



FROM BOOT CAMP *to the* NAVAL ACADEMY

Making a Marine Aviator, 1946–1949

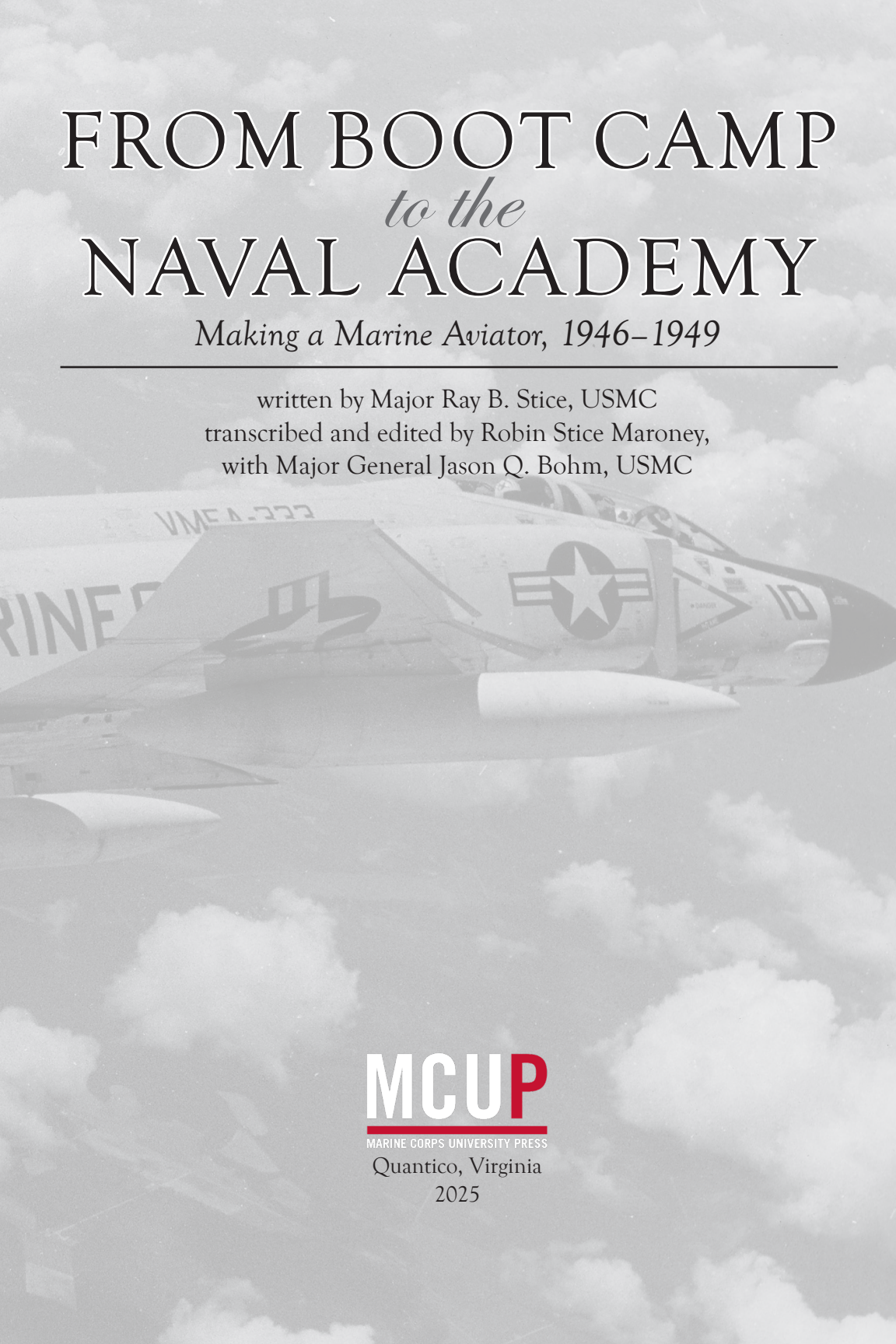
written by Major Ray B. Stice, USMC
transcribed and edited by Robin Stice Maroney,
with Major General Jason Q. Bohm, USMC



FROM BOOT CAMP
to the
NAVAL ACADEMY



An F4B Boeing Phantom airplane flown by Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 333
Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.



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EDITORIAL NOTE

In 2022, the staff at the Marine Corps History Division Archives and the Stice family began the long and sometimes tedious work of preserving and archiving the extensive collection of documents from two generations of military servicemembers. The collection of letters and photographs in the pages that follow represents just one of the voluminous works held by the Stice family, representing decades of correspondence between family members at home and, in this case, the journey to becoming a Marine and everything that entails.

Much has been published in trade and scholarly publishing in the memoirs of military greats, but this work is different. Not because Ray B. Stice was not great—his family took such pride in his service—but because these letters highlight the importance of military recruitment, training, and education to the individual Marine and the Corps at large. As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Marine Corps, it is fitting that we show the adventures of one such Marine in his determination to wear the beloved Eagle, Globe, and Anchor and how that journey will continue to be traveled by countless of America's youth in the years to come who just might see a bit of themselves in Ray Stice.¹

¹ For more on the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Marine Corps, the annual Marine Corps Birthday Ball, and the dedication of Tun Tavern, see “Marines 250,” [Marines.mil](https://www.marines.mil), accessed 31 January 2025.

The pages that follow offer the letters of Ray Stice and his family as he figured out where his future lay in the Marine Corps. This printing represents as closely as possible the original transcribed letters, with minor alterations to the text based on current standards for style, grammar, punctuation, and spelling, but also to accommodate space constraints of the publishing process. Due to the passing of time and the challenges of transcription, some information may not be complete or the names/terms left as per the original because verification simply was not possible. In some instances, we have retained the original spelling of specific places and things as they represent the accepted spelling for the historical period. Further, editorial text, informational footnotes, and citations have been inserted to provide additional context, to educate the reader on social and historical terms from the period, and to allow for additional research later.

At times, the letters venture into sensitive areas, including the socio-cultural and political issues of the day, at times using terms that some readers may find offensive. We include these terms, not with the intention of drawing attention to or supporting what would be considered by many as derogatory but to celebrate the journey of one young man to military service and the families who offered their support in the effort.

Angela J. Anderson

Director

Marine Corps University Press

FOREWORD

The Stice family has indeed left us with a treasure trove. This compilation of letters home from Ray Stice is at once in the moment and timeless. My first reactions to the letters propelled me back to a time when I too started military service as an 18-year-old, away from my family and friends I had grown up with and thrust into a world that was wholly unfamiliar to me as a plebe at the U.S. Naval Academy. At the time, we all hand wrote letters to communicate with our loved ones and friends to share our thoughts and stay connected. The correspondence of Ray Stice reminds us of a time when the written word in letters was so precious; not a text or email but a handwritten message that needed to be thoughtful and organized to bide the time being read repeatedly until the next precious letter arrived. It is funny how, throughout this body of work, so few letters or feelings were misconstrued—if only that were the case with instant messages today, which is certainly something to ponder.

For those who hesitate to read a book full of letters from the past, and I originally included myself in that group, I urge you not pass up this opportunity. What I found in these letters was something for everyone who has, or who has known someone who has, undergone the transformation from being a civilian into a U.S. servicemember, who has worn the cloth while defending our nation, or who has deployed overseas to remote postings. Readers will find that regardless of the era during which Ray Stice wrote home, you will recognize in his voice as your voice.

I personally found myself absorbed throughout several of the phases of his service. First were the letters from boot camp, which hearkened back to when my son shipped to the recruit depot at Parris Island, South Carolina—“Tell Dad if he writes not to put his rank in the envelope. Not because I’m not proud to have him as my dad—no, sir—just so the DI won’t know until I get ready to tell them so”—then with the fleet, where we all felt isolated and endured hours of boredom and monotony followed by thrills and high-tempo operations, and finally the U.S. Naval Academy, with his reflections of the unknown, the return of the brigade, the instructors—“[who] are either so old and decrepit they can’t talk, or they talk and figure so damned fast it makes my head swim”—and of course the seemingly impossible academics. For anyone who has lived a portion of this life, you will be entertained not by what has changed, but by what remains the same.

And in the end, these private letters took me to a place we all experienced in our military careers and life—facing challenges that seemed too hard, impossible to overcome, more than we could endure, and feeling we were just not cut out for it. What young Ray Stice shows us in his character is that we all have it inside and will emerge even stronger if we do not quit regardless of whether we can meet the standards or not: “If I can’t raise my standards to meet theirs, that’s my shortcoming, not yours. All I can do is back up a little and charge into them again or try something else.” And that he did, ultimately achieving his dreams of becoming a Marine officer and aviator—a story for another book.

The Stice family hoped by publishing this treasure of personal letters that Ray Stice would be an “inspiration to anyone entering the military, especially aspiring Marines and aviators.” They have succeeded. Even this old Marine aviator was inspired by reading them. My sincere thanks to the Stice family for preserving this legacy.

Scott Benedict

Major General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret)

PREFACE

By Robin Stice Maroney

My father, Ray B. Stice, became an enlisted recruit for the United States Marine Corps at the age of 17 on 18 June 1946. Following graduation from Urbana High School in Illinois, my father, along with eight of his classmates, embarked on an adventure that would take him around the world. This manuscript includes a transcription of all 193 handwritten letters Dad wrote home to his family during a period of three years beginning at boot camp in Parris Island, South Carolina, and ending when he attended his first year at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Along his journey to becoming a Marine, Dad consistently wrote to his family as often as possible. His father and mother, Kenneth and Milly Stice, and sister Lucile saved the letters for him while they lived in Urbana, Illinois.

This incredible letter collection gives insight into a young man's journey to become a Marine, highlighting his immense excitement and conviction, along with a fierce sense of loyalty to the Corps. His training in boot camp, along with learning radar across the Pacific Ocean on Midway Island and at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, provided him with the military foundation he would need to be accepted into the competitive U.S. Naval Academy. Dad's enlisted experience enhanced his strong patriotic spirit and resiliency to juggle both academic and military responsibilities. My father made a career in the Corps and attained the rank of major. He accomplished his dream of becoming a fighter pilot and served in combat

during the Vietnam War in 1966–67. He came full circle 24 years after enlisting in the Marine Corps by returning to the same salt marsh island where he had been as a young recruit in boot camp in 1946, but this time he was assigned as the executive officer for Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 333 (VMFA-333) at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. Dad spent his last years as an officer flying the coveted McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II.

This unforgettable portrait of becoming a Marine is an inspiring story of spirit and valor and is told in his own words.

SCRAPBOOK OF LETTERS

I found my dad's original letters in April 2020 when cleaning out the garage. It had been six years since my mother Elizabeth "Gig" Stice passed, and it was finally time to sort through her treasured heirlooms. Our country was under the coronavirus quarantine, so the opportunity to "be still and declutter" presented itself. On the last day cleaning out the garage, I came across a heavy, tattered cloth bag filled with an old and musty leather satchel. I came very close to throwing the bag away because it looked like it contained a bunch of left-behind junk. When I pulled the tattered satchel out of the bag and tried to unzip it, I found the most wonderful surprise! The satchel was filled with my father's personal handwritten letters when he was a young Marine, taped together inside the original scrapbook that my grandmother Milly meticulously kept for him at his request. In one of his letters to his mother from the Naval Academy in Annapolis, he wrote,

Oh yes—here are a couple of pictures I took last week to put in my scrapbook. By the way, Mom, you are still keeping that book for me, aren't you? Someday I'll really appreciate being able to "look back" and sort of reminisce. Somethings we always forget and pictures etc. help remember old times.

I immediately started reading my father's letters written in 1946 when he was only 17 and ending in 1949.

I found this treasure of letters on Good Friday, Easter weekend, and without hesitation, set up shop in the front corner of the garage, where I would have good natural light with the garage door open and a nice gentle breeze. History came alive as if I had entered into a living time capsule. I absorbed this unexpected gift and read as many letters as I could every day. I carefully untaped and removed each fragile page from the old scrap-

book and took pictures to email to my sisters so they could read them too. The feeling of seeing my dad's actual handwriting and reading his stories was surreal. I imagined I could hear him "speaking" about his dreams, academic struggles, friendships, and his genuine excitement about joining the military and becoming a Marine. He wrote about how much he admired and respected his mother, father, and sister. He wanted them to be proud of him. Dad had passed 43 years prior to me finding these letters, and we missed out on having him around to tell these stories himself.

Dad grew up in a military family. His own father, Kenneth Stice, was an Army colonel who was awarded the Bronze Star after serving in both World War I and World War II. It was no wonder Dad wrote from boot camp,

My main wish for the last four years is to be in uniform in the Service and do something with Dad while he is still in, and it looks like my wish is going to come true. And it would tickle me to death to make him salute me on the street and not have him recognize me!

He also wrote to his father at the end of boot camp on 19 August 1946,

I hope I meet you on the street and you don't recognize me, and you salute. That is sort of an ambition of mine and then yell at you after you passed. We'll see.

As I read many times, Dad would remind his mother to save his letters and artifacts so he could document his memories of becoming a Marine. I am so thankful she saved them. As Dad writes a month into boot camp,

Your letters really cheer me up and make me feel pretty damn good whenever I'm not. I read them over and over so it's almost like I'm talking to you, so keep 'em coming whenever you have time.

Another sweet moment is reflected during boot camp when he writes,

Whenever I start to write home, I feel funny in my eyes and throat. Maybe I'm really homesick, Mom. They (the rest of the fellas) don't mention it, but I know they are. I know damn well I am.

Figure 1. Kenneth and Ray Stice in uniform outside the family home



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Figure 2. Kenneth, Milly, Lucile and Ray Stice at home, Christmas 1945



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Another aspect of reading these letters that touched me was how thoughtful my dad was to his sister, Lucile. When he writes to his mother on 29 September 1946 from Pearl Harbor about getting his sister a 20th birthday present, he says,

*Please tell Lucile not to open her package until her birthday.
... I hope she has a black evening gown so she can wear "it."*

And when Dad gives his sister advice about school,
P.S. Tell that sister of mine not to worry about her exams so

Figure 3. Lucile and Ray Stice at home, ca. 1940



Source: Stice Family Collection.

much if possible. We take so damn many, it's second nature anymore. One of these days I'll learn how to study, then I'll learn how to remember what I've studied—that will be the day!

This historical letter collection is particularly rare, not only because it describes the daily mental and physical challenges of becoming a Marine in 1946, but because it reveals the patriotism and excitement of a young man yearning to earn the title United States Marine. As days went by, especially in boot camp, you can see how he became more disciplined and focused. The correspondence reveals his growing confidence, maturity, and leadership skills. For example, there is a notable change in his letters when he writes from boot camp saying, “This is the hardest thing I have ever done in my whole life.” And after a few weeks, his tone had changed: “Don’t worry about my quick temper anymore. I’ve learned to think before speaking.”

Two months later, he writes, “I can see some of the Marine Corps ideals and am proud to be able to be one, thanks to you, and the Lord, and dad.”

His unabashed pride during the transformation of becoming a Marine was moving. Four weeks into boot camp, he writes,

Well, the two most feared days of my life have passed. We are at the rifle range finally and without too much trouble. The hike out to the beach was something I’ll never forget and the experiences we had while we were out there either. Each night, you can go to bed and truthfully say you have learned something new for each finger on both hands, and although I wouldn’t care to go through hardly any of them again, I can’t really say I’m not glad I didn’t go through them. Most everything seems and is hard while you are doing them, but the [drill instructors] DIs seem to know just how much the average man can take before he folds up and if you are average or better you never have to quit or drop out, just almost do.

Two years after enlisting, Dad became a midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy. His hard work had paid off. He writes,

The attitude of the officers is wonderful because they don’t know who was what (and don’t care anyway) and everyone is treated very much like a gentleman. . . . I’ve got to hand it to a lot of these civilians. Most of them catch on to the military angle pretty nicely. After all, this is an awful lot different than boot camp. They treat you with respect, and are very courteous,

but once you step out of the very straight and extremely narrow line, you get tromped all over so fast it makes your head spin. They really are on the lookout for Navy and Marine "Juniors" (brats) too. I'm glad I came here as a former Marine!

Reading the letters chronologically took me back to World War II, when patriotism and heroism was a vital part of everyday life. This was an era when worldwide news and hometown coverage was limited to listening to radio broadcasts or receiving a clipping from a newspaper. Making long-distance phone calls was a special treat, and hearing the live voice on the other end of the line was something to be cherished. Dad called his mom after boot camp was over on 28 August 1946 and said,

Hi Mom, last night was the first time I've really made a long-distance phone call; 1,400 miles isn't to be sneezed at. I'm glad you're paying the bill! Your voice sounded so close and just like I was calling you from Champaign [Illinois] or next door. I don't reckon my voice has changed any either.

A couple of months later he writes, "I'll write you from Pearl Harbor. I'm awfully glad I called you from Louisiana now. Everyone's trying to call home at the last minute." Then he writes from Honolulu four months later in January 1947, "It sure was nice to hear your voice when I called from New Orleans. If I had about \$10 bucks that I could spend, I would not only be talking to you, but you would talk back. They have swell overseas phone service downstairs. Maybe I'll surprise you sometime and call up."

This was a time in history when the little things in life meant everything. Mail call was a huge source of anticipation or anxiety when nothing came. Speaking on the telephone or receiving letters from family, friends, or girlfriends was a grand day and helped preserve relationships.² These exchanges provided the emotional armor all new recruits needed to get through an overseas tour of duty.

One of the other surprises I found out about Dad while reading the letters is that he hitchhiked quite a bit, and not just around the town but

² With the advent of limitless long-distance services and then cellular phone technology, the concept of *long distance* ended more than 20 years ago. See Christopher Stern, "So Long to Long-Distance?: Calling Packages, Internet Phoning Swiftly Ending a High-Cost Category," *Washington Post*, 5 August 2004.

Figure 4. Promotional card for telephone services, ca. 1940s

"I'll be right over!"

"Can I stay for lunch at Bill's, Mom?"

"I'm coming by plane Friday!"

"I'll send some right over!"

