

1945 June 25 - July 1

A Letter from Home

Since we are halfway through the year 1945 in La Crosse County newspaper articles about World War II, now is as good a time as any to point out a weekly feature in the *La Crosse Tribune* during the war era.

In every Sunday edition of the *La Crosse Tribune*, there is "A Letter from Home" written by a female member of the *Tribune* staff. Despite the large number of women serving in the military, it always started out with the salutation, "Hi Fella!" Then it summarized the happenings of the week in La Crosse and vicinity. This is the place where men and women in the service may have first learned that people they had grown up with or went to school with had been killed, wounded, captured, or listed as missing. It included the main stories from the newspaper during that week, as well as weather and sports. There was also more mundane news of the sort that would have been passed by the casual conversation in streets and backyards. The feature always closed with the first name of the writer. By this time in 1945, it was "Vee."



La Crosse, Wis.

July 1, 1945

Hi Fella!

Center of attraction in La Crosse this week is the big hole in the ground being created by a crane-operated "bucket" at the northeast corner of Fifth and King, where passers-by just can't resist joining the watchers' union, if only for a few minutes.

The hole takes up nearly half a block, measuring this way by that, and looks as deep to our inexperienced eyes as the famous open pit mine at Hibbing, Minn. What's going to take the place of dirt that's going out has not yet been announced.

After a week of heat, when crops and gardens began to take courage to grow, that ole meanie, the weather man, sent a rain and wind storm early Thursday morning.

Wind uprooted 14 trees in Riverside park, and lightning, striking a radio in a 16th street residence, set fire to the living room. Later a woman residing north of Holmen was struck unconscious by a lightning bolt in the second or third storm of the day.

Rain came down, too, last Sunday, when Veterans Memorial park, formerly Waterloo, was dedicated, but it didn't daunt the large crowd which gathered there.

The county highway police, assisted by officers from the surrounding area, marshalled more than 3,000 cars in and out of the park with nary a traffic jam or accident.

The county board has some fine plans for the further beautification and extension of your park, where you'll be able to enjoy many leisure hours.

"Land of the Living Dead" is what A. W. Rice, Tribune city editor, called the Japanese prison camp at McCoy after viewing it upon the invitation of McCoy's new commanding officer, Brig. Gen. John K. Rice, who arranged a newspaper tour. The Japs there have been declared dead by their families for permitting themselves to be captured.

They have no cigarettes, their tobacco is restricted to two ounces a week, and their food is limited. The day of the visit they were having pork kidneys fried in re-rendered fat. No wonder the cats in La Crosse can't have this delicacy any more.

After serving with the city police department for 22 years as motorcycle man and radio system oper-

ator, Elmer William Schnick has retired. La Crosse residents have purchased to date in the Seventh War Loan drive \$1,256,559 in "E" bonds. When the "Beansies" play, the Rev. Greg Keegan is right there at rightfield.

First of a series of air markers to be placed on buildings throughout the United States has been painted on the roofs of the West Salem Packing company's plant. So if you're flying home, boys, follow the big arrow that points to the nearest air field, La Crosse. The little one will lead you off to Hudson bay.

Seven liberated prisoners came in all at once to be interviewed last week, and it was quite a task for one of our gal reporters (what other kind do you think we have?) to sort out the jokes from the facts.

They were bubbling over with fun and looked hale and husky after recovering from their experiences. They are Pvt. Willard De Boer, Pfc. Lorenz A. Pinski, Sgt. Robert M. Pomeroy, S. Sgt. Alfred Harnish, Pvt. George Besl, T4 Robert Milkey and Pvt. Edward Wojahn.

S. Sgt. Russell Wolden, former Logan letterman and Blackhawk star, was in, too, looking fine after regaining the 35 pounds he lost in German prison camps.

Maurice Allen, Plc, injured when a suicide plane hit the deck of his ship, is recuperating from his wounds at Great Lakes, where he is pursuing his hobby of art by learning to paint in the modern manner.

Casualties reported last week include John Clayton Olson, Flc, who lost his life at sea Feb. 21; Pfc. Francis Balfany and Pfc. John W. Schmidt, wounded on Luzon; Pfc. George Wiederhoeft, wounded in Germany.

T4 Ernest Risberg and Sgt. Rolland Williams have received honorable discharges.

Work-whistle Annie, who works not and neither does she whistle, has been discovered at the warehouse of the ordnance shops here. She received that name because she appears for crumbs exactly at 12:25 every day when the men have finished lunch and returned to work. Pretty clever, but give me a mouse who can tell the quitting time!

Vee

When the year began, the writer was Lynne. Here is her first "letter" in January 1945.



