

Three: May 29, 1943 to July 25, 1943

May 29, 1943

Up at 0730.[†] Group meeting at 0730. Doug at [the] warehouse all AM, getting shortage equipment. Gosh, all the junk we have to take.¹ Got a brand new B-17, #430276.² New arm gunner, S/Sgt. P.J.;[‡] Render did not show up from six-day leave. Issued a new .45 caliber pistol, number: 945428 M1911, US Army; also, a pair of field glasses. Spent all evening packing. Sent two bundles home, *del.* a suitcase, *del.* a ValPac,[†] two blankets, a short coat, old socks, pants and etc. Bed by 0200. Rain.

May 30, 1943

Selfridge Field, Detroit, Michigan

Rain, early in [the] AM. Up at 0800. Take off at about 10:00 AM. Saw [the] results of [the] floods in Mid West; rough weather. B-17, a honey; am in love with our "Queen."³ Landed near Detroit, twenty-eight miles south. Selfridge Field, a very sorry post; had no sheets, pillows or nothing. Very discontented at everything offered on this post. Had to wait over an hour to get anything to eat in [the] cafeteria. Bill stayed on [the] post. Three of us, Doug, Fred and I, went to see the town. Ride to Detroit. Rain in [the] evening. Did the town, as per [our] usual manner. A quart of bourbon costs \$12.

May 31, 1943

Had about 0130 hours of sleep. Bus back to [the] post. Rainy weather; staying over another day. Slept in [the] plane most of the day. Pay day: \$69. *del.*^β Four of us went to Detroit to raise hell all evening. Supper in Detroit. Rain, most of [the] evening. Bed, 2400 or so.

June 1, 1943

¹ From November 1942 to June 1943, the Eighth Air Force endured a supply crisis brought about by flawed stateside logistics and losses to U-boats. The Eighth attempted to remedy this problem by using its incoming forces as cargo planes. The situation improved after a more suitable shipping plan was adopted and the Battle of the Atlantic turned in the Allies' favor. (C&C, vol. 2: 614)

² One of 256 replacement planes received by the Eighth Air Force in June 1943. Beginning in April of 1943, steadily increasing batches of replacement aircraft landed in theater for the Eighth, perhaps in response to the material needs of the impending Combined Bomber Offensive. (C&C, vol. 2: 617)

³ Mark Wells has noted that airmen tended to idealize their aircraft and endow them with human characteristics. Aircrew members viewed their type of plane as the pinnacle of aviation technology while downplaying negative attributes and slighting other types of bombers, fighters or transports. The female personification, according to Dr. Douglas D. Bond, a prominent wartime neuropsychiatrist, served as a means of channeling "the uncertainties of [the] male psyche," for these young men, as well as a way of satisfying, "the need to demonstrate potency and strength." (Wells: 96)

Dow Field, Bangor, Maine⁴

Had to report to [the] plane by 0800. Take off, before noon. Flew over Canada [for the] majority of [the] trip. Beautiful scenery and cities, such as Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Landed on Dow Field, Bangor, Maine, around 7:00 PM. Forms filled out and etc. Very hungry; a good meal and to bed by 2400.

June 2, 1943

Made last minute changes [in the] issuing of equipment. Staying over all day; weather bad on forward. Restricted to town; [no] phones, telegraph and letter mailing. Wrote three letters in [the] club: Chick, Amy and home, to be mailed when [our] destination has been reached, England. Bed, early, 2300.

Overseas Address:^p

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APO No. 12042
New York, NY

June 3, 1943

Labrador

Up at 0430. No need [in] being called so early. Fred and I pre-flighted the plane. Slept in [the] plane until time for takeoff. Left Maine and [the] US on this day, about 1330 EWT. Flew over mighty rough country, just a mess of lakes, forest and hills, barren. Hit some very nasty weather, rain and wind. Landed on Goose Bay Field, Labrador, Newfoundland, at about 1830. Fred had a troublesome tooth pulled. Post was mostly Canadian. Very fine runway. Movies at night; saw a Navy picture, free movies. Bed by 2400. Pilot, co-pilot and navigator at a briefing session. Good meals and quarters for a far away post as Goose Bay.

June 4, 1943

Greenland

⁴ Planes bound for the Eighth Air Force generally used the following air bases to transverse the Atlantic: Presque Isle, Maine; Goose Bay, Labrador, Newfoundland; BLUIE WEST I at Narsarssuak, Greenland, or BLUIE WEST 8, further north at Sondre Stromfjord; Meeks or Patterson Fields near Reykjavik; Prestwick, Scotland. This route across the Northern Atlantic originally developed as a path for ferrying RAF planes from Canada to the United Kingdom. After the Lend-Lease Act went into effect, the AAF, largely through the Ferrying Command, built additional bases, expanded the existing facilities and established meteorology and communications posts. (C&C, vol. 1: 342-349; 641-645)

Slept eight hours last night. Weather, cool and windy. Took off from Goose Bay Field, Labrador, at about 0130 GCT. Cloudy weather. #4 engine, run away prop. The noise scared [the] hell out of us. Prepared for any water forced landings; were out 300 miles at [the] time of [the] incident. Made it okay on three engines. Beautiful sight, flying through the great fjord,⁵ fifty miles long. Landed on Greenland, [at] a post called Bluie West I.⁶ Hills all around. Icebergs and lakes surround it. Just a desolate post; no women. Good meals and quarters. Phenomena, twilight all night. Showered and washed clothing before bed. Fred and I, free movies, *Tombstone*. Everyone carries guns, quite an atmosphere. Runway is one strip of steel mats.

