

LETTERS TO FREEPORT

Jo and Wayne Dirksen's
first years in Washington

1942 - 1943

Edited from original sources

by

Mark Dirksen

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INTRODUCTION

From January 1942 to October 1944, Maudie carefully preserved every letter that Wayne (and later Jo) wrote from Washington. These letters give a detailed picture of Jo and Wayne's life in those first tumultuous years in D.C. They encompass Wayne's first term at the Cathedral, his tenure as a private with the Walter Reed Medical Corps, the first year of their marriage including Rick's birth, and contain many little details about their life in the Nation's Capital during the war.

A brief chronology of those years:

January 28, 1942	While in his second year at Peabody Conservatory, Wayne is appointed Assistant-Choirmaster at the Cathedral.
March 5, 1942	Easter Sunday
April 20, 1942	Scholarship Recital at Peabody
June 7, 1942	Final recital at Cathedral
June 8, 1942	Enlists in Army Medical Corps and is stationed at Walter Reed Hospital
August 2-11, 1942	Jo visits D.C., staying at the Williams' house
December 6, 1942	Wayne plays a recital at the Cathedral for a crowd estimated by Eddy Marr to be 1200
December 18, 1942	Jo's mother Edith (Mary) Shaw commits suicide at the Shaw's winter apartment on Stephenson Street in Freeport
January 9, 1943	Jo and Wayne married in Freeport
January 20, 1943	Wayne returns to D.C.
March 22-27, 1943	Jo arrives and they take an apartment at 1856 Ingleside Terrace
April 27, 1943	Easter Sunday
May-August, 1943	Peggy in training for Red Cross in D.C. and New York
August 11, 1943	Move to 7049 Eastern Ave. in Takoma Park
August 24, 1943	Radio studio completed at W.R. and regular broadcasts begin

October 12, 1943	Rick is born at Walter Reed
October 15 - November 4, 1943	Maudie visits and cares for them all
late October	Move to 39 Sycamore Ave. in Takoma Park
December 5, 1943	Article on Walter Reed radio station appears in <i>New York Times Magazine</i>

In the Fall of 1943 President Roosevelt appointed Judge Shaw chairman of (yet another) committee to settle the big railroad strike of that year. He was therefore a frequent and welcome visitor in Washington. Following Edith's death, he married Millie at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria in the Spring of 1944.

From the over 100 letters saved from this period, the editor has extracted material that provides insight into Wayne's growth as a musician, details of life in wartime D.C., and specific incidents in Jo and Wayne's lives.

In the interests of brevity many references to life in Freeport have been regretfully omitted, as well as the ordinary courtesies that are unfailingly observed in every letter of both Jo and Wayne: inquiries after the health of relatives, requests for news or materials, and greetings to family members and friends. It is hoped that enough remains to convey the over-all tone of love and courtesy to which the volume and frequency of this correspondence testifies.

Then, as now, major events were discussed and recounted over the telephone as well as in person by eyewitnesses. Thus these letters often give the "shadow" of certain occasions. For example, Maudie attended Wayne's scholarship recital at Peabody, and would have told those in Freeport about it first-hand. Thus we have no description of the event itself, just its surrounding circumstances. Likewise, Jo and Wayne's wedding will not be described below, or any of a dozen more "life events". This makes the re-creation of events that are here especially precious: Wayne's full, lively description of his first Easter at the cathedral, Jo's account of their first visit to Dumbarton Oaks, and many more.

The inclusion of complete day and date -- Wayne's custom was to give day of the week only, often with time of day added -- was made possible by the postmarks on the envelopes, which Maudie also saved. The (very) few ordinary misspellings and grammatical infelicities have been tacitly corrected, paragraphing has been added in a few places, and an occasional passage has been re-ordered for clarity or concision. Other editorial additions are in square brackets.

Mark D.
November, 1989

I -- THE CALL TO THE CATHEDRAL

Baltimore, Thursday, January 22, 1942

Dear Parents:

Well, I suppose that long before this you have given me up for lost, so I had better reassure you that on the contrary, I am more alive than ever. But I have been too busy to write. I have had term papers and exams coming up all along, and I needn't tell you how much work that takes.

Sometimes the capacity of my mind amazes me. I mean by that that I know a certain exam is going to come up and that I shall have to study diligently for it, so I go to work. The exam may cover a period in history of a thousand years or more, and there are so many facts and dates to remember as well as the general trends of the different periods involved. Somehow or other the exam goes by and I get a good grade, and then I realize that I actually had all of that knowledge in my head. It makes you marvel even more at the capacity of man -- for work, for play, as well as for knowledge. In spite of the fact that the world seems to be in a terrible mess, I am thankful every day that I have the capacity to live and learn and to appreciate beauty. Without those capacities there is nothing.

This weekend coming up will be momentous to me I feel, for reasons which I shall withhold until a later date. It will be very interesting to see exactly how things turn out.

Heard the other day from our landlord that our house has been sold, and so I suppose that means a jack in the rents. Prices are going sky high, and we can't get more than two pounds of sugar at a time, which is rather annoying but quite necessary to prevent hoarding. All prices are rocketing skyward, and Lord knows how much higher they will get, but since everyone is making money again they seem to be happy.

Milton and Sizer and George are doing just fine, and I must say that it is a lot of fun being around here for the most part -- never a dull moment. Ed is already worrying about Easter music, and I suppose that we will do parts of the second half of the *Messiah* and a cantata -- not the *Crucifixion* or the *Seven Last Words of Christ* I hope.

Don't work too hard, Mother -- especially on the French course.

Sunday, February 1, 1942

Well, dear family, I shall write a few words to you before going to play my last service at First Methodist, a place I enjoyed working. This morning at the very end of the service, Dr. Haas called me down from the organ bench after the last hymn had been sung, just before the benediction. You see, no one in the church except the music committee knew about my new job, and he built it up with all the dramatic ability he has. When he came to the phrase "Mr. Dirksen has been appointed...to the post of....Assistant Organist and Choir-Director....of the.... National Cathedral in Washington" there was a very big and audible -- Oh! -- which swept over the congregation. Then he remarked that a week from that Sunday would be my twenty-first birthday, and that brought forth another murmur, for the great majority have always taken me for about twenty-five or six. The service itself went beautifully, and I shook about two hundred hands afterward, and everything is ducky.

Well, I guess I was about as happy and surprised last Wednesday morning [January 28] when I called as I have ever been in my life. You see, a week ago Saturday, Paul Callaway had come over to Baltimore to listen to three of us play: Milton, Bill Watkins (a very fine organist but a minimum of personality), and myself. He talked with us, and then we waited, and last Wednesday....Well, you know all that part of it.

Thursday I went to Washington and looked over my new job. I met Canon Draper, Canon Wedel, Dean Philips, and Alfred Stoughton, executive secretary of the Cathedral Association. Every one of these high officials on the staff are splendid men, and they treated me as though I had always been with them, and were going to be there for some time to come. It was a beautiful experience, and I [will have] more to tell you about them as time goes on.

I made one more important contact, however, and that was Mrs. Williams, wife of Canon Williams of the Cathedral. Canon Williams was a reserve chaplain in the Navy, and went on active duty about two weeks ago. That left his beautiful study in his home free, and there is every possibility that is where I shall stay.

Need I say how much of a thrill it was to play that magnificent one-hundred and twenty stop Skinner for two hours? By merely looking upward seeing those tremendous arches and that magnificent stained glass....God is ever present there, and ever the attitudes of the workmen show it. I shall have my own choir composed of members of the St. Alban's School for Boys¹ who are not in the main choir.... My primary job for the first few weeks will merely be to follow Paul around and learn everything there is to learn about the Cathedral.

¹ "St. Alban's" is the correct original spelling.

And now to the rather pressing question of money. I shall need about fifty dollars right away, for tuition and for sustenance until my first check comes through from the church in Washington. I realize that my salary seems quite large, but living conditions in Washington are sky high. I will have to eat out, and although my room will not be more than five a week, food and laundry and transportation to and from Baltimore are all going to draw.

Glad to hear of the fine basketball being played in my old home town, dear Mother, and keep the news flying. Now to sign off and go back to work collecting my stuff. Take care of yourselves, all of you....

and best of love from a rather excited and completely happy son.
Tomorrow I start!!!

Wayne

Wednesday, February 4, 1942

I spent all of today in packing my things and getting them shipped on the way. It is going to cost me five dollars to get the desk and the bookcase to Washington, but I couldn't do much better than that, and anyway I got so darned tired of worrying about the things that I called the biggest trucking company in Baltimore to come and get the stuff and take it away. Ed is driving me over tomorrow morning with such odds and ends as lamp, radio, etc.

I am staying at the home of Canon Williams in Washington, and I have a very nice room, though not the one I thought I might get at first, for there is a nice young married couple also staying there.... Nevertheless, my desk will be placed underneath a window from which I have a full view of the Cathedral on the hill directly across the street -- and need I say that it is always an inspiring sight.

