

Ira Weiss Correspondence
Transcribed by Adina Langer, MHHE Curator
August 2020

Western Union Telegram

R199C Cr INTL

CD SANS ORIGINE VIA PREWI

EFM MR A WEISS

1ST WEST 17TH NYK

LOVE TO ALL AT HOME. ALL WELL AND SAFE. WISH I COULD BE WITH YOU.
IRA WEISS

June 10, 1945,

Dear Mom & Pop,

I finally arrived at Camp Beale yesterday afternoon.

It is a very big place fifty two miles north of Sacramento situated in a vast treeless plain. It isn't a nice place but once can't expect anything better since everyone leaves after a short time.

With nurses, there now are 2000 officers all waiting to go abroad. Today, Sunday, I was at most run ragged going all about this place processing. I may stay here a week to three weeks before I hit the big boat, but I am hoping it will be real soon.

I haven't any idea where I am going except it is someplace in the tropics. I have been issued a host of tropical equipment already.

With me, on my orders are about thirty five others and we are all living in the same barracks. A couple of them, I knew well from Camp Claiborne. They are all men in their late thirties, and all are construction men in civilian life. It is my guess that we will be a construction group in Manila or some such place concentrating on reconstruction. I as Fiscal Officer would have the authority to pay all bills and make the necessary audits.

I do know for a certainty that I will never be in combat and away from the fighting zone.

Starting with my July pay (August 1) you will receive every month a check for \$130 plus a \$25 bond. It won't leave me much money, but I hope to get by.

I expect to send most of my winters home. Will send it by freight a few days before I leave at government expense.

I will have to buy additional clothing such as combat boots and more khakis.

The weather here is very hot and humid. The nearest town is Maryville about eight miles away on Route 99.

If I can get a little time off, I will go to San Francisco to see the town. Once I leave, it may be a couple of months before you hear from me. The trip may take a month and it will take a little time to get a letter back. So don't worry.

Will send this to the shop as it will save a day in getting to you.

Regards to all.

Ira

Address: OKB ASF PRD
Camp Beale
Cal

**Letter written from Officers Mess
Army Service Forces Personnel Replacement Depot
Camp Beale, California**

July 1, 1945 (Sunday)

Dear Folks,

Today was about the hottest day since I have been here. It was 110 degrees in the barracks and probably much higher outside. The only part of California which is cool are coastal cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles. When you get inland, it is very torrid.

Since we are alerted we can't leave the camp. We will probably leave for the staging area in a few days. At the staging area, I should be there from three days to a week. Mail will be forwarded to me there. My letters will probably be censored, but won't know anymore there than I know here.

I sent home my winter clothing. You had better have it dry cleaned.

We play plenty of gin rummy here. A couple of fellows also play chess. On the boat, I imagine time will pass by quickly. I hope I don't get seasick.

I am just taking essentials with me. I will let you know what I may need.

I got paid yesterday. No bond will come to you this month, so I will figure out how many I can buy and will send them home.

There are 36 officers in our group, but there will be other groups on the same ship. I don't know what staging area I am going, but it is probably Camp Stoneman near San Francisco.

I hope everyone is alright.

Love to all,

Ira

July 1945

Dear Folks,

I am writing this letter to serve as a record of my experiences so I can read it with glee in later years. Please don't judge this as a complaint as it is not written with this in mind. I realize that I am not on a pleasure cruise and things can be lots worse.

Now that we are very deep in the Pacific and gradually approaching our destination, I can tell you about my life at sea.

This ship is named the General R. L. Howe. It is a miniature city in itself. Among other things, it has a balcony, boiler shop, ice plant, ice cream room, laundry, huge water plant (where sea water is purified,) library, post exchange, hospital, and recreation rooms.

It sounds ideal anyway. However, the tropics is hot and surrounded by water all the time, the humidity is high. In fact, the heat of the staterooms is stifling, especially at night when all portholes are shut to comply with the blackout regulations. I go around most of the time in shorts and sleep up on deck. At least it is cooler there even if I have to sleep on hard metal.

The ship is crowded and that is our worst hardship. We have several thousand aboard though in peacetime I doubt if it could have ideal space but for a few hundred passengers. Here, we are always bumping into someone. We have eighteen in our stateroom and if we were all there together, we would be tripping over each other.

