1944

Clanagan, Frederic F. 1944-45 (holographs)

MSRC Staff

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Recommended Citation
Staff, MSRC, "Clanagan, Frederic F. 1944-45 (holographs)" (1944). Correspondence. 27.
http://dh.howard.edu/humwa_corres/27

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SOMEBODY IN FRANCE

MY DEAR MR. NABRIT,

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO WHEN I RECEIVED YOUR VERY INFORMATIVE LETTER ON HOWARD'S ACTIVITIES AND OTHER HOWARDITES, I PROMISED TO WRITE YOU A LONG LETTER BECAUSE AT THAT TIME I DIDN'T HAVE AMPLE TIME. HOWEVER, SINCE THAT TIME, I HAVE BEEN MOVING SO VERY FAST UNTIL I HAVE SCARCELY HAD TOO MUCH TIME FOR PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE. AS YOU WILL NOTE, SINCE MY LAST LETTER, I HAVE BEEN MOVED FROM ENGLAND TO FRANCE.


STREAMS OF MOVING COLUMNS OF PEASANTS MAY BE SEEN FILING BY, THEY ARE RETURNING TO THE RUINED CITIES IN WHICH THEY ONCE LIVED, ONLY TO FIND NOTHING, BUT A HEAP OF RUIN AND AN OCCASIONAL CHIMNEY, AND A FEW PIECES OF FURNITURE ONLY TO BE SALVAGED. THE FRENCH HAVE HAD SO MANY SUCH SIMILAR INTERRUPTIONS IN THEIR CIVILIZATION AS A RESULT OF WAR. I SUPPOSE EVEN THE VERY YOUNG CHILDREN HAVE GROWN WEARY.
II. After all most of the fighting today, to my mind, is being done with much courage and fortitude regardless of the capacity. Whether on the front or on the docks, I say this because not too many of us are represented in actual combat groups comparatively speaking.

From the representation of colored troops in this theater, they are performing their duties willingly and with much proficiency, not stopping to ask what we are fighting for. Well wouldn't it be kind of hard to say what we are fighting for at any rate? In the last war perhaps various answers such as this would be applicable: the French were fighting to keep the Germans away from Paris, the English didn't want them near the Channel; the Russians were trying to drive them back into their own country. Perhaps each little spot in Europe is looked upon with greedy eyes with every neighboring country always ready to plunge into a war of aggression or for defense of some traditional holding. I sometimes wonder where does the culture lie; on this side of the ocean or at home? I only believe there are many more monuments and museums erected abroad.

From all latest reports of the war today, all five fronts are progressing according to schedule and plan, armored spearheads and tank columns make advances in France, liberators make progress in the Pacific; the Russians throw in crack regiments on their front, allied forces in Asia make advances, and in Italy, Florence reported to have been cleared by the Poles (unofficial), and flank the Gothic line. I sincerely hope by the time you have received this letter the Allies will have reached Paris, the Russians in Berlin and this phase of the war ended. After all it does take from eight to eleven days for
For mail to reach the United States. When this gigantic task is over and the free people can resume their normal way of life, I suppose it will be like putting down a heavy weight.

A few of former Howardites that I have by chance been able to contact are as follows: 1st Lt Benjamin C. Smith, T Sgt Joan C. Houseit, S/Sgt John T. Riley and Private Thomas H. Chase. Our Chaplain at the present time is 1st Lt Lewis A. McGee. Although not a former member of Howard, he is no doubt known around D.C., prior to Chaplain McGee, Capt. Edward G. Carroll, former Staff Member of Morgan College.

At this time I wish to extend my very best wishes to all, and I hope that this year will bring one of the largest classes to Howard ever in history. I have planned to return to Howard and resume my studies after the war is over. I beg to remain.

Very sincerely,

T/Sgt Frederick F. Clanagan
My dear Mr. Nabrit,

Since my last letter to you I am happy to say, the other day I was fortunate enough to run into another Howardite—Clifton Felton, with a Quartermaster Truck here on the continent. Didn't have much time to learn much about his activities only that from observation he is well.

Somehow each time I write, I am always forced to make some form of apology. I hope not on this letter. As you know things are moving so very fast over here until we service troops have to almost trot to keep up our end of the game, which is a tremendous one but important. By God's help I'm quite sure we'll make the grade.
I cannot dwell too largely upon the fantastic eruption of massed joy noted on the faces of the people here, their demonstrations too when you pass through the liberated towns of France. I shan't attempt to dwell on it much, somehow it is much, much too large for me. I don't know where to start or what to say. Words you put down about it sound feeble to the point of its asininity. I believe most of we Americans have been so unused to anything quite so bright and spectacular.