June 5, 1943

Up at 0930. Slept very well; feel very fine and contented. Missed breakfast. Saw a B-26⁷ on fire. Quite a scene, putting the fire out. Our crew may have to stay here [for] three to four days before a new #4 engine is flown in. Swell dinner. Doug, Bill, Fred (George) and I went three to four miles out, to a swift flowing river, to do some unsuccessful fishing; used our emergency kit equipment from [the] parachutes. Came back in time for supper. Spent one hour or so in [the] PX. Four of us played poker all evening, 'til 0200; didn't win or didn't lose. Bill [was the] only loser.

June 6, 1943

Up at about 1100. Chicken dinner. Four of us gambled all afternoon. I lost \$65. Wow! What PP luck. Supper, good meal. Four of us, movie, *Commandos Strike At Dawn*. Killed our last drop of bourbon, Bourbon Supreme, after [the] movie. Rest of [the] group took off early this AM. #4 engine changed; ready to leave tomorrow AM. Bull session before going to bed.

June 7, 1943

Iceland

Up at 0630. Breakfast. Down to the plane. Flew one hour on a test hop. The Queen is ready to fly on. Take off around 1100. Landed at Meeks Field, Iceland, about 1900 GMT.⁸ Supper. Four of us played cards; I lost, again. Retired to a filthy BOQ; rather, huts, Eskimo-style; sheets, dirty, and cots. Latrine stunk something disgraceful. Post is very desolate and hopeless looking. Will be happy for a quick departure. Meals are rationed; no milk. Origin of "Where Roland Is?"ⁱ

⁵ Tunugdliarfik Fjord.

⁶ BLUIE WEST I was the code-name for the airfield at Narsarssuak, Greenland. (C&C, vol. 1: 343)

⁷ The B-26 Marauder, manufactured by Glenn L. Martin Company, a medium bomber, saw extensive action in Western Europe, North Africa and the Pacific. (HDUSAF: 92-93)

⁸ Greenwich Mean Time.

June 8, 1943

Up at 1200, in time for dinner. Cloudy and rain, all day. Read a good book, *The Blood of the Conquerors*, by Harvey Ferguson, about a Mexican living in New Mexico. Boys played cards all day. Did not have enough money left to gamble; lost, all told, around \$90. Bill went to town, Reykjavik, [the] capital of Iceland. Three of us saw a movie, *In Old California*, John Wayne and Binnie Byrnes. To bed about 0100. Had clean sheets tonight.

June 9, 1943

Up at 1100. Thought we were going to take off. Rain, all day. Read a book, *The Bloody Wig Murders*, by George Bagby, a good book. Bill, Doug and Fred played cards all day. Saw a good movie with Bill Warose, *They All Kissed the Bride*, Melvin Douglas and Joan Crawford. Bed by 2430. Sun went down about 2030. Witnessed a huge convoy sailing into a near by port. Reykjavik, a pro-Nazi town; will not go to town at any cost. Wrote three letters: Mother, Amelia and [the] Kandels, all by V-mail!

June 10, 1943

Up at 1130 GMT. Cloudy day. No take off; weather bad on route to England. Dinner. Spent [the] afternoon in [the] plane. Started [the] engines and pre-flighted [the] plane with T/Sgt. Arkwright. No take off. Weather poor over [on the] other side. Wrote a letter to Sgt. Pete Yanowsky and Art Schendelman. Fred and I went to see *Eagle Squadron*, a good movie. Played poker again; as usual, I lost,^b poor luck. In fact, all four of us lost plenty; had exceptionally poor luck. Went to bed, 0030. Cold night. Stuffy quarters.

June 11, 1943

Rain, most of [the] day. No take off. Only sixteen planes left. We were held up because of a long line ahead of us. Saw a huge convoy off the coast. Bill went fishing, caught a mess of flounders. Cold coming on. Walked around for a few hours. Food, getting poor; no vegetables or juices. All four of us retired early, 9:00 PM.

June 12, 1943

Scotland

Up at 0630 GMT. Breakfast. Woke up with a cold, headache and fever. Windy, as usual. Take off at 0930 GMT. Ninety percent of [the] trip, flew through clouds. Snow and rain over [the] Atlantic^p Ocean. Came upon a huge convoy; turned immediately, so as not to be shot at by mistake. Had fifty rounds per gun. B-17 behaved okay. Hit Scotland by 0100. Flew over Stornoway and [the] Irish Sea and landed at Prestwick, Scotland, Orange Field. Very beautiful countryside; used to be a golf

course. Supper. Slept in a RAF barracks. Had no hot H₂O. One B-26, out of control, ran into another and both burned up. No one [was] killed; bombardier [was] seriously hurt. Rain, all evening. Drank some beer at [the] operations hotel and to bed by 10:00 PM. Cold room. Sure is plenty [of] evidence of a war going on here. The atmosphere is one of a determined battle to the finish.

June 13, 1943

West England

Up at 0630. Breakfast, one egg, *del.*^β coffee and bacon. English are sure rationed on food.⁹ Take off in a twelve ship formation, 0900. Landed *del.* at Preston Field, England, Wharton Field, near Lytham. Beautiful, green country. Dinner, two shillings, \$.40.¹⁰ Unpacked our plane. Will leave for [our] next destination by train. Showered and shaved. Supper. Went to Blackpool, ten miles in a GI truck. What a town! More ugly looking people than I have ever seen in my whole life, millions of them, [celebrating] Whitson^β holidays. Four of us made the rounds of all [the] bars. British DS¹¹ time; gets dark about 11:00 PM. [The] taxi home cost thirty shillings.

June 14, 1943

Up at 12:00, noon. Dinner. Not leaving today. Four of us went to town, Blackpool, by bus. Supper in town. Actually, English restaurants, some, don't serve supper, just tea snacks.¹² Sure are pressed for food. [Had] a few drinks together. Went to [the] winter gardens, danced 'til 10:00 PM. What a crowd! All the people! Music, mostly American songs. Waltzes are danced very attractively, better than [the] American way. Taxi home. Bed by 2400.

