

TRIP TO WEST POINT, NEW YORK FOR JOHNNY'S GRADUATION
June 1, 1943

Hommels left Elkader Tuesday, May 25th, after eating at the Checkerboard with Flesners. Took the Burlington Zephyr from Prairie du Chien. Got into Chicago about eleven p.m. and went directly to the Chicagoan to check in. Went for a walk and had hot chocolate at Kranz before turning in. Esther had left the same day to spend a week with the Twinings in West Salem.

Hommels left call for seven o'clock Wednesday morning. Had breakfast at the Forum Cafeteria, and then Hom went out to the Evanston Hospital alone, where he learned Caudal Anesthesia. Maude shopped and bought a black dress. No lunch. Took "L" to Davis Street, Evanston. Attempted to see Clark and Scotty - both at club. Went to hospital. Saw Julia Scott and Kate Schneider - new baby girl. Saw Dietrick. Called Ann. Went back to Howard and back to hotel on top of bus. Hom back to hotel first. Ate at Old Heidelberg and heard marvelous music - the entire score from the Student Prince. Dooley came and visited with Hommels. Sent flowers to Mrs. Deuel.

Margaret left La Crosse on the Burlington Zephyr Wednesday evening and arrived in Chicago about eleven - going directly to the Chicagoan. Hommels were already in bed.

Thursday morning we got up fairly early, in order to do some shopping before taking the train to New York at two o'clock in the afternoon. We had breakfast at the Forum. Maude went to get some shoes-repaired and to buy shirts at Rothschilds for Jamar. Got her suit. Margaret attempted to buy some shoes but couldn't find what she wanted. We all saw the Model homes at Fields and just enjoyed browsing around the store. We window shopped a while and then went back to the Chicagoan for lunch and to pick up our bags. Met the Becketts at the La-Salle Street Station and met the Whitcombs, who are perfectly marvelous people. We enjoyed them so much on the entire trip.

The train trip out was not at all bad, but none of us slept very much. We were unfortunate enough to get a coach with lights that could be dimmed very little. We met a very interesting woman on the train, who was on her way to a reunion at Columbia University. She was from Evanston and had gone to school in England - had traveled over a great deal of Europe and was so interesting.

All along the way we saw so many things of interest - among them the Gripsholm, a trainload of Australian soldiers, and of course the beautiful scenery up the Hudson. We caught a glimpse of the buildings at West Point.

As it was our first glimpse of Grand Central Station in New York we were all much impressed. While it is larger than Union Station in Chicago, it is much the same. There were crowds of people everywhere we went, but we didn't have any trouble getting red caps or cabs. The Becketts had made reservations for us at the Bristol and we went directly there to check in. We had had breakfast on the train. We cleaned

up a bit and then walked over to 5th Avenue, where we took a bus to the McAlpin Hotel, where Maude and Hom had stayed the first time they had gone to New York. We had a lovely luncheon in the Marine Grill in the basement of the McAlpin - it was a beautiful place. We had our first French Pastry there - sis had a Strawberry Tart.

After lunch we took a bus to the 42nd Street Ferry and had a marvelous three hour trip around Manhattan Island by Yacht. This delightful trip encompasses practically all of the waterways both surrounding and leading in from the Sea, and while it unfolds to the observer this Wonderful City, it lays before you the secret of all New York's Greatness - the premier shipping port of the world. This tour gives you a better idea of New York, Brooklyn, New Jersey and Staten Island than you can obtain in any other way. Every point of interest is fully described by a lecturer. You obtain the finest skyline view of Rockefeller Center, Empire State, Chrysler Building and all of Manhattan's billion dollar skyscrapers. Other highlights are passing under the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, past the Bellevue Hospital, Welfare Island under the Queensboro Bridge, Ward's Island, Hell Gate, Randall's Island and Stadium, under the Tri-Borough Bridge which connects Bronx, Manhattan and Queens. We entered the Harlem River under a number of bridges while we saw Yankee Stadium, The Polo Grounds, the home of the N.Y. Giants, Columbia University's Grounds, the beautiful Hudson River, sailing under the famous George Washington Bridge, viewing the majestic New Jersey Palisades, Grant's Tomb, Rockefeller Center, Rockefeller Riverside Church, World's largest ocean liners at their piers (including the Queen Mary and the Normandie, on its side), Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and countless other points of interest. We also saw LaGuardia's home.