"It's a boy!"

Your Telephone is worth More than it Costs!

Link between family and friends . . .
trusted business aid . . . swift, convenient
messenger — your telephone service is
one of the biggest bargains you can buy.

Source: Stice Family Collection.

to another state a few times. Looking back, I realized he was doing it out of necessity, as it was his only means of transportation to get to his destination.³ On 17 November 1947, he writes from Bainbridge, Maryland, “I hitchhiked up to Philly Saturday noon and came back last night at 2300. Much fun.” And a few weeks later, he said,

I fulfilled my half of the bargain that if I got home first, I would look up my buddy’s folks. They live near Washington, so I hitchhiked down Sunday. They were awfully worried about him, and it took me three hours to explain to them that you just don’t do what you want to do in this outfit. . . . I thought I would end up with pneumonia, but my cold just started up strong again. It sure gets cold here—averages around freezing most of the morning and night.

I admired the commitment Dad made to his friend, and how cold it must have been to travel in the freezing winter elements. Dad had the best attitude:

I have finally cut my hobby down to one heading: “Meeting and Talking to Different People.” Ever since hitchhiking to NC, I’ve liked to meet people, and it really is sort of a hobby now. I like to try to figure out their character, background, and experiences, I think it is interesting.

BECOMING A MARINE

Becoming an Enlisted Marine

After completing three intense months of boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, and earning the rank of private first class, Dad was given his first orders to work radar on “The Rock” in the Midway Islands in the Pacific Ocean for several months.⁴ After only one month on Midway, he decided he wanted to be an officer. On 22 November 1946, he writes,

³ There are no federal laws prohibiting hitchhiking, but all 50 states put laws on the books as early as the 1960s, varying from allowed but not in the road, allowed but not on traveled sections of the road, and not allowed anywhere. For more on the topic, see Jack Reid, *Roadside Americans: The Rise and Fall of Hitchhiking in a Changing Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

⁴ Ray B. Stice, “Chronological Record of Duty Assignments,” 19 June 1946 to 31 March 1970, Stice family collection, 1; and LtCol H. B. Meek, “Marines Had Radar Too,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 29, no. 10 (October 1945): 16–19.

I'm pretty sure of what I want to do for my future. I would like to be a Marine officer somehow. I don't want to be an Army or a naval officer, but I'll take one of the two as second choice. I hope Dad won't feel too bad about my choice.

He was then sent to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to learn how to repair and rebuild radar gear at the fleet training school for five months. Back at the rock on Midway working radar for another half year, he began the process to attend the U.S. Naval Academy Preparatory School in Bainbridge.⁵

Preparatory school was a challenge for Dad, considering he had to relearn in four months what he studied in high school for four years. It was interesting learning about his academic encounters and his youthful optimism. He writes from Bainbridge on 18 February 1948 in the dead of winter:

The sun came out and all the snow is melted now. It really feels wonderful to get outside every once and awhile. It sure reminds me of high school, when all you had to do was jump in your car and drive out in the country somewhere and go swimming, etc. I sure had a lot of fun, I guess, but I'd sure do a lot more in so many things if I had it to do all over again! I like to look back and laugh at the things I thought were so important or difficult then. I wonder if I'll do the same thing someday, at these last two years? I'm glad I'm still just a kid—life's too interesting to pass in such a hurry.

In June 1948, exactly two years after enlisting in the Marine Corps, Dad became a midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy.⁶ Although his military indoctrination gave him a jump start at the academy, he really

⁵ The Bainbridge Naval Training Center was originally founded in 1898 as the Tome School for Boys in Port Deposit, MD. In 1941, it was purchased by the President Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, who constructed what would become one of three centers for the introduction of naval recruits. Named for Commo William Bainbridge, the school served as a recruiting and preparatory center for the U.S. Naval Academy for more than 35 years. The school was deactivated in 1947, but reactivated only three years later in 1950 to address the growing situation presented by the Korean War before it was finally deactivated in 1976. For more on the school's history, see P. E. Coletta, "U. S. Naval Training Center—Bainbridge," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 83, no. 6 (June 1957).

⁶ Ray B. Stice, "Chronological Record of Duty Assignments," 19 June 1946 to 31 March 1970, Stice family collection, 1.

had to work hard to make his grades. Academically, he struggled in several subjects. He writes,

Now we have finished solid analytical geometry and are on the second chapter in calculus—that makes algebra—trig, plane, and solid analytic and now this stuff. Brother, and me in the middle of a class of students, 70 percent of which have already had the stuff in college. Do you realize I was 1 of only 100 people who had never had chemistry before?

My biggest sense of appreciation while reading his letters was seeing his honest feelings about whether he would pass the various tests he had to encounter each step of the way on his journey to become a Marine. Dad was an ordinary teenager with ordinary struggles who became an extraordinary pilot because of his perseverance and drive. When the rubber hit the road, and he thought he might fail, he refused to give up. In one of his last letters from the Naval Academy, he writes, “If I can’t raise my standards to meet theirs, that’s my shortcoming, not yours. All I can do is back up a little and charge into them again or try something else.”

As I look back on the entire breadth of correspondence, there is a saying that resonates throughout, “You cannot change the direction of the wind, but you can adjust the sails.”⁷ Another time he writes, “There was no quitter’s spirit tied up in that exam.”

This manuscript of letters concludes in 1949, when Dad was 20 years old, after plebe summer and his rigorous first year at the U.S. Naval Academy.

Becoming an Officer and Fighter Pilot

While being an enlisted man his first three years in the Marine Corps, Dad mastered the tactics and techniques of infantry and radar, and he ful-

⁷ This saying has been in print in various forms for several hundred years, often recrafted to suit that author’s purpose. The earliest known version came from the 1832 edited work by R. Chambers, *The Book of Days: A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities*, 2 vols. (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1832). In 1859, the well-known spiritualist Cora L. V. Hatch delivered a lecture at the Cooper Institute while in a trance that appears the closest match to this current sentiment. “Cora L. V. Hatch on Spiritualism: The Law of God a Unit,” *Daily Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), 15 January 1859, 2.

ly learned the concept, “Every Marine a rifleman.”⁸ Dad was prepared to do the hard work always: “I’m glad I came through the hard part without skipping any of the tough stuff because I believe I’ll be a better Marine for all the discipline alone!”

He certainly did not skip any of the “tough stuff.” But the fires were burning for him to be a Marine Corps officer and a pilot. Dad worked hard, moved up the ranks, proudly earning his aviator wings as a captain in 1955. Soon after pinning on his wings, he married my mother, whom he affectionately called Gig.

Together, Ray and Gig raised four children and traveled the country from coast to coast on different tours of duty. These included serving one year in Japan and one year as a combat fighter pilot during the Vietnam War, where he flew 163 combat missions and was awarded 12 Air Medals.

Dad had a distinguished military career, retiring as a major after 24 years of military service in 1970.⁹ Because Dad had prior enlisted Marine experiences before becoming an officer, he was known as a “mustang,” and this background enabled him to provide invaluable support and encouragement to fellow enlisted Marines, especially in Vietnam.¹⁰

FROM THE MAJOR TO THE MISSUS

The book of Dad’s handwritten and transcribed letters written during the Vietnam War in 1966–67 is titled *From the Major to the Missus* and was published by the Marine Corps University Press in 2023. This book also includes all the letters my mother Gig wrote to Ray while he served in Vietnam. It documents how my mother, as a military spouse, bravely coped while her husband was away fighting a war. She kept the home fires burning while taking care of four young children in Austin, Texas. Their two-way conversation chronicles one year of active duty, with stories of bravery and sacrifice from both the battlefield and the home front.

Finding the correspondence became a four-year journey and passion of transcribing hundreds of our family’s military letters (from World War

⁸ Marine Corps lore points to Gen Alfred M. Gray making this statement during his post-Vietnam transformative years as Commandant of the Marine Corps. The full quote is “Every Marine is, first and foremost, a rifleman. All other conditions are secondary.”

⁹ Ray B. Stice, “Chronological Record of Duty Assignments,” 19 June 1946 to 31 March 1970, Stice family collection, 2.

¹⁰ Originating at the U.S. Naval Academy, the term *mustang* was used to distinguish traditional officers (thoroughbreds) from prior enlisted officers (mustangs).

Figure 5. Ray with his wife, Gig Stice, after pinning his wings, ca. 1955



Source: Stice Family Collection.

II to Vietnam). We also chose to donate the original Vietnam letters to the archives of the Marine Corps History Division in Quantico, Virginia.

I was inspired to document these stories in order to show future generations my father's personal experience in choosing to respond to his call of duty. Being the children of a Marine fighter pilot has always been a great source of pride for me and my siblings, Karen Stice Ratliff, Kathy Stice Blanchard, and Kirk Stice (deceased). After reading Dad's letters, we

now have a much greater appreciation for the patriotism and sacrifice he and our mother demonstrated while serving their country. The deeper I dug into the history of the Marine Corps, the more profound the respect I have for all Marines who have served our country in support of the Corps' motto, *Semper Fidelis*, Always Faithful.

Lieutenant General Victor Krulak writes in *First to Fight* that Marines have "innovativeness, resolution, obedience, patience, endurance, and the ultimate in raw courage."¹¹ I could not agree more. I witnessed firsthand in reading Dad's letters that he had every one of these qualities. Dad's legacy of faithfulness to his family, our country, and the Corps has been a badge of honor our family will treasure and look up to always and forever.

¹¹ LtGen Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), chap. 11.

SELECT TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS, AND ACRONYMS

Airedale	salty Marines with a long service record
ALMAR	all Marine Corps memorandum
ALNAV	all Navy memorandum
BAR	Browning Automatic Rifle
boot	refers to someone in boot camp or someone very inexperienced
BOQ	bachelor officer quarters
CO	commanding officer
DI	drill instructor
EDP	extra police duty
EGA	Eagle, Globe, and Anchor
EMS	Equipment Maintenance Squadron
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
FPO	Fleet Post Office
hop	a flight or aviation mission
GD	general duty
GI	government issue
GQ	general quarters
gyrene	slang term for someone in the Marine Corps
H&S	Headquarters and Service
MAA	master at arms
MAG	Marine Aircraft Group

MAW	Marine Aircraft Wing
MCAS	Marine Corps Air Station
MOS	military occupational specialty
MP	military police
mustang	former enlisted Marine who later received an officer commis- sion
NAAS	Naval Auxiliary Air Station
NAS	Naval Air Station
NATS	Naval Air Transport Service
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NOB	Naval Operations Base
NROTC	Naval Reserves Officer Training Corps
OCS	Officer Candidates School
PFC	private first class
PI	Parris Island, SC
plebe	a new cadet or freshman
POW	prisoner of war
PX	post exchange
The Rock	Midway Island
SL	section leader
SOI	School of Infantry
SP	shore patrol
swabbies	U.S. Navy sailors
USNA	U.S. Naval Academy
USO	United Services Organization
VMF	Marine fighter squadron
VMI	Virginia Military Institute
WO	watch officer
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

FROM BOOT CAMP
to the
NAVAL ACADEMY

INTRODUCTION

by General Jason Q. Bohm, USMC (Ret)

One does not “join” the Marine Corps; one must “earn” the title Marine. Being a Marine is not a job. It is a calling. Earning the title Marine is achieved by surviving the crucible of boot camp at either Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California, or Parris Island, South Carolina, or by proving one has the fortitude to lead Marines through screening and evaluating at Officer Candidates School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia. Yet, earning the title Marine is not an end state in itself. One has not “arrived” at earning the title. This is merely the start of a lifelong journey in what Marines refer to as the transformation process.

The transformation process begins when an individual first sees a Marine Corps recruiting poster or speaks to their first Marine and does not end until the day they die. Being a Marine is for life. The term “Once a Marine, Always a Marine” is not just some catchy recruiting slogan. It is a Service truth, and it is ingrained into the hearts and minds of all Marines. The Marine Corps makes three promises to the nation: it makes Marines, it wins our nation’s battles, and it returns good citizens to our society.

The transformation process starts with an idea formed in the souls of those individuals seeking more out of life, those seeking to be challenged, and to becoming one of the best. The Marine Corps seeks young men and women with an inner drive to be part of something larger than self, individuals wanting to be the selfless servants our great nation needs to defend those who cannot defend themselves and to be willing to sacrifice

all for the greater good and for their fellow Marine. It seeks those who willingly choose to live by its motto of *Semper Fidelis*: always faithful to God, to our country, and to our Corps.

Young men and women with the personal conviction to test themselves for the honor of earning the title Marine have been attracted to the Service for the last 250 years. They confronted the challenge of earning the title knowing that Marine Corps boot camp is harder and longer. They understand that the Corps has traditionally been asked to do more with less, that they will often be called first to run to the sound of the guns, and that they will habitually be deployed in harm's way in austere locations with little support other than that provided by their fellow Marines. Yet, they keep coming, because it is this very culture, the shared hardship experienced by all Marines, that attracts them to what has rightfully become known as one of the world's preeminent fighting organizations.

Seventeen-year-old Ray B. Stice was among those drawn to the Marine Corps. Although he grew up in an Army family, with a father who served as a colonel, Stice sought his own path. He wanted to be among the best. We are blessed today to read Ray Stice's inner thoughts as shared through his personal letters found in this collection as he began his transformation process in earning the title Marine. Little did Stice know at the time that his journey into uniform would last for 23 years and take him from enlisted to officer, serving in peacetime and war, adding to the rich tradition and legacy of the Marine Corps.

Ray Stice joined the Marine Corps at an interesting time in its history. The Corps had just helped to achieve victory against Japan during World War II. Like many young Americans at the time, Ray watched as his father and several other relatives went to war to defend the American way of life. He experienced firsthand the respect earned by a nation that fully mobilized to win this "total" war.

Ray and others of his generation craved to do their part, but they were too young to join before the war ended. American history demonstrates that our nation has participated in a major conflict an average of once every 15 years, so perhaps Ray and his friends felt dejected for having missed their chance to add to the next chapter of our nation's illustrious history. They would face new challenges, however, in what became known as the Cold War and to everyone's surprise the United States found itself in a new shooting war just five years after the end of World War II. Ray would

miss this war too, but true to our history, he would bravely do his part in combat over the skies of Vietnam 15 years after this conflict.

Ray Stice's story is one worth reading. Although a personal journey, it is representative of the many young men and women who have chosen to wear our nation's uniform in peacetime and war, to follow their own path, and to answer their calling in their own way. Unsatisfied with joining as an officer like his father, Ray wanted to first become an enlisted Marine. He wanted to experience what the thousands of Marines before him experienced in boot camp, during service overseas, and if called to serve in harm's way. Stice got his wish and then some when he first stepped foot on Parris Island, South Carolina.¹

BOOT CAMP

Like most recruits, Ray Stice faced significant culture shock after arriving at boot camp. He questioned his decision to enlist and sought ways to get off the island to avoid the domineering control of his drill instructors. But, as is always the case, once the shock wore off, Stice began to enjoy the hardship he confronted. The Marine Corps was living up to its reputation and Ray accepted that he was getting exactly what he sought from the Corps. The transformation process took hold as Ray saw a nasty group of individuals from all makes of life coalesce into a cohesive well-oiled team.

While at Parris Island, Ray acknowledged that being a recruit was the "hardest thing I have ever done in my whole life," but over time he accepted that "seeing as how all those other Marines went through it all, I guess I can stick it out." And stick it out, he did.

The reader gets to experience the sights, smells, joys, and challenges of Ray and his fellow recruits during their 13 weeks of boot camp. We see Ray begin to transform as he realizes the sheltered life his father and others provide their fellow Americans through their military service: "You never really appreciate the things while you have them, do you, Mom?" Growing up in the Midwest, he was also exposed to the diversity of America, enjoying its different cultures, practices, and accents: "You would get a bang out of listening to the Boston boys talk."

¹ For more on Parris Island, see Elmore A. Champie, *A Brief History of Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina, 1891–1962* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1962).

Figure 6. U.S. Marine Corps Barracks, Parris Island, SC, ca. 1939



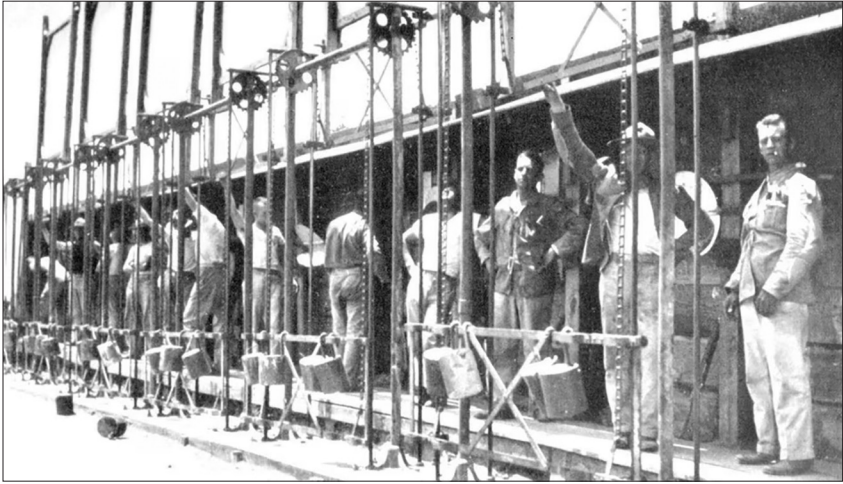
Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

Stice's transition from civilian to future Marine comes alive in his words. One gets a sense for how Stice and his fellow recruits hardened their bodies, minds, and souls over the weeks on the island as he shares with his mother that "we all changed a lot down here." A growing pride in their accomplishments, replaced the shock and confusion once held by the recruits "you should have seen us marching to and from the PX, we really marched like future Marines. Snap! Lord, that's what makes you feel good is to have a little snap and precision."

