

'HI BUTCH': the World War II Letters of Everett Johns

Edited by Curtis Miner, *Pittsburgh History*

WORLD War II formed a watershed in twentieth century history. As U.S. soldiers participated in a global conflict that would revise international relations, those Americans who stayed behind confronted their own problems. The scarcity of consumer goods and preparations for impending invasions pressed average Americans into solidarity with G.I.s overseas. More importantly, though, the war advanced broader scale domestic change: the entry of women into a traditionally male work force; racial and labor tensions; the population's increasing flight from farm to city and from city to highway suburbs; and the emergence of personal values that would complement post war prosperity and consumerism.*

* For the most recent discussion of America on the homefront, see Ross Gregory's *1941: America at the Crossroads* (New York, 1988). Two of the most lucid and readable examinations of American society during wartime are Richard Polenberg's edited volume, *America at War: The Home Front, 1941-1945* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968) and John Morton Blum's well regarded *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York, 1976). For a more thorough treatment of women workers during wartime, see Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, Conn., 1981) and D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984). Frank C. Harper's *Men and Women of Wartime Pittsburgh and Environs: A War-production Epic* (Pittsburgh, 1945) documents the contribution of over 100 local manufacturers to the war effort. Thanks to Studs Terkel, readers can also turn to an intelligent compilation of oral histories with former World War II veterans. See Terkel, *'The Good War': An Oral History of World War Two* (New York, 1984).





War bond campaign, Oliver Avenue and Smithfield Street, 1944.

The letters of Everett Johns speak to many of these subjects. Between 1942 and 1945, Johns, an Order Department employee at the American Standard Company in downtown Pittsburgh, enlisted himself as a first-hand witness to World War II Pittsburgh. During the war years, Johns penned 62 letters to about 75 former employees of American Standard serving in the armed forces. Johns addressed most letters to an anonymous "Butch," the author's way of personalizing the letters he reproduced on office stationery and sent each month.

The topic — Pittsburgh on the homefront — has not received its proper due. What we do know is that war took lives and gave jobs. Between 1941 and 1945, an estimated 175,000 people from the Pittsburgh district enlisted or were drafted to fight the "good war;" casualties numbered 3,982 (according to the county's veteran services office). Meanwhile, at home, the war stimulated sagging economies; the federal government, in cooperation with steel manufacturers like Carnegie-Illinois Steel, pumped millions of dollars into reviving heavy industry across the region. With mills working at full capacity for the first time in over a decade, Pittsburgh's skies returned to their infamous gray, and industrial workers — many of them women this time — streamed into the rolling mills and

open hearths.

As Johns's letters show, the war shadowed nearly every aspect of life. Civil defense procedures such as city-wide blackouts interrupted normal work and leisure patterns. Newspapers accustomed to reporting local events filled their front pages with dateline news from the battle lines. War administration boards rationed consumer goods, creating long lines for everything from butter to gasoline. Meanwhile, the federal government's propaganda blitzkrieg raised funds and patriotic fervor. Bond drives, to meet the costs of war, supplemented victory gardens and glass recycling campaigns.

Industrial soot and defense blackouts, though, could not obscure more striking developments. Organized labor, having survived the dark ages of the first third of the twentieth century, periodically tested its new power. Assimilation and suburbanization began to wear down distinct immigrant neighborhoods. While areas like the South Side remained solid ethnic enclaves, others, like the Hill District, were flooded with new immigrants — in this case blacks, many from outside the region who came to work in the weapons industry. To the east, along new commuter highways like U.S. Route 30, nascent suburbs provided new homes and modern conveniences for both working-



and middle-class Pittsburghers. Even with the restriction on consumer goods, demands for the good life, and anticipation of post-war prosperity, tantalized Pittsburgh's subconscious.

While Johns's letters reveal such collective emotions, they also show a highly personal ethic: to give the boys overseas a taste for what was happening in their hometown. For many soldiers, Johns's letters surely were the next best thing to the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, *Homestead Messenger* or *McKeesport Daily News*. Each posting was more than a mere compilation of headlines, though. Johns relayed the homefront through his own eyes, including tidbits he thought would be of interest — and comfort — to the locals. As a result, his letters are a curious mix of public and private worlds. Some narratives are thoroughly homespun, revolving around events in his own backyard garden or the dramas of commuting and working in downtown Pittsburgh, often infused with a Bob Hope-style humor. Others supply candid insights into a city undergoing the stress and strain of rapid economic and social change, and uncertainty. Still other letters contain poetic reflections on the character of Johns's adopted but beloved hometown. (He came to Pittsburgh from the Midwest.)

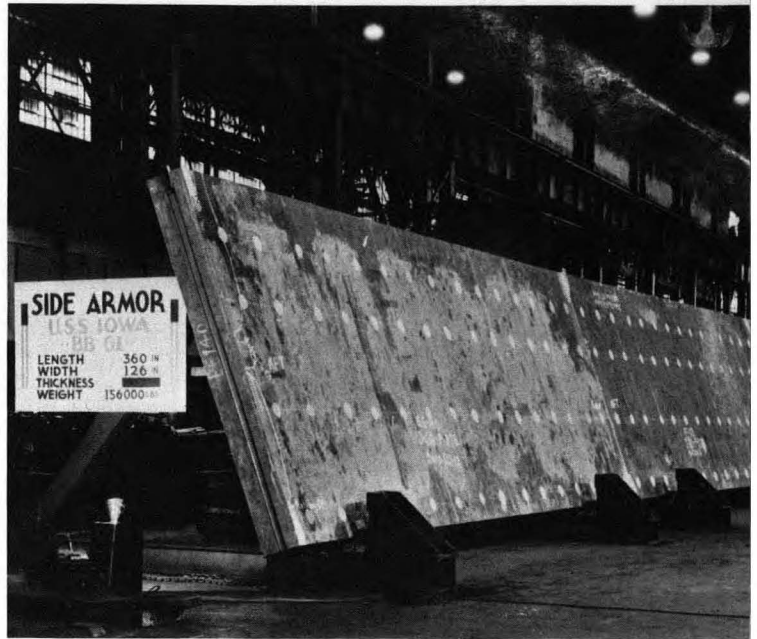
To the historian in search of testimony to dramatic societal change, Johns's letters may be a bit frustrating. Although there are passing references to race riots, labor conflicts and women in the workforce — references often full of stereotypic biases — those receive less play than ball scores or dance halls, or problems with the boss and the angst of the white collar worker. But by transcribing Pittsburgh as he perceived it, Johns's reportage achieves a unique authenticity absent from more systematic but aloof accounts. His comfortable vacillation between the pedestrian and the altogether new may in fact stand as a more accurate reflection of the peculiar habit of mind in Pittsburgh during the 1940s.*

