

So long, Bill-----

Your number is up. You are going to the army. There is a job of serious, nasty, uncivilized business to be taken care of and you have been assigned a part in it.

The task is unpleasant, repulsive. The assignment is different to anything that you had planned. Yet, it is a privilege as well as a responsibility. For only Americans--the pick of the nation's manhood--are eligible to march with Uncle Sam's armed citizenry and participate in this grim game of war.

There is, now, but one thing to do. Make the most of it. Be a soldier in every sense of the word.

I told you, as a little curly-headed boy, when you started to school, that I wanted you to endeavor always to be the best in your classes. I had no idea that you would achieve that distinction. I had not been that calibre of student before you. But that kind of aiming never has a bad effect on the score.

Then, when you grew up and started thinking of your first job, I told you that, even though you were employed at nothing more important than ditch-digging, I wanted you to try to be the best ditch-digger on the job. I had no idea that you would achieve such top-rank standing in your chosen vocation. I had not. But ambition and the will to get ahead never kept anybody down.

Now, as you go with millions of other sons from millions of other American homes, I want you to put all that you have into this business of soldiering. It matters not whether you ever wear bars or stars if you are man enough to be a good soldier. And being a good soldier means more than drilling and marching and fighting--and dying.

It means living--in a man's world--as a man should live.

There is an inclination on the part of too many men, once they are in the army--away from the influences of home and family and reputation--to cut loose, go the gaits. There is in the army, as in civilian life, every type of manhood and every social strata. Every man is on his own. The choice is yours.

Men, like water, ultimately seek their own level--in the army as elsewhere. Don't lower your standards, Bill.

Then, there is the matter of soldiering. The fellows who have difficulty with army life are those who refuse to adjust themselves to the rigid discipline that, although stern and harsh, is as necessary as are guns and tanks and planes. The "yes, sir" men are those who get along in the army.

To attempt to buck the game is folly. The army is bigger than any man in it. Failure to become a working part of it is the worst mistake any soldier can make. Army life is not easy. To cultivate a mental feeling of resentment and self pity can only make it more difficult. That is true of any station in life.

So, I hope Bill, that you will be able to accept your lot in this grim business as just another chapter in life's exacting school of experience and endeavor to get out of it something worth while; something that will help in the years ahead.

You can always find that something if you search for it. Never cease searching.

I am saying these things to you--not because you are different to the millions of other young men who have gone and are going out to engage in this world contest in death--but because you are of my own flesh and blood.

Because, man though you are, you will ever be that little boy of mine.

The uniform that will shortly be issued to you stands for the high and noble principles upon which this nation was founded and has since existed--principles that, to much of the rest of the world, are unknown. It stands for freedom among men and nations; the right to live and the will to let live. It stands for humanity, civilization, Christianity.

It has never gone to war except in defense of the principles for which it stands. It has never gone on a rampage of conquest or oppression. That uniform, Bill, is the hope of Old Glory and 130 million Americans. It is the hope of civilization. Wear it with pride.

I remember well that day, almost 24 years ago, when, while sitting in a lecture period at Camp Gordon, I was handed a telegram that announced that you had made me a father. I was the soldier, then, You were the war baby.

I remember the day, four months later, when I gazed for the first time upon your face. I remember every day of your life since that time. I shall watch--and pray--every anxious day for your safe return.

When you have a son of your own some day, as I hope you shall, you will know what I mean. I hope your going to the army will be more successful in freeing your sons from the scourge of war than was mine for you.

There are two things that I want to give you, Bill, as you go to join other fathers' sons in this business of killing, from which God alone knows whether you will return.

Both went with me to the army 25 years ago.

One is a khaki-covered textbook on military methods and soldiery. Peruse its pages and endeavor to master the art of being a good soldier. It may not bring you promotions and high honors for there are in the army, after all, more mere men than anything else. But it will bring to you the satisfaction of doing well whatever you do. It will help you to learn more quickly what is expected of a good soldier.

The other, also khaki-covered is a Bible. Don't feel that to take it is being sissy. There will no doubt be times when just to hold it in your hand will bring a mysterious comfort. I confess that I read it but little while I was in uniform. Yet there were times when it's nearness--the knowledge that it had stood the test of all time and countless other wars--seemed to sort of satisfy my longing for you and Mom--lull my homesickness for all the peaceful ways of life that had been disrupted by war.

Take them Bill, and use them. Make the most of the army and come back a better man than when you left. There is, you know, a personal as well as a national victory to be won.

It seems a bit silly, doesn't it, to send you away with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other? The gun to kill. The Bible: "Thou Shalt Not." There is no explanation except that the gun appears for the present to be necessary to our national security. The bible has ever been our hope of eternal security.

Learn to use the gun, Bill, but rely, finally, upon the Bible.

And may the Good Lord--although I confess it is a big assignment--watch over and keep you, and those who go with you as the guardians of American freedom, until the day--and may He speed the day--when we shall thank God for peace and a safe homecoming.

So long, Bill.