Letters From World War II: The Minker Family

In February 1943 Ralph L. Minker, Jr., of Wilmington enlisted in the Army Air Corps and served as a B-17 pilot until August 1945. Minker, his parents, and his two younger sisters wrote detailed letters. Captain Minker’s letters home provide detailed accounts of his pilot training and his experiences flying 37 bombing missions from Rattlesden AAF Base in Suffolk, England. Letters from home supported him with local news, encouragement, parental guidance, and jokes and lighter news from his teenaged sisters.

These are just a few of the more than 650 letters that the Minker family exchanged during World War II. The entire collection is available online at http://dehistory.org/minker-introduction.

TOUCH SCREEN TO EXPLORE
Dear Dad,

Truly a semblance of order is coming out of the chaos of the last several days...

My first impressions:

There were hundreds of planes lined up at the airport. It was a spectacular sight. It was really an impressive sight to see all the new planes, the huge hangar and airstrip and the numerous mushrooming villages nearby.

I saw Stowell and Springer in a hotel while waiting for the Silver Meteor which came at 4:30 (EST).

We had a fairly comfortable journey down in the really clean and spacious cars. 3 of us were on the train and we. The two Dickinson boys went on another train however.

We arrived in Miami at 11:30 Friday night after a monotonous journey through the poverty-stricken south.

Finally, a truck came for us and we were taken to the Cadillac Hotel. They weren't expecting us so we were temporarily assigned to the Hotel Stodd and given our mail equipment - two steel plates, bride and groom. We were followed by eight more (including Stowell and Springer) at 2:30 and twelve more at 4:15. We got two hour street beds before being called for breakfast at 4:45. (We have fifteen minutes to shower, wash and brush our teeth.)

Miles have been very good although not like mother's and we have to stand in line from thirty to sixty minutes sometimes.

We first stood around and waited most of Saturday. We were then on Flight 635 and assigned to Flight 697 in the Fair Real Hotel. The idea failed out in flight to which had been formed yesterday but at the Fair Real Hotel. Dickie of Dickinson, Phila, was there and I am at present one of nine with him in one room although I will probably have another room shortly as they are shifting quite a few out.

We first came in from getting our outfit except for gas masks, flak, flashlight and certain items of clothing things. Hyde, Stowell and Springer are still in my group and I have seen the other Dickinson boys for they are in 635 mostly.

My address is AAAC: P.O. Office: Air Mail
TSS 1129 Flight 639

Miami Beach, Florida

All write more latter but Christmas will be tackled for the next few days. Don't send any packages yet.

Yours,

Lee
Saturday night
February 12, 1944

Dear Sue:

How are you liking your new stationery? It's the official school paper, and it has been ordered since September and just came this week. Just make out? The picture is now where the office headquarters of this army are now.

It started to snow after the graduation dance on Saturday night and snowed until late last night. I had a grand time at the dance and Joe left this morning for Nashville to be discharged. I'm all right, the boys think Nashville is an awful place. Joe wants to be a pilot and has his heart set on it. I hope he makes it, but they are looking 85% of all the boys out. That night the cadets gave an original show and I went with Joe. They had some cute cadets in the show and half of the show was just music. They have a wonderful air show this week, and the music is really good. They played a lot of neat songs. Afterwards, the cadets had open-gate until ten. That was unusual for a Friday night, as I guess you know. It was coming hard, so Joe and I went walking in the snow and had lots of fun. It seemed funny to have to see that he was in first because he's always rushing to get me in on time. I guess you won't be able to meet him because he leaves a month from now. The estate to fly tomorrow and I can imagine how you felt the first time you saw up because he's so uptight.

I got a nice letter from Jeremiah last week today. He's some sort of a college training detachment at Iowa City College. I'm not sure what he is in, but he had cold in front of his nose, but I don't think it's the flu again.

Both mothers tell you that Darvies is enjoying in a training detachment to England tonight. She has written quite a thrill out of that, I know. Thank you so much for your valentine. I have really surprised to get one from you. I've got some studying to do now and there isn't much else of our vagy around here so I'll close. how are about yours now?

Lots of love

[Signature]
To: MRS. RALPH L. MINNER
P.O. BOX 230
WILMINGTON, 97
DELAWARE, U.S.A.

FROM: LTR. L. MINNER, JR.
11-28-44 0-770723
3007 E. 7TH ST.
AP 80749 M.C.

Dear Mother,

I have written an airmail letter to Bernice this evening so you can compare the delivery speed of airmail and V-mail.

Off late I have practically ignored correspondence. I am going to try to write a bunch of Christmas letters however.

I wish that you would use some of the money I send home to purchase Christmas gifts for Dad, Shirley, Bernice, Grandmother Jones, Grandmother Minner and Julia.

I have received two Christmas packages (one each from Grandmother Jones and Bernice). There is hardly a thing I need over here. Can you send the Ben Johns' and J. Bright addresses. Love,

Lie
Dear [Name],

This is the first letter I've written in 1945. Sue and I had a marvelous time celebrating the New Year at a party. The kids were mostly soldiers and sailors from last year's class. It was really that kind of fun, ending the evening, of course, with a midnight showing of movies, giggling after, and munching potato chips.

My last letter was written over Christmas break. I certainly hope you got your Christmas packages to-day. Were any of them good? We kept one box a day, but little else. We were unable to eat it. It didn't seem as if we were sending you much, but I hope you liked everything.

