

Bob Stone joins the Army Air Forces, 1943-1944

Introduction

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, life changed drastically for Robert Stone and his family, as it did for all Americans. Bob finished his sophomore year of college before enlisting in the Army Aviation Cadets in July 1942.

ENLISTED RECORD OF

Stone	Robert	L.	12120188	A/C
<small>(Last name)</small>	<small>(First name)</small>	<small>(Middle initial)</small>	<small>(Army serial number)</small>	<small>(Grade)</small>

Born in New York, in the State of New York

Enlisted ~~on~~ 21 July, 1942, at 39 Whitehall Street N.Y.C.

When enlisted or inducted he was 20 7/12 years of age and by occupation a Student

He had Hazel eyes, Brown hair, Buddy complexion, and was 5 feet 8 1/2 inches in height.

Detail from "Honorable Discharge and Enlisted Record of Robert L. Stone," October 22, 1943. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09620.054)

Due to the backlog of men waiting to be trained, Bob did not report for duty until February 1943. He would earn the rank of officer *if* he completed his training. The first hurdle for him was to pass numerous physical and psychological evaluations in Nashville, Tennessee. Those who failed the examinations "washed out" and became privates in the infantry. On March 5, 1943, Bob wrote a long letter to his family describing the tests and the medical team's concerns about a steel plate that had been put in his leg after a car accident when he was sixteen.

Excerpt from Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, March 5, 1943. GLC09620.013

Last monday I started off with a day of written psychs that lasted for eight hours. It was the multiple choice type based on everything imaginable. Nobody is ever washed out as a result of this part of the test and it's merely used to help in your classification. The next day we took our individual psychs that can best be described as "penny arcade day". They have the damnest contraptions with lights and levers and buttons to push on and off. These tests were very interesting and are used to test your coordination. The next day and the most important I took my "ARMA" (adaptability relative to military aeronautics). This was an interview with a psychiatrist in which he asks a million and one different questions. This is the part of the test that the majority of the fellows are washed out on. I really had fun talking with my fellow and I think I did quite well. The following day the actual physical came. Never have I had such a complete going-over. The most extensive thing is the eye test in which they give you depth perception, prism divergence and convergence, as well as a number of other

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things. I went through the whole exam without a recheck until I came to the last room where I got a recheck on my leg cause they wanted to have it x-rayed. Had this done right away and took the pictures and the report to the captain who is the orthopaedic surgeon. He said he thought that the plate would have to come out not because anything was wrong with it but because if anything ever happened to my leg it might cause complications or some such rot. Then I reported to the flight surgeon who told me to come back the next day which I did. Went to the original captain who had eight medical officer sitting in his office like a jury. He told them about my leg etc. and the verdict was rendered not guilty—i.e. that I didn't have to have it out. Then reported back to the flight surgeon who said my papers were O.K. to go on to classification and that was that. As yet no word has come through but it's not too bad a sign as some fellows have had to wait as long as two weeks to get any word as it's a long procedure. Waiting anxiously for some word one way or the other is absolute hell but there's not a darn thing you can do about it. . . .

The number of wash outs is increasing daily and some of the kids are really broken up. After being reverted to a private they get an automatic three day pass as well as open-post every night until twelve—hardly worth it, though!!

Although the medical team initially cleared him for flight, he discovered that the steel plate would indeed be a problem. The military planes provided no protection from the cold temperatures at high altitudes.

Excerpt from Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, February 21, 1944. GLC09620.080.01

I've had trouble with my leg at high altitudes when it was so terribly cold. So, after much consultation they decided to operate on my leg and remove my plate taking the chance it was the cause of my trouble. . . .

The one tough thing about all this seige is the fact that I was removed from my crew when I was put in the hospital. It really breaks my heart because I had such a swell gang. The boys are swell and come up to see me all the time. . . .

P. S. When they removed my plate, they found the screws to be a little loose. Consequently, it was just as well that it came out—it makes a swell souvenir! A little black [*inserted: metal*] plate with six separate screws. Just like something a carpenter would have.

Bob's surgery delayed his deployment. While he was recovering, his flight crew advanced

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without him and he was forced to wait for a new assignment. The first replacement crew he was assigned to was less than ideal, and he was happy to be assigned to “Pop” Elkins’s crew in May 1944.