June 15, 1943

East England

Up at 0700. Breakfast, mighty poor and measly. Packed and ready to go to [the] trains. Took a train from Lytham, a four-and-a-half hour ride. Off at Cheddington, thirty miles from London. Dinner, late, very disorganized. Sleeping quarters, very much under expectations. Thunderstorm soon after. Rains on the average of once every hour,

⁹ Eating breakfast with members of the RAF, who enjoyed better rations than most British servicemen, Lt. Piech did not yet perceive the true extent of the English people's sacrifice. As David Reynolds points out, "In America food rationing generally meant shortages whereas in Britain the same foodstuffs were simply unavailable." (Reynolds: 50-51)

¹⁰ The dollar to pound sterling exchange ratio at the time was 1:4. (Reynolds: 51)

¹¹ Daylight Savings Time.

¹² Restaurants in Great Britain were prohibited from serving more than one main meal a day. (Reynolds: 51)

very damp country. Four of us retired early. Woke up at 2030. Went to a nearby pub for a beer. Also, took a walk into the country; beautiful, cozy farms. Back to quarters by 2300 and to bed. Only had two blankets and almost froze; didn't sleep much.

June 16, 1943

Up at 1100. Missed breakfast. Four of us went to the nearby pub for beer and sandwiches. Dinner, very poor. Meeting at 1530, lecture and etc. Doug and George went to London. I was too lazy to go. Bill, not feeling good??? Supper, very poor, as usual. No facilities for a good shave or shower. Walked three miles along a canal to a town called Tring. Attended a swell dance. Had a good time with fellow officers. Talked and drank at the pub with a few old English "Timers." GI transportation on [the] way home. Girls dance very much the American way, and do they like the American movie actors!?! Bed, 2400.

June 17, 1943

Up at 1000. Bill [and I]^b went out for a walk in the countryside. Ate a box of K-rations for breakfast. Changed American money to English. Some crews are leaving for Bovingdon¹³ this afternoon. Washed clothes all day. Saw a movie at Tring with Eileen Hunt, *Happy Go Lucky* and *The Story of Jacqueline*, a very nice theatre. Home by 2300.

June 18, 1943

Up at 1100. Bill and I lazed around all day. Rainy weather [is the] cause of our actions. Doug and "George" returned from London; had a poor time, disgusted with the city. They even slept through an air raid and bomb explosions. Saw a variety show with Eileen; show [was] presented by the British servicemen, a very good show. On [the] way home, I rescued a tech sergeant from trouble. He was carrying on, drunk, and cussing the English.¹⁴ Walked him safely home for four miles. Home by 2430.

June 19, 1943

Up at 1100. Dinner, very good. Meeting at 1400. Doug and I went to the nearby pub for something to eat. No beer sold between 1400 and 1800. Bill left this AM. Three of us

¹³ New bomber units and replacements went through operational training at Bovingdon Field, the Eighth Air Force Headquarters aerodrome, and Cheddington. (C&C, vol. 2: 608)

¹⁴ Both the American military and British authorities went to great lengths to avoid friction between GIs and airmen stationed in the United Kingdom and the local inhabitants. The US Army produced a series of pamphlets and movies designed to limit culture shock and foster sensitivity. Nevertheless, as more Americans arrived in Great Britain, the "oversexed, overpaid, overfed, and over here," stereotype emerged. As the Eighth accumulated more crews and ground personnel during the summer of 1943, both Gen. Eaker and local authorities in East Anglia made note of increased Anglo-American tension. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, during his first tour as ETO Theater Commander in the summer of 1942, established a policy of meting out stiff punishments for men caught insulting the British, like this tech sergeant. (Reynolds: xxiii; 94-95; 173-176)

slept all afternoon. Doug and I walked to Tring, to a dance, very crowded. Danced only once. Very disgusted to see a white woman, English, dancing and dating a Negro.¹⁵ The black boy had on a British Army uniform. Ride home in trucks. Bed by 2400. Air raid alarm over London. Also, saw a fleet of ten^{P ii} Halifaxes¹⁶ heading for Germany.¹⁷ Good luck, lads.

June 20, 1943

Up at 1100. Dinner, okay. Three of us and Chuck Wallin played a little football. What a workout!!! Confidentially, diary, I actually saw the old man run!!¹⁸ Read a book until supper, *Good Night, Sheriff, del.* Steeves Mercury Mystery Stories. Supper, mighty fine, Spam, cheese, beans, jam and coffee. Doug and I walked up and back to Tring. Saw a double feature, *Mystery Sea Raider* and a *Blondie* picture. Stopped in a pub for a beer. Watched a *del.^B* number of Halifaxes head for the Deutchland.¹⁹ Give 'em hell, lads. May you all come back. Full moon tonight.

¹⁵ Mr. Piech stated in an interview with Shaun Illingworth on February 19, 2001 that he was surprised, rather than disgusted:

At first, I wasn't used to seeing this back home. In New Jersey, ... that was the talk of the town, if you saw a mixed race couple, and you would only see it perhaps in New York, and very rarely. ... So, that was kind of different for me, but what I thought was, that probably wasn't a good idea, because there were many of us that were from different parts of the United States. ... I was afraid that there might have been a riot started or some Yank, all of a sudden, going up there and cutting in and say[ing] that this is not a good thing to do, 'We object to this,' and then, there would really be a nasty fight. Someone would just lose their head, get too emotional, and I am glad that nothing did happen at that time.

