

BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

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Robert Lancaster, L.B. Redden, and Glen Redden

World War II Correspondence

New York, Nebraska, Illinois, Virginia, Missouri, Saipan, Hawaii, Okinawa, England: 1942-1945

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A collection of 398 letters and some photographs from three Peekskill, New York natives serving during World War II to their sister and brother-in-law, Barbara and James Lancaster, from 1942 until 1946. All letters are very good or better with modest age toning and small tears from opening. An extensive assembly of materials illustrating the dynamics of the family and their longing for the comforts of home, while discoursing at length about girls, war stories, and the exotic locations and people they encounter. All three men had by turns both similar and differing experiences during the war and their letters depict the soldier's life from basic training to being shipped various places around the United States, England, and the Pacific.

1. 84 letters from Sergeant G. C. Redden to his sister Barbara Lancaster and her son Dickie while Redden was stationed with the Army Air Corps as a weather observer from December 1941 until 1945.

Glen C. Redden was stationed at the Jefferson Barracks in Missouri when he began writing home to his sister in Peekskill, New York. In a letter from December 19, 1941 he writes, "I received a notice yesterday telling me that I had been re-classified from 4-A to 1-A. I expect to get called any day. That won't make me mad though. All I want is a crack at those damned yellow Japs." He was unhappy with the conditions in camp, the soldiers had recently been quarantined because of an outbreak of meningitis and were living in tents. "This isn't the same army anymore. Everything is changed....Most of the men live in tents. They are cold and drafty. If you've never been away from home and don't know how to take care of yourself you are licked before you start."

In February of 1942 Redden was told that he qualified as a weather observer for the Air Corps and would be sent to officer school. "When I leave here I'll go direct to a combat outfit at some active air field as a weather observer...I'll sure be glad to leave this hell-hole." He was sent to Maxwell Field in Alabama to attend "Air Education and Training Command" classes. "School has started but isn't so hard yet. Just a lot of tricky codes to learn and that takes time. I have to study quite a bit."

By 1943 he was sent to England and stationed in Cambridge with the 18th Weather Squadron of the Air Corps sent over "to England as token of a plan to make the Eighth Air Force ultimately independent of its British ally." Redden's view of England was what you would imagine from an American soldier, "you asked me about the weather here - it's just what you would expect. Cold and wet. Fog, rain, and cold. This isn't a great place for a man to live. I'd rather be here than in Germany though." Later he writes, "as for air raids - don't say a word about that. Read the papers. They tell when the Nazis raid England. No more now. I'm still ok and couldn't feel better unless I was home. That's all I'm waiting for." He discusses his situation with his nephew, emphasizing the war planes and Redden's patriotic duty. "From where I'm sitting now I can see plenty of war planes. Over here we see them every day. It makes us all feel proud to be Americans and to be licking the Nazis and Japs."

He tells his sister, "It is hard, even for people over here, to realize what it is like in Germany. I've seen and heard the planes starting out from here. Some of them come right over us...Just imagine sitting in a house and hearing planes overhead - huge four engined bombers, hundreds of them. The roar of the motors is all you can hear....If you can imagine that just try to think about how you'd feel if you were in Germany, sitting in an air raid shelter, with each of those planes dropping a few tons of high explosives on you."

In September of 1945 Glen signed his papers and began his journey home after celebrating three birthdays in the U.K. An intriguing look at the American view of the war overseas and the evolving technology being utilized to end the fighting.

2. 279 letters from Lloyd D. Redden to his sister Barbara Lancaster while he was serving with the Air Force in World War II from 1943 until 1946.

Lloyd D. Redden, who went by his middle name of Don, joined the war effort in the beginning of 1943 after his brother Glen enlisted. He was stationed in Missouri at Jefferson Barracks where he underwent basic training. "Yesterday we were taken to the gas chamber with our gas masks and we were given a test to see if our gas masks worked. Mine worked fine until we were ordered to remove our masks and when we did, wow!...I thought they would never open the door. My eyes and throat were burning up until I got out into the air and then the tears ran down my face like water...You would have laughed at the sight of about 200 soldiers crying their hearts out."

After basic he was sent to Augsburg Seminary Dormitory in Minneapolis, Minnesota to attend classes with the Air Force for officer placement, arriving on June 16th 1943. "The captain told me that when we start the course we will attend classes six hours a day. From 8:00 pm until 10:30 pm we will have supervised study. That means a professor looking down your neck all the time. You can imagine how much time I will have to myself." Unfortunately school did not go well and by September he had flunked the course and was shipped to Lincoln, Nebraska. "Monday afternoon the captain read off a list of the ones that had flunked out and where we were going. Twenty-one of us came here to Lincoln Air Base...We were told that we will have to take our basic training over here and I can't figure out why. One of the reasons was to classify us."

