

Buddy Poppy/National Home

December

This December Sunflower Express I wanted to do something a little different. We all know what we are to do for the “Buddy Poppy” Program and The National Home. So, I’m not going to repeat myself this month, but I do hope to enlighten you in a letter written on Christmas Day in 1944.



Pfc. Irvin Schwartz in 1943

Somewhere in England

***Christmas Day, 1943
5:30 PM***

Dear. Mr. Reber:

Shadows are falling, and Christmas Day, 1943 in England is drawing to a close.

***Christmas** joy is joy which nothing, not even war, can take way from anyone, and so this day was slightly different from all other days. However, there were no lights, giving of gifts, midnight movies, or anything which went with my former Christmases. Great Britain’s fathers and sons are away from home – on the battlefields. Its mothers and daughters are away*

working in defense factories. Its children are being taken care of by grandmothers and by children's homes and other similar institutions.

And we are observing the day over 3,000 miles from our loved ones. So you see this was a type of Christmas no American nor Briton wishes to observe again. We are praying, hoping, and working hard that Christmas 1944 will be observed in peace all over the world.

Christmas Eve was simply just another quiet, dark night. One could hear Christmas carols being sung in the little blacked out churches and by groups of American soldiers on the streets. At times the music was faint, but one was reminded that another Christmas has arrived.

As for the numerous British children, we did all we can. They have forgotten their old friend, St. Nick, until their parents return after the war, but we tried to make this a merry day for them regardless. And I'm sure we did. We had saved our candy and gum rations for the past six weeks or more and these constituted all that was enjoyed by the kiddies of the United Kingdom this year.

But Mr. Reber, I can't describe how much they really appreciated these sweets. These things were greater to them than were the dolls, baby carriages, trains and other toys which they received from St. Nick before England declared war in 1939. There were cases where American soldiers took a British child to a movie on Christmas Eve.

Season greetings were exchanged among British people and Uncle Sam's boys serving in the European Theatre of War. Officers expressed greetings to the men of their respective units and all seemed to think that the next Christmas will be observed in each of the forty-eight states.

A short paragraph on the dinner given to American soldiers this day. It was even a greater meal than we had Thanksgiving Day. We had American turkey and to make a big story as short as possible, ALL that goes with a real good turkey dinner. (Mr. Reber, ordinarily I have a 5 ½ inch clearance on my belt, but fifteen minutes after this meal there clearance was minus one!). In addition, each received a pack of cigarettes.

Again the American Red Cross lived up to its great name. This afternoon one of its well known clubmobiles, which is a very large truck built somewhat like the one owned by our friend, Confectioner Ivan Newcomer's, visited us and gave us each a valuable sleeveless khaki sweater made of wool, and also all the candy bars we wanted as well as hot coffee and pipes for the men who smoke. Most of the candy was immediately handed over to a British boy or girl.

At a large American Red Cross canteen, everything was free and extra employees were on duty serving servicemen from morning until night. This place served free turkey dinners tonight, and you know this was my second for the day. Various kinds of sandwiches, lemonade, coffee, cake, etc., were free to us throughout the day, and razors, razor blades, cigarettes, and candy were presented.

An Englishman told me this morning that the King would deliver his annual Christmas Day address at 3:00 PM, but I didn't get the opportunity of hearing him. Probably you heard him back in the States. The highlight of the church services held in the United Kingdom were those at Bevis Marks Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in the English-speaking world. It was built in 1656. Trees, with few and simple decorations, were scarce, and I seen several Yuletide decorations here and there.

This was the Christmas that Prime Minister Winston Churchill's people observed in this wartime year, and also how the United States forces spent this great day across the vast Atlantic.

Mr. Reber, our Christmas is rapidly drawing to an end for another year, but back home right now it's only early in the afternoon Christmas Day. When I "hit my bunk" shortly, I'll remember it's the midst of Christmas 1943 in that "pleasant busy village" of [Pine Grove](#).

*Sincerely,
Pfc. Irvin Schwartz*

I hope you enjoyed this as much as I did. A lot of us probably had fathers, uncles, friends that were in WWII. My father was in the South Pacific Campaign, attached to the VMSB-243 22SBD-4/5 Munda, Solomon Islands. Their squadron handle "the Flying Gold Bricks", then from there they went to the Philippines Campaign. I often wondered how he spent his Christmases of 1942-1944. Love you Dad !

Some dates to remember:

January 7, 2054, Nation Home 100th Celebration

February 8, 2025, is National Home Gala

March 9, 2025, will be Pollet House Dedication/Ribbon Cutting Event

June 28, 2025, 100th Community Celebration



Cindy Biggs

Department Buddy Poppy/National Home

