

Letters Home from R. Walter Johansen

Excerpt from letter dated 2 February 1945 "Somewhere in Italy"

"We have reached a stopping point and this point is high up in the snow-capped mountains of Italy. The country is really beautiful. The air is clean and pure and the climate has been very favorable. It has been a little cold, especially at night but the past two days have been warm enough to cause some thaw.

We are in a little typical mountain village, houses are built one above the other on the slopes, and the people are also quite typical. They are very much like the people that you would expect to find up in the Alps. They are a hardy bunch, very clean and although hard hit by the war as for foodstuffs, they still do not beg or lower themselves as the people did that we found in the Southern part of Italy, especially the type that we met when we visited Naples and vicinity.

Up here they go about wearing wool sweaters and hats, baggy pants, (the men) and the women wear wool socks with bare knees, even in the coldest weather. Kids are not dressed heavily and yet they seem to be as healthy as can be.

Upon our arrival at this town we found that our office, and others, were to be in the local school. Here we were to sleep also, (on the floor), and we took it as the thing to do until we found out that rooms could be had in the nearby houses. "Mac" and I got a room with an Italian family and here we had everything that we wanted. We slept in this house for two nights and then had to move out and return to the hard marble floors of the schoolhouse because too many of the guys had gotten rooms and some rumors or something started and so we had to give it up. I am hoping that soon the restriction will be lifted and then I will return to the room that I had. I know that it is still there for I go there every day and wash up or shave or change socks, leaving the dirty ones and picking up the clean ones. They, (this family), do all of our laundry for us (Mac and me) and even one day that we did not go over in the morning, two clean handkerchiefs were brought over to us by the youngest son, about 13 years old. There are so many things I could tell you about these people, but it would almost take a book to do so. So I will just say that they will do anything for us and that their hospitality is wonderful. Today we had the morning off and Mac and I went there and had a bath in a modern tub, and after a change of underwear and socks, a shave, and a a glass of wine we felt" like new persons!"