*The excerpts presented here are from the Everett Johns Papers, Archives, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. This collection was recently donated to the Society by Johns's daughter, Jo Clapperton, of West Virginia. Although Johns kept a scrapbook with mementos given to him from returning G.I.s (see the illustration on page 191),

no letters from the G.I.s themselves could be found. To avoid redundancies, we have omitted the final line in each letter, which was signed, sincerely, by Everett Johns. In every case, we have maintained the original grammar and spelling, although we sometimes did correct punctuation to clarify meaning. Such changes, including places where we edited material out, are indicated by brackets.



Everett Johns



Above: During the war years, the Homestead Works of Carnegie-Illinois Steel devoted much of its production to armor plate for naval ships. Opposite page: Revitalized industries and labor shortages spurred a migration of southern blacks to northern cities like Pittsburgh. At many plants — the men shown here, c. 1944, worked at a Philadelphia shipyard — the ratio of black to white workers was representative of the society at large for the first time in U.S. history. The newcomers speeded a transition underway in urban neighborhoods such as the Hill District: blacks came as Jews and ethnic Italians left.

July, 1942

Hello Fellows:

[...]On June 26 we had our first complete black-out, wish you could have seen it. Traffic came to a complete standstill and the town was as dark as the Allegheny forest on a cloudy night. It was so dark on Fifth Avenue I made a couple of mistakes, bumped into a couple of men and they were the barrage balloon type at that. There were very few violations for a city the size of Pittsburgh and they were promptly handled by the Air Raid Wardens and the Courts dishied out fines of \$200.00 in every case.

[...]It's getting pretty tough on some of the boys, they don't have much left after digging up ten percent for War Bonds and shoveling out for the various relief shows. About all they can do now is to take the girl friend for a brief stagger in the park or go up on Mt. Washington and see who can spit the farthest...

[...]Everything is about the same around the office, still pretty busy even with all the restrictions. You don't see much of that coming in low in the morning

and going home high stuff anymore, everybody is too busy and also too short of change to play around very much.[...]

August 13, 1942

Hello Fellows:

...Blackouts...dimouts...siren tests keep you taut and on your toes. Our last complete black-out late in July was a grand success, a few violations of course but they were promptly handed fines of one hundred to two hundred dollars...may that be a lesson to them. New Monday store hours from 12 NOON to 9 P.M. for the benefits of the defense workers...Old Glory flying proudly downtown against the daily scenes of War Bond Rallies on the downtown streets..music..loudspeakers...the crowds dipping deeper into their pockets at each patriotic appeal.

[...]Yes, We Have No Bananas...a very popular tune in Pittsburgh to-day as the banana famine enters its third week. The importing firms say it may be some time before we will again see bananas on the local market.

[...]If you are interested in sandlot baseball, the following is the standing of the leading teams, week ending August 8, in the order named: Greater Pgh. League; Dormont, Oakmont, New Kensington, Corbins, Jena. The Municipal League, South Section; Pittsburghers, 18th Ward, Crailo, St. Michaels. In the North Section, same league; Monarchs, Aspinwall, KSKJ, Wilkinsburg.

[...]We are expecting a daylight Air Raid Warning at any time now and the Wardens in the Order Dept. have issued the following instructions:

1. As soon as bombs start dropping, run like hell.
2. If you find an unexploded bomb, always pick it up and shake it like hell, the firing pin may be stuck.
3. Always get excited and holler bloody murder—it will add to the fun and confusion, and scares hell out of the girls.
4. If you should be the victim of a direct bomb hit, don't go to pieces. Lie still, and you won't be noticed.
5. Knock the air raid wardens down if they start giving orders. They always save the best seats for themselves and their friends, anyhow.[...]

September 10, 1942

Hello Fellas!

[...]We had another air raid test a few days ago — the first in daytime. Everything worked like clock-work, the upper floors in our building were emptied and everyone in their proper place within five minutes. Pretty good sez I.

If I may borrow some of the colorful words from the lexicon of that vanishing American — the jitter-bug, I can tell you that the “joints were jumping” Saturday night with all the night club headwaiters spending most of the late hours saying, “Sorry, we're all filled up”.

The next thing due for the ration list is beef. It's getting scarce and high priced around these parts. Fact is, eggs are running neck and neck with beef in this battle of prices. Notice where Washington says; “Output of Eggs must be Increased”, hope all the farmers will pay attention and go right out and give their hens a pep talk.

[...]Around our house we've been saving all the extra fat and turning it over to the corner grocer, however from the number of zipper spreaders we've seen appearing in slacks on the downtown streets there is not such a shortage of fats after all.

November 9, 1942

Hi Butch:

Almost like a “Dream come true”...that's what you'll say when you see our new Honor Roll, proudly hung on the outside of Bill McClintock's office. It's quite a bit larger than our old one and very attractively done in colors. The background is soft purple with red, white and blue stripes across the top, broken in the center by the Liberty Bell and a “V” on each side in gold stars. The descriptive heading is done in gold letters and twenty-eight names now on the board are done in white. The board is enclosed in a beautiful gold frame and everyone is so proud of the “Honor Roll” that they go struttin around like little



squinchbugs.

The service employees of the department stores went on strike last week. This made some of the students of the Pittsburgh Art Institute so mad that they Picketed the Pickets with placards denouncing the strikes during wartime. To avoid the riot the police gave the students a ride in the station wagon.

[...]Al Vignal has been entertaining us every noon by struttin around and singing “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition.” He’s not so hot, and, I believe this old horned-rimmed ninnyhammer could sing better than that with one tonsil.

