

Meets and Chats With Ross Endicott, Also of Lindsay —Receives Soldier's Bless- ing in the Vatican—Rome Beautiful, Modern City.

Below will be found excerpts from an exceedingly newsy and descriptive letter written by Signalmán C. E. Richmond, a Lindsay boy, now fighting with the Allied army in Italy. The story of the visit to Rome and to the Vatican and other historic places of interest, together with his racy story of a soldier's impressions of conditions in general, will make interesting reading for the young soldier's many friends in Lindsay and district. In part the letter is as follows:

"I still receive the local papers, always a little late, but I enjoy them just the same. Even though I was in Lindsay only four years, it seems like home to me. Guess on account of so many I can count on as friends.

Now I'll get down to the things over here. For news of the war, well you get all that in the paper, but I'd just like to take you along for 7 days' leave which I have just completed.

Bright and early in the morning I arose, having slept very lightly, being all thrilled about leaving for my seven days' leave—so I dash to the shower and get busy cleaning up for inspection. We are checked from head to foot to see if we are in shape to meet any situation which might arise, then off to the dentist who jabs you a couple of

times here and there, looking to see if the army food is sweet enough to start eating a hole in your molars—but, what a chance! Next is what we think is O.K., and we march off to the paymaster, whip up a big salute and hold-out our hands; this time it is definitely hands, as we are allowed to draw \$44.00. In Italian it is 4400 lire. We're happy now and all ready to get on our way. I intend to visit Rome during my holiday, and as they have very little to eat, I start on my way to try and scrounge some canned goods, and what a chance! But knowing some of the boys, I manage to get 10 tins of bully beef, so I am most lucky, as in Rome you can buy anything for that, and most mothers would let you take their best daughter for a stroll in the park, even after dark, for I can—so imagine what I could do with 10.

It wasn't long before we were loaded into a truck—you know, our mode of travelling in Italy, the 1944 style is a nice open air 60 cwt. truck (and I'll never again worry about a squeak). So twenty of us are in one truck and drive to town, where we transfer to a convoy of trucks and then on our way. I

didn't know whether to take an open air job or a closed one, but came to the conclusion I'd try a closed one, as it would keep the sun off and maybe a little dust, and you can imagine how lucky it was, as after about three-quarter hour drive we ran right into a cloud burst. The truck behind us was an open job and you never saw 20

lads so wet before. The water stopped our car, and so we spent nearly an hour watching the water pour down the road and turn into rivers. They certainly need that in Southern towns, as the streets are heaps of garbage and they smell to the high heavens, so you can see just what a good rain can do.

Eventually we arrive at our camp. This camp is just a rest camp, and the boys come here to do nothing but rest. You are registered in and out and given a bed and what you do after that is your own business. They have everything at the camp. It is situated right on the Blue Mediterranean and has its own shows, stores, barber shop, fruit shop, etc. Italians do all the work and even wait on the table. We were in a section called Eastbourne. "C" tent, 3, right facing the sea, which looked awfully tempting, as, though it was storming in the mountain it was terrifically hot here. But as dinner was being served we tried it, and the less I say about it the better. Most of our gang started off for Rome, but Fritz, that's the chap I was with, could only get 6 bucks, so had to coax him to take a chance and come to Rome, so we decided to wait until morning and put out. Needless to say, you can imagine we spent the afternoon swimming in the Mediterranean.

Supper was no better than dinner, so went over and bought our rations of sweets, which consisted of 1000 cigs (English), 1 bag of candy, the ones you buy for 10 cents, gum and a cake of Lifebuoy (it's good for B.O.) and one sure gets warm over here. Also one quart of beer, but not being a beer drinker, I let Fritz have mine. We then went to the fruit store and sunk our teeth into a beautiful mellow melon, and was it ever good, especially after the meals! Then we decided to go to an English variety show, which was certainly very, very good. The house was packed, so we enjoyed a couple of hours.

Next morning we get a ride and are dumped off in Naples, with a real heavy pack on my shoulders, and if you could only realize how hot the sun can really get—for example, take our hottest day and add a few more suns, and there you have it.

After a struggle we finally managed to get out of Naples and on our way. After a short ride here

