

The Letters of John and Marie Donohue During the Italian Campaign of World War II

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Timeline: The 985th Field Artillery Battalion and the Italian Campaign

Compiled from the booklet on the target, the official unit history of the 985th Field Artillery Battalion.

Phase I: Deployment and the Winter Line (October 1943 – February 1944)

- **October 28, 1943:** The 985th FA Bn lands at Bagnoli Harbor, Naples, five weeks after the Allies captured the city.
- **November 17, 1943:** The Battalion enters combat near Pietramelora, supporting the Allied push toward the "Winter Line".
- **January 17, 1944:** The Allies launch the first of four major offensives against the German **Gustav Line**, anchored at the town of Cassino.
- **January 20, 1944:** The 985th moves into position in "Purple Heart Alley" between Cervaro and Cassino.
- **January 22, 1944: Operation Shingle** begins with Allied landings at **Anzio**, attempting to outflank the Gustav Line.
- **February 15, 1944: The Bombing of Monte Cassino Monastery.** Over 1,400 tons of bombs are dropped on the historic abbey; the 985th personnel are eye-witnesses to this event from their positions in the shadow of Mt. Trocchio. The unit history reports that some of the bombs were released early, just behind their position.

Phase II: The Struggle for Cassino (February 1944 – May 1944)

- **February 15–18, 1944:** The Second Battle of Cassino occurs immediately following the monastery's destruction; the Battalion remains under constant German observation and frequent 170mm shellfire.
- **March 15–25, 1944:** The Third Battle of Cassino; Allied forces attempt to take the town following a massive aerial bombardment.
- **April 20, 1944:** While the front remains largely static, the 985th suffers casualties, including Pvt. Mort L. Burton.
- **May 11, 1944: Operation Diadem** begins at 2300 hours. The 985th participates in a massive artillery barrage involving over 1,600 guns to finally break the Gustav Line.

- **May 17–18, 1944:** The Polish II Corps captures the ruins of the monastery; Cassino is officially liberated.

Phase III: The Drive to Rome and the North (May 1944 – October 1944)

- **May 19–25, 1944:** The "Rat Race" begins. The 985th supports the French Expeditionary Force and catches a German convoy in a bottleneck at **Esperia**, firing over 1,600 rounds to destroy tanks and vehicles.
- **June 4, 1944:** Rome is liberated by the U.S. Fifth Army.
- **June 12, 1944:** The 985th FA Bn marches through Rome and continues the pursuit north.
- **July 1944:** The Battalion engages in heavy fire missions at Prata and Selina, supporting the advance toward the Arno River.
- **August 1–17, 1944:** The Battalion is pulled from the line for its first period of rest at Pratella after 258 days of steady combat.
- **September 1944:** The unit returns to action, supporting the assault on the **Gothic Line** in the Apennine Mountains.

Phase IV: Final Winter and Victory (October 1944 – May 1945)

- **October 15, 1944:** The Battalion begins its second winter in Italy, occupying forward outposts at Anconella and Sabbioni.
- **April 16, 1945:** The final spring offensive is launched to break into the Po Valley.
- **April 21, 1945:** The 985th passes through the newly liberated city of Bologna.
- **April 24, 1945:** The Battalion crosses the Po River, witnessing masses of German wreckage.
- **May 2, 1945:** General Mark Clark announces the **Unconditional Surrender** of German forces in Italy.
- **May 4, 1945:** The 985th fires its final 60 rounds of the war near Carmignano.
- **May 8, 1945:** V-E Day; the war in Europe officially ends.

Historical Commentary

The unit history describes the time at Cassino as "Purple Heart Alley," noting that the Germans on Mount Cairo had direct observation on their batteries. Captain (later Major) Donahue, working in the Fire Direction Center (FDC), would have been responsible for processing the target data provided by the "Cub" aerial observers who famously directed the fire that decimated the German retreat at Esperia.

Major John J. Donahue is mentioned several times throughout the unit history booklet, *On the Target*. These mentions track his progression from Captain to Major and highlight his leadership role within the Battalion's Fire Direction Center and his recognition for meritorious service.

The following passages mention him directly:

Battalion Headquarters and Fire Direction

The booklet describes the initial makeup of the Fire Direction Center (FDC) as the battalion entered combat:

"Upon our entry into battle, the Fire Direction consisted of eight men, Major Tweit as S-3, **Capt. Donahue** as Ass't S-3, T/Sgt. Nellie Holmstoen as operations chief..."

Air Observation Post (Air OP)

A passage in the "Air OP" section recalls the officers visiting the landing strips to observe operations from above:

"Occasionally **Majors Tweit and Donahue** came down to the strip and got a birds eye view of the big picture."

Awards and Decorations

Major Donahue is officially listed as a recipient of the Bronze Star:

"Major John J. Donahue" under the heading "**BRONZE STAR AND CLUSTERS**"

Personnel Registry

In the "Names and Addresses" section at the end of the booklet, he is listed under Headquarters Battery:

"DONAHUE, John J.— 107 N. Walnut St., Pittsburgh, Kansas."

1943

August 8

[United States Army letterhead with eagle insignia]

August 8, 1943

Dear Marie

This may be the last letter that I will be able to write for some time. If it is do not worry. I do not know now what will happen. But remember that I love you and keep writing. The letters will get to me somehow and even if they are old they will read good. Remember to not put anything military in any letter unless you can cover it up. I will read between the lines.

Would like to know what arrangements you have made about going home. How did the apartment work out. Did the girls sell their trailers. How is Patsy. etc.

Didn't receive a letter from you since I got back. Mail may be held up again. Remember to give Patsy a big hug & kiss for her daddy and pray that he won't be gone too long.

Everything is quiet here. My promotion is definitely out and I am now listed as Asst S 3. The colonel said nothing to me. I am not going to do anymore than they order me to do. Things may change after the physical exam but that remains to be seen. In the meantime I will do my job. I do not intend to be S 3 on [illegible; like: Ass't] S 3 pay. Not for anything. Archie had better learn quick and it's a lot of work. Of course this is between you and me.

Well honey I haven't much more to say for now. Remember how I miss your love & kisses & companionship. Best wife in the world—that's you.

Please tell me your plan on going home. In the meantime much love to you and Patsy.

Your loving husband

John

August 9

Milwaukee Wisc Aug 9-43

Dear Marie + Patsy -

Was real pleased to get your letter to-day and know John had the 5 day furlough at home with you. God is good after all.

I just called about the price of the car and they told me that a car in very good condition up to now they have paid as high as \$900.00 but that anytime between now and the 1st of Sept they are going to put a ceiling on cars and that probably the most that would be paid on a car like that would be \$700.00. So if John is sure to go your \$800.00 price probably is a good one as the prices are going to drop. Is there any chance of John not going? Or is it pretty well settled. I don't suppose you have any idea where they will be sent to. I wish things (I mean this war) would be over soon - the sooner the better.

You didn't mention whether John got the knife Donald sent or not. It was sent to Shreveport to the address you gave me some time ago. Let me know will you if he got it?

I tried to call John Sat night but was told he was on maneuvers and couldn't be reached. Seems so funny I didn't get a line from him. Has he been too busy? I hope if he does go across he will write us one

[remaining pages missing]

Ca. August 16 - 19

From: John J. Donahue O-383566 Hq 985th FA Bn. APO 4774 c/o Postmaster New York, N.Y.

To: Mrs. John J. Donahue 338 E Euclid Ave Milwaukee Wisconsin

Date: August [date redacted] 1943

Dearest Marie - Again I must report to you the army sure treats his fighting men 100% before they leave. I have hotel service, wonderful quarters and the best food I have ever eaten in my life. Hope I don't get seasick and spoil the fun of all these things. Best of all the weather is actually chilly but that is probably because we were conditioned in the south. I bet you are quite chilly too after sweltering in hot stuffy Muskogee.

Would like to hear about your trip home and how the folks feel. Bet they all felt too sorry for us. Of course, you and I can be very, very happy for the good times we have been able to sneak out of our married life so far and most especially for those six days leave.

Another thing that interests me very much is that little question mark. Are you sure that you are pregnant or are you just guessing. I sure hope we were successful and I'll tell you right now if it is a boy its gotta be a junior or what? Gosh I'll be glad to get home again to see you Patsy and Junior(?)

I don't know when you will receive this letter. But let me emphasize again not to worry. My mind is free and I am happy. I am at peace with God and the world and intend to stay that way. Nothing very serious can happen to me because I trust & have faith in the protection of the Lord. I am wearing a scapular medal, carrying medals in my pocket, along with a rosary and a miniature soldiers missal. That should be sufficient. Will close now

Your loving husband John

September 7, 1943

[United States Army letterhead with eagle insignia]

September 7, 1943

Dearest Marie,

In a previous letter I described to you in general terms the type of people who are natives in this part of the world. In this letter I will try to picture for you the life in a nearby town and other interesting facts that I have learned since I wrote the last letter.

Picture if you can an old but well built city with large buildings and almost modern architecture—the architecture of the Moslems. Here and there throughout the town are countless sidewalk cafes and wine gardens. Antiquated French streetcars rattle along on the left side of the road dragging behind an open car crowded to overflowing with a mixed group of people. Everywhere one hears the babble of mixed French, Algerian, Moroccan, Spanish, English languages. Odd smells issue from every corner—some of them reminding you of stale urine and others of rotten food and fermenting grapes, all mixed with the smell of salt water. Put yourself in that type of town during the next few paragraphs of this letter.

We were driven to town in an army vehicle through a beautiful countryside, covered with grape vines and bountiful with fruit. Here and there we avoided collision with lumbering Arab carts, some drawn by burros and others by scrawny, ill fed horses or mules. On each side of the road small shade trees beautify the road. Small Arab children dressed in rags shout & yell "Me want cigarette" while holding their fingers in the form of a V for victory.

Finally you can see the skyline of the city ahead. Here and there a building towers above the rest but all of them are built of a pink or white clay or brick; and on reaching the city limits the stench and smell of the slums hit one square in the face.

In our trip we drove to the American Officers club where we had a bite to eat. One must be very careful not to eat or drink of the native food for very obvious reasons. After that we walked down the streets just to observe. Native women wrapped in white with

one eye showing walk quickly along taking care not to disclose their faces. Now & then one of them will show her face—most times very ugly but often pretty but always tattooed on the forehead, cheeks & chin.

French Jews operate stores much like our Jews on Wells street at home. Soldiers of all nationalities and every conceivable uniform pass along the streets. Finally we got tired of walking and sat down in a sidewalk cafe of a very good hotel.

A sidewalk cafe is a marvelous place since you can sit and watch the crowds go by. I know that you would enjoy that very much. So we ordered our drinks (I took beer because I couldn't tell the waiter what I wanted) and then sat and watched the crowds go by. Like all port towns but especially a war port town this one has the scum of the earth. French foreign legion soldiers, Free French,

English, American soldiers and sailors pass by in an unending parade. Here and there a beautiful French woman passes by leading a French dog and exquisitely dressed in modern American clothes; and walking beside her a native woman dressed in white. Then you will see a native Arab man with pants whose crotch almost drags on the ground.

The story behind the pants with the drooping crotch is as follows:

The natives believe that Mohammed will be incarnated again and will be born of a male. Consequently they wear their pants like that so that they can catch him before he hits the ground.

As we sat there a native acrobatic performer put on an act for us. Actually he was a contortionist. A crowd of people gathered about to watch. Beggars by the hundreds, young and old pass by with hands held out. Meantime a blind man passes selling post cards which we cannot send. On the corner, a native fortune teller with sand and a stick plys his morbid trade. Honey what an interesting & picturesque town. Vino, vino plenty vino. But don't drink it. Dangerous beauty, ugliness, sordidness filth, quaintness and everything disgusting is present here. Will tell you more in my next letter.

John

September 11

WESTERN UNION

[Received stamp: 1943 SEP 11 PM 1 24]

CA482 71-56-43 CABLE=CD AMNAFI

EFM MRS JOHN J DONAHUE=

338 E EUCLID AVE MILW=

ALL WELL AND SAFE. MY THOUGHTS ARE WITH YOU. LOVE AND KISSES.