One cannot help but chuckle when you see Ray's pride transition into the cockiness for which Marines are known. He speaks disparagingly of the newly arrived recruits with their fresh haircuts compared to his platoon mates that have a whole three weeks of seniority over them, "We feel about stuck up (only fooling) when we see the 'skin heads' come in." He demonstrates the healthy competition that exists to this day between Marines who graduated from Parris Island with those who went to California, which he refers to as the "Sissy Boot Camp at San Diego."² This

² For more on the Marine Corps base at San Diego, see Elmore A. Champie, *A Brief History of the Marine Corps Base and Recruit Depot San Diego, California, 1914–1962* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1962).

Figure 7. Marine recruits pull targets at the Parris Island range



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo courtesy of the Parris Island Museum.

well-placed arrogance even extends to his friends who took an easier path, “If Jerry L. Dyer thought the Army was tough, he wouldn’t have lasted the first week in our training.”

Ray goes on to share how the experience of boot camp and its culture has an inevitable influence on one’s human nature. He describes in detail the pounds of food he digested at each meal to fuel his body during this strenuous period, going so far as to share how he and his platoonmates devour their food to the point that “we don’t taste anymore.” He shares how “everybody is getting nervous about whether they will ‘slip’ and cuss in front of the wrong people, because all everyone uses is foul language here.” Unfortunately, this too is a practice with which modern day Marines can relate.

The boot camp experience transformed Stice in other ways as well. Hardship and pushing one to their limits tend to help them find religion as they begin to understand that they cannot tackle the challenges of life alone. In explaining why he started going to church services to his mother, Stice says, “I went because I’m slowly getting sounder ideas on what religion is and what it means.” Of course, Marine Corps boot camp also instills another type of religion in recruits, that of being a warrior.

Stice shared with his mother how he could not wait to begin weapons training and qualifying with his rifle. He loved engaging targets and sharing his knowledge of marksmanship as he lived up to the Marine Corps adage of “every Marine a rifleman.” Stice’s favorite weapon was the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) that was designed during World War I to provide a heavy volume of automatic fire to support maneuver. He shared, “I finally fired the BAR. After the first round, I fell in love with it . . . that is what I call a real rifle.”

Thus was the backdrop of the formulative experience that would put Ray Stice on a 23-year adventure as a Marine, a journey that would soon find him overseas.

MIDWAY ISLAND

Private Stice signed on for the travel and adventure of being a Marine. He did not have to wait long to fulfill that goal. Thinking he was being assigned to beautiful Pearl Harbor, Stice, like many Marines before and after him, had his orders changed. The Marine Corps thought it better to send young Stice to Midway Island to become a radarman.³

In June 1942 and just four years prior to Stice’s arrival, Midway Island and its surrounding area were the location of the turning point of the war in the Pacific. American forces using secret intelligence gathered from their signals intelligence experts established an ambush for Japanese invasion forces assigned to capture Midway Island. The outnumbered and outgunned Americans achieved a stunning victory in the four-day battle that resulted in the sinking of four Japanese aircraft carriers and United States Marines holding firmly onto Midway Island. Marines defended the island against Japanese air attack, as Marine pilots participated in the attacks against the Japanese fleet.⁴

The Midway that greeted then-Private Stice was far from the once busy forward operating base at the center of the war. Stice described how, “for as well-known as this place is, the Midway Islands are the most forgot-

³ For more on the history of Marines on Midway, see LtCol Robert D. Heintz Jr., USMC, *Marines at Midway* (Washington, DC: Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1948).

⁴ LtCol Frank O. Hough, USMCR, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, USMC, and Henry I. Shaw Jr., *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II: Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1958), 205–34.

Figure 8. Aerial view of Midway Atoll, ca. 1945



Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

ten far out of the way place it the world.” He shared how the island was occupied by “two small native tribes and 200 Marines” with “about 100 swabbies” who ran a small submarine base. Having become accustomed to letters from his mother only taking two days to arrive at Parris Island, Stice now had to wait four to eight *weeks* for mail to arrive.

Stice expected to be on the island for 18 months. He shared how beautiful the scenery was and that the swimming was great. Unfortunately, there was not much more to do to occupy the men. Marines have a way of finding humor in tough situations, or what modern day Marines refer to as “embracing the suck.”⁵ When sharing what other Marines had to say about being stationed on Midway, Ray stated, “They say the first six months here, you look at the gooney birds; the second six months the gooney birds look at you; and the third six months you look at each other and, by that time, you’re both crazy and probably draw up a marriage license.”

⁵ *Embrace the suck* was first popularized by Marines serving in Iraq, ca. 2003.

Stice did not want to be a radarman, but as is often the case, the Marine Corps knows best. With little else to do, Ray dove into the material to learn his new trade. He shared with his father how “in the last week, I’ve found so many things I don’t understand and want to find out what they are and what happens that I’ve changed my mind completely.” These early lessons initiated a period of lifelong learning that would carry Private First Class Stice to new heights and an eventual commission in the Marine Corps. Just like Marines do today, he sought to better himself, “Yesterday, I even enrolled in the Marine Corps Institute (MCI) to take a course in ‘The Fundamentals of Electricity’ so I might understand better some of the things that are taken for granted ‘as are,’ and for the many things I can’t explain.”

Although postwar Midway was a dull place to serve, Stice reminds us that being a Marine is an inherently dangerous profession no matter where they are stationed. He recalled how he was on top of a 207-foot radar tower one day when “I got the living hell scared out of me.” Ray heard a humming sound when suddenly the “antenna started to revolve and make a sweep. By then, I was wondering why I wasn’t dead. All the steel parts are all connected, with more than 150,000,000 amps running through the transmission lines, and there’s no telling how many volts were along with ‘em.”

In between the pendulum swings of shear boredom and life-threatening events, the Marines occasionally had fun too. Ray fondly remembered a USO troupe visiting the island and treating the Marines well, “The dames even served our supper chow, and the show they put on was the funniest, craziest, burlesque show I’ve ever seen. The gals looked good, and the men were terrific.” Marines of every generation since Stice’s service on Midway would agree with their affection and appreciation for the United Services Organization (USO) that still entertain and support the troops today.

The close quarters on the small island also had a way of bonding the small bands of Marines and sailors. Having first referred to the sailors on Midway as “swabbies,” the shared hardship of operating on the island created a cohesion among the naval personnel on the island. One can see Stice’s attitude toward the sailors change as he affectionately recalled, “I think all this difference between sailors and Marines is ignorant. . . . We all work together, choke on beer together, and whatever else comes up and we actually are part of the Navy anyway!”

Life on Midway settled into a daily routine of guard duty, classes, studying, eating, working out, and inspections. There were, however, certain bouts of excitement. One evening, a Marine opened his desk drawer to have a large rat jump out at him. Ray recalled, “After a mad chase around the barracks, some Joe hit it with a book, and I closed in with a deadly Coke bottle and the fun was over. We were going to put it in one of the guy’s pillow slips, but the majority ruled so, ‘Out the Window He Must Go’.”

A quick stop at the island post exchange (PX) also helped to break the monotony. Although, sometimes the Marines faced disappointment, “You ought to see the candy and cigarettes they sell here—mold and mildew all over! The only good things are peanuts and marshmallows (when they are available) and Life Savers.” Stice did not mind though as he shared, “I guess we weren’t sent over here just to smoke (which I don’t) and eat pogy bait so, to heck with them.”

Life on the rock was a rollercoaster of emotions with highs and lows. It also provided lots of time for self-reflection. Stice contemplated, “It’s funny how my mind changes. When I came in, I wanted to fight things and wanted to resist, but now you take things as they come more or less and accept them as they are and think how they could be worse or different.” Although frustrating at times, Stice had made the decision to follow in his father’s footsteps and make his military service a career. He shared with his parents, “I’m pretty sure of what I want to do for my future. I would like to be a Marine officer somehow. I don’t want to be an Army or a naval officer, but I’ll take one of the two as second choice. I hope Dad won’t feel too bad about my choice.”

Stice understood it would be a long road to becoming an officer, but it was a journey he was willing to take. He worked with his gunnery sergeant and sergeant major to set up an interview and seek permission to fly to Pearl Harbor to take a test to attend officer candidates school, but the process took too long, and he missed his chance by a mere week. Undeterred, Stice committed to pursuing his goal, even if it would take a little longer to achieve.

PEARL HARBOR FLEET TRAINING CENTER, ELECTRONICS MAINTENANCE SCHOOL

Private Stice’s disappointment in missing the opportunity to test for OCS did not last long, as he was selected to travel to Hawaii to attend Electron-

Figure 9. Seaward-facing aerial view of Naval Station Pearl Harbor, ca. June 1941



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

ics Maintenance School. His weeks in Hawaii were a balance of studying, taking tests, and enjoying the sights, sounds, and smells of Oahu. He recalled, “We had a lot of fun ducking the surfboards and their riders as they zoomed over us and wrestling near the beach. . . . I can’t remember when I’ve had more fun since I joined up!”

But one can also sense through Stice’s words how this young boy was growing into a man. Like most young men, Stice and his buddies sought female companionship. They believed Hawaii to be a target-rich environment, but as young Ray was to find out, the hunt was more challenging than he expected, “These dames here are all married or should be. I swear, they won’t even smile at you. It is nice to see them around anyway instead of gooney birds.” We also see Stice seeking the mentorship of those who can help him achieve his life’s goals as he explores options for his future, “My problem is, what to do? now that I have actually decided what I want to do for the rest of my life, I’m more confused than ever!” Ray’s frustrations grow as “I tried like a fiend to find someone who knew

Figure 10. Aerial view of Naval Air Station Midway, ca. 1945



Source: U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation.

anything about OCS or one of the academies, but I just got a large-scale run around.”

Stice experienced other events that helped to shape a young man’s perspective while in Hawaii. He nearly drowned after getting caught in a strong rip tide while swimming in the ocean. He helped to fight a major fire that erupted on the piers in Pearl Harbor, and he faced the challenges of local disdain for servicemen. He and five buddies found themselves in a pickle one night when “over 100 gooks came out of this building and surrounded us. One drunk gook pulled a razor and the others all put on brass knuckles and really attacked in the dirtiest, lowest, filthiest way I’ve ever imagined!”

Overall, the months in Hawaii were rewarding for Stice. He learned much and grew more as he solidified his future with the eventual help of

his father. Young Stice learned that one had to work hard to pursue one's goals in life and he was more than willing to put in the time and effort, but he first had orders to return to Midway.

MIDWAY ISLAND . . . THE SECOND GO AROUND

Private First Class Stice arrived back at Midway a new man, "Midway has changed a great deal like everyone here, including myself. It isn't paradise, by any means; but with a different outlook on my future both near and far, things seem generally better at the present." Stice continued to ride on a high wave as he settled back onto "the Rock." His successful completion of school had increased his confidence and instilled a positive mentality in him, "By golly, this Marine Corps has made me do so much thinking for myself. I'm probably more independent than ever."

Even as Stice faced another obstacle to achieving his goals after failing his entrance physical for the Naval Academy Prep School, the Corps and his father had taught him to maintain a positive attitude, "And like you said (or hinted), 'There's more than one way to skin a cat. . . . The best motto I can think of is 'Where There's a Will, There's a Way.' Stice's persistence paid off and, following a promotion to corporal and surgery in Hawaii, he found himself with orders to Washington, DC, to finally pursue his goal of becoming a Marine Corps officer.

BAINBRIDGE (NAVAL ACADEMY) PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Service directly with the Navy expanded Corporal Stice's thinking beyond the parochial pride of being a Marine. The indoctrination at the Naval Academy Preparatory School caused Stice to question his loyalty to the Corps.⁶ He shared with his parents "Did I tell you that I've given up the idea of becoming a Marine officer? A naval officer doesn't have as much respect, tradition, or 'esprit de corps' as a Marine, but he sure has a better deal. What do you think, Dad? What's your opinion?"

Stice struggled with this decision and many others over the coming weeks as he fought for a permanent seat at the Naval Academy. He quickly learned that the road to becoming an officer would not be as easy as

⁶ For more on Bainbridge's history, see Cdr William P. Mack, USN, and Cdr H. F. Rommel, USN, "NAPS Comes of Age," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 76, no. 10 (October 1950).

Figure 11. Ship's service library at Bainbridge Naval Training Station, ca. 1943



Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC.

he believed, “This morning we—all the students failing in four or more subjects—were called in to “mast” one at a time. It seems I failed in all five subjects and conduct to boot, and so help me, there isn’t anything else to “bilge” in!”

Yet, as he had done before, young Stice adapted to his new environment and began to improve his performance over time, “School seems more interesting than it did before, but the record and mind breaking pace hasn’t slowed down any.” The reader can sense how the new hardships of performing to a higher standard served to mature the 19-year-old Stice, “I like to look back and laugh at the things I thought were so important or difficult then. I wonder if I’ll do the same thing someday, at these last two years. I’m glad I’m still just a kid, life’s too interesting to pass in such a hurry.”

Of course, life goes on and with it new challenges that result in a constant shifting of emotions. Stice was no exception, as his letters highlight the doubt he felt throughout his time at the preparatory school, “As you probably know by now I’m on probation again. . . . When I get one

more unsatisfactory effort grade from any teacher, I get the boot, canned, kicked out, finis, par, done!” Although sympathetic, Stice’s parents cut him no slack and provided Stice with the tough love he needed to persevere during these challenging times. Their method worked, as Stice pulled himself out of a funk and shared, “When I look back two months and remember how much I hated this place and wished I’d never left the Pacific, I laugh.” Corporal Stice’s commitment held, and he received a full-time appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy.

NAVAL ACADEMY PLEBE SUMMER

Like many *mustang* officers before and after him, Corporal Stice experienced some difficulty accepting his new role as a midshipman.⁷ He had already gone through the rite of passage by earning the title Marine, and he had been promoted to a noncommissioned officer. But, as a fourth-class midshipman, he once again found himself at the bottom of the totem pole having to prove himself to upperclassman who have yet to receive their commissions. Stice shared with his mother that his being called a “fourth class” midshipman was like “adding insult to injury.” He also learned that there was a lot more to being an officer than a junior enlisted man. Stice sarcastically shared how, “I’ve only read about 4,000 of the regulations, and I have another 2,300 to go.”

Just as he warmed to serving beside sailors on Midway Island, Stice also gained an appreciation with his fellow students who arrived at the academy with no previous military service, “I’ve got to hand it to a lot of these civilians, most of them catch on to the military angle pretty nicely. After all, this is an awful lot different than boot camp. They treat you with respect and are very courteous.” Stice was sure to point out that although different from boot camp in several ways it was no less easy, “Once you step out of the very straight and extremely narrow line, you get tromped all over so fast it makes your head spin.”

Stice’s time at the academy was a milestone in another way. In addition to transitioning from enlisted to officer, he also transitioned from teenager to adult at the school and with it an increased desire for female

⁷ *Mustang* is a term used to describe former enlisted Marines who received officer commissions. For more on the history of the Naval Academy, see Jim Cheevers, *The United States Naval Academy, 1845–2020*, ed. Sharon Kennedy (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Academy, 2020).

Figure 12. Noncommissioned Marine instructors who have been specifically selected are attached to the Department of Ordnance and Gunnery of the U.S. Naval Academy to instruct the midshipmen on the nomenclature and operation of the M-1 and Carbine rifles before the plebes do any actual firing, ca. 1950



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

companionship. Stice's letters provide insight into how women become central in his thoughts, "I'm glad you tell me about Patty, Mom. I think she's a very important, though temporarily somewhat distant part of my life. Her letters and yours really help a lot. I like the way her hair curls all over too." Stice was a little more blunt about his feelings to his mother when he shared, "This absolutely sexless, beerless, life is getting me down."

Corporal Stice continued his journey of self-reflection and growth during his tenure at the Naval Academy. As is the case with many midshipmen, he developed a love-hate relationship with the institution, sharing that "sometimes this country club is okay, and most of the time, it isn't." Although believing he may want to become a Navy officer after his

early indoctrination at the preparatory school, he ultimately decided that the Marine Corps was the only life for him, “To hell with all this Navy stuff. I’m still sold on the Corps.”

Corporal Stice’s love for the Corps strengthened as his plebe year progressed. He engaged with the other Marines at the academy with which he held a common bond, “Boy, I’m glad there’s so many Marines here. No fooling. Some of them are really gung-ho plus, and I always did eat that stuff up. I was very surprised to come across so many upperclassmen who were Marines, I was afraid to mention the fact for a while before I found out I was ‘among friends’ at times.”

This chapter of Ray Stice’s compelling story, as told through his own words, ends with him confronting further academic challenges at the Naval Academy, yet maintaining a firm conviction of remaining Marine. There is more to this story. Ray Stice’s journey as an active-duty Marine would continue through the coming years and involve his commissioning as a Marine Corps officer, a marriage, raising a family, and service as a Marine pilot flying 163 combat missions over Vietnam, as beautifully told in *From the Major to the Missus* (2023).

Ray Stice’s story is one for which all Marines can relate, and non-Marines can learn. One can exchange his name in the following letters for the name of any Marine who has earned the title. His story is their story; stories of trials and tribulations of young people finding their way, determining their own path, and questioning their own abilities along the way. Yet, these journeys and the victories and defeats experienced along the way are shaped and influenced by those with whom one surrounds themselves. Ray Stice chose to serve beside United States Marines and the shared values, standards, and commitment they had in common was a deciding factor in his ability to overcome any challenge or obstacle attempting to block his path to achieving his personal and professional goals in life. His life was a life worth living and stands today as a shining example of what our Corps promises all Americans: to make Marines, to win battles, and to return good citizens to our communities. Well done, Ray, well done.

1

OOH-RAH!

*Parris Island Boot Camp Letters,
18 June–19 September 1946*

17 June–16 September 1946
Private Ray B. Stice 607636
Platoon 180, 3d Recruit Battalion
First Week, Boot Camp, Parris Island, South Carolina

You wanted me to tell you everything and not “feed” you anything, so I’m not. I don’t believe in that way anyway.