Monday was a busy day in Washington, and I had my picture taken right after dinner at the console of the large organ. It was to have appeared in the *Chicago Sun*, so maybe you have seen it by now. I went to a rehearsal of the Cathedral Choral Society of Washington, a chorus of one-hundred and eighty voices conducted by Paul, on Monday evening. We rehearsed the Verdi *Requiem*, which will be performed in about six weeks at the Cathedral, accompanied with the mighty Skinner and the National Symphony Orchestra.¹ It will certainly be a thrill to sing in it, and I will describe it to you in greater detail as I go along.

¹ This was the Cathedral Choral Society's first performance, in which Wayne sang bass.

[February 4, con't.]

My new address, incidentally, for you might want to write one of these months, is 3515 Woodley Road, Washington D.C. I shall write a letter to Grandmother this evening, and thereby ease a guilty conscience a little.

There is nothing more to say now, so I shall quit. Thank heaven that I am through packing.... I suppose that I don't appreciate how fortunate I am however. Imagine how I shall wish someday that I could again move all of my worldly possessions with a half-day's work and five dollars trucking bill?

Tuesday, February 17, 1942

Well, it is suppertime on Tuesday and soon I must go out to eat -- at my favorite drugstore. I get pretty good hot lunches there, and it is the only decent place to eat in ten blocks. There is an apartment hotel dining room, but the prices are prohibitive and the food has been rotten the few times I have been there. Then there is a filthy tavern which serves meals, and I did try and eat there a couple of times. "Complete Steak Dinner \$.45", but even my stomach couldn't stand it, especially the pregnant cat that wanders around among the tables on the beer-slopped floor. That leaves the drug store and the Hot-Shop, but the latter is ten blocks up the street, so I don't get up there every meal. The drug store is very clean, and the food is home-cooked and excellent. So far I have been eating on less than \$1.00 a day.... I think my diet is quite balanced and sufficient.¹

Tomorrow, Ash Wednesday, there are a flock of services to play, and at 11:00 p.m. (tonight) Paul is going to New York. He will be gone for two days, leaving me in complete charge of the music of the Washington Cathedral over Ash Wednesday and First Thursday in Lent -- some stuff.

I registered Monday, and after the drawing of numbers I shall see how I stand. If I am low, I shall probably enlist rather than be drafted, for you may choose your branch of service if you enlist. To hell with the infantry: I shall get in the Field Artillery and ride!

Starting tonight there are regular Tuesday night rehearsals of the full Cathedral choir, for they are preparing the *St. John Passion* by J.S. Bach. Mother, I wish you could hear them. 40 boys and men sing flawlessly. I don't know whether or not I told you that male altos are used. They are right husky masculine men who are merely trained to sing a pure, true,

¹ The hotel dining room and the tavern referred to are Alban Towers, and one of the many precursors to the Wit's End, respectively. "Hot-Shop" is the original name of Hot Shoppes, of blessed memory.

falsetto tone, and it blends beautifully. The baritone soloist of the choir also does the alto solos, and he is a strapping fellow, but when I first heard him sing alto, it bothered me. You do get a peculiar sensation, until you get used to it.

Sunday, February 22, 1942

Today is Sunday, and I thought at first I would take in a show this evening, but habit is too strong -- I am going to practice. But to continue with a discussion of my work and the people around me...I shall answer some of your questions about Paul, Mother.

He is a man about thirty-five I should judge, stands but 5' 3 1/2" tall, and weighs but a handful. He is really tiny, and the Vergers (Sextons to you) get a kick out of seeing him tearing through the halls with his cassocks flying, and me right behind. I always let him go first, for he has always had somewhat of an inferiority complex about his stature. He never told me this, of course, but it was quite obvious to me.

He is very energetic and a titan as a musician, handling his choir with an iron hand. He isn't the organist that Virgil is, but then that is not to be expected. In fact he claims that I play more organ than he does, but that is charity, for there is much I am learning from him, especially about service playing. He is unmarried -- smokes a lot, drinks a little, (better delete the latter for dear Grandmother) drives carefully, is a swell fellow, and has been grand to me. That is about all I can say about him so far.

I now have full charge of the Junior Choir...[which] is composed of 35 young devils from the St. Alban's School for Men [sic]. They are between the ages of six and ten, and are really fun to work with but so noisy and mischievous. Paul treats them with the same iron gloves he uses with his own choir, but I work differently. I get their confidence in me and themselves, then I set about to make them like to sing. They rehearse three times a week and sing two 4 o'clock evensong services a week -- Monday and Friday.

I wish you could see me at 5 minutes to 4 on Mondays and Fridays. I stand in the vestment rooms with a line of the smaller boys in front of me tying running bows for dear life. (They are too little to do it themselves, most of them anyway.) We sing our service in Bethlehem Chapel -- chant the Versicles and Responses, Psalms, Canticles and Creed and Lord's Prayer, a high evensong, always. It is fun to make them work -- and they love it.

Wednesday, March 4, 1942

Paul is in New York today, so that makes me boss, and I feel rotten. I have had a miserable cold for several days and it picked today to come to a head. I can't talk, my chest and throat hurt, nausea, headache, all the symptoms. Tonight I go to Baltimore, and perhaps tomorrow it will be better. Virgil is back from his tour, so I am having lessons again.

Incidentally I go to Baltimore every Wednesday night because I have my organ lesson at 9 Thursday morning, and although it only takes 40 minutes to get from Washington to Baltimore, it takes almost 1/2 to get from here to Union Station if there is any traffic.

Last Sunday at 4 p.m. Paul played an organ recital that was superb. He is every bit the organist that Virgil is, with as much technique, the only difference being he doesn't play from memory. I turned pages and doubled some of the pedal passages on the solo manual, for the stentorian Tuba on the solo cannot be coupled to any other manual or the pedal. Consequently playing the pedal parts on the solo Tuba...enhances the brilliance quite a bit.

My recital at Peabody will be on Monday, April 20, and I would be delighted if you could come out for a week, Mother. Mrs. Williams said that she has a guestroom you would be perfectly welcome to use, so you could stay with me.

Sunday, March 8, 1942

Hello Dear Parents:

Well, it is a beautiful Spring day -- a splendid day to be alive and working at the Cathedral. The music is positively beyond description. Perfect -- the best music in the world presented flawlessly every Sunday. The nicest part of the whole thing is sitting through rehearsals where everyone pays full attention and works at top efficiency; also where every pain is taken with the smallest details to gain perfection. Countless times Paul will go over a measure until he gets just what he wants.

Yesterday Ed and George and Helen and Marie [from Peabody] came over, and we had a swell time. After the Cathedral was closed we went upstairs with the place to ourselves, and that magnificent organ really got played for about three hours. They went back about 9, and I worked at my latest composition, a setting of a poem by Sara Teasdale. Incidentally, there is every possible chance that another three months will see my *Benedicite* in print, either by Fischer or H.W. Gray. It isn't certain of course, but I have at least assurance that it will be printed sometime.

Sunday, March 15, 1942

This week I have practiced most diligently and shall continue to do so until April 20. I want to play a good recital, for I have had to obtain special permission to play it [having] only studied 2 years at the school.

I was most glad to hear of Freeport's [basketball] victories in Saturday's telegram, and most sorry to hear of your misfortune, Phyllis. Please write and tell me full particulars, for I have always rather wondered how broken bones felt, having never suffered any myself.

My choir sings Palm Sunday and Easter mornings at the 9:30 service, and I want them to do a good job -- I think they will, although Friday we had a miserable rehearsal. It was one of those fragrant Spring afternoons, and the warm breezes were drifting into the Gothic-arched cloister whispering -- "tops....marbles....baseball!" They were inattentive. I pleaded, I bullied, I yelled, I coaxed, all to no avail. Well, maybe they will realize the importance of the nearness of Palm Sunday this week and get down to work.

My recital at Peabody is one of the heaviest to be played this year. It consists of "The Wedge" *Prelude and Fugue in E Minor*, Bach; *Trio Sonata No. V in C Major*, Bach; *Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue*, Healy Willan; *Prelude*, Samazuehl, and "*Thou art the Rock*", Mulet. The last two numbers take about 6 minutes together, and the whole program will take about 95, so you can get some idea of the magnitude of the three main works.

Best of love to all of you and for heaven's sake keep me posted on the State tournament. (I would advise Gerry to go find Eddleman and throttle him this coming week....)

Wayne

x x x x -- kisses for poor "itty" "Phiddis" bad leg!

Wednesday, April 1, 1942

Palm Sunday was some day, believe me. Washington and Baltimore suffered a terrific snowstorm. We didn't give the long rehearsed *St. John Passion* in the afternoon, for the tenor soloist couldn't get down from New York, and the main power lines in our neighborhood were down and the Great Organ was dead. My communion service at nine-thirty was sung by nine faithful boys, some of whom had walked in that storm as [far] as four miles to get there and sing. I had thoroughly expected to call it off, but when I saw those kids pour themselves into the cloister that morning, I didn't have the heart. Even if only two had arrived, we would still have sung the service. Such devotion they show toward me -- I really don't think I deserve nor command that much.