In February of 1944 Redden made his way to Illinois' Chanute Air Force base. Here he worked and attended the Army Air Forces Technical School. Because of issues with his eyes he was held in the States longer than expected. "[The doctor] told me that my right eye was in pretty bad shape and he was going to have a special pair of glasses made for me...I have been scratched from the overseas shipping list temporarily." During his wait for orders he spent time in the company of numerous female companions claiming, "Barb, believe me all a fellow has to have is a

uniform and there are a flock of girls around him.. They are all alike in all the big cities regardless of whether they are society girls or tramps.”

By June of 1944 Don had been to “14 states in 15 months” and still felt he was nowhere closer to an assignment. He was sent to Kearns Field in Salt Lake City and was told he would definitely be shipped overseas but the destination was secret and he was given a San Francisco address for his family to write to. On July 28th he wrote, “starting last night we were restricted to the immediate area and passes have been canceled. All the information we could get as to where we are going was when the C.O. told us that we would be issued tropical clothing.” The beginning of August marked the start of his overseas assignment with the 7th Air Force, but it was still classified and to get letters through the censor he was limited in what he could say. “I still can’t tell you where I am as much as I would like to because you are all probably wondering...As I said in my last letter I am west of the Rockies and that’s all I can say.”

“I am on the island of Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands. Everything is fine and so am I. That is all the information I can give you about where I am at the present time. I don’t know how long I will be here but this is a very lovely place.” In December Redden was writing from Saipan, “The censor says it is alright to tell you now that I am on Saipan. I guess our little island has been getting headlines in the newspapers back home lately. You have probably read about the excitement we have been having here. Don’t worry, I am still safe and I can run pretty fast so I think I will be alright.” He continues later in the letter with, “we still have Jap snipers here and occasionally a search party goes through the hills and hunts some out.”

Don spent most of 1945 in the Pacific waiting with his fellow soldiers for orders and the word that he could return home. “The first of November I’ll be up for a discharge with 63 points. I now have 4 battle stars with another one pending. I may not leave Okinawa for three months yet the way the transportation situation is.” He was eventually sent to Fort Dix to receive his discharge, leaving the Air Force in Early 1946.

An interesting correspondence that begs the question what did Redden do to earn his battles stars.

3. 35 letters from Lieutenant Robert C. Lancaster to his sister-in-law Barbara and his brother James during his time in World War II from 1942 until 1945

Robert Lancaster joined the army in 1942 and reported for basic training at Fort Belvoir in Virginia. He corresponded with his brother, Jim who stayed home after being declared 4-F. “I advise you to try and stay out of the army.” After debating whether to enter officer classes he eventually gave in and completed his training, becoming a 2nd Lieutenant by the end of the year which lead him to an assignment in Los Angeles. “I spent four days in Los Angeles with a beautiful babe. And I do mean nice...It surely is surprising what a uniform will do. (I know it isn’t me.) But I can almost have my pick of women unless there is a Captain or a Major around.”

Los Angeles was just a stopover on his way to the Pacific for Robert who was with the Army Corps of Engineers. He was unable to disclose his location until much later in his letters when he reveals that the army has sent him to Saipan, near his brother-in-law Don. In November of 1943 he writes, “things aren’t too bad in the Army but we wouldn’t be happy if everyone didn’t think we were tuff as hell...All in all my work is very interesting but there don’t seem to be enough time in a day to do everything I want to.” He continues, “But it’s a funny thing how this little brother of yours has gotten around in the last year or so. Tell me how do you feel when you think of your kid brother going to Los Angeles, Hollywood, New Orleans, Chicago, Baton Rouge, Mexico, Texas, and lots of other places.”

In August of 1944 Robert writes from Saipan, “as you probably know by this time your little brother has seen his share of war...When we first hit here there were still a few bodies around and the stink was something that words cannot explain.” Robert notes that the locals are unusual to him and he gives his opinion of the women to his

family by saying, "You should see the women here. They used to live just like animals...They stink like dead people and are really rotten dirty. But we have set up a camp for them and they are living under better conditions than they have seen. Also we are teaching them what a bath is." He describes the conditions of the island as well, "there wasn't a building left standing and the whole place was just like the pictures we used to see of the last war. There are still a few japs here on the loose and it is a little scary at night when you hear a noise outside of our tent...Little by little we are catching them all, either taking them prisoner or killing them."

He spent the next year in the Pacific waiting, like so many other soldiers, for the end of war and to be sent home. "Things aren't really BAD over here. Life goes on as usual, but that is just the trouble, life goes on and where am I? 8,000 miles from home it should be written like this 800,000,000,000,000...well maybe it shouldn't but that is the way it seems. Every day is just another day." By the end of 1945 he was expecting to be discharged in early 1946. "Little did I dream way back in 1942 that I'd be still away from home. But soon I'll be back and war will be a thing of the past. I hope to leave here on the 18th of February. I know this seems like a long time to you...but...if you think of the 3 ½ years I've been in the army 50 days will seem like nothing." [BTC#390133]