Excerpt from Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, May 12, 1944. GLC092620.095

Yesterday a pilot came in looking for a new bombardier for his crew. He had finished all the phases and would have shipped out in ten days or so but his bombardier took sick. So, he wanted me to replace him rather than take a new man with no experience in a B-24. He and his co-pilot and navigator all seemed like swell gents and so I accepted the position. We are now put back in the middle of second phase, and it means that I won’t have to repeat all the boring ground school ect. They seemed very anxious that I join the crew and I’m mighty glad I did. will write more when I get to know the fellows better.

As you may have gathered I was rather disappointed with my other crew, although I didn’t know them too well. I had two flight officer pilots who were quite young and a little scatter-brained. Most of the kids who are coming in now seem to be quite immature and surprisingly young. To have gotten on my present crew would appear to be a swell break.

Due in part to his extended time in the hospital, Bob’s training spanned a year and a half and took place at six army bases: Nashville, Tennessee; Ellington and Childress, Texas; Wendover Field, Utah; March Field and Hammer Field, both in California; and Oahu, Hawaii. In addition to teaching the essential skills needed to be an airman, these schools often prepared men for war in an unexpected way.

While training at bombardier school in Childress, Texas, Bob witnessed two fatal plane crashes in one day. Between December 1941 and August 1945, the Army Airforce had 52,651 airplane accidents in the continental United States that were not related to combat. Many of these crashes occurred during training and drove home the dangers of airforce duty.

Excerpt from Robert L. Stone to his family, September 25, 1943. GLC09620.047

Great sorry came over the whole camp when our squadron commander announced that one of our planes had been lost in an accident on the way to maneuvers. One ship came up under another and it’s props cut the tail fins off the other ship. The AT-11 is a twin finned ship and so the pilot didn’t have any control over his plane and it went right to the ground without a chance for safety. Our hearts were saddened when he announced the death of all the men—two cadets, the pilot, and the crew chief. . . .

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After supper the camp was hit by the greatest blows any of us had ever received. We were playing ball against the officers out on the landing field. Our squadron commander, who's one of the greatest guys you'd ever want to know, and a major who was the head of our maneuvers, were buzzing around the vicinity in a little basic trainer that we had along to go for the mail every day. All of a sudden the ship made a sharp turn about 200 ft. above the ground and went into a spin when the engine stalled. The wing flew apart like paper in mid air and the ship crashed into the ground. It was horrible when it immediately broke into flames right on the end of the runway not 300 yards away from us. Of course, both of the poor devils were killed instantly as the plane burned to a cinder before our very eyes. It was horrible and at first we couldn't believe what had happened although we saw the whole thing unfold before us.