Speaking of singing, reminds me to let you in on a secret. Twelve of our best looking “gals” and “six” of the fast vanishing males are now practicing on Christmas Carols which they expect to sing during the “holidays” in the various departments. Okay, Okay! maybe they do have fat lips and chapped hips but they can sing.

Glimpses of wartime Pittsburgh. Short glimpses but revealing. Girls eating together in downtown restaurants on Saturday nights. A sign in the window of a lunchroom, declaring the place is closing earlier because of lack of help. Chewing gum displays have disappeared from drug store counters. Huge Army trucks rumbling, like columns of elephants, along the Blvd. of the Allies.

[...]Here’s a scoop worth checking. Perry Gish tipped me off, but wouldn’t explain where he got the information. We hope it’s not a military secret so let’s go ahead with it. Perry said: “The underwear issued to members of the WAACs consists of a Khaki wool slip and more intimate garments of khaki-colored rayon.” Maybe Perry has been reading some of the columns on the Women’s pages during his spare time.[...]

January 5, 1943

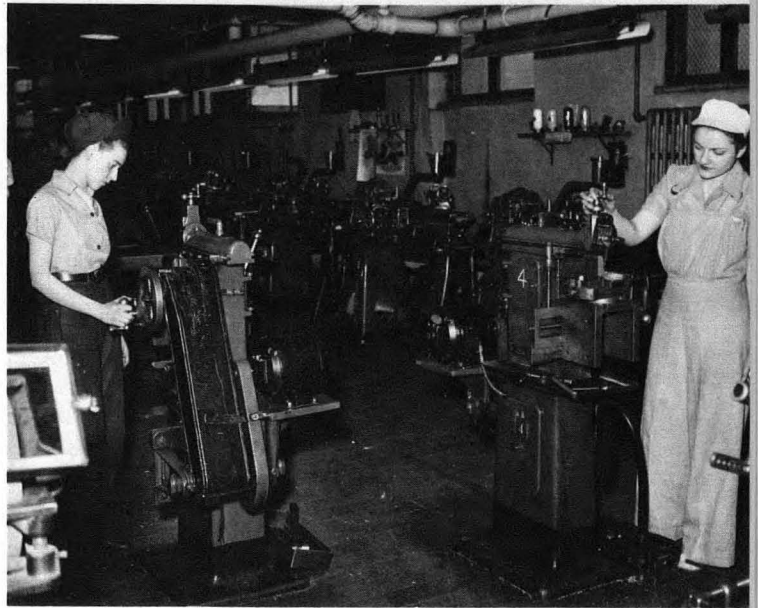
Hi Butch:

Here goes, for the news from our happy little village...

[...]Quite a few women bus drivers are appearing on various lines about town. It’s very refreshing to watch them drive with one hand, and with the other hand, knit one, purl two & hit three.

[...]Eateries jammed at all hours, everybody tearing into vittles with desperate haste, as if they feared it’ll be their last meal. If eating will win the War, we’re in the money. Lining up for butter is the latest vogue in our village and believe me you need good elbows if you expect to get a pound of butter. Why the day before Christmas, a barrage ballon type woman with a large caboose literally shoved me into the gutter. I was so mad, I chewed up a handful of mothballs and zipped myself in a bag. I wouldn’t mind a bit if they rationed kumquats.

[...]There may be drastic changes in our way of life



Above: “The girls are replacing the boys,” chimed Johns, “at Carnegie-Illinois.” The entry of women into traditionally male workplaces — they rolled steel and drove buses — was one of the more striking social alterations wrought by World War II. *Opposite page:* Anthony Mascaro, a familiar downtown face, trumpeted fish as a substitute for red meat, the protein source of choice among Americans. His antics were part of the government’s effort to redirect consumer habits away from goods made scarce by the war’s demands.

before you get home, but I’ll bet my little bundle, the girl friend will never be ready when you call for her. Even when Gabriel stands with one foot on the land and the other on the sea to proclaim that time shall be no more, every woman in the world will hoist her boudoir window and shout, “I’m not ready, Gabriel; you will just have to wait.”[...]

January 20, 1943

Hi Butch:

This well-chilled January day we intend to tell you about the ups and downs of our little village. I’m sure you remember our little town which lies between the grassy-tree-lined banks of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers, just above the “Point” where they join to form the Mighty Ohio. Oh! Yes! We still rush to the “Point” everyday at twelve o’clock to see if we can catch a glimpse of the noon-day sun.

[...]The ban on pleasure driving and the OPA checking drivers for joyriding has made a vast difference in our little village. At nights our streets are just like a country lane on a sunny week-day afternoon — deserted if you please. The suburban night clubs have

folded up and everyone walks to the picture show.

[...]Walking over to the corner drug store the other evening, I missed the "Drug Store Cowboys." The place seemed deserted, but then I remembered there was a war on...[...]

May 19, 1943

Hi Butch:

[...]We shudder to think what is in store for the first rabid fan who hurls a ripe tomato at an umpire during the coming summer. Such wanton waste is as dead as the custom of tying old shoes on the moter that carries away the bridal couple.

[...]Well Butch, the next time you're in Pittsburgh don't fail to visit our modernistic new Canteen, just outside the Pennsylvania Station. We are very proud of this new building and believe it to be the finest of its type in the country. Everything is ready for the opening next week and thereafter it will never close, until the war is won and there are no more tired, hungry and travel-stained soldiers and sailors to be served.

A two day strike of the City's Garbage Collectors ended last week as approximately 360 collectors voted to return to work pending a settlement of their grievances. They walked off the job in protest to disciplinary measures of a Supervisor.[...]

November 16, 1943

Hi Butch:

Pittsburgh! A magic word in these war-time days. A smoking, roaring town of steel mills, coal mines and war-time factories turning out a daily production far beyond anything ever dreamed of!