Now that the basketball excitement is all over, perhaps Mother you might be able to concentrate on whether or not you are coming out for my recital, and if so what arrangements you are going to make. I have written...to Joan, but whether or not she is coming is still in a state of discussion, for I haven't heard from Mrs. Shaw.

(Handwritten post-script)

1:30 a.m. Thursday

Hello again:

Well, it is very late and I am very tired, for I have been working all evening copying more special music, and now at last I am finished. There isn't much to add to the above, except that when I returned from Baltimore tonight a letter from Mrs. Shaw was here. Joan is not coming. I feel like hell, so goodnight.

love, Wayne.

Tuesday, April 7, 1942

Dear Family:

I have just finished putting in a solid 13 hours of work, and now I shall try to do justice to this letter, but I don't think I can. I shall start with Easter Sunday morning.

I awoke about seven...to hear what sounded like angels singing afar off. It was the most glorious sound, and truly the Resurrection Morning. I wasn't far wrong on the angels, for it was the full Cathedral Choir rehearsing already for their 7:30 service, for which I didn't have to be on hand. I lay there in bed and listened until they had gone into service. I think the instant I realized exactly what I was hearing was when I heard the mighty voice of Paul himself, threatening dire results if a certain soprano didn't stop "scooping" up to a high A flat.

I arose and dressed about 7:30 and then ate breakfast, for my choir was due to arrive at 8:45, which they did, all thirty-five of them. Then came my turn to forget the coming glory of the service in the immediate task of getting them worked up to the task at hand.

I can't begin to describe to you the feeling I had when I began the Prelude, and then saw my choir come in the huge doors in the rear of Bethlehem Chapel. What is left to say is anti-climax -- it went beautifully -- flawlessly -- perfectly. Dean Phillips, Canons Wedel, Smith, and Draper all had nothing but the highest praise for the job the boys did. In two months time they vastly improved their tone quality and ensemble, and sounded splendid and quite professional. Those kids wouldn't have let me down for anything in the world, and they did a magnificent job.

Then came the 11:00 service, and about that I can hardly say a thing, for it was something I shall never forget. The processional -- with flags, banners, 2 Bishops, 9 clergymen, the Dean -- all of it like I have always dreamed Easter Sunday could be -- was, in fact, somewhere. I had nothing to do but sit back in the alcove behind the organ console and enjoy it, and the emotions with which I was filled that morning were of every description -- dominated by pure joy. The music was perfection itself, and the brass and tympani augmenting the organ raised the vaulted arches right off the pillars. I made my communion at that service, which lasted until 1:00 p.m. What a service!

An estimated 12,000 people passed through the Cathedral that day, and the eleven o'clock service was heard in every one of the lower chapels through amplification, and communion given also with priests below saying the service when it started -- not until after Morning Prayer and Sermon was over, and all those not wishing to take communion had left, to be replaced by the thousand or so outside who were waiting to get in.

After that, I ate dinner with Paul, and then went back to the Cathedral to get ready for Evensong Service. Evensong was as impressive, but no orchestra, and after it came a splendid organ recital by Paul to climax a glorious day for him. I left at six and came to the house to wait for Virgil, who was stopping off to play the organ here for a while since he is going to play a recital on the 29th of April.

After he had gone, I came back to the house and sat up and read "Jeeves" for a while...and about midnight I gave up. I couldn't go to sleep, and I was hungry, so I started walking down Wisconsin Ave. and went all the way down to M Street -- about three miles, and there found a restaurant. I had something to eat, read some more "Jeeves", talked with several people -- a drunk -- the counter-man -- a college student -- a prostitute eyed me, but I didn't converse with her, not because I was squeamish, but because she wasn't talkative.

[April 7, con't]

I watched the city asleep, or as asleep as a city ever gets, ate some more, read more "Jeeves", finally got to talking with a milk-truck driver, and he brought me up Wisconsin again and home, at 3:00 a.m. It was a splendid warm night, and I wrote a letter, then stood looking out over the city -- and still I didn't want to go to bed, for it had been such an exciting day -- and somehow I had the strange feeling that never again would I recapture an Easter such as this had been. I did go to bed though, and stayed there until eleven the next morning -- Easter was over! Easter -- 1942 -- I shall never forget, but now April 20th, 1942, is just ahead, and that requires all of my concentration from now on.

Maw, for Gawd's sake send some sox, the pair I have been wearing for three weeks are so strong they just walked out of the room chasing the Williams' cat!!!!

Wednesday, April 15, 1942

Well, it is right after dinner and I have been in Baltimore since Monday night and will be here until Friday afternoon, at which time I shall return to Washington for rehearsals, and then come back to Baltimore and practice all day Saturday, return to Washington again Saturday night -- and this was a long sentence, wasn't it. Now Mother, listen carefully. Since I have to be in Baltimore Tuesday and Wednesday until noon, I have decided, and the fellows here have agreed that you might as well stay here until then. Therefore, buy your ticket through to Washington, but get off the TrailBlazer Monday morning in Baltimore at 6:56. I will meet the train...and after that you will be in my capable hands -- by George, I hope my hands are capable that Monday, whew!

Things are going well -- too well, in fact. I have everything in the groove, and Virgil is tickled pink -- frankly I am worried; more so than if I were not so sure of myself in everything.

I have made up my mind to try and get into one of these Officer's training schools, either Naval or Army. My draft number is low in my board and there is every chance I may be called before then, but if I am not, then I shall get in.

This is the last you shall hear of me for a week at least - what a blasted week.

Sunday, May 17, 1942

At 9:30 this morning just before I went in to play my service, the phone rang. It was Paul, and he told me that I had better omit the Gloria and the last hymn and take over the rehearsal of the regular choir at 10:15 for he was laid up in bed with a sprained thigh muscle. Well was I excited and scared. It meant that on an hour's notice I had to dig up two postludes, rehearse the choir, and sight-read all of the music for both the 11:00 and 4:00 services. I did! -- things went splendidly, and even one of the canons didn't realize that I had played the service.

Incidentally I may have some surprising news for you concerning my forthcoming military career, but I am sorry, I can't tell all yet. And I didn't see anyone either -- it just fell in my lap as so many good things seem to have done the last two years.

P.S. My eyes were much too bad for the Navy or Air Force. In fact, I can hardly see -- they told me as I began reading the label on a nearby bottle of eye drops, thinking it was the chart twenty feet away.

Monday, June 1, 1942

This week [I will be] packing my things and shipping them home. In the barracks where I shall be stationed there isn't enough room for books.

My certificate will be in the trunk when it arrives, and on it you will see the *cum laude*. The \$200 goes to Milton, and then I am just about all square for my two years of education.

Such a grand experience Friday night was! All the people, and the faculty on stage -- and 3 times the trip to the front of the stage to Mr. Stewart -- the third time he said, "My, you're having quite an evening, aren't you!"

It's summer again, but it doesn't seem that way -- no family, no Joan. I can't even think of how disappointed I was because she didn't come out for my graduation or for this week at least. I had hoped up until the last minute on Friday that she might arrive -- she didn't.

And I had better go eat, for I have four hours of practicing to do tonight.

Monday, June 8, 1942, 1:30 a.m.

I have just finished packing my trunk, and there are several words of advice and caution I must send with the key:

- 1) Open lock quickly and jump back -- then pick contents up off floor.
- 2) Seriously -- there are pictures packed in between the suits and coats; bottles of ink in the towel in the clothes section.

My recital [at the Cathedral] was all right. I mean by that I played all the notes with good effect. But myself -- I felt rotten...headache, cough, sore throat, nose stopped up. Consequently my playing did not have the fire and spirit of sometimes -- but the magnificent organ supplied a lot of that. All in all it was a nice climax to my work at the Cathedral -- and how I hate to leave!

It was swell of all of you to call me today; a nice surprise. Congratulations to Gerry on his graduation -- incidentally I sent him a little token for a present, and if it doesn't arrive, let me know.

Well, I think I shall sleep a little now, for tomorrow should be an exciting day!

Best of love,

Wayne

II -- "SUCH A JOB FOR A SOLDIER"

Private R. Wayne Dirksen
Detachment Med. Dept.
W.R.G.H. Sec.; A.M.C.
Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, June 10, 1942

Hello Dear Family:

Well, already I could write a book -- but I haven't time now. Things that have impressed me:

- 1) The discounts of 20% to 40% soldiers get on everything.
- 2) The freedom I shall have: we have roll-call and calisthenics at 6:00 in the morning, and you can stay off the post from 5:00 p.m. till then every night if you wish. Many of these men are married and live off the post entirely, coming here only to do their 8 hours a day of work. What work I shall do I don't know yet. Today I get shots and shall be issued a uniform.
- 3) The excellent quality of the food and literally all you can eat. I should rapidly gain weight back.
- 4) The immense amount of red tape and carbon paper. I have often heard that an army travels on its stomach. That is a fallacy. An army travels on carbon copies.

