Part VII.

Separated Again

*Chérie—mon petit, Paris has fallen! Just in this moment I hear it, and maybe only you (surely only you!) can feel what I am feeling in this moment.*

—Otto’s V-mail message to Eva on August 23, 1944

*Chérie—I just turn on the radio: Paris liberated! Can you imagine how I feel?*

—Eva’s V-mail message to Otto on August 23, 1944
Otto had joined the OSS at the end of February 1944. He had received training at Fort George G. Meade in Maryland and at another unidentified OSS location in Virginia. As he recalled, “With a group of other prospects, I was taken to a secluded facility in Virginia for telescoped military training and for special instruction for the task that was before us: to be dropped behind the lines in Europe to join and help the antifascist underground.” Otto was inducted in the U.S. Army in Washington, D.C., on May 9, 1944. The U.S. government expedited the granting of U.S. citizenship to him, and he received his Certificate of Naturalization on May 25, 1944.

Otto’s return to Europe: a lifesaving change in assignment

Following the death of Eva and Otto’s first child on April 13 and the completion of his OSS training, Otto was shipped to London on June 12, 1944, where he engaged in further OSS training. To Otto’s surprise, however, it was determined that he would not be able to participate in the parachute jumping course:

After crossing the Atlantic, in the stifling, overcrowded holds of the Queen Elizabeth, we reached our quarters in London. The buzz-bomb attacks were in full swing, and when we lined up the next morning in the street, one of our men was killed by a fragment. We started to go through some more training courses. One was parachute jumping, taught by a British outfit. Prior to
this course, there was a very thorough physical check-up, and I was not accepted. I was told that, although in perfect health, considering my age (44), the British authorities did not want to assume responsibility for me doing this work.\textsuperscript{2}

Otto’s age was likely the explanation he was given for this decision, but other factors were apparently also considered. A document in Otto’s now declassified OSS personnel file about his eligibility for additional “hazardous duty pay” contains another explanation: “The only reason why Pfister did not go on the mission for which he was recruited was that the area to which he was to be sent was overrun and the mission, therefore, was not capable of being initiated. Pfc. Pfister did render a very valuable function in assisting both Lt. A. E. Jolis and Capt. Richard Watt in Field Bases C & D, respectively, in preparing agents for penetration projects in Germany.”\textsuperscript{3} This document does not provide any details about the “area to which he was to be sent” and by whom it had been “overrun.” The invasion of Normandy began on June 6, 1944, and Otto arrived in London three weeks later, on June 29.\textsuperscript{4}
28. Otto’s OSS Mission and Eva and Otto’s Wartime Correspondence

Willi Eichler later gave Otto yet another reason for the change in his mission. In a letter to Otto shortly after the war, Eichler explained that “the primary difficulty was that they did not want to let you out of the Army here [in London], and we, on the other hand, did not want to commission any soldier with such a delicate mission, such as the one Jupp [Kappius] had.” Otto had been inducted into the army to facilitate his transportation to Europe for this mission, but apparently he could not be released from the army to perform it as an independent ISK member. Instead, other ISK members such as Julius “Jupp” Kappius, who were not affiliated with the U.S. Army, would perform the mission envisioned for Otto.

Whatever the reason, this change in Otto’s assignment may have saved his life. The danger of dropping by parachute behind enemy lines to organize and engage in espionage and resistance activities at that point in the war was enormous. In an interview, Arthur Goldberg later recalled that he personally accompanied refugees who had volunteered to serve as OSS agents to the airplanes that would carry them to their drop targets. When asked if he “had any sense of the kind of odds they faced,” Goldberg replied simply, “Very bad. I didn’t think they could make it. And I used to tell them that. They were much braver than I.”

Kappius (alias “Jack Smith”), would later be dropped by parachute into Germany in September 1944 on a mission like the one also initially intended for Otto. The purpose of the mission (referred to as “Downend” in OSS code) was for Kappius to organize an underground network of trade unionists in Germany’s Ruhr region “to foster resistance against the Nazi regime, carry out acts of sabotage in strategically important war plants, build up a network of agents, and use subversive operations to wear down German morale.” Kappius encountered serious difficulties but survived his mission.

