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O AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR RELATIVES ASSOCIATION
P PARCELS FOR PRISONERS OF WAR
Y. Headquarters 1205 Delaware Ave. Buffalo 9, New York

December 6, 1944

Colonel Thomas T. Drake

My dear Colonel Drake:

As I have no idea where you are I am sending this to Indianapolis thinking it will be forwarded. Probably by this time you are in Washington, and I am sure you and Quincey had a marvelous time in California. It must have been just beyond any words to express, for you to be free again, home once more, and in that wonderful climate! I can imagine how happy both you and Quincey are and I am so very glad for you. I do hope that you are feeling very much better, and that the proper diet and good food will soon put you in really good shape again.

However, I know that your heart must be with the men you have left behind and that you are more than anxious to do what you can for them. I feel that you can speak with a good deal of authority and for many reasons I am sure that your word will have immense weight with the powers that be! Any suggestions from you will, I imagine, be acted upon more quickly than ours were.

I must admit that the War Department has been most cooperative with the requests that we have made and have seemed especially anxious to try to give the men what they want, not what some one else thinks they should have. (Entre nous, that it seems to be the opposite attitude to that of the Red Cross, as your wife has doubtless told you.) X

Bee Waters naturally knows the right people of whom to ask favors in the War Department, but on account of her position has particularly hesitated to do so and has made a special point of having requests come through me rather than to have them seem a personal favor granted to her. I can see her point, although I feel that every influence one can use in this cause is justified.

We formally requested the P. O. W. air mail forms in December, 1943, writing to the President, the Secretary of the War, the Secretary of Navy and all the other heads of the departments concerned, and had favorable replies from them, but those forms were not available until last June!— When I was in Washington last February, I went over a food list with Colonel Carpenter of the Provost Marshal General's Office, who was most amiable and concerned about the best possible contents for these parcels, and then we formally requested these additions from the Foreign Economic Administration and the Red Cross, but it was not until June that they were permitted. I realize, of course, that all large government agencies are necessarily unwieldy, that everything takes time, but still this P. O. W. work is an emergency and such delays seem all out of line. X

The Red Cross Information Bureau is now doing the work that should have been done eighteen months ago, and which was recommended by me in a letter to the National Headquarters as long ago as February 1942. X

During that same trip to Washington Mrs. Roosevelt was kind enough to invite Bee Waters and me for tea, and was extremely interested in our P. O. W. work, and offered to assist in any way she could.

Due to the experience of over a year which I had had in sending over 1500 parcels to British Prisoners of War and in working with the Canadians, I realized how enormously helpful the Canadian and British Prisoners of War Relatives Associations were, and suggested that something of the sort be started in this country under Red Cross supervision. Mrs. J. O. Asselin, President of the Canadian Association offered to meet me in Washington and discuss this whole problem with the Red Cross and wrote them to the same effect, but they replied that they saw no such need for this sort of service. Mrs. Asselin has been decorated by the King with the M. B. E. for her work in connection with Prisoners of War, and all of us who have been concerned in it know the enormous need for what is now being done so much later than it should have been.

I do not want to seem to dwell on past mistakes, but this is just to give you some idea of the continuous struggle that we have had, not only to organize efficient groups, but to have to try to prove the need of this work over and over again to the agencies who should have recognized it and cooperated with us from the beginning. Your wife will tell you many corroborating details, but this background should give you an idea of how very much your suggestions and ideas are needed, and how much we will appreciate having your personal interest.

From my personal experience it seems to me that the greatest good such a group as ours can do is to organize packing centers to that each next of kin parcel is not only properly packed but contains the most nourishing and the most desirable of foods allowed. In many cases these relatives are not able to afford a really "good box", and I feel strongly that such local groups should be able to finance all such parcels. We do this for any of our local people and for any others who obviously need help. We never ask for any contributions but so many people know of our work and have been interested in it for so long that they are more than glad to give anything that may be needed, and we have had hundreds of requests to "adopt" some American Prisoner of War. We have asked the War Department for names of any men who have no next of kin to care for them for these adoptions but the War Department will not give them out, and any of these go to the Red Cross. However, the Red Cross tells me they have very few.

If you could send us a short message as to what you think about the parcels and what you consider the best possible contents, with some sort of personal word about not only the conditions at the camps, but the intimate life and spirit of the men, it will be of great comfort to the relatives. I know that all of them are heartsick to think of their boys probably spending this Christmas in camp and need whatever lift can be given. I want to send

a Christmas letter to all of the chairman of our branches, and a special word from you would be just the right touch.

There are many problems which I am anxious to ask about, but I know that you are so busy I will not attempt to go into them now, and hope that perhaps after the holidays I shall be able to come to Washington. I am longing to meet you and to have time to really talk with both you and Quincey. Bee Waters wrote me that she felt you could do a great deal for us as you were really "hot stuff", and I think we should not delay any longer now in making whatever suggestions may seem necessary.

Incidentally, I have had letters the last few weeks from all over the country from people who have had requests from their sons and husbands for dried egg powder. They have been unable to buy it here and upon writing to Washington were informed by the War Food Administration that our Association had purchased it and was including it in our boxes. It is amazing how all these particular items which we have heard about for over a year are now becoming known throughout the country. It is a perfect example of the need for these packing centers.

Enclosed is our latest food list, and any changes you may suggest will be acted upon immediately, as far as permitted. If you want some special items that are not permitted, perhaps you would take that up with the War Department yourself.

We have been having some interesting interviews with some of the boys back from Rumania, and I find that all these young airmen are especially keen to have Prisoner of War Service Ribbons. They feel that this is an experience which makes a very strong bond, and they would like to be able to recognize their comrades who have shared this with them. This is particularly so of the airmen, and several of them have asked if we could not, as an Association, make such a request. As a regular army man you have a different opinion, but I would like your point of view. You can surely understand how these youngsters feel.

The most amazing and encouraging thing to me is their wonderful vitality and their marvelous recovery from their wounds, burns, and all the hardships they may have suffered. The ones I have met are just an inspiration as they seem not only to have conquered most of the effects of physical suffering, but their tolerance and understanding has widened so much that their entire spiritual outlook upon life seems to be different than it would be under any normal circumstances. I feel actually uplifted after talking with them.

With all best wishes to you for your speedy return to good health, and love to Quincey.

Cordially yours,

/s/ HELEN WADE JACKSON