Wednesday, June 17, 1942

Suppose I tell you first that I have gained 12 lbs. already. No kidding, I have been eating double meals every time the mess hall opens.

They issued me my uniform last Friday, and there is a lot to it. All in all about 60 separate pieces of equipment and we don't have a pack or guns and gun slings, etc. -- so you can begin to see how much a full infantryman gets.

[June 17, cont.]

A schedule of my day runs like this:

5:40 a.m. First Call (wash, shave, make bed)
6:00-6:15 Roll Call, calisthenics
6:15-8:00 free time (eat breakfast, write letters)
8:00-11:30 Drill
11:30-1:00 free for dinner and anything else
1:00-4:30 lectures on military courtesy, discipline, nursing, first aid,
gas warfare, etc.
4:30-6:00 absolutely free.

Talk about soft! Whee! I am reading and practicing more than I was at the Cathedral, and I also manage to shoot pretty proficient pool about 1 hour a day, and swim for an hour.

Sunday I played my first service in the chapel, and I have 8 weddings this week -- \$40.00. That certainly isn't bad if you ask me. I can put about \$30.00 a month in the bank or in bonds, and no kidding about it.

Sunday evening I went to the first "Watergate" Concert down on the Potomac with the National Symphony Orchestra. I was one of the first enlisted men there in uniform and had a center seat free.

Wednesday, June 24, 1942

Last week [our] platoon of 70 men finished basic training, and we were assigned to duty yesterday. My recruit days are over already. Some of the men went to the medical school, some to laboratories, some are being used in their professions, such as pharmacy, many are on ward duty -- male nursing -- and I am a janitor! I am on duty 8 hours a day at the Chapel [to] scrub, sweep, dust, etc. The catch is that about 3 hours a day will keep the place spick and span, and the rest of the time is mine, as Chaplain Trexler planned, to practice, lay out music, compose, etc. Do I like it? No!!

I don't feel as though I am making any sacrifice at all in the war effort. I have a unique position that hundreds of organists have tried to get -- yet I can honestly say that I have not lifted a finger or asked for a thing. It was thrust upon me suddenly. I couldn't even consider it properly. Mind you, I don't mind the janitor work, for it is easy and I have been around churches long enough to organize it efficiently and get it done easily. It isn't pride -- I just feel...a little parasitic. Maybe I can make the Bombardier force yet -- I think I shall try it again in August.

This chapel is beautiful, though. It is clear up on the corner of this almost a square mile of ground, and stands by itself away from everything with beautiful lawns and a little woods on one side. The organ...is really an exceptional instrument, and a delight to play.

Thursday, July 9, 1942

Virgil is at Bolling Field here in Washington, and is most dissatisfied with the Army, poor guy. I expect to see him this week-end. Paul will be inducted the end of this month, since the Dean's death [Dean Phillips, chaplain of the Senate as well as Dean of the Cathedral] quite noticeably affected his chance of getting a commission. He doesn't seem to be perturbed about the matter, however, but his successor, George Varley, isn't the man Paul is -- as if anyone could be. I heard Paul play a splendid recital Sunday afternoon and I also talked to Canon Smith, acting Dean of the Cathedral. He said a very gratifying thing to me to the effect that I was expected back at the Cathedral when the war is over regardless of who might be there.

I hope, Phyllis, that you had a very prosperous birthday and that you received my night letter all right. I have become so used to remembering your birthday by the sound of firecrackers that I almost forgot it, for I neither saw nor heard a single firecracker on the 4th. In fact (this for the benefit of Republican critics of the administration) the only things closed on the 4th were banks and post offices. Every single government office was open its full 12 hours, and there wasn't even a parade.

[Wayne plans to write to Mrs. Shaw asking to marry Joan, and there follows a lengthy discussion of the financial aspects of marriage, including the news that Jo's father is going to send her to business school in Chicago.]

Well, it requires a lot of thought and sacrifice on your part at not seeing us married -- or is that a sacrifice when you know how long we have planned this? -- or am I crazy? You might talk it over with Mr. and Mrs. Shaw [and] see what they can make of it. At any rate I am looking forward to seeing Joan in a few weeks.

Tuesday, July 21, 1942

Last night I was called on two ambulance trips and there was a blackout, upon which some of us who were on special fire details had to be up and about, so not much sleep all told.

Come to think of it -- that "all told" just about sums up this letter. Outside of swimming and pool, my life is most boring. The eight hours a day I put in for Uncle Sam would consist of "sitting" if I didn't practice. But even practicing is no fun when you feel guilty about it -- and I do feel guilty about practicing on the Army's time. I thought I would like it, too...but didn't count on my extreme conscientiousness nor on the rather militaristic viewpoint which has grown in me since I have been in uniform.

It will be grand to have Joan out for a few days -- I must talk to someone. Judge and Mrs. Shaw wrote me a long explanatory epistle which clarified a lot of things for me -- but then if I wasn't so upset about my job I wouldn't get such wild schemes I guess. Consider the whole marriage aspect closed....

Wednesday, August 12, 1942

After a beautiful 10 days...I saw Joan on board a Pullman last night. She and I had a perfect time and Mrs. Williams was splendid. We did much and saw much together -- concerts, shows, amusement parks. It was a perfect vacation for me.

We also made our plans to be married on the 29th or 30th of December for sure and Joan will give you the details.... I shall want Gerry for my best man, and the wedding will be only for the immediate families and no mistake -- just you and the Shaws and possibly grandmother if she is well and I hope she is.... There is quite a long story behind some of Joan's trip and I shan't set it down here -- I am still "friends" with the Shaws -- (I think!???)

We have started daily morning broadcasts throughout the hospital of organ music. I choose one particular composer, giving a short biography and playing some of his works. Last week it was Schubert, this week it was Bach -- such a job for a soldier -- hell's bells!

Tuesday, August 18, 1942

Was very glad to hear that Gerry has \$120.00 of the old laughing- lettuce laid away, and I suppose he is beginning to get excited about school [college in Des Moines]. Good enough, Gerry, work hard -- and remember!...When they say "Dirksen, report for football," Report!...When they say, "Dirksen, report for ping-pong,"....Report!....If they say "Dirksen -- **D I R K S E N** ! -- report! Your time is not your own, Gerry, and I hope you do as you're told by your coaches, for the sake of your education -- your children -- your children's education -- me -- sis -- ma -- pa -- sis-boom-bah -- rah! -- rah! -- rah! -- (am I slightly mad? am I slightly mad? am I slightly mad? am I slightly mad?)

(A 64.00 dollar questiontheladygetsaboxofforeveryoursanda freetickettonextweeks production-----ding!)

(My! warm, isn't it!)

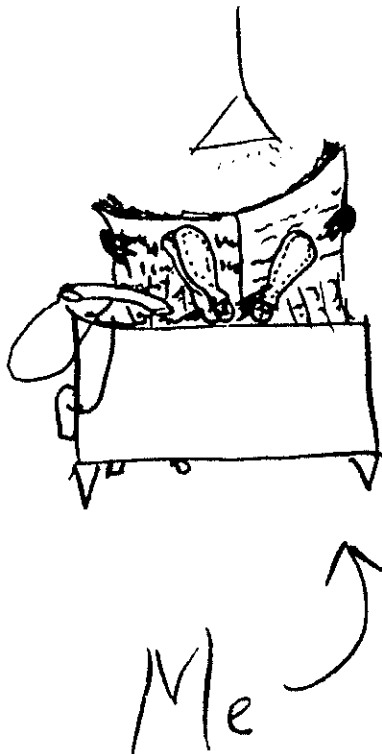
Well, family, I shall sign off now. I broadcast every morning throughout the hospital and the programs are becoming increasingly well received. Perhaps touching the minds and hearts of, say, 300 or 400 people at the start of their monotonous days is some justification for my being here.

Where's Milton? -- How's Grandmother? -- What's Cookin'? --

Dominus vobiscum, et cum spiritum
tuo...threeo...four...

(at best, I am still conscious)

Wayne.



Friday, September 4, 1942

I have received word that Paul is down in Florida greasing airplane motors and it makes me so sick at heart I can't eat. Honestly, he could have been out here -- but no, he must be heroic about it! Anyway I shall do my best to get him transferred through Chaplain Trexler, maybe to this post and my job if necessary. I shall try.

My Cathedral recital [will be] the first Sunday in December...so I have laid out a beautiful program of Christmas music. I shall play 4 recitals in the Chapel in October also, and will have plenty to do. We are now using the organ for several 15 minute broadcasts a day of light and popular music, and I am really becoming known on the post. At last, thank heaven, I feel as if I were doing something with my music that is helping....