and there we find ourselves on a Free French truck which hauls bread to their boys, and he gives us a ride that takes us well on the long road to Rome. We pass through Cassino, and this is the first time I have a real good seat. The driver can't speak Italian or English, so it's very quiet, but he lands us a few miles on and leaves us on a quiet highway, but after sitting around for an hour or two a couple of English chaps come along and inform us they are on their way to Rome, so "climb aboard." I can assure you we didn't need coaxing. From there on the road and scenery was the start of the battle of Cassino and the Hitler Line and the result of the German retreat to Rome. You'd see a smashed tank here, a gun there, a few shattered walls which at one time was the happy home of some native. Fox holes, of course, here and there. They are your best pals when you hear that distant whistle. You hug the earth so closely in the bottom of that hole that you think it feels like a long lost friend. A shell can hit at an amazingly close distance and no one will be even scratched, yet if you were on top you would soon look like mince steak, only you wouldn't be in one spot. We travelled on, seeing nothing but the grim evidence of a terrific struggle and the Germans were really dug in. You would wonder how they were ever dislodged. Guess they thought they couldn't be, but then they forgot about our boys and just what kind of stuff they were made of and what they were fighting for. Even as you pass you see the crosses row by row, and now and then, beside the road, you'll see where some of our boys have found their well earned rest. If you were able to speak to them you'd find their only regret would be they had only one life to give; they know how their loved ones and friends live back home and death would be much sweeter than to return home and find out you'd be returned to what we see over here.

We go on and eventually find ourselves looking at a sign which

reads "DO NOT STOP VEHICLES, OR ENTER BUILDINGS. MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS". We are now entering the town that the Canadians were the only ones able to penetrate but it took all the Allies help too. Our drive slowed down to a slow speed and we gazed on war at its worst. The whole town is nothing but a heap of stones and not a single house left standing. One doorway I saw intact which looked as if it might have been a place where one could enjoy a drink of wine, and I wondered, just a few years ago it was likely a place of laughter and fun and today is a place of horror. Looking up above the town one sees the Monastery. It, too, has been reduced to mere rubble, where only a few days ago it was one of the world's biggest monasteries. But this is war and everything in its path is brutally destroyed.

We soon leave Cassino and its countryside and now we are entering Rome—and what a contrast! We are let out at an intersection about 20 minutes from the Canadian Club, but we are amazed by the contrast of this old city to the others we have seen. No houses blown up, people clean, wide avenues with boulevards, street cars running, and a soldier here and there, while streets are crowded with civilians who stare at you with a strange look in their eyes. Being around 6 and having only fruit to eat all day, we thought our best plan would be to locate a room, and we finally, after walking a block, came across a lad who told us where we could obtain one. There is no such thing as a self-contained house. They are all large apartment houses and six to eight (and higher) floors. All have elevators, but on account of the shortage of power one has to walk. Upon entering one finds these houses similar to the homes in Montreal and the house we were in was just an ordinary home and furnished very nicely. It was here we found out how the other people are existing in Rome. They haven't any money, well I should say very little, and food is almost impossible to obtain, unless you've lots of money. Meat is something they haven't seen for months and would sell their soul for one can of our meat. Of course these people can't

talk English and Fritz hasn't bothered about trying to talk with the natives, so that leaves me doing all the talking. It's really fun. By the time I get them on the right track I'm all in, but I'm finding I could get along if I had to.

Next morning we're up bright and early and after a cold bath (they have no gas these days and that's their main means of cooking, when they have food to cook) we're off for the Club. It's full daylight and we can now take an interest in our surroundings, not being as tired as we were. Wherever you go you see beautiful buildings and now we begin to observe the people. They're just like back home, nothing like the natives we know in Southern Italy. They're clean, they don't go through a wrestling match when they talk, I even saw one chap talking with his hands in his pockets and leaning against a pole. Now in Southern Italy they just couldn't talk in that position. They throw themselves right into the conversation, using body, hands and head to express themselves. But here, if possible to transform it into thin air and reset it in New York or London or Montreal, you wouldn't know the difference. What impressed me most was the beauty of the female of the race. The girls are very smart dressers and their skin is clear and even though they lack cosmetics they have beautiful skin. They aren't dark olive in complexion as we see many back home, and if you were to walk down the street you couldn't tell the difference from a Canadian girl.

I purchased a map of Rome and soon found the Canadian Club. It is a grand building with huge stairs leading into the front entrance. It is rather an old building; of course when you say old you mean 200 or 400 years, and at that it's rather modern. It's a grand spot. Inside the main room is most palatial and beautifully decorated with palm trees in the centre and around the side large easy chairs and chesterfields. On the left is the billiard room and ping-pong room and the barber shop. On the right is the main information room, gift shop and dance hall. The dance hall was all right too. A terrible native band, and the girls are not allowed in unless escorted but they overcome that by waiting outside and asking the lads to bring them in. Upstairs

one finds a nice cool spot where one can obtain lemonade for 5 lire a glass and another room where you eat at 12:30 and 5:30, gratis, but it's a very light lunch. Later on who should I run into but Ross Endicott, so we sure had old home week. Ross and I got hold of a native who had a car parked outside the Club, and as he was allowed extra gas, he agreed to take us for a trip, and did we ever enjoy the sights! The most impressive was a grand park, but just what its name was I never did find out, but it was beautiful.

