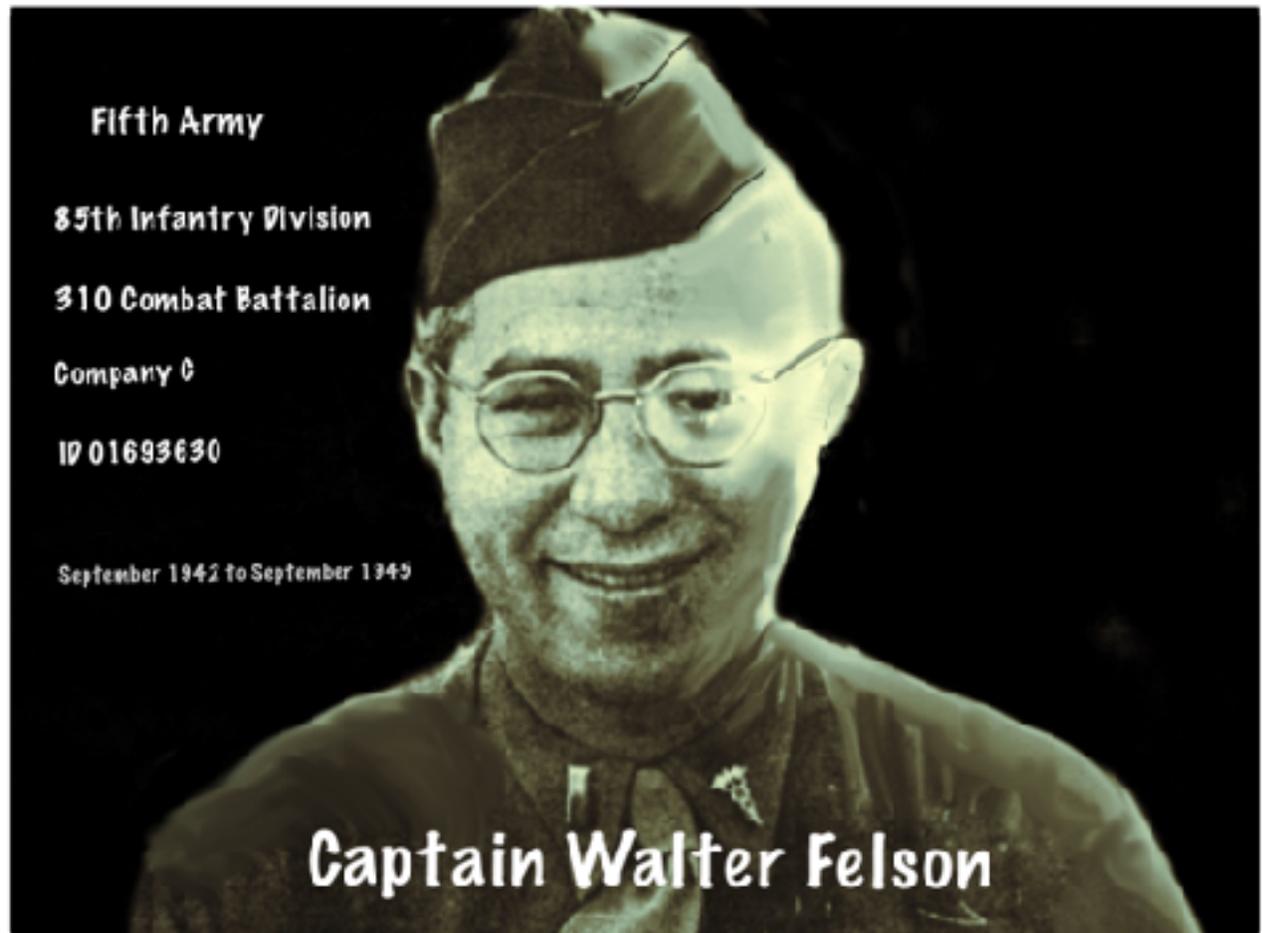


Captain Walter Felson's War Experiences in World War II as revealed in his letters to his family
Scanned and compiled by Judy Felson Duchan
June 20, 2016



On September 18, 1942, Walter Felson left his medical practice in Greenfield, Ohio, for a three year stint in the US Army. During the first year of service, when he was in training, he travelled with his family throughout the United States. He and Roslyn, his wife, reported their experiences in letters written to members of the Felson family—siblings of Walter. Leo Felson, Walter's youngest brother, kept the letters sent him, and around year 2000 Leo's son David gave those 1943 letters collected by Leo to me (Judy Felson Duchan), Walter's daughter.