1944 correspondence while Otto was in war-torn Europe

Of course, Eva was unaware of any details about Otto’s OSS assignments. On June 28 she wrote to Otto that “the news was good this morning: Cherbourg free, authority handed over to the mayor, Governor Poletti doing a thorough cleaning up job in Rome—all that made me somewhat hopeful. When am I going to hear from you? I am with you with all my love.”
In a letter to Otto on July 1, 1944, Eva referred to a special secret they shared: she was pregnant again. “Another week is gone. No news from you. No change in my condition—I still don’t tell anybody about it for fear that our hopes may not materialize. Still, I feel I ought to tell Herta, but up to now I just was not able to. Oh Ottoli, help me believe that we can have a child, and that this time I will be able to give him enough strength to live!” Eva asked Otto not to be worried and assured him, “I try hard to do alright and to remain the way you want me to. If only I knew how you are.”

On July 4, Eva expressed her joy at finally receiving a cable from Otto. She reported to Otto about a letter she had received from her mother in South Africa, the first one after her mother had learned of the death of their child. Eva noted that her mother “was of course terribly upset” and advised Otto that her mother’s health “is rather badly shattered.” Eva added, “I am worried, and feel unreasonably guilty that we had to add to her worries.”

On July 9, Eva informed Otto of sad news about their secret:

My heart is hurting very much that it has to cause you pain once more. But we have to take it, and although it is even harder than I had expected it to be, I promise you to get over it. So there will be no child when you are back, and strange and exaggerated as it may seem, the pain is almost as great as on April 13th. Also, I was quite alone when it happened. Herta had left in the morning for Wellesley. . . . Finally, I talked to Dr. Gottschalk . . . and she told me to lie down, be very quiet—at the beginning it looked as though it might perhaps stop. But at night it began again, and all day today, so there can be no doubt that it is out. . . .

Please, Otto darling, you must not worry about me, although I know that it is hard on you, this news. Physically I am alright, and otherwise I am sure I will get over it. . . . Now I am looking at your picture, and it is a little bit as if you were holding my hand, and strength and faith and confidence are coming over me, slowly.

Eva then expressed her concern about news she had received from South Africa that there seemed to be something wrong with her mother in
addition to her heart condition. And in a V-mail message to Otto the following day, Eva explained that her brother Rudi, then serving with the Allied forces in Europe, had just advised her by letter that their mother had recently been in critical condition with her heart and diabetes and had “nearly not pulled out of it.”

Otto’s first long letter to Eva from Europe was written in German, in part on July 14 while in a hospital in London and in part after his recovery on July 22. Otto explained that when he first arrived in London, he was hospitalized with high fever and pain and swelling where he once had an operation on his thyroid. He assured Eva that he had now recovered and sent greetings from their ISK colleagues in London, including “Vic” (one of Willi Eichler’s pseudonyms). Otto also described his “cheap but very clean room” that was outside the city (over an hour commute by train and bus to his training) but “undisturbed by Hitler’s flying bombs.” Confirming that he had not yet received any of Eva’s letters, Otto then asked Eva about their secret:

But now to you, my love, it always comes into my mind how it will be decided, baby or not. Perhaps you have already sent a letter that will let me know more . . . but I still wait for a sign of life from you . . .

I think so often about you, my love, and our home. It is something wonderful to be with a person to whom one can tell everything, get it all out; one hardly knows to treasure it fully when one has it. And then I am completely without your hands, your face, and you. And my hands are alone; my arms long for you and my lips want to tell you how much I belong to you. How much joy it would give me to see your writing, what you have written, what you think, what you feel. I love you so, Evali!

Eva’s letter to Otto dated July 17 included an encouraging comment from their close friend Marie Juchacz:

Marie wrote me the other day from Wellesley, after she had heard that I had gotten your cable. She said: “It is bitter for you to be thrust apart. It is good to know that you are but one in your way of thinking and acting. You have chosen a very, very
painful happiness. But don’t be afraid, don’t lose your courage; I am convinced that you will grow, and that later on you will not want to miss even the very painful elements of this period of your life.”

Eva added her encouragement to Otto. “You will miss me, as I miss you. But both of us, we will make it. Because we know that the other being is ever present, because we know that the way we decided was basically right, and we would not want it otherwise.”

Eva’s letters to Otto often included her observations about the course of the war. In a V-mail message dated July 20, 1944, Eva explained her reaction to news of the unsuccessful attempt by German officers to assassinate Hitler that day:

You can imagine how excited we are about the news of the Attentat [assassination attempt] against Hitler. I had a feeling since late last night, when I heard over the radio that telephone communications with Berlin had been interrupted, that something was bound to happen. What a shame the bomb or whatever it was missed Hitler! Every minute that he disappears earlier is a gain for mankind.

