

World War II Letters from the Front

A lesson plan related to this material on the [Wisconsin Historical Society website](#).

Letters written from 1943 to 1945 from Roy F. Bergengren, Jr. to Don Anderson and other co-workers at the Wisconsin State Journal. Roy Bergengren worked at the Wisconsin State Journal in Madison for five years before enlisting in the army in 1941. He served as an aircraft controller with the 311th Fighter Control Squadron, 63rd Air Defense Wing, and with the 78th Fighter Control Squadron, 2nd Air Defense Wing, rising to the rank of major. By the time of his discharge in 1945, Bergengren had seen action in England, Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, and Germany.



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North Africa, 1943

Dear Roy, Mac, Don, et al,

. I've had a very interesting little trip and I could sure write some damn fine P-1 Sunday features, but alas, this must go through the censor. Right now I'm holed up in Africa (where I cannot say) and am a busy little boy. My duties (I'm not allowed to describe them) are fascinating. The food--I can't describe that either. But the weather is wonderful. No more of that English raw rain. I gladly gave up the luxuries of RAF life for a bit of sunshine.

I've seen most of Britain and threw away a lot of cold cash in London. I also had a fine trip to "the Rock" [of Gibraltar]. I'll tell you all about it before too long--I hope. I miss my wife, but that's only natural, isn't it? My physical condition is excellent. And my financial condition, I fear, is static since "there ain't no promotion this side of the ocean" unless one is damn lucky which I'm not. . . .

Love and kisses,
Bergie

Italy, November 24, 1943

Dear Don,

. . . This will be my second Christmas overseas and I think I'm well qualified to report that the Yank, 1943 version, is doing a good job in upholding the traditions of his father and his grandfather and all who came before him. His few weaknesses are a source of pride rather than otherwise. He occasionally gets drunk, but that's because he loves his home and family and is terrifically lonely for both. He's slow to anger, but when he does get mad, he fights like hell. He's quick to forgive--the pictures of him giving his candy ration to Italian kids is not a publicity gag. Sometimes he gets cheated, but it's because he has a deep faith in human nature. I think he's the best there is.

We could have done very nicely without this war, but I do think it has given us a new sense of values which will go a long way in cancelling any future war. We'll come out of it a stronger than ever and with a revitalized conception of man's brotherhood to man which is, after all, what Christmas is all about. Next Christmas we overseas will demonstrate personally--at home.

Sincerely,
Roy.

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Germany, January 20, 1945

Dear Don,

Having entered Germany a while ago, I feel something like the coast-to-coast marathon runner must as he crosses the New York State line. In 28 months, I've journeyed through 11 countries to get here. It was a rather roundabout route, but there's never been any doubt about where we were headed. I hope I shall travel right to Berlin--and then home.

So far, it has been an interesting, if unpleasant experience. I could certainly have done nicely without it; but since it has been necessary, I'm glad to be one of those taking a share in it.

There have been a few outstanding impressions. Obvious though they may be, they are none-the-less vivid.

First is the absolute futility of war. Seen at close range, it becomes so brutal and stupid that we have to rub our eyes to believe the world is capable of it. It can't be written; sample of the death, poverty, and destruction in war's wake must be seen to be appreciated.

In a Lyons café, a French journalist asked me, "Why is it you Americans refuse to believe the Germans really tortured and killed so many innocent people in France?" I couldn't answer. I guess it's because we live so far from such things and we must see to believe. Words fail to make such things real.

A second impression is the fundamental similarity of the peoples of the United Nations. I've lived and worked with British, French, Australian, South African, New Zealand, Polish, and Belgian soldiers to name a few. I'm convinced that we all seek the same general sort of life. We criticize one another for our little individual eccentricities; each of us thinks his is the best nation; but fundamentally we differ little. When this war is won, we must remember only the fundamentals and get together in a big way.

A third impression is that of America's own capabilities. London, Algiers, Paris, Rome, Florence, Marseilles, and every other city and town in every liberated country teeming with American traffic. Huge depots of American supplies, throngs of American men everywhere. If we can put forth one half the effort for peace that we've extended in this war, because it was necessary, there should never be need for another war. We must realize that peace, now, is just as necessary as the war has been.

I'm now living in a half-wrecked miner's house. There's snow and there's cold in addition to other little worrisome things. I and millions of others like me aren't enjoying ourselves at the moment, but we're perfectly willing to live this way because we have faith that the peoples of the world involved this time are going to do a better job in fashioning the peace. . .

I've ramble on at some length and must now get a bit of shut-eye. The lessons to be learned from war are so simple and so obvious, that they have to come out. This time, dammit, we've got to remember them.

My best to the gang!
Roy

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