The next morning we were up early. I struck up an acquaintance with an Italian captain who was retired on account of his age, but still smart looking and at one time a wealthy citizen—today, penniless. He promised to take us to Vatican City, and I thought it would be nice being shown around by one who knew it inside and out. His uncle was a previous Pope. Promptly at nine we met him on the corner and we started. He showed us the War Memorial from the last war, and it is definitely a thing of great beauty. Solid white marble, and the sculpture work is magnificent. I was wishing I was able to take a few snaps, but we moved on and passed innumerable magnificent buildings, statues and water fountains, some dating back to 1,200 and still in perfect condition. It is then you wonder how much beauty and old art that must have been destroyed in their cities.

Eventually we reached the Tiber River, which is fairly large, but with dark muddy water. Crossing it is a beautiful bridge with, with statues of angels standing all along the rail every few feet. It is when you cross the river, after turning left you have your first glimpse of St. Peter's, and it is really a beautiful building. We have a distance to travel yet, so on we go. They have a number of souvenir shops on the road up and very interesting souvenirs to those who are of that faith.

We now are approaching the Vatican, which is expressed by a sign, "A Neutral Country" and guarding it is a couple of native police and Yanks with their white steel helmets. Amid all this tranquility a few miles away people are wandering and digging in a heap of ashes

which was once a happy place called home and here we were gazing upon a building which I don't suppose the world has its equal. Everywhere you see soldiers, Canadian nurses, service girls and many Canadians, whom, I should imagine would represent Canada from coast to coast. We are just about to enter and are rather thrilled to think we will soon be on the inside. Inside it is cool and we feel very different. Maybe as if we're in another world. You take a few steps and something seems to take possession of you as you stand there and gaze at the colossal interior. Its beauty holds you spellbound, words just don't seem to come from your throat and it seems maybe the holiness of it has you in its power. Those are in crude words just a small idea of how I felt. I could spend hours if I were a writer, describing its altars, its tombs of the previous Popes. The sculpture work is wonderful and of course of beautifully coloured marble. We come to the tomb of the Pope who was our friend's uncle and he said a prayer and took us over to a priest. The priest took a long object and blessed us and walked away. Our good host explained it was a blessing to protect us from harm and bring us good luck. One tomb that impressed me, not by any means the most beautiful or artistic, but, first noticing it from a distance it looked like a large red rug over the door of the tomb. But upon arriving one notices it is a huge blanket sculptured from red marble and a skeleton carrying it as one would a sheet in the wind. You know how a large sheet looks in the wind. But just who was sleeping peacefully inside I forget. There are so many and so many strange names, I didn't even take them in. So we were ready to depart, but noticing a large crowd assembled at the entrance we joined it, and who should stroll in but the Ambassador from the United States. We had hoped it might have been the Pope, but, we hadn't eaten a meal since the night before leaving camp, and as the Pope makes his appearance at 12:30 and they eat at 12:30 at the Club, I'll leave it to your imagination which seemed most important to us.

In the afternoon I met Ross again and we just bummed around, two

weary Canadians. Had our pictures taken meeting on the Club steps.

The stores have practically anything you wish to buy, but what a price. They have nothing, though, that you couldn't buy at home. Of course they have novelties, etc., but one thing which you can't buy is food, that is unless you have a lot of cash. Ross and I had a beautiful steak, small of course, bread, tomatoes and a bottle of delicious wine, for \$1.25; but if you work two days for that, one doesn't spend it that way. An egg or eggs can be bought for (only) 35c apiece, flour around \$2.00 a pound and sugar similar. We managed to get a loaf of bread about the size of an ordinary small cloth brush, for 10 cigarettes. Tobacco is like hen's teeth and civilians pay as high as 5c per cigarette. Liquor is plentiful and Vermouth very good at \$2.50 a bottle.

We visited the English Club. It was a modern department store—and we think we are modernistic! What a place! The building has seven or eight floors, and up to the sixth floor the centre of the building is like a large room, and each floor has a railing around which gives it a veranda effect. The floor of this room is used for dancing. On the first floor you can buy wine from 11 to 7. The next three are snack bars, the next a gift shop and the sixth is the ice cream parlor and beauty shop. I did justice to both. The ice cream is not like our own, mostly frozen water, smelling like a popsicle—but the beauty parlor—oh boy! What an up-to-date place, and the Italian barbers are artists. I think so, anyway. It felt like old times getting into a modern barber shop, and I had the works—hair cut, oil shampoo, shave, face massage and a manicure and all the trimmings! You can just imagine the cost of all that, but I considered it worth 60 lire and a couple of cigarettes for tips.

We hoped to get a ride back home by airplane, but it was the day they invaded Southern France, so couldn't get near an airport."

Letter Letter From Lili

Monday Boy In Italy

SIGNALMAN "CHES" RICHMOND
WRITES DESCRIPTIVE AND
INTERESTING LETTER ON ROME