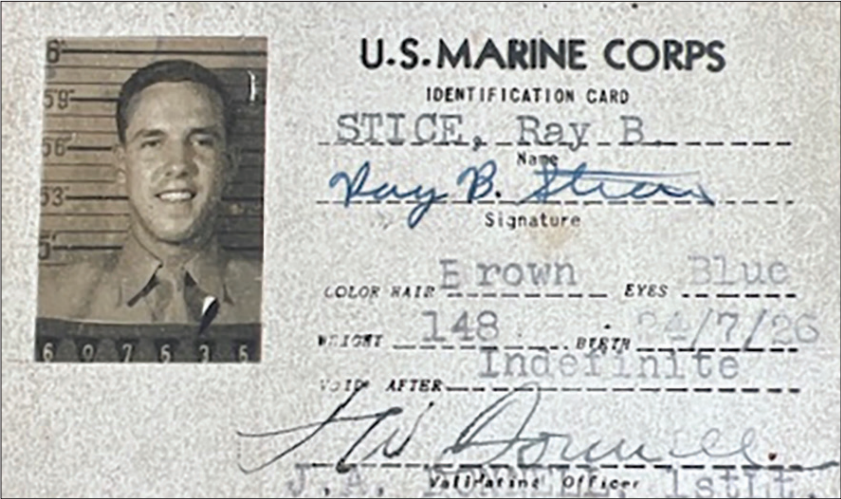
18 June 1946
Hi Mom,

It was too late to do anything Monday, so we slept at the Fort Dearborn Hotel and took our physical today.¹ A short blond-headed guy was rejected. About 140 of us started and there are only 7 or 8 of us left, and we still haven’t finished signing papers or been sworn in yet. If all goes well, we’ll leave for Parris Island tomorrow night about 2330.

You get George’s address for me if you can and send it along when I

¹ The Fort Dearborn Hotel in Chicago, IL, was built in 1914 and the lobby held two murals depicting scenes at the 1803 fort, which was named for then Secretary of War Henry Dearborn. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places, though it does not still operate as a hotel.

Figure 13. Ray Stice’s official U.S. Marine Corps identification card



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo, Stice Family Collection.

Figure 14. Ray Stice with his high school friends, Murvin Valentine, Don Clinard, and “Bud”



Source: Stice Family Collection.

get down there, also and three handkerchiefs. I guess that’s all I’ll need. I’ll write you later. I’ve only spent about \$5 so far.
Ray

Figure 15. Aerial view of Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, an 8,095-acre training facility in South Carolina. About 16,000 Marines pass through boot camp here every year



Source: courtesy of Library of Congress, photo by Carol M. Highsmith.

P.P.S.

I only smoke on the average of one butt a night, so I don't want my pipe or cigarettes yet.² You wanted me to tell you everything and not "feed" you anything, so I'm not. I don't believe in that way anyway.

We're getting about eight hours of sleep now, so we don't try to shave our noses and eyebrows off anymore. We can at least see to shave. We shave every morning and shower every night. Everyone is required to wear skivvy shorts and shirts to bed too.

The days go fast because they are so complete, but the individual minutes and hours of drill go slow. We are thankful every time we have to wait in line for anything, because at least we aren't marching. We've even washed our clothes two times. Tomorrow, we'll have been here one week.

² Minimum tobacco purchasing ages have existed in the country since 1883. By 1920, more than one-half the states had an age minimum set at 21 years, though most simply restricted "minors" (14–24 years). In the late 1920s and throughout the 1930, all states had laws in place setting the minimum age to purchase between 16 and 19 years.

I guess I'll close now for this time.
Write soon,
Ray

P.P.P.S. 2340 hours, Thursday

Hey, guess who came in and saw me just now? Phil Reed! Boy, I feel 100 percent better. We had a nice long chat, and he really built my morale up just seeing him. I heard someone calling for Stice, and I went outside and there he was. I let out a war whoop and ran at him. I nearly knocked him over. I didn't realize how homesick I was. He told me the other three are at the rifle range. He was really surprised when I told him I had been here a week! I'm gonna hit the sack now, Mom, so don't even think of worrying about me anymore. I'm gonna be okay.

Good nite, ole gal.
Yer lovin' son,
Ray



This is the hardest thing I have ever done in my whole life. It's really "rough."

23 June 1946
Hi Mom,

This is the first time they've allowed us to write letters, so here goes some stored-up stuff. This is the hardest thing I have ever done in my whole life. It's really "rough." The drill is the most tiring and monotonous, and we really haven't started our training yet! We haven't been X-rayed or "shot" yet, just another physical.³ I took out insurance in your name.⁴ I hope Dad

³ Though an exhaustive list from the period is not available, most recruits would have received small pox, typhoid, cholera, yellow fever, diphtheria, measles, hepatitis, mumps, polio, tetanus, rubella, and many others. More modern data on vaccinations of service-members is available in John D. Grabenstein et al., "Immunization to Protect the US Armed Forces: Heritage, Current Practice, and Prospects," *Epidemiologic Reviews* 28, no. 1 (August 2006): 3-26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxj003>.

⁴ The National Service Life Insurance Act of 1940, 8 October 1940, ch. 757, title VI, part I (Sec. 601 et seq.), 54 Stat. 1008, was established as an additional system of government life insurance for new entrants in the Armed Services.

Figure 16. Ray Stice's high school class photograph (top row, second from left)



Source: Stice Family Collection.

isn't offended. We have to remember an awful lot of notes and numbers. I'm number 8 in the 2d Squad in first section of Platoon 180. My number is 65 alphabetically. My serial no. is 607636, rifle no. is 223302, and there are several others.

We are still forming and, according to the two DIs [drill instructors], we won't finish until next week, then, in 12 weeks (if we're lucky) we'll get out of this hellhole. The DIs really slap you around down here, and we have to watch our step all the time. There are 74 of us in our room.

They won't let us do anything, and we can only write once or twice a week, so you won't hear from me too much. If you see or talk to Joan, please tell her why I'm not writing.⁵

We get all our first clothing issue tomorrow and our shoes. We have only dungarees so far.⁶

Please don't send me papers or candy yet! The DIs will kick our little butts if we get any. What I've told you is very very mild in comparison to

⁵ Joan Starkey was Stice's girlfriend when he left for boot camp. They were childhood neighbors, and both lived on in Urbana, IL.

⁶ *Dungarees* refer to a denim, bell-bottomed working uniform with a blue overshirt used by the Navy from 1913 to 1999.

the treatment we get here, but seeing as how all those other Marines went through it all, I guess I can stick it out.

Tell Dad and Lucile hi for me and all keep your fingers crossed.

I'll write you the very next chance I get.

You ought to see what's left of my hair. It's about this – long! They really shaved our heads completely. Read the pards post.⁷

Your loving son,

Ray



Mosquito Repellent Please!

24 June 1946

Hi Mom,

Send me a flock of post cards along with the stationery, will you please? It's about 2011 hours and we hit the sack about 2100, so I have lots to do yet. My opinions are really mixed. We don't eat for taste anymore, it's just to fill up on. I eat everything except coffee, tea, mayonnaise, and cheese! Beans, onions, all kinds of concoctions. We start "training" Thursday. We got our second issue of clothes today and my feet are sore but still there. It all gets a little tougher with new things each day, but we are beginning to know what to expect in the future three months, so don't worry about your boy, Mom.

I'll see ya later,

Ray

Mosquito Repellent Please!



Well, you can get rid of my civilian clothes now.

27 June 1946

Thursday, 1645 hours

⁷ The reference here is unclear. The newspaper at the time was called *The Parris Island Boot*, so there may have been another bulletin named the *Pards Post* or it could refer to the Parris Island Recruit Depot.

Hi Mom,

Well, you can get rid of my civilian clothes now. We just got through with our physical and we were x-rayed, and no one said anything, so I guess I'm okay physically. Four of the fellas in our platoon (really almost a company) are going to be rechecked and discharged. I don't know whether they are lucky or not. They are going home and getting out of an awful hole, but I don't know. I passed, so it wouldn't make any difference whether I cared or not.

We walked between two tables and one Navy swab jockey with a needle slugged you in each shoulder the same time.⁸ They didn't bother anyone much. Mine are getting sore, my arms, but I reckon the DIs will work all the soreness out. They warned us they were either going to make us or break us!

I can't hardly believe I'm in the same corresponding place as the soldiers I used to sell magazines to at [Fort] Monmouth [New Jersey].⁹

Whenever I start to write home, I feel funny in my eyes and throat. Maybe I'm really homesick, Mom. They (the rest of the fellas) don't mention it, but I know they are. I know damn well I am.

I just finished cleaning my rifle. It's a pretty nice weapon, but it gets awfully heavy when you're marching. We've only carried it about 2.5 hours at a time and that was this morning. After a while, we'll get so we can carry it six and eight hours a day.¹⁰

The DIs explain everything in very much detail with an awful lot of repeating, and still some of these dumb guys don't understand!

I guess we go to chow now, so I've got to close. Maybe I'll get time to write after supper.

I'll see you, Mom,

Ray



Last night one of our DI's was half drunk and he and one of his

⁸ The term *swab jockey* is a derogatory term used for Navy personnel, referring to when sailors were required to mop the decks of wooden ships to prevent damage.

⁹ A newspaper clipping from *The Evening Courier* dated 22 August 1945 reports that Col Stice (Ray's father) reported for service at Fort Monmouth after the war and he was in charge of a signal company.

¹⁰ Marines during recruit training at Parris Island for the period may have been using a .22-caliber rifle, the M1 Garand, or the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR).

*friends drilled us till pretty late. We all got down on our hands
and knees and scrubbed the deck spotless.*

29 June 1946
Saturday, 1400

Hi Mom,

I got your two letters today. I was very glad to receive them because that is the first time I've heard from home in almost two weeks.

It's too bad Murve [Murvin J. Valentine] didn't make it the first time. He would probably look very cute in sailor pants.

The time won't be too soon when you send me some stationery and one of my pens. Don't buy a pen. I have two or three at home.

Tell Woody I won't believe he's in the Navy till I see him with a swab in one hand and a cigar in the other up at Great Lakes.¹¹ If he does go in, he won't have anywhere near the time we're having, because three or four of the fellas are former swabbies and they know.

We had our picture taken this morning for our ID cards. We haven't gotten our dog tags yet.¹² They had my serial number wrong on the roster here and several other places. In Chicago, they told me it was 607636. Here, they say it is 609636.¹³ I hope my pay and insurance etc. isn't all fouled up.

Yesterday and today, we haven't done much. Last night, one of our DIs was half drunk and he and one of his friends drilled us till pretty late. It took us the rest of the night to swab the deck and hold "field day" (cleaning up). We all got down on our hands and knees and scrubbed the deck spotless. Then a Lieutenant Colonel Atkins (formerly 1st Division,

¹¹ Founded in 1911 and located on the shores of Lake Michigan, Naval Station Great Lakes is home to the U.S. Navy's only boot camp and 19 of the Navy's technical service schools.

¹² The Marine Corps has been issuing identification or dog tags since 1916, according to Marine Corps Order Number 32 (6 October 1916). The 1940 *Marine Corps Manual* stated in Sect. 1, Art. 58 that identification tags will be used "in time of war or national emergency and at other times when directed by competent authority." *Marine Corps Manual*, 1940 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 21.

¹³ According to Stice's records, his service number was 062183. Ray B. Stice, "Chronological Record of Duty Assignments," 19 June 1946 to 31 March 1970, Stice family collection.

Figure 16. Ray Stice as a new recruit, Parris Island, SC



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Fleet Marine Force [FMF]) came by this morning and inspected us.¹⁴ I don't know the results.

We took a lot of tests yesterday and got classified. My first choice is the engineers [13] and second choice general duty (probably chemical warfare maybe [57]).¹⁵

Every day, more recruits come and boots leave. There are only 68 in our platoon now. Please put this enclosed letter in an envelope and send it along.

¹⁴ The term *Fleet Marine Force* refers to: "A fleet marine force is defined as a balanced force of land, air, and service elements of the U. S. Marine Corps which is integral with the United States Pacific and/or Atlantic Fleet. It has the status of a full type-command and is organized, trained, and equipped for the seizure or defense of advance naval bases and for the conduct of limited amphibious or land operations essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign." Navy Department General Order 245, para. 10(a) (4) (27 November 1946).

¹⁵ Stice refers to testing for their primary and secondary military occupational specialties (MOS). He would have been given the Basic Classification Test, Battery of the Aptitude-Area Classification Test.

Thanks for writing.
Your lovin' son,
Ray



*We have to double time in everything all the time! We run up
and down the ladder, we run inside our squad room, we eat in
a hurry, march in a hurry, and even sleep in a hurry!*

29 June 1946
1430 hours

Hi Dad,

I hope you haven't felt slighted because I didn't write to you. You and Lucile are to read Mom's letters just as if I addressed them to you too.

We have to double time in everything all the time! We run up and down the ladder; we run inside our squad room; we eat in a hurry, march in a hurry, and even sleep in a hurry. I was never so mad in all my life as I was the other morning when I woke up in what seemed only seconds because I didn't dream. The only time our minds are released from this place is when we are asleep.

The discipline is hard, but I'm not the only one who is getting it, so I haven't any right to feel wronged and I don't now. One poor fella got caught spitting while we were in chow line, and he had to get down on his hands and knees and lick it up in the mud. More fun! Sort of an appetizer, no?

We get a little ice cream every once in a while, but it usually melts fast. Today, I ate (tell Mom) salad with everything in it, ham, creamed potatoes, peas, water, cooked carrots, cake, bread and butter, muffins for dinner; and yesterday afternoon, fish, water, potatoes, beans, peas, corn, salad, bread and butter, etc. I eat most everything now. This morning, I had milk, corn flakes, sugar bread, jam, pancakes, porridge, water, butter, prunes, etc. We have plenty to eat, and I eat plenty. The only thing is I don't always have enough time to go back in line and get seconds. I do whenever I have time though.

After one week here, I'm beginning to see the way this place is run now, so I'm not so much in the dark as we all were at first.

I'll write you later, Dad,
Ray



*We've learned a lot, and we'll learn a hell of a lot more so I
can't be bothered about being away from everything and do
everything right here.*

June 1946

I'll be glad when I get the stationery you're sending, because every time I sit down and don't have anything to do I write a letter to get my mind away, and I have three or four letters waiting for envelopes.

I haven't been able to get in touch with Phil [Reed] or Carol [Lee Martin] or Bill S. or [James L.] Jim Lustig. I've seen Phil in the band several times but either he or I was in formation at the time. Probably three weeks from today, we will go to the rifle range. We won't be so in close touch with our DIs, and we will have more time to ourselves. We will be there four weeks and come back, then we'll have one week mess duty, one week guard duty, and part of another week cleaning up and returning nonessential gear. I'm thinking seriously of flying back so I'll have more time on leave because I only have 10 days travel time.

I feel like I've talked to someone now that I've written you and I'm not quite so bad off. We've learned a lot, and we'll learn a hell of a lot more, so I can't be bothered about being away from everything and do everything right here.

How are the plans to the house coming? Do you know when you're going to build yet. How's Dad and Lucile. I'll bet she's 10 times as brown as I am because we have to wear caps and dungaree jackets every time we step outside.

My hair isn't quite so short, or at least you don't see my skin under it so much. By the time I get home, it ought to be fairly long considering how short it is.

The temperature out on the asphalt drill field is more than 100 degrees during the morning and afternoon, so it's quite warm here.

I'll see ya later,
Ray



Ooh Rah!

Today has been the hardest yet. This morning, he got mad and drilled us with our rifles and belts back and forth in the same tracks out in the blazing sun for more than two hours without even slowing down. You never really appreciate things while you have them, do you, Mom?

2 July 1946
1740 hours

Hi Mom,

Thanks a lot for the stationery and repellent. I don't need the repellent yet, but I will. Thanks a lot, too, for the gum but it won't do me any good. We have to open all packages in front of the DI and anything to eat is taken. Confiscated I think they call it, but we know damn well they use it.

Today has been the hardest yet. This morning, he got mad and drilled us with our rifles and belts back and forth in the same tracks out in the blazing sun for more than two hours without even slowing down. Everyone was expecting this fella next to him to faint and drop out any minute. This afternoon wasn't quite so bad because we walked in different directions. He gets to shouting the same command over and over till all the commands seem the same and we get all fouled up. I just about went crazy when he yelled "heels, heels, heels, heels, heels, heels, heels, heels, heels till my brain was almost ringing. Finally, he stopped. I wasn't the only one. All the fellas were bothered by it the same way. Today ends our 5th training day; only 13 more here till we go to the range. They say the range is just as tough if not tougher, but at least it's different.

Reinbolt, this fella from Danville had to go back and have his chest X-rayed again. Most all of us would jump at the chance to get out, especially after drill, but at chow (or garbage as it really is) time we're not doing anything we don't think so.

We know we asked for it and we're getting it, but we can't understand why we don't have any privileges at all.

This afternoon, we saw three training films on the manual of arms—very dull.¹⁶

¹⁶ A *manual of arms* was a military instruction book for handling and using weapons in formation, whether in the field or on parade.

One of these days, we'll stencil all our gear then no one will get their stuff mixed up.

I got one letter from Joan that didn't even make me feel good at all. It's still the same ole stuff that she's probably telling Chris. I was glad to hear though.

Most of the boys are either from Boston, Massachusetts, or Portsmouth, Ohio. You would get a bang out of listening to the Boston boys talk, I think. I do.

You never really appreciate things while you have them, do you, Mom? It seems I should have learned that before now, but I sure as hell miss you really. And of course, Dad and Lucile!

I've got to hurry and close for chow now, so I'll write you later if I can. Thanks for everything.

Your loving son,
Ray



I'm glad the car is fixed finally. I sure would like to drive a car now.

2 July 1946 (postcard)
2040 hours

Hi Mom,
I got your letter and package both tonight. I'm glad the car is fixed finally. I sure would like to drive a car now. We could use some of the rain you are having down here. When does Dad leave for Michigan?

I have \$7 left from my money, and I don't and won't have anywhere to spend it, so I won't need any money for a while. What about flying home? I get all your letters two days after they are written. That's pretty good. I'm stuffed to the gills with noodles, hamburger, beets, bread (4-6 slices), a quart of water, corn, some kind of cake—sugar! I'm pretty satisfied as far as fullness is concerned.

