

Letters to My Mother sent by Dad – January, 1945

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Fred Kitson circa late 1944

Dad once told me “My time in WWII was the most exciting 6 months of my life and for me it is like it happened yesterday” He never really talked about it until he was about 75 years old. Initially it upset him to talk about it and he would often breakdown in telling a story. Once he got comfortable about talking about it, he kept remembering more stories to tell and wanted to share his story.

Dad (Fred Kitson) trained at Camp Wheeler in GA. Dad and I visited the area around Camp Wheeler in 2006. The camp no longer exists and very little information is available. Some of the camp is now a residential and business area. The letters are from my father to my mother Jeanne Ruth White Kitson.



Mom and Evelyn Jeane circa
first half of 1945

(This photo was taken in the side yard at my grandparents house sometime in the summer of 1945 after my father came back from Europe.)

1944

12/2 – Daughter Evelyn Jeanne is born in Buffalo, NY

12/7 – Finished training as Infantry replacement for mortar and machine gun

12/9 – Furlough

12/19 – Furlough ends

12/31 – Boarded the Queen Mary at NYC; 18,000 including buddy Melvin Lau. The Queen Mary sailed January 1 – January 7, 1945. Duration of sailing 5 Days, 16 hours, 44 minutes. Speed 26.63 Knots. Normal Troop Capacity 15,000. Dad said the ship had 18,000 loaded.

1945

1/7 – Landed Gourock, Scotland; boarded train for South Hampton, England; traveled through the night under black-out conditions.

1/8 – Boarded U.S. Navy landing ship tank (special ship for unloading tanks and other military vehicles and equipment); traveled across the English Channel to Le Harve, France.

1/12 – Left Le Harve in boxcars; 33 men in each car with full

field pack and duffle bag.

1/14 – Arrived at Repo Depo at Metz, France.

1/16 – Loaded on truck at dusk with other infantry replacements

The rest of this account is told in first person as my father told it to me or has been written in the letters he wrote. Occasionally, clarification comments will be made by the author to add additional detail which will be in parentheses:

1/17 – Sometime during the night Melvin Lau and I heard our names called out and we jumped into the road and were led into the basement of a damaged schoolhouse. The basement was illuminated with burning rags stuck into wine bottles filled with gasoline; black sooty smoke filled the air.

We had joined Company D, 1st Battalion, 3rd Regiment of the 87th Infantry Division of the Third Army under General Patton. We never saw him! We subsequently learned that this division had been committed to action for the front on December 25th 1944 in Leige, Belgium at the Battle of the Bulge. When we joined the men in our squad, on Jan. 17th (23 days later), only one half of the combat force was left. The others were either sick, wounded or dead. We replacements were welcomed into the machine gun squad with genuine appreciation.

Camp Wheeler trained 1000 replacements per week. To fill the Queen Mary it was necessary for 18 other replacement camps around the country to supply 1000 men each to fill the ship with 18,000 men and probably some women. Can you imagine the logistics of assembling 18,000 infantry replacements from around the country to load on to the Queen Mary; one man at a time walking up the gangplank? We were told that loading men had been going on for 24 hours prior to the time we loaded and we left about 30 hours after we loaded. This was the first and last time I spent time in New York City, on New Years Eve.



217 Glenridge Road, East
Aurora, NY, circa 1935

(My grand parents lived at 217 Glenridge Road in East Aurora, NY. Mom stayed with my grandparents while Dad was in Europe. The house had recently been built and only small trees surrounded it by 1945.)

1) This is the First Letter written after his first night on the ship.

Envelope: Passed – Army Examiner – Clarence L. Brauton, 2nd Lt. (cursive signature)?

U.S. Army Postal Service 13/Jan/1945

From:

Pvt Fred Kitson 42096197
Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.
a.p.o. 15705
% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred Kitson
217 Glenridge Road
East Aurora, NY, USA

Hello Dear Jeanne,

I love you and hope you and our precious baby are feeling all right. I am fine and will be quite a way from home when you get this. I am writing this while at sea.

Without a doubt you will be wondering how I like the boat

ride. The first night out to sea was rather rough. After evening chow my stomach rolled quite a bit, but I managed to keep it down. A good many boys were less fortunate and tossed up everything. We haven't rolled much since the first night, and I have felt quite good and haven't missed a meal. The meals are pretty good and we eat just twice a day, which is enough as we haven't much to do.

