

Somewhere in France
25 July 1944

Dear Uncle Boyce:

We just witnessed a most awe-inspiring sight, something that we shall never forget. There passed over these French meadows and hedge-rows in which we are camped a mighty air armada. A spectacle of America's air might, the sky was filled with airplanes of all sizes and descriptions, fighters, medium bombers, heavy bombers of all kinds, thundering toward the Reich.

For three or four hours the air was filled with the incessant roar of high-powered engines. The sky seemed blotted out by the unending ladders of tactical formations with the swishing in and out of the fighter escort like a mother hen watching her chicks. Some men tried to count the stream of planes, but it was a tiresome job, especially hard on the neck. How many bombers were there? We can't say, but we will read in our bulletins tomorrow of their numbers and their shattered target.

In this particular field around which we are pitched, a French peasant boy about Dickie's age is driving his horse hitched to a contraption which is turning over the hay for drying. We have been using his hay for bedding, which is leaving him only the middle of the field to work. He has one of those hats---a temashantey I think you call them---that every American pictures the Frenchman as wearing.

In the next field over there is a large herd of cows that an American farmer would be "busting his geluses" over if he owned them. They are fat, well-fed, beautiful creatures that don't seem a bit disturbed by the airplanes' roar or the ack-acks' crack. They seem a little war weary to me. This morning the whole family was out milking them. One old lady was having a little trouble with one of the animals. The cow wouldn't stand, so the old woman would have to follow along with

her bucket and three-cornered milking stool till the animal stopped.

Also in this field with the cows are three horses. They are lithe lean-necked racers. All three of them are brown in color with spots of white. Some of the GI's have been riding them with not too much success. In the French family that owns these fields there is a little fellow not quite as old as Tommy. He has a great time. One of the GI truck driver who works around here has taken him under his wing and the kid rides around with him on the front seat with as much importance as Mussolini on a balcony. He usually has a handful of "Cherms", a type of candy found in K rations, which the fellows have given him. He jabbars away in a polygot of French and American phrases he has picked up.

Running along the side of our tents the full length of the field is a 3- or 4-foot drainage ditch which, incidentally, we jump into in case of air raid or shelling. In this ditch can be found more epicurean establishments than a Bum Jungle along the Conotton Creek. Right now the boys are having a mid-afternoon feast of K rations and hot coffee. Many tempting dishes have passed over these griddles and the fellows keep away monotony by tending the fires and concocting new delights.

One soldier---12 Mustangs are now passing over in formation---in this camp has a dog he brought over from England. I think it is an English wire-haired terrier. I am not sure, though. It would be the kind I would want if I had a dog, for it certainly is a nice one. It is a pure-bred and he bought it for two pounds, about eight dollars. He got it for that price, he says, because he did some work for an English family.

Our chow is improving and we are getting bread now, too. We eat a lot of dehydrated stuff. We had dehydrated potatoes last night. They reminded me a lot of wallpaper paste.

I haven't spent any money since I have been here. It isn't because I am trying to save my money. It is because I haven't had a chance to spend it. There is nothing to buy so it looks like I will be a capitalist before this thing is over. Pay day is coming up and I will be getting full pay with only insurance deducted, so I am sending some money home with which I would like you to put in War Bonds for me. I think I'd better help pay for some of the gas those Air Corps boys used this morning.

Love,

John

P.S. This letter is written on six V-mail forms. It won't be complete until you get all of them. I don't feel like writing two or three of these letters so when you have read it please send it to mother. She can send it to Anne, and so on around the family circle.

Corporal John M. Nolan wrote this letter to his Uncle in Bowerston, Ohio. At the time, he was a member of a Replacement Company assigned to a Replacement Depot a few miles from Omaha Beach. This Company landed D+44 (July 20, 1944) on Omaha Beach. Four days earlier, they had landed from a troop ship in Liverpool, England. Traveled south on the railroad to Weymouth, England where the unit was put on a landing craft for the Channel crossing to Normandy. It was September 6, 1944 when Nolan joined Company G, 119th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division at Tournai, Belgium.

John M. Nolan
5 DECEMBER 2005