Coming here four years ago, after a lifetime spent meandering over the prairies of Western Kansas and Nebraska, the Black hills of South Dakota, the Teton Mountains and Jackson Hole country of northern Wyoming and the marvelous Rocky Mountains and canyons of Colorado, never can I forget our utter confusion over the lay-out of Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle. Nor can we forget the damp, dismal and smothering smogs that hid the sun and made mid-morning seem like the twilight hours just before darkness. Nor can I forget the times I left the Keystone Hotel headed for the Bessemer Bldg. and within five minutes was completely and utterly lost in the myriad one-way streets and alleys. It was not uncommon to find myself wandering in the dark, dismal streets underneath the old train sheds behind the Wabash Bldg. or walking into the Chatfield & Wood Building on the lower end of the Boulevard of the Allies believing it was the Bessemer Building.

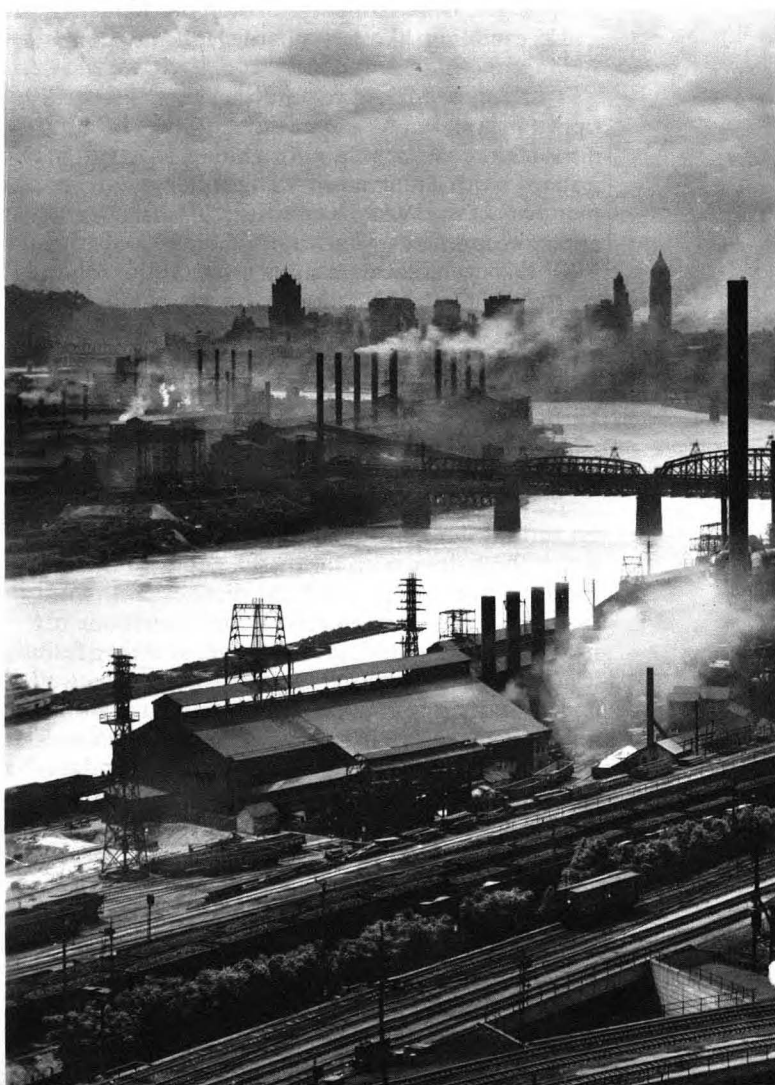
After living here for four years, I've figured out how to get around in the Golden Triangle; however, just let me get off the beaten path and I am lost.

There's just one balm—people who have lived here all their lives can't find their way around either. A friend of mine who was born and raised here undertook to drive me out to Edgewood one smoggy evening. In about fifteen minutes we found ourselves crossing the George Washington Bridge headed into Millvale, considerably farther from Edgewood than our starting point.

Last night we went up on Mt. Washington and now we realize why Pittsburghers call this city of dirty bumpy streets, weary rivers, burdened bridges and teeming mills "Mother Pittsburgh".

Going down to the old B. & O. Station to meet a friend, we discovered the train was two hours late and decided to take on one of those funny cable cars that look like a triangle climbing the side of Mt. Washington. The ride reminded us of a freight elevator—slow but sure. Walking out to one of the observation points on Mt. Washington, we discovered it was a glorious, frosty fall night and the moon stood high above the mighty Ohio River.

Directly across from us were the glistening towers



of the Golden Triangle, the winking red airline beacon on top of the Grant Building and behind it the Gulf Building with its thousands of lights. Below us is the Monongahela, silver and black in the moonlight; the lights from the traffic ways and tall buildings ripple and dance across the water. To our left are the Point and Manchester Bridges with the headlight of night traffic weaving across them. Beyond are the millions of lights in the city once known as Allegheny and now called the North Side. Away in the distance you follow the lights of Route #19 as it weaves its way up the mountain side toward West View and Wellington Heights. A sharp shrill whistle calls our attention to a Pennsylvania freight train directly below us, winding its way up the Monongahela with a string of flat cars loaded with tanks and trucks, which remind us of a string of ghosts dancing up and down the river bank.

Just below us to the right is the Liberty Bridge with its twinkling lights and the large Duquesne beer sign picturing a man drinking a glass of beer. Its red and gold neon lights reflect across the silver bosom of the Monongahela. Across the river we follow the traffic

lights of the Boulevard of the Allies, as it winds its way below Duquesne University, out through Oakland and on to Wilkinsburg.