January 7, 1945

La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Hi, Yella! —

Did you miss us—we hope? Just like you Joes, we wanted to be home for the holidays. But here we are again and glad to be back pounding out this weekly letter of the week's events for your information and amusement.

La Crosse county finally met its "E" bond quota in the Sixth War Loan last week. In fact, local bond buyers oversubscribed the original goal of \$1,119,000 by \$50,000. Big factor in putting La Crosse over the top in the latest bond campaign was the presentation of an excellent bond show Wednesday evening in the Vocational school auditorium featuring the smooth 109th Army Service Forces band from Camp McCoy and a technicolor film, "Combat America," filmed by Maj. Clark Gable.

Of course, last Monday was New Year's day with the usual amount of accompanying resolutions and headaches. But we must say that New Year's Eve was comparatively quiet in contrast with other brighter years. This more subdued celebrating can be attributed to the fact that the Eve fell on Sunday, absence of husbands and boy friends, and the feeling that quiet home gatherings were more appropriate at this time.

After serving as La Crosse county agricultural agent for 26 years, W. E. Spreiter resigned his position to become associated with the agricultural engineering department of the University of Wisconsin.

Costliness of the war's stepped-up tempo in all theaters was felt keenly in La Crosse last week as the casualty lists began to pour in. Four local men were reported killed by the war department, and six La Crosse servicemen were listed as missing. Reported killed in action were: First Lieut.

Aubrey G. Sundet in Belgium on Dec. 18 with the First Army; Flight Officer Otto Warren Bey, Havoc pilot, declared dead after he had been missing since Dec. 17, 1943, over Atina; Pfc. E. G. Hoch, 22, on Nov. 29 in Germany; and Pvt. Gerald Seidel, 20, with the infantry in France on Dec. 3. La Crosse servicemen listed as missing include: First Lieut. Bernard W. Schams, a pilot in the 15th Air Force based in Italy; Pfc. Leonard F. Nieland, with the infantry in France; S. Sgt. Russell J. Wolden, with Gen. Patton's Third Army in Germany; Pfc. Thomas T. Pretasky, missing in action since Dec. 13 with an infantry unit in France; Sylvester Servais, S1c, USN, in the South Pacific theater; and Gerald G. Outcalt, S2c, USN, in the South Pacific.

Mufflers, earmuffs and snowshoes are the order of the day in your old home town as both the snow and the mercury fell. We were treated to some nippy sub-zero weather all last week in a cold wave that reached 11 below. Oh, br-r!

This column received its first letter from the Philippines last week with an interesting account of America's latest theater of war related by Corp. Merlin Hanson, of La Crosse.

"Arriving in the Philippines from a place like New Guinea," Corp. Hanson wrote, "is next best thing to actually sailing back under the Golden Gate into 'Frisco bay."

And here's hopin' it won't be too long before all you fellas in the Pacific see the Golden Gate and those in the ETC wave at the Statue of Liberty.

Is it too late to wish you all a very happy New Year?

Lynne

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 January 7, page 7)

We never learned anything about Lynne, besides seeing her name at the end of this weekly column. Lynne carried on until her last letter on April 1, 1945.

The following week, the letter writer became "Dottie."



April 8, 1945.

La Crosse, Wisconsin

Hi Zella!

This is your new pen pal reporting to let you know what keeps the home fires burning while you men-on the battlefields make the real news.

Mayor Joseph J. Verchota took the spotlight in the city election Tuesday to ring down his ninth term of office. Wednesday morning found his office in the city hall swarming with local people offering congratulations as he entered his 17th year in that office, though his service hasn't been in a continual stretch. He polled 3,832 votes to 1,651 by his opponent, Richard Becker.

The weather man slipped us a mickey on Tuesday when a combination of snow and sleet made thoughts of spring vanish for a few days. Viroqua and Westby were hit hardest of the communities, with many of the communication lines down. However, the ladies were thankful the storm didn't hit on Easter Sunday or frilly bonnets would have taken an awful beating in the cold, wet atmosphere.

City snow removal crews let the sun take care of this final (we hope) snow fall, after looking at the \$16,822.08 bill for the job during the first three months of the year. Only \$5,093.79 was spent during the entire year of 1944 for the same job, for there was much less snowfall.

First barges to tie up at the La Crosse docks for the 1945 season were brought up the Mississippi river by the Kansas City Socony Thursday. They carried oil products. It's a sure sign of nice sunny days ahead when the lazy barges plow through the river again.

