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My dearest Mother,

One year ago today I "earned" 5 points towards my discharge from the army, by qualifying for the award of the Purple Heart. 12 months have gone by, the war is over, and I think it's all right now to tell you just exactly what happened; I am sure you will not get excited any more this long after the event.

As you may remember, the flying bombs started to hit London on 15 June 1944. We saw the first one going by, it was being shot at furiously by anti-aircraft fire, and we couldn't understand why the "pilot" didn't swerve from his course. After a while we heard a tremendous crash in the distance and assumed that the plane had been shot down and had exploded with its bomb load.

This ignorance about the new type of bomb went on for several days. Saturday night, 17 June, London had one of its heaviest barrages, and it was an interesting experience for those of us who hadn't been in an air raid before. The firing went on all night. After another day or two they discovered that there was no sense in shooting at these flying bombs, except over open country. So the fire ceased completely over London.

But the doodle-bugs kept coming thick and fast. They sounded like outboard-motors on small boats, sort of irregular. The dreaded moment was when the motor cut out. Then you could look for cover, count to 5 or 10 and hope it wouldn't hit you. Sometimes the bombs glided in without making any noise, or they cut off and then glided in for miles, so you had no warning at all. The air raid warning system was used all the time, but since these things came so regularly during the day and night, it was "Alarm" and "All Clear" so often that one didn't know which was which after a day or two. One couldn't possibly spend all the alarm times in shelters, we counted 11 out of 14 hours under "Alarm" one day, and that was nothing unusual.

On Sunday, 18 June, the Guards Chapel near Buckingham Palace was hit during a Service and many soldiers and civilians were killed. That was one of the worst accidents. Once in a while you would hear a terrific crash, the windows would shake (and a lot of the people) and you thanked your good fortune that this particular one didn't hit you.

Many people have told me that the flying bombs were worse than the heaviest blitzes, because they were so unpredictable, and on your mind and nerves all day and night. Every time we heard a car or bus start, we thought it was another doodle-bug. It took us many weeks after arrival in Edinburgh before we got out of the habit of looking up and watching every time we heard a car in the distance. Some fellows even have it in their system until today.- The most pathetic sight was the sight in the Underground Stations where thousands of mothers, children and old people slept for months.

As far as our crowd was concerned, we had varying reactions to the flying bombs. Dick Bierregaard was the only one who was really scared of them, because he happened to pass by the Guards Chapel on Sunday morning, 18 June, just after that bomb had killed close to 300 people and left an unbelievable amount of damage and rubble. He preferred to sleep in the air raid shelters rather than in our billets, which consisted of a row of buildings, formerly 2 or 3 family houses, on Sloane Court, in Chelsea, London.

Most of us, however, were fatalistic about the doodle-bugs and decided that it was no good worrying about them, either they hit you or they didn't, and there wasn't really anything we could do about protection. It was officially forbidden to sleep in air raid shelters, as there were just enough for civilians in the area.

On Monday morning, 3 July 1944, at about 6.30 a.m. a terrific crash shook us all, rattled our windows and we woke up realizing that a flying bomb must have landed very near our place. Many of the fellows decided to get up, as there was no sense to stay in bed another hour. I was very tired from the previous day (when I had visited Mrs. Loewenstein in Gerrards Cross), and merely turned over and went to sleep again. I got up about 7.10 a.m., got washed and dressed and was just about ready to leave, when Dick Bierregaard came in from the air raid shelter, and said that he heard that our office was hit during the night and we should go over and help clean up the mess. (We later found out that there was a near-hit but that only the windows were blown out in our office building.) Dick said he'd go upstairs and clean up and comb his hair, and I should wait for him downstairs for a couple of minutes. He didn't even stay in our building, had his things elsewhere and slept in the shelter.