We went back to the hotel and then went to ~~lun~~ dinner at the Francois Cafe in Rockefeller Plaza - a most ~~beautu~~ beautiful place. We ate with the Becketts and Whitcombs and then separated - the Becketts and Whitcombs to see the Follies, and the rest of us to go to a broadcast (our first) - the Phillip Morris Playhouse. Paulette Goddard was the guest star, and we enjoyed seeing the whole thing. None of us knew just how a broadcast was conducted. We had an opportunity to hear Fred Waring's broadcast too, but it was to be very late, and we were all tired, so we passed it up. We had to get up at 5:45 the next morning in order to catch the seven o'clock Weehawken Ferry to New Jersey and the train for West Point; at 10:30 we got to the Point, and the Hommels went right to the plain for the air review. Margaret took the bags to the hotel and got the room settled a bit. Hommels came back to the hotel at two thirty and we had lunch at the hotel in the dining room. We had a very nice room, even though it was a bit crowded for three of us. We had excellent meals at the hotel all during our stay, and some of the grandest negro waiters. We threatened to bring a couple of them back with us.

After lunch John, Hom and the Becketts went to the baseball game; Maude went to have her hair combed at the hair dressers. After dinner at the hotel we all went to the movies with John - "Mission to Moscow" - and met Carolyn, whom we all liked from the beginning.

Sunday morning we had an excellent breakfast, met Carolyn, and then went to Baccalaureat, at the Cadet Chapel - we enjoyed this service almost the most of anything that we attended while we were gone. Johnny sings in the choir, and the choir sang "The Corps" and "Alma Mater" during the service. There are 165 voices in the choir. Almost one entire side of the chapel was filled with handsome cadets, and there weren't many dry-eyed people there by the time the service was over.

John and Carolyn had dinner with us at the hotel, and then at three o'clock in the afternoon we went to the reception at the Superintendent's home. The reception was held on the lawn and in the beautiful garden at the rear of their home.

The Retreat Parade - our first dress parade - was at five thirty, with the lowering of the flag giving us the chills as it always does. We ran into Mrs. Appleton at the parade, and also saw a boy from La Crosse who was a cadet but who had broken his ankle some time before and because of that was watching the parade instead of participating in it. We had a very nice visit with him. His name is Fredericks. His father and brother are both in the Navy.

After dinner that night we went to another movie with the kids - "China."

Monday at 11 a.m. were the Alumni exercises, at which a wreath of laurel was placed at the foot of Thayer's monument or what have you. There was another dress parade in honor of the alumni. The weather was perfect every minute of the time. At three o'clock that day the cadets received their wings from General Arnold, in an outdoor ceremony on Trophy Point. At 5:30 was the graduation Parade, where the graduates fell out and the rest of the corps passed in review for them. It was such a beautiful day and the weather was so perfect that it seemed to have been made to order.

For the first time in the history of West Point women were allowed in the Cadet Mess Hall Monday night. At 8:30 all the graduates and their immediate families had dinner in the mess hall and there were approximately 2500 people there. It was a very colorful affair, with most of the girls in gorgeous formals - with orchids and gardenias everywhere. We ate with Bethel Edrington (Johnny's pal) and his mother and his aunt and uncle. We all fell in love with Mrs. Edrington, a lovely, charming, scatter-brained woman.

The hop that night was in the War Dept. Theater. Charley Barnett's orchestra played; we sat in the balcony and watched the kids until about midnight. Never saw so many beautiful girls and lovely dresses.

Hommels sat beside a woman who turned out to be Mrs. Allan Jones. George Pritchard is her husband's aide.

Neglected to say that there was a hop at Cullum Hall on Saturday night. We all went over there after the movie, and watched the kids dance for a while before returning to the hotel. Walked all the way back to the hotel.

June 1st was graduation day, and it just poured all morning long. Because of the weather we had trouble getting busses or cabs, and were twenty minutes late for graduation exercises at Field House. We were there to hear the last of the address by General Arnold though, and saw Johnny get his diploma. We didn't find Johnny after that, with all the crowd, and in fact didn't see him until about five thirty that night.