Your kid,
Ray



Tell Dad if he writes not to put his rank in the envelope. Not because I'm not proud to have him as my dad—no, sir—just so the DI won't know until I get ready to tell them so.

Ooh Rah!

July 1946

Hi People,

I kinda wish I was coming home with my clothes, but I guess I'm not. I'm keeping my T-shirt and underwear for rifle rags, and I'm keeping my small bag for when I come home. I'll bring my sunglasses home myself, so I can wear them home. They gave us our choice to send them now or to have them kept till we get out.

Write me when you feel you can. Tell Dad if he writes not to put his rank in the envelope. Not because I'm not proud to have him as my dad—no sir—just so the DI won't know until I get ready to tell them so.

Thanks again,

Ray

Do I have to register for the draft on 24 July?¹⁷



Yesterday, we got two more shots, one in each arm again. One was a vaccination. Only one arm is sore now.

4 July 1946

0600

Hi Mom, Dad, and Lucile,

How's everybody and everything? We're having quite a row or whatever you call it now, because three fellas lost money last night. That makes four fellas now! Everyone is checking their wallets. Now five have missed money. Another one—six! I didn't lose my \$6.75 for some reason. The DIs are really going to raise hell about this! I'll bet somebody suffers for some damn fool's actions. It seems that everyone had their boxes locked last night, so they must have lost it yesterday when everyone was gone.

This is nice stationery you sent me. Thanks again.

¹⁷ Stice is likely referring to the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 (a.k.a. Burke-Wadsworth Act), Public Law (U.S.) 76-783, 54 Stat. 885, enacted 16 September 1940. This was the first peacetime conscription in U.S. history, and it required that men who had reached their 21st birthday but not yet turned 36 register with local draft boards. When the United States entered World War II, the age ranges were adjusted so that all men from 18 to 44 were subject to military service, and all men from 18 to 64 were required to register.

If you can, try and send me a thermometer; a very small one but one large enough so I can see how hot it gets down here.

Yesterday, we got two more shots, one in each arm again. One was a vaccination. Only one arm is sore now. Then we had a short training film on first aid. I have never in my life seen or heard such sights or language on the screen before in all my life. They are quite interesting and easy to understand. Everything we learn here is explained so completely and repeatedly, nothing is hard to catch on to.

Today, we don't go to exercises before chow, and I don't think we'll do too much drill. I hope!

Now everyone is lining up to go into the head by themselves. If a fella has the money, he is supposed to drop it into a can. That way we hope to get it back. It better work because the DI knows about it, and he just went to the guard house saying it better be returned before he came back. It better be there too! I hate to waste all this beautiful space, but I've got to close.

Your loving son and brother,
Ray
Maybe I can write more later on.



We're sitting on top of the world now!

5 July 1946 (postcard)

Hi Mom,

I got your very refreshing letter this afternoon. Thanks a lot for writing so often. It's really nice to get mail almost every day and, to all the people I write to, I average a letter a day almost. I'm satisfied as far as mail is concerned.

We had an eight-day inspection today on our seventh day and passed! Now, we'll leave for the rifle range a week from tomorrow, the 13th, and it will be on our 14th training day—not our 18th as we were supposed to. We're sitting on top of the world now! Tonight, as usual, we have a field day, "sweep, scrub, swab, and secure." More fun! And I used to scorn scrubbing the kitchen. How we learn, no?

Nothing was said about the money that was stolen. I don't know what will come of that.

Ooh Rah!

This is an island, not a city. Swamps like Monmouth around it but no mosquitoes yet.

Yesterday, I wrote six letters. I still haven't heard from everyone.

Tell everyone hi for me,

Ray

Private Ray B. Stice, 607676

Parris Island, South Carolina

Send me ink please.



*Mom, you should have seen us marching to and from the PX!
We really marched like future Marines. Snap! Lord, that's what
makes you feel good is to have a little snap and precision in your
marching and to know that everyone is at least trying.*

6 July 1946

Hi People,

I'll bet you're surprised I write home so much. I hope you're not tired of hearing from me though.

We all feel pretty good right now, to someone somewhere, we owe our good fortune of being permitted to go to the PX this afternoon! I didn't need anything, but I went and got a pint of ice cream, three candy bars, and a small package of cookies. The ice cream really hit the spot right; I don't care too much for "pogie bait" anymore though (candy that is!).¹⁸

You can send me a can of peanuts or a small can of cookies or anything, but only in an air- and bug-tight can.

Like we were told, as we get to know our drill instructors better, we really get to like them better. We still reverently respect their slightest whisper of a command though.

Mom, you should have seen us marching to and from the PX. We really marched like future Marines. Snap! Lord, that's what makes you feel good is to have a little snap and precision in your marching and to know that everyone is at least trying.

A week from tomorrow, my dear family, your prodigal (er sumpin) son will march his little self (plus a rifle and 70-pound pack) out to the rifle

¹⁸ Use of the term *pogey bait* dates to Marines in the Korean War. Pogey roughly translates in Chinese to prostitute, so in this context it refers to candy as bait to entice someone.

range. I'm doing all this writing I can right now, because we will really be kept on the move out there. We can expect rifle inspection every day at least for the first week. If I write, you can expect the same type of letters I was putting out the first couple of weeks I was here. The first week is entirely "snapping in." We won't even get to pull the damn trigger! Snapping in is straining every muscle in your body in order to get into some of the impossible shapes and positions they expect you to shoot from the three weeks afterward. Everything we do at first is hard, but we eventually work into the manners we are supposed to.

I think the reason for our accelerated schedule is because there are several thousand recruits waiting to enter Parris Island and are camped out in tents just waiting. I'm glad I got in now.¹⁹ Even if I don't like this stuff, I know it is awfully good for anyone, either spoiled like me or not.

Don't worry about my quick temper anymore. I've learned to think before speaking, especially in front of people I don't know very well, like a lot of the fellas I don't like or know too well yet.

I know the majority of the fellas in our platoon now, so I don't have to yell, "Hey, Mack" or "Joe" and have 15 fellas turn around at the same time.

"The clouds of mystery clear with patience," as the noted poet Private Ray B. Stice wrote, and my patience is beginning to lengthen out.

I'll write whenever I can because, for the first time, I really enjoy writing, especially to you all.

Ray



As the DIs said, we can't do anything in boot camp except "take a [bowel movement] BM and wipe yourself" only that isn't the way they said it. You would be surprised at the difference between the Marine Corps and the Army. The difference is so great, you couldn't start to compare them.

¹⁹ For more on boot camp activities during the period, see Jessica Anderson-Colon, "Marine Corps Boot Camp during World War II: The Gateway to the Corps Success at Iwo Jima," *Marine Corps History* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2021), <https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2021070103>.

8 July 1946
1435 hours

Hi Mom,

The mailman was very good to me today, I got three letters this afternoon—two from you and one from Lucile.

Instead of drill today, our platoon is on guard duty. Before tomorrow morning, I will have completed more than nine hours of walking various beats. This morning, I walked a four-hour (0800–1200) fire watch, and tonight I’m a sentry out west of the island somewhere (1830–2230), then from 0330 to 0430 I’m fire watch again. Complete with cartridge belts, bayonets, canteens, first aid packets, rifles, khaki shirts, and caps. Most of the boys only have three- and four-hour watches, but I just got loaded up through no fault of my own.

Thanks for sending the pictures. None of the fellas knew what I looked like with hair.

What all did Mrs. Martin tell you that I should know or shouldn’t know. I don’t keep anything from you, so if there is something please tell me. I wrote Carol [Martin] a card this morning. I knew his platoon number because I read about his “expert” score on the range, so I’m going to try to get in touch with him.

My number is 607636 no matter what his is. That is the number they gave me in Chicago when I was sworn in, so that it is. We don’t put our serial number on our own gear anyway. You can send me the paper once a week if you want to. I won’t have time to read it any more than that.

You are slightly fouled up. You don’t need ID cards to shop at the PX or anywhere else boots could go or dog tags.²⁰ And no one had “shot” reactions except sore arms, and there were plenty of them.

As the DIs said, we can’t do anything in boot camp except “take a BM and wipe yourself,” only that isn’t the way they said it. You would be surprised at the difference between the Marine Corps and the Army. The difference is so great, you couldn’t start to compare them.

²⁰ Since Stice’s father would have been considered former military, he would have had access to base commissaries. Though restrictions have changed access in recent years to allow Department of Defense civilian staff, on base shopping was considered a benefit to servicemembers and their families even though the stores often relied on taxpayer dollars for operating budgets. For more on current requirements, see the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, 114th Cong., 2d Sess. (4 January 2016).

I went to church yesterday. The ceremony was communion, so we had slabs of dough touched in wine crammed down us by a Navy and Marine chaplain.

All the gripes I tell you about are just the minor things I want to tell someone to get them off my chest. You ought to see the left-out things none of us could tell, like our drunk DIs slapping the hell out of some of us.²¹

Last night, we were just about ready to take one DI down a notch because he was slamming one kid's head against the bunk till the bunk was all the way up to the bulkhead! But he stopped, and the other one halfway apologized. When they are sober, they are two of the nicest, best, meanest, worst DIs on the island.

Some of the lucky guys have watch in the open-air theater tonight.

Say thanks to Dad for the Schick razor. That really is a smooth outfit. I've wanted one ever since I shaved with George [Kehm]'s, and I'm really pleased with it. I got it yesterday.

I wrote Mrs. Chase a letter the other day and sent a card to Grandmother Stice too.

You ought to see the recruits pile in here. Everyday more come.

We just happen to have bad DIs because the other recruits get to go to the PX, movies, etc. That's the truth really.

Tomorrow, we get some more shots. More fun! You ought to see the big one's faint.

I hope I can write a more cheerful letter next time.

Your loving son,
Ray



Yesterday, the boys next door, Platoon 178, got their DI fouled up and he marched them in the sand pits after they had their shots. Seven (7) of them collapsed the minute they got back to their squad room and there were more ambulances around here than mosquitoes. Then 23 boys from Platoon 179 collapsed on a march to the beach last night!

²¹ Ryan Pickrell, "The Marine Corps Is Still Struggling to Stop Drill Instructors from Abusing Recruits," *Business Insider*, 15 May 2019.

9 July 1946

Hi Mom and Dad and Lucile,
Well, today is another day and a darn hot one at that, over 110 degrees. We just came back from chow (rather, everyone else did. I was the last one done) and we went down to the dispensary. Off came our jackets and up our left sleeves, then out on with the red paint and in with the needle. I started to walk away when the corpsman yelled for me to get the hell back in line, the needle was still stuck in my arm. Such is the life of a recruit.

This morning, we marched past the [commanding officer's] CO's house and went to the movies; one was on malaria and the other one was on sex hygiene.²² You know the final speech I gave in speech class? I guess my topic wasn't too far from being wrong. The movies were very interesting and then we went "back to the Marine Corps" and started "troop 'n drill" with "rifles, belts, and bayonets."

In about one hour, we are going to some more training films, only these won't be so interesting. They'll probably be on marching like most of the films we see. We don't go to the post theater; we go to some old barracks, where it is actually hotter inside, and just benches instead of seats.

Yesterday, the boys next door, Platoon 178, got their DI fouled up and he marched them in the sand pits after they had their shots. Seven (7) of them collapsed the minute they got back to their squad room, and there were more ambulances around here than mosquitoes. Then 23 boys from Platoon 179 collapsed on a march to the beach last night!

Two Ohio boys are rather doubtful of staying in, their eyes aren't good enough.²³ They are two of the nicer of the group too.

Every once in a while, I see a 1936 Ford or a 1941 Mercury going down the road, and I start to get homesick or at least wish I was driving.²⁴

We just got back from seeing three movies and drilling in mass forma-

²² See, for example, USMC 104745: " 'Malaria Control'," 1, United States Marine Corps Film Repository, Moving Image Research Collections, University of South Carolina, 18:43; and *Sex Hygiene*, directed by John Ford (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Signal Corps, 1942).

²³ Though enlistment requirements varied by Service, MOS, and wartime manpower needs, in general, Marines were required to have at least 20/400 or 20/200 vision corrected to 20/20 with eyeglasses or contact lenses. Depth perception and color blindness is also tested.

²⁴ The Ford Motor Company produced only two models during 1936: the Model 48 and 68 series, though Stice could have been referring to an earlier model.

tion with three or four other platoons. Tomorrow, we are marching in a parade for the general (Major General Julian C. Smith).²⁵ We get to wear emblems for the first time! It will be a fine day the time we get to wear them all the time.

If you think it is advisable, send me one package of aspirin or a mild headache relief. I frequently get headaches, and I can't shake them off like all day today, except during the last show it slowly went away (It was in my eyes too!).²⁶ The shows were on the infantry (two of them) and bayonet uses. Some of the "gory" pictures, whee, they're so real, blood, etc. that you know they are under actual battle conditions.

We go to chow in a few minutes, so I'll write you once more before we go to the range Saturday if I possibly can.

My guard duty last night was something new, but I didn't have much trouble. I had a little fun because I had a challenging post and I had several opportunities to challenge stubborn ATs, "boys awaiting transport" to China and points far off. They had stolen a truckload of watermelons, and they were restricted to their area by the colonel. Some of them tried to cross the road, but I think we caught most of them. Don't think I wasn't ready to hit the sack (bed) when I got back.

Your loving son and brother (for Lucile),
Ray



Thanks ever & ever so much for the ink and stationery.

10 July 1946 (postcard)

Hi Everybody,

The packages you sent me came this afternoon! Thanks ever and ever so much for the ink and stationery. I don't know why you sent me the scissors, because I already had three pairs, but I guess you didn't know

²⁵ Gen Smith commanded the Marine Corps Recruit Depot from February 1946 until he retired that same year. *Julian C. Smith: A Register of His Papers in Archives Branch* (Quantico, VA: History Division, 2012), 3.

²⁶ In addition to aspirin, over the counter pain relievers at the time included Anacin (mix of aspirin and caffeine) and several powder-based options like BC Headache Powder or Goody's Headache Powder, which were both a combination of aspirin, acetaminophen, and caffeine.

that. I won't need writing material for the rest of boot camp now, so thanks a lot.

Ray

Time for chow.

This morning in the parade, I felt right proud with my rifle and emblem on my cap, the band playing to our cadence and 5 battalions of 3 platoons each following us.

10 July 1946

Wednesday

1645 hours

Hi Folks,

I wrote yesterday, but I haven't had a chance to send it yet. We just had a long lecture on our M1s. They really are sweet rifles. The way our "nicest" DI explains things, we can really learn a lot. He has an awful lot of patience, the other one—the one who is drunk all the time—hasn't any patience at all. His wife is about seven or eight months pregnant in Charleston, and he's probably nervous about her.

We no more than get to looking halfway decent and they cut our hair again. This time, they didn't touch the top, just around the sides and back and it cost us 20 cents!²⁷

This morning in the parade, I felt right proud with my rifle and emblem on my cap, the band playing to our cadence, and five battalions of three platoons each following us. All together, there were 900 boots and probably 20 noncoms [noncommissioned] and various officers. Many's the time I watched parades and wondered about the men in them, keeping the lines straight, doing the manual of arms, and marching to the military band playing. It seemed like all the work we had done had at least showed fair results, and we could see that we had actually been working up for this parade all the time. Naturally, it was boring waiting for the other battalions to pass in review after we did, but we all felt proud deep inside.

²⁷ Grooming standards for current Marines are found in the current version of *Marine Corps Order 1020.34H, Marine Corps Uniform Regulations* (1 May 2018).

Tomorrow, we'll have another inspection and prepare to go on a long hike to some Elliott's beach for the day.²⁸ Then we march back, and Saturday we pack up, move out, and march with full packs to the range. They take our seabags and all equipment we can't carry by truck. Then comes the week of very trying "snapping in."²⁹ After the next week has passed, things will get better for us. We have mess duty from 11 to 17 August, and we are scheduled to leave here on 3 September, according to the guard house schedule.

Maybe you will hear from me in the next week, maybe not, so don't think anything is wrong if you don't hear from me for more than four days in a row. I like to say I try to average three letters in four or five days, sometimes more. I never know how much I write, but you all are the only ones I write to without getting an answer first, so you get the major majority of all my letters. Feel honored? Okay, so I don't have a sense of humor!

Write to the same address, unless I send for a change. I think it will be the same.

Your kid and kid brother,
Ray



*. . . the DIs seem to know just how much the average man can
take before he folds up and if you are average or better you never
have to quit or drop out, just almost do.*

14 July 1946
Sunday morning

Hi Mom,
Well, the two most feared days of my life have passed. We are at the rifle range finally and without too much trouble. The hike out to the beach was something I'll never forget or the experiences we had while we were

²⁸ Elliott's Beach is on the southwest corner of the island and was named after the Elliott family, owners of a plantation on the island long before it became part of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot. For more on the history of the area, see "Myrtle Bank (Elliott) Plantation," Heritage Library, accessed 11 July 2024.

²⁹ The term *snapping in* refers to practice aiming, adjusting, and firing a rifle with no ammunition. See Sgt Tyler Viglione, "Recruits Snap in on Marine Corps Marksmanship," DVIDS, 2 December 2015.

out there either. Each night, you can go to bed and truthfully say you have learned something new for each finger on both hands; and although I wouldn't care to go through hardly any of them again, I can't really say I'm not glad I didn't go through them. Most everything seems and is hard while you are doing them, but the DIs seem to know just how much the average man can take before he folds up; and if you are average or better you never have to quit or drop out, you just almost do.

