

„Into a quiet college town, came accounts of flushing out Japanese resistance in the South Pacific, liberating a concentration camp in Germany, holding the line in an Italian foxhole, and transporting troops during the Normandy invasion. “ **WEITER**

- The town I am talking about is Decorah in Iowa. **WEITER**
- Home to Luther College, a small Norwegian-Lutheran school **WEITER**

- At the beginning of the second World War about 500 students went to school there
- By the school year of 1943/44, enrollment had plunged to half of that
- The war had pulled away all but 80 of Luther’s male students **WEITER**
- One of the college’s professors knew what the students were going through since he had many experiences with the military himself.
- He missed his own graduation ceremony from Luther college in 1918 because he had enlisted in the navy and was already aboard the USS Pennsylvania.
- After he returned to Luther college, he taught history and soon became head of the history department.
- His teaching style was described as unorthodox and unstructured and he was remembered as a lively and controversial history teacher.
- His name was **Chellis Evanson**

- To boost the morale of the college’s “student soldiers” Evanson created a newsletter for those transplanted from the classroom to the battlefield. **WEITER**
- As he was always a navy man in his heart, when WW2 began, he knew that corresponding with soldiers was a way of helping with the war effort. **WEITER**
- At first, he began writing letters to naval recruits, but it expanded immensely until it was reaching everyone from Luther college in the armed forces.
- The writing evolved from letters into a newspaper called “Scuttlebutt”
- A chronicler later described it as “It was a cheerful sheet with the typical Evanson touch, made possible by his singlehanded, devoted efforts.
- Evanson updated the war-weary soldiers with news from the college and community, with for example observations about life on the campus and news items.
- In return, students wrote to their history teacher reporting where they were and what they were doing as far as the censors would allow.
- Many times, they also included pictures.
- Luther College’s “Student soldiers” sent Evanson honest and forthright accounts of the battles they fought, the countries they passed through, and the world changes they witnessed.

- He then published this information in Scuttlebutt, encouraging his readers to watch for other Luther alumni stationed nearby.

- As a result, Evanson received letters from “student soldiers” from all around the globe

WEITER

- Bud Eiden wrote him from an air base in North Africa in November of 1943

“Perhaps I was a poor student of geography because I never knew that they had a real winter in Africa but I learned the hard way... I came over here without clothes for cold weather but now I’m spending my money for winter uniforms. [...] We buy eggs from the Arabs for fifteen cents apiece and [...] usually manage to eat a couple egg sandwiches before going to bed. It reminds me of our room up in Old Main at Luther college which was pretty much a kitchen most of the time. [...] I’ve seen a lot of Europe from the air and I’ll have a lot of interesting things to tell you when I get home. I’ve come to the conclusion that this war isn’t going to last an awfully lot longer. The news from the Russian front is very encouraging and I don’t see how Germany will be able to stand up forever [...] I’ve seen the results of some bombing and I know what it is. I’m glad the bombs are dropping on Germany instead of on the United States.” **WEITER**

- Don Strom wrote Evanson in mid-March 1944. He was in a foxhole in Italy on the day after the bombing of Cassino had begun in earnest, and he painted a gritty, tense picture of the horrors of war.

“I get used to the noise but put that with the ground shaking and trembling and you really have something. I said I got used to the noise, that’s about half true, you just don’t get used to it, I guess. [...] I have many nice holes to jump into to be truthful I’m writing from one of these holes. It’s the same one I’m sleeping in. [...] The only thing wrong with my setup in the hole is that it won’t stop raining. So far, I’ve managed to stay afloat. [...] I’ve had a few shells land around me, but no harm was done. In fact, I got so brave once I had to look out just to see where they were busting, I got the look but another ‘Whistling Joe’ told me to get back where I belong. Couldn’t say I was scared, I guess I just stopped living for a while. I kept thinking of room 88 in Larsen on Luther campus and how nice it would be to be back there.”

- Two months later Evanson again heard from Strom.

- The Allied had dropped more than 2000 bombs over Cassino and their victory brought the Allies north toward Rome. Strom's unit was left behind to secure the area.
- He tells him about how he had lied in holes for the past three months, but now he can move around more freely; however, his unit is only allowed to work at night.

"The truth of the matter is it's too quiet for any good use. Been so used to having things whistling me to sleep, that now, being so quiet I find it rather hard to get any sleep at all. [...] I don't see much of anything, except our planes and it wouldn't do to shoot one of them down. I don't know if you have ever shot at something you can't see, but you know it's there." **WEITER**

- Another big event set tone for many letters...