Saturday, October 3, 1942

I am dead tired -- Saturdays are full, what with 2 broadcasts to prepare and play, all the stone floors to sweep, marble to scrub, communion sets to prepare, kneelers to brush, woodwork to rub down with oiled rags, altars to set up, and now 2 weddings. The one at 6:00 is over, and another at 8:00, after which I must change Protestant for Catholic trimmings in the large chapel, then practice for my recital tomorrow afternoon. Wow! Even I didn't know it was that bad till I wrote it all down.

Incidentally, I should now be addressed as Private First Class Dirksen, which becomes "Pfc. Richard W. D---" on an envelope, and I now draw 54.00 per month. By Christmas I should make Corporal and maybe Sergeant -- the Chaplain will see to it, I think.

Friday, October 23, 1942

Senator Hamilton Fish's (of New York) secretary is seated out in the chapel at the present time playing the organ. He called Chaplain Trexler and wanted to know if there was any possibility of his playing a service sometime to get some experience, so the Chaplain, knowing I was going to take a couple of Sundays off after Christmas, said "yes", and told him to make arrangements to meet me. We met -- he is about 45 or 50, his name is Stratton, and he is probably a good secretary, having been with Mr. (Honorable) Fish(face) for 18 years. It is either awfully cold in the chapel and Mr. Stratton has mittens on, or the organ wiring has suddenly screwed itself up badly -- but, Buddy, "it ain't the way I heered it." If I think he can learn the service by Christmas I'll let him try, but something tells me the Chaplain will be waiting for me with harsh words -- very harsh indeed.

Thursday, November 5, 1942

Over at the Williams' house last night for an excellent dinner and then some excellent cribbage with Marg (Mrs. Williams' sister) and some equally excellent Gilbert & Sullivan and Handel with Pat. Pat Williams, Chaplain of the *Wasp* (sunk some time ago) has been home on a 30-day leave. He had a harrowing experience: the first evening I saw him about a week ago I said, "Well, Pat, how far did you swim?" "About 3 miles," was all the answer, but later I found out it was an oil-covered, shark-laden 3 miles and that he was lucky -- meaning God still has a use for him on earth.

I had sort of half figured on flying to Chicago on an Army bomber [at] Christmas -- it costs you only a dollar for insurance and your parachute. However, even if I were lucky enough to get passage, I sort of wonder!!! One always sees a couple of privates in those casualty lists of cross-country bomber crashes. Those aren't crew members -- merely a couple of poor soldiers getting a "lift" home or back on furlough.

Well, dear parents, the 7:30 mass is over and soon there will be an organ program. They are popular now, and we get excellent response from these fellows. The other day a first-class fighting man with 4 years in the Marines, 3 in the Navy and 8 in the Army, informed me when I griped about my passive position here: "Dirksen -- you aren't trained to yell and swear down a platoon of 50 raw recruits. You wouldn't be -- ever, for you aren't put together that way. You would lose your patience and blow your top at the dumb monkeys in 5 minutes rather than pound it into their skulls. You know morale, music, a little religion, churches -- you're doin' a great job here -- you stick to your racket; let me have mine." It made me feel swell; for a day I walked on air.

At the present, however, I am treading on the heels of Time, who is marching inexorably ahead of me, telling me that in 1/2 hour I have a program to play, and first I must prepare it. So now, goodbye.

all my love,

Wayne

Many happy birthdays to Mother! and not many Christmas presents for anybody -- save the dough for bonds and stamps!

Wednesday, November 11, 1942

A big [American] Legion service was just held in the chapel, and it went very smoothly. The Chaplain was particularly pleased with my choir, and the boys did do a swell job.

You know, it tickles me the way the Army does things. I rather imagine, for instance, that last week some time General Marietta, Commanding General of the Post, got to thinking over the Armistice Day service, and it struck him that there should be more soldiers in the Chapel to impress the Legionnaires and civilians than would go of our own accord. On Monday of this week, the regular inspection list was posted on the bulletin board, which means the men were to be spick and span in full uniform and "fallin" behind the main barracks for Inspection and (according to the orders) Special Instruction.

So...100 men fall in, are inspected, and then marched to the chapel, much to their surprise, for "Special Instruction" consisting of an Armistice Day service. Oh, it's wonderful what a dictator can do, be he political or military. Somehow I get a kick out of it...all the guys wondering for three days what in #%\$&*!! "Special Instruction" is, and then marched to church.

Friday, November 30, 1942

The recital at the Cathedral is this coming Sunday afternoon, and I still have a lot of work to do on it unfortunately. The rest of the week will be devoted to that, and then Christmas to prepare for. I sincerely regret not having written more often these past weeks, but I have been working at my old clip. Thank Heaven for the Army mess, however, I am not losing weight, but a lot of sleep, what with rising at 5:45 every morning. *Every morning!*

Dad's and Phyllis' and Mother's letters all came and were all duly acknowledged. If Phyllis knew how popular she is in the barracks she would write oftener. Best of love to Grandmother -- and I shall write her right after the recital is off my mind. We -- Joan and I -- expect to move into her apartment late Saturday night or sometime Sunday, January 9th or 10th. We will be married on the 7th, definitely, and more power to us, long may we live, love, produce cannon-fodder for future wars, pay taxes, curse the administration, etc.

I'm sorry! I am really not that cynical -- just tired and with so much work to do that can seemingly have no connection with winning a war, yet must be done I guess....

Saturday, December 26, 1942

I have so many things to tell you -- the Christmas program went splendidly, and I have made quite a name for myself on the Post. I shan't try to describe it to you now, for I shall see all of you whom I love so dearly soon -- then I can talk.

The grief in my heart [at Jo's mother's death] has been matched in this past week only in the pride I have in Joan -- a wonderful, choking, intense pride in the woman I am to marry -- and can you doubt she is a woman?

As to staying in Freeport -- we shall, but please, if you can, lie a bit for us. No one need know we are in the city at all if you are careful -- we would appreciate it so much. I already have plans well underway for moving here and we shall be all set when the time comes.

Joan and I will be home Tuesday on the "Corny Limited" and she will probably stay at our house -- at least I hope she will. As far as I know we will be married on the 7th of January, moving into Grandmother's place immediately -- and Dad, you, not Gerry, are to be the best man. I shall have all the papers with me and we shall get the license on the 6th.

Now it is late, and so I shall go to bed. The past week I have worked 16-18 hours a day and I am tired.

My love and admiration for both of you cannot be here written-it is far too great!

your son,

Wayne

III -- MARRIAGE, MOVES, AND MOTHERHOOD

Thursday, February 4, 1943

Dear Parents:

It is not at all remarkable or unusual, but the human mind drops back into its accustomed routine pretty rapidly...which is a round-about way of saying that it seems ages since I was home. I have been a little lax about writing primarily because there hasn't been a single incident worth writing about. Weddings, services, broadcasts, sweeping -- those comprise my work, which is not arduous enough, so I practice and do a little composing now and then.

On the Army in general the only comment is that things are being run in a hell-of-a-hard way around here these days. Discipline is getting more and more strict and I am afraid that "there'll be no promotion this side of the ocean" as the song goes. Perhaps I am just imagining things, but I think I swapped corporal's stripes for a 15-day furlough. If so, it was an excellent bargain.

Sunday, February 21, 1943

This week past has been quiet, punctuated only by Joan's letters and "capitalized" by an epistle from Gerry breaking some bad news. I answered his letter with a long and very straight-from-the-shoulder letter -- telling him...not to transfer to Physical Ed. School! He has too good a head on him for business management to mess around as a high school coach. If he gets the right kind of an education and the polish in his conversation and grammar, with his social poise and good-natured likableness plus the keen sense of position and gambling instinct, he could become an executive that would make him more cash in a year than I'll make in a lifetime. Perhaps I'm wrong, but that is essentially what I told him.

Last evening Marg and I went to see a hockey game between the Providence Rhode Island Reds and the Washington Ulines at **ULINE'S ICE ARENA**, a very beautiful and frigid place. I was thrilled to death with it and quite amused at the list of major, minor, and misconduct penalties -- the first a 2-minute penalty, the second a 5-minute penalty, and the third ejection from the game. Under the first group came everything up to knocking a player unconscious, and if the unfortunate incident occurred that one player killed another by body-checking, stick-slamming, or ramming a skate in his head, the player accidentally(?) committing the crime is penalized 5 minutes. That took care of murder. The crowning penalty...for which a player is thrown out of the game, is (of all the horrible dirty things...) "using foul or abusive language in reference to an official." Strict, aren't they.

Monday, March 8, 1943

It was a great surprise and pleasure this last week-end past to have seen Dad Shaw again, and I do think he was looking a little better than when I saw him at Christmas.... We spent Saturday evening together, and then he did me the honor of making the long trip out to the Post merely to see what sort of place I hang out in.

I have made no move toward getting an apartment so far, for I think it will be better to let Jo stay at the Williams' for a while until she gets a job....

