

June 25, 1944

Dear Dad:

I am writing of this to you just in case, the war dept. sends a telegram home to you as they sometimes do in similar cases to this. On a recent straffing mission, I was very slightly hit by some anti-aircraft fire. The wound was so slight that the doctors say that I will be out of combat operation for only about 10 days to two weeks. I am carrying out my usual ground duties in the meantime. I have been recommended for the Purple Heart medal, given to those wounded in action against the enemy and I thought that they might write something in the Philadelphia papers about it. I immediately spoke to the publicity men about this, telling them that I didn't want anything to come out about this because it would unduly alarm my Mother. They promised me that nothing would go in about the event.

I suppose you are interested in hearing how it happened. Well, I was leading our squadron on a straffing mission against transportation facilities behind the German lines somewhere in France. Incidentally about a week ago I was given command of a fighter squadron - the 375th Fighter Squadron - 361st Fighter Group. It's the same group. Well anyway, we saw a trainload of tanks. We fired at them for a few minutes but the damage that we were capable of doing was questionable, so we decided to try and look up something else. A few minutes later, I spied another supply train. This train was in a railroad yard just outside a French town. These yards are very often equipped with anti-aircraft installations. This one was. I made my first pass opening up with my machine guns at about 1000 yards. We always open our fire at a long range in case the train is loaded with munitions. When those things go up the farther you are away from them, the better. I was getting hits so I kept coming in at about 300 miles per hour. I was just about pulling up from the train. I was just about fifteen feet above the train when I noticed the white puffs of 40 millimeter fire all around my plane, also tracers from machine guns. Suddenly something hit me in the face, knocking my head to the left side of the cockpit, and momentarily stunning me, I guess. I realized that I was hit. I hugged the tree tops and kept skidding the plane from side to side to confuse their aim. Tracers and shells were still rushing all around. When I got beyond the range of their fire, I started climbing. I told the boys over the radio that I was hit and that I was going to try to make it to England which was several hundred miles away. I received no answer. I realized that my radio had been shot up. I looked at my engine instruments and saw that they were all normal. I had not been hit in the engine, thank God. About that time I felt the trickle of blood down my neck. It's funny how you don't feel anything when you're hit. I ripped open a little first aid kit that I keep strapped to my parachute harness. I took out all the bandage dressing and wiped some of the blood off my face. All I could see was a gash about an inch long in my jaw. I felt relieved at this. About this time I noticed two holes in the canopy of my cockpit. They were on the right side and were in a position which indicated that the objects which went through would just about have to be either imbedded in my head or else would have had to pass out the other side of the canopy. The first thing I did was to look at the side of the cockpit that the bullets would have had to come out of. There were no holes there. So I took off my flying helmet and examined my head in the rear view mirror. No holes. To this minute I don't know what became of the object that made the second hole in the canopy. The first object was what hit me in the jaw.