

LETTERS FROM THE LEISZ'S

THE FIRST HOLIDAY AWAY FROM HOME

1942

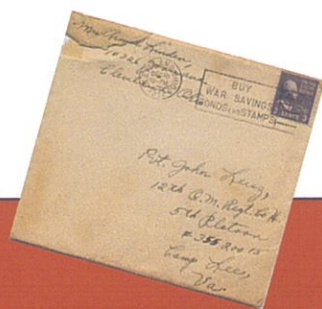
Jack Leisz's First Christmas In The Army
During World War II



He was just 21 years old when the United States Army came calling. Jack Leisz was the youngest of seven children, the kid brother to five sisters, and a brother ten years his senior. His father had passed away earlier that same year. And in November Jack left his family's home on Cleveland's near West side and entered basic training in the United States Army at Fort Lee, Virginia. In this year



when we look back at the end of World War II 60 years ago, let's remember that first Christmas of 1942, the one when the Joseph Leisz family of Cleveland said goodbye to their patriarch in death—and to their youngest son who became a soldier and went off to war.



ABOUT THE LETTERS

They were tucked away in the attic of our home at 4100 Wetzel Avenue in Cleveland, Ohio. Piles of old letters, yellowed with age, brittle and dusty from near half a century in storage. Jack Leisz saved those letters from home—from his brother and five sisters. He also answered them regularly, and his family kept those missives as well, returning them to Jack when he came home. Today these messages live on as we look back to life on Joan Avenue and West 135th Street as this family copes during the uncertainty of wartime at Christmas 1942.

LEISZ FAMILY MEMBERS

MA AND PA

Joseph and Louisa Haspray Leisz. They had 9 children, including two that died in the flu epidemic of 1918. Joseph died in spring 1942, months before Jack, his youngest child, joined the Army during World War II.



ELDEST CHILD MARY (MARIE) LEISZ WATERS LUCAS

Marie and son Billy Waters, 11, lived with her recently widowed mother when kid brother Jack left for the Army. Marie herself was widowed, in 1934 when Billy was just 3 years old. She was dating Em Lucas. Billy was like a kid brother to his Uncle Jack, who was 10 years his senior.



SECOND ELDEST CHILD ANNA LEISZ LINDEN

Ann also lived with her mother during World War II. Her husband Arnold Linden was in the Army. Ann never had any children of her own. She was 20 years older than her kid brother Jackie, so he was like the son she never had. Ann worked at the W. Bingham Company in Cleveland.



ANOTHER SISTER, BARBARA LEISZ DAVIS

Sister Barb and husband Charles Davis had three children, all born at the time of World War II—daughters Joan and Mary Lou, and the youngest, son Chuck. The family lived at 3782 West 135th Street in Cleveland.



BROTHER JOSEPH WAS A FIREMAN

Big brother Joe Leisz was 10 years older than Jack. He turned 32 years old shortly after Jack went off to Army boot camp. Joe and wife Jean had five children at the time of World War II—Nancy, Bobby, Marianne, Buddy (Joe) and baby Francine. Karen, Jimmy and Jane were not yet born.



STILL ANOTHER SISTER! LUCY LEISZ WESTFALL

Lucy and husband Al Westfall had four children at the time of World War II—two daughters Marilyn and Carol, and young sons Albert and Leonard. Sons Michael and Joseph had not yet arrived. The family lived near Lucy's mom at 3762 West 135th Street in Cleveland.



YOUNGEST SIS JOSEPHINE "JOAN" LEISZ CRAVEN

The second youngest of the Leisz kids, Joan was unmarried at the time of World War II, as was her brother Jack. Joan lived with her widowed mother and sisters Marie and Ann, and nephew Billy. She was busy during those years courting future husband Charles "Chas" Craven, who was from Buffalo, New York.

NOVEMBER 26, 1942

Joan remembers Pa

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. It sure is going to be kind of a lonesome day tho for us, with Pa gone and you gone and

Ann at Lindens.

Remember last year.