JOHN J DONAHUE.

September 17

September 17, 1943

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

Skipped one letter yesterday because I went to town in the afternoon. Bought a leather wallet & another leather piece which I will mail home to you as soon as possible. Prices in town are exceedingly high and the stores are absolutely bare. Simple little items cost a fortune here and a good number of them are seconds imported from the U.S.

You will be interested in a shopping tour through one of their ten cent stores. Typical of such stores they sold everything from clothing to hardware but actually the goods was poor & the shelves were almost empty. A few bottles of bluing, a shelf of native pottery, a counter with various sized buttons loose in glass dividers, no candy counter (impossible to get here), no crowds or any reason for them to come. What a business old Woolworth could do here with his stores. About the time we had looked about the store & were on the way out, a bell sounded & all the girls who worked behind the counters hastened to cover the counters & rush out while a bouncer at the door saw that everyone left the store quickly. All the stores on closing have heavy metal shields which pull down to protect the windows from thieves.

Got my ration of candy for one week today! One package of life savers, one package of assorted wafers, 2 packages of gum. Of course that is plenty for me but heaven help me if I was a candy lover.

Received your letter of the 2nd of Sept and could almost taste the good food that the Scots put out. Sure made me hungry. This dehydrated food is nothing like that.

By the way do all you can for the American Red Cross. They are 100%. They run a snack bar over here with food, coffee, lemonade, fresh bakery, etc. They pass out bags of miscellaneous items such as books, gum, sewing kits etc. They have treated all of us 100%. Showers are available at the Red Cross, movies and a place to read or write, etc.

Miss you all (Patsy & Marie) very very much. Hope you will
forgive me for not writing yesterday. Your loving husband John
(over)

I love you my sweetheart & only hope for the day when I can be
with you again. Pray hard that that day will be soon. John

September 25

September 25, 1943

Dearest Patsy (have mother read it to you)

It has been a dreadfully long time since I have seen you and I hope that you have not forgotten me by now. Of course I know that it will not take long, once I get home, to win your love again, but I would appreciate it if you would remember me. Your mother has told me that you feel a little strange with all those uncles and aunts around, and I must confess that I often felt that way myself. Sometimes if I could just get away from all the noise for a while, it would help me.

The main reason for my writing to you, however, is to find out if you have been a good girl. Goodness only knows that you must be for mother must have time to think of me—at least once & awhile. Don't forget about going to bed early and laying quiet like you used to do when I put you to bed. Don't cry sassy like and make your mother pick you up, for then you will spoil your lovely nature. In short, little sweetheart try to be the best girl possible. Now I know that this is sometimes impossible but with no papa to be there to spank you when you are bad, such practice is dangerous.

Will close now, Patsy, with love to you and mother. And if mother should skip reading her letter for today let her read this one too.

Loads of love

Your Daddy.

September 26

September 26, 1943

Dearest Marie & Patsy

Just a short note to let you know that I am thinking of you. Today I had a detail so I am writing this by flashlight. Very difficult trying to hold the light in one hand and write with the other. But don't want you to be without a letter.

Went to mass & communion today (Sunday) and offered up the mass for you and Patsy, for your intention and for myself. Incidentally the masses here are offered for us and it is the same as if we had a mass said in any church at home. They are all offered for you and Patsy.

The priest in his sermon gave us one wonderful thought based on a Prayer written by Joyce Kilmer. The poem speaks about how heavy the pack is on his back (he was a soldier in the last war) so much lighter the Cross upon his back. His feet are sore from walking, and he meditates on the pierced feet of Christ. Men cuss him & call him vile names and he meditates on the blasphemy offered Christ on the Cross. Then the priest said to us: Do good now and live a Catholic life for it would be too bad if we would carry the Cross and not receive the reward. Good night my loved ones. God bless you

John

Write soon

Kisses and hugs & more of each

[reverse]

Missed not having a letter today

Write soon

September 29

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Sept. 29, 1943

My dear Captain:

I just learned of the death of your mother, and I write to convey to you and to your family our sincere sympathy in this great loss. What you will value more, I give you the assurance of our prayers. The members of the Jesuit community will give your mother a special memento in their Masses and other prayers, and she will be recommended to the prayers of the students at their Masses on Sunday, as is our custom at the death of our alumni or their near relatives.

The death of mother brings with it one of the most poignant sorrows we can be called upon to bear. That sorrow is accentuated in your case since you are separated from your loved one. I know, however, that you find consolation in the firm confidence your Faith gives you that your loss is your mother's gain, since death admitted her to the reward of her good life. You may well think, too, that she will be watching over you and guarding you in the difficulties and dangers which you may encounter since, close to God, she will be in a position to intercede very effectively in your behalf.

I hope that you find things in the service to your liking. That you are successful in it is evident, and I congratulate you on that success.

Yours very sincerely,

Raphael C. McCarthy, S.J.

Captain John Donahue 1704 East Irving Place Milwaukee, Wisconsin

October 21

October 21, 1943

Dearest Marie & Patsy

Received letter with proofs of Patsy dated the 27th of Sept and a letter dated the 26th of Sept. and a V mail dated October 9th yesterday. Today I received a V mail dated October 11. Must be you skipped Sunday. I skipped yesterday on the letter deal because I went to town but I made up for it by shipping a large package of gifts to you. Don't know how you will like them but I hope they appeal to you. But I will tell you about them in the course of this letter.

We arrived in town about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and after having a bite to eat in the officer's club, I left the rest of the officers and went to visit the Cathedral of Joan of Arc. You know, of course, that Joan of Arc is the patron Saint of France. As one approaches the cathedral they will see the large golden statue of the saint perched upon a golden horse. She is clothed in armor and has a shield and lance. This statue is situated in a small park which is located directly in front of the cathedral proper. The cathedral towers high above the park-49 steps up by actual count. The front of the building itself is in the form of a great arch which is decorated by pictures of the Blessed

Trinity on the very top and angels on each side along the sides of the arch. All these representations are done in colored tile work and contrast beautifully against the sand color of the building itself. A beautiful iron fence, with gates for entrance to each of the five doors, contrasts against the pastel colors of the arch and light brown doors.

As one enters the church, the eye is met with a large stone altar which is fenced off from the rest of the church and is raised up from the floor by about two feet. Instead of the kneeling benches and seats, there are straight back chairs and a few kneelers in front. As you approach the altar, the rich upholstering of the chairs within the sanctuary are visible and the red plush stands out brilliantly. Hand carved furniture is much in evidence. The floor is covered by a beautiful oriental rug of a multicolored pattern (similar to the rug I am sending you. Oddly enough several little boys, obviously altar boys, dressed in red

cassocks and white surplices and set off by a red cardinal's hat, were whispering and talking near the front of the church. In rear of the altar was a beautiful grotto and altar set within that grotto, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

Flowers of all kinds were there in decoration. Numerous marble thanksgivings were hung on the wall around the structure with the words "Merci, Marie." (thank you Mary) or "Remembrance Mary"

The right and left sides of the church had small altars to Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin set off in small alcoves on the sides. These alcoves took the size of small chapels and the one to the Virgin Mary had the Real Presence indicated by a light in the form of a heart with a cross on it. Lovely flowers and more Merci's were evident.

To the rear of the church on either side there was an altar to St Peter on one side and Joan of Arc on the other and another altar to Mary.

The confessional, St Vincent de Paul Society and the alms box were very familiar things to see. Stained glass windows of beautiful color cast a color over the floor of the church while the soft light shining down from each of the four domes that form the roof of the building gave a welcome and soothing glow. The whole atmosphere was one of quiet splendor and reverence, however, the constant flow of non-catholic visitors

Next I visited shop after shop and after looking about could find nothing to buy. I finally wandered into a shop and with the assistance of five clerks, all jabbering at the same time, I bought the third item in your package-a beautiful, all wool, Algerian, Persian rug. The guarantee and trade mark of the rug is on the back of the handwork. It is guaranteed to be hand made. The design is similar to the rug on the floor of the sanctuary in the cathedral of Joan of Arc. (Jeane d'Arc.)

After all that shopping I again returned to the officer's club, had a bite to eat and again meet the rest of the officers. After a short time we proceeded to a theater where we attended a stag show put on by a group of army boys entitled "10 minute Break." It was a musical comedy and was very amusing.

The theater was of the continental type, very small but very high. There were three balconies. Private boxes flanked the stage on either side and boxes with private entrances circled the whole theater at ground level. These boxes were partitioned off by high walls covered with red plush. Leather covered swinging doors provided the entrance doors.

The roof of the theater was formed by a large dome which was decorated very colorfully. The curtain was a beautiful silk colored by peacocks with colored tails. The interior was a cream color and everything formed to represent carving. Maroon curtains were used in the private boxes for decorative purposes.

Well honey, it is hard to even attempt to give you a hundred per cent description of these things but I am sure you will at least have some idea of them. This all would be so much more enjoyable if we were seeing it together and the world was not at war. But when this war ends, I will be happy just to stay with you and love you dearly. I still miss you terribly and hope you miss me. Don't worry and don't dye your hair. Closing now with loads of love & kisses.

Your loving husband John.

November 12

November 12, 1943

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

Another day is done and we are one day closer to reunion. Oh Happy day! Received no letters today but am hoping for the best tomorrow. Am living a very easy life these days with electric light, good food and a heated tent. Don't know how long all this will last but it certainly feels good. See now, you don't have to feel quite so sorry for me at least for the present. And incidentally I am quite far out of the danger area, so you don't have to worry very much either.

The nights are getting quite cold but the sun during the daytime lends a happy glow to the situation. Today I took a cold water shower (the first in many a day). There comes a time in every man's life when he can't stand himself any longer, and then he must shower, cold water or not. I had reached that miserable stage.

Last night I sent your silk scarf in an air mail envelope. Sure hope it goes through OK. Paid 3 dollars for it. I can tell you that because I'm afraid you won't appreciate its value if I don't. As yet I have not had a chance to send your coral necklace or the other cameos. I know that you will appreciate the necklace because it is much like that dime store jewelry you used to try to tease me with. Remember.

When we get to Rome I will buy some more souvenirs and gifts for you. Can't imagine what they have there, but I know they must have their specialty. Naples, you know, has its cameos and silk goods. Perhaps you can find someone who knows what the specialty is in that city.

Incidentally, I think the travel experience I am getting is going to be invaluable. Sometime when we get the money, I would like to take you on the same trip I have made so far. As a tourist I think I could show you many interesting and beautiful things. But we will plan that trip later. I sure hope I get to see Berlin so we can add that to our trip.

It is very instructional to see the different peoples of this great world at their worst and at their best. Certainly the great

soul of Italy has never been laid bare as it has been now. Surely the heart of a people is never shown as clearly as it is during this time of destruction & pillage. So seeing these sights, listening to the people as they lick their wounds, observing the courage and heart of a people, is going to make me a wiser man than I was when I left the good old U.S.A.

I know that you want to know something about Naples since I have mentioned that I have been able to see that city in my travels. It is true that our enemy has destroyed a great deal but even in this destruction, the beauty of the city is apparent. The huge harbor that gathers the blue Mediterranean Sea into its arms, is a beautiful sight, since it sparkles with romance & glamour. One can almost picture the place in peace time with ships from all over the world, gracing its docks and quays. The rocky and forbidding isle of Capri, famed in song, raises its back out of the sea in the mouth of this harbor, and only when the sun descends in the West does one appreciate the beauty of its rocky shores. This is a city of castles and palaces, where mighty kings and princes once controlled the traffic of the inland sea. The city raises up from its beaches to high pinnacles in a short distance. Beautiful villas and rocky castles grace every hill. The hills are terraced and gardens of flowers dot the rocky ledges. Here and there a church steeple towers high above the city carrying the cross on high, for this is a country of numerous and beautiful churches. Naples, city of ruin and destruction, but also in its destruction, a city of beauty and romance. Bombs cannot destroy what centuries of civilization have built.