Last night after we got here—after hiking with a darn heavy pack and rifle—we made up our sacks and mosquito netting and actually went to the PX. We were only there about 30–45 minutes, and the lines were coiled all around inside and out, waiting for ice cream and pogie bait. I finally got some ice cream, but I couldn't get any milk. All the milk we get is powdered, except what we get each morning (about one full cup). The chow is 100 percent better here at the range in quality, but you don't get as much. I went back for seconds this morning. I got (all together) three boxes of cereal, two cups of milk, two slices of French toast, two servings of syrup, two servings of butter, one slice of bread, one sausage ball, and about six tablespoons full of sugar. How's that for a breakfast? I call it damn good!³⁰

Sometime this week, we will probably go to a show because it is supposed to be a regulation that boots get to go once a week, and we haven't been in more than three weeks. And during our 15-day inspection (on our 12th day), the commanding officer came around and asked all (most) of us if we had been to the show, how we liked the chow, DIs, etc. I don't think he was too pleased with his findings. I almost laughed in his face because he was a colonel and he really looked (or at least reminded me) like Dad. I couldn't help feeling at ease and smiling, so I did—nothing happened! I was more nervous in front of a master sergeant and a lieutenant than the colonel.

My address is still the same as it was before, so don't put anything else in the envelope.

We were sleeping in regular double tandem barracks like these [Ray drew a picture] crude drawings, but now we are in "PB" [personnel barracks] huts, not round Quonset huts. They look like long, dirty, small storage huts. The head is about 300 yards away. We do have electricity

³⁰ For more on what was being offered in most mess halls in the military during this period, see *Army Food and Messing: The Complete Manual of Mess Management* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing, 1942).

though. Our huts are at least 150 feet long and about 30 feet wide and house 70 men. [Ray drew another picture] The last range is directly across the road from us, and the steaming tables aren't more than 150 yards away and the mess hall is about 3 blocks away, so I guess we are sitting pretty fairly.³¹

So far this morning, I washed three pairs of socks, two skivvy shirts (green), two skivvy shorts (white), one towel, one dungaree jacket, and one dungaree pair of pants. Quite a washing for my own clothes. We hadn't been able to wash for more than a week.

Tomorrow will start our 15th training day—how they move along. I only hope and pray that the next three weeks goes as fast because that will mean we'll only have about three more weeks till I get to go home.

One of my DIs says I can probably fly home if I want to pay that much—we have to furnish our own transportation home and back—so when the time comes around, that is what I am going to try to do.

Quite a few of the boys know Dad is a colonel, but the DIs don't yet. I'll tell them one of these days. I don't think it will make any difference now.

I've got to close now and get hot on my rifle, just one measly fingerprint turns into a rust spot in less than two hours. Mine hasn't been cleaned since yesterday morning, and that was just to get all the sand and mud out of it after our trip to the "boondocks" (beach). We had to "hit the deck" so many times with our rifles, I skinned my left elbow all up and went to sick bay yesterday to get it fixed for the last time. It's okay now, as are my five blisters from having to wear new shoes on the hike. Such is the life of Joe Recruit! I'm not worried about me not taking it now, because I'm not too sore yet probably, but we start "snapping in" tomorrow, and I'll be mad again then. So while I'm feeling good, Jackal (a.k.a. me) says so long for now. I hit the jackpot at the beach, I saw Phil, Carrol, Bill Stephens, Jim Lustig, and learned Bud Bennet was here also. And Murve and Don Clinard are coming too.

All my tattered-up love,
Ray



³¹ See *One Hundred Years of Making Marines a Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina* (Parris Island, SC: U.S. Marine Corps, 2015), chap. 4.

The peanuts and thermometer came today.

14 July 1946

(postcard)

Hi Mom,

Consider yourself kissed on the snuzzle a hundred times! The peanuts and thermometer came today, and the “good” DI was the witnessing officer. He frowned at the thermometer and said, “Huh, a can of GI peanuts,” without only seeing the end of the can. I said, “Yes, Sir,” and walked out. He didn’t say anything, so that’s good enough!

Thanks again,

Ray



Your letters really cheer me up and make me feel pretty damn good whenever I’m not.

16 July 1946 (postcard)

Hi Mom!

It isn’t too bad. We are all stiff and sore, but we are away from our DIs more and we have gone to the PX twice since we got here. I ate three pints of ice cream the other night. Really went down nice.

We have learned the prone and sitting positions so far. We get kneeling and standing tomorrow, I guess, and start firing the first of next week. The chow is wonderful compared to what we got at the main base.

Your letters really cheer me up and make me feel pretty damn good whenever I’m not. I read them over and over, so it’s almost like I’m talking to you. So, keep ’em coming whenever you have time.

Whenever you begin to get something I might like to eat, I would appreciate it. No gum or “paper wrapped candy.” We have cockroaches too—big ones!

I’m better than I expected to be, so don’t even think about me not being okay from now on.

Ray



Today we got to pull the trigger. . . . The Marine Corps says, "squat and grunt" so we squat and grunt with no questions asked and nothing said, except "Yes, Sir," and "No, Sir," . . . I try real hard in most everything I do, and I haven't been called down for anything yet, so all I have to do is keep my nose clean and mouth shut and eyes and ears open, and I'll be okay. Quite a difference in Mr. Ray B. Stice and in Private R. B. Stice 607636 (convict number).

17 July 1946
2040 hours

Hi Mom,
How's the ole gal anyway? I'll bet you're sort of lonesome there at home by yourself.

We just got through with about one hour of fast, snappy troop and drill. We march every once in a while to keep sharp on the manual. Even if I do say so myself, I think we would look perfect if we could get rid of a couple of deadbeats.

Today, we got to pull the trigger! Big thrill! Huh? At least it isn't as boring when you have to swing your rifle out of position and cock it and shoot the trigger off as it was when you just held it into a strained position and "froze."

We only have two-and-a-half days left to "snapping in," and we expect at least two more training films on the "stuff." The last three days went very fast and at times were very, very trying. Some of the positions even hurt quite a bit at first, but only the kneeling position bothers me now and that's because I can't sit very well on my right ankle without bending my toes under. Your shoelaces are supposed to be flat on the deck.

I am very surprised as to how steady you can hold a rifle with the sling tight on your arm. You think the darn sling is going to cut your arm off any second, but when the bull's-eye sits right down on the front sight blade at six o'clock and doesn't budge an inch, you thank the Lord it is tight because the sling is what holds your arm up and straight. All you have to do is place your arm in the right place, which is very hard at times in the sitting position because your elbows have to be hooked low on your shins; in the kneeling position, your left elbow is flat on your left shin with your knee in your arm pit. The Marine Corps says, "squat and grunt"

Ooh Rah!

so we squat and grunt with no questions asked and nothing said, except “Yes, Sir,” and “No, Sir.”

The term *serviceman* still doesn’t seem right when I am the subject. Maybe one small reason is because we only wear our dungarees all the time.

The rifle range sure is a definite point of our boot training. Everything here is changed to the better for all alike. Everyone is more cheerful and even the DIs seem to joke around more. One of them is really swell, the other one I still don’t like.

I hope you realize your son has been a Marine for a month this Friday! And I’ve been on the rock here for four weeks this Friday too.

You asked if I had made any friends. My “bunkie” is Wayne Bruns, six feet tall, big brown eyes, brown hair, and likes or at least doesn’t mind me, so we’re all pals. He’s from Crete (near Chicago), Illinois, so we came down on the train. Rheinbolt is sort of slow catching on to things and I didn’t want to be tied down in any way. That may or may not sound reasonable, but I want to get everything I possibly can get out of this training and the faster I can catch on the more time I have to better myself, no?

Three or four maybe six of the fellas got ptomaine poisoning from greasy mess gear we think.³² They are going to sick bay now. I feel fine for some reason. About my headaches, they are no more. I believe the reason for them was that I wasn’t taking enough salt pills. One day, I took about six of them and 45 minutes later my head cleared (in the middle of a show [film] too). So, I began taking them before and after I expected or did sweat a lot. I haven’t had any trouble for a week now, so I guess that’s that.

My vaccination has finally cleaned up and is almost gone, and my sore left elbow is dried up and healed very fast even though I’ve been on it several times in the prone position.³³ Also, my blisters are okay again and

³² Ptomaine poisoning is a form of food poisoning caused by bacteria. See, for example, “Poison Bread Fells 1,900 German Captives in U.S. Army Prison Camp Near Nuremberg,” *New York Times*, 20 April 1946; and G. Dennis Shanks, “Historical Perspective: The Critical Role of Disease and Non-Battle Injuries in Soldiers Isolated on Pacific Islands During the Second World War,” *Health.mil*, 1 February 2023.

³³ For more on the history of military vaccine policies and potential side effects, see John D. Grabenstein et al., “Immunization to Protect the US Armed Forces: Heritage, Current Practice, and Prospects,” *Epidemiologic Reviews* 28, no. 1 (August 2006): 3–26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxj003>; and Anderson-Colon, “Marine Corps Boot Camp during World War II.”

my shoes are just about fully broken in, so I'm back in condition again I reckon.

I try really hard in most everything I do, and I haven't been called down for anything yet, so all I have to do is keep my nose clean and mouth shut and eyes and ears open, and I'll be okay. Quite a difference in Mr. Ray B. Stice and in Private R. B. Stice 607636 (convict number). I just wonder how long I will keep up the good habits I've acquired?

I've got to take my shower and hit the sack, so I'll write you again when we get time.

If you see Joan, tell her I'll write someday. You know her letters don't make me feel the least bit moved one way or another. Tell Woody, "Hi," and to write me once. Don't forget something canned if you can get anything.

Your lovin' son,
Ray
X right on the snozzel!



We finished another day of snapping in today. . . . DI is at the slop chute, so he'll probably be drunk and we'll drill or have a field day (sweep, scrub, and swab the deck).

18 July 1946 (postcard)
1742 hours

Hi Mom,
I think I wrote you this morning, maybe last night, I don't know. We finished another day of snapping in today, only one-and-a-half more! We get our firing pins tomorrow and a lecture and snap in all day.

I'm hoping we get to go to the PX, but the DI is at the slop chute, so he'll probably be drunk and we'll drill or have a field day (sweep, scrub, and swab the deck).³⁴ We learned a lot on windage and elevation of our rifles today. I wrote Mr. [Henry] Bothwell this noon.

Chow time.

³⁴ The term *slop chute* is slang for a tavern frequented by enlisted military personnel.

Love,
Ray



To give you an idea of how much marching we did, I wore out a brand new pair of boots in two weeks! I wasn't the only one and I wasn't dragging my feet either.

18 July 1946
2030 hours

Hi Mom,

You would never guess where I am now. I'm inside my mosquito netting in my sack. This is the only safe place to write anyone after dark because the daredevil dive bomber mosquitoes we have down here aren't afraid of any future Marines. About an hour ago, a truck went by spraying DDT, and I actually sat outside reading the newspaper you sent for a half-hour without even being bitten once.³⁵

It seems every time I'm not cleaning my rifle or doing some chore in my spare time that I am writing to you. I'm glad I don't have any girl (besides you, cutie), because I would be writing and worrying about them, and you wouldn't get hardly any mail probably.

How's the Mercury running now. It should be pretty well broken in by now. I hope it doesn't cause you anymore trouble like it did before. How is Dad's Ford? Has it fallen apart yet?

And by the way, how is Dad? Is he going to get retired pretty quick like? Or will be able to stay in long enough to retire in the 30-year bracket?

I noticed Lucile's picture twice in the paper. She looks pretty nice. I'll bet she's nice and brown like the rest of my face. I also roll my shirt sleeves up as far as I can and still get away with it. But poor me, I can't roll up my pant legs to show off my nice boots. To give you an idea of how much marching we did, I wore out a brand new pair of boots in two weeks! I wasn't the only one, and I wasn't dragging my feet either. I'm going to get them half soled as soon as possible because they really are comfortable.

³⁵ DDT refers to dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, a synthetic pesticide developed in the 1940s to fight malaria, typhus, and other insect-borne diseases. Due to its adverse impacts on the environment, wildlife, and human health, the Environmental Protection Agency banned all further use on 14 June 1972. See "DDT: A Brief History and Status," EPA.gov, 12 March 2024.

The song, “I’m Getting Tired so I Can Sleep” fits me perfectly right now, so unless I can think of anything else I want to say, I think I’ll close for the night and say goodnight.³⁶

I’ll see ya, Mom.

Yer lovin’ son, offspring, kid, and what have you,

Ray

P.S. Bill, Carrol, and Jim are all leaving here next Tuesday and should be home about Wednesday night or Thursday. If you could get in touch with one of them, it (looks like one of Dad’s words, doesn’t it?) would be nice.

I asked Bill to look you up if he got time. They are really lucky to get home in time for the county fair. It looks like it ought to be pretty large this year.

P.P.S. Me again! Do you think you could send me something to eat? I think, if I tried real hard, that I could eat it. The quality is wonderful here, but the quantity is pitiful.



I wouldn’t not take the Marines for anything though—good or bad—they are the best! . . . The last week just flew by. Tomorrow, we start shooting hot stuff. I’m in an awfully good mood today.

21 July 1946

0830 hours

Hi Mama Dear,

Very affectionate, what? I just got back from chow. I was in the mess hall more than an hour and a half, and they practically had to carry me out! I ate two boxes of shredded wheat, two cups of milk, about five tablespoonful of sugar, four slices of toast with three servings of butter and two servings of apple butter, about six slices of bacon and one slab of Canadian bacon, two slices of cantaloupe, and three large servings of pears! See why they almost had to carry me out. I’m really satisfied right now; my tummy is actually delightfully stuffed. As long as you have time, you can eat all you can hold, and they really serve you large “seconds.”

Well, ole gal, I’m catching up with you slowly but surely. In three

³⁶ Stice is likely referring to Jimmy Dorsey and His Orchestra, “I’m Getting Tired so I Can Sleep,” written by Irving Berlin, Decca Records, September 1942.

days, I'll be 18 and you'll still only be 45! I'm getting used to having my birthdays away from home anymore, the last three were away: New York, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.

The mailman was pretty good to me yesterday. I got three letters—all from girls though—one from Viona (Urbana) Jean in Danville and Jean in Paxton (her first letter, darn her hide!). I must average a good letter a day. I think I am very fortunate.

Yesterday, Carrol and two of his pals came over to see me, because they leave Tuesday. He is coming over to see you (so is Bill Stephens if he can), so I hope you can arrange to see him. I think you would enjoy talking to him now. We've all changed a lot down here. They brought me 10 packs of gum, 5 Mounds bars, and a can of Planters peanuts.³⁷ I thought that was damn nice of them.

Will you send me George's letter again—address I mean—I seem to have misplaced it or did you send it to me?

Just think, we have finished snapping in already. The last week just flew by. Tomorrow, we start shooting hot stuff. I'm in an awfully good mood today.

Carrol said he doubted very much if I could fly home because he wanted to and couldn't.

I don't think I ever will go to the beach and enjoy the sand after being down here. All we have is sand and more sand. Even all the steam and water pipes are above ground because they would work to the surface in a number of years (and only about four feet below the surface is the water level).³⁸

Yesterday afternoon at about 1730, I took my thermometer outside. It was only 90° inside and out in the sun, it went up to 100°-105°-115°-120° (as high as it marked) and on up to 125° and it was still slowly on its way to the top when I took it in. That is the first time in my life I have ever seen a thermometer go that high, and in only about 10 minutes too! We

³⁷ Mounds are shredded coconut and dark chocolate candy bars first made by the Hershey Company in 1920. Planters Nut and Chocolate Company first introduced the canned nuts and Mr. Peanut in 1916 and is now owned by Hormel Foods.

³⁸ According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the water table varies in South Carolina from 2.98 to 111.45 feet. Beaufort County water table, where Parris Island is located, lies at around 24.55 feet. See "Current Conditions for South Carolina: Groundwater," Water-Data.USGS.gov, accessed 12 July 2024.

are getting used to the heat by now, and everyone was really surprised. We could take it well over 130° and not be affected, I believe.

The other day, we went to a training film on “positions” and afterward they showed a “short” on the Marine Corps. Now I understand why I was so misled about all the pictures and articles I had read on the Corps. Of all the bull and misleading corruption I’ve ever heard of that took the cake. I wouldn’t not take the Marines for anything though—good or bad—they are the best!

I know only two weeks ago I would have jumped at the chance to get out, but thank the Lord, I didn’t get that chance. I’m awfully young, aren’t I, Mom? Mentally, I really mean. And someday I hope to be able to see things like you can foresee things. I reckon it’ll all come about in time though, so I’ll just hang on to the merry-go-round till the ring comes around my way and grab it off right snappy like.

I’ll write you in a day or so, maybe sooner, so thanks for writing so often. It really helps, and I’ll see ya later, Mom.

Your loving son,
Ray



We have learned the Marching Manual. If you’ve ever seen it done by a platoon of well-trained Marines, you’ll never forget it. It really looks snappy when executed right. . . . Several of the fellas have had birthdays and nothing special ever happened, but I’ll be thinking of you and home and all the things and events connected with the things the word “home” stands for.

22 July 1946
1955 hours

Hi Mom,
How’s my favorite mother coming along? No slam on Dad either! Today, we fired at the same base range on the other end of the range. We walk about 3 kilometers before we get there, then we stack our rifles and line up in relays waiting our turns to be a coach and loader and then fire. We shot 22s today, and we’ll fire them again tomorrow. I didn’t do so bad for my first time, but there naturally is all kinds of room for improvement.

Ooh Rah!

These little rifles weren't much good, and they were always jamming, wasting time during rapid fire practice. Everyone got to fire at least 50 rounds. I remember how I used to figure up how much each shot cost me at home, and the way they throw away rounds here is a dramatic contrast.

We are searched about five or six times a day. After each meal you are frisked to check for stolen silverware; and at the range, when you leave to secure (go back to your area), you have to take everything out of your pockets, and you are frisked again to make sure that you haven't picked up any cartridges or shells. Government property they say. No one minds it—a hell of a lot of good it would do to object!—and we all get a kick out of it sometimes, telling the “inspectors” not to get fresh.

It rained to beat the band here and just as we were going to chow.³⁹ We put our ponchos on, but everyone still got pretty well soaked. We had a real fine chow, so no one kicked. Slices of beef, potatoes, gravy, cocoa, string beans (peas for seconds), cabbage, spinach, bread, sliced tomatoes, and water. Naturally, I went back for full seconds. I had to wait in line for almost a half hour for it, but I walked away contented. And then, of all things, we had troop and drill the minute we got back from chow. That only lasted about a half hour, so it wasn't bad.