We were all together – yet. I think that Mom is going to invite Barbara and Charlie over for dinner so it won't be so bad. Mother bought a 12-½ lb goose from the chicken man yesterday. He was squawking all day in the basement.

I suppose you'll have turkey, won't you? Em has to work so he won't be over.



Leisz family patriarch Joseph with wife Louisa, shortly before Joseph's death in spring 1942.

NOVEMBER 27, 1942

Marie worries about Jack's underwear

Mom has the underwear, she may have to buy some for you. Jack, I don't see why you can't get underwear from the government. Surefy they have other tall boys in the service. You just insist on it, you are

entitled to it ... Mother is just washing those wool socks. She said to tell you that they are a little scorched because when we were in



Wisconsin six years ago Tracy gave them to Mom.

They were given to August in the last World War and he had no use for them. So she gave them to Mom and coming home we had that fire on the car when Joe threw the cigarette out. So those socks have quite a history.



NOVEMBER 29, 1942

Lucy misses Jack's dancing and singing

We all get a big kick out of your letters especially the one about washing all those windows. I still don't know how to wash them.



Al always does them for me so maybe some day you will be doing them for your honey also ...

Ann and Katherine

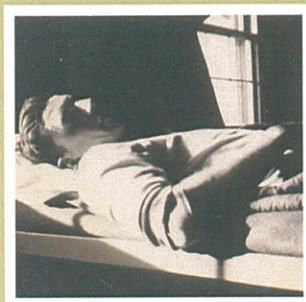


came over about 9:30 and we were visiting with Jean & Joe until 11:00 and then we went to the Jam Bar, where Em and Marie were waiting for us. They came there after the show. We had a very nice time, but I sure missed your dancing and singing. We will sure paint the town red when this darn war is all over. I do hope it will be soon. I sure enjoyed going out with you. Too bad we didn't get together oftener. Oh! By the way, one of your old girl friends was asking about you. You know, Mary, Angela Dixon's niece.

KEEP THE FAITH: A message from Lucy

We sure are important to God. Why He even came down from heaven to prove it to us. I guess that's why there is a war. People never really appreciated enough, all that God gave up to prove to us how important we all are.

So if you can help some of the other fellows you know to know God better to love and serve Him, you really would have accomplished something for greater than words can say. I hope you will always remember that we are only here a short time even during peace. I hope and pray it will all be over soon so we will all be together again.



DECEMBER 1, 1942

Joe writes a hello to Jack

Last nite the folks down home were out for supper, my birthday party, 32 years old. It was very nice even tho I was in bed only up for supper. They played pinochle 'til 11 o'clock and had lunch then went home. They are having 40 hours down at St. Ignatius, so Jo went to church after supper... So Jean and the kids all say hello and we'll have wieners and baked beans together again when we're together. So Jack don't forget that Big Guy up there and say a few prayers for everybody, because that's all we have left these days, and don't worry about anything. We'll make out. So long Kid. I'll be seeing you.



Jack's brother Joe with one of his children.

LIFE DURING WARTIME

MARIE: They are rationing gas, you know, and most people have to use the street cars.

LUCY: Gas rationing has finally caught up with us. So we will have to stay home more and meat and milk are getting pretty scarce. I suppose they will be next. The war isn't going to miss many people. Well, we will do all our little part and maybe some day soon it will all be over. I don't know what they do in Europe, they only get one good meal a day.

ANN: Mom said that the financial condition is about the same, we just about get along. Food is even higher than when you were home. We can't hardly get any meat anymore. We had pork for dinner, that's the only thing mom could get.

ANN: We got our tree Sunday and it's the same kind we had last year with the long needles. We paid \$2.50 for it.

ANN: This morning we had an air raid alarm here and we all had to file out and go on another floor until the all clear was sounded. It sure was exciting.



Jack home on leave in 1943, with brother Joe (left) and brother-in-law Al Westfall.