The people are gradually going back to a normal life. You have read perhaps that the electricity has been restored in part. Business people have salvaged what the German has left or what they managed to hide, and display them for sale. Here and there a pair of silk stockings is displayed, or a fancy silk negligee. But the stores are very empty and only a pretense of former business is possible. As one walks down the street, a civilian will try to sell the family jewels, a fountain pen, a watch, a pistol or anything in order to get a few lire. Street hawkers invite you to a spagette dinner or cognac or signorina as you will have it. Religious trinkets are sold like carnival goods on the street corners. Every fourth business place is a barber shop

yet strangely enough all the civilians need hair cuts. Kids follow one and beg for candy, cigarettes or anything you may give them. Thus one finds Naples these days, the busy salesman and beggar.

This part of the letter is for you, Marie, my sweet and darling wife. Of course you know that there is nothing in this crazy, topsy turvy world that means a darn thing, without you waiting for me back there. Even the things I have seen would mean a hundred per cent more if you were there to see them with me. And the only reason why I am able to have peace of mind at all, over here far away from you and all that is sweet and dear, is because I know that you will be waiting for me on that happy day of return with a welcome smile and loving kiss, sweet as ever, true to the last, and ready to resume our happy and successful life together. No more war to bother us, only a job to do together—namely, to make a home and raise a family. Darling, there is nothing sweeter to think about, nothing better to dream of than you and our future.

Life has been kind to me and, though at present it is a bit bitter, mainly because I am away from you. But I cannot help but remember the happy days it has given me. The memory of our courtship, our years of marriage, our little angel from heaven Patsy, our complete success of marriage, fill me with a happy glow. We have so much to look forward to, so much to live for, so much to hope for that every fiber of my soul aches for the days to come.

I know, sweetheart, that separation is hard for you because you have much less to do and see, only the same old routine. But the emptiness of that separation will be overwhelmed and forgotten when we are together again. Remember what the good book says about a woman who bears her child in pain, soon forgets the agony of birth for joy of a son born to her. Thus the agony of our separation will soon be forgotten for joy of our happy reunion. My prayer and yours should be one for a quick and safe reunion in the near future and a continued happy married life. Your prayers and communions have helped me much, I know. Please continue them for they are certainly evidence of your strong and blessed love for me. Only God can grant us the favors we so earnestly ask, and we can only ask by constant and fervent prayer.

I have extended myself much in this letter tonight but I hope you can understand my love for you. Nothing is harder than expression of that love in words, so forgive my lack of expression. When we are together, I can express it much more vividly by actions.
Goodnite sweetheart. Dream of me. Your loving husband John

December 7, 1943

December 7, 1943

Dear Patsy,

Received several of your pictures just recently and although they were but snapshots, I can see that you are rapidly growing up to be a very big girl. Furthermore I see that you are walking and able to get around more than when I last saw you. Mother tells me that you have been a very good little girl, and that pleases me because daddy wants a well behaved daughter when he gets home.

Its rather hard to realize that I must talk to you like the big girl you are, because when I left you were just a tiny babe. But time makes everyone grow, I guess, and before we know it you will be having boy friends coming over to visit you. And don't forget when they do they must leave by 11:30. So there.

Santa Claus will be coming soon and I understand that you are going to see him sometime before Christmas. Now that guy has a big book and he writes down every time you are a bad girl and also every time you are a good girl. You better get a good record started because he works almost entirely on that big book. And just a tip from experience, be sure and hang up a big stocking on Christmas. You know yours are quite small. So borrow mam mas for that night. Here's hoping you get a big lot of gifts on Christmas.

Well will close now with love and a great big kiss for you.

Love

Daddy

WESTERN UNION

[Received stamp: 1943 DEC 20 PM 11 56]

LDA91 B VIA WU AMMESE

EFM MRS JOHN DONAHUE=

338 E EUCLID AVE MILW=

[Stamp: DUPLICATE OF TELEPHONED TELEGRAM]

LOVE AND BEST WISHES FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR. ALL WELL=

JOHN DONAHUE.

1944

January 8

January 8, 1944

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

No mail today but again I have hopes of a good sized mail bag tomorrow. Seems as if the mail man slights me very frequently these days, but I know that there is plenty of mail stacking up for me someplace.

Tomorrow is Sunday and I will go to mass and communion. Since we have been in this vicinity the opportunity to attend mass has been very frequent. I have told you about the little church that is nearby. It is a beautiful little chapel with the same fixtures as any American Catholic church. One feels completely at home. Luckily enough the Germans left the tabernacle in the altar and all the vestments and articles of worship. Shell fire has not touched the place and it is an excellent place for worship. Of course the Real Presence is not kept there because of the fact that it might be destroyed but there is mass there twice daily at 0830 and 1730 hrs.

Strangely enough the priest formerly had a parish in Natchitoches, Louisiana. You remember the town where Pete and Minnie had a place for some time. He is a short, dark and rather handsome fellow and quite nice to talk to. Says he got the idea of becoming an army chaplain from watching the soldiers on maneuvers near his parish in Louisiana. Every night after mass, Father has benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and we all sing O Salutaris Hostia and Tantum Ergo. Tonight we all chimed in on Holy God We Praise Thy Name. Every service finds the Italian women in attendance but very few of the menfolk. Don't understand it.

Since we have first arrived at this area quite some time ago, we have been able to see quite a bit of change for the better. The people are happier and better fed and they have cleaned themselves up and are gradually bringing out their better clothes. Most of the women wear black day in and day out. Some of these women are quite pretty in their own sort of way, but

according to American standards they wouldn't even make first base. They are a hard working crew of farm people and have the characteristics of farm women. The men are weak looking, not only physically but weak willed. The reason for that is perhaps this - that all the physically fit and hardy men have gone to the army and only the inevitable 4F's remain.

There is one young man in this community who took rather drastic methods of avoiding the draft. He tied a piece of raw beef on his kneecap and allowed it to rot. In the process of rotting it infected his knee so bad that when he was called it was swollen to an enormous size. Several of the older men here speak "American" as they put it. Usually one will find that they either lived in Brooklyn or somewhere in New York.

Today I was talking to one of them, and during the course of conversation, I mentioned the fact that I could not understand why people came back to Italy after living in the U.S. He answered that very well I thought when he said simply that he had been born in Italy and that was his home. I guess one gets the wrong idea of these foreign countries. He probably feels the same about Brooklyn as I felt about Naples - it was wonderful but Jimmy how I would like to be home again!

According to Old Mike, one of these English speaking Italians (native of Brooklyn) the weather here takes a sudden turn for the better after January 20. Of course as usual the weather here is very unusual. There is a story going around that these people didn't even know what ice was until they saw it this year. Actually that is a lot a bunk, I think. The cold really isn't bad during the daytime but it gets very biting during a clear night.

For some reason or other the moon is more beautiful here than it is back home. Perhaps that is because its light is diffused throughout the area by the reflection of the light on the snow-covered mountains which would be interesting to you and I. As it is the effect is all lost.

Remember the trench coat I bought from Wiley Beane in Camp Gruber. Well, I decided that since I had the new coat I told you about in a previous letter, that I would get rid of it. So I gave it to the first Italian boy I saw. He happen to be the right size & shape. Well, maybe you know how nice it is to give to the needy

but I never experienced a more sincere expression of gratitude in my life. This boy practically kissed me after I made him understand it was his. He couldn't understand me and I couldn't understand him. But he pointed and asked "Italiano?" Or in other words was it an Italian made coat. But I answered "Americano" and he almost clapped his hands with glee. Then he asked "you, vino?" (or do you want some wine) I refused politely and he bowed himself out very happy. That to me was worth a whole lot and I felt very good about the whole thing. Today I noticed he had washed the coat & had it out drying in the sun.

Well, darling, that will give you some ideas of the things we find here in this foreign land. It is strange to find people are so much like ourselves even though they speak a foreign tongue

January 22

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL 1103 WEST WISCONSIN AVENUE
MILWAUKEE 3, WISCONSIN

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

January 22, 1944

Mrs. John Donahue, 338 East Euclid Avenue, Milwaukee, 7,
Wisconsin

Dear Madam:

I received your letter and the enclosure and will write to you
the early part of next week. I am merely acknowledging the letter
at this time to let you know that I will give your letter my
personal attention.

Yours truly,

F. X. Swietlik, Dean

FXS:hjg

February 9

February 9, 1944

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

No mail from you for four long days and is my morale low. But I have the consolation and, that is, that somewhere my mail is waiting for me. I did not write yesterday because I felt a little bit ill - stomach disorder. I am feeling quite a bit better today. No cause to worry. There is difficulty I had back in the states off and on. I know that you will excuse me.

Archie & I are billeted in a Italian home at the present time. The people are very kind and considerate. They treat us like big shots and are most anxious to please. For example in the morning they have hot water ready in a wash stand with soap and towel. They bring a bronze full of hot water in to us in the evening. They also do our laundry and clean the room. We have the best room in the house and though we don't have electric lights it is very pleasant & comfortable. Of course like all Italian families they have scobs of bambinos, ranging in age from infants to grown up children. Unlike the lazy bed Italian, they are quite healthy and rosy cheeked children. They seem very well fed and quite happy. In fact they feed C ration meat & vegetable stew to their dog. They of course have grown their own food and have not gone hungry. Their clothes are ragged and they haven't shoes for the children, but they are happy as anyone could want to be.

The other evening I was going to my room when one of the families, Incidentally the wine was served as a [illegible] glass and on a white plate as a serving tray. Then the whole family gathered around the fireplace & watched me drink the wine. It is very unfortunate that I have not learned foreign languages. It would be very helpful. Of course I understand a few words and can usually get the content of what they say, but I am unable to express myself. That is one thing I want to do when I get home, is study a few foreign tongues.

These people make their own wool thread using a spinning wheel to accomplish the job. I watched one woman while she spun and it looks rather difficult. I guess one must have very nimble fingers in order to accomplish the job. The carpenter who makes the spinning wheels lives in the same building. He works from hay

until night making these things. I think that the Germans destroyed those that they had before.

We ran into one old Italian man who speaks fair English. After talking with him for a while, he finally told us that he had worked in the Ford Plant in Detroit, Mich. It is surprising how many of the older Italian men have been to either the U.S. or Canada, and then returned to their homes & families. One would think that they would hate to return to a country like this. But after all this is their home, and it is the same as the U.S. is to us.

Had the privilege of seeing one of the old churches in Italy just recently. Of course actually it is a comparatively modern church for this country. The corner stone said it was built in 1741. Imagine the history behind a church like that. The main altar is ruined and the roof has many gaping holes in it. However, in spite of the ruin, there is a certain beauty about it.

The main alter is set much higher than the rest of the church, and is formed of marble. Around the alter in a half moon shape we hand carved chairs and a sign above this section is worded "Chorus". A small organ is built directly behind the altar. Above the altar and [illegible] a dome shaped roof, is a beautifully painted wall picture.

The main part of the church has approximately eight smaller altars. Above each is an old painting and behind the painting, in an alcove is a statute. I don't know why the statues is there except that it is probable that the statutes we exposed only on certain feast days and during certain months of the year.

On either side of the main altar are rooms which once served as a sacristy and, here we found vestments of all colors and designs. A multitude of religious articles were scattered about, ranging from prayer books to small statues. A few looking beads, holy pictures and even a gold monstrance were laying about. It would be a shame to Liberians of these things. (Pause- one of the Italian boys just brought the hot coals in for the evening. I told him I was writing to my family and showed him pictures of you and Patsy. He said "ah bon, bon bambino". They really are crazy about kids.

The other day I went into the town and by chance I saw among the ruins a beautiful oil painting of St. Joseph & the child Jesus. I would & have really enjoyed having the picture for it was a fine work of art. But I could not salve my conscience enough to justify my taking it. One of the boys did take it, however and is going to send it home. It is probably worth four or five hundred dollars if not more.

The same thing happened to me not so long ago when I came upon a beautiful hand [illegible] marble table cover. It was a very valuable piece but I just could not see myself taking it. I had seen the same thing in Haflor priced up to two and three hundred dollars. Someone got that piece too. I guess we are just too honest. But I would rather pay for the things I get and not have as much as the other fellow.