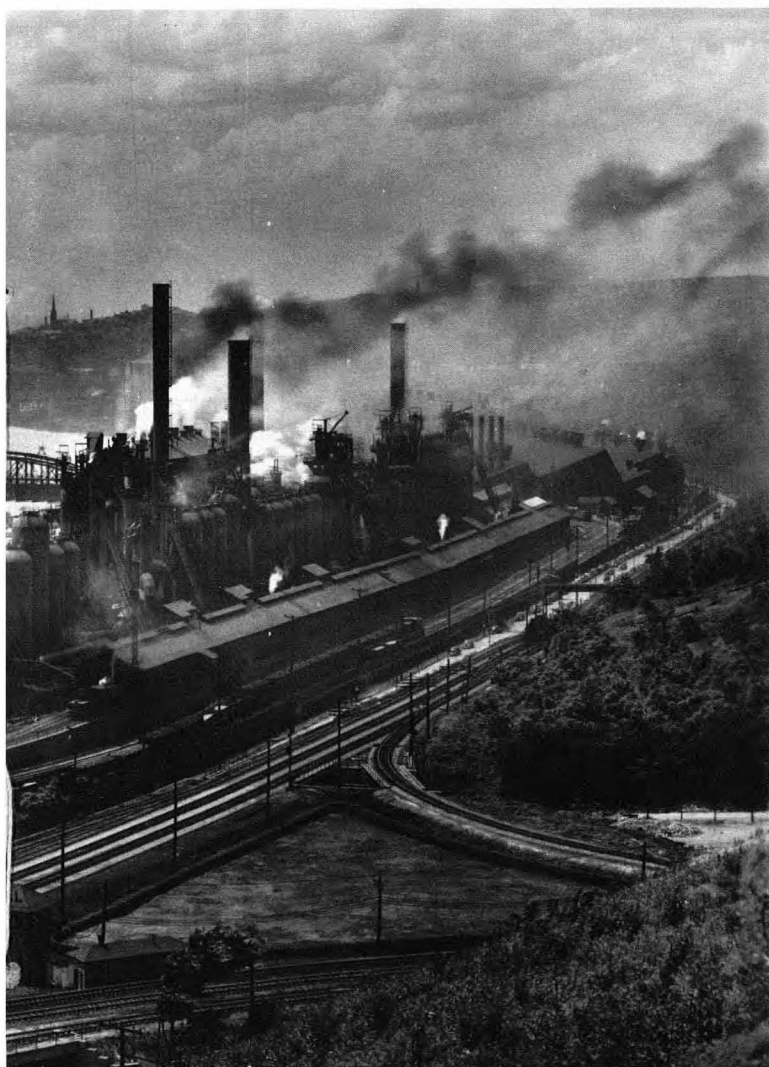
Coming down the river is a great tow of barges loaded with coal for the yawning maw of a Bessemer furnace. The water cascades over the paddle wheels and sparkles like millions of diamonds in the moonlight as the stern wheeler pushes its load silently down the river.

We follow the outline of the hills, mountains, cliffs and valleys that are Pittsburgh, and suddenly a "Bessemer blows", lighting up the sky and throwing high its flame and molten metal like the eruption of a volcano. We stand enthralled as one after another the great "Bessemer" up the Monongahela Valley "blow", and the sky glowers red. From the lighted sky we can see a huge volume of smoke that by morning will hide even the waters of the river from our view as we cross the Liberty Bridge on our way to work. The sun will be a red ball in the sky and it will be another smoggy day in Pittsburgh.

I have been thrilled by the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and have stood on the summit of Pike's Peak and gazed across the plains of Colorado. There may be more stirring sights than that which was mine to look upon last night, but at the moment I can think of no sight more challenging or stirring.

It is true there is no excuse for the ugliness of Pittsburgh; that no city in the world can equal it for dirt, smoke or the stark, dreary ugliness of it. Yet seeing the city as we did on this beautiful fall night, you suddenly realize that you have an uncommunicable affection for this dirty, bumpy city. Seeing the many bridges burdened with the heavy night traffic, hearing the whistle of freight trains as they rush through the night carrying the products of the city's factories, the glistening, glowering power of the teeming steel mills, you cannot help but feel the vast power and the glory of this great city.

Seeing the power and production of this rugged giant, we can understand the passionate loyalty of her citizens. In admiration and respect we bow our heads in a silent salute to "Mother Pittsburgh".



"[S]eeing the city as we did on this beautiful fall night," wrote Johns, "you suddenly realize that you have an uncommunicable affection for this dirty, bumpy city....seeing the glistening, glowering power of the teeming steel mills, you cannot help but feel the vast power and the glory of this great city."

April 8, 1944

Hi Butch!

[...]Come another spring, tra-la, and the army of Victory Gardeners have gone into action to help solve America's food problem. Pittsburgh in April is not to be confused with a palm-studded Florida resort, yet it has its points. It isn't Pittsburgh's fault that raw winds come charging up the Ohio Valley and snow not infrequently spits in your face...

[...]Spring waits for no man—another way of saying that it has been two years with this issue since we started the "HI BUTCH" letters in April, 1942 with a mailing list of thirteen. This is the thirty fifth number and the mailing list has grown to seventy five.[...]

June 16, 1944

Hi Butch:

The only drawback to being a white collar worker is that you have to go right on white collaring, day in and day out. No chance to take the afternoon off to go fishing. Never an opportunity to let down and take in a ball game. Just bear down all the time, and don't stop scratching, brother, don't stop scratching. When you think you have cooked up that feeling of invincibility in the mind of your boss you're in a hell of a fix when he begins to mouth off something fierce, blowing out radio tubes far and wide over the errors you've made. That's when the red begins to clamor for the tips of your ears....To recover our egotistic equilibrium we decided to rush out and see the Pirates lick the pants off the Giants.

[...]Somber is the word for the mood that gripped Pittsburgh when D-Day struck. There were few cheers, but many prayers. Throngs streamed in and out of churches all day long. Clergymen of all denominations held special services, ranging far into the night.

The invasion is expected to spur sales of bonds in the Fifth War Loan Campaign which began Monday. A goal of \$335,000 has been set for the Fort Pitt Area.

[...]Wash day at Presbyterian Hospital in Oakland bears striking resemblance to the old fashioned corn husking bee, where neighbors from all parts of the community drop in and help. The labor shortage is so acute that hospital officials, ministers, professors and other volunteer workers roll up their sleeves and do the laundry themselves.[...]