Lt. Piech's fears were not baseless. Numerous incidents occurred where white American servicemen would harass and/or assail African-American soldiers who frequented bars, dances and so forth with English subjects. British authorities attempted to impose a color bar in accordance with American military officials, but these efforts met with fierce resistance on the part of the English people. Subjects from British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, brought to Great Britain as soldiers, airmen and workers, also felt the brunt of American racism from GIs who saw only the color of their skin, not the cut of their uniforms. (Interview #1; Reynolds: 302-303; 305-306)

¹⁶ The Handley Page Halifax and the Avro Lancaster, both four-engine heavy bombers, served as the backbone of Sir Arthur Harris's RAF Bomber Command and its nighttime area bombing campaign against the German homeland. (Rand McNally: 267; 290)

¹⁷ Mr. Piech may have seen Halifaxes or Lancasters.; This force could have joined the 290 RAF bombers that endeavored to bomb the Schneider armaments plant at Le Creusot, France, on the night of June 19-20. Pathfinder ships leading the armada failed to highlight the facility with flares. Then, the air fleet's attempts at visual bombing flopped. (Levine: 57)

¹⁸ "Old man" is a reference to Doug Harris.^B

¹⁹ Again, Mr. Piech may have confused the Halifax with the Lancaster.; On the night of June 20-21, sixty Lancasters in two taskforces attacked the Zeppelin plant at Friedrichshafen, which produced the Wurzburg radars that serviced the Kammhuber Line. The plant also produced V-2 missiles, a fact the RAF discovered much later. Bomber Command abandoned its area bombing tactics for this mission to explore two precision bombing methods.

One force was led by pathfinder ships, outfitted with H2S radar, which dropped flares before the

June 21, 1943

Up at 1130. My cold, almost gone. Officers' club after dinner to read the news. Shower and shave. Read the mystery novel. Doug and I went on another of our evening walks along the canal. Saw thirty B-17s coming back from a raid.²⁰ Gosh, did they look swell, just like a Queen. Three of us read our books 'til 0300. I finished [my] novel, *Good Night, Sheriff*. Air raid sirens wailed at about this time. Moon was beautiful.

June 22, 1943

Up at 1100. Dinner. Read a book, *Wildfire*, by Zane Grey, [was] three-quarters finished by [the] night. Doug and I [went for] a walk along [the] canal. Watched a few rabbits play and, also, a ruffed grouse being dive bombed by a strange bird resembling a snipe. Bed about 2400. Beautiful evening.

June 23, 1943

Waterford CCRC²¹ #11, Bovington [Field]^b

Up at 1000. Finished reading [the] novel, *Wildfire*, by Zane Grey, a good book. Ready to leave by 1300. Transportation to Bovington Field, Waterford, by GI truck, three-quarters of an hour; very near London, about fifteen miles [away]. CCRC #11, Combat Crews Replace[ment] Centre #11, Crew 20-E. APO #634, c/o PM, New York, New York. Good meals. Poor quarters, as usual. Four blankets, no sheets. Sleep in cold huts. No showers, use tubs; no hot H₂O. Doug, Fred and I took a walk around [the] countryside. Shave before bed. Fell asleep by 2345. Beautiful day, very unusual for English weather.

June 24, 1943

First Day of School in CCRC

target. The bombers trailing them released their loads shortly after passing the flares. Another force attacked in similar fashion, relying on a landmark rather than pyrotechnics. As a result of the raid, the Zeppelin factories were ruined and the V-2 rocket program there was scrubbed. However, these efforts failed to impress Bomber Command chief Harris, who persisted in his method of area bombing aimed at cracking the morale of the German people. (Levine: 57-58)

²⁰ There is no record of a combat mission for the Eighth on this day. Perhaps these Flying Fortresses were returning from a practice mission.

²¹ Combat Crews Replacement Center; CCRCs prepared crews and individuals for the style of combat specific to that theater. Bombing accuracy received special attention at this time, as did aircraft recognition, high altitude training, formation and instrument flying and gunnery. (C&C, vol. 2: 697; Training To Fly: 466; 472-473)

Up at 0615. Cold in our huts, #24 in Site 7. Breakfast, 0700 to 0730. School from 0800 to 1200 and 1300 to 1700, lectures, pictures and aircraftⁱⁱⁱ identification. Experienced combat crewmen acted as instructors. Am very urinated off at some of the dumb bombardiers in my classes. Here's hoping that I do not mess things up over enemy territory!?!²² Beautiful day.

June 25, 1943

Up at 0700. Just made breakfast in time. Eight hours [of] school. Bombardiers who have completed their twenty-five missions lecture[d] to us, very interesting stories.²³ Went to [the] hospital to have my ear looked at. Trouble, again, in my right ear. The cold caused an infection to start. [The] Captain grounded me and [I] am to take two sulphathiazole pills every four hours. Bill caught up with us today. Four of us went walking in the evening. Couldn't sleep at night. [Must] visit Doc three times per day, until ear [is] okay. Shaved with cold H₂O before bed, 2330.

June 26, 1943

Up at 0630. Breakfast. Ear looks better. Three hours [of] school in [the] AM. Inspection parade, in honor of [the] boys receiving medals for combat duty over Europe. Bomb trainers in [the] PM, three-quarters of an hour, a very unique set up, similar to that of a celestial navigation trainer. Good, hot bath before supper. Cold, gone. Doug and I borrowed bikes and went to a dance in Sarrat, a very poor affair, all jumpy music.²⁴ Didn't stay long. Went for a ride. Home, 2400.

June 27, 1943

²² In an interview on February 19, 2001, Mr. Piech explained his reaction:

They acted kind of stupid, as if they didn't have a brain in their head. There were some pilots that made fun of the bombardiers as being stupid or washouts; in this case, maybe they were washouts from pilot training, and it struck me a little sensitive, at that point, to think that I was part of that group of people.

