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Last Two Letters Written by Lieut. Harvey Billings

Following are the last two letters received by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Billings of Drake from their son, Lieut. Harvey F. Billings who died April 28th of wounds received in action. Memorial services are being held for him in the Drake High School Assembly this afternoon, Thursday, at 2 o'clock.

23 April 1945

Dear Folks:

I have got a few minutes again so here I come with a couple of lines. At present we are still getting in shape for the next "big push", it should be about the last big one for us, and it looks like this one is going to be really rough. At present we are with the forward element of the Third Army. Yep, that's correct. We really do get around. My latest town of any importance that I have seen is Nuremberg. I guess you read all about that. I can't tell you where we are heading next, but it's going to be very soon, and we are all anxious to get this thing done so we can get home. The news looks good. The Jerries know the jig's up, but they still come on just to kill more Americans. It's not right, Dad, but they do it.

We have been having a little rain the past couple of days, but other than that things have been pretty good. The country is still beautiful even when you approach the Czechoslovakian border. The people around here are very well off except the Americans are occupying them which they don't seem to care for too much. We stay in their homes whenever we get a chance to. Of course we have to boot them out first, but that's a pleasure when we think that it's because of them that we are here.

I got a couple of letters from Sammie the other day and one from her mother. Haven't heard from you folks in four or five days now. But your mail has been coming through pretty regular, and it has helped a lot towards holding up my morale. You can't imagine how good that homemade candy and sausage tasted. We ate the sausage in one big gulp. Then one of the other fellows got some salami and it went the same way. Plenty good too.

Well, how is everyone and everything back at home? I sure do hope you are all in good health. I am fine but a guy never knows from one day to the next just how he is to be over here. One day a guy is laughing and enjoying all the privileges life can offer then the next day he is a goner. It's hard to realize but it's true. I guess I am sure you know what I'm talking about, Dad. Sammie wrote and said she got the flowers for Easter OK, and thought they were so nice. Thanks so much for going to all the trouble of sending them to her for me. I was afraid my request wouldn't get to you soon enough. Thanks a million.

I have been censoring so much mail lately that it hardly leaves me time to do anything else. It seems that the fellows are all so happy to be alive after than last fracas that they have got to tell everyone about it. We surely got a good bunch of boys. And I am glad our casualties have been nothing to speak of. We lost one man and stuck a screwdriver in his eye. As I told you, we lost our little dog mascot. He didn't know that you have to get in a foxhole when all that artillery is bursting in the air.

So you've been having some pretty cold weather back there I imagine it will be getting nice back there soon tho, at least I hope so.

I suppose Joyce is in the middle of banquets and graduation. It hardly seems possible that it is five years that have passed since I was going thru the same thing. Time flies and the next months to one year can't go fast enough for me, cause then I hope to be home again. I plan on being back by Xmas. That is, if my dog tags don't beat me home.

How's Woody's back coming along? I just got a letter from Emma the other day so I guess I'll have to answer it as soon as I get a little more time. I'll bet Connie is surely growing. Is Mother working at the restaurant now? Who owns the place?

Tell Emil and Verdie that I picked a good spot to cross the Rhine and a fair spot to cross the Siegfried Line, go over the Danube soon. I just hope I don't come home via the Pacific Ocean. I don't care to cross any more oceans, but I guess that's the only way home.

Guess I've rambled on enough for this time. Please don't worry about me cause I'll be OK. Just keep mentioning me in your prayers and if I don't write too often for awhile you'll know why. Take good care of things back there, and keep the home fires burning til I get back again,

Love, Son

25 April 1945

Dear Folks,

Well, good luck has smiled on me again so I am back to give you the latest dope of what there is to tell. We have had a couple of good days rest in which to prepare for the next big show and now the curtain is about to raise on it. We're more set for them this time. We've got a little more combat experience and we've tried to correct some of the mistakes made in our last meeting with the Jerries. Together with that we now have him a little more at a disadvantage inasmuch as he has lost a lot more ground and no longer has a big backyard into which he can retreat. In short, I believe we have him on his last legs, and they are rapidly giving way. That cannot be too soon to suit me.

Yesterday we had a personal talk by General Patton, and Dad, you can't help but admire a guy with as much guts and knowledge a General Patton has. He speaks in plain words cussing more in five minutes that I could in a week. But he gets his points across, and his points are sound. I'll tell you all about it when I get home.

It is quite a wonderful feeling being placed as Patton's spearhead and indeed an honor for our division. We showed up pretty good in the Ruhr pocket, you know. I'm well and fairly happy at the present, folks. I weighed myself on a Jerry scale today, and I weigh 182 pounds so you see I am doing OK. We get plenty to eat and it's all good food. I guess that's quite a contrast from the last war, isn't it Dad? It's too bad you fellows didn't get some of the things we are. Of course no matter how modern the war is there is plenty of blood and terrible sights to see. It's hell at any time and any man that says different has me to deal with. You know, folks, this army and war has done one big thing for me. It has made me gown up and in a hurry and

one thing I am happy about is the fact that my boys in my section really like me. It's a grand feeling to know that when I went up forward as an observer in the last action and then came back, they couldn't pat me on the back enough. There were actually tears of joy in some of their eyes, just to see me safe and alive.

Dad, regardless of all the hell – I may have to go through it things like that that make the whole thing no in vain (this is exactly as found in the newspaper). In turn I have recommended two of my men for Bronze Stars for meritorious service. They have been approved and will receive them in a short time. It's a small return for their donation but it's something.

I've been getting mail pretty good the past couple of days. I received at least eight letters from Sammie in the past three days. She has been a peach and a very faithful wife, and I am very proud of the way she is handling our financial affairs as well as everything else. I also got some extra special pictures of her. I guess you folks got one too, aren't they good tho?

Is Woody in the army yet? Has anything been heard from Duane yet? How is Vince? Greet them all from me. In addition to Glory, Emma, Connie, Mother, and Joyce.

Oh, yes, Dad, for your information I have recently been on Hitler's military highway. I guess you'll be able to figure the rest out from that OK.

How's everything with the business? Still working hard? Take it ieasy. Don't work too hard cause it isn't worth it. Tell Mum to take it easy too, and to write and also Joyce too. Wish I could be there for her graduation. I had planned on it some time ago. But Uncle Sam doesn't worry about previous engagements.

We're going to try to wind this thing up in a hurry. Then we'll have a real get together. Boy, I'll really raid that old refrigerator. I sure could go for a raw hamburger with lots onions. We find quite a few potatoes in these German homes so we have fried potatoes with onions as often as time permits. All in all, except for the combat it isn't a bad life at all. Of course, I'd much rather be home, but I think the guys in the Pacific are having a rougher time of it. I'll tell you one thing tho, I'll always hold a deep respect for those Jerry 88's. They are really the thing and have made me very uncomfortable more than once.

Well, guess I've used up all my time for now and I've run out of information so I'll close for now, hoping I'll be able to write again soon. Take good care of everyone, Dad, I'll be seeing you all as soon as possible. Be good and don't worry about me.

Love,

Son

Harvey died of wounds on April 28th and the curtain came down on the last big show for him.
(Editor's note)