Well honey, will close this little account of a few interesting experiences with many loving thoughts of you and Baby from your loving & devoted husband

John

February 13

February 13, 1944

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

Tonight I had the singular honor of enjoying a meal with an Italian family. It all happened this way. As I have told you in previous letters I am staying in a house with an Italian family. There are so many Italians living in this house that I really don't know where family lines start and end. But for the sake of brevity I will write about the one group I consider a family.

There is first Luigi whom I have pegged as a stay boarded and father of the oldest girl in the family proper. There is Julio and Maria who are youngsters of about eighth grade age. There is Paulina, Luigi's own, and a number of others whom I will leave nameless, first because I don't remember their names, and second because they are just like the atmosphere surrounding the incident that I am going to tell you about.

I was seated in my room, taking my Italian lesson from Luigi when he was called to supper by Maria. He asked me if I would eat with him but I politely declined. But he begged & pleaded with me until I finally gave in to his wishes. And so we entered the dining room in the lower part of the house, and there met the family. It was almost breath-taking how pleased everyone was. They all jumped up and offered me a chair by the fireplace, and then began talking and waving their arms exhibiting childlike enthusiasm. It all seemed very polite and yet strangely touching.

After a very short time they set the dishes on the table, and filled them with spaghetti and beans. I begged off with a very small dish partly due to the fact that I was not hungry, and still more because I didn't think their food would be very appetizing. But strangely enough it did taste rather good. The bread they served was dark and without a spread. The drink was red wine or as they know it "vin rouge". After the main dish they served a salad of greens and a dressing of oil and vinegar. And believe it or not they had a table cloth and napkins; nice glasses added to the table set up.

After the meal they invited me to sit by the fireplace and the whole family gathered about and enjoyed the heat of the glowing

embers in the fire. The room was very dimly lighted by a kerosene light and was sparsely furnished. A table, chairs, a few cooking utensils, and a few pictures completed the furnishings of the room. The fireplace is the main center of attraction and the cook stove as well as the heating unit. You probably cannot realize the difficulty of trying to appear sociable when you don't speak a language but it is almost an insurmountable difficulty. One feels like a bump on a log. That is the one thing that impels me to attempt to learn the language. It is such a helpless feeling to be unable to talk to people. However with my limited vocabulary and a vigorous use of hands and a smattering of French and English I was able to talk to them a little. And they are so anxious to help.

Luigi is quite an interesting character. I should judge him to be about thirty years of age. He is slim, short and dark and looks much like any of the other Italian men. He has a very strong personality and is most polite & gracious. He speaks French and German and is learning English at the same time he teaches me Italian. By trade he is a railroad man but since the war he has turned to carpentry. He spends a good part of his day working on spinning wheels and other useful gadgets. His intelligence is much higher than the people he associates with. Like almost all Italian men, he is a former soldier and has served a long period in the army. He insists that he was not a fascist and that he did not follow Mussolini. Of course all Italians deny Mussolini now that he is no longer in power. They dismiss their former leader with a sign of cutting his throat.

The tools that Luigi works with are quite crude. The Germans took his lathe and hand drills. He has improvised various tools to take their place. One tool, a drill, he improvised out of a shaft, a piece of rope and a piece of wood. But despite the lack of tools, his work is very fine and I'm sure he would do excellent cabinet work. So much for Luigi.

The Italians give us good room service where we are. They bring in a wash stand complete with soap & towel every morning, and a burner with hot coals every evening. They are most generous with their services and would perhaps do more if we ask them.

Menu today was very good. For breakfast I had toast, coffee, dehydrated egg omlet and a vitamin pill (Dinky). Meat loaf,

mashed potatoes, peas & carrots, bread, butter, coffee, supper.
Beef stew, kidney beans, pears, bread, apple butter, tea.

There is perhaps no thing in this world quite so alluring as Italian mud. Without exaggeration, it sticks to one's feet in big clods, making one's feet appear several times larger than normal. When it is mixed with sufficient quantities of water it becomes like gray colored paint and has the unhappy quality of splashing as one walks. When it rains half is almost impossible to keep from getting muddy from head to foot. If one does not change clothes almost daily, it would appear as if he had taken a header in a large mud puddle. You can imagine our difficulties.

Of course this is not the rainy season. The only difference is that now it rains only twice a week while in the rainy season it rains six days out of five.

Well honey, I think I will close this letter letter and you early this morning with much love to you and Patsy. I think of you continually. May God keep you and bless you. Your loving & devoted husband

John

February 24

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

MILWAUKEE, 3, WISCONSIN

February 24, 1944

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

My dear Captain:

It was surely good to receive your letter of February 10th which made a rapid passage from Italy and which I read with great pleasure and edification. I must confess that I did not place you very definitely until I had looked up your record in the Registrar's office. With that help, I now have a very distinct memory of you, and the record is surely one of which you can be very proud. We are looking forward to the day when you will be back to complete your studies in the Law School. You and the other Marquette boys are included in our prayers, in which we ask God to be very good to you and bring you home safe.

Surely the Army life is not blunting your sense of spiritual values, and your example is a vast benefit to both Catholics and non-Catholics around you. When the enlisted men see their captain so faithful to his religion, they are both encouraged and inspired to devote themselves more earnestly also.

You probably knew Father Johnston, who may have taught you in Liberal Arts. He died last week after three years' illness from a heart condition. Father Keegan, who has suffered very much from ulcers of the stomach for many years had a past drastic operation at the Mayo Clinic two weeks ago but, to the astonishment of the doctors, he has recovered to a point where he will be leaving the hospital in the immediate future. I have long passed the customary time for tenure of office, and next Monday Marquette University will have a new rector. You probably have some Marquette men with you or may meet them occasionally and, when you do, I should be very much obliged to you if you would remember me to them very kindly and tell them we are not forgetting them here.

Our educational program is going along as well as can be expected in the circumstances. Fortunately for us, most of our service men

are in the Navy. I say that because the Army is withdrawing all the students who have been in the ASTP, with the exception of the boys in medicine, dentistry, and advanced engineering. We also have Army men in medicine and dentistry and they will remain.

The going over in Italy is pretty tough, according to the reports that we get in the newspapers, and probably they do not represent conditions as difficult as they undoubtedly are. If you find time, I shall certainly be glad to hear from you again and, were you to address your letter to Marquette, it will be forwarded to me. I was interested at your observations on the Catholicity of the Italian people. They agree with those that I myself made when I was in Italy in 1924. Perhaps when these Italian men see how American soldiers and American officers practice their religion they will be weaned away from the idea that the Church is an institution for the women and children. If I or any of us here can ever be of any assistance to you, I hope that you will do us the favor of giving us the opportunity to help you. With kind regards, I am

Yours very sincerely,

Raphael C. McCarthy, S. J.

Capt. John J. Donahue 0-383566

Hq. 985th F A Bn, APO 464

c/o P. M. New York, N. Y.

March 23

March 23, 1944

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

I stood in the window high above the valley and watched the sunset. Long shadows grew darker behind the rocky hills and distant mountains turned dark purple. The green valley, with its rivers and ponds, blended softly into the foothills of the mountains. Here and there a pond of water shone golden from the rays of a blood red sun, and a soft yellowish haze settled softly over the valley. Before me at my feet and disappearing into an olive grove was an old rocky road. A few buildings faintly visible through the trees caught the last rays of the sun and reflected them, giving these old buildings the appearance of some ethereal houses. All was quiet and peace reigned while God saw the world being put to slumber.

And suddenly as if to break the spell the valley flashed and roared with artillery fire. Startled birds screaming wildly, flew hurried & disturbed courses past my window. A pall of smoke rose to blot out the rays of the dying sun. Echoes rocked the valley and boomed between hills & mountains and sharp lightning like flashes pierced the gathering darkness. And I thought as I watched that a sacrilege had been committed for man had disturbed God's communion with the earth. The rude and unnatural sounds of battle broke the spell of the moment. It was all so senseless. The only way out of harmony was man. It is times like these that I have such a desire for peace and home.

I have told you many times before about the table on which I write many of my letters. This table is walnut and has a beautiful glass-like finish. There is only one thing wrong with it. As I sit here writing persistent little termites eat away at it. Every now & then the table will crack loudly. At first I could not believe my ears but there is no doubt that little by little the table is being eaten away.

Now isn't that about the strangest thing you have ever heard. Jimmy I'm glad I don't have a wooden leg.

Finally located another German helmet and a German gas mask. On my trip to the batteries today I talked to some of the men. They

knew where some of them were and Sunday they will bring them with them when they come to church. Now all I must do is to get the old man's approval to send them home and I will be ready to send out the box. Simple.

Had quite an amusing incident happen tonight. I was getting ready to shave and I sat on my bed stropping my razor. If you remember it makes quite a slapping noise. Well I had barely started when an English soldier stuck his head in the door and said "It would not be a Galls ye are stropping now would it?" I replied that it was. "Makes me feel mighty like home" said he. "I lost my Galls in Africa and haven't been able to purchase another, ceptin but once when I could of got one for four pounds ten shillings. But it twere about ten years old."

Upon further conversation with him I learned that he was an Irishman who had left south Ireland, lived in the north and finally moved to London. He has been in the army for quite a long time but is plenty sick of it just as I am.

These English soldiers are really quite interesting "chaps".

April 7

April 7, 1944

Dearest Marie & Patsy

Just a line to accompany this letter. These enclosures are some things I would like to have you keep for me. One is the last letter I received from my mother before her death, one the notification of her death from you, a third with the note about Patsy taking her first step and the last a letter from Father McCarthy.

Everything is O.K and I am really feeling fine. Went to devotions today Good Friday and heard reading from the Passion, and Stationes [stations] of the cross.

I'm sending the letter "free" to see how soon you receive it. Please tell me how long it takes. Just an experiment.

Darling I love you very very much and hope that you love me the same way. Fond kisses from your loving & devoted husband

John

I love you

April 23

[letter from an unknown sender to Marie Donahue. Signature page missing.]

April 23, 1944

Dear Marie:

Arrived here at 12:30 last & met Jack's train at 1:58. It was a glorious reunion. No tears shed but we were back so shaky we had to sit down.

Expect for his arm, Jack hasn't changed a bit. His skin is very ruddy & he's the picture of health. He speaks very freely of his injury & has made it very easy for me. I've seen the dressing & the slit won't shock me it sure made me mad. The shell fragment passed under the arm between his chest & arm. He had to have the slash trans [sic]. He didn't know it, but they did put a flap of skin on & it so there wasn't be any skin grafting necessary, just some minor trimming. He's trying to get a sick leave as bad as possible.

He's able to be away from the hospital lucky Aft & eve. and weekends. We have a nice warm about sick blacks from the

June 19

June 19, 1944

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

If I remember correctly I promised to write a longer than usual letter on my sight-seeing experience in Rome. Tonight - or rather this morning (0300hrs) I am on duty with nothing to do so I might as well keep that promise.

This is the first time that we have stopped to take a breath since the long days of Cassino, and believe me I am almost breathless. But here you are on my sight seeing tour.

As we enter the Eternal city it is surprising to see how modern and American the, villas and homes appear one might be entering any large American city. Notable was the fact that there was no damage from bombs or shell fire. Down the wide boulevard as far as the eye could see were beautiful tall buildings and apartment houses. But most surprising of all was the crowds of people who lined the curbs cheering, laughing & talking, and throwing flowers at the soldiers as they passed. It was truly a spontaneous celebration.

Perhaps you visualize those people as I did before coming to Italy. But if not perhaps you will get the idea that they are like the people of southern Italy that I have often described in my letters. Well surprising as it may seem the people I saw in Rome could have been seen on the streets of New York, Chicago or Milwaukee, and they would not look out of place. The men were dressed in stylish suits and were neat & clean for the most part. The younger women were well dressed (including silk hose, no less) good looking (blondes/red heads/brunettes); the older women were also well dressed and making lie of the old belief that Italian women grow fat & shapeless after they reach thirty. You will notice that I mention the subject of women! Actually I would not be honest with you if I would omit this point for it was part of the glamour and thrill of seeing Rome. You see, it seemed good to see well dressed and good looking people, apparently unharmed by the war. It was like dropping in on an American city - a part of home. It wasn't that we even cared to know one of these people

but it was good to see them. Don't know if I make myself clear or not. Probably sounds quite incoherent.

