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How Not to Spend Furlough Told By Writer After 6000-Mile Trip.

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By T/3 KLAUS MANN.

A 15-day furlough is a rare and wonderful thing. You'll get it only if you have been a good boy, for six months at least, and even if your record is immaculate it's still a matter of chance. Well, I got it—being fairly good and unduly lucky.

Here I am, back at Crowder, in a state of utter exhaustion. I had the time of my life—going from Missouri to southern California; from the Pacific coast to Washington, D. C., Baltimore, Md., Philadelphia, Pa., and New York city; from the shores of the Atlantic back to the state of Missouri. Of my precious 15 or 16 days, I spent nine days and nine nights, or 216 hours, in overcrowded railway coaches—covering more than 6,000 miles on my hectic trip across the continent. It sounds like madness, and I actually felt at times that I'd go mad under the strain of my venture.

But I'll tell you what happened, all in its proper sequence. It was a beautiful Tuesday—one of those hot, slow-moving Tuesdays, you know, as we had quite a few during the past two months. I expected my furlough paper about 5 o'clock in the afternoon and, therefore, showed up in the orderly room about 4 p. m. The first sergeant—slightly irritated, but indulgent and understanding—explained to me that I'd better be patient for another hour or so. I tried to follow his reasonable advice, and did pretty well, for a while. About 5:15, however, I began to feel rather restless, and after 5:45 I became indeed extremely fidgety. When the precious document came finally through, about 7:30 p. m., I had passed through the whole gamut of emotional torments and was near a nervous breakdown.

Of course, it was too late now for the 5:30 train to Kansas City. The situation seemed hopelessly messed up. How could I make the midnight train of the Southern Pacific Line, from Kansas City to Los Angeles, when there was no possibility to reach Kansas City before the following morning? What good was my Southern Pacific ticket, with no other train of that line going West until tomorrow night? My ticket had to be changed. I rushed to Neosho—only to be informed by the railway official that he was by no means in a position to do me this minor favor. The little transaction—namely, the changing of my Southern Pacific ticket into one of the Santa Fe Line—had to be carried out in Camp Crowder, if at all. So I hurried back to camp; it was about 9 p. m. by now. An hour later, I found myself in Neosho again, waiting for a bus to Joplin, from where I hoped to proceed to Kansas City. The bus was scheduled for 1:30 a. m., which gave me plenty of time to explore the night-life of Joplin.

The trip from Kansas City to Los Angeles takes, supposedly, a little more than 48 hours. But what if the train from Chicago, due at 9 a. m., pulls in shortly after 12, and proves so jammed with people that no more passengers can be admitted? There was nothing to do but to wait for the next express, which ought to have arrived at 11 a. m. and actually showed up about 2 p. m. Not that this train was empty—quite the contrary. But the bunch of soldiers, including myself, who had been left behind by the first, this time somehow managed to sneak into one of the crowded coaches.

Two days and two nights is a pretty long time, all right, when you have to spend it sitting up on a not very soft, not very convenient bench, in a cruelly shaking car, sandwiched between noisy sweltering people. It was disturbingly hot. Refreshments were hard to get. In fact, the thirst would have become most disagreeable, if it hadn't been for the kindly ladies of the Red Cross and USO who treated us occasionally to a glass of milk or orangeade. The "chow line" in front of the dining car was longer than any I have seen in any army camp. No mess sergeant has ever been more peremptory and despotic than was the headwaiter of this train in his attitude toward the passengers. Evidently, he disapproved of the luxurious restlessness which induced people to move from one place to another—from Kansas City to Los Angeles, for instance—senselessly, as the headwaiter claimed.

"What are all those people traveling for?" he asked me, in an affable mood. (He liked servicemen more than civilians, and among the soldiers preferred those traveling on orders and equipped with GI meal tickets.) "Nobody should be admitted to a railway train," he said, grimly, "unless he can prove that his trip is really necessary."

Most of those people just travel because they have an extra dollar to spend".

Everything comes to an end, eventually—and so did this tedious journey. We arrived at Los Angeles with a delay of only ten hours or so. The garden-like scenery of the California coast appeared as a lovely mirage, after the torrid solitude of the desert. Another 30-minute ride in our car, and I would be at home. Hello, Hollywood Boulevard, Beverly Hills, Sunset Boulevard! There you are, beautiful palm trees, orange groves and humming birds of Santa Monica and Pacific Palisades!

Why didn't I stay as long as my furlough permitted? It was so peaceful at home—everything familiar and yet excitingly new, after so long an absence—the house and the beach, the dog, the garden, the books, and all the beloved faces.

The idyl lasted only four days. Then something came up—an emergency, so I thought; something I felt to be urgent, important enough to let it interfere with my holiday. I decided to use the rest of my furlough for a hasty trip East.

California—Arizona—New Mexico—Oklahoma—Kansas—Missouri—Illinois... familiar names; vast spaces. They pass by under changing skies—only half-real, dream-like to the drowsy traveler who gazes at the enormous, monotonous panorama from his mobile prison cell, his hot and dusty, ever-shaking coach seat. There is a new fight for such a seat in Chicago, where I have to change trains, and there will be another struggle in Washington, D. C. It's the same thing in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and the picture won't change when I go back from New York's Grand Central to Chicago and Kansas City. All the railway stations of the United States seem to be crammed with sleepy rookies, singing sailors, crying babies, worried mothers, loving young couples, brisk lieutenants, independent-looking WAACs, philosophical Negroes, and bewildered elderly gentlemen.

One can feel part of the mass and still try to remain observant and detached—watching the attitudes of these innumerable human types: men and women, young and old, black and white, soldiers and civilians—Americans all of them. And that is what I did. I kept watching them with sympathy, in deed, with admiration. What stamina and adaptability! During all these 216 hours of my pilgrimage from coast to coast, I hardly heard one disgruntled, bitter word. The people I saw had a remarkable way of making the best of difficult conditions. They kept smiling, tried to help each other. It's no longer necessary to remind them of the fact that "there is a war on." The phrase has long become obsolete. People realize that there is a war on, and they know also that we are going to win it. That is why they don't complain when they have to wait for their breakfast or must spend a few hours standing up in the aisle of an overcrowded car. Their good-humored stoicism is an expression of national self-assurance—con-

sciously or unwittingly so.

I don't say that it's a good idea to spend three-quarters of one's furlough by crossing and re-crossing the continent in crowded railway trains. On the contrary, my purpose in writing this is, to warn everybody against such a foolhardy enterprise. Yet it was quite an experience. Now, that it's over, I wouldn't want to have missed it.

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By T/S KLAUS MANN.

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