

V-E Day Joyful, Pensive Time for 398th Chaplain

by Clarence (Bill) Lecrone, 398-Headquarters

Captain Clarence ("Bill") Lecrone, chaplain for the 398th Infantry Regiment, wrote a letter home announcing the end of WWII. His daughter, Pat Sasson, found this letter among her parents papers and shares it with us.

Germany

May 10, 1945

I am typing most of this letter as it announces the end of the war and is very touching.

So this is it! The victory for which we have so long and so hard worked and prayed and fought!! How I long to be with you in these great moments. Now more than ever I feel our separation, for unlike most other things, I just can't imagine how this grand news had reached America and what the reactions are or what forms the expressions of gratitude and celebration are taking. For us the news kind of crept up on us. First was the reported death of Hitler; we felt that would have an effect on the continuance of the war. Then came the surrender in Italy and we felt that that was the beginning of the actual end. Finally on Saturday night the 7th Army got the order to cease fire unless fired upon. This Monday afternoon Major McCrum, our Battalion Commander, came back from Regiment with the news that Germany had surrendered all forces unconditionally and that hostilities would cease as of 0001 May 9th. On Tuesday at 3:00 we heard Winston Churchill make the announcement and, of course, President Truman and Marshall Stalin were making the same announcement and one can hardly imagine the unbounded joy all over the world except Japan. I really believe most of the German people—that is, the average people whom we see—are genuinely glad, too. As for myself I am really too tired and weary to do much rejoicing according to my custom at such times. But tired or not, nothing can ever add to my deepest possible gratitude to Almighty God that I have come through this horror in good health.

For us Tuesday was a day of preparation for Wednesday, for at 9:30 Wednesday we had the whole combat team in reveille formation in a field just outside of the small city where we are located. Chaplain Buckley gave an invocation prayer Colonel Williams read the message of the end of the war from President Truman, General Eisenhower and General Patch. General Burress then spoke for about 5 minutes, we sang the "Star-Spangled Banner" then I had a memorial prayer and the Benediction. The Division Band was there and the 15 minute ceremony was very impressive. Beside General Burress, we had the assistant Division Commander, the now-General Tyschen—whom you knew as Colonel Tyschen of 399th—and General Murphy, the Artillery Commander.

Immediately following this ceremony we had services of Thanksgiving for all three religious groups. The Catholic Church here is quite small so Mike had his mass in the open, Chaplain Eskin has his Jewish service in a little Theatre, and we had a magnificent Church in which to hold our service. The Church had a wonderful organ, and although Saint was in Nice on pass, we did very nicely with the regular organist. Smitty from near Williamsport directed our choir rehearsal the evening before, and the interpreter was a missionary of this church to Africa who had been educated in Scotland, but who since the war has been working here at the home church. That was a unique rehearsal with the choir director giving direction to the organist through an interpreter.

I shall never forget that service. I think we had about 900 men there. We had three chests of hymnals with about 150 hymnals in each or a little less we gave one to each two men and didn't have quite enough. We began the service with an organ number then we had a trumpeter in the distance play "America" softly. I had a call to worship and the congregation then rose and sang the Doxology. The Invocation prayer was closed with the choir singing the last stanza of "America," after which we all sang the 4 stanzas of "America." I then had the service divided into 3 parts: Thanksgiving, Memorial and Dedication.

Thanksgiving:
5-minute talk
Responsive Reading
Anthem: The Heavens are Telling
(we mimeographed the music from 1big red hymnal I brought along)
Thanksgiving Prayer
Thanksgiving hymn: We Thank Thee All Our Lord
Memorial:
5-minute talk
Responsive Reading
1 minute Congregation standing in silent prayer and reverence
Taps from distance
Dedication:
5-minute talk
Scripture
Hymn: Take my Life and Let it Be Consecrated Lord to Thee
Prayer of Consecration
Hymn: Onward Christian Soldiers
Benediction and Amen by Choir
Organ Postlude: A Mighty Fortress Is Our Lord

Just to see those men all together in a beautiful church, the wonderful organ, and a pretty good choir, and above all the occasion Thanksgiving for victory!!! I am sure everybody was in a truly worshipful and reverent mood. There wasn't a lot of wild senseless rejoicing we have had too many good friends killed and seriously wounded for that, but we did have, I am sure, a real sense of gratitude for victory and the end of the war here, a reverent memory before God of those who were killed, and a great desire to live in such a way that peace shall forever be the lot of the years to come.

The civilians here are certainly interesting to observe. They are all smiles when they see American troops and they would do anything for us if we permitted it. I don't propose to know why they are so happy, but I think I know some of the answers or reasons. Some of them are just glad that the war is over for them even before yesterday as the lines moved forward and their lives and property escaped damage, of course they were happy. Then I believe truly that some of them so much hated the Nazis and life under the rule that they realized that our coming was the only way they had any hope of ever again having any kind of decent living. To them we are not conquerors but liberators. Then I believe there are some who are deliberately trying to put up a nice pleasant front to keep from showing before us that it really hurts them to have lost the war. Another big reason they like Americans is that our treatment is firm but decent. Where the French take over the situation is abominable so much senseless looting and destruction. We think it pretty bad even though necessary to take over a house and have all the people leave. The people are glad to have us come for they know they are safe with us near. Believe me I have never been so proud that I am an American as now nor have I ever been so proud of the men of our Regiment. You can talk about it as you please, but an American just has a sense of decency, fair play, and sportsmanship that has to be seen in a liberation like this to be believed. Perhaps it can better be stated that the capacity of some of the other people around here for cruelty, injustice, and general indecency makes one appreciate the inherent fineness of the average American. The people here know this and they sure would do anything for us. The other day our aid station moved into a very fine house and the people offered to keep the fire going for hot meals. Then in the evening they brought in a beautiful large cake and the next day offered to wash all the clothes for our aid men.

I am sorry this letter was so long in getting written. Since Monday I have been trying to find time to write, but with all the big doings, I just haven't been able to get it done. When I got the news that the war is over here how I wished I could have telephoned you or I can dream and hope and wish that I was with you. Well maybe before too long. I must say that I have been more homesick since Monday than ever

before. While the war was on one had a job to do. Of course the job is still here with my men. But I know one thing. If anything ever happens that I am not with the fellows I know in 398, I will be ready to head for home Pronto and I mean Pronto!

Well goodbye my beloved family. I know you will join with me in giving thanks to God for this goodness. The future is our together.

Love,
Bill and Daddy

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