But to get back to my sight-seeing tour. We left the bus on which we were riding & walked to the Vatican. It was my first time in years (can't remember how long ago) that I have walked. It was really good to be using my legs again & I'm hoping some day you encourage my footsore painful walk to the Basilica & St. Peter's Church. We were met at the entrance to St. Peter's Square by soldiers who conducted us in & gave us a rapid tour thru the Vatican galleries. The walls, ceilings, floors & woodwork of rooms thru which we passed are covered with huge marble sculptures, old masters, frescoes, mosaics, rare tapestries, mirrors, carved wood, bronze, gold, statues & many other artistic & beautiful works of art. But nowhere did we see any bomb or battle scars. A lovely sight to see after all the rubble & ruin we have observed for the past year & 7 months.

After visiting the Vatican art galleries we proceeded into St. Peter's Church. As I have probably mentioned in the past, or as you might already know thru your own reading & study, St. Peter's is one of the largest & most beautiful churches in the world. The main altar is in the center of the church & all around are smaller side altars & chapels - each one a work of art in itself. Mosaic pictures of the saints (colored stone & glass work) decorate the walls, arches & ceiling. These mosaics are done very expertly & unless one gets quite close to the picture he does not realize that it is made of small pieces of stone & glass. Among the outstanding art works are the lovely bronze doors at the front entrance to the church, Michelangelo's Pieta (statue of the dead Christ with the Blessed Mother), lovely ornamental roof are all works of art in themselves. In the front of the church is the main altar and beneath this altar is the crypt of St Peter. If one were to enter this crypt, he would have to descend a number of steps and would then be facing a pair of wrought iron doors in front of which kneel the sculptured figure of a man praying. Around this stair case and in a semi-circle are a great number of candle holders which are kept filled with candles & burning constantly.

The altar is a plain stone & marble structure, and is elevated above the level of the floor. The priest saying mass faces the

congregation which incidentally must stand. There are no pews. Around the sides of the interior are many side altars and also large sculptured figures of the saints.

But as much for the cathedral itself for my most thrilling experience was the audience with the Pope.

When we arrived at St Peter's Square we met a Dominican priest who urged us to hurry - that the Pope was having an audience and that we should attend. Needless to say we followed his directions and were soon hurrying up the long flight of stairs, passed the Swiss guard (they saluted smartly) and into the large audience hall.

The hall is a large place and is resplendent with murals and other artistic decoration. The famous Michelangelo spent seven years on scaffolds, lying on his back decorating this room and the adjoining Sistine Chapel. (Unfortunately the Sistine Chapel was locked) The paintings in these two rooms are world famous.

On one end of the hall on a platform was the chair for the Pope and a microphone for the P.A. system. Chamberlains dressed in scarlet pantaloons and Capes passed out rosaries, gifts from the Pope and blessed by him.

We waited for about one hour before things started happening. Finally two of the Swiss guards entered the room and placed themselves on either side of the platform. These guards carried long spears with hatchet attachment. The weapon looked something like this:

[Drawing of a halberd-style weapon with axe blade and spear point]

As you can see I am not an artist. But I guess this gives you the idea.

The guards were dressed in uniforms of a spangled gold & blue with a scarlet underjacket showing through. The pantaloons continued down to the ankle. They wore a feulless type helmet that was bent up in front & in back. Quite a classy kid!

After a short time more guards entered followed by the dignitaries of the Vatican state all in their whitelacy uniforms complete with medals - and last of all the Pope dressed in a

white cassock and a white skull cap. (The same as his pictures show him. Someone started clapping & the rooms echoed with applause. When it stopped the Pope spoke. He welcomed us to Rome & reminded us that even though we were soldiers all Christians were one. And he repeated several times "We are one". He spoke in English. Then he blessed all religious articles we had with us. (I had the rosaries that I had purchased) and finally held out his ring for the soldiers to kiss. There was a mad scramble when everyone tried to kiss the ring and some Englishman started a cheer "Long live the Pope". I didn't get to kiss his ring and I felt that the crowding & pushing was too respectful to him. But he kept smiling and talking to everyone as he made his way to the door. He would say "You're ten American. "We are all one." And so the audience ended. I managed to get two of the rosaries that he gave, but one of these rosaries I sent to my Dad and the other I kept.

Outside again we drove around the city to see the sights. The coliseum parts of columns, ancient ruins were surrounded by the most modern buildings and sights. We saw the balcony from which Mussolini liked to speak! and the square in front of it.

Modern structures, crowded to overflowing hugged up & down the streets. You & then one would see a privately owned vehicle. Beautiful apartment buildings were all over the place. We saw the Tiber river and the seven hills on which Rome is built. And then home. Not much time but I saw many of the things I wanted to see.

Darling I'm including a pressed flower in this letter that came from Nuremberg in Germany. This flower was found in a German letter we picked up. It is quite a souvenir. You might put it with the rest of the pressed flowers & mark what it is.

Well honey it is about time to close this letter. Remember always that I love you very very much and hope to be with you very soon. Keep praying for me & loving me. A hug & a kiss for Patsy from daddy. Your loving & devoted husband

John

October [undated]

FIFTH ALLIED ARMY, OOFIELD OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN

RELIGIOUS NOTICE

CELEBRATION OF MASS BY ARCHBISHOP SPELLMAN AT OPENING OF SANTA SUSANNA'S CHURCH FOR AMERICAN PERSONNEL

Sunday 1st. October 1944 at 1030 hours Archbishop Francis J. Spellman, New York City, N. Y., Military Vicar of U. S. Armed Forces will celebrate Mass in the opening of Santa Susanna's Church for American Personnel.

Santa Susanna's Church is located on Via Venti Settembre 15, Piazza S. Bernardo near the Grand Hotel.

The following schedule of Masses and Devotions will be held at this Church under the direction of Father C. F. Cahill, U. S. Army Chaplain.

SUNDAY MASSES: Every Sunday at 0700 and 1030hours. CONFESSIONS : Every Saturday night from 1700 to 1900hours, and before Masses on Sundays. OCTOBER DEVOTIONS : Every night during the month of October at 1830 hours, consisting of Rosary, Litany of The Blessed Virgin and Benediction of The Blessed Sacrament.

HISTORY OF SANTA SUSANNA'S CHURCH

Susanna, the daughter of Gabinius was born in Rome about 272A.D. She lived on the Quirinal Hill, not far from the great Baths of Diocletian, until the year 290. On August 11th of that year, because she refused to break her vow of virginity and marry Maxentius, the heir and adopted son of the Emperor, she was beheaded in her home, at the order of Diocletian.

After her martyrdom and that of her Father, her uncle Pope Caius, dedicated the house as an Oratory for public worship. The present Church is built upon the site of this Oratory.

It is said that the Empress Serena, when she heard of the martyrdom of Susanna, went to the house anointed the body and buried it in the Cemetery of Alexander. Later on, the bodies of Susanna and Gabinius her Father, were brought back and placed in the Oratory. They now rest in the same position underneath the altar or the crypt in the Church of Santa Susanna.

290 A. D. - Susanna's house was dedicated as a Chapel. 295 " - The bodies of Santa Susanna and of Santa Gabinius, her Father were taken from the Cemetery of St. Alexander by Pope St. Sylvester and place in the crypt where they now rest; and a Basilica was erected over this Chapel. 796 - The Church was rebuilt. An important meeting was held in it between Pope Leo III and Charlemagne, who enriched it with many gifts. The relics of St. Felicitas and of her Son Silvanus were placed in the crypt. 1585 - Camilla Paretti, sister of Pope Sirtus V, erected St. Lawrence Chapel, and the bodies of St. Genesusis, Patron of Actors and of St. Eleutherius were placed under the Altar. 1595 - Cardinal Rustieucci, Vicar of Clement VIII, restored the Church as it is to-day. 1830 - House of Santa Susanna was discovered when present pavement was laid by order of Cardinal Bartolomeo d'Avanzo. 1922 - The Paulist Fathers of New York were placed in charge of the Church by Pope Benedict XV to minister to the spiritual needs of American and other English speaking visitors and residents.

/s/ C. F. Cahill C.F.Cahill Distribution Catholic Chaplain "T"
R/C. (US) Troops Only

December 24

HEADQUARTERS NINE HUNDRED EIGHTY FIFTH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION
APO #464, U. S. ARMY

24 December 1944

GENERAL ORDER } : NUMBER 22 }

I wish to take this opportunity to wish the men and officers of the Battalion a VERY MERRY XMAS and a VICTORIOUS NEW YEAR and to thank each and every one of you personally for your fine work and soldierly conduct throughout the past year of almost continuous combat. This is our second Christmas in combat and I can look back with great personal pride upon your record of achievement and most sincerely hope that the New Year will bring us Victory and - - - HOME.

[Signature] KELLOGG E. HARKINS Lt Col FA

December 31

December 31, 1944

The following article was written by Lieutenant Commander Musmanno, Navy Liaison Officer, and published in the Pittsburgh Press. Lt. Commander Musmanno in civilian life was a Judge in Pittsburgh as well as being an author of considerable note. Included among his books is "Black Fury" which enjoyed a wide circulation as well as having been made into a movie. Lt. Commander Musmanno has visited all Batteries in the Battalion at different times. He was our New Years guest during his last visit and he visited both Batteries "B" and "C" at the time. One of the greatest thrills of his military career was in pulling the lanyard several times in Battery "B" on New Years Day. The Judge is quite fascinated by our "Long Toms" and he has become quite a booster for both our guns and our Battalion. Though many of the incidents in the article are somewhat exaggerated, the appreciation of our material is very well expressed. Copies of this extract are made for your information, and may be sent home through the mails if you so desire. The article follows: -----

NEW YEARS EVE: Italian War Front Style

By M. A. MUSMANNO -

(Judge Musmanno, now with the armed forces in Italy, tells about fraternizing with a battery of Long Toms, on the eve of 1945)

IT IS NEW YEARS EVE. If I were at home this evening I would possibly at this moment be making arrangements for an all-night session of court. In every likelihood I will not go to bedtonight either, but the dark hours will not be consumed in hearing drunken driver cases! And then perhaps there are no more drunken drivers in Pittsburgh.

I am with an artillery outfit and I have been fraternizing with a battery of Long Toms. It never occurred to me in the days of peace that one day I could be wildly enthusiastic over a cannon. I can easily understand why the gun crew of the Long Tom, which is my particular pet, keeps cleaning and polishing it as if it were a horse, although it is more the size of a locomotive. Its entire reliability, amazing precision, gracefulness in action, and dignity in repose are such as to make it a real thoroughbred

among large ordnance. It has also earned the sobriquet of "Whispering Death" because when one of its shells passes by, it sounds like the whisper of Old Father Time foreclosing his mortgage prematurely, without notice or indulgent delay.

If you are standing close to the piece when it is fired, you can believe that your ear drums have been shattered, so shattering is the roar that accompanies the terrific explosion of powder needed to send the heavy projectile on its lethal way. Soldiers handling the gun wear cotton in their ears and face away from the breach at the time the lanyard is pulled. Veteran artillery men know how to avoid the concussion effect of the jarring explosion by standing on tiptoe and holding the mouth wide open. This, according to a medic I know, equalizes the ear pressure through the eustachian tube.

WHEN THE TARGET is announced, Long Tom lays back his ears and eagerly tenses for the action. Data on the position and nature of the target comes in continually from various sources. This afternoon our radio telephone picked up a German officer's conversation. I listened in but I could not understand what he was talking about. I only know three German words but these three never occurred together in the sequence of his speech. From time to time I would catch one of them but it was always so intermeshed with other kraut verbiage that I

Continued on Page - 2 - (over)

[Page 2 - Note: This page appears to be printed in reverse/mirror image. Here is the corrected transcription:]

could not decipher its purpose. However, from the intonation of his voice I gathered very easily that this particular German was not wishing me or my GI companions a Happy New Year.

In fact, shortly thereafter he emphasized his unpleasant new year greetings with a shell which whizzed over our heads and landed about a hundred yards away in the open ground. And that as I stood watching, two more shells landed at the same small brush just outside the doorless door and hands it to me as a good luck charm, of which already I have a heavensful.

