

357th Infantry Band
APO #40
Camp Barkley, Texas
July 6, 1943

Dear Wendell,

Received your letter. Fourth of July here in Camp Barkley was a little dull. I laid on my bed and slept most of the afternoon and in the evening took in a show at one of the camp theaters. There was nothing going around here to indicate that there even was a holiday.

And you, I suppose, went to Bemidji as planned. Parade in forenoon, dinner in the park, movie in the afternoon, fireworks in the evening. Well, that's about the best way of spending the fourth. When you are in the Army you look back on holidays spent like that and think how much fun it really was. -As you say, haying starts the morning and its hard to get in the spirit of working after celebrating so desperately the previous day.

We had to run what is known as the obstacle course yesterday afternoon. This course is, as the name implies, a series of obstacles. -Two men were started off every thirty seconds. The whole course had to be run at "double time", an Army term meaning a quite fast pace. You started by running down a winding park marked by wires in each side. There were frequent deep holes and ditches in this park but they weren't hard to get through if you watched your step. Let me say now that this whole obstacle course was laid out amongst trees so you never knew what new obstacle was going to loom into view as you rounded a bend. The first serious stumbling block was a contraption consisting of a scaffold about ten feet high. You had to mount the scaffold by means of a hanging rope and then jump off. Ten feet looks awfully high when you are looking down. I came down by means of the rope. - The next thing a high tower about thirty feet. You climbed it on one side by means of the cross pieces which were about four feet apart and you descended on the other side by rope netting. Some very wobbly footing let me tell me tell you. I had never ventured higher than ten feet before and I looked several times at that tower before starting, but finally closed my eyes and went up as fast as possible. A bunch of troublesome logs, then a narrow, wobbly bridge and then across a what was supposed to be an artificial river by means of a cable and pulley. You hung onto a handle fixed to the pulley and sailed right across. But woe unto you if you had let go of the handle - a sheer drop of twenty feet. Through some small holes in a wall - over the top of a ten feet long wall - through more holes, ditches - over a series of hurdles, and at the last a bunch of barbed wires entanglements to crawl under. The last impediment was this barbed wire and after getting though that you ran perhaps twenty-five yards and then fall forward on your face, completely exhausted. Immediately after running through this course we had to take a fast hike - three miles in thirty six minutes. It's good exercise.

Well, Wendell, this letter yet a little strung out, but thought you might like to hear a little about the sadder moments of army life. Write again.

Virgil.