Food is extraordinary. We perhaps eat better than anyone at home. We have steak very often and we were served turkey too. For every breakfast, we get eggs and bacon and fruit and cereal. Thanks to the ice cream machine, we have ice cream once a day. No one has any complaints on the food situation.

Inactivity is depressing. I already read three large books beside countless magazines. Movies are out because of the intense heat. We have a chess tournament in progress and have a good chance of winning it. I play some cards but gambling is forbidden on the vessel. Time is passing by quickly though. We have the same routine daily.

Outside of the first few days, the water is very calm. I haven't been seasick and don't think I will for the remainder of the trip.

We see hundreds of flying fish daily. They, of course, don't fly but sail above the water at a rapid speed. These fish seem to be about eight inches long and they flap their fins like wings. It is quite remarkable.

Another phenomena (sic) I notice in tropical water is at night is the specks of vivid green when the breakers hit the ship. It seems as if there is some kind of phosphorescence in the water. I have seen schools of porpoises jumping to and fro in the water in unison. The ship's [unreadable] spotted a whale but I didn't get to see it.

The only duty I have on board is mess officer every fourth day. I am glad I have something to do though the heat in the galley is appalling.

We have a small daily newspaper where we get the highlights of current and sports events. The news is encouraging and if you could see our strength in the Pacific from what I observed, the Japs can't resist effectively much longer. Through our loudspeaker system which hits every nook and cranny of the ship, we hear both popular and classical music. We practice ship emergency drills daily. Morale aboard is high.

So please don't worry about me. I am feeling very well and am in good...

July 2, 1945

(Note, this date is inaccurate, based on content of this letter and previous letters)

Dear Folks,

Since it is pretty hard to write continually, I may find it hard to write to all the members of the family. In fact, I am writing this letter on my knee.

I made a trip to Manila today. The city is destroyed. I didn't find a house that wasn't damaged. All the large buildings are completely razed. There are many Japanese hulks in the harbor.

About all that has been done is removing the rubble. Rebuilding must wait as the winning of the war is our first priority.

The people live in ruined houses, and they are in a sorry plight. They look emaciated and very lean. Lots of kids look like Japs and it is apparent the enemy was really on the ball.

I was glad to get out of Manila. There is nothing to do and nowhere to go. Outside of the Red Cross, there are no conveniences for us. Prices are outrageous. There is very little of anything and what is for sale is ridiculous. A mediocre meal sells for \$7.00 in American money. Frankly, I was glad to get back to my wilderness camp.

I visited a church which had a famous bamboo organ a few hundred years old. Right near the alter, they kept the body of one of their priests who died many years ago. The body was presented excellently-- but what an unusual sight!

Ironically enough, the slums suffered very little from the fighting. The Japs figured that there was nothing there to loot. Manila is an oriental city with a very low standard of living. It is so different than any city in our hemisphere.

Words can't describe the havoc. It is easy to realize how lucky the American people are. We haven't felt the war at all.

Flash! I just got the letter you mailed to me at Camp Beale dated July 3. Others should follow soon. Also got one from Babs. Thank her for me.

Will write again soon,

Ira

Excerpt, date unknown

...appeared.

All the Filipinos on Luzon are Catholics though on other islands there are some Mohammadans (sic) and savage pagans.

There are plenty of churches all around though many are in ruins. The average Filipino is very pious. They observe all the religious customs. Yet, there is quite a crime wave prevalent.

Thirty seven soldiers, including a couple of army nurses, have recently died from poisonous liquor concocted by a Filipino distiller. It certainly didn't improve relationships between the G.I. and the native.

Most soldiers regard the Filipino in disdain. Their standard of living and their habits are so much lower than ours that many of us lose our respect for them in addition, they are brown skin (sic)

White people are prone to deem people of other colors as inferior. The fact that many Filipinos are charging soldiers huge prices for junk has n't helped the situation out. The biggest reason for our ill feeling is that our soldiers want to go home, in the worst way. Since that isn't possible, they take it out on the natives or the country itself. Almost all of the boys agree that we should give the Philippines their independence and wash ourself out of a big headache.