In January of 1944, once Walter's army training was over, he and his company were sent overseas, first to North Africa and then to Italy. During this time between 1944 and 1945 he continued his letter writing, often writing more than once a day, recounting his experiences as a captain and medical doctor in the army's 85th Infantry Division of Company C. Most of the letters were to Roslyn, with the expectation that she would forward them to the rest of the family.

Some were addressed directly to the family, as a group (“Dear Gang”). Roslyn saved most of these letters. Because they were so vivid and so regular, they became highly anticipated and valued commodities among family members and their friends.

I have scanned the 1943 letters in Leo Felson cache as well as the 1944 and 1945 letters in Roslyn Felson’s collection. Another set, with many duplicates of those in Ros’s collection, were saved by Evelyn Felson, Leo’s wife. She donated these to the the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio as part of the papers of Leo Felson. There are 34 letters in Evelyn’s cache that are not in Leo’s or Roslyn’s sets. I hope to scan these 34 at some point adding them to those here.

The total number of letters scanned here are 133. They are organized by date. Below is a table of contents containing links to each letter along with a short description and key-word table. Click on the dates to get to the individual letters.

If you want an overview of the experiences of Walter Felson and his family during these war years, have a look at my essay where I trace his war journey and give a synopsis of the highlights. I drew much of the information in the essay from the his letters in the collection below. Walter’s letters do not include names of particular places because of army censorship restrictions. I have filled in the names of places in my essay drawing from the writings of others, especially from the book by Paul Shultz: *The 85th infantry division in World War II*.

1942—1 letter

1942-10-07 To brother Chippy, life at Camp Grant

1943—26 letters

1943-01-10 War maneuvers

1943-01-12 To Leo from Walter and Ros: arranging a gathering in Cincinnati
War exercises, unfair court martial trial

1943-02-00 Anti-semitic clique in company

1943-02-14 To brother Leo. Describes Elaine’s ear infection, details plans to meet up with family

1943-02-16 Leave cancelled, met with Kawasaki, Pearl Harbor description

1943-02-25 Ros to Leo, Leo’s hospitalization, Louise pregnant

1943-03-06 Ros to Leo, family travel plans

1943-04-00 Pitching a tent, vehicular casualties, antisemitism

1943-04-01 Walter’s non medical duties, Black battalion

1943-04-10 Louisiana, description of camp

1943-04-20 Duties of a collecting company

1943-04-23 Judy entering nursery school in Louisiana

1943-05-16 Camp Polk, Leesville Louisiana, anti-semitism in company

1943-05-23 To Leo, Ginny moving to Cincy

- 1943-07-03 Move to Camp Pilot Knob, Arizona visit with Louise and David, desert heat, socialized medicine (response to Ginny)
- 1943-07-08 Ros to Leo and Evy, newly married, Ginny and Ben's social radicalism
- 1943-08-22 Trip to Cincinnati, visit with Louise family in Springfield
- 1943-08-22a Life in the desert, move to Coxcomb, family move to Beaumont CA, rain in desert
- 1943-09-01 Promoted to Captain, touring Los Angeles with family, Camp Coxcomb military operations, desert heat
- 1943-09-02 Continuation of last letter, fire power demonstration, desert heat and maneuvers
- 1943-09-14 Touring California, Army duties, politics to get rid of Jews in his company
- 1943-10-16 To Leo move to Fort Dix, visits to family on way
- 1943-10-25 Visits to family, sightseeing Washington DC, found place to live, Lakewood NJ—a Jewish community
- 1943-11-11 House in Lakewood, NY sightseeing, politics of Company C, Walter's duties
- 1943-12-20 Goodbyes in New Jersey, Irv drove Ros and kids back to Greenfield, Walter acts as censor, comments on soldiers letters home—Walter as censor

1944–89 letters

- 1944-01-03 Description of boat trip overseas (to Algeria), camp conditions
- 1944-01-04-05 Shocked at Arabs lack of morals, camp conditions
Raised money for soldiers, met Jewish kids
- 1944-01-10,11
Moved to another camp, distaste for Algeria, no electricity
- 1944-01-23 To family describing trip overseas
- 1944-01-25 To Judy on her birthday
- 1944-05-12,13,14,16,17,18,19
In Italy, company doing well, success using plasma for shock, treatment of German prisoners, on the move, Italians helpful, Germans raid Italian farms for food, occupied Italian house
- 1944-05-16a To family, description of role of his company at the battlefield
- 1944-05-28 Horrible raid some days prior, trouble bringing wounded back, what did on rest period
- 1944-06-00 To family, liberated Rome, end of letter missing, date illegible
- 1944-06-02 Visit to Rome
- 1944-06-17 Didn't court martial a soldier when told to, describes visit sites in Rome
- 1944-06-28 Comment on news reportage about war, Vatican visit, Jews of Rome, views of Rome, parts of this letter appeared in a Cincinnati Catholic newspaper and was widely circulated
- 1944-07-01 First two pages missing, job of checking whether soldiers saluted officers when away from base, who he listens to on the radio