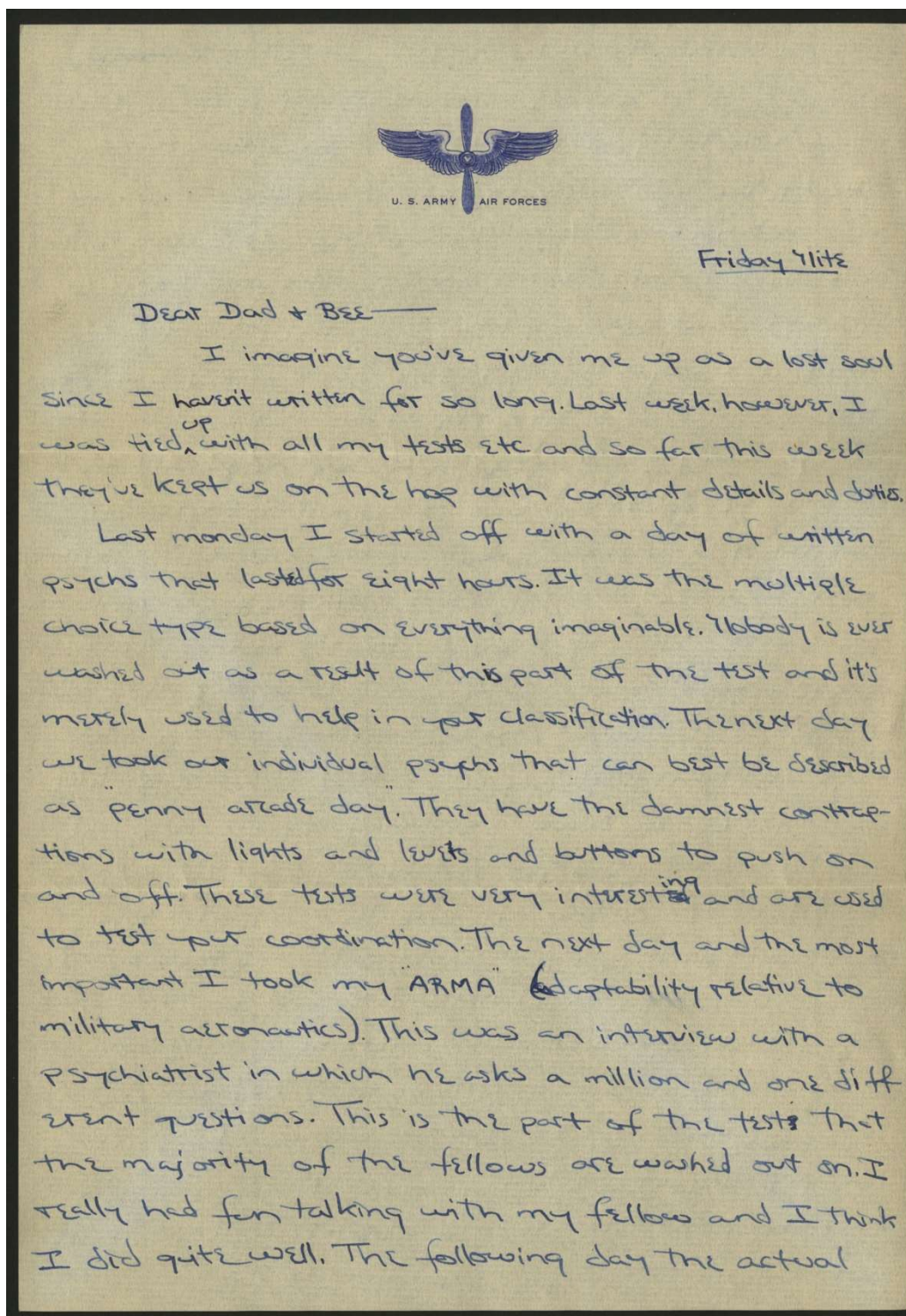
This was a tragedy that left the camp deep in sorrow and mental dejection. There was just nothing to say since we'd all seen it happen and it was nothing but an indescribable catastrophe. One of the pilots tried to say a few words to us but he choked up and had to stop so we all dispersed and returned to our tents in silence. Everyone was deeply affected by the blow of such a loss as was that of Lt. Sayer. All of us, both cadets and pilots were crazy about him since he was a real square guy. Because of his eagerness our squadron is admitted to be the best on the line. Actually, Lt. Sayer died a Captain since his promotion came through the day following his death. He was a fellow who would go far in the army because of his likable personality and ability to get things done the way the higher ups wanted. He was so close to several of the pilots that a few of them were broken up as much as if one of their own family had passed away. This was a tragedy that only a long time will erase from our memories. Our squadron will never be the same!

Questions for Discussion

1. What is a "penny arcade day"?
2. Why would the military spend so much time on "psych" evaluations for pilots?
3. Which part of Bob's physical was most extensive? Why?
4. What happens to candidates who wash out?
5. How did Bob's medical situation impact his flight career?
6. How did Bob and the other pilots respond to training accidents and death?

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Image



Robert L Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, March 5, 1943.

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09620.013 p 1)

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Transcript

Robert L Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, March 5, 1943.

[draft]

Friday Nite

Dear Dad & Bee—

I imagine you've given me up as a lost soul since I haven't written for so long. Last week, however, I was tied [*inserted: up*] with all my tests etc. and so far this week they've kept us on the hop with constant details and duties.

Last monday I started off with a day of written psychs that lasted for eight hours. It was the multiple choice type based on everything imaginable. Nobody is ever washed out as a result of this part of the test and it's merely used to help in your classification. The next day we took our individual psychs that can best be described as "penny arcade day". They have the damnest contraptions with lights and levers and buttons to push on and off. These tests were very interest[~~strikeout~~]ing and are used to test your coordination. The next day and the most important I took my "ARMA" (adaptability relative to military aeronautics). This was an interview with a psychiatrist in which he asks a million and one different questions. This is the part of the test that the majority of the fellows are washed out on. I really had fun talking with my fellow and I think I did quite well. The following day the actual [2] physical came. Never have I had such a complete going-over. The most extensive thing is the eye test in which they give you depth perception, prism divergence and convergence, as well as a number of other things. I went through the whole exam without a recheck until I came to the last room where I got a recheck on my leg cause they wanted to have it x-rayed. Had this done right away and took the pictures and the report to the captain who is the orthopaedic surgeon. He said he thought that the plate would have to come out not because anything was wrong with it but because if anything ever happened to my leg it might cause complications or some such rot. Then I reported to the flight surgeon who told me to come back the next day which I did. Went to the original captain who had eight medical officer sitting in his office like a jury. He told them about my leg etc. and the verdict was rendered not guilty—i.e. that I didn't have to have it out. Then reported back to the flight surgeon who said my papers were O.K. to go on to classification and that was that. As yet no word has come through but it's not too bad a sign as some fellows have had to wait as long as two weeks to get any word as it's a long procedure. Waiting anxiously for some word one way or the other is absolute hell but there's not a darn thing you can do about it.