I am anxious to know how the baby is coming along. I'll bet she is growing like a weed. How is her rash? Does she still look like her Daddy? I hope her mommy is feeling good and getting along all right.

I have buddied up with a fellow from Minnesota whose name is Mel Lau (Melvin) (Dad and Melvin Lau became life long friends). He is married, but has no children. He is the same age as I. We chum together most of the time and I enjoy his company a great deal.

We have a P.X. on the ship and we can get what we need. Incidentally cigarettes are 5 cents a pack on the ship.

We received nifty Red Cross packages which contained the following; carton of cigarettes, deck of cards, pencil, writing paper and envelopes (which I am using), a pocket reader of short stories, life savers (lime), sewing kit, soap box, and soap, and shoe laces. All this came in a useful cloth bag with a drawstring on top. It's a nifty gift and we appreciate it. Red cross women also gave us coffee and donuts and candy just before we boarded the ship. (I am pretty sure this got dumped shortly after arriving in Scotland, as they had to carry so much and this would quickly become dead weight. Dad said they learned very quickly to travel light.)

I haven't seen Bob Jones yet, but I have seen several of the other boys on the ship. I saw Gates the farmer and asked and asked him if he got the manure pile moved, but he said no, but he did get is pig and bull butchered.

Let me know if you received the Western Union money order which I sent from the P.O.E. (Port of Entry?). That was the only way I could send it because of censorship.

Our ship is very beautiful and we have a good stateroom. It is a former first class passage room, with nine bunks in it. We have a lavatory with bathtub, and an extra wash stand in the room with beautiful mirrors which make shaving very easy. Hot and cold running water. We have a good bunch of fellows in the room which makes it very agreeable.

I would like to tell more about the ship, but as you know everything from now on will be censored. (Dad said that there was a rotation of the bunks and meals. I believe he said 3 rotations. Each soldier got 8 hours in the bunk. He previously mentioned in this letter they got two meals a day. I believe this information was not included because it would have disclosed troop numbers and would have been censored)

I am writing this in the recreation room, and one of the boys is playing very beautifully on the piano. If the writing is any poorer than usual, it is because of the rolling of the ship. This letter will be censored on the ship and will start back shortly after we hit the dock, (Gourock, Scotland), so you will get it as soon as possible.

It will soon be chow time Darling Jeanne.

Good Afternoon.

I love and adore you and Evelyn Jeanne. Many hugs and kisses.

Your truly, Fred

May God Bless You both abundantly.

2) I believe this is the second letter. No envelope. On United States Army stationary. (Since he knew no mail would be mailed back to the states until the ship docked in Scotland, he may have combined letters and not have been too concerned when they were posted while on the ship.)

Hello Dearest Jeanne,

Here's hoping you are feeling O.K. when you receive this darling. I am feeling fine and wish I knew that you and the baby were as well as I am. We are still at sea and the weather is still about the same and the boat is rolling very little.

I was on the top deck this afternoon and got quite a kick out of watching the water roll by, which is just about all you can do. It was very breezy up there and the salt spray felt stingy as it blew into the face.

Last night I was in the bunk at 7:30 and I read quite a bit out of my pocket reader before lights out. We have reveille at 6:00 AM, chow at about 9:00 AM, and 5:00 PM, and lights out at 10:00 PM. In between time we go up on deck and read or just loaf.

They frequently have movies on the deck, but I haven't bothered to see any. In the evening we can get a canteen cup full of pop for 15 cents. It tastes pretty good particularly because the ships water doesn't have a good taste. I still haven't missed a meal and furthermore I don't expect to. Tonight we had potatoes, corned beef, bologna, carrots, turnips, pickles, bread, butter, cheese, coffee, and an apple. It was all very good and I enjoyed it. We eat out of our mess kits, which saves a lot of dish washing for the K.P.S. (kitchen patrol?)

I am anxious to know all about you and the baby and know you will let me know as soon as possible. My best wishes and prayers are with you constantly. I love and adore you precious Jeanne. May God Bless You abundantly.