1944-07-01a Visit to home of Mussolini's mistress and other places in Rome, Buozzi's death, his recommendation of a soldier for bravery

1944-07-2,3 Day at the beach, complaints about food, shower experiences, disciplined 2 soldiers

1944-07-02a To friends Tuck and Plum Smith, his experience of war until now

1944-07-04 Diarrhea epidemic, circumcising 2 men every day, claim by others that Walter is "writingest" man in the army

1944-07-05 Some food Ros sent was spoiled, visit to Rome

1944-07-07 Mahogany desk reprimand

1944-07-07a Visit to Rome, saw a movie, a bit homesick, recalls reunion with kids in US

1944-07-07b
 Censorship of letters, called on carpet for his man stealing desk, upset with company politics

1944-07-08 Met boy at synagogue who reminded him of Elaine

1944-07-08a Talked with Jews who filled him in on concentration camps, one estimated 4 million Jews killed

1944-07-10,11
 V mails: Sent Alan Travis a German helmet, news about the family (Leo, Gene, Phil), writing under an olive tree

1944-07-11a Company politics, antisemitism, Chippy offered to go to bat for him

1944-07-11b Job—to check on whether men salute officers (military courtesy), upset that soldier is cheating on his wife with a "hag", visits child who looks like Elaine

1944-07-12 Move to new area, volley ball game and Walter's role, how new site is picked

1944-07-13 Keeping fit, punishing "boys" for skipping out, Russian/German maneuvers, upset that Life Magazine didn't credit his company

1944-07-14 James Roper news article of what happened on Walter's watch

1944-07-14a Issues with water, how he disciplines his men

1944-07-16 Activities of men in his command, wouldn't let his men eat the dog they killed

1944-07-16a More on his men, his GI upset, went to town looking for wine

1944-07-17 Outcome of his military courtesy checks, swimming in the brook

1944-07-17a In heart of Italy's mountains, party to celebrate promotions, censorship

1944-07-18 Domestic day—sewing and washing clothes, roles of fellow soldiers
 Lists what things he has, food from Italian garden where bivouacked, compares radio Europe to US, advice to Ros (go to Spring Mill with Sophie)

1944-07-19 Reprimand of him removed (about mahogany table) from his record

1944-07-19a Describes his things in his tent

1944-07-20 To the Lough sisters, description of Italian farm

1944-07-20a Vmail: to girls, not sure who (maybe neighbors, Loughs)—refers to Aunt Roslyn, advises to go to camp

1944-07-20b Mentions Leo—one more week of school, sorry to have turned guy in for not saluting him

1944-07-21 Mother's letters more important to him than food, learning to play ocarina

1944-07-22 Letter from Ben, had everyone read it, trying to get rid of one of his men

1944-07-22a Idea of having busts made of kids

1944-07-23 Bombing at Fondi—terrible, various people promoted and demoted, commissioned busts to be carved from a picture image

1944-07-24 Hopes to get rid of mischief makers, air raid, expects war to be over in 3 weeks

1944-07-25 Watched busts being made, love letter to Ros about their lives together

- 1944-07-26 To Bob Cocherill and family, description of Italian countryside and farming practices
- 1944-07-26a What got in mail and what sending home
- 1944-07-27 Ankle hurts from walk two days ago, Minturno fiasco, stealing in army—a way of life
- 1944-07-28 Bored, becoming a hermit, reflects on own childhood from Studs Lonigan book artist doing busts—Pietro Costaglio
- 1944-07-29,29a
How busts need adjustment, terrible rain storm, describes slit trenches
- 1944-07-30 To Edie: thanks for package, describes busts
- 1944-07-30a,31
Rectifying damage from downpour, everyone sending home packages, thinks Strozzi, someone in company, is an anti-semite
- 1944-08-17 Describes patients, blitz in England, trouble bathing because women around
- 1944-08-31 Mine explosion, voted against Taft (for governor), discussion of what is more important--choosing between preservation of self or race
- 1944-09-14 Action starting up again, enemy 1-2 miles away, staying in tobacco barn, describes close call, his “boys” working in front aid station—unusual
- 1944-09-18 Broke through German positions in mountains, treated German soldier, responds to Ros question about chances for promotion
- 1944-09-20,23
Interactions with a general, German shot in penis, Germans carried litter containing a soldier who can walk
- 1944-09-20a Second anniversary of being in army (September 18, 1942), close to front line evacuation of casualties, saw 20-50 Germans dead, 400 yards from front lines, shells 1 mile away
- 1944-09-22 To whole family: Close call and miserable conditions
- 1944-10-1,2 In the Appenine mountains, watched the battle, story of Germans mistreating soldiers, Germans killing medics (“they should be shot!”)
- 1944-10-02a Front of letter missing, cold, miserable, moody, worst weather ever, trouble finding new quarters, short of ambulances, treatise on ordering supplies
- 1944-10-03 Front of letter missing, close to front lines, Red Cross girls brought donuts
- 1944-10-5,6,7,8,9,10
Lots of fighting, ransacking by Italians and soldiers, wounded Germans treated, Captain Little—key role in breaking Gothic Line, Italian cooking and supplies, Jerrys (Germans) take from Italians—Americans give to Italians
- 1944-11-03 Things are dull, oversupply of beer, prob getting food to litter bearers, lists things received in the mail
- 1944-11-05 Heavy shelling, tired of C rations, don’t get enough vegetables
- 1944-11-07 Shelling subsided, election day—rooting for Roosevelt, politics of voting, spies among Italians
- 1944-11-11 Armistice day, fighting still going on, responds to letter from Ros about Morry Heiman
- 1944-11-18 Compares Italian to American workmen, acquired F 38 gun, goldbrickers