The bombardier corps was plagued with morale problems in the early years of the war. The bombardier's position was regarded as the least demanding and least important occupation on the ship, the last resort of pilot training rejects. The AAF rectified this situation by 1943 through a series of pamphlets and films that emphasized the bombardier as the centerpiece of the daylight precision bombing concept, the "key to victory." (C&C, vol. 6: 585; Cameron: 428)

²³ Gen. Arnold attributed low morale among new combat crews to the fact that veteran flyers were telling neophytes the horrific truth of air combat. He directed that rookie airmen, "must be sent into combat knowing the truth, but not the whole truth." (Cameron: 479)

²⁴ The bicycle was one of the most popular modes of transportation for American airmen in the United Kingdom. Their prevalence derived partially from the fact that airbases in East Anglia were "dispersed," spread out over several miles, for protection against enemy raids. (Reynolds: 297)

Up at 0645. Breakfast, poor. Dinner, very good. Supper, terrible. School, eight hours. Spent [the] evening walking through the countrysides. Bed, 2330. Gets dark here after 2330. Wrote a letter to Mother.

June 28, 1943

Up at 0645. Breakfast, as usual, poor. School, eight hours. After supper, took a long, solitary walk around the English countryside. Bed, 2330. Visiting [the] hospital two to three times a day for ear treatments.

June 29, 1943

Up at 0700. Breakfast, poor; only good thing, tomato juice. School, eight hours. Learned everything there is to know about a .50 caliber machine gun. Shot sixteen rounds [of] skeet. Hot bath before supper. Went for a solitary walk in the evening. One of my crewmates[†] came home drunk; put his fist through a window; twelve stitches put in. To bed about 2400. RAF went over again for an hour or so. Saw a good many of our boys, B-17s, head for Europe.²⁵

June 30, 1943

Up at 0700. Breakfast, poor. School, eight hours. Went to Chesham, three miles north, and bought a bike for eight pounds, second hand; has gears on [the] back wheel for three shifts. After supper, I took a long ride to Sarrat and on farther, to Chorleywood, and to a dance. Just a few Yanks there. Danced a few times. Orchestra, fairly good, mostly all American music. The long ride home in the night. Bed, 0300, and very tired and sweaty. Shot sixteen rounds [of] skeet, four hits.

July 1, 1943

Today is the birthday of: Reminder: send Frank a card.

Up at 0700. Breakfast. Four hours of classes in [the] AM. Dinner. Saw Bob Hope, Kay Francis and Romono present a show in [the] hanger. Bob was very good. Slept two hours. Hospital, twice today. Ear almost okay. Shave. Rode on a bike to Rickmansworth, about five to seven miles south of the post. Saw a movie, *Desperate Journey*. Bill and Doug went to London. Wrote a V-mail letter to Mother. School ended today. Heard that [my] 43-1^P classmate, Joe Baggs, had already been on four missions. Thus far, [won] four lbs.²⁶ to the good, shooting dice.

July 2, 1943

²⁵ 232 Eighth Air Force bombers took off for the Continent, but most returned without attacking because of inclement weather. Seventy-six heavy bombers raided an aircraft engine plant at Le Mans. (C&C, vol. 2: 846; CC: 151)

²⁶ Piech's confusion of monetary and physical pounds has been left as it appeared in the original text to accentuate how American airmen adjusted to their British surroundings.

Up at 1100. Finished school, no classes. Dinner. Won five lbs. shooting dice in ten minutes; nine lbs., so far, to the good. Orders [are] to leave tomorrow. Cleared [the] post. Ear [is] supposedly getting worse. Doctors want to send me to a hospital. Asked to be held over and leave with my crewmates. Went for an evening ride by myself. Hot evening, wore only a shirt. Bed by 2400.

July 3, 1943

**351st [Bomb] Group, 509th Squadron, Polebrook
APO#634**

Up at 0800. Missed breakfast. Packed and ready to leave Bovingdon. Dinner. Made repairs on my bike; rides very smoothly now. Finally left Bovingdon at 1700. Three-hour ride in a GI truck. New assistant engineer; we lost Pope, [who is] sick in [the] hospital, sinus trouble. New engineer [is our] third Hall, Donald Hall, from Jacksonville, Florida. Had a swell supper. Temporary quarters for tonight. Shower. Boys are getting ready for a raid, to take place tomorrow. 351st Group, 509th Bomb Squadron, they started [their] first raid [on] May 15, 1943.²⁷ Well, we're here and ready?!?

July 4, 1943

Up at 0930. Did not eat breakfast; not hungry. Saw a group, eighteen planes, leave on a raid for Le Mans, France. Blasted the hell out of the target.²⁸ Saw them come back. No one hurt, no damage. Everyone on [the] field [was] tense before [the] boys landed.^{iv} They had a swell time shooting off flares in commemoration of July 4th. (Five planes [were] lost on that raid, all from [the] low group position).²⁹ Ear looked at by [the] squadron flight surgeon, Capt. Lewellen,³⁰ a good boy. Grounded for three to seven days, [aero]-otitis of [the] right ear, external.³¹ Met [the] Squadron CO³² and [the] Squadron

²⁷ The 351st Bomb Group was one of five B-17 units that arrived from the States in May 1943 to reinforce the Eighth. On January 15, 1943, the first elements of the 351st arrived at Polebrook to prepare for the air echelon, which arrived on May 12. The following day, the group departed for its first target in German held Europe, Fort Rouge Airfield at St. Omer, France, but aborted over the Channel due to formation difficulties. On the 14th, the group completed its first mission, a raid on Courtrai Airfield, Belgium. The May 15th sortie Mr. Piech refers to was the 351st's first visit to Germany as part of the Eighth's attempt to destroy the submarine works, marshalling yards and airfield at Emden. (351st: 4-7; C&C, vol. 2: 338; 345; CC: 134-135)

²⁸ Seventeen out of eighteen B-17s from Polebrook raided the Gnome-Rhone aircraft engine plant at Le Mans as part of the 237-plane strong force that attacked Le Mans, Nantes (aircraft engine works) and La Pallice (submarine yards). Several sources comment on the high degree of accuracy achieved by these strikes. (C&C, vol. 2: 674; 846; CC: 153; 351st: 10; Coffey: 234)

²⁹ Craven & Cate record only four planes going down on the Le Mans raid. Three were lost over Nantes and one over La Pallice. (C&C, vol. 2: 846)

³⁰ Captain Charles H. Lewellen, 252nd Medical Dispensary. (351st: 125)

³¹ Aero-titus, swelling of the middle ear, was caused by exposure to the atmospheric pressures of high

Bombardier; heard a security lecture. Spent [the] evening in [the] officers' club. Good meal. Had a "before bed snack," Spam and bread. Good quarters. Bill and I sleep together, again.³³ One bureau desk, two chairs, a large mirror and plenty [of] room. Bed by 2300.

