

A soldier's reaction to the Death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1945

Introduction

On April 12, 1945, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt died from a cerebral hemorrhage in Warm Spring, Georgia. He was sixty-three years old, had been elected to four terms, and served as president for twelve years. For many American servicemen, Roosevelt had been in office for nearly half their lives.

Roosevelt's death was mourned across the country and around the world. As the train carrying Roosevelt's body traveled to Washington DC for burial, hundreds of thousands of Americans gathered to pay their respects. Yet even as the nation collectively mourned its beloved president, Americans wondered what kind of president Harry S. Truman would be. It was the first time in the history of the United States that a new president took office during a time of war.

Written on April 15, 1945, Lieutenant Stone's letter to his parents reflects the feelings of the nation.

Excerpt from Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, April 15, 1954. GLC09620.173

First heard the sad news of the Presidents death a few days ago when our radio operator picked up a broadcast from Frisco. I imagine his sudden death came as a real blow to the American people. Everyone out here feels a definite sadness and a real loss at a time like this. I guess we can thank God that we have such capable military leaders to rely on. Most of us are wondering what kind of a fellow Truman will be as president. Will he be kicked around like a rubber ball or will he assert himself in the right direction? I imagine only time will tell.

Questions for Discussion

1. Briefly describe the impact of Roosevelt's death on Bob Stone, and on the American people.
2. What concern does Bob Stone express for Roosevelt's successor as president?

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Image

The Illarians
April 15th, 1945

Dear Dad + Bee—

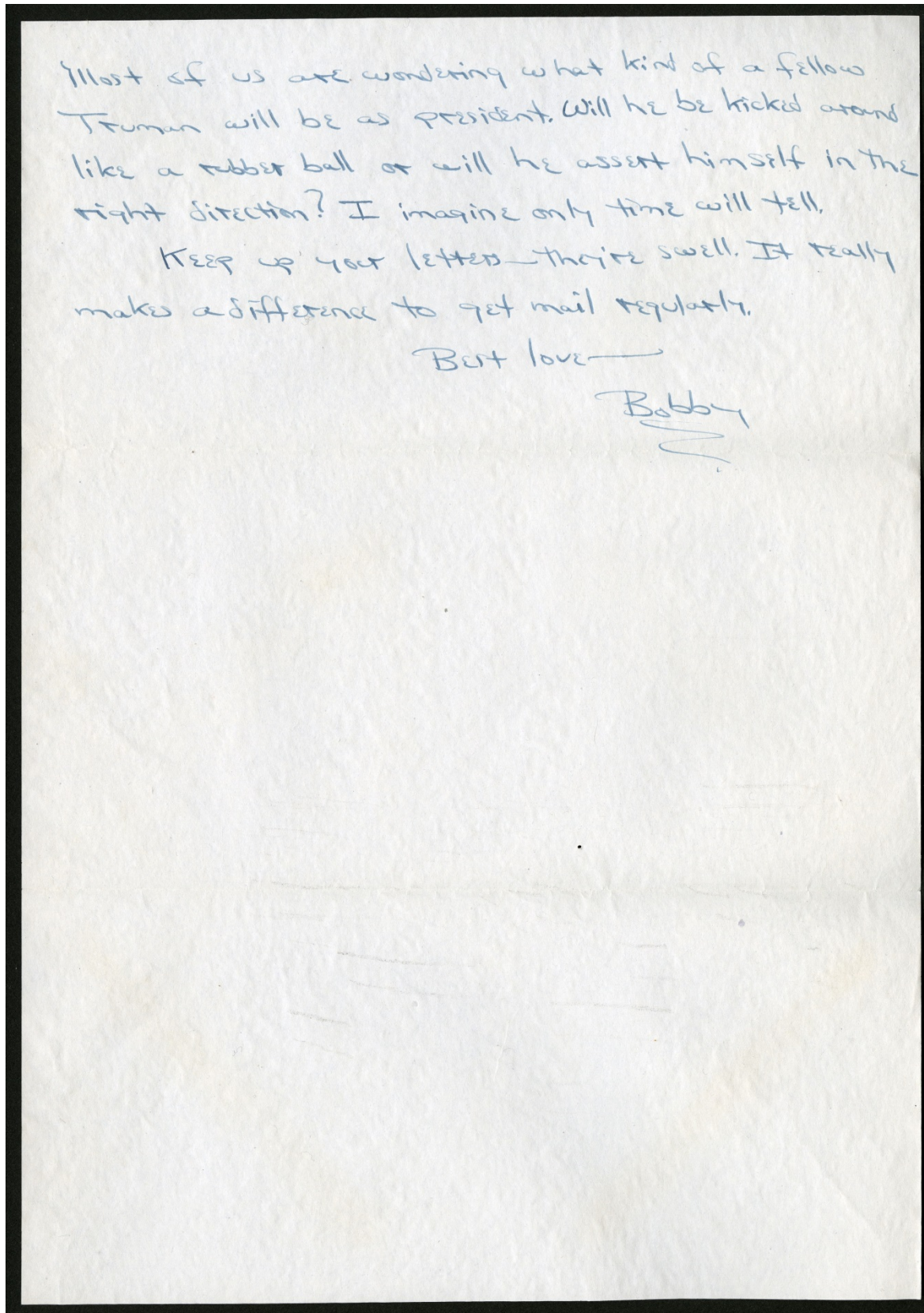
Very little to write except that I now have thirty-nine mission under the old belt. They don't mean a thing until you've flown the all-important fortieth. I'm afraid that my letters are more like a serial story than anything else. I imagine though that you've wanted to keep apace as I complete my missions. Each mission has been like a major victory since we hit the thirty mark. For most of the last ten or twelve raids we've been flight leaders. As a matter of fact, we're now the senior crew in the outfit. It seems like an absolute life time since we first came down under and went on our first few missions.

Haven't been up to see Barry for a few days but I rather imagine that he's left for the States by now. Last time I saw him he thought his orders would be coming through very soon.

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Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, April 15, 1945.
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09620.173 p 1)

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Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, April 15, 1945.
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09620.173 p 2)

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Transcript

Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone and Beatrice Stone, April 15, 1945.

[draft]

The Marianas

April 15th, 1945

Dear Dad & Bee—

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First heard the sad news of the Presidents death a few days ago when our radio operator picked up a broadcast from Frisco. I imagine his sudden death came as a real blow [insert: to] the American people. Everyone out here feels a definite sadness and a real loss at a time like this. I guess we can thank God that we have such capable military leaders to rely on. [2] Most of us are wondering what kind of a fellow Truman will be as president. Will he be kicked around like a rubber ball or will he assert himself in the right direction? I imagine only time will tell.

Keep up you're letters – they're swell. It really makes a difference to get mail regularly.

Best love—

Bobby