. I realize now, though, that soap flakes wouldn't be of any value, because the wash basin cannot be plugged up. I just rubbed the bar of soap over the clothes and then rinsed the clothes. I put them outside and they dried in about 3 hours. They are trying to get us another suite of fatigues. If I do get it then I can send the fatigue clothes to the laundry.

Mother, I received your box of cookies on Friday. They are really

Image 10:

² Battalion

delicious. Anytime you want to send more is O.K. with me. I wish I could sit down to some good meals at home. If you send any more put some cardboard around the box, because a few on top were crushed. However, the rest were O.K. I still have 11 oranges left plus 2 apples.

I had a very nice letter from Harry Daniels today. I must write him. It is so hard to find time though.

Claire Green must be working overtime trying to fix things up. I had a lovely Valentine card from Lena and Lois the other day. Also I had a letter from Henry Rosenthal inviting me over to Athens whenever I get a pass. It is only 250 miles. He sends his regards to all of you.

Here is his 1st paragraph:

"I heard thru the family that you are stationed in Columbus, which is just 250 miles from here and if at all possible, we'd love to have you come over and visit us sometime when you get a leave." God damn!! 250 miles – just around the corner. Oh well, his heart is in the right place. Now I have to write a letter to him.

After I talked to you this morning, Mother, 2 other boys and I walked over to the Service Club for dinner. I had a wonderful meal – fried chicken, peas, sweet potatoes, carrots, cole slaw, 4 rolls, 2 bottles of milk (2 full glasses), and 2 pieces of cake (white cake – one with chocolate and the other with white icing) – all for 85¢.

Dad, it was good to talk to you yesterday. I thought I would get

Image 11:

(11) Feb. 6, 1944

to talk to you this morning. I received your letter yesterday. I am glad that you talked to Father Gabe. I wish I were back at U.D. now.

Tell Aunt Fannie that it was good to hear her voice.

I was surprised to hear that the H. Green Jr.'s are expecting again. I suppose H. Green Sr. will start hollering for more money again. After all, now he'll have 8 people besides himself to support.

Personally I think the S. Green's and the H. Green's are all nuts.

Well, I had better stop now. If I had the time, I could ramble on like this forever.

Love,

Jerome, Jr.

P.S. All the boys here are very nice. I met a Goldblatt boy from Chicago – his father is the owner, or one of the owners of the dept. store.

Also, there is a Friedberg boy from Pittsburgh. He had 2 years of pre-med work at Harvard. His father, a doctor, is a graduate of Harvard, and is a professor at Pittsburgh Medical School. He is trying to get him into Pitt. Med. School.

Image 12:

There are a lot of Jewish boys in my company.

They finally lit the stoves in the barracks. It was warm last night for the 1st time.

I wonder if you could send me some type of slippers that I could wear to the shower.

Also, I just learned that during basic you have to get up at 6 in the morning and start marching in the cold and dark. What a life!

Also, please send me some air mail special delivery stamps. I am running low.