Good nite My Love,
Your Sweetheart Fred

3) From: 12 January 1945 (United States Army Stationary)
Pvt Fred Kitson 42096197
Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.
a.p.o. 15705

% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred Kitson
217 Glenridge Road
East Aurora, NY, USA

Envelope: Passed – Army Examiner – Clarence L. Brauton, 2nd
Lt. (cursive signature)?

At Sea

Hello My Darling,

I hope you and the baby are feeling good and want you to know that I am feeling very good. The sea has been very calm and we haven't rolled a bit today. Mel and I spent a couple hours today on the deck enjoying the fresh air and shooting the breeze. We talked about home and our love ones whom are keeping the home fires burning for us. Naturally our conversation centered on our wives and he told me about his and I very proudly told of my wonderful sweetheart. We talked of our courtship and carried right on to the present. I'm sure that we both enjoyed it tremendously. He is very happily married and you surely know I am also. It is wonderful to have you dearest to think about and think of our happy life together. It is also good to think of the future when I can come home and enjoy you and our loverkins, Evelyn Jeanne

Good night darling, I love and adore you. Take good care of yourself and Evelyn Jeanne, and I'll take good care of me. All my Love, Fred, May God Bless You.

4) From: (Sent V-Mail)

Pvt Fred Kitson
Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.
a.p.o. 15705
% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred V Kitson
217 Glenridge Road
East Aurora, NY, USA

Envelope: Passed – Army Examiner – Clarence L. Brauton, 2nd Lt. (cursive signature)?

Hello Darling Jeanne,

I love you with all my heart. Jeanne think of you and our precious baby constantly. I hope you are well and our baby are both feeling well and happy.

I am fine and have been enjoying our trip quite a bit. You are without a doubt quite concerned about me, but please don't make yourself unpleasant by worrying over me as you have a great big job with the baby, and I am all right.

You and Evelyn Jeanne are my precious loves and I miss you much but I have perfect memories and look forward to making our wishes come true. God Bless You. All My Love, Fred

5) This is the 5th letter. No envelope. Appears to have been combined with the previous letter. At Sea.

Hello Dearest Jeanne,

I just wrote a V-mail, but it is too small to really say anything, however I did want to write it as you will get it quickly. I had expected to write air mail, but there are no stamps available. After I get set on shore someplace, I will use airmail regularly.

I am still at sea and seem to enjoy it more all the time. Today has been very bright and the sea is calm. I spent a couple of hours today on the top deck just looking around with my buddy Mel from Minnesota.

We had exceptionally good chow tonight; beef stew, lima beans,

potatoes, spiced ham cold cut, stewed figs, bread, butter, cheese, jam, and coffee.

Last night we had an entertainment in our most beautiful dining room. We have a ship orchestra made up of talented passengers. A tenor soloist sang a song from the operetta Student Prince. It was very well done, and of course brought back fond memories. Two accordionists also played a couple of polkas. The orchestra also played several tunes, including "Paper Doll", "Shiek of Araby", and "In the Mood". It all sounded very good and we enjoyed it, but we must admit it sort of made us homesick.

I surely was lucky to have had that short time at Christmas, and enjoyed it to the fullest extent. It was a thrill of a lifetime to walk into the bedroom and see you feeding our beautiful Evelyn Jeanne. You are very beautiful Darling and I enjoyed looking at you and realizing that you are really mine. I am very happy and proud to have you as my sweetheart, wife, and mommy of our precious baby. You looked as pretty or prettier as you always have in spite of the fact that you had just recently given birth to our little lovekins. I realize in part at least what you have gone through to bring our baby here and I assure you I appreciate it all. It was the greatest thrill of all to hold the baby and realize that she is ours. I'll bet she looks quite a bit different now than she did when I left. Here's hoping she continued to sleep through her two o'clock feeding.

Good nite Dear Jeanne, I love and adore You; 4 bushels
May God Bless You
Your Sweetheart Fred

6) Pvt Fred Kitson 42096197 (V-Mail) (Date unreadable) (France – must have arrived and started his way across Europe) (no date)

Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.
a.p.o. 15705

% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred Kitson
217 Glenridge Road
East Aurora, NY, USA

Envelope: Passed – Army Examiner – Lt. Burnsca (cursive signature)?