Thursday, March 18, 1943

Dear Dad:

Here is a letter to you and since it will probably be the last before your birthday, I wish you a happy one.

From the general tone of your letters you must be working night and day and probably will be before Easter at least. I am surprised that you are still able to get parts, but as long as you can there is no reason for not using them. Incidentally, have you had to register with the War Manpower Commission yet?

Out here things are getting plenty tough, and by that I mean that Washington hasn't seen any potatoes, cabbage, or beef for about a month. The gas ration of A cards has been sliced in two and it looks like a long summer.

Jo and I have been Invited -- I said invited -- to stay at the Williams' house until such time as we may be able to get a nice apartment and until Jo gets a position. Although the housing situation is pretty tough here in the city, there is quite a big turnover and it will be possible to find exactly what we are looking for in due time. The wedding [business] is really going to be something, and I now have a weekly pupil at \$5.00 per lesson, and that comes to twenty a month. Add to that my playing for the Jewish services, which comes to another twenty a month, and the twenty to forty a month for weddings and such...I am making much better than a Staff Sergeant, except that I don't have the stripes on my sleeve.

Paul Callaway was home on furlough the past week and although I talked to him on the phone I didn't get a chance to see him. He is at last going to the Army Band School where he will graduate in three months with a Warrant Officer's rating and probably take over the conducting of a band at some post here or abroad.

from Jo, at new apartment
1856 Ingleside Terrace

Friday, March 26, 1943

Dear Maud --

Finally I have time to write - haven't had a chance to catch my breath.

Well - I have a job - and we have an apartment. First - the job is with the United States Army Motion Picture Service - it's very interesting work - wonderful salary - also a 48 hour week - which means I have to work from 8:15 to 5 and all day on Saturday.

Wayne is fine - but I doubt that he'll ever get around to writing. He's at the post tonight - he's had to work late several nights this week - and get up at 6 - but it doesn't seem to bother him. Needless to say we're both terribly happy! Oh yes - Wayne was quite taken aback at my news - but after the first shock he was really happy about it - as I am.

Do write soon, and give everyone my love - keeping a great deal for yourself!

Friday, April 2, 1943

Dear Folks:

I am writing for both of us tonight - Wayne is at the post.

Both of us are terribly busy - we get up at 6:30 every morning, get breakfast and leave the house at exactly 7:33. We walk up to 16th Street (3 blocks) and take buses in different directions. I get home around 5:30 in the evening, and Wayne gets home around six.

This working 8 hours a day every day is quite something - but after all, for \$145 a month I should kick! That ain't hay! All that meat you lucky people have sounds wonderful - we're feeling very affluent because we're going to have two little lamb chops Sunday noon!

I'm glad the ingenuity of the Dirksens en masse is getting together to cook up names for the prospective littlest of the clan. Thus far it has merely been called "it" - but it will eventually be called "Wendy" - anyone want to bet on that?

The cherry blossoms are due to be in full bloom Sunday but I doubt we'll have time to get out to see them. I'm beginning to believe that people who live in Washington never see the things people come for miles to see - thus far I've had one fleeting glimpse of the Washington Monument.

[But] this is a wonderful town - not a *Tribune* in sight! Gosh it's a relief to get in with a town full of Democrats - God's people!

Thursday, April 29, 1943

(from Jo)

At last I have a minute to write....I've been pretty busy lately and when I get home at night all I'm good for is to beat Wayne a game or two of cribbage and go to bed.

I went to the service at the Cathedral [Easter] Sunday...it was very lovely. However, I was disappointed in the choir, which is under the direction of Mr. Varley now and isn't anywhere as good as it was when Paul Callaway was there. The service was beautiful though. They had a brass quartet for one of the numbers and drums for the processional. It was very effective, and, of course, the Cathedral looked absolutely gorgeous.

My job is coming along fine and I've been feeling much better than I did a while back. I don't get as tired as I did - guess I'm beginning to get used to it. I'm [starting] to gain some weight and am losing to some extent that 24-inch waist line. Wayne (the fiend) gets a big kick out of it and says I was too proud of being thin anyway, and I look much better this way...like a Reubens painting according to him.

Sunday, May 23, 1943

(from Jo)

Peg was here for a few days interviewing with the Red Cross for a job abroad. We won't know whether she is accepted 'till next week [but] it looks as though she will be, which means she may be heading for England or somewhere this summer.

Not to be outdone by you people we too have acquired a cat. We aren't on speaking terms with it yet, but we're trying to lure it into our apartment by means of dishes of milk on the window ledge. It's a big evil-looking black and white job, and thus far all it's done is sit outside the window and yowl. It has every dog in the block terrified. We think Mehitabel is a good name for it since we have doubts as to the moral purity of its standards.

We also have a mouse which we call "Mouse". It's a little jerk - very crafty, hungry, and fresh - when Wayne isn't here it talks to me. It has wicked designs on our sugar ration, and has already consumed about half a box of cornstarch.

Friday, June 11, 1943

(from Wayne)

[After an apology for not writing more frequently comes the following:]

I have been fairly busy and Jo is always busy for she works very hard at her job....a little bit too hard at times I think, and I am very glad that she is quitting this weekend. We shall probably have to move somewhere out closer to the hospital in the near future and that will mean a chore, but there is no hurry about it.

Bishop Freeman of the Washington diocese and the Cathedral died on Saturday...and there will be a big funeral this afternoon. Paul is going to play for it (he is over at the Fort Meyer Band School and will graduate in July).... I have also taken over the job as accompanist for the Cathedral Choral Society for the summer, and I will get a great deal of pleasure working with Paul again and on the *B Minor Mass*.

Tuesday, June 28, 1943

(from Wayne)

[Judge Shaw in town on "official business" - appointed by FDR to chair a committee on settling the railroad strike. It has been over 90 degrees for seventeen days straight.]

Sunday afternoon after the four of us had a fine dinner we went back to the air-conditioned room at the Statler where the Judge was staying and played some bridge and talked. The result was that for four hours I was in a very nice cool place and that when I finally stepped out on to the street I caught a beautiful cold. Yesterday I went on sick call for I had a bad sore throat and felt rotten. The Captain asked me what was the matter and so I told him that I was a victim of modern science and invention in that I had caught a bad cold as the result of air- conditioning unconditioning me to Washington's outside temperature.... Aha, he said, and that will teach you to stay out of those dens of iniquity. Whereupon he threw me into a chair, and for the first time in my life I had my throat swabbed with black creosote and road tar. The doctor...picked a mop up out of a bucket of throat swab. Taking it in both hands and requesting six orderlies to hold me, he stood over me and vigorously worked it up and down in my throat like plunging out a toilet. The only thing out of the ordinary occurred when the mop came off the handle and he was forced to stick his arm down up to the elbow to retrieve it. Finishing the job, he cheerily exclaimed that the treatment would fix me up and that I wouldn't be back for more -- boogie-woogie, he was dead right! I don't go back any more for throat swabbing.

There are only two things ever the matter with enlisted men: either they have a sore throat or they have athlete's foot. If they have a sore throat they paint their throat with iodine and if they have athlete's foot they paint their feet with iodine. Anyone claiming to have anything else is thrown in the guardhouse for impersonating an officer.

Thursday, August 5, 1943

Dear Parents:

Well, at last the typewriter is fixed, and at the present time I am sitting in the chapel writing this letter to you and more or less killing time until six o'clock (it is now four-thirty) [when] I must go over to 7049 Eastern Ave, Takoma Park Md. and make a down payment on the rent of our new apartment. The apartment should prove much more satisfactory than the one we are in now, for it has a private bathroom, and that is indispensable with a baby around.

Things in Washington are still as hectic as ever and prices of fresh garden stuff make me wistfully appreciate those days when I could go out in the garden and eat tomatoes whole and fresh. You would be amazed at what a moderate food bill for two people runs to, even with me eating the big meal of the day at the post. On an average I bet that Jo and I spend half as much again for groceries as all of you put together.

It can't be helped however -- just as standing in line for half-an-hour to see a show can't be helped, for that is what we did last night. Every once in a while I get in sort of a demented condition which makes me think that I want to see a moving picture. I always regret it bitterly afterward, but at the time the only thing that I want to do is go to see a moving picture, so last evening Jo and I went to one of the downtown theatres to see "Dunbarry was a Lady", starring Red Skelton. Frankly, it stinks, not just in black and white does it stink, it stinks in technicolor. There is however a catch to this statement in the fact that a comedian by the name of Zero Mostel is in the picture, and within five minutes of the opening of the picture, he does a takeoff on Charles Boyer that is a scream. I can honestly say that I have never in all my life seen anything funnier on the screen....