[3] On friday a big shipment of several thousand men went out as pilots and Pete was among them. We've heard from them already from Maxwell Field, Alabama. Right now another bunch of pilots and navigators are on orders to leave any time, destination unknown. Slowly

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but surely most of my friends are taking off and I'd certainly love to join them.

The number of wash outs is increasing daily and some of the kids are really broken up. After being reverted to a private they get an automatic three day pass as well as open-post every night until twelve—hardly worth it, though!!

On wednesday I went to Lois and Phil's apt. for dinner. Lois really outdid herself and cooked up one super meal. I was so surprised to find she was such a wonderful cook. I hadn't eaten so well in a month. It's certainly swell to have them around to visit with on open-posts.

Don't know if I've thanked you or not but many thanks now for the hanks, underwear, towels, sneakers, and cookies Bee. The last of which will be muchly appreciate any time [inserted: again.] Also, thanks Dad & Bee for your letters that are more than welcomed.

[4] The last week or so the weather has been absolutely miserable in this hell-hole. The temperature has been down around zero and it's most uncomfortable since we have such crummy barracks. Last night it snowed like anything and today we have a good four inches on the ground—no kidding this place really stinks and I'll certainly be glad to leave it.

Has a taste of real drudgery a week ago when I was on guard duty. It's a 24 hour proposition with two hours on and four off. Believe me it's no fun to be up most of the night pounding a beat all alone out in the cold—not my idea of a good time.

Last sunday I had my first typhoid and tetanus shots. They really dish them out wholesale. You roll up both sleeves and you're hit from both sides [inserted: at once] by a needle—most unpleasant!

I hope by now my watch is about ready as I'm lost without it. Please send all my letters to the boys at Deerfield as well as to Don and Ken so I won't have to write everybody seperately cause I just haven't the time.

Keep your fingers crossed that my classification comes through alright and that I get by. I'll let you know as soon as anything comes through. My love to you all—

Bobby

[envelope]

A/C R.L. Stone 12120188
Squadron D-4
Nashville Army Air Center
Nashville, Tenn.

Lt. Comdr J.C. Stone
375 Park Avenue
New York City
N.Y.

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Image

^{Monday aft.} ^{Bunny-}
 Dear Dad, Bee, Don, Tim, Barry, Ken
 I'm sorry it's been so many ages since I last wrote but it so happens that I've been here in the hospital for the last three weeks. I didn't think it would be wise to worry you until it was all over but for some time I've had trouble with my leg at high altitudes when it was so terribly cold. So, after much consultation they decided to operate on my leg and remove my plate taking the chance it was the cause of my trouble.
 Right now I am feeling lots better and before long I hope to be up and about again. The operation wasn't too bad but for about a week I wasn't feeling too hot. My leg was rather painful but it's coming along nicely now. The major who operated on me is supposed to be a good orthopedic man.

Robert L Stone to his family, February 21, 1944.

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09620.080.01 p 1)

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Transcript

Robert L Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, February 21, 1944.

[draft]

Monday Aft.

Dear Dad, Bee, Don, Jim, Barry, Ken & Bunny —

I'm sorry it's been so many ages since I last wrote but it so happens that I've been here in the hospital for the last three weeks. I didn't think it would be wise to worry you until it was all over but for some time I've had trouble with my leg at high altitudes when it was so terribly cold. So, after much consultation they decided to operate on my leg and remove my plate taking the chance it was the cause of my trouble.

Right now I am feeling lots better and before long I hope to be up and about again. The operation wasn't too bad but for about a week I wasn't feeling too hot. My leg was rather painful but it's coming along nicely now. The major who operated on me is supposed to be a good orthopedic man. [2] He, of course, knew of Gallie and thinks very highly of him.

