

Writer of Letter From Joe



CPL. RITO HERNANDEZ

Wrote the "Letter From Joe" that appeared in last week's Sunday Miner. The letter that has been discussed widely since its publication was written from North Africa by Corporal Hernandez to his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Everett Hernandez, 1119 Vermont street. Corporal Hernandez was left an orphan at an early age and was reared by his uncle and aunt.

Letter of Sonny
& his picture,
cut from Rocket
for Sonny when
he comes home.

of moving into town. I'm glad for you will like it better. Now more than ever, I must return home some day.

You probably want me to tell of my experiences during the recent campaign here. One has to experience it (the recent fighting) to know how it feels to be a target for big guns, rifles and machine guns. It is like being in another world.

I will not mention any locality by name, but we were nearly every place where Americans fought.

If you read Ernie Pyle's column in the papers you have the inside story. He covers it very nicely. His column is one of the favorites over here.

Once we contacted the enemy we had regular calls. Mornings, just at dawn, they would send over a barrage to waken us. Then, after a little lull, they would let us have another reminder just about breakfast time. This took place again at noon, again at supper time and to finish the day off they would send another barrage just about dark. These barrages are a series of big shells lobbed over by big guns. They burst with ear-splitting noises. We nicknamed some of them "Whistling Annies" because the Germans have a siren on some of the shells to make a high siren-like noise as they come through the air. Others we have nicknamed "Whispering Willies" because they make a soft whispering or whirring sound.

It seemed that every time we opened our cans of C rations, "Jerry" (a German soldier) would send over a barrage just to make us duck and spoil our meal. When the shells landed too close we would be showered with dirt that flavored our open C ration cans. Every time a shell lands nearby shrapnell whistles through the air like so many bullets, each meant

for destruction of some human being. The shells burst into thousands of small pieces, each capable of destroying a human life.

However, for every shell they shoot at us they receive many, many times that one from us. Our artillery is "right on the ball." It is very accurate, much more so than that of "Jerry's".

As for death, the first casualty you see gives you a shock. After that, though very disagreeable, it becomes an every day occurrence. Funny how cheap life becomes in times like these. But it is much worse to see those men carried out who will be cripples the rest of their lives.

While in central Tunisia, we worried a lot about the different types of mines, especially the anti-personnel mine. It is an object similar in appearance to a No. 2 can, only much larger. It is buried in the ground with three small prongs at the level of the ground. When some one steps on it—and it is hard to see—it bounds about six feet in the air and bursts. It is filled with small pellets, each capable of killing or at least maiming for life. This innocent looking object is one of the most feared things in the life of infantrymen.

In northern Tunisia, the terrain is very rough and thick with underbrush. It is a series of hills, similar to the Harris hill (at Mt. Harris, Cold.) Only I believe there is more and thicker underbrush here. These hills are steep on all sides. Everything had to be brought to the foot of the hills by packmules and from there on we packed it on our backs. Rations, water, ammunition were all brought up in this manner. The wounded were carried out on litters. It was hard work, much harder than one can realize.

We didn't shave for two weeks, and you can imagine what I looked like. We didn't bathe for more than four weeks. I have not been to any town in four months.

And what do we hear and read from the States! Strikes everywhere, walkouts, people kicking because they don't make enough money and because they can't have all the gasoline they want, a cry for shorter hours, child delinquency and many more things.

Believe you me, just send some of those folks who complain over here and let them go through with what we have to, just for two weeks. They would be glad to go back and work and work hard for less money and they would not strike, walkout or have such petty complaints as "hollering" because a few things they might want are rationed. If they saw what was left of Bizerte they would thank their lucky stars they live in a country like ours. And when they got back to our country they would put a lot more effort into the war effort.

CPL. RITO HERNANDEZ

Editor's Note—Sunday Miner readers will find this letter of Cpl. Rito Hernandez worth reading, as they do all letters published under "Letters From Joe." Corporal Hernandez, 24, gives a vivid description of fighting in Africa and drives home some pungent facts for those of us on the home front. Recipients of his letter are his uncle and aunt with whom he made his home, after the deaths of his parents several years ago. It is clear, concise, interesting.

Africa
May 28, 1943

Mr. and Mrs. Everett Hernandez,
1119 Vermont street,
Rock Springs, Wyo.
Dear Folks:

In your last letter you told me

I'll write more about Bizerte in my next letter.

We have started softball again. And I might add that we have not been beaten since we came to Africa. I have the honor of holding down third base.

Incidentally, I got me a "Jerry," just to avenge some of the swell boys we lost.

If you'll notice I have received a promotion after nearly two years in the army. I am now a corporal.

That is all,
As ever
Rito

(CPL. RITO HERNANDEZ)
P. S.—Thank you for your regular letters. They sure help.