DECEMBER 3, 1942

Big brother Joe offers advice



Jack, about that dependency allowance, I think that the fifty dollars was for a wife and the thirty-seven was for mothers or fathers, so you see that's nothing to worry about. In fact back home here we're all able to take care of ourselves, and the only thing you should do is take care of yourself. Don't forget to dress for the weather and don't expect the weather to suit you. You've got to first of all stay well and healthy in order to keep looking the old world right in the eye and not shake when you start thinking. That really is half the battle. The other half is remembering that there is after everything else God to take care of us and that we're only here to get ready to meet Him. All other things are secondary to the extent that we do the best we can then we have no regrets or fears in facing a mirror, our superiors, equals or in the last analysis, God. The way I write you'd think I was a preacher. Anyway you know what I mean. It seems to me that you ought to be getting to be an expert at shooting, and marching both. Of course, that's all in the game and you sure ought to be in A-1 shape.





"Well, Jack, let us know if you want us to send you some more underwear, as Mom is worried that you'll catch cold if you take the one suit off to have it laundered."

- Ann, December 5, 1942

DECEMBER 9, 1942

Ann says to keep St. Christopher with you

Ma is fine Jack, She gave me some hankerchiefs to send to you. Barb gave them to her for you and so Ma put your initials in, so you won't lose them and also a little St. Christopher statuette from Ma. She said you shouldn't lose it, keep it in your pocket with your money and be sure to keep it on your person at all times. He'll protect you from harm if you do. And don't lose it.

ST. IGNATIUS PARISH SENDS GOODIES TO SOLDIERS

"Arnold said he got a package from St. Ignatius Church for Xmas. It had peanuts, cookies, soap, shaving cream, razors, tooth powder, envelopes and writing paper. Wasn't that nice of them?"



*Best wishes at Christmas
for though you're away.
Just want you to know
YOU'RE REMEMBERED EACH DAY!
your sis
Ann L.*



Sis Ann is all smiles as she poses with kid brother Jack with in 1943 when he is home on Army leave.



**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1942,
7:30 AM**

Dear Jack: Charles just went to work and it's nice and quiet around here with all the kids in bed. Charles had a tummy ache last nite. Today is two weeks from Xmas. And I haven't done a bit of shopping. Joan is having a fit. She bought a few gifts and has wrapped and unwrapped them about 10 times. Xmas certainly is a thrilling time for children. They are invited to the clubs Xmas party next Saturday. Charlie painted the kitchen cupboards last night a bright red and it looks very nice ... All the boys of 18 or 19 have to register today and that means quite a few from our street.

Jan. 10, 1943
Dear Uncle Jack
We all had a merry Christmas Charles got a train for Christmas a Boy what fun he has with it. Most of all I like my ink pen & pencil with my name on it. We all sure miss you this Christmas for grandma. When I hear that you called grandma and told her to tell us to write to you. So I did tell I'm running out of words.
P.S. Tell me see you soon.
Joan

If I put a dollar in the envelope with this letter, would you get it? Sometimes I may feel like sending you some and I wondered if you would get it. Do you need anything Jack? Don't hesitate in writing and telling us because we would be only to glad to send it.



With hearty greetings
FOR CHRISTMAS
and the New Year
and happiness
the whole year through!

Charlie & Barbara

DECEMBER 9

Lucy wishes she could take Jack's place

I took the kids down town yesterday to see Santa Claus, at Harvey's and while there I saw some more boys leaving for the Army. It sure made me think of you and all the rest of the young men, doing their part in this great job. You sure have to 'Hat's off to all of you.' I wish I could take your place for a while. Well I can't so the best I can do is pray for you. The kids pray for Uncle Jack every nite so their Uncle Jack will come back after this is all over. Leonard heard them talk about the war on the radio and he comes running out to the kitchen and telling me this is war time, and asking about you. They talk about you quite often. You'll have turkey, won't you? Em has to work so he won't be over.



Being with kid brother Jack was just a dream for sister Lucy (in babushka) and brother Joe (right) during Christmas 1942. Jack had left for Army basic training two weeks before Thanksgiving that year. But the New Year of 1943 would bring the family together again. Shown above is Jack (center), home on leave from the Army in 1943 with some of his many nieces and nephews.