And in a letter dated July 26, Eva reflected further on this unsuccessful assassination attempt:

Chéri, and what do you think of the news? When it first happened, that is when I had the first inkling of what might happen from a little dispatch over the radio, we all were very excited, and thought that the end of Hitler and his system and the war might really be within reach. Now it looks a little different.

Certainly none of the top officers who revolted can be called our friends, and in order to have peace in the long run, they must disappear just as much as Hitler and his gang must. But the fact that they obviously do not believe any longer in the possibility of a German victory must be considered of the greatest importance, and reflects, I am sure, the war weariness of the bulk of the German nation, at this time, with the exception of the Nazis themselves who know that their time is up anyhow.
The generals tried the trick in order to save their own necks, and there are certainly a number of potential Badoglios among them. But I don’t believe that history can be stopped very easily. And once things begin to crumble at the top, repercussions down below the rank and file will probably follow. And all depends upon their coordination, political wisdom and determination to clean house.

But of course, the end of the Nazi war machine may still be quite a ways off, and I think we have to count with the possibility that before they are doomed, they will try to bring as much misery upon mankind as they possibly can. How I wish we could talk about all this, you and me. But then, maybe it is right that this is not the time to talk, but to do the things you do. I love you, Otto, you know?

Turning from the assassination attempt to hopeful personal signs, Eva commented in this letter on “our avocado” plant. She observed that it was “quite a miracle how the plant has grown since you left. Believe it or not: it is now about 27 inches tall, has real leaves, and is growing every day.” She advised Otto that she did not yet want to plant it in a garden but that “a larger pot is certainly soon necessary.” She concluded, “I like this plant which still is not very beautiful, but so strange and vigorous.”

In a brief letter to Eva on July 22, Otto reported that he saw Eva’s brother John, who was then serving in the British Army, and noted that his wife and child were well. In a V-mail message on July 27, Eva expressed her joy on learning of this. “I was so happy, but couldn’t help the tears—you understand me, don’t you?”

Otto’s V-mail message to Eva dated July 27 confirmed that he had finally received Eva’s prior letters, including the July 9 letter with news of her miscarriage. “Chérie, I feel so well how hard it must have been for you to realize that there will not be a baby this time. But I think like you: Maybe a little later better conditions will give better hope that everything is going alright. And don’t think it is too late.”

Otto provided more details about his meeting with Eva’s brother at Welwyn Garden near London. “One evening, I got out of the train in Welwyn and there he stood, waiting for me. . . . He is almost the same as six years ago, looks young, strong in his British uniform, and has the same optimism in his eyes like in the time of Paris.” Otto told Eva that
he and John had been able to spend one afternoon and evening together, and although the time “was of course too short to tell each other all that happened the last six years, we could at least have a general impression.”

In a V-mail message on July 29, Eva wrote about “Hitler’s awful, cruel, indiscriminate attacks” against suspected traitors in the wake of the assassination attempt. “It often keeps me wide awake at night, and never leaves me.” This failed coup by officers in Hitler’s army had a deep impact on Eva, and she would have more to say about it.12

In early August, Dorothy Hill invited Eva, her brother Erich, his wife Herta, and Marie Juchacz’s husband Emil Kirschmann to spend two weeks of vacation at Dorothy’s home in Wollaston, Massachusetts, to escape a heat wave in New York City. In a letter to Otto on the first day of that vacation, August 5, Eva noted that “it is so stifling hot that it is almost unbearable” even though Dorothy’s home was “only three blocks from the ocean.” Eva described a swim she took that day:

It is kind of a bay, and the water is quite still, no waves at all, just like a big, big lake. But the water, very salty, carries you without you making any effort at all, cool, refreshing . . . it was heavenly.
I felt I was back in Montauban, swimming in the river. Although the surroundings were so different, something in myself reacted the same way: I was so close to you, and happy, a confidence spreading, a trust that everything will turn out right, that the time is not so far away when we again will live together, experience the beautiful and the hard things of life as one. I felt the same way when swimming in the Tarn river [in Montauban], and never again was the confidence there so alive as it was today in the ocean.

Eva reacted to news of the progress of the war in French towns she knew so well. “We follow the news eagerly, as you can imagine. The advance in France is stupendous, and when I think of Granville, Mont St. Michel, St. Malo, Nantes, my heart beats faster. What may our friends in those parts of France feel, do today? Sometimes it really feels as though the day of the final breakdown of the Nazis and Wehrmacht are near, and then better things can begin again.”