Thursday, August 26, 1943

(from Jo)

We've been quite social late -- as Wayne says we've out-Virgiled Virgil by mixing with the elite of the town. We spent Sunday afternoon at Dumbarton Oaks, [the] home of Ambassador and Mrs. Bliss. A friend of Wayne's, one Doda Conrad, is practically an adopted son of theirs, so Sunday we had him over for dinner and then went with him to see the place.... The house is perfectly beautiful, of course, but I was more impressed with the grounds.... Wayne went swimming in the swimming pool, but didn't have much fun because he couldn't play rough. There were several people in the pool and there was no telling whether or not the skinny gentleman in the purple trunks paddling around wasn't maybe the British Ambassador when he had his clothes on. One particularly unprepossessing individual crawled out of the pool and emerged later resplendent in the Navy whites of a Commander.

It's been ghastly hot lately...a little shower tonight sort of broke the heat temporarily, but, gosh, what I wouldn't give to have it late October! Maud, the curtains that I've been struggling with have been packed away to wait your magic touch. I can't cope with them, and I'm afraid of ruining the material I have. So you'll have something to do when you get here (5 minute intermission for big laugh. I should change that "something" to "plenty".)

There has been a big reversal on the subject of girl's names. Wayne has decided he doesn't like Wendy...mainly because Daddy insists on calling it "Windy". I like the name Jennifer, but Wayne says Kerlin had a hearse named Jennifer once. That doesn't bother me though, and since my grandmother's name is Jenny I think it would be nice. As for boy's names, we are judiciously weighing the respective merits of Richard and Gerry. Maud...I ought to warn you that Wayne has unconditionally rejected Pamela...says it sounds like a heroine in a magazine serial...so there goes your dream of a grand-daughter named Pam until Gerry or Phyllis sees fit to go into the matter.

P.S. - Our phone number is Shepherd 4081.

(from Wayne)

The radio room has turned into a studio and so one of the projects that I have been working on for over a year has at last materialized -- slow to be sure. We have record turntables and a soundproof room, and we are getting a lot of records in order that we may put on our own programs every morning [when] the airwaves are usually cluttered up with soap operas. The patients have the wardboys phone in their requests and we play them immediately. We have been running such programs for the past two mornings and I have been doing the whole show with all of the chatter that Norman Ross used to do plus some more or less uncensored nonsense of my own. No, we aren't censored, so we have a little more license than the average radio station, but of course things must be kept in fairly good taste because of the women who are patients and listening in also. However, it is nice to have the feeling that if a spur-of-the-moment remark goes out that you won't be immediately cut off the air and ostracized from society for the rest of your life.

Wednesday, October 6, 1943

(from Jo)

Well, we're still sitting around and waiting...I hope I can oblige and have the baby at a time convenient both for Maud and Daddy! Daddy met the President the other day...he was much impressed with him, naturally, and quite proud of himself for having got into the White House! He and I both went to Wayne's recital Monday night. Virgil was there and brought us home afterwards. He's quite a guy...I don't know how he does it, but he manages to convey the impression that you and your affairs are the most important thing in the world to him! Funny thing is that while he's talking to you they *are*.

Sunday noon Daddy is taking us to the Toll House...or perhaps I should say we're holding him up for it, since the price you have to pay is amazing.

Maud, even though you can't buy a ticket to Silver Spring, you can get off there. So find out what time your train gets in and plan to get off there and Wayne will meet you. It's much closer than Union Station and will save you a lot of trouble, since that station is an absolute mess at all hours of the day. We'll be *mighty* glad to see you!

Friday, November 11, 1943

Dear Mother, Dad, Phyllis, Grandmother, and Gertie:

It is Friday evening, the day after Mother departed, and believe me when I say we miss her...but how. I must add that Richard in particular has missed her in that he has had to not too graciously put up with two pairs of rather amateurish hands holding him and caring for him.

Dearest Mom, I can't begin to thank you for all of the work you put in out here. It must have been a labor of love, for no three people could have accomplished the things you did during the short time you were here....

(from Jo)

Maude, I couldn't say much when you left yesterday, mainly because for some reason I found it very difficult to talk. It isn't possible to thank you for everything you did for us, you did so much! Rick and I have really missed you today...but he's been a good boy, and by the way, he weighed 7 3/4 pounds this morning. We really had a time last night -the furnace was still off and the house was freezing cold. We finally ended up with Rick in bed with us to keep him warm, and did he love it!

I must go to bed and get a few hours of that precious and wonderful stuff called sleep....

Sunday, December 26, 1943

(from Wayne)

I am seated in front of a lovely fire in my living room at the present time, and writing this to you in the spirit of Christmas. Perhaps I shall say a few things that may make you newly homesick, Gerry, and if I do...it won't hurt you any. I may describe things that will make you feel a little lonely and deserted, Mother and Dad, but after all you aren't...you have been very close to me this Christmas and I have a thousand memories of other Christmases which enabled me to enjoy this one the more. Grandmother, I hope that you had a merry Christmas; and you should have, for after all you had your son with you. Millions of parents over the country lacked that this year. Joan and I??? Well, we had a very happy Christmas. Perhaps it lacked a few things, but we are smart enough not to try and analyze them. We are very grateful to God for having given it to us.

What did it mean? Well, perhaps I could do better by starting with the beginning, namely the day before Christmas.

[There follows a lengthy description of Christmas activities at the Chapel: special radio broadcasts; a carol sing with 150 singers from DC churches, and of course a big Christmas Eve service. He was given Christmas Day completely off duty.]

Christmas morning I went to bed again at nine after having been up with Rick since seven, keeping him occupied and giving him orange juice in order that Jo could get a little sleep. When I awoke, Martha was busy in the kitchen, for this was the day that we assumed the responsibilities of Host and Hostess for a Christmas dinner. Martha, Jack and Zadie; John and Bill and Rose, Martha's brother, sister and brother-in-law from Baltimore. We had two turkeys, tons of dressing, sweet potato souffle, whipped white potatoes, cranberry sauce and consomme, lemon pie, coffee and salad. We started to eat at three, and to wash the dishes at five. At six-thirty we all said goodbye and they went next door and we went to bed. Rick behaved himself beautifully and I read out loud to Jo for a while and then we went to sleep. It was Saturday evening, the 25th of December, and the 26th was to be Rick's christening day.

Today is the 26th of December, and it wasn't Rick's christening day. Instead it was a nasty flu and ice-ridden day which saw the streets a glaze of ice and me slipping to the chapel at nine-thirty to find no one there. At ten-thirty there were twenty, counting the choir, and so we had an abbreviated service and I was told that I could have the rest of the day off.

[December 26, con't]

Every good book has an epilogue, and I see no reason why a good letter should not have an epilogue. Therefore....

EPILOGUE

Our Christmas tree is beautiful, standing about seven feet tall and with many lights and decorations. The mantel of the fireplace has greens on it and a string of blue lights behind the greens. On the front door is the most beautiful Christmas wreath in the block, for Jo made it herself out of greens from our evergreen in the front yard. A fire burns at my feet here in the fireplace, and presents look out from under the branches of the tree. Rick is getting his last feeding until three in the morning.... And now back to the second paragraph of this letter, and to clear up what it all did mean.

To me it meant that traditions were started for my own home and family. The meaning of "being married" was never so clearly before me. To Jo, it meant that if the next Christmas should find us separated, she will have beautiful memories of Christmas, and the vision of future ones to match it. To Rick, it meant being more or less shut away from all the company all day in order that he might not catch the various colds we had in the house. To all of us it meant a home, friends, and the start of some traditions for a new branch of the Dirksen family. And we are very humble and grateful to all of you, for if it had not been for you, we couldn't have achieved it, now could we? Again Jo and I send all of our love, and Rick sends his regrets that he still is not named, but much love for all the rest of you, especially his grandmother, whom he greatly misses, and the rest of you whom he would like very much to see one of these days.

love,

Wayne

APPENDIX

The Walter Reed Radio Station

WRGH, which still broadcasts today, was first installed as a form of entertainment for the many wounded that filled the hospital during the First World War. A gift from theatrical producer S.L. Rothafel, the original system consisted of just a headphone jack by each bed.

When Private Dirksen and his cronies Sergeant Egeland and Corporal Bradley began their work the system was inoperative, though most of the hardware was in place. They got permission to rebuild, and began scrounging parts and wire from many improbable places, including a pinball machine repair shop in downtown DC. Soon they were able to start broadcasting short concerts of organ music (letter of August 12), but that was just the beginning. Soon they had turntables, a soundproof studio, master control board, and two outside channels to choose from.

Obtaining records was very difficult as shellac and resin were strictly rationed war materials -- you had to turn in an old record to receive a new one. But the response to the plea for old records in the New York Times article reprinted below was overwhelming. They received literally tons of them, and quickly built a library of 2-3000 albums.