July 5, 1943

Good Deal*

Swell day. Up at 0900. Major looked at my ear; sent me to [the] Second Evacuation^v Hospital for consultation. Clinic said [the] ear [is] not bad. Checked out my knowledge of the .50 caliber guns by [the] squadron arm. Unpacked and organized my clothing in [the] room. Bob Hope [is] here tonight. None of my classmates [are] on this field, only John Tynan.³⁴ Oh, yes, Capt. Clark Gable^{P35} is on this field, also. Spam sandwich before bed time. Bed, 2400. Wrote a letter to home. *The squadron and [the] group are okay; a swell set up.

July 6, 1943

Up at 0830. Breakfast, good. Major looked at my ear, [which] is progressing very rapidly. Blinker code check; am okay on six words per minute. Escape lecture in [the] afternoon. Took flying equipment into a special locker. Organized room, once more. Pasted pictures on [the] wall, all comely beauties. The boys went to Peterborough for the evening. I stayed home to write letters. Wrote to Larry, Chick and Claire, and to the Analytical Dept. Spam sandwiches for a snack/meal. Boys came home quite disgusted of the town. Bed by 2330. Rained today, first time for many days.

July 7, 1943

Up at 0830. Breakfast, good. Ear checked; all dry and about ready for flying duty. Practice mission for three-and-a-half hours in [the] afternoon, no higher than 3500 feet. Navigator [was] lost most of [the] time. Very difficult to do pilotage over England, must pinpoint yourself every second.³⁶ First attempt to land was very rough, nearly^B a

altitude flight. (USAFD: 14; 72)

³² Lt. Col. Eliza Ledoux. (351st: 85)

³³ "On separate cots in one room, again."^B

³⁴ Capt. John T. Tynan, 508th Squadron. (351st: 134)

³⁵ Clark Gable joined the 351st Bomb Group with the special duty of making a film that would attract recruits for aerial gunnery duty. Gable was given this assignment by direct order of Gen. Arnold. The USAAF went to great lengths to protect Gable, but he still managed to complete five combat missions, three while under attack from *Luftwaffe* fighters. His film, *Combat America*, debuted in 1943; Piech appears briefly in the film. (351st: 3; Coffey: 85; HDUSAF: 252-253)

³⁶ Orienting navigators and pilots trained in the sparse American West to the cluttered landscapes of Europe

crack up, but for Doug's good flying. Supper. Played volleyball 'til 2200 with [the] rest of [the] crew. Officers beat the enlisted men by five to four games. Had a swell time. Bed by 2330.

July 8, 1943

Up at 1000. Attended a few classes and lectures. A group practice mission was scrubbed on account of rainy weather. Doug, Bill and I [went to the] town of Peterborough, a nice town, but, no drinks and all ugly women. Went to a dance at the town hall; disgusted, only danced a few numbers. Bus home at 2300. Snack, Spam sandwiches, before bed, 0100.

July 9, 1943

Up at 0900. Breakfast. Skeet range; I improved tremendously, shot ten birds out of twenty or so. Did not finish, called on a practice mission, which was scrubbed on account of rain. Radio code check; passed, eleven words per minute. Dinner. Navigation. Out to the plane, guns, oxygen mask. Shower and shave. Supper. Four of us hailed for Peterborough. Had a few drinks of beer. Went to a dance. The girls, as usual, were very PP looking. Bus home at 2315. No more snack sandwiches. Bed, 0100. Loading tonight. Breakfast, 0130. None of us are going on this one.

July 10, 1943

Up at 0945. No lecture. Group coming back from a raid over France, Villacoublay; could not see [the] target. Our group did not drop any bombs.³⁷ Photo taken in civilian clothes. Got [a] heated suit, gauntlet leather gloves and a pair [of] silk gloves. S-2 lecture. Poker game most of^p [the] PM; won fifty lbs., (\$200). Bill and I went to town, Peterborough. Made a date for a crewmate[‡] with Jean. Saw a movie, English, *Gentle Sex*, all about the ATS in training, good. Missed bus. Slept in [the] Red Cross building. Rain, all day.

July 11, 1943

Taxi, half way to home, 0900. Dinghy lecture. Skeleton crew flew a ferry trip; thus, bombardiers attended dinghy lectures in [the] PM. Slept two hours. Shave and ready for the party. What an affair, rough!!! Everyone drunk, glass⁸ breaking, cussing and etc. Dancing was okay. Music, good and American. Party end[ed at] 11:00 PM to 11:30 PM. Bed, soon after.

often caused significant delays between a new unit or replacement crew or crew member's arrival and their first mission.

³⁷ Only seventy out of 286 heavy bombers dispatched to occupied France succeeded in striking their targets, air fields at Caen/Carpiquet and Abbeville/Drucat. A thick undercast over the Continent deterred the other 216, including twenty 351st B-17s. (351st: 10; C&C, vol. 2: 846; CC: 155)

July 12, 1943

Up at 0900. Mission scrubbed in [the] AM. Went by GI truck to a town, Kettering, twenty miles [away], to a clothing PX for officers. Bought seven lbs. worth of clothing, pants, winter^p underwear, cloth for a battle jacket, towels, bedroom slippers, etc. Supper. Bill, Fred and I talked over world problems all evening, how to solve the Negro and Jap problem in [the] US. Doug joined in, hours later. RAF out for a visit to Hitler's land tonight. Bed by 2400. Clear night. Loading tonight.