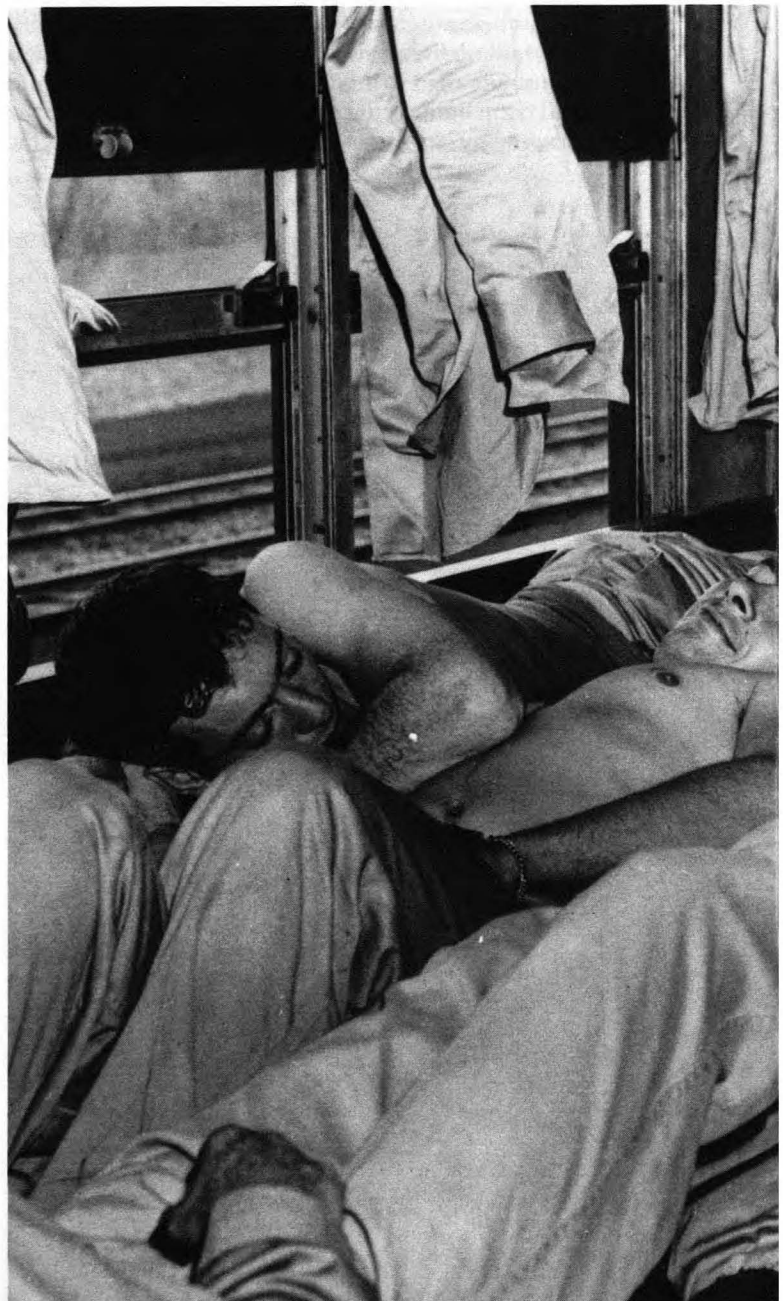
July 25, 1944

Hi Butch:

As the gent who writes the communiques might say it, "Action along the news front during the past two weeks was confined to local skirmishes," which would be another way of telling you that headlines worth a second glance were mighty scarce. Sorry we

don't have a lot of news but we'll try to give you a few newsie's that will bring back memories of that fair city on the Allegheny.

Scully still sits behind the mayor's desk, in the City-County Building on upper Diamond St...There has been some good clicks-on at the barn run by Sam Nixon...Koppers still make coke and the Camel Ad at Sixth & Liberty still smokes...Couples still go to Parry for pictures when they marry...The Tele is still quite blatant and the Press is as sober as your aunt...Mr. Mellon still owns the bank and Mr. Scaife is still building tanks...The Exercycle lady still cycles on the Boulevard of the Allies...The bobby-sock brigade still uphold the Stanley's trade...Mrs. Heinz is still making pickles and Mr. Benedum still eats at Kleins...Fritzie



Zivic is in the Army now and Dr. Clausen has left our town for Cleveland...Bob McClintic was taking a rest during the Fifth War Loan...Edgar Beck is still saving souls and Rheas are still making jelly rolls...Rosy and his dipsy doodle is better than the Hofbrau's apple strudel... Council still has James O'Toole and the trade is fair at Boggs & Buhl...Frankie Frisch is still on the ball and Loeffler is still at the city hall...Streamline trolleys still make the run all around Mt. Washington...Doc McCartney is still at the First and Warner is restoring hair...The movie boys are still supplying the dough for the U S O and folks are still paying the Brookline way...The union still holds a fear, of Ernest Tener Weir...The nudie is still the star at the Continental Bar...The girls are replacing the

boys, at Carnegie-Illinois...The same old newsie still sells papers at the door, of Confortis subway floor...The little blind lady still sells smokes, to those speedy Bessemer folks...We still curse when its foggy and suffocate when it's smoggy but it's a pity, how you miss this smoky city.

[...]Powder rooms in carbarns! That's the latest war-born innovation here. The Pittsburgh Railways Co. is building ladies lounges in its barns on Craft Ave. and in Castle Shannon. The lounges will accommodate women trolley and bus operators now being recruited by the company.

The liquor front here boiled over with Hymie Darling, king of the North Side honky tonks, surrendering his licenses for the places at 305 and 804 Federal St. and Sammy Weinstein for his place at 228 Diamond St. In a grumpy mood, Hymie told the agents to "take 'em away," then pulled the blinds and locked the doors.

Police are inclined to blame a numbers war for an explosion which wrecked two confectionery store fronts at 7804-06 Frankstown Ave., and which apparently was caused by a bomb. Detectives say they found numbers slips in the store.

The guys and gals around here are pretty sore at the gink who missed Hitler with that bomb. A hulluva time for a wild pitch. That's all for this time Butch. Good luck and don't forget to write.

August 9, 1944

Hi Butch:

We are sometimes overwhelmed by the size and import of our major problems. Take the Post-War world for example. So far as we can learn, thousands—even millions—of our fellow citizens have countless long-felt wants and long-wanted felts, too, that should be supplied after the war, but there are too many different ideas as to which things should have a priority.

To the woman whose curves are out of control, a two-way stretch is needed to get things back in shape, while to the gal whose gams are her glamor bearers,

Johns's letters served up a welcome taste of home for many young men who, upon enlistment, found themselves in unfamiliar surroundings for the first time. Here, Yanks just back from the war start a 65-hour train ride from New York to Washington state, (about the same as an Amtrak ride today) and their homes in the Northwest.