The minute you dismount from your vehicle you are kissed, and hugged and mauled by frenzied, friendly, elated mobs until you are left speechless; even though you do know a little French, you are left speechless, "merci" being the most overworked French word, you just say that. The gatherings are represented by little children and old women, grown-up men and beautiful French girls!
Most of them have bright flags of various sizes both British, American (with yet thirteen stars), and the tri-color.

I believe that this is the flower garden of the world—all variety of flowers, including the expensive gardenias, carnations and red roses which would cost you many dollars for a bouquet back in the states.

Not to say nothing of the cognac and cider which is literally poured upon you should you become unguarded.

As you drive along, gigantic masses of moving and screaming humanity; to witness this, your old veins begin to tingle with queer pulsations. For you are gay in a sense and somewhat melancholy in another sense because you know of the inevitable catastrophe to be confronted back in the United States, however, momentarily this may be, you are soon back into a gay mood again. Helping others to see the light.
again is quite alright and in actuality there is so much of the same thing which we fight remaining across the Atlantic—at home untouched in a sense.

The other day I was fortunate enough to have a petit garçon sing the "Le Marseillaise" in French as well as in English which was quite beautiful, other songs that are quite noted over here are "Tipperary," "Madelon," also "Over There."

Aside from all of this gaieness, there's the ugly, dirty, somewhat more unfortunate, under the occupation. I presume some lived better than others provided they played on the right team; having under the Iron shoe must have been a bit uncomfitable. I suppose the ugly and dirty are just as much in their right for emotions as any other citizen and they do demonstrate!

There seem to be but very little left to say about life on the Continent. I look forward to the Howard Bulletin with much anticipation. Sincerely,

Frederic Clanagan
HQ, 95th Engineers
A.P.O. 350 C/O Postmaster
New York, N.Y.
16 October 1944

Mr. James M. Nabrit, Jr.,
Secretary, Howard University
Washington, D.C.

Somewhere in Belgium

Dear Mr. Nabrit,

Since my last letter to you, I believe some time in August, I have had an opportunity to visit Paris several times since its liberation. Never before have I realized that people could be so maintain that quality of mind which meets danger or opposition with so much intrepidity even though they had lived under so many limitations during four years of occupation. The liberation of Paris will not be forgotten very soon by any of us. Notwithstanding, any of the hardships and sufferings, I'm sure some must have suffered, not all could get on the inside of the Germans; Paris is still gay, even without
food and fuel. The extremely needy commodities are not available as yet. A hot shower is out of the question. Actually, Paris is only gay on the surface, underneath, the people are hungry and tired, tired of war.

I have been keeping up with many of the Howardites from our Negro papers as well as through some personal correspondence. From all reports there are any number of marriages in spite of the war. Well society must continue.

The uppermost discussion now seems to be defeating the Germans which will end the European phase of the struggle then the Peace Alliance, the three "Great Powers." What sort of lasting peace will be negotiated this time? The proposals are many. The policeman idea presumably has created nationwide discussion. I sincerely trust that (the governing powers) are not trodding the wrong road toward their haughty goal, the mistakes of 1814 and 1919 must not be made.
They dare not be made. International affairs will be more complicated after the war, but race unity should be more pleasant, we are expecting that, both economic and social relations.

I am no longer in France, as you well note. I am now in Belgium, the push must forever go forward. I cannot say anything about Belgium because I have not had chance to note any reaction of the Belgians toward the soldier. Their language is French and Flemish (a Belgian of Dutch descent), perhaps of the low German branch or of the Teutonic languages.

Time will not permit me to continue this letter any longer. I am anxiously awaiting any news about old friends.

Sincerely,
Frederic F. Clanagan
Somewhere in Belgium
13 January 1945

My dear Mr. Nabrit,

I believe in my last letter I described Paris—after liberation, as of September 1944, as being the nervous, triumphant paradise city when the Allies moved in. From all reports of the papers now that have died down. When you enter today whether on foot or car the Parisians are no doubt glad to see you, but there are no more mob scenes or riotous greeting exploding around about. The people are permitted to breathe pure fresh air again. They are free from the Germans as well as their collaborationists, for they are being well rounded also. I'm sure this was a sure sign of the real days when Paris was full of life.

