



A selection of Christmas letters sent by John Crook to his parents in 1943 and 1944, during his time as a PoW at Stalag Luft VIII-B camp.

12th December '43

My Dears: A very happy Christmas is in store for me after all, for I have received your first letter. So glad and relieved to learn you are well, and have survived the suspense of waiting for news of me. What with Red X Xmas parcels and plenty of fuel we shall do all right over the festive season. Very Xmassy weather – snow and ice. More news follows. Love from John.

(Note change of address. Same place, different designation).

12th December'43

My Dears: More Christmas news: Carols, "Messiah", band concert, cabaret, pantomime – everything in style. As you didn't get my first card, I'd better repeat: Captured Salerno 10th Sept, with all the boys. Busy decorating our barrack with paper-chains etc. – Like last year in Zubair. Band concert a success, though a hard blow. Best love, John.

20th December'43

My Dears: Amidst the Christmas decorations I have at last found time to write you a line. So intensely busy about rehearsals and writing parts, teaching Greek, cooking gelatine-and-chips, planning a chamber-music concert and acting as usual as a general confidant and receiver of everyone's troubles, that only just before bed can I fit a letter in to my dearest ones! Anyway there's no time to pine away. You need not bother much about sending clothes: we're pretty well set up. But cigarettes, if possible, because they are currency here, and one can obtain for them anything from a banjo to a tin of porridge. Last night conducted a string octet in "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik", very successfully. Am going to rehearse some other things with them.

Was very pleased to hear from Sissie, and am looking forward to your next letter. Give my love to all the kind friends who were so concerned for my safety: and tell Sister Gerand I lost the medal with my identity discs from off my neck – thereby hangs a tale to tell when I come home. Love to yourselves, Mrs Rose, her Bussey, Francis & Wendy, From John.

26th December'43

Boxing Day: Had a good Xmas; pudding steak & kidney, jelly, cake, beer, and your second letter. What a lovely programme at Maidstone! The Brahms is one of my favourites, also the Bach. Thank Mr Oakden very much. The boys are all very grieved about Doulton. He was with the Colonel and they were wounded together. More to follow; best love, John.

26th December'43

My Dears: Best New Year wishes – rather late – in hope of a speedy reunion. Capt. Williams was adjutant of the 8th Battalion, so we know nothing of him. Don't be surprised if you hear from Mrs Morgan, senior or junior, or Mrs Phillips, the mother of our fairy godfather here. Don't put my army no. on my address. God be with you always – your loving John.

Christmas Day 1944

My dear Mother and Father, In the midst of decorations, cakes (stalag-made), greetings and whatever good cheer we can put into a prison camp at Christmas, and on a perfect day, dry, cold, sunny and with all the trees and wires covered in frost, I must just tell you how much I wish I were home, and how much I long to see your dear faces again. This is a brave effort: dances, concerts, parties, shows and band programmes, and everyone in their best khaki slacks and with their boots and buttons polished. But everybody's heart is really at home, and especially mine, because I love you both so much. I am still thinking and hoping how best to repay you for all your love and your confidence in me; and I trust to be soon home to start. I've had a very pleasant Christmas present, for my recognition papers here at last came through, and Dick Morgan's as well. The Christmas show is The Yeoman of the Guard, with the RAF Choir and the Camb Orchestra, and some positively sumptuous costumes: a great deal of work has been put into it, and it has turned out a fine show, and could give points to most amateur dramatics societies. Once more all my love: remember the hope of Christmas; John.