The day I was operated on Ronnie and Doug came over to the hospital and were here when I woke up the first afternoon. It made it lots easier for me cause I wasn't feeling too marvelous. I think Ronnie is coming over again tomorrow.

The one tough thing about all this seige is the fact that I was removed from my crew when I was put in the hospital. It really breaks my heart because I had such a swell gang. The boys are swell and came up to see me all the time. They always bring my mail up here ect.. Incidentally, continue to write to the same address as always because I'll get my mail quicker than if it came directly to the hospital.

Speaking of mail I'm afraid I owe everyone a letter but I [3] haven't written a soul for the past three weeks or so. Please be sure that this letter gets around to all the family so they'll excuse my not writing. Hope you can make out my scrawl but I'm on my back writing since I still get dizzy when I sit up, because they've been stuffing me with sulfa pills for about a week now and they have this effect on you.

Can't think of any more now cause life is kinda dull here in the hospital. I hope this letter finds you all well and in top spirits. Please don't worry about R. L. S. because I'm feeling lots better now and ought to be up walking again before too long. I hope you received my telegram that one of the boys was sending for me this morning.

Please thank Bunny for her sweet letter that arrived this morning, Tell her [struck] that I'll [4] write as soon as I'm up and around. Be sure you tell her cause I got a long letter from her this morning.

'Nuff for now—

All love—

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Bobby

P. S. When they removed my plate, they found the screws to be a little loose. Consequently, it was just as well that it came out—it makes a swell souvenir! A little black [*inserted: metal*] plate with six separate screws. Just like something a carpenter would have.

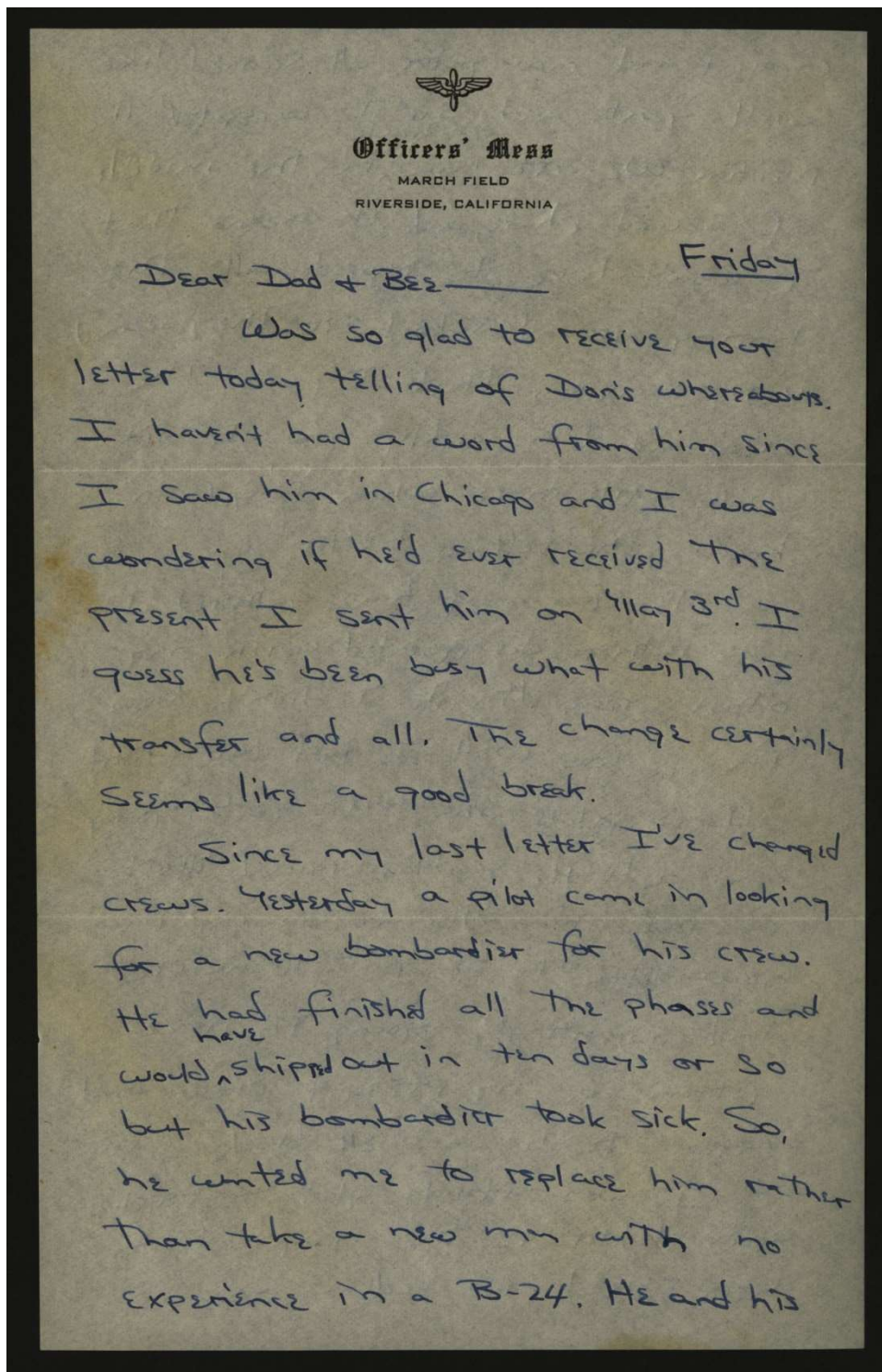
P. S. S. Got your telegram this morning, Dad, and of course you can understand why I wasn't able to call back on Sunday,