LETTERS FROM LUCY:

Countdown to Christmas 1942 at the Westfall house

DECEMBER 10

*16 more days before Xmas and
I have just loads of work yet.
I'm making the girls dresses and*



Jack with nephew Albert
Westfall

*myself a hat. With all the other
things shopping and all I guess
that ought to keep me out of
mischief for a while. I do hope
you will be able to come home
soon. I am dying to see you in
your uniform ... Santa is going
to be kind of poor this year by
the looks of things everything is
so expensive ... I wish you
could be with us all Xmas. Well
we will all be thinking about you,
and hoping you are fine and
having a good time.*

DECEMBER 16

*Xmas will be far from what it
should be, this year, with so many
boys gone. But I guess that is
what you boys are fighting for to
keep Xmas and the light of Xmas
shining. Joe got his tree tonite.
I guess I will get ours tomorrow
and I'm going to get Ma's too if
they haven't got one yet. The kids
are all excited about Xmas.
Already they are counting the
days. I hope you are feeling better
by Xmas. And I wish you were
back home again. Well I can't say
it this year, so I'm writing it.*

A Merry Christmas and I don't

*mean maybe
— and many,
many more
of them.*



I HAD DREAMED ABOUT YOU
A message from Marie

Sunday morning I woke up and I had dreamed about you. I saw you standing at the front door with your brown leather jacket on and you looked so pale and sick and tired

"I had the blues the rest of the day. Also dreamed about Pa that him and I were taking the old Chevy out to get gas ..."

and you had about 6 other fellows with you from camp. The first thing you said was "Mom, can you make us something to eat? We are all hungry." Then you went right up into your room to see how things were up there. That's all remembered when I woke up. But I had the blues the rest of the day. Also dreamed about Pa that him and I were taking the old Chevy out to get gas ...

Marie with kid brother Jack
(center) and son Billy,
before Jack departed
for the Army



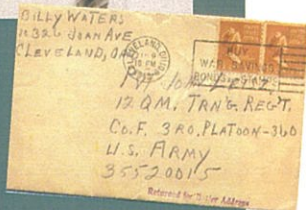
This was a Holy day (Immaculate Conception) so Billy had no school. He went over to Waters, they brought him home about 10 o'clock. Just through washing and drying my hair. Lucy and Al left the kids here while they did some shopping at Sears. They just left a little while ago.



DECEMBER 22, 1942 ON JOAN AVENUE

Billy writes to Uncle Jack

Dear Uncle Jack; Mrs. Haney has her Xmas tree up already. I made \$3.50 on Xmas presents and calendars. I am going to get a Xmas present from Father Stuber because I am his paper boy. We had a party in school today we had ice cream and candy. I made a pot holder the thing the holds the pot holder for the wall behind the stove. I just got finished wrapping persants. And am I tired. It's 25 minutes after 11 o'clock. I am going to go over to my Grandma Waters tomorrow and stay till Xmas



my love
for now.
your nephew
P.S. WRITE Billy Waters.

Eve. I'll wright you soon.

Good by for now.

DECEMBER 22, 1942: Preparing for Christmas

MARIE: Mother is ironing the kitchen curtains. Billy is wrapping a few gifts you know he gets such a big kick out of it and I'm glad, he saves me the job. Ann washed her hair she is drying it by the kitchen stove and Josephine went to a Xmas party tonite at the Lakeshore Hotel.

ANN: We're so darn busy this week, Saturday we washed the kitchen walls and Friday the bathroom walls. And Mom's been washing curtains for weeks. One night last week I ironed and hung the curtains for your and my bedroom. Always something to do.

ANN ON DECEMBER 30

Jo went out for supper with Craven tonite and Marie and Em went to some couple's house to play cards. So it's quite lonesome around here. Billy is in there listening to Red Skelton on the radio and Ma is in bed.