July 13, 1943

Mission scrubbed. Up at 0930.[†] Briefing at 1000. Off grounded status, ears okay. Dinner. Gunnery mission, 1315 to 1600, air-to-air, over [the] Channel, 2000 feet.³⁸ Cleaned [the] guns. Supper. Volleyball game with [the] crew. Round of beer with [the] crew. Shower and shave. Talk with Bill about home and etc. Letter to home.

July 14, 1943

Up at 0900. Missed breakfast. Gunnery mission scrubbed on account of weather. Dinner. Shot skeet all afternoon, very poor; shot four out of twenty-five. Rain, all PM. Supper. Town in [the] evening. Went to a dance, poor. Home on [the] 2300 bus. Bill and Doug saw a movie. Grapefruit juice and a Spam sandwich before bed.

July 15, 1943

Today is the birthday of: Brother, Frank, 1915.

Bill and I had to get up at 0730 for an early class. Wrote a letter to Amy. Briefing for a gunnery mission. Mission scrubbed because [the] tow ship developed engine trouble. Another briefing at 1700 for a gunnery mission tomorrow AM. Supper. Assigned a new ship, #726, out of commission at present.³⁹ Beat S/Sgt. Simmons, [our] tail gunner, in Ping-Pong, six to five. What a battle that was. Poker game 'til 2330; lost twenty-five lbs. Bed, 0030, sleepy.

July 16, 1943

Up at 0715. Breakfast, especially early for us. Gunnery mission all AM. Congratulated by [the] Captain. Our crew performed very satisfactorily. Cleaned [the] guns. George practiced^b two landings and take offs. Dinner, 0100. Briefing for another gunnery mission at 1315. At [the] guns, again. Flew approximately seven-and-a-half hours for the whole day. Good mission. Cleaned [the] guns. Supper at 2030. Very tired. Four of

³⁸ On an air-to-air gunnery mission, gunners fired on long sleeves or flags that dragged behind an escort plane. (C&C, vol. 6: 593)

³⁹ *Poisonality*, 42-29726 RQ-Q [RQ designates this aircraft as a 509th Squadron B-17]. (351st: 93)

us stayed up to argue, discussed all [of the] problems on the face of this earth. Bed at 2400. Loading tonight. Briefing at 0230.

July 17, 1943

Up at 0800. Breakfast. "Shadowgraph" class. The boys could not see [the] targets; clouds [were] a hindrance. Salvoed bombs over a country store, (laugh), in Germany. Blew the town off the map.⁴⁰ Dinner. Went to Kettering to buy clothes; bought four pairs of shoes for my sergeants. Supper. Bike ride to Oundle, four miles [away], just a reconnaissance tour, a small town. Back home by 10:30 AM. Four of us [were] arguing in our rooms. Called on a mission, on Maginnis's⁴¹ crew. Knees were shaking like all hell until after [the] briefing. Briefing at 0230. Guns in ship,⁴² all set to go [on the] mission. Mission to Kassel, scrubbed on account of weather.

July 18, 1943

No sleep last night. Bed at 0600, 'til 1430.⁴³ Dinner. Dinghy lecture. Met a hometown boy from Sayreville^{vi} named Pvt. Joe Przybylko;⁴³ works in [the] permanent party, officers' mess. He knows Rudy and Frank and his folks know Mother and Father very well. Supper. Bought a sheaf knife from Van Tassel,⁴⁴ two lbs. Shower and wrote a letter to home. Bed, early. Midnight snack, after two hours in bed. Cloudy, dry at night.

July 19, 1943

Up at 0715. Breakfast. Briefing for a gunnery mission. Take off, 1030. Landed, 1330. Dinner. Cleaned [the] guns. Crew lecture in our room by Doug; seems that all [of] the new crews are off the ball. Last Saturday night, four of our enlisted crewmates were drunk and, for some reason or other, a fight started, from which one civilian hit and killed another civilian. Our boys were cleared. S/Sgt. Simmons was on the spot for a while. Believe we have everything ironed out by now. Sent out laundry this AM. Supper. Wrote a letter to home. Bill, Doug and I, bicycle ride to Oundle. Had a swell time riding in formation and enjoying the countryside. George went to see a movie

⁴⁰ The 351st dispatched twenty-six B-17s to destroy a rubber tire factory in Hanover, but the formation found the city immersed in dense cloud cover. Fifteen of the 351st Bomb Group's Fortresses joined nineteen other Eighth Air Force heavies in bombing targets of opportunity in northwest Germany. The men from Polebrook bombed an undesignated town and fought off heavy fighter attacks over the English Channel. One "Queen" went down in the Channel; the crew was rescued, but a second lieutenant from the 511th Squadron was killed in action. (351st: 10-11; 86; 101; C&C, vol. 2: 846; CC: 159)

⁴¹ 1st Lt. James J. Maginnis, 509th Squadron. (351st: 126)

⁴² "Put my guns into the plane."⁴³

⁴³ PFC. Alex J. Przybylko, 11th Station Complement (351st: 129)

⁴⁴ 1st Lt. Newman Van Tassel, 509th Squadron. (351st: 134)

on the post. Read *Times*. Something to eat before turning in for bed. Very cloudy, day and night.

July 20, 1943

Up at 1030. "Navigation" class. Weather, still [the] same, cloudy and unfit for any missions. Rome was bombed yesterday.⁴⁵ Ear trouble, again, not grounded, an inflated ear drum and a little pimple at [the] edge of [the] canal. Dinghy lecture and, also, an actual demonstration of the life raft *del.* and its contents. Supper. Poker game, for ten minutes, then, left to go to town, by myself, to see a movie; saw *Dr. Gillespie's New Assistant*. Bed, early, 2400. Light rain [for] most of [the] day.