Nylon hose become a must. To the soldier who whiled away his passes on the beach at Waikiki, no Post War planning would be complete without a South Sea smoothie, a sagebursh sarong and a ukelele.

Morganthau, of course, has a Post-War gleam in his eye that means he longs for bigger and better taxes. Roosevelt longs for longer terms; Eleanor for longer trips; and Clare Luce for longer laughs. Frances Perkins hopes to see labor lie down with capital, with John L. Lewis to lead them. The flit-dizzies with which this world abounds wants more tonsil tremors from Sinatra, while the East coast wants five gallons per coupon and no questions asked. Anybody can see that Post-War planning is no pushover.

But take the common, ordinary, Victory Garden American (like me for instance) and he is not looking for any Utopia. Long ago we found out that there wasn't any Santa Claus and that those long white whiskers belonged to either Father Time or Monty Woolley. For a job; three square meals a day; a few bellylaughs from Abbott and Costello at the neighborhood flicker palace; a baseball game on

Saturday afternoon; a gee-ed up jolopy with four reasonably good tires and a spare; and a T-bone steak, we'll sell you our share of Post-War Utopia, but quick.

Some day in the not too distant future, I shall curl up on my favorite sofa and snuggle a pillow and think back a few years...I'll think about the days I smeared catsup and jams on food which would have tasted so much better with butter—had there been butter...the problems I had with ration stamps. Handing the grocer blue points when they should have been red and tearing out a number eighteen when it should have been twenty-three...the long waits on a frosty street corner waiting for a bus and not being able to get on when it came...the proud way a woman in the service wore her uniform...the wonderful job Bob Hope did entertaining troops abroad...the tired expressions on the swing shift on their way back home in the early morning...V-mail.

I'll laugh over the number of times I had my black shoes re-sold [sic] and my brown shoes re-heeled...the scarcity of scotch and the way my host would whisper the news if he had a thimble-ful in the umbrella



stand...preserving the coal supply by wearing extra long woolies...the alert ears of a woman when the word Nylon was mentioned[...]

September 12, 1944

Hi Butch:

[...]No doubt you're as starved for entertainment as you are for an inch thick porterhouse steak. How about making the rounds of the night spots? Remember those Saturday nights you drove down to Ogilve Park in Wheeling to take in Millers' or Dorsey's one night stand?

Wishful thinking gets us nowhere. How about some spots within carfare and transfer distance? O.K. How about Al Mercur's, the Nut House gent's Music Bar downtown? You'll find it hiding around the corner from Fifth and Liberty on Graeme Street. You'll like the atmosphere and the entertainment on the Baby Grands will tickle your ears. Perhaps you would rather go to Jack McCarty's just around the corner on Delray St. for an evening of informal pleasure where you can dine or drink by candlelight. Something livelier? How about the Villa Madrid on Liberty Avenue—whispering sands, swaying palms, New York floor shows and the tallest Tom Collinses. Maybe you'd prefer the Nixon on Sixth Avenue where sophisticated sway is tunefully supplied and the Nixon emcee does vocal gymnastics every night with his popular renditions of the oldtime favorites.

How about tripping over to the Fiesta Room in the Roosevelt Hotel where rhumba rhythms stimulate the appetite and the large menu satisfies it. We'll have to go early for a ringside seat at the Gay Nineties on Fifth Avenue. The sweet familiar strains of the well loved ballads that grand-dad used to sing are played in the atmosphere of 1890. Just the place to drop in i[s] the 7th Avenue Lounge. Haphazard is the entertainment with everything from jazz to opera in the offing, but [it's] fun.

If you're on allowance let's try the Balconades on Saw Mill Run. Dinner at the strains of "Long Ago and Far Away" is a palatable pleasure. Or the Oasis on Bower Hill road. Tops in supper entertainment plus the longest in long spaghetti. You want to get away from downtown, okay how about the Sky-Vue for a little dancing and [it's] just a skip from here to Bill Greens on route 51. From here we can go to the Blue Ridge Inn on Saw Mill Run for a typical roadhouse night club of pre-war day. Nothing is changed even the service is good. Now lets [sic] hop over to Joe Mazer's on Washington Road where good barbecues and music are the specialties at this jukebox haven. Just a little farther is the Green Lantern and Lebanon Lodge, both juke box dancing.

If it's an impression on that luscious blonde you're wanting to create, then take her to the Vogue Terrace



Above: Blackouts and air raid drills created an atmosphere of nervous expectancy. During a typical drill in a Pittsburgh public school, c. 1944, teachers and students filed into hallways, where the theory was they would be better protected from bombs. Johns parodied his own company's contingencies, noting it was best to "knock the air raid wardens down if they start giving orders. They always save the best seats for themselves and their friends, anyhow."

Opposite page: Scrimping and saving were patriotic acts. At this scrap rubber drive, c. 1944, at an elementary school in Brookline, students sacrificed their old heels to the cause of Hirohito's defeat.

on Crooked Run Road in East McKeesport, Pittsburgh's No. 1 Night Spot. A grand floor show, dancing and a cosmopolitan atmosphere. On Saturday Night the Schenley Hotel on Forbes Street across from the "Keep Off the Grass Sign" is a good spot for dancing and a midnight supper.[...]

If you don't like any of these there's lot more both good and indifferent. They are all awaiting your return and if you crave to paint up the town, make your reservations early. As I said in the beginning [it's] rather a silly subject to write about, but maybe it'll bring back a few pleasant memories and the good times ahead in good old Pittsburgh when "Hitler's Dream" turns out to be a nightmare. Good luck until next time.