The Hommels went to Highland Falls for lunch with Becketts, and then we all sat in the lobby to watch the brides as they left for the chapel to be married. There were ~~receptions~~ receptions all over the hotel and the place was packed. Hommels and Becketts attended a wedding in the Old Chapel - Col. Wheat who wrote C. Praeger. John, Carolyn, the Hommels and Margaret went to New York by bus, riding with a bunch of cadets who were going home on furlough and were happy as larks. They sang all the way and the trip was a very pleasant one in spite of the dense fog and not being able to see a bit of the scenery. Went through the Lincoln Tunnel.

We went back to the Bristol and cleaned up a bit before starting out for the evening. Johnny and Carolyn took us to the Hawaiian Room at the Lexington Hotel - a lovely place and delicious food - and from there to Greenwich Village - Cafe Society - quite an experience! We heard the star of "Cabin in the Sky" who has a voice much like Paul Robson's. We got back to the hotel at 3:30 took our baths and had a couple hours sleep - getting up at 5:45 to catch our train for Washington. Johnny stayed in New York with Carolyn, and went on to Baltimore to be best man at Wickam's wedding the following Saturday.

We got into Washington at 11:30 and there was certainly a mob in the station. Maude stood in line for an hour, trying to get reservations for us the following day. It began to look like we were in Washington for the duration, but with much persistence we finally got three seats for the following day.

We took a cab out to Mass. Avenue where Margaret was to stay, in Shirley Heider's house, and after getting located there the Hommels got in touch with Gilje's, who said they would pick the Hommels up and take them out to Bethesda. We went out and had lunch in an air conditioned drug store - a treat after the 91 degree weather - and then the Hommels went to Bethesda.

The Giljes have a marvelous home - Hommels bathed and dressed for dinner with Dr. and Mrs. Tilton and Sammy. Dinner at Fan and Bills across from the Mayflower - delicious food. Out to Tiltons for the evening, and then Mrs. Tilton took them back to the Giljes. Breakfast late and then Hom went to the hospital with Louis. Hom was in his glory.

Margaret went to her room, cleaned up, and took a nap before Shirley arrived from work. Met some of the grand-dst kids there, and it is no wonder that Shirley and Elmer are happy in that household. The home is beautiful and there are 40 people staying there. Elmer and Shirley and Margaret had dinner at the house and then took a cab downtown. The boys had thought she would be there two nights and had ~~pea~~ planned for the Schneiders to come out to the house to visit the first night, and to go to see "Doughgirls" the second night. When they found that we were to leave the next afternoon they changed out reservations and Elmer and Shirley and Margaret went to see the play that night and then met the Schneiders later in a gorgeous cocktail lounge. We had a grand evening and it was so nice to see them all.

Mrs. Gilje insisted on Margaret's coming out to the house, so after having slept most of the morning and having breakfast in bed, served by a cute little colored maid, Margaret packed all her belongings and took a cab out to Bethesda. We had lunch out on Gilje's porch and then Kay took us over to the hospital and took us all around. Louis showed us the operating rooms and many other places of interest. He is the head surgeon at this beautiful fifteen million dollar Naval Medical Center - Roosevelt's pet project.

We attempted to change our reservations so that we could stay an extra day or two at Gilje's, but it was impossible so Louis and his wife took us to the train in their car, driving through interesting parts of Washington on the way. We checked out bags through and then had something to drink while we waited for the train. We had dinner on the train. The scenery was beautiful, but we missed the greater part of the scenery through Pennsylvania and were terribly disappointed about that - it just got dark too early. We all rested better on the trip back, as the coach was darkened and Maude and Hom each had a double seat to themselves.

When we got into Chicago we checked our bags and coats and went shopping. Maude got things to send back to Gilje's, and some things for herself, and Margaret tried again to get shoes. We had lunch at Henricis, and decided that was the nicest meal of our entire trip - the food was grand and the atmosphere super. It was the first time the Hommels had eaten there in years. Margaret had eaten there last summer. We window shopped until time to take the Zephyr home.

Edna and Helen met us, and here we are, after a swell trip. Johnny got home yesterday.