Santa Claus really treated me well. Besides the trip to New York, I received lots of nice things (including sweaters, scarves, writing paper, etc.). The best part was the piece of wood to build my own plane. Santa left and P.O. sent a new coat which had been sent some time ago. I bought a Santa's fitter, tailor with various buttons and labels and embroidery. By the way, you ought to have this real neat black hat with a white feather on it or will it remember? Remember mine speaking of Mason's downstairs? Well, he came up Friday, spent the night, and left Saturday. We went to the movies. The Charles home is quite a surprise to me. Shirley and I were supposed to be going to Billy's Saturday, so we all rode that first together. Today it's lovely rain just like Christmas, day like it. Are you allowed to say anything about the weather in your letters?

Does it ever snow? I don't think college friends do. I'm going to spend the night with Bill and Grace tonight. We arrived at their house very late and are going to meet her at 3:45. Since Shirley and Sue are going to the movies,

So why don't you request something in your letter? We could send you late or stuff.

Wishing you a Happy New Year,

Lots of Love,

P.S.: - would it be no way to write on V-mail? They're urging more of it, bs.
May 7, 1945

Dearest Son:

We have just been through one of the greatest weeks in history, haven’t we? And now Daddy just called me to say that Eisenhower has announced that this is V-E day. We are still waiting for an announcement from the President or Churchill, but this surely must be it. Our hearts are full. I suppose at this hour every mother is thinking of her own son first and then trying to think of the whole picture. I wish you could have been here with pride at the wonderful way you have carried on. I hate to think of what you have had to go through and see a time when you should have been experiencing the joys of youth; but that cannot be undone now. I am glad that there have been and will be some weeks of rest and relaxation and peace. We know we still have responsibilities and that many hard years lie ahead. Dr. Stidger has expressed it in his hymn "Rise Up, O World".

Rise up, 0 world, the light is on the hill;
Face valiantly the work that lies ahead;
This is the task to do thy Master’s will;
To this great day His mighty hand has led;
God’s bugles blow, the dawn of light is here;
Stand on thy feet and put away thy fear.
Dost see, 0 world, the new dawn rises high
From out the mists of darkness and of war;
The sun of hope is rising in the sky,
The sound of death and weeping is no more.
Stand forth, march on, the far peaks are aglow.
In the light of an immortal dream,
Have hope, O world, 0 thine to seek and find
The everlasting secret of the skies;
That human hearts still be good and kind.
The Flag of Faith forever bravely flies
Above the cross-crowned hill of Calvary,
Still points the way to man’s great Destiny.
Dost have, 0 world, that all is well and good.
March forward to this brave, new dawn of hope;
Send forth the bugle call of brotherhood,
Where men in terror blindly reach and grope.
It is the Christian Day, let anthems ring;
Let every Christian heart be glory sing.

Your beautiful Mother’s Day card came this morning and I appreciate it more than you know. I will celebrate my 50th birthday on Thursday of this week. It frightens me sometimes to see the years come creeping on. There is so much still to be done. But I have three fine children to be thankful for. They will be able to do some of the things which I have not. This will be the third Mother’s Day that you have been away from home. I feel sure we will be together when the next one comes around.

Mrs. Briscoe called me Friday night. I had written her at the time Leland was reported missing. They have not heard from him since Easter time but of course are most hopeful now that so many German prisoners are being released. Of course she was asking all about you. Bob Durlham, the one who was in Berrice’s class at A.L., has been reported killed in action in the Pacific.

Yesterday was Communion Sunday at Grace. The first table is always in memory of those of you who ordinarily would be there with us.

If this is really V-E day there will be no wild celebrations. The churches are to be open for prayer. The business houses are to close, I believe, but not schools. We all realize that while this is a time of thanksgiving and praise there is still much to be done before the war is over and we have to stick to our jobs.

Take care of yourself, dear, and let us hear from you as often as you feel you can write.

With all my love,

Mother
May 10, 1945

My dear Lee:

Mother will send the stepping of last night’s game (enclosed). It will amuse you, I think. Blue Rocks 33, Hagerstown 13. It was a weird affair. Herb, Bernard, sat near me and stayed through the 9th inning. Left at the end of 9th. I think you would gotten a kick out of it.

The news of the last few days has been very welcome. It is difficult to imagine how the Nazi ideology could be completely grip people with the potentialities of the Germans. Yet we have seen it take place—and the spanning we have given them is just the beginning of the work necessary to a changed point of view.

I think you sense how I feel toward the news. I am counting the days until you are able to return and resume your preparation for your greater work of the future. You proved to yourself that you can take what comes—and I can see many satisfactions coming your way as you fort your ability and spirit into some of the big tasks that lie before us. Opportunities for understanding and skilled leaders were never greater—and I am thrilled to think of the possibilities of your life.

You haven’t replied to my suggestion about golf. Perhaps you thought I was rehabbing it in a little after reading the scores you sent. Some of one of your attempts at the game. I think you’d get a kick out of it—and it is something we could have some fun out of together. By the way, I’m trying to get a fake tennis court laid down near Rock’s. It’s a little too strenuous for me, but I think you, the girls, and friends would enjoy it.

To the best to you now!

Sincerely,

Dad