For some unknown reason I decided to wait for Dick on the staircase landing outside my room (2nd floor), and not downstairs. It looked like rain that morning and I was carrying my raincoat over my left arm. The time was about 7.40 a.m. I never heard or saw a thing until several seconds after it happened. Then I found myself lying on the floor, covered with parts of the ceiling, wall and a large painted window near which I was standing. I remember lots of little flashes, and thick clouds of dust which threatened to choke me so that I kept spitting as fast as I could. I couldn't move because some soldier was lying across my legs moaning like mad. Personally, I looked like a mess. My uniform was torn to pieces, I was bleeding from several places, and my right hand was covered with blood and quite painful. My left hand had been under the raincoat and wasn't scratched. The first thing I did after I managed to get up (I don't know what happened to the soldier who had lain across my legs) was to move all fingers of my right hand and fortunately I could move them all, so that I knew the injury to my hand wasn't too serious. In the meantime I was bleeding from wounds in my head, neck, back and legs, but not seriously anywhere.

I think now that the most serious thing at first was the shock. I went into my room where there was a terrible mess, with bleeding fellows running and shouting all over the place. After resting on my bed for a couple of minutes, I remembered that Dick had gone upstairs, and I decided to look for him. Coming out on the landing, the smoke had lifted and I could see that almost all of the staircase had crashed in, except the part where I had been, and a narrow strip along the walls.

I went upstairs as closely to the wall as I could, hoping that the stairs wouldn't give way. When I came to the bath-room door, I came closer to fainting than I ever have before. Whereas my bedroom was to the back of the building, the bath-room faced to the street. You can imagine my shock when I saw little beyond the door but space. Practically the entire bath-room, and the front half of the building had collapsed into the street. I saw no sign of Dick or any one else who had been up there.

I then went downstairs, climbing over the rubble and went out of the front door just in time to see a twisted leg sticking out of the rubble, with Dick's voice on the other end of it saying "be careful, I think that leg is broken". Yes, he had fallen down to the street from the third floor and wasn't even unconscious. But he looked a terrible mess, cuts and bruises all over his body, and both legs broken, one compound (i.e. bone through the skin), the other simple (i.e. no flesh wound). The only explanation we had was that he must have come down on a piece of the wall and that lessened the impact on the street.

With my left hand I was able to help carry Dick on a door to the near-by ambulance, where we loaded him on a stretcher and put him inside. I went along with the same ambulance, as I was getting a little weak probably due to shock and loss of blood. Here I must say that the British A.R.P. service, including the Fire Dept., First Aid and Ambulances Services were really doing a magnificent job. In many instances they had ambulances on the way before the bomb crashed, because once in a while you would see them glide in and could just about figure out where they would hit.

From the first aid station, where we were given morphine and plasma injections, we were eventually taken to a civilian hospital. I had a chance before that to call Col. Johnson (then Major) at the office to let him know "we couldn't make it to the office today". At the hospital they cleaned us up, and then gave me an injection which knocked me out for about six hours. During that time they operated on and bandaged my hand, and bandaged all the other places where I had been injured. Part of my clothes had to be thrown away, but part of them I was able to keep. The same afternoon Colonels Wagner and Johnson and Major Haley came to visit us, but I was just out of the operating room and not awake yet. The civilian doctors and nurses took very good care of us, there were just Dick and I and one other fellow at that particular hospital. The third fellow (also of our Unit) was given up, but finally pulled through by the skin of his teeth, he had broken his pelvis bones, legs, one arm and head injuries. He was sent back to the States the following week by air. Dick was sent back in September.

The following day we were sent to the 1st General Hospital near London, and on Saturday, 8 July, I was released from the hospital, after I had been doing some persuading. The stay there wasn't doing me much good, and I could always have my bandages changed in town. Besides, Col. Johnson had told me on the phone that the Unit was moving to Edinburgh any day, and I certainly didn't want to miss that. What's more, these doodle-bugs even reached as far North as the hospital, and once in a while we would hear the droning of the motor, and the cut-out and then the crash.