Love again —

Bobby

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Image



Robert L Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, May 12, 1944.
 (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09620.095 p 1)

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Transcript

Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, 12 May 1944.

[draft]

Friday

Dear Dad & Bee —

Was so glad to receive your letter today telling of Don's whereabouts. I haven't had a word from him since I saw him in Chicago and I was wondering if he'd ever received the present I sent him on May 3rd. I guess he's been busy what with his transfer and all. The change certainly seems like a good break.

Since my last letter I've changed crews. Yesterday a pilot came in looking for a new bombardier for his crew. He had finished all the phases and would [*inserted*: have] shipped out in ten days or so but his bombardier took sick. So, he wanted me to replace him rather than take a new man with no experience in a B-24. He and his [2]co-pilot and navigator all seemed like swell gents and so I accepted the position. We are now [*inserted*: put back] in the middle of second phase, and it means that I won't have to repeat all the boring ground school ect. They seemed very anxious that I join the crew and I'm mighty glad I did. will write more when I get to know the fellows better.

As you may have gathered I was rather disappointed with my other crew, although I didn't know them too well. I had two flight officer pilots who were quite young and a little scatter-brained. Most of the kids who are coming in now seem to be quite immature and surprisingly young. To have gotten on my present crew would appear to be a swell break.

I was certainly glad to receive your letter re the navy and to hear that you feel as you do [3] about the whole thing, Dad. I know that you've done a swell job with your assignment and are thought very highly of by your associates so that you shouldn't feel at all bad about it if they decide to release you. You know how proud we are of the "Comdr." but we'd be just as proud of him as Mr. J.C.S too! Be sure to let me know what develops one way or the other.

If I can get a line, I may ty to call you tonight. If not tonight, I'll try in a day or so.