MISSING PA

Christmas 1942 isn't the same without Pa and Jack

MARIE, DECEMBER 22

Jack are you wearing your Sacred Heart badge? Be sure to wear it always...Well Jack it's 11 o'clock and I think I better get some sleep. I have all my prayers to say yet. I hope you can go to Communion Xmas. We will all go and offer it for you. It will be a lonesome Xmas with Pa gone and you far away. Joe took a wreath out to Pa's grave Sunday. I didn't see it. Well Jack Dear we will be with you in spirit Christmas day and you think of us. Mom cried a little Saturday after she talked to you she was so glad to hear your voice again.



JOHN LEOPOLD "JACK" LEISZ
Of Cleveland, Ohio (1921-1988)
U.S. Army, circa 1942

LUCY, DECEMBER 9

Home won't be the same this year, with you gone, and Dad not here any more. Life sure does change. I hope it will all be different next Xmas, and all the boys will be home for good, and this will only be a memory.

BARBARA, JANUARY 6, 1943

We all missed Pa so much for Xmas. You know he never said very much. But just the idea that he was there or sleeping in his chair was nice. We must all remember him in our prayers.



With lots of love at
Christmas
And with PRIDE in
every line.
Here's a hope you're
well and happy
And that everything
is fine!
ma

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1942

9 P.M. ON JOAN AVENUE IN CLEVELAND, OHIO

Ma writes to her youngest child Jack in the U.S. Army



Dear Jack,

How is your cold? Josephine is writing this letter for me. I was out at Joe's yesterday and I forgot my eyeglasses but Joe told me you had a touch of bronchitis and I'm worrying about you that you don't take good care of yourself. You should wash your hands before you eat because you can get any kind of germs from those fellows. Take something for your cold as soon as you get it. Those milk of magnesia pills are good. Josephine was in bed yesterday with a bad cold and she took them and is feeling ok again. If you would like some of those pills let me know.

You asked about bakery Jack. I can't get any apricots or poppy seed. I tried up at Fisher's and all over but no luck, so I will buy some bakery and send it to you soon. Ann is going to bake something Sunday for you and Arnold ...

Keep it up writing because last week I didn't get any letters for a few days and I was sure worried that you were sick in bed and couldn't write. So just write a little bit so I'm not worried about you. I can hardly do my work sometimes from thinking ...

If you want a sweater I'll knit you one after Christmas, a slipover without sleeves. So let me know. We will send you six more hankies this week. They are from Barbara.

The weather was so cold last week the windows were frozen day and night. It was a regular blizzard. There were snow drifts in our driveway a foot and a half.

But yesterday and today is warmer again.

We are all praying for you to come back safely and don't forget to pray with us. Your bedroom is the same way you left it. I didn't touch a thing. Same way you left it. I don't want to change it or anything. I just figure on the war ending soon so you come back to it again.

Your car is the same way you left it, because Joe has been sick and is still under the doctor's care but next week we think he can be out so then he will jack up your car.

I want to tell you again to take good good care of yourself, of your health. A fellow from Bingham's who was in the Army a short time died with scarlet fever. So wash your hands before you eat. That's the most important, 'cause through that you get all kinds of germs.

I was so glad I got a letter today from you. Wasn't much in it but it sure satisfied me so I could do my work. You don't have to write any news, just a couple of words so I know that you're all right, and can do my work ... If I get money from you I'll save as much as I can for you and if you need any let me know and I will send it to you.

Your Loving Mother

P.S. I want you to go to Mass every Sunday and to confession and communion too and say your prayers.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Wishing you and your loved ones
a wonderful Christmas and Year 2006,
enriched with memories of years past
and the people who made them so special.
And filled with the promise of tomorrows
that are healthy, happy and peaceful.



LETTERS FROM THE LEISZ'S

This booklet was compiled in the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving 2005, an inspiration borne out of the letters that my Dad saved from his time in the Army. I noticed them in a closet in November and I began rereading them. I was moved to create a tribute to my Dad and the Leisz family for their sacrifices so many years ago during World War II.

Want another copy of this booklet? Contact Denise Leisz Pazur
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