Dear Albert,

The cats away and the mice are at the typewriter. Thus far I am not very close to science but I have hopes of rejoining the guild next week.

Two days after arriving here I found myself in a tent with six other fellows, two barracks bags full of assorted clothing such as long woolen underwear, canteen and army boots. The temperature dropped to about 20 degrees that night and I soon lost all scorn of the underwear. The tent is "heated" by a small wood-burning stove which gets cold about an hour after the last log is thrown on. If we manage six hours of sleep a night we don't complain. At 5:45 A.M. a trained cuckoo blows a whistle and our day begins. In pitch darkness a well trained belgian police sergeant manages to find the mess hall and herds us in for breakfast, the food is not eaten but nutriment is acquired by a combination of imputation and aspiration. Bluntly its lousy. From breakfast we again march back to the tent for the morning period of housecleaning. For some reason which I don't as yet fathom the army assumes that in 24 hours needs mopping, sweeping, dusting and polishing even though the same procedure was performed the night before.

When this is finished and inspected by a fishy eyed sergeant we really get going with subject euphemistically known as "fatigue duty". Here the Gods step in and when our names are called off we are assigned to various combat jobs such as cleaning out the bathrooms, filling fire extinguishers, cutting fire-wood for our stoves, painting the wooden walks, moving beds or any other heavy ordnance that a tractor cannot pull. At 11 in the morning we are famished and very sensibly they allow us to eat again.

Since the demand for a third and even fourth front is very strong it is necessary that the men in basic training never stop their determined efforts to improve themselves so we drill for two hours after lunch. This is really fun, much like the old kindergarten game of "Simon Says". Some of the men assigned to the Medical Corps are here because they are no good for any sort of combat duty. To watch them learning commands is a lesson in neurophysiology. One can actually see the impulse of a given command slowly travelling down the spinal cord as a slowly moving lump which finally smashes into a foot or arm and makes it move, usually in the wrong direction. As one of them said to me, "The criterion for men in the Medical Corps is that the body be warm when the examining physician touches it."

Drill being concluded we turn to easy matters as gas mask drill or bandages. Gas mask drill consists in trying to put on a Tibetan ceremonial mask in 25 seconds when your fingers are blue with cold. Bandages are self-explanatory and assume that in the heat of battle you are well equipped with sufficient gauze to make dressings for a regiment or two; however its not for me to criticize Somervell's command.

At five more food and then we are finished for the day. Of course there are occasional matters like having to walk a half mile for the mail, helping some newly-enlisted man carry his bed into the District of Columbia or the peace of vespertime, but these are taken in stride.

I have been a little more fortunate and two days ago was asked to spend my afternoons in the headquarters office where my great talents as a typist and file are contributing towards the defense of democracy. On
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Monday I am supposed to stop all this nonsense and go to work in Virus Lab, probably under Smadel. However I am a little cynical at the moment and do not believe anything until it actually happens to me, sometimes not even then.

On reading this over I fear it sounds as though I don't like the private life of a private. Truly, such is not the case for it is a good experience and the hardships are shared in company with many others. One of my tentmates was a professor of Latin and Greek at the Catholic Univ. here in Washington. I believe that he is slated to become an X-ray technician, most likely because it is thoroughly Greek to him.

As soon as I get back to a white collar existence I will try to get the dog and cat paper off to you.

My best to you and Sylvia,