We have learned the *Marching Manual*.⁴⁰ If you've ever seen it done by a platoon of well-trained Marines, you'll never forget it. It really looks snappy when executed right. The men are marching down the road, at right shoulder arms, go to left shoulder arms to port arms, to slap your left side two times to secure arms (muzzle down) back to port (canting across front like /) then to left shoulder and back to right shoulder. All movements are distinct and taken one to a step. There are 19 counts to it. Of course, we don't have it down pat yet but give us time.

I swear these mosquitoes have hair on their backs. I watched one bite me just now and the darn thing actually had hair (brown) on its back. They grow them about two sizes bigger, like the Jersey gnats we used to battle in New Jersey.⁴¹

One of these days I'm going to have to write Mrs. Sparlettes. I still

³⁹ The origin of the term, *rained to beat the band*, is not clear but it is defined in most American dictionaries as energetically or abundantly.

⁴⁰ Stice may be referring to some early version of MCO P5060.20, *Marine Corps Drill and Ceremonies Manual* (3 May 2003).

⁴¹ Stice is likely referring to biting midges or gnats known to flare up during the spring in New Jersey.

have her handkerchiefs at home, I guess. I haven't written her yet. I got an answer from Mrs. Chase. She must have written about six pages.

I received another wonderful letter from you yesterday. I almost started to bawl once just from feeling good, but I didn't. And today, I got your birthday card and the two \$5 bills. Thanks an awful lot, Mom, that pays for almost half of my way home if I have to take a train. The card is very cute too! Several of the fellas have had birthdays and nothing special ever happened, but I'll be thinking of you and home and all the things and events connected with the things the word "home" stands for.

Do you realize that in a few days we will have completed half of our boot training? It doesn't seem like we've been here more than a month when we look back over the days. Time really does go fast, thank the Lord! And Carrol and the rest of them say the next five weeks will even go swifter. Here's hoping! The latest scuttlebutt is that we have 15 days furlough, and we don't come back here to ship out. Could be, but more than likely it's just real scuttlebutt.⁴²

Keep 'em coming, ole gal.

Thanks,
Yer offsprung,
Ray



*This morning, I fired about 206 out of a high possible 220.
. . . I guess it just takes practice and a little more snapping in.*

23 July 1946

Hi Mom,

The reason for the air mail is that I want to hurry and correct what Joan told you about my wallet being taken or my watch either! I can't imagine where she got that idea. I would have told you if anything like that ever happened. I might have told her I don't wear my watch or carry my wallet, but nothing else. And my pen was stolen on the train. I told you that, re-

⁴² Marines attend recruit training or boot camp on either the East or West Coasts. After the completion of boot camp, Marines attend the School of Infantry (SOI); West Coast Marines attend SOI at Camp Pendleton in San Diego, CA, while East Coast Marines attend SOI at Camp Geiger in Jacksonville, NC.

member? About my little overnight case with brush etc., I still have them all. I keep all my letters in the little brown case (almost 30 of them.)

I would like to see George again. We had some pretty rare times together.

California Street [Urbana, Illinois,] should be changed into an avenue if they black top it and make it smooth. I'll bet there will be some nasty wrecks at some of the through streets.

Maybe it's just fate. After all the howling I did about the old lawnmower, you have to get a new one after I leave.

This morning, I fired about 206 out of a high possible 220 and the rifles I shot with wasn't correctly zeroed in, but even though that sounds good.⁴³ As accurate rifle fire is, you have to get almost 100 percent correct to be a good shot, and I knew at the time of firing that I didn't have the correct picture a few times. I guess it just takes practice and a little more snapping in.

I think I wrote you yesterday, and I don't have any news except that every other minute some colored boy keeps running over my feet. They are repairing something.⁴⁴

Chow time.

All my love, Mom,

Ray

P.S. I've met several boys from Illinois, but no one I knew previously. It is very interesting to yell out "anyone from Illinois, New Jersey, New York City, North Carolina?" You would be surprised at the results, especially in the head where some gather.

⁴³ According to Marine Corps Training Command, a new rifle course with a score of 250 was introduced in 1948. Record day was a high point in recruit training that occurred during the third range week. Recruits fired in the standing, sitting, kneeling, and prone positions at the 200-, 300-, and 500-yard lines for a maximum score of 250 points. This system remained in place until 2007, where 190 points were required to achieve the marksman's medal, 210 points for a sharpshooter, and an expert rifleman had to score between 220 and 250 points.

⁴⁴ President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 8202 on 25 June 1941 that opened military service to all Americans regardless of color. In spite of this presidential mandate, Blacks in the military remained segregated into separate units and only by quota in certain military occupations like cooks, barbers, and manual labor. For more, see Henry I. Shaw Jr. and Ralph W. Donnelly, *Blacks in the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 2002 reprint).



I have a myriad of experiences to tell you since I last wrote. All about the range. Time really flies like Carrol said it would.

26 July 1946
(postcard)

Hi Mom,

I'm fine and dandy and so's everyone else, I guess. I don't even have time to clean my rifle let alone write letters, so this will explain my drop in correspondence.

Mrs. [W.] Sporleder of all people sent me four cans and a tin of peanuts. I guess that sets me up as far as peanuts are concerned. This afternoon it was around 135° but it's pouring cats and dogs now, so it's cooler. I have a myriad of experiences to tell you since I last wrote. All about the range. Time really flies like Carrol said it would. Has he seen you yet? I hope so, he's a swell fella.

Dad wrote the other day.

Yer offspring,
Ray



That is what every boot wants to achieve, it is to throw his live grenade. You get to keep the ring and put it on your dog tags string. . . . My main wish for the last four years is to be in uniform in the Service and do something with Dad while he is still in, and it looks like my wish is going to come true.

26 July 1946
1700 hours

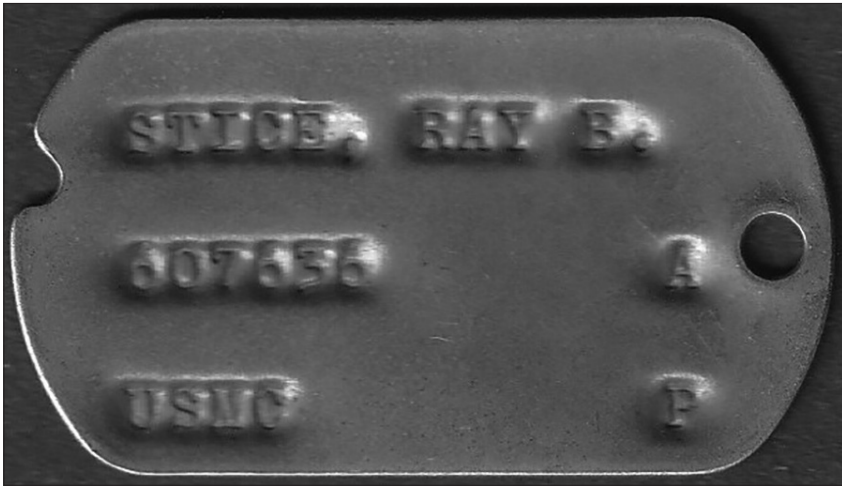
Hi Mom,

I just wrote you a card telling you I'm okay because I didn't have time for a letter. By writing installments, I hope to get this on off in a day or so.

The first time I shot my rifle, it liked to scare the living heck out of me. But I was sitting on my boots, so they didn't fly off. The slow steady squeeze and then all hell breaks loose with a cloud of smoke and "Hi-Yo

Ooh Rah!

Figure 17. Ray Stice's dog tags from boot camp



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Silver Away.”⁴⁵ If you’re lucky, your target comes back up and a white disc is raised before it, saying you got in the bull’s-eye. This morning, we worked the butts. That includes running the targets up and down, marking the holes with spotters, posting up the holes, and shoving up score discs over the top of the butts. It’s a soft job and very interesting too. Now I know how the “other end” works, and that has been bothering me for quite some time.⁴⁶

Tomorrow, we have to start shooting at 0630 in the morning for some ungodly (Marine) reason. We will fire at C range and that is much closer than A or B range and D range is right across the highway. Rumors have been going around for a month that we wouldn’t fire the carbine or BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) or throw our hand grenades, but we know we will now. That is what every boot wants to achieve, it is to throw his live grenade. You get to keep the ring and put it on your dog tag’s string. We

⁴⁵ “Hi-Yo Silver Away” was the catch phrase of the Lone Ranger, originally played on WXYZ radio in 1933 and then turned into a television show for ABC from 1949 to 1957, starring Clayton Moore as the Lone Ranger and Jay Silverheels as Tonto.

⁴⁶ *Working the butts* gives recruits a sense of what it is like to receive fire, where they hear a distinct crack of the bullets as they fly overhead. They do not get this same sensation or sound on the delivering end of firing a weapon.

haven't received our tags yet, but I believe we'll get them the first of next week.⁴⁷

My main wish for the last four years is to be in uniform in the Service and do something with Dad while he is still in, and it looks like my wish is going to come true. I'll sure be proud to be able to shake his hand and say, "Hi, Dad, your little boy is finally growing up." And it would tickle me to death to make him salute me on the street and not have him recognize me!

Carrol, Bill, and Jim ought to be home by last night or this morning. If you see any of them, find out how they got home and how much time it took.

Say, I'm awfully spoiled even yet, and now I want a roll of 127 film. There is a fella who says I can use his camera if I can get the film. I don't want my camera, and we can get films developed overnight at the Urbana Drugs, but most of the boys have to wait two or three weeks.⁴⁸

Are all the rumors about higher prices for commodities and necessities true? Someone said milk cost almost 24 cents a quart. Give me the low down on the high low down. Isn't there a GRA anymore?⁴⁹

Inquisitively, yer little boy,

Ray

P.S. I didn't think I would have any time to write more than a few lines, so until chow time comes (in 15 minutes) I'll keep on jabbering.

It's still raining. This is the longest rain we've ever had!

We feel almost stuck up (only fooling) when we see the "skin heads" come in. Our hair has grown out on the sides again and looks half decent. In about two weeks, we'll get it trimmed again and, with our hats on, we'll

⁴⁷ According to Marine Corps History Division, dog tags are issued to officers once they report for active duty; enlisted Marines are issued dog tags at their recruit station after their initial training is complete. It is not the practice today. Recruiting stations do not issue dog tags. They either get issued at boot camp or the Marines first unit.

⁴⁸ The term 127 refers to a roll film format for still photography introduced by Kodak in 1912. The 127 enjoyed mainstream popularity until it began to decline in popularity in the 1960s as newer, cartridge-based films came on the market. As of 2020, it remains as a niche format and is still in production.

⁴⁹ The reference to GRA is unclear, but it may point to a consumer goods pricing index. According to a 1949 government report, food prices after June 1946 were one-third more expensive due to the end of extensive wartime regulations. *Retail Prices of Food, 1946 and 1947*, Bulletin No. 938 (Washington, DC: Department of Labor, 1949).

look like brand new recruits. Cuss, cuss. I've been wearing my cap on the back of my head whenever I could and now my forehead is as brown as the rest of me. My hands and wrists are quite brown too. My poor snozzel takes quite a beating; it peels and burns and peels etc., so it's spotted but two weeks back at the main base will fix that up fine.

By now, California Avenue should be about halfway done. Did they tear up the "beautiful" side "lawn" of our house any? I thought maybe all the heavy machines might just about ruin a lawn.

Have the Allen's moved into their new home yet? I'll bet they are pretty pleased with their house.

Of all people, Leon [Woodworth] finally broke down and wrote me the other day. I about split my sides laughing and almost crying because it was so much like the way he talks. I would like to see him down here. Oh boy! Still the same ole Leon and his love for himself. He thinks he is madly in love with Pat Brown (blonde college gal). Ask him about that if you want to tease him sometime.

My stomach says chow time (as it does the other 24 hours of the day), and some of the fellas are getting their "dinner jackets" on so I'll close now. Oh yes, they gave us summer dungaree jackets with padded elbows and a shoulder pad on the first day. You can tell Dad about that. He wanted to know which guns we fire: U.S. rifle, 30-caliber, M1 Garand.

That's all for right now, Mom. I'll try not to wait so long between letters next time.

Ray



AMERICAN RED CROSS

Guess where I landed? Sick bay with food poisoning.

27 July 1946

Hi Mom,

Guess where I landed? Sick bay with food poisoning. They are going to keep me until I get rid of a slight fever. I just couldn't hold any food, so they slapped me in bed this morning (such a nice soft sack too). I'll probably get out tomorrow afternoon.

The mailman sure surprised me this afternoon! Five letters and a can

of peanuts. The nuts won't help matters at the present, but they will later on. Lucile, Grandmother, Reverend Doran, Max Start, and best of all a letter from you!⁵⁰

I guess I ate something that didn't agree with me for chow last night. This afternoon, a Navy corpsman went to the PX and brought two gallons of ice cream back, but I didn't get any. Such is life! All they have given me is three cups (large) of fresh milk. That is almost a treat right there. It stays down, that's all I care about.

When I do leave this base, there won't be hardly any where I haven't been. But I'd just as soon stay out of sick bay.

There is another fella from 180 here with an abscess on one of his breasts. It looks like a boil to me. He has been in here for three or four days now, and he was transferred yesterday. They only let you miss two training days and then they set you back to a platoon a week earlier.⁵¹

I'm still not at ease when I fire my rifle. I guess practice makes perfect.

Say, is Clyde Barnes out or is he just home on leave? How does he look? Better, I imagine. I'll have to write to him, or he'll have to write me one.

You ought to hear the corpsman sing. He can really put out with the tunes. Lucile would really fall flat for him.

This is going to be short, and I'm going to catch up on my lost sleep while I have the chance.

I'll write again tomorrow. Probably by the time you get this, I'll be back with my platoon. So don't worry, it's just a case of upset stomach.

I'll see ya later, ole gal.

Goodnight Mom,

Ray



⁵⁰ Stice's paternal grandmother was Mrs. A. J. (Jeanette) Stice. His sister is Lucile Stice. Reverend Herbert J. Doran was their pastor of the Urbana Presbyterian Church. An article in *The Evening Courier* dated 11 February 1945 covers Ray Stice's debate of "Peacetime Compulsory Military Training" that mentions Doran.

⁵¹ Abscesses are caused by a bacterial infection, which are common for military service-members due to communal living spaces and harsh environments during training and deployments. See Gehan A. Pendlebury et al., "Relevant Dermatoses among U.S. Military Service Members: An Operational Review of Management Strategies and Telemedicine Utilization," *Cureus* 15, no. 1 (January 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.33274>.

My temperature yesterday was 103 and last night it was 98 I believe (maybe 99), anyway it was pretty normal, so I shook my fever off in a hurry. To wake up for chow (a cup of milk) last night, the corpsman squirted me with penicillin! Expensive waker upper I think!

AMERICAN RED CROSS

28 July 1946

0905 hours

Hi Mom,

It's tomorrow already (Sunday), and I was down at the other end of the ward putting water on a guy's dressing when the doc came through so I didn't get to ask him if I could go. My temperature yesterday was 103 and last night it was 98 I believe (maybe 99), anyway it was pretty normal, so I shook my fever off in a hurry. I'm still on a liquid diet, cuss the luck. Last night, I really slept like a log on a cloud. The sack is soft, and I really took advantage of it. Now I'm catching up on my reading magazines. I think, and hope, I'll get out sometime tonight.

To wake up for chow (a cup of milk) last night, the corpsman squirted me with penicillin! Expensive waker upper I think! He's from Chicago (the one who sings all the time), and he's a right guy.

Hey, what did you mean in your letter, "the part you do reread probably isn't the 'meaty' thought provoking stuff" or something like that? Mom, I read and reread all of your letters and love every bit of them and I do pay special attention to the thought-provoking material. I used to sort of look over and say, "Oh yeah, I've heard that before." Maybe I have actually heard that before, but now each phrase and everything you say takes on a new meaning. I just got squirted again! This time half water and half penicillin. More fun, little things like that used to make me boiling mad but they don't anymore, unless I'm mad to begin with.

Tomorrow, I think we get our dog tags. Then I'll feel more like a serviceman because I'll at least look like one.

If Jerry L. Dyer thought the Army was tough, he wouldn't have lasted the first week of our training. Do you have Keith Jardine's address? I would like to write him. Have any of my Navy pals come home

from boot camp yet? I don't think their training is quite as long as ours. I got a big kick out of one of the Navy fellas saying he thought he was in the infantry because he drilled for four whole hours with a rifle.⁵² Tough stuff!

We have pretty regular hours here at the rifle range: get up at 0430, usually eat at 0600 or before, then about 1200, then about 1730 or 1800 again. Hit the sack about 2100 or 2130, depending on what kind of field day we have or how long it takes to sweep, swab, and scrub.

We start firing at C Range tomorrow and then for record on Friday. Time is still flying damn fast!

All me love, Mom,
Ray



*I hear he isn't as "easy" on you, but Lord I don't see how any
DI would want to. I realize how well disciplined and trained
my old platoon was.*

31 July 1946

New Platoon 174, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion

Hi Mom,

They released me last night about 1800 and, by 2000, I was secured okay. This new outfit is a mixed variety of boys—men and babies. It's an awful large platoon and they aren't anywhere near as disciplined as Platoon 180 was. The junior DI is a short corporal and is just like "one of the gang." As yet, I haven't had much to do with the other one. I hear he isn't as "easy" on you, but Lord I don't see how any DI would want to. I realize how well disciplined and trained my old platoon was.

The senior DI is passing out dog tags now, I guess mine are down at the old barracks. I'll get them this afternoon if I can.

⁵² According to the U.S. Navy boot camp site, Navy recruits receive the following weapons training: "weapons training will consist of marksmanship fundamentals, service pistol characteristics, clearing barrel procedures and weapons safety practices for successful completion of the Navy Handgun Qualification Course." Navy recruits currently train with the M9 pistol and Mossberg 500 shotgun.

I'll only have to repeat about three days—today, tomorrow, and the next day—and then I'll have caught up where I got off.

I'm pretty lucky. I still get to go home on the original day I was supposed to. This platoon had some mess duty to sort of mark time back at the main base and now they won't have it after the range.