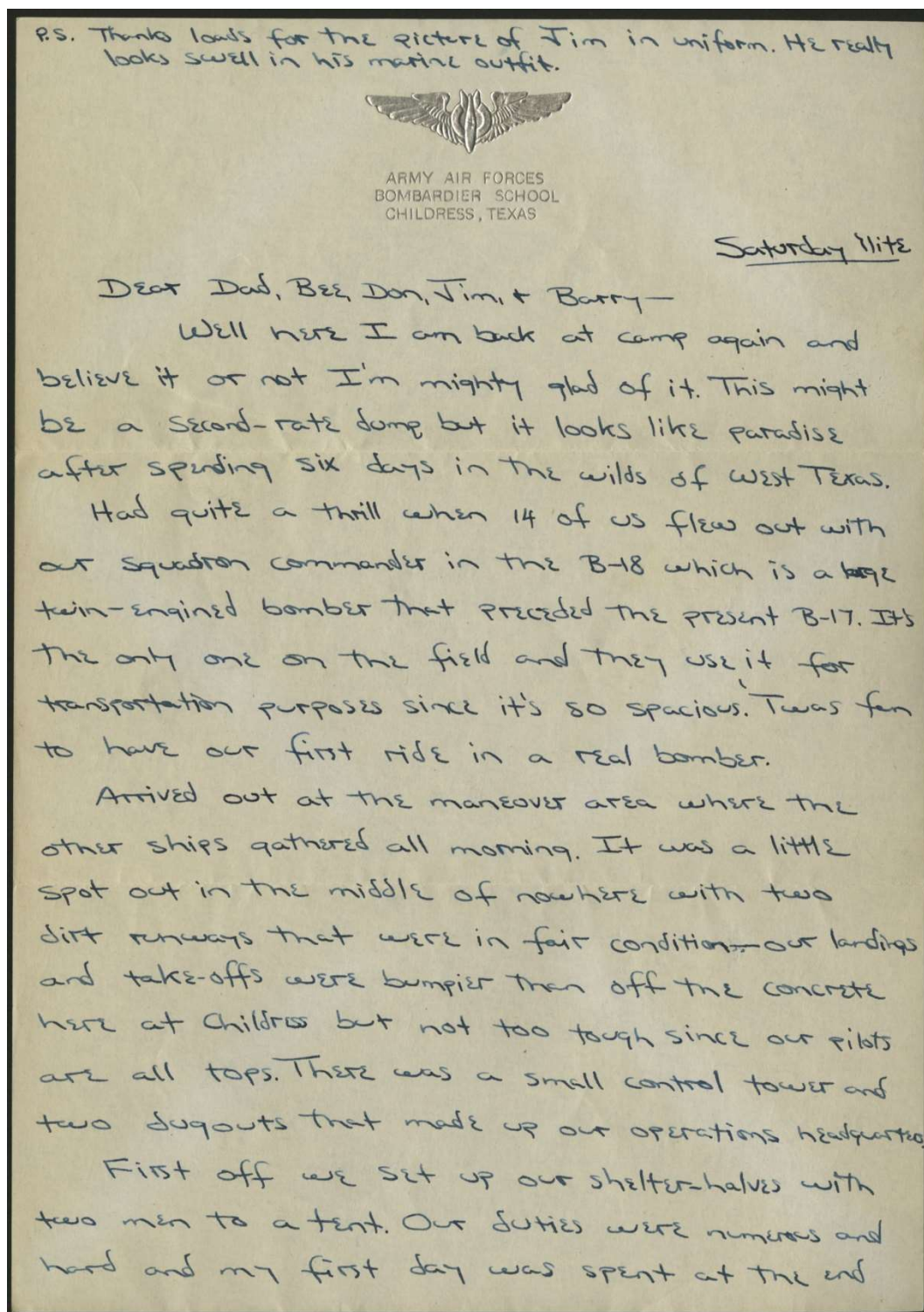
Write often.

Lots of love —

Bobby

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Image



Robert L Stone to his family, September 25, 1943.

(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09620.047 p1)

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Transcript

Robert L Stone to his family, September 25, 1943.

[draft]

Saturday Nite

Dear Dad, Bee, Don, Jim, & Barry—

Well here I am back at camp again and believe it or not I'm mighty glad of it. This might be a second-rate dump but it looks like paradise after spending six days in the wilds of West Texas.

Had quite a thrill when 14 of us flew out with our squadron commander in the B-18 which is a large twin-engined bomber that preceded the present B-17. It's the only one on the field and they use it for transportation purposes since it's so spacious. 'Twas fun to have our first ride in a real bomber.

Arrived out at the maneover area where the other ships gathered all morning. It was a little spot out in the middle of nowhere with two dirt runways that were in fair condition—our landings and take-offs were bumpier than off the concrete here at Childress but not too tough since our pilots are all tops. There was a small control tower and two dugouts that made up our operations headquarters.

First off we set up our shelter-halves with two men to a tent. Our duties were numerous and hard and my first day was spent at the end [2] of a shovel digging slit trenches and garbage disposal pits. Incidentally, Texas has the hardest rockiest soil I've ever tried to penetrate. By evening we were all weary when we gathered for supper.

Great sorry came over the whole camp when our squadron commander announced that one of our planes had been lost in an accident on the way to maneuvers. One ship came up under another and it's props cut the tail fins off the other ship. The AT-11 is a twin finned ship and so the pilot didn't have any control over his plane and it went right to the ground without a chance for safety. Our hearts were saddened when he announced the death of all the men—two cadets, the pilot, and the crew chief. After a few simple words it was dismissed as one of those tragedies that accompany war. It was hard for all of us to take but we had to be philosophical.

Comes tuesday morning and I went on a four hour navigation flight up to Oklahoma. Got back in time for lunch after which two of us loaded 10 bombs into the ship and went out bombing. Came back and loaded 10 more bombs which we dropped and repeated this once more until we had completed three bombing missions and had dropped 30 bombs. Believe me it was the roughest day of flying I've ever spent.