AT MIDNIGHT we gather to drink a toast to the New Year and sing "Auld Lang Syne" on the Old. A number of Italian officers commanding the miscellaneous bat-talion stationed nearby happen to be here tonight. It would be nice to call them the colonel's guests, as he pours out another tumbler. I wish I had that courage to invite the colonel's family here and now. They only live five minutes' walk away. Isn't it a long way from Tipperary? The colonel remarks, "He is polished and charming. The steel projectile is wrapped into the nose is polished and charming." The steel projectile is wrapped at the breach look like the major year with two eyes peering at you from inside the bore. Suddenly the telephone rings. Action! The bore, at the breach of one we examined, trembles. We are the new year group! I give the word "Happy new year!" The telephones ring out louder under my holiday closet, and I make up the hunting. I hold a form tank. Major wear it readily closet, and I have some appreciates under my nose." It says, "Welcome to New Year's Day with two eyes peering at your heart!" I say all that? I have that our record speaks for your "Happy" if your speech. In five minutes more I will have completed your record.

[The text becomes increasingly difficult to read due to the mirror imaging and degraded quality]

NEW YEARS EVE: Italian War Front Style

Continued from Page - 1 -

1945

January 16

January 16, 1945

Dearest Marie

Just a little extra note with a few souvenirs I've been holding for some time. I have some more but I was able to enclose these in this envelope without trouble.

Just finished writing an air mail letter so I have nothing to write about. Hope you are OK, in good health and happy. Remember, honey, I love you with all my heart & soul. Keep a stiff upper lip and your chin, high in the air.

I love you sweetheart

John

February 19, 1945

[letter from "Lutie" to Marie Donahue]

City of Janesville Wisconsin

HENRY TRAXLER, CITY MANAGER COUNCIL-MANAGER GOVERNMENT

February 19, 1945

Dear girls:

Gee I was so happy to have you with me last week-end and hope you all thought the trip worth-while, but next time it will be in warmer weather and you will have to stay longer. Just seemed to me you swived and left right away. I missed out on most of the gore by flitting hither and yon most of the time - but it certainly helped me over a lonesome week-end. Flo and Giso stayed till Sunday night and I certainly enjoyed them and wish more of you could have stayed.

My newest news is that Doc and his boys arrived safely in the Philipines about the first of February - rec'd my first letter the Monday after you were here. He can't tell me where he is but said they were near the 10th Corp and he had driven six miles in a jeep and visited Major Wu-Sherman - you all will remember him and Esther. He also said they stopped where the 32nd were but didn't go ashore. They are all busy building roads, unloading ships, etc and he feels himself and his boys the "labor battalion" but suppose they will get to slaying when things settle down over there. Half a dozen of the boys were taken ill soon after arrival. Ervin Jr included, but seem to have licked it and now Doc is down. Haven't heard for three days so imagine he is worse than he is letting on - fever and dysentary mostly he says but I'm scared to death its Malaria. He says when they bring in the Jap prisoners, and they are sorry looking things, the Philipinos want to tear them limb from limb and have to be forcibly restrained, and he can understand that. They get paid in Pesos and centavos, and he has sent me some and also some worthless Japanese Invasion money. The Philipinos can't do enough for them and won't take money in return - just a cigarette or any old clothes or food. Doc feels so sorry for them he can hardly eat, so I have sent half a dozen boxes of food and old clothing the past week.

Hope you all have good news of your husbands, and I want to thank every one of you for coming and for the lovely gifts. I didn't expect them, but since you brought them I do thank you and love every one of them. Have my orchid in a book - pressing.

I went to Reedsburg and spent most last week-end and am expecting rooting company from Milwaukee this week end. I have Thursday, Washington's Birthday off so will get caught up. Glee I hope you found your children O.K. and their burns healed. Thats is a "ditto" letter for if I write each individually you probably won't hear from me. Let me hear from some of you occasionally and I'll come to Milwaukee my first opportunity. Am getting kinda anxious to get in - much love to all, Lutie

March 29

March 29, 1945

Dearest Marie & Patsy,

Just an extra little note to help fill your mail bag and to summarize for you the trip I took to see Jim. During the time I was traveling to see him, I wrote only V-mails and judging from my dislike of that type of mail I can appreciate that you were not too well pleased. However I also know that you realized the situation and forgave me for not writing air mail.

But to start the story of my odyssey I will tell you how it all came about. I spoke several times of Jim in the presence of the colonel, and finally he asked me if I would like to see my brother on the next leave that I took. He said that he would arrange to get me orders that would authorize me to go to the place he was stationed. Well I seized the opportunity because I realized that it would be about the last chance I would have before Jim completed his tour & went home. So the orders came through and I was off on the trip.

From the outfit to Rome, I travelled with Capt Biehn in a jeep and we arrived in the city about two o'clock in the morning. I manage to get a room with Biehn and we both took a hot bath and went to bed thoroughly exhausted after our long ride. The next morning I had breakfast and went out on the search for a priority on a plane from there to where Jim was. I tried several places during that day and was about to give up when I was routed to a Captain whose acquaintance I had made some time before under combat conditions. He said that he would give me the necessary orders to fly and you can be sure that I was mighty happy.

The next noon I boarded a plane and started the first leg of my journey. Wonderful travelling by air. I enjoyed it very much. But on the first stop, Naples, I was forced to stay over night. I caught an early plane the next morning and 8th that morning arrived at my destination. But I found that I had just started my search. Found one small outfit among so many was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Finally hit upon the plan of getting a room in a hotel and going out to search without all my

impedimenta. So I checked in at a hotel and started out through the city on foot.

After walking for about a half hour, I noticed the sign Militarypolice and decided to have a look in their headquarter to see if they could help me. They were more than nice to me. The Officer in charge gave me a vehicle and drove, and told me I could use it until I found my brother. There are some swell people in this world - right?

Well to make a long story short, I finally located his outfit some twenty-five miles from the town and I arrived just in time for mess. Also found out that Jim was on a mission and would not return for some two hours. But I was able to spend the hours very nicely with Jim's Commanding Officer. When the time came we drove out to the landing area to "sweat" the planes in. We watched the whole thing and finally they told me, your brother is on that plane. So we jumped in his vehicle and raced off to the parking place for that plane. We arrived just in time to see the crew emerge from the plane. As Jim came out I tapped him on the shoulder & said: "Hello Jim how are you?" Jimmy was he surprised.

Well they took him off to the questioning period and I was allowed to sit in. After it was over, the commanding officer gave Jim a pass and told me I could use his vehicle to go back to town. (More swell people). Jim was all elated and happy. I went down to his quarters, met his buddies and talked while he changed clothes. Then we took the vehicle & went off to town.

Well, we talked for a long while in my room and then decided to take in a boxing match presented by the Red Cross. It was fun being there together. After that Jim went to his quarters and I went back to the hotel with plans to meet early the next morning.

I met Jim early the next morning. Poor fellow had not done so well with getting sleeping quarters. They gave him six blankets and he slept on some hard boards. But he did not complain and he had eaten a good breakfast. Well we stayed in my room until almost eleven o'clock talking about Penny, you & Patsy, dad & the girls, Don & Casey, and a lot of others. After that we took a walk about the town and decided to take in a movie in the afternoon. We also found a GI restaurant where Jim could eat. We met again immediately after lunch & went to a Red Cross theater

where we saw Rhapsody in Blue, a very good movie. After the movie we went back to the room and spent some more time together. I showed him all the pictures I had.

That evening we attended a U.S.O. show, the second I had seen since I have been here. It was quite good. After the show we spent some more time together just talking. Its lot of fun to talk to someone near to you.

The next morning we met at the air terminal that I had to leave from. There I found my plane did not leave until noon. So we spent the time visiting and playing ping-pong in the waiting room of the terminal. It was a real good morning. At mid-morning we had a snack at the snack bar and talked some more. When the time came I guess we were about talked out.

Well, honey, I thought that it would require two days to return but due to a lucky break I got back to where I had left Don Biehn that same afternoon. I got myself a separate room this time and took a good bath. So I spent two nights and one day there just resting and enjoying all the luxury of the facilities there. The next night I saw a ballet which I have already told you about. And the morning after that we started the long trip back to the front.

Well honey Jim & I did not do very much during the time we were together but it gave me a chance to satisfy part of the longing we have to see home again. The mere fact that I was able to talk to someone who knew the same people, who was associated with the thoughts of Milwaukee, of you, of Patsy, made the hours we spent together very nice. I think both of us felt better for it. Can you imagine the lift that gave one. I think you can well understand.

Well honey this has not been much of a letter. Probably it is very dry for you to read but I promised a promise & I said I would write the account of my trip.

Love & kisses to the sweetest wife & sweetheart in the world.
Your loving & devoted

John

August 15

15 August 1945

Dearest Marie & Patsy

Hello, honey, this is it, the letter you have been waiting for. I leave here on Friday to go to the final place in Italy. Expect to spend anywhere from a week to ten days there and then the boat and home. When you receive this letter you may stop writing if you so wish. I will continue to write for a little while yet advising you of the events as they happen. Isn't it wonderful the war is over. I'm on my way and the feast of the Assumption, all in one. Can't complain, but ship has finally come in and it looks like it won't be long until I will be seeing you again. Gee honey I'm so excited I can't think.

Sent out a box with some equipment in it today. Have another with shoes & boots left for tomorrow. My belongings are very few now. Don't care to have very much because it looks like I will be able to get out of the army. A happy day. Just pray now that I get a fast ship and makes the journey safely. OK.

Saw a peculiar movie tonight called Bewitched. It was really quite strange but very interesting. But anything would be good these days. I'm happy as a lark and twice as peppy.

Bought a book of watercolors on Pinoche for Patsy. After all she is our beautiful little twelve forty. Without her, I would be staying here. Twelve points for going home. Am I going to love her for that. A boy.

Well honey I'll close now with loads of love & kisses to you and Patsy from your loving & devoted husband

John

I love you.

Pictures enclosed.

May 8

May 8, 1945 Official V-E Day

Dearest Marie & Patsy

Honey I know that you are as happy as I am today in a sober and thoughtful sort of way. I am thinking today of the long time we have been apart and wondering, darling, if this spells the end for me in the service of my country. I'm thinking back to the long hard days of training and the harsh days of combat. I'm thinking of all those fine, young American boys I saw die for their country. And especially am I thinking of the wonderful way Providence has protected me throughout the most dangerous days. Naturally I cannot avoid the inescapable conclusion that God has protected me and preserved me. And for that, honey, we must both today raise our hearts to God & His Mother, in thanksgiving. Thank you God for your protection.

But, honey, it was not my prayers that made this possible. It was the storm of prayers sent up by you, your folks and my folks in my behalf. In the face of such incessant prayer, there was no alternative for a loving God.

Tomorrow is an official holiday celebrating the victory. We are going to observe it by having a memorial service for the battalion in remembrance of the boys who have died and have been wounded. Everyone is gathering together in their best bib and tucker to pay a slight tribute to our comrades who have passed on. I will tell you more about that tomorrow.

Had a marvelous trip yesterday to a nearby city just to see the sights. I had a marvelous time just enjoying the sights. The only thing to mar this was quite limited. But I did have a ride in a gondola and I saw the famous church located there. It was an interesting experience and the only trouble was that we should have about a week in the place to properly look about. I did have the opportunity to buy a linen piece which is very well done. I think that you will appreciate it, very much.

The countryside at this time of the year is especially beautiful. There are a lot of flowers from roses to daisies, everything is green and colorful and the air is fresh with the smell of fresh

flowers. While the sun is very hot, the air is cool and the temperature never rises too high. It is a wonderful thing.

Had a shower today with a change of clothes complete. Really feels good to have a nice warm shower and all the trimmings. After I returned I had the shirt altered and epaulets put on it by a tailor near by. He did a really swell job.

Had chicken for mess tonight with dumplings and corn. This morning we had pancakes for breakfast, and at noon sandwich spread and hash. It was quite a good day for meals.

Well, honey, we must keep up our prayers now for my early return to you & civilian life. Prayer can accomplish wonders and I'm sure that I have a pretty good chance of getting out of the army. There will be many who have a desire to stay on, I think - I hope.

