

Dear Folks:

Although I have written you twice before this week, I want to write you again tonight and tell you about the events of the day, for I know they will be of great interest to you. This morning I was studying the map, and I came to the conclusion that at the present time I was as near to Ingwiller as I would ever be and that this was the time to visit the town if at all possible. (Note to Edith: Ingwiller is the European home of the Meis family and is only a few miles from where Dad was born. While Dad was not born there, Ingwiller is a place of great interest to our family, for, in 1927, we spent a week there, on our first trip to Europe; and all our known relatives in Europe came from Ingwiller and were presumably still there or in connection with Ingwiller at the present time. Thus the trip to-day was a combination return to the ancestral haunts and a reliving of the days of 17 years ago when we were all together in Ingwiller-Uncle Henry Mies, his first cousin aged yet sprightly 80 year old Rachel Meis (correct me where I am wrong, Dad), the family of Salomon Levy, (further removed relatives), Mother, Dad, Robert, E.J., E.J.'s nurse and CH. Ingwiller is a town of about 2000 population, located in the province of Bas Rhin, Alsace. It was German at the time of Dad's birth, French until 1940 (from 1918), German from 1940 until a few weeks ago when it was once again liberated.

After having verified by consultation with an up-to-date situation map that Ingwiller definitely was in our hands, the next problem was to secure transportation. I asked the Judge Advocate-General, Lt. Colonel Evetts, who was game to lend me his command car, although he had had some other plans for it. I, therefore, approached a Captain Fruitman, who is the only sanitary corps office in the division and is responsible for sanitation in the area and every installation occupied. He has a jeep at his "command" and proved quite willing to take me. I cannot reveal the time we left, or returned, nor the distance nor direction traveled. However, the character of the land changed radically after we left our present location. Instead of flat, uninteresting terrain, we soon found ourselves in markedly rolling country, heavily timbered with tall pines and conifers, with richly green grass in the cuts and valleys, a reddish earth stretching away from those valleys and carpeting the forests, which were heavy with the dried, fallen leaves and pine needles of the past years. The air became colder and crisper. These are the foothills of the Vosges mountains which resemble the foothills of the Alps. The dull uninteresting colors of the Moselle valley dwellings quickly gave way to the colorful pastilles of Alsace, with the bright red tile roofs and the deeper brown and mauve clays of this earth, which is rich in iron ore. Now we began to pick up signposts indicating the number of kilometers to Ingwiller. These signposts were almost all in German. For the most part of our route lay along the railroad, which had been heavily damaged by enemy action. Almost every bridge was blown, every mile or so, the tracks were blown, where the railway ducked under a hill frequently one or both entrances to the tunnel had been sealed shut with dynamite and the usual wreckage to rolling stock along the way. Undoubtedly some of this damage had been done by our own air force, for we saw the wreckage of one American plane also. In addition, there was along the way the usual assortment of wrecked tanks, trucks, field guns, and so forth. Further on, almost all roads which have seen combat, the Germans have fairly extensively dynamited the tallest trees so that they would fall across the road and form an obstruction to our troops. And so, all along the way one would see these trees (known in military science as abatis) which our own troops had laid back away from the road, but still clinging to their stumps.



As we drew into Ingwiller the three of us, the Captain, his driver, and myself were immediately impressed by one glaring fact. Aside from the fact that Ingwiller has not suffered a bit from artillery shelling, bombing or even small arms fire - events must have moved too quickly in this sector to have created much damage - Ingwiller impressed me as the cleanest town I had seen to date in Europe, cleaner than any even which I had seen in England. Somehow I didn't remember it as being outstandingly clean when we had first visited, but now its cleanliness hit you between the eyes. The cobbled streets were in glaring contrast to almost every other French town in which we have been where the ordinary street, mud-style, prevails. The windows were bright and clean, the sidewalks swept, everything very much in order. (The German influence?) As we were leaving the town, the Captain turned and said to me: "Well, there's one thing I can say for your folks, they certainly picked a nice town to live in." And the driver was so impressed that he bought a whole set of postcards to send home to the family. As we entered the town, I was wondering just how I would find the old spots, but my dilemma was quickly solved for here we were driving smack-dab past old Salomon Levy's store. It was smaller-as such things generally are-than I had pictured in my memory. The steel window corrugated blinds on the store were rolled down over the windows and looked grey and shabby. The name and description of the merchandise sold were painted over but still visible. We parked the jeep nearby, and I set out to explore, feeling strange to be walking over the same ground of 17 years ago in such a different fashion-along, 17 years older, armed and attired as a soldier rather than as a civilian youth on a vacation trip. I walked in to a store which faces that of Salomon's from across the street. This later proved to be the store and home of one Fritz Klein, Coiffeur, Grand-Rue 40. The place looked to me like an artists' supply store, for there were paintings, frames, and glass all around the counters, but the quiet fortyish woman who came to the door later insisted they were coiffeurs, and she had often done the hair of Lucy and Morris (!) Almost as soon as I came in the door, she started to fumble for and continued until she found a large wedding picture of Lucy, which I will send you under separate cover. (Note to Edith: Lucy is the attractive and sweet daughter of Salomon Levy, who (Lucy, that is) was in her teens when we visited Ingwiller but several years before the war married a young surgeon and bore him two children). Here is what she could tell me of the family.