In 1936, we passed a law evaluating our dollar to be worth two Philippines pesos. It is still in effect. We get paid two pesos for each dollar we earn. Yet, because of inflationary conditions, the peso is perhaps worth now about 5 cents in purchasing power. You can easily see that we take a beating financially. As a consequence, most soldiers can spend very little money around. (I have written too much already)

Regards,
Ira

August 11, 1945
Luzon, P.I.

Dear Folks,

Today we heard that Japan is willing to give up provided she keeps her mikado. There is wide celebration here as everyone knows the war is drawing to a close.

So my prophecy comes true. When I spoke to you from St. Louis, I told you the war was in its last legs and wanted to be over before the shooting dies down.

I understand that I am being assigned to the 730 Engineer Depot Co. Will write you again when I get more definite information and my APO number.

Everyone would like to get home in a hurry. That is impossible, and in my case it may be six months or more. At least, I know that my stay in the army will terminate eventually.

Regards to all,

Ira

August, 20
Manila, P.I.

Dear Folks,

I arrived at my new outfit yesterday. It is located in the suburbs of Manila.

Facilities are pretty good.

I have a tent to myself with a wooden flooring. There is a shower a few feet away. We have our own recreation room and mess hall but most important, the company possesses a refrigerator where we can get ice cold water.

We help operate a very large Engineer depot. Our company furnishes the labor to operate the Receiving Section of the Depot twenty four hours, seven days a week. For this week I work the swing shift (from 5 PM till 1AM). We don't even get Sunday off.

This company has been abroad nine months and perhaps some of the men may come home soon. I feel that within a year I should amass enough points to be eligible for discharge. Time will tell.

Haven't had a letter in a week.

Regards,

Ira

August 26, 1945

Dear Folks,

Today is Sunday, but I work today like any other day. Next week I will confine my duties to a new depot about fifteen miles out of Manequina (sic).

However, I will still live at the old area.

There is a swell bunch of boys in this company and I am friendly ith the ones who work under me.

I haven't received any mail and am wondering whether the change in APO number had anything to do with it.

I sleep under a net and that keeps mosquitoes away to be more certain, use a repellent on my exposed portions when I go to bed. The ants are very annoying as they bite too. The army has a very good powder DDT which seems to be very effective against them.

The little radio I took with me plays pretty good. There are two army broadcasting stations in Manila which plays popular music and recordings of the god music and plays from American stations. It is funny, but for us to get the latest news of the Far East, we must get it by short wave from San Francisco.

We have a company PX which sells a few items. Whatever we buy is pretty cheap. Gillette blue blades at a penny apiece, cigarettes at fifty cents a carton, etc. The trouble is that there isn't much to buy.

Our company is running a dance tonight. We will have a G.I. band and many of the Spanish and Filipino "beauties" will attend. Since I will be working, I won't be able to give you an account of the proceedings.

I am feeling well, and time is going by quite rapidly.

Regards to everybody.

Ira

August 31, 1945

Dear Blanche,

I got your V mail letters of August 4. They come together and are legible, but they take too long in getting here.

I have seen very few dogs and no cats around. Yet, I have been told that there were thousands of them before the war. Perhaps you can use your imagination (sic) what happened to them. As a matter of fact, the ordinary Filipino is hungry. Even with money in his pocket, he still can't buy sufficient food. Good food is very expensive and his main diet is rice.

On our night shift, we take sandwiches and coffee with us. When we start eating, the Filipino laborers watch us with wide open eyes that seem to be imploring us. It reminds me of a dog pleading for a bone. It is hard to turn them down.

The average native is lazy and devoid of energy and ambition. They have no incentive to try to better themselves.

I have spoken to many of them about the Japanese occupation. During the first few years, it wasn't bad. The Japs flushed with victory didn't abuse them. In fact, they tried to be conciliatory in conjunction with their oriental policy toward members of similar races. They did issue invasion money for everything they got. But when the Americans invaded the Philippines, they became very bestial and sadistic. Innocent people including women and children were bayoneted and shot.

Manila is shaped in such a way that it is militarily indefensible yet our enemy left a division of marines to resist knowing that the city would be destroyed in the ensuing fighting. Incidentally, there are still a couple of Japanese bodies floating in the Pasig River near our quarters.

