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U.S. Air Force

Sunday evening

July 9, 1944

Dear Dad,

Greetings from Gulfport, Mississippi!!!

Friday afternoon of last week 56 B-17 heavy bombardment combat crews complete except for bombardiers and navigators, shipped aboard a special troop train of the Atlantic Coast Lines. The following afternoon the group disembarked at Gulfport Army Air Field, Gulfport, Mississippi, where they will be given final combat crew training in Flying Fortresses.

I am first pilot and plane commander of combat crew number 156 of the third flying section of the 43'rd training wing of the third army air force. As such it is my job to whip a combat crew of great precision into being in ten weeks of operational training in this replacement training unit for the Eighth Army Air Force. My crew: Arthur D. Rohl,

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2'nd Lieutenant, co-pilot; James E. Shannon, corporal, aerial engineer; Olaf Larson, Corporal, radio operator; Harold O. McKay, corporal, aerial gunner; Max G. Shepherd, private first class, assistant radio operator; Donald W. Miller, private first class, assistant aerial engineer; Roman Michalacean, Private, assistant aerial gunner. These men, plus a navigator and a bombardier to arrive latter [sic], have had prior training in their own particular fields. The work here consists of perfecting their work and becoming a positive unit of a combat crew team. (Don't misunderstand, all are gunners but all have some particular other job.)

I hope that I can make a good leader. Now is when it counts.

So far I have not had a chance to learn everything about Gulfport Field and vicinity but here is varied assortment [sic] of data. It is hot and mucky here and now. We sleep under mosquito nets at night. The coast is over run with navy men. Gambling and liquor are taboo be [sic] law in this state but along the coast both flourish in the open and the state collects ten

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percent taxes on it. Fralines, a pecan and brown sugar, rum, butter mixture (very sweet), are a very tasty native specialty. The venereal rate is higher here

than in any other state of the union; also illiteracy and the proportion of blacks to whites. The memory of Jefferson Davis still lingers on.

The Air Field is comparatively [sic] new. Aviation Mechanics were trained here until January of this year; we are the third class of combat crews to be trained here. (B-17 operational training is now exclusively in the third air force). The base is large, well equipped and well administered — the best yet! Eighty percent of our instructors have seen service in either England or China. From here we will go to final staging units at either Hunter Field, Savannah, Georgia, or Langley Field, Virginia. Sixty percent will fly across to combat. There will be no more furloughs before combat and no overnight cross countries. All crew members will be at

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least the rank of corporal before leaving here; 25 percent of the first pilots will become first lieutenants before leaving here. The schedule ahead seems to be harder (more intensive and complete) than any yet experienced. The food is really like home, wonderfully prepared and all you can eat.

That should give you a general idea of my present setup. Let me know if there is anything you would like to know further.

Please send all my clothing (WINTER) as soon as possible as it must all be checked before leaving here. (shoes, greens, pinks, blouse, caps, dress hats, coat). I could use a dozen pair of socks, Julia's picture, my camera, one more towel. I have made arrangements for the U.S. Army Finance Department to send home fifty dollars of each monthly pay starting in August. I will probably send more with which you do as you think best. Please arrange to send the News Journal to me again.

How was the 4'th (Delaware Park)? How are the Blue Rocks doing? Has Ginger had a family? Are you ready to begin your long freshening up vacation after the bond drive is over?

As always,

Lee

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P.S. I saw Mr. E. V. Cavanaugh my last night that I was in Tampa. He and his family were very nice and I had a splendid evening visit with them. Please relay my thanks to Mr. Alvin Cavanaugh for introducing me. (I don't have his address.)

P.P.W. Did Mother remember Julia's birthday present yesterday?