Your very lovely Christmas greeting reached me only yesterday which was indeed a deep and warm expression of the season from you as well.
as the University Community. At this time I sincerely thank you both. I do not count the distance that separate me for, I am ever reminded of that good old genuine Howard Spirit; deep down in my heart a flame was aglow on the occasion just as the electric ones burned in your window. Of course I had much for which to be thankful in spite of the nervoussness created abroad by the German Mad Counter Offensive and dash back into Belgium. Naturally with all of us, the holiday was spent in great solemnity, no doubt because of the tactical situation. It is quite true that being in the midst of want, suffering, and ruin, people become more penitent; that most of us were. I shall not discuss the more gloomy side of my experience further.

I have been more or less trying to visualize the average 81's reactions after the war; what he will be thinking how he will utilize his discoveries.
abilities and experiences. No doubt the civilian population back in America can best judge that now and make a pretty accurate account. It has been pointed out very clearly that the record of education in America is far below par, being that only 23.3% of troops in the armed forces finished four years of high school, another 3.6% had four or more years of college, totaling 70% of the American men of fighting age home had less than a high school education. There will be a great influx to the many colleges and universities. In time of peace there was but very little money appropriated for education, in comparison to war time conversions, yet in less than three years we can train, equip, house and feed 10,000,000 men to master the weapons of war to kill, with no cry of "too much money." Billions of dollars poured in and many more needed before the final victory. While a few thousand was formerly spent for teaching peace to avoid war, improve the educators of tomorrow.
will inherit the world's biggest job. Converting "I" back into peaceful citizens after having been taught to kill. This globular war is certainly a big classroom, many of the teachings are a little rough. The yesterday's tune will not do. New times will automatically demand new techniques, with more real life - the practical things taught. Of course this will lessen the syntax and we will demand more citizenship with the infusion of more humanity.

I believe it depends largely upon the teaching possibilities of an equal education, which will decide whether we will have another war. Education with the full backing power of all the people behind it will shape our sons and daughters into the type of citizens who will not want war. We should like to have the nation mobilized to build essential necessities for comfortable living, to pattern things in order that everyone might be permitted to have wholesome living regardless. Since war and conscription
Has no discrimination, the right to work and live as a citizen should be the same.

During the past year I have managed to keep in contact with many of my former classmates and other Howardites through our Negro papers. From all reports the men and women of Howard are well represented in this present struggle doing every that is required to promote a speedy victory for a permanent peace. I hope it will be possible for Howard to inaugurate some sort of program after the war which would enable all Howard men and women to meet once a year for one week out of the year just for a good old-home coming. Something similar to our Classic.

Since I began this letter there have been any number of interruptions, consequently I must bid you good luck and prosperity throughout the present year.

Sincerely,

Frederic F. Clanagan
Dear President Johnson,

As the custom on New Year's Day to look retrospectively on events and to make resolutions for the New Year. But, I dare not dwell on the looking back on the events of '44' even though at times, I am carried back to the Class of '44' Howard of which, I was a member.

It made me very happy to receive your Christmas letter yesterday. Christmas Day in spite of the grave tactical situation here in Belgium, I was carried back to my first Christmas spent in Howard's Community. It was truly a joyous occasion. I am looking forward to the end of the war in order that I might return to Howard and complete my training.

Imagine if we were try
to look back on the past year and try to summarize all of the events. What a tabulation we would have for "44"! Such a review would make such a vast history, a history alone of World War II. From each of our memories the things that stood out most is the day leaving home for the army, the trips down south (U.S.A.) on the Carolina maneuvers, Pearl Harbor, trip to Alaska (Alcan Highway), return to continental U.S.A., for a brief spell, preparation for POE, phase off to England, days spent in England, preparation for the Continental invasion, the gallop through France up to the present time now in Belgium. All in between, each one of the aforementioned places had their hardships as well as many grand experiences, some of which I shall never forget. As well as a world of valuable
knowledge. I cannot say either one of these are more important than the other - all are more real than many things that are happening at this very moment.

The uppermost thing in all of our minds is home - but not to have to go home and return. Final victory! Conclusion of the German war and hope to never have to study the art of killing again. With the firm belief that our children will not have to engage in another similar struggle.

It is indeed gratifying to review the Allied triumphs in the past year. But of all of the enslaved people of Europe due to Nazi occupation, many have been liberated and restored to freedom once more while many other subjects have perished, died a tormented death!

At the moment, I can only hope and pray that the triumphs will only come bigger, better and much earlier toward final victory.

I haven't told you much about
myself. I am the Personnel Sergeant and Major for the organization to which I am assigned. The duties that I perform are administrative. In my next letter, I will be able to relate some of my experiences here on the continent. I did find the Normans in France quite interesting. Their customs are entirely different from the other French.

Best wishes and all good cheer to you and your family also Howard's community.

Sincerely - a student

Frederic Clanagan