The streets are congested and there are terrific traffic jams. The thousands of Army vehicles constitute the only cars on the road. Yet, you can see a few civilians (sic) autos. Every street car has been obliterated. The natives get around in trucks used as buses. Usually, you see so many packed in together that they can barely move.

I am getting use (sic) to the heat though it is very annoying. You feel itchy all day long and when you scratch you might get infected. Also, I have prickly heat rashes on my legs.

September 29, 1945

Dear Folks,

I just completed a 440 mile trip in less than two days and I mam pretty tired.

There were three of us-- another lieutenant, a sergeant, and myself, and we had the company jeep. We journeys to Baguio, high up in the mountains of northern Luzon.

The region around Baguio is so mountainous that it is very hard to get there. The scenery is like the Pocono Mts. The only trees available were pine trees and the weather was very cold. In fact, I had to wear a field jacket and slept with these blankets. You can't believe you are in the Philippines when you are there.

The city itself was destroyed in the fighting however the suburbs are intact. Some of the homes were beautiful. I saw many picturesque log cabins [unreadable] moratas and Luzon were so interesting that I was intrigued for hours.

I saw the house in which Yamachita surrendered. Many of the signs are painted in Japanese.

One of the most unusual spots was the country club which is still intact. At present, it is being fixed up for an officers recreational center. It is a huge log building much larger than our Hiawatha clubhouse with large spacious rooms with fireplaces. It was right on top of a mountain and in the dining room there was a very large window with a view of {unreadable} of peaks. It reminded me of the window in titter's refuge. Furthermore, on the grounds was a golf course and tennis courts.

On the sides of the hill, the Japs dug deep holes and they fought very tenaciously from within. If you recall the news, the most san- [unreadable] war took place there. Baguio is the Phill-

December 14, 1945

Dear Folks,

I am just getting over a cold. Everyone seems to have them. Though it is hot during the day, the weather varies at night. We all have taken influenza "shots." But that is to help us when we get back home.

Eddie should be leaving sometime in January with 50 points. There is a lull in shipping this month but January will be a big month. I still think I will be eligible in February.

I got a package from O.L. Stamps from Italy which took almost a year to get to me. It consists of glass book ends. Stamps is home tho (sic) I don't know his address.

A score of P.W.s started drinking methanol from drums at the depot. They figured it was the equivalent of whisky. They did not realize it was poison. Many never woke up. They are dead.

Nothing new around here. Write soon,

Ira

1945--- Specific Date Unknown

Dear Folks,

Eisenhower's statement on demobilization was like passing a bombshell in the Philippines. Nens are very low in spirits and are at a loss what to do. It means practically everyone is stuck for an additional ninety days. In my case, I may be delayed till March before I become eligible. We will however continue our protests by letters and cables.

We are still getting thousands of tons of useless equipment from America each week. That is the only excuse that could be used to keep us here.

All the accidents at the depot happen in my shift. Last week, a Filipino sergeant was hit by a small trailer and practically died in my arms. It was a gory mess and I am not inclined to discuss it.

A few nights ago, one of my trucks hit another. Six people were injured and I had to take them to the dispensary and make a full report of the accident. Also one officer g.I. completely wrecked a tractor. Miraculously, he was uninjured.

Last night, a truck loaded with chemicals arrived at my exchange. It burst into flames and our fire extinguishers couldn't overcome the blaze. I ordered the driver to remove the [unreadable] a safe distance away from our warehouse and other trucks. He was afraid-- so I hopped on the

truck myself and drove it away. The chemical fumes almost overcame me, but I parked it by a fire hydrant. In a half hour we had the flames under control, but lots of excellent adp. I was commended for my efforts.

Do not vote for Truman and the administration.

Ira

January 23, 1946

Dear Folks,

I am now eligible to go home. Officers with 45 months service can now be released provided they are not considered essential.

Now, I have to work and try to get releases from higher units to eval:

- a- my company
- b- my debot
- c- Depot Group
- d- Base X

So don't be too elated till I give you more substantial information.

Ira

RCA Radiogram

1946, FEB 6, PM 9:52

SMX2085 Manila 357 358 122 Via RCA
EFW Fay Weiss Lake Heawata (sic) NJ

EXPECT TO BE HOME SOON DONT WRITE FURTHER WILL CONTACT YOU ON ARRIVAL
BEST WISHES TO ALL AT HOME --