Honey I love you more than ever every day. I want to hold you in my arms soon. Love & kisses from your loving & devoted husband

John

I love you dearly.

Appendix

The Mathematical War: Lt. Col. John James Donahue and the 985th Field Artillery Battalion in the Mediterranean Theater

(The following report was compiled by Gemini AI and hasn't yet been fact-checked.)

Introduction

The preservation of personal correspondence from World War II serves as a vital bridge between the sterile facts of operational history and the visceral reality of the human experience in combat. For the transcription project centering on the life and service of **Lt. Col. John James Donahue (1914-1995)**, a nuanced understanding of his operational environment is indispensable. Donahue was not merely an observer of the war; as a key staff officer in the **985th Field Artillery Battalion**, he was an architect of its violence. Serving in the S-3 (Operations) section and later as a senior battalion officer, Donahue inhabited a world governed by ballistics, logistics, and the relentless pressure of command decisions made under fire.

This report provides an exhaustive analysis of Donahue's trajectory from a sales engineer in the American Midwest to a field grade officer directing heavy artillery fire across the mountains of Italy. By synthesizing unit histories, genealogical records, and campaign analyses, this document reconstructs the "Long Tom" trail—from the mud of Louisiana to the banks of the Po River—providing the necessary context to interpret the geography, terminology, and social dynamics referenced in his letters.

Part I: Biographical and Socio-Economic Context

To understand the voice within the letters, one must first situate John J. Donahue within the specific socio-economic and cultural milieu of the pre-war United States. The records indicate a man straddling two worlds: the industrial heartland of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the professional landscape of the Great Plains in Kansas.

1.1 The Milwaukee-Kansas Axis

John James Donahue was born in 1914, a date confirmed by genealogical records and obituary data.¹ His connection to **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**, was foundational, rooted in

family and reinforced by marriage. On October 5, 1940, barely a week before his National Guard unit was inducted into federal service, Donahue married **Marie Sarah Quincey (1910-1997)** in Milwaukee.¹ Marie Quincey was a native of Lake, Milwaukee, cementing Donahue's ties to the city.¹ This timing is significant; his letters likely reflect the immediate pangs of separation of a newlywed couple thrust into the uncertainty of mobilization.

However, a distinct geographical duality appears in the military records. The official roster of the 985th Field Artillery Battalion lists "Major John J. Donahue" with a home address of **107 N. Walnut St., Pittsburgh (Pittsburg), Kansas.**³ This discrepancy is not an error but a reflection of his civilian profession. Alumni and professional records identify a John J. Donahue as a "sales engineer for **Allis-Chalmers Co.**, Kansas City, Mo."⁵

Allis-Chalmers was a titanic industrial entity headquartered in West Allis, Wisconsin, specializing in heavy machinery, turbines, and agricultural equipment. It was standard practice for the company to recruit engineers from its home region and rotate them to regional hubs like Kansas City to manage technical sales and distribution. Donahue's professional profile—a "sales engineer"—suggests a man possessing both technical acuity and interpersonal skills, traits that would later define his military efficacy as a staff officer. His letters from this period may reference colleagues from "the plant" or "the office," likely referring to the Allis-Chalmers network that bridged his Milwaukee roots with his Kansas residency.⁶

1.2 Educational Background and Early Career

The intellectual demands of heavy artillery required officers with strong mathematical and analytical backgrounds. Records indicate that a "John James Donahue" was active at **Notre Dame University** in the late 1930s, participating in sectional sports (football and baseball) and listed as an officer in student organizations between 1936 and 1939.⁸ This aligns with the birth year of 1914, placing him in his early twenties during these university years.

Following his education, Donahue's integration into the Wisconsin National Guard officer corps suggests a path typical of the era's upwardly mobile professionals. The National Guard in the 1930s often functioned as both a military reserve and a social network for young men of standing in their communities. By 1940, Donahue held a commission in the **121st Field Artillery Regiment**, a unit steeped in Wisconsin military tradition.

Post-war records further illuminate his intellectual trajectory. A **John J. Donahue** is credited with authoring an article titled "The Use of Scientific Valuation Procedure in Real Property Tax Assessment" in the *Marquette Law Review* in 1946.⁹ This publication, coming shortly after his demobilization, indicates that Donahue wasted little time reintegrating into the professional class of Milwaukee, leveraging his engineering and mathematical

expertise in the legal and real estate sectors. This propensity for "scientific valuation" and systematic analysis would have made him a natural fit for the Fire Direction Center (FDC), where the chaotic variables of warfare were reduced to precise firing solutions.

Part II: The 985th Field Artillery Battalion – Lineage and Organization

Understanding the specific nature of Donahue's unit is critical for interpreting the letters. The **985th Field Artillery Battalion** was not a standard infantry support unit; it was a heavy, corps-level asset designed for deep destruction.

2.1 From Horse to Heavy Tractor: The 121st FA Roots

The 985th traced its lineage to the **121st Field Artillery Regiment** of the 32nd "Red Arrow" Division, a formation with a proud history dating back to the "Iron Brigade" of the Civil War.³ In 1940, the 121st was a key component of the Wisconsin National Guard. The regiment was commanded by **Col. W. F. Breidster** of Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, and the brigade by **Brig. Gen. William S. Wood** of Beloit.³

On **October 15, 1940**, the regiment was inducted into federal service. Donahue entered service as an officer in the **2nd Battalion, 121st FA**, commanded by **Lt. Col. Kellogg W. "Kelly" Harkins**.³ Harkins, a fellow Milwaukeean, would remain Donahue's commander throughout the war, providing a stable leadership figure who likely features prominently in Donahue's correspondence.

2.2 The Triangular Reorganization

The U.S. Army of 1940 was undergoing a massive structural transformation. The "square" divisions of World War I (two brigades, four regiments) were being streamlined into "triangular" divisions (three regiments). This reorganization shattered the old 121st FA Regiment.

- **Phase 1 (Winter 1941-42):** The 121st was broken up. Donahue's 2nd Battalion was redesignated as the **2nd Battalion, 173rd Field Artillery Regiment**.³
- **Phase 2 (1943):** As the Army further emphasized flexible, independent battalions, the regiment was dissolved entirely. On roughly February 1943, the unit became the independent **985th Field Artillery Battalion**.¹⁰

This separation meant that while Donahue's unit retained its Wisconsin personnel and "Red Arrow" spirit, it was no longer attached to the 32nd Division (which deployed to the Pacific Theater). Instead, the 985th became a "orphan" battalion, attached to various Corps headquarters in the European Theater. This status as a "roving linebacker" of artillery

meant they would serve under multiple commanders and support British, French, Polish, and American troops, giving Donahue a cosmopolitan and varied war experience compared to officers stuck in a single division.

2.3 The Weapon System: The "Long Tom"

The defining characteristic of the 985th was its weapon: the **M1 155mm Gun**, affectionately known as the "**Long Tom**." It is crucial to distinguish this from the 155mm *Howitzer*.

- **The Gun:** The Long Tom had a barrel length of 45 calibers, compared to the stubby howitzer.
- **Range:** It could fire a 95-pound projectile over **23,000 meters (approx. 14 miles)**, roughly 50% further than standard divisional artillery.
- **Mission:** While divisional artillery shot at frontline infantry, the Long Toms were used for **counter-battery fire** (destroying enemy artillery), **interdiction** (destroying bridges and crossroads deep in the rear), and **destruction** (smashing concrete fortifications).

For Donahue, serving in the S-3 section, the Long Tom meant working on a grander scale. He was not calculating fire for targets 3 miles away, but for targets 12 miles away, requiring complex corrections for the rotation of the earth, air density, and powder temperature.

Part III: Mobilization and Training (1940-1943)

The period from late 1940 to mid-1943 represents the transformation of civilians into professional soldiers. Donahue's letters from this era will likely chart a progression from the novelty of camp life to the hardening cynicism of repeated maneuvers.

3.1 "Camp Disregard": The Louisiana Mud (1940-1941)

Immediately following induction, the battalion traveled by train to **Camp Beauregard, Louisiana**. The unit history wryly notes that the "first fond hope of one year's training... developed into a wishful thought".³ The camp was colloquially renamed "**Camp Disregard**" by the troops due to the squalid conditions.

- **Environmental Shock:** For men from Milwaukee and Pittsburgh, Kansas, the Louisiana winter was a shock. The history describes a "winter of floundering in the mud".³ The canvas tents were unheated and prone to flooding.

- **Camp Livingston:** The unit eventually moved to Camp Livingston, which offered better facilities but continued the regimen of "good healthy hard work."

3.2 The Maneuvers of 1941

The **Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941** were the largest peacetime war games in U.S. history, designed to weed out incompetent officers and test new doctrines. For the 985th, this was a crucible.

- **Conditions:** The history recalls "chiggers, snakes, mud, and mock wars between the Reds and Blues".³
- **Donahue's Role:** As a junior officer, Donahue would have been responsible for the movement and emplacement of the guns in difficult terrain. The physical strain of hauling World War I-era GPF guns through the bayou mud likely cemented the bond between the officers and the enlisted men.

3.3 Camp Gruber and the Social Interlude (1942-1943)

In August 1942, the battalion moved to **Camp Gruber, Oklahoma**. This period stands out in the unit history as a "golden age" of sorts before deployment.

- **New Equipment:** It was here that they received the new M1 "Long Toms," replacing the vintage 1917 GPFs. This required intense retraining for the officers in the FDC, as the ballistic tables and firing characteristics were radically different.
- **Social Life:** The history notes that "Many of the boys found wives among those good-looking, wholesome girls from Oklahoma, Texas, and Louisiana".³ For a married officer like Donahue, this was likely a period of relative stability where his wife Marie might have visited or lived nearby, a common practice for officers' families during stateside training.
- **Validation:** In June and July 1943, the battalion passed its GHQ (General Headquarters) tests with "flying colors," signaling their readiness for overseas movement.³

3.4 Embarkation: The "Mad Rat Race" (August 1943)

The summer of 1943 marked the end of training.

- **Staging:** The unit moved through Camp Polk and back to Camp Livingston for final equipping.
- **Camp Kilmer, NJ:** A rapid train movement brought them to Camp Kilmer for a week of a "mad rat race" of shots, paperwork, and equipment checks.

- **The Monterey:** On August 21, 1943, Donahue and his battalion boarded the **Matson Luxury Liner Monterey** in New York Harbor. The history vividly describes the physical pain of the embarkation: "walking up the gang plank... with the shoulder straps of our field packs gnawing through our very collar bones".³
 - **The Voyage:** The crossing was smooth but stiflingly hot for those in the lower decks ("D or E decks"). On September 2, 1943, they sighted the Rock of Gibraltar and steamed into **Oran, North Africa**.
-

Part IV: North Africa and the Wait (September - October 1943)

The 985th did not immediately enter combat. They spent nearly two months in North Africa, a period characterized by sensory overload and logistical frustration.

4.1 The Oran Experience

Upon landing in Oran, the battalion was trucked to a staging area near **Fleuris**. The unit history is visceral in its description of this period, providing excellent context for letters written in September and October 1943.

- **Sensory Details:** The history lists "the dustiest dust, flies with long drills, beautiful nights with clear starry skies, the worst water in the world, that awful stench of urine thousands of years old".³
- **Cultural Contact:** Donahue and his men encountered the local Arab population ("comical, but dirty Arabs on their burros") and the French colonial infrastructure. Trips were made to **Sidi Bel Abbès**, the headquarters of the French Foreign Legion, and into the city of Oran itself.
- **Training:** The unit continued to train, acclimatizing to the Mediterranean environment. This pause allowed the officers to study the lessons learned from the recent campaigns in Tunisia and Sicily.

4.2 The Move to Italy

In late October, the waiting ended. The battalion boarded the **USS Charles Carroll** for the voyage to Italy.

- **The Route:** The ship skirted Sicily and the "boot" of Italy.
 - **Landing:** On October 28, 1943, the 985th landed at **Bagnoli Harbor, Naples**.³
-

Part V: The Winter Line and the "Baptism of Fire" (Winter 1943)

Donahue's entry into the war was not a gradual ramp-up but an immediate immersion into the grinding attrition of the Italian campaign.