January 9, 1945

Hi Butch:

[...]Sober is the word—literally and figuratively—to describe the way most of us spent the New Years Eve. Hi-de-do was out of the question, what with icebound streets and the fact that Sunday laws banned the sale of liquor, thus making it the slowest "Eve" since repeal. The night spot business has been pretty



Fifth Avenue, Downtown, on V-J day, August 14, 1945.

lean for the past four weeks, however the entertainment continues in the upper bracket despite the weather. Marty Gregor has his band at the Terrace Room of the William Penn, Everett Neill's Orchestra has returned to the Oasis and Dick Averre is making a record run in the Fiesta Room of the Roosevelt. Due to bad weather the Pines has been closed until April 1st. Bill Bardo is winding up his final week at Bill Green's and will be followed by Tommy Carlyn, who played 37 out of the 52 weeks last year for Bill. Tommy not only has a good band but he's a past master at collecting the biggest part of my paycheck every week-end at his grocery store on Brownsville Road.[...]

May 15, 1945

Hi Butch:

Pittsburgh celebrated V-E with prayer, work and the release of pent-up enthusiasm. From Downtown office buildings, laughing, singing girls and men sent a paper storm over the Golden Triangle. Groups "ganged up" on willing service men and kissed them. Streamers of ticker tape and adding machine rolls festooned utility wires and trolley poles. A brisk wind kept the paper storm flying. At noon we shoved our way through a sea of celebrators and side walks ankle deep in paper and jammed ourselves into a restaurant

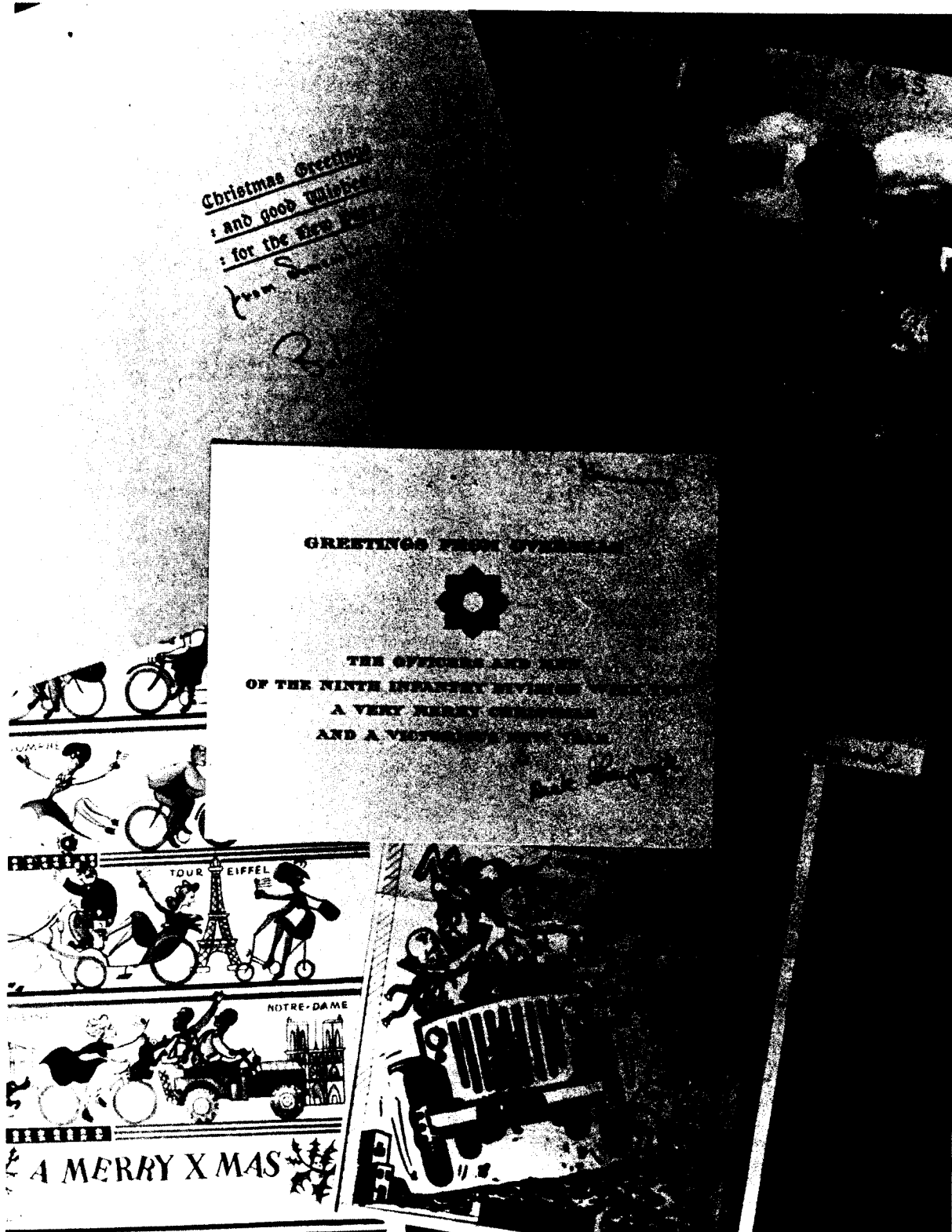
for a bite of lunch. Everyone was talking to everyone else and ignored the food.

Tap rooms and State Liquor Stores were closed. Throngs were flocking to the downtown churches, and there must have been fully two thousand jammed in front of the First Presbyterian Church on Sixth Avenue, listening to Dr. McCartney deliver a V-E Day message. By three o'clock the paper showers had thinned—the crowds were less boisterous and the Gold Triangle was getting back to normal.

Fickleness of South Side girls, who didn't always dance with the guys "what brung 'em" was blamed for a street riot in the Hill District at midnight the day after V-E Day. The riot flared when six auto loads of South Side hoodlums staged a free-for-all with a number of Hill District men.

Clubs, fists, milk bottles, hatchets and home-made billies flew before squads of police converged on the scene from Center Avenue, South Side and Downtown. Most of the South Side bruisers ran for their autos and sped away only to be arrested at the South Side end of the Tenth St. Bridge.

I don't know what you got out of V-E Day, but it sorta knocked me down and made hard work of letter writing. It's a rather scrambled sort of thing. You'll excuse it, I'm sure. We'll cut it off here and simply say, Thanks, Butch, for all you've done. ■



From 1942 to 1945 Johns sent letters to about 75 G.I.s overseas. In return, Ernest Lodino, Bob Boselvig and dozens of others sent Johns greeting cards from around the world, which he collected and saved in a scrapbook.