

- JULY 25, 1941 -

Dear Ernest -

You are to be congratulated on the job you have undertaken and I am glad to write you freely on the subject for what it is worth. Please, however, do not use my name unless some purpose is to be served by it and you first let me know about it so I can tell my superior officers.

This is my 15th week in the army as a private. One week at ( ) ~~xxxixxxxxxxofirstxxxxxxx~~ and fourteen here at an infantry replacement center, ( ). I know by first and last name and have had a more or less intimate talk with about 300 men since leaving New York. I have an intimate acquaintance with the 60 men in my barracks here and think I can reasonably accurately reflect their views. I have, however, talked to members of every battalion in this center (18,000 men) and have been able generally to get what I think is the correct feel of the picture. This, however, is just one small cross section of the army and it may by no means be typical. Since induction all my spare time has been spent in Gallup polls of my own and thinking on what effect this all will have on the future of this country - most of it has been directed towards a study of the distinction between morale and discipline in a military sense but enough of it applies to your interest to warrant comment. I give you this background so you will know my qualifications and limitations as a commentator in this field.

Major conclusions to date: (1) The morale of the draftee is low but on the whole a lot better than one would expect when the drastic change is considered objectively. Lives have been completely disrupted, futures blighted, prospective homes destroyed and in addition few people are happy at first when they change anything (I remember personally it took me six months to get to stand Wall Street after moving there from St. Louis). The fine American trait of "I can take it" shines through all this and the attitude of the man in the ranks is on the whole good. They do not understand what it is all about but they would like to learn and a great opportunity to sell them worthwhile values in which they instinctively believe now, because they are Americans, but are beginning to doubt, presents itself.

(2) Morale in the readjustment sense tends to improve with time, not as fast as it normally should but the trend is in the right direction, but morale in an ideological or political or psychological sense starts declining and here at least

with minor interruptions the trend is alarmingly down. The leadership in the army is second rate compared to the attitude and, in the case of a great many selectees, the training and ability of the men. Leadership is badly needed in this sense (some of the military men at the top like my commanding General ( ) are very able and intelligent men but there are not enough of his stripe and his job is primarily military anyhow and some excellent military men are handicapped by their training along purely military lines from understanding the psychology of a selectee. There is no question in my mind (even under our present inefficient military procedure) we can and will win the war. Unless leadership develops to improve the situation I picture seriously question whether the freedom for which we are basically struggling will be attained. ~~Hitler~~ Hitler may well win a moral victory even though losing in a military sense. In fact the trend here is to destroy subconscious faith in free institutions because of the overlapping of military discipline (necessary but unexplained) and the stupidity of what the men (many of whom are quite able even if not university graduates) laughingly call "our leaders."

Minor conclusions: answers to your questions:

(1) The average soldier has little idea of why he has been drafted and a lot are suspicious of the whole move. The older men 30-35 are inclined to be bitter about mistakes of their draft boards and all know some men much younger than themselves in less important jobs whose numbers have not come up and who they feel should have been taken first. This is an aside but in my judgment as one of that number they have a good grievance.

(2) Only one in five or six has any faith in the belief there is a crisis or a threat to democracy in the sense of loss of freedom to them individually or their friends. Their knowledge of democracy is almost nil.

(3) Our army as seen here is not becoming a fighting army in the psychological sense. The only point about Germany fully understood is persecution of the Jews and needless to say not everyone thinks that is so bad.

I could give you some interesting excerpts from my diary on actual straw votes it has been my pleasure to take but the conclusions would only be strengthened and it is too hard to do much writing as a private in the army where you only have the foot of your bed and some borrowed stationary like this.

Concrete proposals for improvement: based again on what goes on in the little orbit I see.

(1) I have only seen the American flag once - and that on a

parade here. We don't have enough bands, enough of the things which would subconsciously stir patriotism. We need from Washington conscious, unashamed, honest morale building steps. We need to be told as soldiers what a privilege it is to wear the uniform as an offset to a lot of the crushed pride the military life requires.

(2) The issuance of a booklet of some sort available to every man giving in general terms the purpose of our army, national defense, etc., necessity for military discipline. We need an honest, fearless, intelligent war department directed drive to teach the meaning of our constitution etc.

(3) Out of these two previous points, actually the same, must come a recognition of younger men of merit in the army, a conviction they are not being discriminated against because they are selectees (a feeling a lot of them including myself sometimes have) that there will be a future based on merit and a minimum of economic waste and that democracy is functioning and not just a stupid dogma all men are created equal when we see proof on all sides they are not equal.

It is naturally difficult to write this way under the handicap of a camp life but the general idea of what you want is here. I am going to finish my training period here this week and then go to ( ) the first of next week. If this is useful to you you might ask your secretary to make a couple of copies and send it to me for amplification and editing, if not it was fun writing anyhow.

Give my best to Mrs. Angell.

As ever,

BILL MARTIN