1944-11-21 Difference between evacuating at rear vs front of aid station, Catholic soldier wanted to bury leg as if it were a body

1944-11-24 End missing, rest in hotel, describes hotel

1944-11-24? Front missing, logistics for litter bearers of negotiating terrain, ends with jokes

1944-12-17 Letter is to family, describes hotel in town, met up with Big Red Goldberg, tells about busts had made of family

1944-12-25 Xmas, soldiers staying with families in town, Xmas dinner, makes rounds in town to see Italian families and how things are going with "his boys".

1945—17 letters and two documents

1945-01-14 Back problems, convoy movement, problem with someone accused of stealing coal, ping-pong tournament

1945-01-25 Judy's 6th birthday, too many doctors, Rosie the Red Cross girl, staying in a Italian house—woman made tomato pie

1945-02-22 To Felson siblings, days spent doing nothing, boys staying with Italian families

1945-02-25 Ros blood pressure up, Walter reassures her tells her not to worry, Italian towns problem with diphtheria, black market

1945-04-01 Remembers Easter Sunday a year ago when took boys to front lines, Inspector General visit to check books, Good Friday—no fish so Catholic men ate matzoh and cheese, wants to come home

1945-04-22 Page 1 missing, working with other units, happy to be out of the mountains, living in a large Italian house with his boys

1945-04-22a Describes house where he is staying, moved through dangerous mountain retreat, Italians returning home to find rubble, takes a whole German hospital, lots of prisoners

1945-04-23 Located in a hospital, planes strafed clearing station nearby, Italians buried dead Germans, German prisoner pulled a gun on his guard—dad would have killed him "in cold blood", townspeople cheered Americans, nurses in hospital are nuns, accuracy of American bombs

1945-04-24 End missing, German propaganda describing Black Americans as barbarians, ally use of German trucks and equipment

1945-04-27 Moving rapidly, need to be in front of clearing company, move at night, air raids, partisans rounding up fascists, took six German prisoners, describes town staying in

1945-05-08 Same hotel in resort town (Montecatini?), soldier missing, Germans and Americans in town but not co-mingling, thinks war officially over

1945-05-09 His company captured important world figures: Niemoeuer, Kurt Schussnig, dad made German soldiers stop doing Hitler salute

1945-05-09a End missing, War in Europe over, everyone subdued, blames all Germans, describes activities of Germans still in area, hotel landlady—anti Italian

1945-05-10 End missing, German plane landed in his area, had to return German vehicles to army, went looking for guns to give people as souvenirs, recommended his soldiers for combat medics badge, lists famous people taken from Germans, horrors of Buchenwald and Dachau

1945-05-29 Visit to Venice, stayed at Hotel Luna—officers hotel

1945-06-11 At Villa at Bellundo, describes activities, shake-up in personnel, point system for going home

1945-06-16 Page 2 missing, describes shifting personnel now that war is over, trip to Genoa

1945-07-01 Looks like he may be getting home in August, trip around Italy (goes 1684 miles in all, at a hotel in Stresa, 60 miles from Milan, went to Milan—didn't like it, Italians inefficiencies on roadwork, describes travel plans, Runde visit, trip to Corunda, company receives a citation for work in Minturno—proud of that and his combat medics badge.

1945-09-07 Tally out

1945-07-10 List of men in Walter's company

Walter returned to Greenfield and to his awaiting family sometime in September 1945, finishing his three-year tour of duty. Together again!