The end of Wayne's tenure with the station has become a family legend. For the record, here is the story:

1944 was an election year, Roosevelt running for his fourth term against Thomas Dewey. Then, as now, the candidates were to receive equal amounts of media time, but Roosevelt refused to campaign as the war was in full cry. Speeches by either candidate were therefore hard to come by, but on Monday, October 5, at 10 p.m. Dewey was scheduled give one on CBS. Unfortunately there was to be a prize fight at the same time on NBC. The majority of the officers, being Republicans, wanted to hear Dewey's speech; the enlisted men, being soldiers, wanted to hear the fight.

Now bearing in mind that WRGH had only two channels available; and that after 5 p.m. the master control switch in the studio determined what single channel was heard throughout the hospital, the station operatives had a decision to make. They opted (privately) for the fight. So at 10 p.m. that night it was necessary that the person on duty (Cpl. Bradley) turn the switch from CBS to the fight on NBC. For whatever reason, he missed it. Now that would have been fine: the officers would happily have listened to Dewey, and the enlisted men, grumbling, would have gone to sleep. But upon discovering his mistake, some 5 minutes into the speech, he did switch to the fight, thus cutting off a presidential candidate's rhetoric in mid-flight.

The repercussions were swift. Dad was enjoying a quiet evening at home when the call came at 10:15 to report to the base IMMEDIATELY, and we can surmise that the next few hours were singularly unpleasant. It was also no surprise that his orders to report to infantry basic training at Fort Barkley, Texas, came three days later. Wayne says now that the war was escalating so fast that he would have been called up sooner or later anyway, but this incident, which had received media attention by this time, was doubtless no hinderance to that.

By the end of the month Maudie had come out to help Jo close up the apartment, and with one-year-old Rick returned to Freeport to await the end of the war.

The article below is reprinted from the *New York Times Magazine* of Sunday, December 5, 1943.

'GOOD LISTENING, QUICK RECOVERY'

by Meyer Berger

The wards of Walter Reed General Hospital are astir with clipped metallic sounds. Nurses and orderlies are busy at the beds with portable wash basins. Clear morning sunlight bends golden bars across the cots. The wounded lie back in their pillows, wounded from Salerno, New Guinea, Africa, Sicily, and only their eyes move as they take in the action about them.

At first you don't notice, but their attention is somewhere out of this room. Some just stare at the ceiling, out of this world. You'd be apt to think, maybe, that they're reliving in memory the hour when Nazi land mines or Japanese shrapnel got them, that the horror of battle has put that vacant stare in their eyes. It isn't that at all.

Down in the basement in a room hardly 15 by 20, where the walls are perforated with white soundproof board, a handful of enlisted men run an extraordinary sound system. From this room, through some 2000 headsets, they pour music into the ears of the wounded kids just back from fighting fronts. The wounded weave dream stuff out of it. That's why they stare so.

The wounded hear songs they want to hear. They tell the nurses their requests, the nurses go to the ward telephone and "Eggie's" basement gang puts the numbers on the record player. This morning it's "Wait for Me, Mary," "Paper Doll," "I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes," "Put Your Arms Around Me," "Suwanee River," "Mexicali Rose," "Indian Love Call," and for some wounded jive kid, "Pistol-Packin' Mama."

Private Wayne Dirksen, who hails from Freeport, Ill. where he was choirmaster and organist, murmurs little asides in to the mike between numbers: little reassuring phrases in soldier language, cheerful bits of harmless gossip, cracks about the weather, the nurses, the Wacs, anything that comes to mind, and upstairs the wounded grin.

This personal service the wounded seem to love. It has been a long time since they could ask for a song and have it served up merely for the asking. They've had to draw it from memory in cramped, muddy foxholes, and it's difficult to carry a tune in your head when machine guns and dive bombers drive it out with their terrific obbligato. It's swell just to lie back, effortless, and hear sweet music.

They have "Eggie" to thank for it, and Corp. John A. Wells, Corp. Andy Hricak, Pfc. Carl Griggs and Corp. Bob Moore. "Eggie" is Sgt. Gabriel Robert Egeland, a blond, quiet lad who ran a radio repair shop in Sturgeon Bay, Wis. Wells, fresh-faced, talks with a Southern drawl. He was with the telephone company in Washington, repairman and on the test desk, where he received his basic communications training in their plant schools. Moore, dark and hollow-

cheeked, was in radio repair in Adel, Iowa. He was wounded at Manila and on Attu. Shrapnel both times. Griggs studied radio engineering at the University of North Carolina before induction into the Army.

Walter Reed had the sound system installed almost twenty years ago, partly through a gift from the late S.L. Rothafel, the "Roxy" who ran the Capitol in New York. It was rather primitive, judged by current radio standards. It piped only one radio broadcast at a time and had no flexibility. Its first beneficiaries were the wounded of World War One, who took great comfort from it in their day.

Over two years ago, though, Eggie and his group took the system over, and without a cent of government money, which is extraordinary in itself, they took the system apart. They rewired it so that it serves a choice of radio or direct recorded programs to the wounded in their beds, mess halls, and recreation rooms, and makes recordings right on the premises. They've built up the record library too, and they have their own workshop.

Right now, Eggie figures it would cost around \$20,000, perhaps even more, including labor, to replace the unit. He and his crew have conjured the whole system out of nothing but salvage -- salvaged old house radio sets, salvaged wire, salvaged knobs and dials, salvaged telephone jacks, terminal strips, made-over plugs and junk-heap lighting units. A certain amount of salvage also figures even in their recording blanks.

The basement gang started the re-vamping job back in March, 1941. Corporal Wells got permission from officials in Washington's Telephone Company to strip wire and small parts from old discarded panels and switchboards. Eggie knew a guy in the pin-ball and slot machine racket, who was willing - even eager - to let Eggie and his men take all the knobs, wire and condensers they could rip out of old pool-hall and drug-store pinball units.

With these materials, and by countless hours in the labyrinths under Walter Reed where the twenty miles of wire sprawl through conduits, Eggie and his soldier mechanics worked the miraculous change. They remodelled the amplifiers and installed an automatic trouble-shooter that betrays the slightest break or short by winking red lights on the high panel board in the basement. They have a recorder and are proud when important people come to their basement to use it. Services for all the principal faiths are held in the post chapel and broadcast through the hospital radio.

Pfc. Dirksen, a born announcer with just the proper amount of corn in his mike feed, handles the purchase of new records. Right now he's having a bit of trouble, because

when he buys records wholesale he must turn in cracked or broken records equal in weight to the amount he buys. If you have any around, incidentally, you might send them to him or Eggie, care of the Radio Room, Walter Reed Main Hospital. Money for new records comes out of the Chaplain's Fund.

The record library has about 1,000 disks in it at the moment. It has grown slowly, but selection has been careful, and is based entirely on the wishes of the wounded. It is predominantly popular, but there's enough standard and classical stuff to meet all demands.

Corp. Leslie C. Bradley, who hails from St. Louis, is in the radio room daily from 2:30 to 11 p.m. After 5 p.m. he alone operates the system and must not only keep the programs interesting but also make spot repairs.

The radio headsets used by the wounded are the ones that Roxy gave, and in addition the basement gang has wired into some of the wards and into the larger assembly rooms some fifteen or sixteen loudspeakers, some of them saved from the scrap heap. Neuro-psychiatric cases sometimes bang their headsets around, but Eggie's gang patiently restores the sets. The worst cases don't use headsets. They get their music over loudspeakers.

The basement crew has fixed switches at every cot, so that the wounded may choose their radio programs. Half the wounded in a given ward may, for example, want to get the football or baseball game, and the other half may want jive, or the news. Each man has his choice, and since the sound pipes in through headphones, men of dissimilar tastes at adjoining cots do not disturb one another.

Someone in Eggie's troupe starts the day's programs at 7:30 a.m. Two of the best general programs are picked out

of the air, and the wounded can have either. By unanimous vote they turned thumbs down on sudsy stuff, the "schmaltzy" soap-opera interval, generally from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. A great many find the chaplain's fifteen-minute Scripture readings soothing.

The basement serves forty wards all told from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. The neuro-psychiatric cases are cut out of the circuits at 9 p.m. Pfc Dirksen keeps comparing the wounded's requests with the "Hit Parade" and finds they just about keep pace. The overseas kids are a little while catching onto the new tunes, when they're fresh off the hospital ships, but pretty soon they're asking for the same numbers as civilian hep cats.

Wherever possible the names of bed-ridden kids who ask for specific programs are worked in. Usually these boys are lonely, and hearing their own names over the system seems to have therapeutic value.

Eventually, if he can wangle the supplies and the necessary room, Eggie would like to build an improved studio. He dreams about the time when he may be able to offer the wounded kids a service whereby they may record their voices, in speech and in song, if they wish, to send to their kin and to the girls back home. He thinks they'd like something like that, and dreams of the day when people like Vincent Lopez and other soldier favorites may come to Walter Reed's basement to sing and play for the wounded, and make recordings.

Pfc Dirksen's signing-off message, incidentally, is characteristic of the warm personal service that's dished out by Eggie's basement gang. It always closes with, "Good listening, guys, and quick recovery."