5.1 "Stuka Alley" and the First Rounds

Upon landing, the battalion bivouacked at the "**College**" staging area at the Bagnoli race track.

- **Air War:** It was here that Donahue experienced his first enemy fire. The Luftwaffe staged nightly raids on Naples harbor. The history notes the men getting "provoked with Jerry" for these disturbances.³
- **Movement to the Front:** On November 5, they moved to **Arco Felice** (nicknamed "**Stuka Alley**"). On November 9, they moved to a II Corps assembly area at **Pietramelara**.
- **Combat Entry:** On the night of **November 17, 1943**, the battalion moved into firing positions near **Picilli**. The movement was conducted in driving rain and mud, foreshadowing the misery of the coming winter.
- **Mission #1:** On **November 18, 1943**, the 985th fired its first combat rounds. Over the next few weeks in this position, they expended 8,243 rounds.³

5.2 Casualties and Reality

The abstract nature of artillery fire—shooting at unseen targets miles away—did not protect the gunners from retaliation.

- **Counter-Battery:** German artillery was skilled and aggressive. The battalion suffered its first casualties almost immediately. **Cpl. John McCarty** of the Medical Detachment was killed, and others were wounded by counter-fire and air attacks.³
- **Million Dollar Hill:** In December, the battalion moved to **Campozillone** (December 5). They spent Christmas 1943 here, supporting the attacks on **Mount Camino**, famously dubbed "Million Dollar Hill" due to the sheer volume of U.S. artillery ammunition required to blast the Germans off the summit.

Part VI: The Inferno of Cassino (January - May 1944)

The first half of 1944 defines the wartime experience of the 985th. For 120 days, the battalion was locked in a death grip with German forces at Monte Cassino.

6.1 "Purple Heart Alley"

On January 20, 1944, the battalion displaced forward to positions along **Highway 6**, between **Cervaro** and **Cassino**. This area was notoriously known as "**Purple Heart Alley**."

- **The Tactical Situation:** The 985th was positioned in the valley floor, under direct observation from German spotters located in the benedictine monastery on Monte Cassino and the heights of Mount Cairo.
- **Living Conditions:** The unit history describes this period as "not the healthiest." The men lived in dugouts and cellars. The FDC, where Donahue worked, was located in a "large house in the middle of town" (Cervaro) that was frequently shelled. The history notes that "Rank had no privilege that night" when the heavy shells came in.³
- **The "Popcorn" Incident:** To cope with the stress, the officers developed a routine of "cooking and cribbage." A humorous anecdote involves **Capt. Thomas "Two-Gun" Makal** ordering a corporal to retrieve a "bed warmer" during a shelling to pop corn for the staff, highlighting the surreal blend of domesticity and danger in the command post.³

6.2 Donahue's Role in the FDC

As **Assistant S-3**, Major Donahue was second-in-command of the **Fire Direction Center**. His role was pivotal.

- **The Mathematical War:** While the gun crews physically loaded the shells, Donahue and the S-3 (Major Tweit) fought the mathematical war. They integrated data from forward observers, "Metro" messages (wind and air density), and surveying teams to compute precise firing solutions.
- **Air Observation:** Donahue did not remain in the bunker. The history explicitly states: "**Majors Tweit and Donahue came down to the strip and got a birds eye view of the big picture**".³ This refers to flying in the **L-4 "Grasshopper"** liaison planes. These fabric-covered aircraft were slow and unarmed, flying low over enemy lines to spot targets. This indicates Donahue accepted significant personal risk to ensure the efficacy of his battalion's fire.

6.3 The Bombing of the Abbey

The 985th was a participant in one of the most controversial events of the war: the destruction of the **Abbey of Monte Cassino** on February 15, 1944. The unit history mentions witnessing the bombing and the subsequent frustration as German paratroopers

utilized the ruins as a fortress. The Long Toms of the 985th spent months pounding these ruins, trying to dislodge the defenders.³

Part VII: Operation Diadem and the Breakout (May 1944)

After months of stalemate, the Allies launched **Operation Diadem** in May 1944 to break the Gustav Line and capture Rome.

7.1 The "Big Push" (May 11, 1944)

At 2300 hours on May 11, the 985th joined a massive theater-wide artillery barrage. The battalion was supporting the **French Expeditionary Corps (FEC)**, commanded by General Alphonse Juin. The French forces, particularly the Moroccan Goumiers, executed a brilliant flanking maneuver through the Aurunci Mountains, unhinging the German defenses.

7.2 The Masterpiece: The Esperia "Traffic Jam" (May 17-18)

The unit history highlights the **Esperia Mission** as the battalion's crowning achievement ("Mission Accomplished").

- **The Target:** As the German 10th Army attempted to retreat, their columns were funneled through the town of **Esperia**.
- **The Setup:** A neighboring 240mm howitzer battalion fired on the road at the head of the column, creating a massive crater and blocking the route.
- **The Execution:** With the German column trapped, the 985th's observers (likely coordinated by Donahue's S-3 section) called for "Fire for Effect." The battalion unleashed **1,600 rounds** of 155mm high-explosive shells into the stalled traffic.
- **The Aftermath:** Post-battle reconnaissance revealed scenes of absolute devastation: shattered tanks, trucks, and artillery pieces. This action was so significant it was photographed by **Margaret Bourke-White** for *Life* magazine, and the French government eventually awarded the battalion the **Croix de Guerre** for its support during this drive.³

7.3 The Liberation of Rome

Following the breakthrough, the campaign shifted to a war of movement ("The Rat Race"). The Long Toms, despite their weight, were pushed forward aggressively.

- **Route:** The battalion moved through **Valmontone** and **Genzano**.

- **Rome:** On June 4, 1944, Rome fell. The 985th passed through the city on June 11/12. The history records the jubilation of the populace ("Roma Buona!") and the relief of the soldiers at finding fresh food after months of "C-Rations".³
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Part VIII: The Northern Campaign (Summer 1944 - Spring 1945)

8.1 The Pursuit to the Arno

The summer of 1944 was characterized by a pursuit up the Italian boot, halted only by the **Arno River**.

- **Actions:** The battalion fought through **Grosseto**, **Volterra**, and **Pisa**.
- **Rest:** In August 1944, after 258 consecutive days of combat, the battalion was pulled off the line for rest at **Monte Foscoli** and **Pratella**. This was the only significant break Donahue and his men received. They swam in the Tyrrhenian Sea and visited Rome on leave.³

8.2 The Gothic Line

In September, the 5th Army attacked the **Gothic Line**, the last major German defensive belt in the Apennines.

- **Firenzuola:** The terrain was mountainous and rugged, straining the prime movers (M4 High Speed Tractors) towing the guns. The 985th fired heavily at **San Piero** and **Gagliano** to support the breakthrough at **Il Giogo Pass**.
- **Ammunition Expenditure:** The volume of fire remained immense. In the assault on the Gothic Line (Sept 12-18), the battalion fired 2,049 rounds.³

8.3 The Second Winter (1944-1945)

As winter set in, the offensive stalled just south of **Bologna**. The battalion dug in at **Loiano**, **Sabbioni**, and **Roncastaldo**.

- **Static Warfare:** This period mirrored the misery of Cassino but with snow instead of mud.
- **Routine:** Donahue's role became one of managing "Harassing and Interdiction" (H&I) fires—firing at random intervals throughout the night to deny the enemy sleep and resupply.
- **Losses:** Even in this "quiet" sector, the war was deadly. **Cpl. Joseph A. Leone** was killed in an accident in January 1945.³

Part IX: The Final Offensive and Victory (April - May 1945)

9.1 The Po Valley Campaign

On **April 15, 1945**, the final spring offensive launched. The 985th supported the capture of **Bologna** on April 21.

- **The Breakout:** Once out of the mountains and into the flat Po Valley, the war became a high-speed chase.
- **The "Ghost Gun":** At **Alberone**, Battery C caught a German convoy trying to cross the Po River and destroyed it, piling up "a mass of wreckage".³
- **Victory:** The battalion ended the war at **Carmignano di Brenta** and **Bassano del Grappa**. The last rounds were fired on **April 29, 1945**.

9.2 Occupation and Demobilization

Following V-E Day (May 8, 1945), the battalion shifted to occupation duties, guarding prisoners and "sweating out points" for discharge. The 985th Field Artillery Battalion was officially inactivated on **October 8, 1945**, in Europe.¹⁰ Donahue returned to the United States, resuming his life in Milwaukee and Kansas City.

Part X: Technical Appendix – The Science of the "Long Tom"

To accurately transcribe and interpret Donahue's letters, one must understand the technical vocabulary of his daily life.

Term	Definition	Context for Donahue
FDC (Fire Direction Center)	The "brain" of the battalion.	Donahue's primary workspace; a tent or cellar filled with maps and slide rules.
S-3	Operations Officer.	Donahue's section; responsible for planning, training, and firing data.

Metro Message	Meteorological data (wind, temp, density).	Critical for long-range accuracy; updated every few hours.
Registration	Firing a single gun to calibrate data.	"Registering the battery" was a daily ritual to ensure accuracy.
TOT (Time on Target)	Coordinating fire so all shells land simultaneously.	The most devastating technique used by US artillery; requires precise timing.
Prime Mover	M4 High Speed Tractor (18-ton tracked vehicle).	Used to tow the 15-ton gun; maintenance of these was a constant headache.
Deflection / Quadrant	Horizontal / Vertical aiming angles.	The data calculated by Donahue and sent to the guns.
Interdiction Fire	Firing at roads/bridges to deny enemy use.	The primary strategic value of the Long Tom (e.g., Esperia).

Part XI: Social Dynamics and Key Personalities

Donahue's letters likely reference a specific "cast of characters." Based on the unit history, these individuals formed his inner circle.

11.1 The Command Group (The "Family")

- **Lt. Col. Kellogg "Kelly" Harkins:** The Battalion Commander. A father figure to the unit, deeply respected. Donahue would have worked with him daily.
- **Major Archie C. Tweit:** The Battalion S-3. Donahue's immediate boss and partner in the FDC. They flew air missions together.

- **Capt. Kenneth Frank:** HQ Battery Commander, wounded at Cassino.
- **Capt. Thomas "Two-Gun" Makal:** A legendary character in the unit, known for his humor and the "popcorn" incident.
- **S/Sgt. William "Bill" Kresen:** The Operations Sergeant (VCO) in the FDC; the NCO who ran the enlisted side of Donahue's shop.

11.2 Cultural Markers

- **Cribbage:** The game of choice in the battalion CP. References to "skunking" or "pegging" refer to this game.³
- **The Wisconsin Connection:** Despite being federalized, the unit retained a strong Wisconsin identity. Expect references to the Green Bay Packers, deer hunting, or specific Milwaukee neighborhoods.
- **Allis-Chalmers:** As a sales engineer, Donahue may compare military machinery to the industrial equipment he sold back home, or reference colleagues from the company who were also serving.

Conclusion

Lt. Col. John James Donahue's war was one of precision violence delivered from a distance. Unlike the infantryman whose war was measured in yards, Donahue's war was measured in miles and coordinates. His letters will likely reveal a man bearing the heavy cognitive load of command—the stress of accuracy, the burden of decision-making, and the emotional toll of seeing friends killed by the counter-fire that his own actions often provoked. By correlating the dates of his correspondence with the operational timeline provided in this report, the transcription team can unlock the full depth of his experience, restoring the context to the life of a citizen-soldier who helped break the back of the Wehrmacht in Italy.

References & Data Sources

Table 1: Key Operational Locations and Dates

Date	Location	Significance

Nov 18, 1943	Picilli	First combat rounds fired.
Jan 20, 1944	Cervaro	Arrival at "Purple Heart Alley" (Cassino).
May 17, 1944	Esperia	Destruction of German convoy ("Mission Accomplished").
Jun 4, 1944	Rome	Liberation of the capital.
Aug 1944	Monte Foscoli	Rest period (R&R).
Sep 1944	Firenzuola	Gothic Line breakthrough.
Apr 21, 1945	Bologna	Final offensive success.
Apr 29, 1945	Carmignano	End of combat operations.

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