July 21, 1943

Up at 0900. "Squadron Navigation" exam, good results. First "G" lecture, "Radar," a marvelous piece of radio equipment. Dinner. Right ear treated, heat pack; getting better as [the] days go by. Light rain, all day, not much flying done. Had to attend *del.* a medal presentation to deserving combat men. About six to seven of us, crewmates, played poker; lost about thirty lbs., (\$120). PP luck!!! Read *Time Magazine*. Also, [the] four of us resumed our late evening talks. Bed by 0130 or so. Rainy weather, all day and night.

July 22, 1943

42-2726*
First Letter!!**

Up at 0800. Doug and I, supposed to attend an AML class, but, no instructor. Checked out on blinker and radio code today. In my spare time, I spent one hour in [the] Link trainer⁴⁶ this AM. Dinner. Heat pack on my right ear after dinner, for half an hour. Athletics for half an hour. Doug, also grounded a few days, ear trouble and a cold. * The entire crew met its new B-17F; already had nine combat missions and six Nazi planes to its credit. The previous crew called #726 *Poisonality*. Practiced [the] dinghy drill, ditching. ** Received [my] first letter from [the] US, from Sister Irene, V-mail. Lost three lbs. playing poker. Rode about ten miles, on a bike, in drizzling rain, all evening. Bed, 1130.^f

July 23, 1943

⁴⁵ 150 B-17s of the Northwest African Strategic Air Force bombed railroad targets in the Eternal City. The fact that they could strike a military target while avoiding landmarks of historic and religious importance demonstrated the relevance of the AAF's precision daylight bombing tactics. The bombing of Rome, combined with RAF area strikes in the industrial areas of Northern Italy, pushed Mussolini's teetering Fascist regime out of power. (CC: 160; Kennett: 149-151; Sherry: 152; Overy: 129)

⁴⁶ A ground trainer for pilots that simulated miscellaneous environmental conditions and mechanical failure scenarios. (HDUSAF: 351-352)

Up at 10:30 AM. Briefing for 1200; [mission] canceled. Athletics, 1430, played softball 'til 1630. Worked on my guns 'til 1830. Supper. Stayed in [the] barracks all evening. Stand by, and, also, a loading tonight. May go on a raid tomorrow. Wrote a letter to Irene this morning. Clear day. Loaned John T. Taylor, 508th Squadron,⁴⁷ five lbs.

July 24, 1943⁴⁸

Up at noon. Athletics; played a hardy game of softball. Sore arm from pitching. Shower. Peterborough. Tried to get [my] watch fixed, also, shoes. No luck; very hard to have anything done in England. Went to a dance in Oundle, a fairly good time. Home by 2400, midnight. Supper before bed.

July 25, 1943

Up at 0400. Breakfast. Briefing. Tough luck, supposed to fly with Leimbeck's⁴⁹ crew. His bombardier showed up half an hour before take off. We flipped a coin and I lost. Dammit, mission was a snap, Norway. Bombed Heroya, AL⁵⁰ and MG⁵¹ plant, a 1800 mile flight. Altitude: 16,000 feet. All came back home safely.⁵² Slept all AM. No

⁴⁷ Possibly S/Sgt. John D. Taylor, 508th Squadron. (351st: 133)

⁴⁸ By July, Gen. Eaker believed the VIII Bomber Command could muster enough operational aircraft to initiate the second phase of POINTBLANK. Weather forecasts predicted that the last week of the month would bring clear skies over East Anglia and Germany. From July 24 to July 30, in a series of operations that would later become known collectively as "Blitz Week (or Little Blitz Week)," the Eighth Air Force conducted an unparalleled number of missions against targets far beyond its previous zone of operation. (C&C, vol. 2: 674; Coffey: 241; *Flying Fortress*: 127-128; Levine: 92)

⁴⁹ 1st Lt. Robert E. Leimbeck, 509th Squadron. (351st: 125)

⁵⁰ Aluminum.

⁵¹ Magnesium.

⁵² The mission described by Lt. Piech took place on July 24. It is possible that he either confused the raids on Norway with the assault on Hamburg that his group participated in on July 25 or he wrote this entry so long after the fact that he forgot which day these events occurred.

Refusing to let weather conditions keep his forces inactive, VIII Bomber Commander Gen. Fred Anderson dispatched 309 (324 according to Thomas Coffey) B-17s to strike objectives in occupied Norway. This mission marked the first use of "splasher" radio beacons, which allowed the Fortresses to assemble in bad weather by following their signal. Despite this new aid, only 208 bombers reached their targets. Cloud cover sheltered the submarine yards and harbor at Bergen. Forty-one B-17s turned from Bergen to Trondheim, where they inflicted heavy damage on the port facilities there.

Twenty-one Flying Fortresses bearing the Triangle "J" [the 351st Bomb Group's tail designation] bombed the nitrate, aluminum and magnesium plant at Heroya as part of a 167-plane formation. The Germans were completely unprepared for the raids on Norway; the "Queens" capitalized on the fighter-free skies and marginal flak resistance by bombing at a lower altitude than usual, which resulted in greater accuracy. Three-and-a-half months passed before the nitrate plant could resume operations. The Germans abandoned their magnesium and aluminum production facilities at Heroya. The Eighth sacrificed only one plane on this mission, which escaped to safety in Sweden. (351st: 11; C&C, vol. 2: 674-677; 846; CC: 163; Coffey: 241; *Flying Fortress*: 127; Levine: 92)

athletics. No mail today. Doug, Bill and I, bicycle ride to Lilleford, an American hospital. All nurses confined, troop movements. [Had] a few drinks at Oundle. Home by 2300. Midnight supper before bed.

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Last Update: April 16, 2013

ⁱ [Origin...Is?] *insertd.* post-war.

ⁱⁱ [ten] X

ⁱⁱⁱ [aircraft] AC

^{iv} [landed] land

^v [Evacuation] Evac.

^{vi} [Sayreville] Sayre.