Cass street has been the scene of the only two accidents in which city buses went berserk over the curb in more than a year and one-half. Most recent one occurred shortly after midnight Thursday when the bus heading south on 16th street leaped the curb and was finally stopped by a telephone pole. The other accident was in September, 1943, on the 14th street intersection.

This weekend has been a hey-day for the La Crosse Elks as they staged a four-day celebration of their 50th anniversary. Opening event was a stag dinner and lodge meeting Thursday night, which more than 500 attended, including representatives from nearby lodges in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Trygve Nustad was handed the insignia of the office of exalted ruler by J. I. Murphy, retiring head.

Surveyors for the La Crosse municipal airport arrived last week and promised to begin grading

and paving as soon as weight bans are lifted from the roads. They have a cozy house on the west road near the airport which will be known as their field headquarters. Sounds inviting enough to drop in for a visit and talk about the future when airplanes connecting La Crosse with all points in the world will zoom in on the strip.

Pretty co-eds at the La Crosse Teachers college are planning to display even prettier baby pictures in a contest on Monday to raise money for the World Student Service Fund, which aids students in wartorn countries to continue their education. Money is collected through entry fees and small admission to the gallery. Their goal is \$250 and already \$180 has been collected from candy sales, cigarette auctions, shining shoes, manicuring nails and washing clothes.

Three more 106th Division men previously listed missing in action during the Ardennes campaign have been reported prisoners. They are Pvt. Edward Wojahn, T4 Harry D. Atkinson and Sgt. Robert Jahimiak. Memorial services were held last week for Sgt. Robert S. Eddy, who died on Saipan Dec. 21. He was with the 32nd Division. Killed in action were Lieut. Francis A. Riley in the Pacific; S. Sgt. George J. Thiele and Clyde J. Haney, both in Germany. Five men were reported wounded—Pfc. Ralph E. Sanders on March 11; Pfc. Larry L. Taylor on March 15; S. Sgt. George W. Happel on Feb. 23, all three in Germany; Corp. William E. Downey at Iwo Jima on Feb. 27; Pfc. Robert L. Jones on Luzon.

News from the sports world indicates that athletes will be met at the docks when they return home from overseas duty by managers and coaches eager to capture sport talent in all fields. Right now major league baseball camps are having a mad scramble to fill their teams with the daily changing draft status of players making havoc with their plans. The battle of the major leagues is truly a major battle, with a new skirmish every day.

In case some of you fellows don't know that Frank Sinatra isn't on the Hit Parade any more though it was old news months ago, I want to warn you. One local soldier on returning home from overseas turned in on the Hit Parade and had his worst shock since leaving the battlefield when he heard Lawrence Tibbett swing out on "Don't Fence Me In." Hope this will save you from a similar fate.

Until next week . . .

Dottie

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 April 8, page 9)

The true identity of "Dottie" was revealed in the *La Crosse Tribune* on June 17. There was no "Letter from Home" on June 17 because Dottie was busy getting married to an Army paratrooper, Lt. George Denno, from Pawtucket, Rhode Island. "Dottie" was Dorothy Roust of Red Wing, Minnesota, and a January 1945 graduate of La Crosse State Teachers College with a major in physical education. She had worked at the *La Crosse Tribune* since her graduation. Denno and Roust were married in the home of Mrs. E. E. Dow at 216 South 16th Street in La Crosse.¹



—Tribune Photo by Fran Burgess

It Was Something New even for war days when the Tribune had to hire a woman sports editor. But she didn't stay long enough, because that certain man came home from the war. Dorothy Roust —"Rusty" most of the time but "Dottie" in "A Letter from Home"—is now Mrs. George Denno, her husband a lieutenant with the U. S. Army paratroopers. She won't be "skirting the sidelines" any more, and she won't be writing to the boys either, because she's on her way east with her husband to spend the summer at Cape Cod. During Lieut. Denno's short stay here Rusty showed him some of the beautiful countryside she learned to love while a Teachers college student. The fense pose in Sand Lake Coulee registered a bit of it for them one day last week just previous to their marriage Thursday.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 17, page 8)

With Dottie honeymooning in Rhode Island, "Vee" made her debut on June 24, 1945.²

This weekly column was probably clipped and mailed to men and women stationed around the world who hungered for any local news. Besides letters from their families and sweethearts, "A Letter From Home" was one of the lifelines that connected them to the place they came from no matter how far they were away from home.

Jeff Rand
Adult Services Librarian
La Crosse Public Library
jrand@lacrosselibrary.org

Sources & Notes:

¹ "Dorothy Roust, Rhode Island Man Mid-June Home Pair," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 June 15, page 7.

² "A Letter From Home," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 June 24, page 3.