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- Operation Overlord or better known as 'D'-Day on June 6, 1944, is the day of the Normandy landings. On that day the Western Allied effort of liberating western Europe from Nazi Germany was initiated.
- This event laid the foundations of the Allied victory on the Western Front and set the tone for many letters written by Luther College servicemen stationed and fighting in France.
- On that day nearly 160,000 troops crossed the English Channel among them many Luther College students. **WEITER**
- F. W. Moen gave horrific insight into the war **WEITER**

"Things are moving rather rapidly these days... First thing I know I was in combat and still am... Whoever said, 'war is hell' and 'war is a constant state of confusion' certainly said a mouthful. One day the monotony of it all practically drives a man crazy and the next day you don't know whether you live or die." **WEITER**

- Sailor R.G. Roalkvam on the other hand wrote Evanson, looked back and considered himself lucky

"We had a part in the D' Day exercises; we took in the initial wave and then stayed a short distance off shore for 16 days... There was plenty of stuff coming our way; but thank God! Neither men nor ship was ever scratched!" **WEITER**

- Norman Selness was impressed by the strong spirit there:

“We’ve been here for some time taking part in the Brittany Campaign. France is a beautiful scenic country, with excellent roads, quite heavily wooded, rich agriculturally, and the larger towns have elaborated private and public buildings [...] The French [...] are happy to be liberated and show it... I’m mighty anxious to get back – have a nice soft bed, American meals and enjoy the niceties of home life again... It will be a task to reorganize Europe to normal socially; economically it is awfully disorganized, but the French have the spirit and determination to again become a great France.” **WEITER**

- Another letter arrived in Decorah Iowa, from Weston Noble, in which he explains his own impressions.
- He also was part of the D-Day invasions and mentions that he saw evidence of heavy fighting all the way to their camp in the Normandy. He witnessed the ruins of several towns and states that it felt like coming back to civilization as they came closer to Paris.
- Noble also describes his units’ encounters with French people on their way to Belgium.
- “The reception we got from the people was most gratifying as they threw everything from grapes, apples, turnips, carrots, cookies to flowers at us [...] the people getting out of bed to stand in the doorway in their nightclothes to wave to us through. Very encouraging to say the least. Yet I was quite surprised to see the pro-Nazi element as strong as it is in some places” **WEITER**
- Weston later again wrote Evanson
- tried to explain his thoughts about what he saw in the concentration camp of Nordhausen. It gave me goosebumps when I first read it.

“Many women and children as well as men had met their death in this place. We made the citizens of the town take each body individually, carry it about 1.5 to 2 miles, and then bury it. We can readily see just what was going on here in Germany. The majority of the civilians deny any knowledge of such...When they could not stand it anymore, we made them carry on regardless. It was quite a day believe me, one that we shall never forget.” **WEITER**

- From the other end of the world, from the Pacific Ocean Theatre, came letters as well.
- This war between the Allies and the Empire of Japan covered a large portion of the Pacific Ocean, East and Southeast Asia, as well as, Northern parts of Australia.
- It started in 1941 when Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor.
- This event ultimately caused the U.S. to enter the World War.
- Over two years would pass until the Allies reached their great turning point in the Pacific War: the defeat of the Japanese at Guadalcanal in February 1943.
- The Japanese were placed on the defensive as the U.S. began taking strategic bases across the central and southwest Pacific.
- By the summer of 1944, the Americans were nearing Japan
- The final year of the war would bring bloodshed and hardship to the U.S. soldiers, sailors and Marines who liberated territory closer and closer to Japan's home island, and take a tremendous toll on Japanese soldiers and civilians as well.

- John P. Halvarson described a land battle in the South Pacific Ocean.

“Rode around in a landing craft for about five hours before landing watching the Navy bombard the beach. Knocking out everything on the beach except for those enemies which were dug away down and there always seems to be some that are.... And imagination plays so many tricks on you and every little noise is the enemy! Don't believe I ever hated to see night come so much in my life...” **WEITER**

In one of the last issues of Scuttlebutt Evanson noted his thoughts on the end of the war:

“What world important event has happened since I left off with writing this sheet.... VJ day has come and gone and all of us will be forever thankful to God for a timely termination of a dreadful war and to out millions of fighting men and women for the part they played in bringing peace again to a troubled world. We at Luther especially will forever remain most grateful to our sons and daughters for their sacrifices in behalf of the preservation of civilization. It will now be up to all of us to see to it that those sacrifices were not made in vain.”

- Now, to come to a conclusion.
- I am sure, all of these young men saw and experienced things unimaginable for us. They fought in countries far away from home and their college in Iowa, when under normal circumstances they would have been living the lives of 'typical' college

students: studying for exams, preparing a ball game, going on dates or hoping for an extra dish of ice cream at the Boarding Club.

- Instead, they were driving for cover from German artillery barrages or attempting to shoot down Japanese kamikaze pilots before their own ship was destroyed.
- Evanson's creation of "Scuttlebutt" gave these men and women hope in the darkest hours and an escape from reality back to their life at Luther College and their memories there.
- The newsletter Scuttlebutt provides a remarkable record of the Second World War and gives rare insights into the thoughts and experiences of these young men.
- Today these letters again give voice to young Iowa soldiers spread across the globe seventy years ago.
- They can help young people to understand the dimensions that this war had and make them remember what many young soldiers their age did to provide security for the coming generations.

Questions?