

BRIEF AMERIKAANSE SOLDAAT ALLAN AAN ZIJN MOEDER¹

'December 25 1944
9th Army – Belgium

Dear Mother,

Last night I went to Midnight Mass. I am one of the two or three hundred boys who will ever have had such a lovely Mass in a most appropriate place for a Christmas Mass.

It was quite cold when we left here. We got lost and had a hard time finding the place. Meanwhile we were really cold and the frost bit our toes and ears.

When we arrived we were about fifty minutes early and had plenty of time to go to confession. We entered a large cave in the mountain and proceeded down its long corridors and catacombs. Only one place was lit up to follow so we wouldn't get lost. We turned a corner and arrived where mass was to be held. The altar was sculptured out, and a beautiful picture of the angel and the shepherds and their flocks. It was done in charcoal.

There were about thirty Brothers that were to serve and sing the Mass, and as we waited for the beginning of the Mass we gazed around in wonderment at the beautiful charcoal murals on the walls and the sculptured pillars, corridors, rooms, and the whole place seemed like a piece of art.

I found out that the "caves" were started back in fourteen hundred by some Monks, and was taken over later by the Dutch Brothers of the Immaculate Conception the past hundred years. Here we were in a place hundred of years old and the charcoal murals and the sculptured art was just as hobby for them. It was a place not to be found anywhere else in the world. Nor was it cold either because it was in the ground. I only wish I could have a chance again sometime to visit the place under a guide.

The Brothers were very good at their singing. None of them seemed very old either. Some looked about eighteen. One of our Catholic Chaplains said the Mass was assisted by eight of the Brothers. Most everyone went to communion. The fat, roly-poly chubby colonel, who was with the General's inspecting party two weeks ago and had asked me how I liked California's rain and mud compared to it here, was there for Mass. They were taking pictures all through Mass, but I wasn't on the side they took them. If I happen to find a picture of it in one of our papers I will surely send it to you. The general came right after Mass. The Brothers had sculptured out a huge side of

¹ Arch. FIC, ds 4939.

the wall, and printed a memorial for us for the first Christmas Mass after their liberation. They had us all write our names in charcoal under it, and even the general put his name in it. We were served coffee and donuts which were surely welcome. After that we left. Even though it was cold riding none of us regretted going. It was just "proper and fitting" and made our Christmas ever so much nicer. Some of the boys that didn't go wanted they had gone this morning.

Its Christmas afternoon now, probably just morning where you are at home. We have just finished the best turkey dinner that I have had in the army. It was even better than last Thanksgiving dinner a year ago we had at Camp Haan. They really fed us everything. I think there were around ten cooks and K.I.P. (Kitchen Police) serving. The hard roasted ground makes it just right for over "White Christmas".

Received a very nice letter from you the day before yesterday. I'm sorry there was sand in the envelope with the picture. Don't know how it could have got there. I so hoped that they would arrive all right. Yes, the letters do hedge hop back and forth. It's a very happy Christmas for us, even though we are on duty all the time.

Bye Mother. Love and kisses.

Allan J. English
Ammunition Corporal Gun #2,
C battery, 127 AAA Gun batallion