Eva then offered her harsh condemnation of those German officers who had so belatedly attempted to assassinate Hitler:

In a way, although it sounds cruel, I do not think it was bad that the Wehrmacht did not succeed, and that the Nazis took those drastic steps [Hitler’s retaliatory killing of suspected traitors] to reduce the power of the traditional—military and economic—war lords so a job is done, or at least begun, that has to be done, and all the better that it happens now, and not after the defeat. Because I am afraid that after the defeat there might be too many who “had said all along” that “after all, the Army was always opposed to Hitler, and brought about his crush—so why not accept their cooperation.” And then everything might start all over again, and the war might end with the foundations laid for the next one. And if there is one thing that frightens me more still than all the horrors of this war, it is this idea.

In a V-mail message to Otto on August 6, Eva described a prophetic dream in her first night on vacation at Dorothy Hill’s home:
If the old saying is true that whatever you dream the first night at a strange place will become reality, we need not worry. I dreamed of you: you came back to me even before I expected you and everything was as before. And there were children—our children—I love you Ottoli, my heart is all filled up with you.

On August 9 in a V-mail message written in French, Eva commented on the rapid advances of the Allied forces in France. “If this continues, Paris will soon be liberated.” And in her letter of August 15, she wrote that she just heard on the radio the news about the landing of the Allied troops in southern France. “You can imagine how I feel. I know this will bring the end of the war so much closer. I know how many hearts in France today will beat faster. But how much suffering this implies! Really, I feel stronger and stronger that every bit of force and imagination ought to be employed to make this war the last war.”

Eva then asked Otto, “Now, that you know a great deal more facts, do you think that your, our decision [that Otto accept the mission to return to Europe] was right?” She added, “I do not question of course the necessity and rightness of our decision as long as we did not know more about the facts. But I would very much want to know—would feel relieved—whether you now think it is worthwhile. Can you let me know?” Eva ended this letter by telling Otto how he eased her pain, even though he was away:

A while ago, I had a little talk with you, looking at your picture. I was feeling lonesome and terribly sad—it’s now four months since our Kindlein [baby] was born and died, and I still can’t accept it, still am looking for a cause that brought it about, and that did not have to be. The hospital, the nurse, my shyness not to insist on getting the doctor on time. So many things came back to my mind as though they had happened yesterday. But then you said, through the medium of that little snapshot, “Evali,” you said, “you must not look backwards. I will soon be back with you, and then we’ll build a future.” Ottoli, I believe you, and I’ll keep strong and fit for that day.

Writing on the same day, Otto told Eva that he was walking that afternoon “through the small, peaceful streets near Hyde Park” and saw the
open door of a small public library. He observed that “libraries are a sort of common ground all over the world. This one wasn’t much different from the one we have around the corner in the Bronx. Only a little darker and a bit sleepy.” Otto commented on the progress of the war:

The news, coming out this afternoon, of the allied landing in South-France, gives a new crescendo to the conviction that only little time is left to Hitler’s modern barbarism. And soon we will be able to see how strong and renewed the movement for human liberty will set in. Let’s hope it will!

At the end of the letter Otto exclaimed, “Oh! How I liked the news about the avocado! Strange, how much such little things may mean.”

The liberation of Paris

In her letter of August 17, Eva wrote that the “news continues to be very good, the advance towards Paris is amazing, and the casualties in Southern France seem to be light, at least at the beginning of the campaign.”

The following day, Eva told Otto that she had just finished making little parcels for him and for her two brothers, Rudi and John. “It is so little that we can give you, but if you know with how much love it is sent, it certainly will mean something.” The process reminded Eva of her mother:

When making those parcels . . . I thought of mother. You know, when we were still going home from time to time, we used to imagine things, and to tell each other what we would like to do if all of a sudden we were to be very rich. And then mother said that her dearest wish would be to have in her apartment one little spare room, with nothing in it but a table, chair, shelves, empty boxes, wrapping material; and enough money so that as often as she liked she could send her loving “Päckchen” [little packages] to all her children all over the world, and if possible to all their friends. She then did not realize how much “all over the world” we would be one
day—oh, it is so terrible to think of her as being desperately ill, and not able to help her!

Eva then expressed her excitement about the impending liberation of “our Paris”:

The news keeps me wide awake. As far as we could make out from the radio this morning, we seem to be quite close to Paris. Orléans, Chartres, Étampes—how many memories are connected with these names. And to think that our Paris will soon be free again, the “faubourg” Issy les Moulineaux [suburb of Paris where they had lived]—it makes me wish to be there with you. If only many of our friends live to see this, and stay on to see the reconstruction of a decent way of life and participate in it! I do think though that hard fights are still ahead before the war is over.

