

Robert L. Stone to Jacob Stone, Beatrice Stone, Don Stone, Jim Stone, and Barry Marks

Childress, Texas. 25 September, 1943.

Autograph letter signed, 6 pages .

[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 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 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

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