Finally I got word Saturday morning that I was being released. I went down to get some new clothes issued and when I came back to the hospital ward, everybody was excited as they had just received word I must be on hand for the Colonel to come to the ward to "decorate" me. I felt like two cents in my pajamas, dirty hospital robe, unshaved and generally looking like a mess. A minute or two later the Colonel commanding the hospital came in with about six other officers and nurses. They called the ward to attention and then they read out the general order making the award, a copy of which I enclose. He then pinned the medal on my robe and they all filed by, congratulated me (!) and shook my left hand.

Shortly after that I got dressed and went back to London by ambulance, happy to be out of the hospital. The shock was still in effect and I wasn't really happy until the train to Edinburgh pulled out of Kings Cross Station the following Thursday morning. My hand was then still a big bundle of bandages, but everything else was healed up.

And here is what happened. Monday morning, just as I was waiting for Dick, a flying bomb glided in silently and crashed to the ground on the street immediately in front of the building next to ours. That and the building across the street were completely destroyed, about 3 or 10 of the surrounding ones were partially destroyed. Ours collapsed partially, that is the front half, and was later taken down completely. There was a truck load of men outside the building, waiting to drive off. Some of our fellows saw the thing gliding in and ran either down the street, or back into the house. That saved their lives in one or two cases. Others were apparently stunned and were ~~never found again. I consider myself one of the luckiest, as I~~ would have been on the street if the thing had come just 30 seconds later, or on the staircase which collapsed.

The total score was terrible, and one of the worst flying bomb accidents during the entire campaign: 110 American soldiers killed, many wounded, and an unknown number (unknown to me) of civilians killed and wounded. The fellows on the truck were later found in all kinds of shapes all over the neighborhood. Many were never identified. I pitied the men who had to go through the morgue to try and identify all these mangled bodies. They were Capt. (then Lt.) Riley and Earl Byleen.

Of our own group we had a high percentage of casualties. When we came down from Manchester there had been 5 of us. One, Sven Kiar, was in the bath-room with Dick and was killed instantly by a piece of wall. Another, Carl Oken, was also in that bathroom but was thrown into the bath-tub which jutted out over the street. That saved his life and he got away with part of the ceiling and wall in his back, which kept him in the hospital for several weeks. He later joined us at Edinburgh. Art Loven was in bed and wasn't scratched, whereas a fellow at the foot of his bed was almost killed by flying glass. Dick was the fourth and I the fifth of the original Manchester group.

By the time I had come to the bathroom that morning, Carl had climbed out of the bathtub, and Art had already placed a blanket over Sven Kiar's body, so I didn't see it. Besides, I was in a daze anyway

The accident was long discussed in London, as it was one of the worst as far as loss of lives was concerned. When we were in London on furlough last December, I went to Sloane Court and took snapshots of what was left. They have taken down about 10 buildings and you can get a good idea of what happened there, I am enclosing the snapshots.

I am also enclosing a letter of sympathy by a lady who saw the result of the accident.

I don't think that the censor at this late stage has any objection to my telling the full story of what happened in London on 3 July 1944, when we "got the fireworks one day early" as we said at the time. Normally fireworks come on the 4 July, and last night we watched them over Oslo in much more secure and comfortable bills

I hope this story hasn't excited you unduly, as it is a year old, and I merely want to record it as a matter of interest. To people who make nasty remarks about my acquisition of the "Purple Heart" in London rather than in battle, I put the question whether they think that the 110 Purple Hearts which were awarded to those who died in that accident, were undeserved. That usually shuts them up, but people with any sense wouldn't comment on that anyway. I have heard of cases where Purple Hearts were awarded to men who fell off motor-cycles hundreds of miles from the front, but in an "active theater of war", so I can rightly say that mine was actually acquired "due to enemy air activity".

Now that you have read this, put it away, I might want to show it to my grand-children some day, or perhaps to some people who never left the States and are complaining about the hardships of war, such as rationing, gasoline shortage etc. Just one more thing: we only had 4 weeks of that, but Londoners have had 5 years of it..

Love and kisses ,

Eric