At the outbreak of hostilities or shortly thereafter, all the Jewish families in town fled before the advancing Germans. Until a few days ago none had returned. But only this last week the first Jew to return came through the town and gave them news of the fate of the rest. Salomon and his wife were living somewhere in Central France until about two months ago when they were shot and killed by the retreating Germans. Lucy was a prisoner of the Germans but was freed when they retreated and is now somewhere near Paris. Her husband who had been a medical officer in the French army, is probably, but not certainly dead. Morris, Lucy's brother, is a soldier in the French army, now in Strasbourg. All these facts were checked with another neighbor who runs a stationery store down the street but very close to Salomon's. The most reliable information seems to be that concerning Salomon and his wife, with all the rest possibly subject to error in some degree. I left my name and Cincinnati Address with the woman, also the name of Henry Meis and Dad's name on the same slip of paper to be given to Morris or Lucy when and if they return. This woman praised Lucy highly. I showed her a photograph of Mother and Dad, and she claimed to have remembered seeing Mother when we visited in 1927. This woman told me that her husband was in the German army and attempted to explain by saying that he was forced to fight in the army; "First we are German, then we are French, then we are German again - what can we do?" She said that he (her husband) had originally been stationed on this front, but this summer had been shifted to near Berlin and that she had not heard from him since September. I then regretted that I had earlier given her a chocolate bar for the photos which she had given me and for three postcards also. The Captain had also given her a



chocolate bar for some postcards which he had entreated of her, being enamored of the town. This woman also gave me a picture of Morris which is enclosed. (Note: the photographs are going direct to the folks, the postcards to Edith for forwarding to the folks. Edith has never seen the town, hence she gets the photos first.)

We bought the books of postcards down the street in the stationery store, also for chocolate. The two women in this store spoke German, quoted prices in German, but spoke to me in French. Our next visit was to the synagogue. As might be expected the place had been thoroughly desecrated. The Germans had removed all the interior furnishings and fixtures, and had turned the place into a gymnasium - judging from the several pieces of gymnastic or calisthenic equipment still around. In several corners there were stacks of ammunition. The windows had been shattered by artillery concussion, but otherwise they were fairly intact. Naturally, the interior was dusty and dirty. The Captain and I went upstairs. He was even more horrified than myself at the desecration. We pushed through the swinging doors which had originally led to the balcony and which still had the black oil-skin covering over the padding on the panels of the doors. The balcony was in just as bad a shape as the lower floor. The pews all piled in the corners, and rubbish littered the floor. The stairs were covered with pages which had fluttered down from torn prayer books, but the prayer books themselves had long since vanished. We climbed the loft of the building, and there under the eaves, we found the Torah sprawled on the floor, torn, dusty, caked with rain and mud. I picked it up, shall clean it up a little, and then send it home to you. I think it would be very fine to some day send this Torah, repaired and cleaned, back to the Jewish congregation of Ingwiller as a symbol of the triumph of our cause over Nazism, for it can still be used. As we left the building I looked for a plaque on the wall outside the entrance, for it seemed to me that I remembered originally seeing there a plaque in honor of the munificence of Henry Weis, but none could be found. The clock in the steeple of the building was stopped at 2:01, the last minute of the last day on which life had coursed through this venerable structure.

Time did not permit me to engage in any further sightseeing. There perhaps was little point in seeing Aunt Rachel's old home anyway, for certainly some one must have occupied it by now in whom I had little interest. I want to call attention to the book of postcards I am sending home. Some of these are taken in Ingwiller, but the spelling in this book is different: Engwiller. Also, on the large photograph, the children in the picture are neighborhood children and have no further significance.

So that is the story of the day. I hope that you find it interesting, for it certainly was so to me. Salomon's tore is quite intact and apparently untouched awaiting the return of some of the family. If it had been a clear day, I would have taken some pictures. However, it was heavily overcast and so that was out of the question. If there is any questions I can still answer, please ask them, but I have told you pretty much all that I know. What have you heard, now, of the family over here?