Darling Jeanne,

I know you haven't received much mail, but rest assured I will write when I can. I haven't received any mail yet and surely look forward to some, to learn how you and our lovekins are doing. I know you have written, it just hasn't caught up with me. I have passed through bombed cities, and they are absolutely ruined. We are extremely fortunate that our cities haven't seen bombs. It's quite cold here and the ground is covered with snow. We sleep in a warm building and have good warm clothes. Where we are staying was an extremely beautiful place before the war. Good afternoon Darling. I love and adore you. May God Bless You. All My Love. Fred

7) Pvt Fred Kitson 42096197 (V-Mail) (France)(no date)

Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.

a.p.o. 15705

% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred Kitson
217 Glenridge Road
East Aurora, NY, USA

Envelope: Passed Army Examiner – Anthony M. Schina, 2nd Lt. (cursive signature)?

Hello Dear Jeanne,

Here is hoping this finds you and the baby in the best of

health. I'm feeling alright. We are sleeping in an old building which the Nazis formerly occupied. We have a stove and bunks in the room. Chow is exceptionally good which is very important. I have been using my French (which he took in high school) to a good advantage. The kids on the street beg for "cigarettes pour papa" and "chocolate pour bebe". Everyone is extremely ill clothed. Everything they have is old and worn.

I love you Darling. Please don't worry about me. God Bless You. Your Sweetheart, Fred

8) Pvt Fred Kitson 42096197 (Somewhere in France) (V-mail) (no date)

Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.

a.p.o. 15705

% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred Kitson

217 Glenridge Road

East Aurora, NY, USA

Envelope: Passed – Army Examiner – Lt. Burnsca (cursive signature)?

Hello My Darling,

I'm hoping that you and our precious baby are fine and not too worried about me. I am fine and dandy. I have seen a lot this war torn world and am happy that my loved ones are in the U.S.A. Have a good anniversary day, (I think their anniversary was on Jan. 18th) and I hope and pray we can be together on the next one. I love you truly dearest and think of you and our loved ones always. God Bless You and Evelyn Jeanne and give you courage. (Keep your chin up precious Jeanne. I adore you. (Assigned to 3rd Army) (General Patton). Your Sweetheart and husband, Fred

9) Pvt Fred Kitson 42096197 (Luxembourg) (V-mail) (Jan. 20,

1945)

Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.

a.p.o. 15705

% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred Kitson

217 Glenridge Road

East Aurora, NY, USA

Envelope: Passed – Army Examiner – Lt. Bumgardner (cursive signature)?

(I believe this is the location of Dad's first combat where he started taking fire from the enemy)

Hello My Darling,

I love you precious and hope you and Evelyn Jeanne are feeling fine. I am O.K. and have been assigned to the 87th division. I am with a good bunch of fellows and living in an old school house. Its fairly comfortable and well heated. It's been quite cold with about 6 inches of snow.

I think of you and the baby constantly and am anxious to hear how you are doing. I'll bet she is growing fine as I know her mother is taking good care.

Take good care of yourself Jeane and I will do the same. May God Bless You and Keep You. All My Love. Fred.

P.S. I hope your family and mine are all feeling good.

10) Pvt Fred Kitson 42096197 (Luxembourg) (V-mail) (Jan. 30?, 1945)

Inf.Com. B. 2nd Plat.

a.p.o. 15705

% P.M. N.Y.N.Y.

To:

Mrs Fred Kitson

217 Glenridge Road
East Aurora, NY, USA

Envelope: Passed – Army Examiner – Lt. Milton C. Sherri
(cursive signature)?

Hello My Darling,

I hope you and Evelyn Jeanne are fine. Jeanne, I am O.K.. We are quite busy and I don't get to write often, but I will write when I can. We had quite a treat today and had the opportunity to take a shower and get clean clothes today. We are well taken care of, and get good chow and usually sleep in a warm building. This afternoon I made a pan of delicious apple sauce which the boys are enjoying a great deal.

I love you dearly Jeanne and keep hoping and praying that you and the baby are all right. I am extremely thankful that all my loved ones are in the U.S.A. and haven't suffered like the civilians have here. Take good care of Our Baby. I pray for us all often and assume?(not clearly written) you do to. All my Love, Fred