In a brief V-mail message on August 23, Otto wrote:

Chérie—mon petit,

Paris has fallen! Just in this moment I hear it, and maybe only you (surely only you!) can feel what I am feeling in this moment. Of course, we were waiting for it, but still, “c’est a peine a croire” [it’s hard to believe]. And how much happier I would be if you were with me in this unique hour, only you (and I) know it.

And at the same moment in New York, Eva sent an excited V-mail message to Otto:

Chéri—I just turn on the radio: Paris liberated! Can you imagine how I feel? I just had to write you right now before going to the office—I know this very minute you’ll be thinking of me and all the things that unite us so closely. Let’s hope, work, pray—that the bell will ring for the liberation of all Europe, and the reconstruction of a better world.

I love you, Otto, with all my heart.
But in her August 25 letter, Eva’s elation about the liberation of Paris was dampened by news of “bitter fighting still raging in Paris”:

I think that the blow was hard to assimilate by everyone who had been so overwhelmingly happy about the liberation of Paris. And I am wondering why. Because, of course, there can be no doubt that Paris will be liberated in the near future, that the Nazis will be driven out. There will be so much more loss of life, and that is terrible. The obvious confusion that brought about the premature news is also discouraging, because one thinks immediately how the Nazis will try to make use of this and to divert attention from their real defeats.

Eva pointed to what she saw as one of the most hopeful aspects of the liberation of Paris:

I think the thing that made the whole news so unbelievably good (and why then the disappointment was so great at first especially for us) was that, according to what we first heard, Paris was liberated by the uprising of the people. That made us proud, and more hopeful for the future of France and Europe than one had ever dared to be before. . . . I have come to the conclusion that there is really no reason yet to be discouraged. Because the fundamental fact that the people stood up has not changed. Only, they were not strong enough to do away with the enemy. The news of the enemy giving up after so short a fight was too good to be true. And we have to accept the hard fact that nothing in this struggle is being won without going the whole bitter way of a deadly fight.13

Eva then shared her bleaker view:

The news of these last days of the tremendous advances of the Allies in France, the news of the crumbling of German resistance here and there, made us all too optimistic. And I have found the way back to my old, more pessimistic outlook that nobody is giving anything away, and that, although I have no doubt as
to the final outcome of the struggle, we better be prepared for very bad things before we are through with it all.

I am writing this at my lunch hour at the office. Just now a girl comes back with a paper saying that Paris is now definitely liberated. But it does not seem confirmed yet, so I am holding back my hope until the real confirmed news comes through.

The next day, Eva was finally able to write to Otto, “Now Paris is free and all the joy when we first heard it has come back into my heart.” She also told Otto that she received a V-mail from her brother John “from somewhere in France,” dated Aug. 13. He was alright, had come by quite a few sad and terrible sights and was very, very busy.” She wondered, “Maybe by now he is already in Paris? Notre vieux, cher Paris! [Our dear old Paris] It is just too wonderful to think of Paris being free, being herself again!”

In Otto’s letter dated August 26, he noted his receipt of some of Eva’s prior letters and answered her question about their “decision”:

Yes, I think even now, our decision was right. It would be too complicated to explain in detail why, but this is the way I feel.

I haven’t had much time and “tranquillité” to talk much with Vic [Eichler] about what you call “our way of life.” I told him once how and why we decided to have Marianne. He listened with comprehension but there was no time to go “au fond des choses” [get to the bottom of things] and I hardly think this is the right moment to have this kind of conversation because everyone is too busy.

Otto closed this letter by telling Eva, “While writing, I am listening to good music, something like our good old WQXR, and my mind and my heart are going back to our little music corner, with Toscanini on. . . . And your beautiful hands are in mine. . . . I am sure the day will not be too far away when we can do this again. I hold you close to me.”

In a V-mail of August 29, Eva expressed her deep gratitude:

You know, chéri, these days I realize ever anew how very rich we both are—to have each other, and to be secure and at home with each other. . . . It is strange. I feel that life has been and is
very hard, cruelly hard to us, and often I miss you so I think I cannot stand it. And at the same time I feel privileged and happy to know you are there, and I am there for you.

This sounds all very confused, but certainly not to you who understand every inch of my being and feeling. I love you, Ottoli.