[3] Even though I was dead tired by this time I was rudely awakened at 12:00 to go on guard duty until 3:00. It was a cold, lonely tour of guard and 'twas swell to get back to bed. The

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next day was my toughest of all. I was on an ordinance detail. We worked in the sand pits loading bombs with 100 lbs. of sand and putting them on a truck to be carried away to the ammunition dump. We worked all day without let-up and I can honestly say it was the hardest days work I've ever put in. Lifting bomb after bomb into a truck is no cinch, when it weighs 100 lbs.

On Thursday morning I had a moderately easy time when I flew two bombing missions as I did also in the afternoon. Wasn't too rushed and got in some pretty good missions. Up that night at 3:00 for guard duty until 6:00 and as usual that was no fun.

On Friday I was on K.P. for the entire day. It wasn't bad compared to ordinance or some of the other details. After supper the camp was hit by the greatest blows any of us had ever received. We were playing ball against the officers out on the landing field. Our squadron commander, who's one of the greatest guys you'd ever want to know, and a major who was the head of our maneuvers, were buzzing around the vicinity in [4] a little basic trainer that we had along to go for the mail every day. All of a sudden the ship made a sharp turn about 200 ft. above the ground and went into a spin when the engine stalled. The wing flew apart like paper in mid air and the ship crashed into the ground. It was horrible when it immediately broke into flames right on the end of the runway not 300 yards away from us. Of course, both of the poor devils were killed instantly as the plane burned to a cinder before our very eyes. It was horrible and at first we couldn't believe what had happened although we saw the whole thing unfold before us.

This was a tragedy that left the camp deep in sorrow and mental dejection. There was just nothing to say since we'd all seen it happen and it was nothing but an indescribable catastrophe. One of the pilots tried to say a few words to us but he choked up and had to stop so we all dispersed and returned to our tents in silence. Everyone was deeply affected by the blow of such a loss as was that of Lt. Sayer. All of us, both cadets and pilots were crazy about him since he was a real square guy. Because of his eagerness our squadron is admitted to be the best on the line. [~~strikeout~~] [*inserted: Actually,*] Lt. Sayer died a Captain since [*inserted: his*] promotion came through the day following his death. [5] He was a fellow who would go far in the army because of his likable personality and ability to get things done the way the higher ups wanted. He was so close to several of the pilots that a few of them were broken up as much as if one of their own family had passed away. This was a tragedy that only a long time will erase from our memories. Our squadron will never be the same!

The next morning a heavy fog rolled in over camp and so we couldn't fly. It was a blessing, since we'd all decided to finish out maneuvers the [*inserted: way*] Lt. Sayer would want us to, although none of us were in any mood or shape to fly that day. Nobody said a word of it and we played ball against the officers in an attempt to forget the disaster of the previous evening. It was slow, but we finally put it in the back of our minds and things were somewhat

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back to normal again.

This morning the ceiling was too low for us to bomb and so we came back to camp rather [~~strikeout~~] [*inserted: than*] waiting until monday as originally planned. We were all tired, dirty, and mighty anxious to get away from that place. We got back here and right now I feel like a new man. Had a shave, shampoo, and haircut and good hot shower which did wonders to remove the grime of sleeping and eating out in the field. When we got back we [6] looked like men from the north pole with long beards and dirty bodies.

Thanks for your letters which were most welcomed out at maneuvers. Incidentally, I didn't get the package you send Dad, either out there or here when we got back. Perhaps it will come in a day or so. About the sweater, Bee, I don't think it would be too good an idea since we are issued one that we're supposed to wear. Thanks anyway.

Starting monday night we go on a new schedule of flying from 12:00 at night until 6:00 in the morning. It will be a screwy set-up and I'll write more about it when I see what's what's.

Think I'll be off to bed for some much needed sleep. Maneuvers really took alot out of us in many ways. The two disasters were horrible, beyond compare, but they do serve to show us that this is war and not a game for weaklings. It's something we're playing for keeps and the sooner it's over the better it will be for all. It's an absolute crime that men like Jack Sayer and those cadets, and pilot have to die that way but I suppose all we can say is c'est la guerre and let it go at that. I hope you'll excuse my rambling on this but it made such a deep impression on us all that it will take lots of time to erase.

S'long now.

P.S. with lots of love to you all—Bobby

[inserted on the top of page 1]

P.S. Thanks loads for the picture of Jim in uniform. He really looks swell in his marine outfit.