Instead, I think we'll get two days of battalion guard duty while the other platoons are having mess. I get out of mess, which isn't counted as training just marking time.

Last night, the mosquitoes really had a feast on me because I got here too late to get any sheets or mosquito netting. I finally had to put on my skivvy shirt and socks and then I even put my dungaree pants on and kept a towel on my arms. Poor me, I dreamt about the repellent but didn't bother to climb down and get it!

Was I ever surprised when I found two letters and a can of cookies waiting for me. I got all the cookies because the DI was in a hurry and didn't ask me to open the package.

This won't be quite as long as my usual letters, but at least you know I'm okay and up and at 'em again.

That was too bad about Lucile's getting bit by a snake. Did the snake bite cause any after affects? Tell Lile not to blow up!

Do you realize that tomorrow's the first of August already!

I've got to close, ole gal. I'll see ya in a month.

Yer lovin son,
Ray



*This morning I had a very interesting job, acting as a rifle coach
and score keeper.*

1 August 1946

Hi Mom,
How's me "modder"? Just all fine and dandy, I hope! This morning, I had a very interesting job, acting as a rifle coach and scorekeeper. After I fired, I kept the score of all the others who fired on my target, and I also instructed and coached them about their positions, trigger squeeze, and right picture, etc. It was interesting to say the least. It helped me a lot too because not only did my ears (and nerves) soon become accustomed to

the terrific noise on the firing line, but I really know how and when to change my sights now.

As usual, when I moved all my gear to these barracks the other day, I was missing something. You've probably guessed by now that it was my pen, and you are right too. I'm going back to my old platoon Sunday and see if I can get my dog tags and at the same time see, or try to rather, what happened to my pen.

Hey, Mom, do you want me to send money to pay for all the things I keep asking for? I will gladly! If you didn't get me that 127 film, it's okay if you did, you could still send it. I guess maybe someone here has a camera that size. To save you trouble, why don't you just send me a regular-size cookie tin full of "store" cookies all varieties. I appreciated the cookies you sent me very much more than I can write here. They really hit the spot right. If you could send me another tin someday, they would still be appreciated . . . hint hint.

I've got to go to chow now—I'm a poet and didn't know it—so I'll write again when I have time. I do have more time to shave, eat, etc., now than I did in Platoon 180 for some reason.

So be good, Mom, and don't do anything I would (or think about it either—bad business).

Your lovin son,
Ray



When we first came here, I used to feel like griping because we had to carry our rifles slung over our shoulders all the time. But now anytime we go to mess or anywhere without them, you miss that 10 pounds and it really feels funny not to have something there.

3 August 1946

Hi Mom,
The mailman surprised me with five letters a few minutes ago. Mrs. Sporleder, two from Jean Ash-Danville, Verna in Urbana, and your letter. By far yours was the best. I don't know how you do it, but you get so much into a letter. They are interesting.

Our outpost day is one month from today! Say, Mom, in order to

Ooh Rah!

Figure 16. Pvt Paul Douglas performs a rifle inspection with his drill instructor aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, ca. 1942



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

save trouble buying cookies, why don't you send me a couple Peter Pan jars of peanut butter or a little jar of jam. I do always save my bread from the mess hall. The fellas downstairs are going back to the main base today, so I went down and switched locker boxes. I couldn't lock the one I had before. I'm all set now. Didn't I tell you I was in regular barracks now? What an improvement over the dirty little PB huts and a head within 10 feet instead of 10,000.

My old platoon fired for record yesterday; 24 of them didn't qualify. To qualify, you have to shoot 268 out of 340. The best shooter fired 303, or 3 points under expert. Was he mad! I hope that doesn't have any bearing on how good I'll shoot. I'll do my darndest, you can bet on that!

When we first came here, I used to feel like griping because we had to carry our rifles slung over our shoulders all the time. But now anytime we go to mess or anywhere without them, you miss that 10 pounds and it really feels funny not to have something there.

Your mail has been delayed too. It took five days for your letter to get here. I hope mine get there quicker than that. Today is Saturday, that's why I can write now and think about what I'm writing.

This morning, we moved to B Range and fired rapid fire sitting at 200 yards. I only got 75 out of 80, 13 bull's-eyes and 3-4s. That isn't too bad, but I didn't hold my sight picture when I pulled the trigger. Practice will help me improve, I hope.

In a few minutes, I'm going to start washing my skivvies and socks and tomorrow I'll wash my dungarees. As I was in sick bay last weekend, I didn't get a chance to wash, so I had to wash a set of skivvies the other night. I was surprised how clean they came out after being in the bag for a week.

Day before yesterday, I stenciled all of my gear (clothes and all) for a two-fold reason. The fellas who are interested in me enough to read my name will get to know me sooner and I can tell my gear from someone else's naturally.

Already I know a good percentage of the fellas and some of the more important one's names (squad leaders, section leaders, and guys from Illinois, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, and Puerto Rico). One guy I've never seen before just came in and gave me a piece of gingerbread cookie. Damn good too! The DI will let you keep anything here, can or no can.

Last night, our corporal came in the squad room and asked who wanted to play games. I was washing my clothes. Half of them went outside, they played snap the whip, pyramid building, horse and rider, and were even wrestling with him.⁵³ I have never in all my life seen a man who was so nice and fun and, at the same time, was an instructor (DI). He shot the breeze for more than two hours with us on everything from women to how to press your "greens" and "blues," and he tries to do everything for us. He is going to try to get hold of some irons just before we go home so we can press our clothes. He's perfect! The other DI isn't too bad. He isn't anything like the "Little Corporal," as I call him (Napoléon II), but he isn't as bad as my old serious DI.

This afternoon, we had spaghetti and meat, bread, water, lettuce and tomatoes, and some lemon pudding, but I filled up on it. Maybe I could choke down a little mayonnaise now, but seriously I would have to be care-

⁵³ *Snap the whip* refers to a classic outdoor children's game, where one person is selected as the head of the whip. They then run in random directions while the rest of the line holds hands and attempts to keep up. It dates back to the late 1800s but became popular again in the 1930s and 1940s. *Horse and rider* refers to a two-player game about a horse rider taming, and forming a bond with, their horse. Paintings and sketches of this games date back to the 1700s.

ful and hold it down. I still feel the same about cheese, coffee, and tea too! I eat most any jam or preserves now and I love oatmeal and cornflakes and lots of sugar. I do eat a lot of sugar and butter when I can get it on bread.

My washing is awaiting, so tell everyone hi for me including the Guinessee's next door and what about Clyde?

P.S. Hi, Lile. Hi, Dad. I'll say it myself.

Your loving son,
Ray



I like it very much in this outfit anymore and can see some of the Marine Corps' ideals and am proud to be able to be one, thanks to you and the Lord and Dad!

5 August 1946

Hi Mom,

Well, I've been wet before but never as when as I was a while ago. We got caught out on the range while it was raining, and we kept on naturally. Finally, the officers gave up and we swam in. I've got all dry clothes on now and I'm in the middle of cleaning my rifle. I can't get a ramrod right now so there's no sense in wasting time.

The peanuts weren't the only reason for my being sick, there were several cases of food poisoning the next night, and all the cases ate at the same mess hall.

Someone gave me a ramrod, so I'll finish this after chow if I get time, since we're scheduled for another "20 cent trim." Big joke! They'll shave you again if you give them any trouble!

After the haircuts, the DI corporal was going to let us go to the PX, but it is closed today so we're going swimming. You know how nice and complete the PXs at Chanute are?⁵⁴ Well, ours is like that or those as much as a peanut is to a watermelon. All they have is pints or quarts of ice cream and a little laundry soap.

I've got to do a little altering on my skivvy shirts. The waist is too large, so I'm going to move the buttons over. I'm sorry to say I haven't

⁵⁴ Chanute Air Force Base is located south of Chicago, IL. It was established in 1917, and it was one of the oldest Air Force facilities until it was decommissioned in 1993.

grown any that I can tell. After all, I've only been in a month and a half, so you can't expect miracles overnight.

I bought a pen at the PX on Sunday, and I saw Buddy Bennett in the morning. He just got here. He recently got a "Dear John" letter from his gal; it seems they were ring engaged and she broke it off, leaving him mad at most everyone.⁵⁵ He will get over it darn quick though, because his mind will be occupied enough for him to forgive and forget quickly. I'm thoroughly (big word!) convinced I'm glad I wasn't attached to anyone when I left because of things like that. It's still nice to have gal friends, especially for a traveling man like me. I received your two letters (1 August-31 July) tonight and you had just heard about my episode at sick bay. I've been back in the groove for a week tomorrow, and by now you know I'm okay again. Thanks a lot for Keith's address. I will write him tonight, maybe Clyde too. Has he been in 18 months already? I haven't seen anything of the brownies you sent, maybe I'll get them tomorrow. It takes an extra day because everything goes to my old platoon and back unless you've gotten my new address.

I like it very much in this outfit anymore and can see some of the Marine Corps' ideals and am proud to be able to be one, thanks to you and the Lord and Dad!

X on the snozzel!

Your loving son,
Ray
USMC



My score was 288 out of 340. You have to get 268 to qualify, 292 for sharpshooter, and 306 for expert. So, I've made marksman. . . . If you don't keep exactly the same sight picture (bull's-eye) all of the time, your dope will change and the number of clicks of elevation and windage keeps changing. It all comes with practice.

⁵⁵ Susan L. Carruthers, "How World War II's 'Dear John' Letters Changed American Society," *Time Magazine*, 14 February 2022.

7 August 1946

2100 hours

Hi Mom,

Today was “preliminary day” for record days, which is only day after tomorrow. I qualified okay, but I could have done much better, especially at kneeling, rapid fire, 200 yards. I really fouled up there. I was jerking the trigger without even aiming. I was just nervous and in a hurry, I guess, but I’m not going to let that happen again if I can help it. My score was 288 out of 340. You have to get 268 to qualify, 292 for sharpshooter, and 306 for expert. So, I’ve made marksman. This doesn’t have any real or direct effect on record day. It just lets us know how many rounds we fire, when, where, and what dope to put on your sights. If you don’t keep exactly the same sight picture (bull’s-eye) all of the time, your dope will change and the number of clicks of elevation and windage keeps changing.⁵⁶ It all comes with practice.

Thanks loads for Murve’s address; I wrote him a letter last night and I hope to go look him up Sunday if I can get permission. I would really love to see him down here. I bet he looks downright cute with his bowed legs and no hair. Speaking (or writing!) of no hair, my wig finally got “briefed” tonight. This is the last one; the one before we leave is just an ear trim. I put my clothes brush to good use brushing my hair when I want to show myself off in front of the mirror.

We’re having mail call now. I haven’t gotten any mail for a couple of days, but I guess I will tomorrow. I never did see anything of Lucile’s brownies or the film. My dog tags haven’t arrived yet either, but they will come in time.

Looks like someone cut the water off, so maybe I’ll shower in my own sweat! I’m so tired that I’ll sleep like a log anyway.

I’ll write you after Friday afternoon and tell you all about record day. Wish me luck.

Your loving “keed,”

Ray

P.S. I wrote Keith Jardine too. Thanks a lot!

P.P.S. Don’t send any more postcards. I have 55 now! I didn’t use many.

⁵⁶ *Dope* is a marksmanship term that refers to data, optics, position, and environment.



The day before, I made 300, 6 points below expert, and was a sharpshooter. That rates a medal. Which, I don't know. . . . The coaches throw a blade of grass in the air and say, "Two clicks left," etc. I got 76 out of 80 rapid fire sitting at 200 yards, which is good. You have to get off two clips or 16 rounds in 60 seconds. . . . Tell Dad not to worry about my ears, after one afternoon's deafness, I don't think I'll forget cotton again!

10 August 1946

0745 hours

Hi Mama, ole gal,

Well, I didn't make sharpshooter like I did on preliminary day, but I qualified. My unofficial score is 278, 10 points over qualification, so I rate marksman. The day before I made 300, or 6 points below expert, and was a sharpshooter. That rates a medal. Which, I don't know. I now understand how some of the fellas who fired previously got their windage dope wrong. The coaches throw a blade of grass in the air and say, "Two clicks left," etc. Sometimes it's okay, sometimes not, and it wasn't in my prone rapid at 300. I only got 67 out of 80, where I got about 75 out of 80 before. I got 76 out of 80 rapid fire sitting at 200 yards, which is good. You have to get off two clips or 16 rounds in 60 seconds.

Your brownies came last night and also another package of some peanut brittle or something like it. They both tasted wonderful. The platoon got the can of candy; I got the brownies and film. They weren't stale by any means!

This will be short because we're going to D Range for school on the carbine or the BAR. This, I've been waiting for!

Last night, I got permission to go to the main base, and I found Murve and Clinard. They both looked damn swell to me, but I could only hardly say hi to them, so I'm going back tomorrow afternoon.

Tell Dad not to worry about my ears. After one afternoon's deafness, I don't think I'll forget cotton again!

I just came back from "Carbine School." We had a sort of lecture in the shade about the carbine. It's so light and small. After loving my M1, I can't believe it uses the same ammo. I can't hardly wait till we get a chance to fire the BAR next Wednesday. I think this afternoon I'm going to see if

Ooh Rah!

Figure 17. Ray Stice's high school wrestling team, including his friends Murvis Valentine (front row, first from left), Stice (second from left), and Jim Finical (third row, center)



Source: Stice Family Collection.

I can get my dog tags and sunglasses again. They have them both now, so I think I'll be able to latch on to 'em.

I wish I could go over to another mess hall for a couple of meals. My old platoon is serving mess there. They told me I'd eat like a king if I ever got served by them.

I swear, I've hardly written you in a whole week, have I? This last week, we were kept on the run all the time. I don't have any dope to predict how much time I'll get this next week, but you know I'll try to write as often as I can.

Thanks a lot for the film. There's a fella who is going to let me use his camera. I don't know if I can send them home to be developed or not, but I'm going to use them up all right.

Naturally, Murve and Clinard want me to bring them pogeey bait when I go to see them. They don't see I can't hardly go to the PX anytime I want to (like they can't too).

Neither Carrol nor Bill have gotten in touch with me. Maybe they have already shipped out by now.

They always say the sharpshooters and experts always get fouled up on record day and vice versa. I sincerely believe that now. The funny thing about it is you can't push the bullet over a little to the right after the trigger is pulled, unless you're the wind, and that is what happened. We had a six o'clock wind about 20 mph that whipped from 5 to 7 all the time. I also know I could have hit a good expert if I had a coach all the way. They are training 32 new coaches now, but they won't help us any. The carbine and BAR aren't so important as the M1 because their marks don't go in your record.

I can't think of anything to say right now (hungry I reckon!), so I'll close and go to chow.

Thanks for the brownies, Lucile, the film, and the can of stuff and pogy bait, Mom.

Yer lovin keed and brother,
Ray



*Parris Island isn't the place God forgot; it is the place where
God is forgotten.*

15 August 1946
1930 hours

Hi Mom,
I'm down on bended knee, you know what, begging your pardon for not writing. We were kept so doggone busy this week, we never even had mail call for five days. Yesterday, I received your tin of cake and the corporal and I enjoyed it very much.

I've finally fired the BAR. After the first round, I fell in love with it. It is the sweetest, deadliest weapon I've ever come in contact with or have ever seen. You can pop 'em off one at a time or you can kick 'em out 600 rounds per minute. That is what I call a real rifle! That darn little carbine was just a miniature M1. The cartridges are a little shorter and there is no kick, but you can really spit the shells out. It'll shoot as fast as you can pull the trigger.

My hips and wrists are stiff and sore from hitting the deck for the

Ooh Rah!

last two afternoons. We've been snapping in for throwing hand grenades. Tomorrow morning, we get to throw our real live antipersonnel fragmentation hand grenade, and we will keep all the safety rings and pins to put on our dog tag necklaces.⁵⁷ That seems (and actually is) to be a mark of achievement, especially to other boots that don't have theirs yet. Tomorrow afternoon, we'll all fire antitank grenades. We put an adapter on the muzzle of our rifle and slip the grenade on the end, pull the trigger, and let 'er rip.⁵⁸ More noise and smoke and sand and dust and shrapnel.

Last night, I took a chance on religion and went to the main base to a prayer meeting. I'll be darned if I don't forget all about religion down here. So do 100 percent of all the other people here. But a sergeant said one thing last night that really impressed my mind. He said, "Parris Island isn't the place God forgot, it is the place where God is forgotten."⁵⁹ Or something like that. I guess it's plenty true all right. I'm glad I went because I'm slowly getting sounder ideas on what religion is and what it means besides, "I joined because I like the pastors voice." Religion is such a deep and contradictory (different beliefs) subject that I don't guess there ever are all the answers to all the questions that could be asked about it. But when there are things like well-conducted prayer meetings or fellowship meetings where the number is small, a person can ask questions right from your mixed-up brain and get good sensible answers, and that's what I do. Last night was the first time I ever shook hands with a sergeant since I've been on this rock. Some Joe was shipping out and he was thanking *me* for coming to the meeting. Quite an honor! I shook his hand and gave him a pretty smile and was thoroughly surprised.

We're waiting for mail call again, so I'm hoping I'll get a letter from y'all, as our Alabama boys say.

Every chance I get, I visit Murve and Don or Bud Bennet. It does me good to see them and we are all happy to see each other. I hear Carrol is "on the road under" to China. Is that true? Murve and Don come out here the day I leave. Isn't that just ducky! This is just like me and Carrol and Bill and Jim Lustig seeing each other the same place. I'll be shipping out just as they are going back too.

⁵⁷ Stice is likely referring to the Mk 2, which was introduced in 1918 and widely used by the U.S. military until 1969.

⁵⁸ Stice is likely referring to the M9 rifle grenade. After the Korean War, it was replaced by the M28 because it was ineffective against heavy armor.

⁵⁹ This quote is similar to a poem often attributed to Hal Popplewell.

I'm still looking for an angle where I can fly home. Could I cash in my train tickets and get my money back, or aren't they redeemable? If I could do that, I could take a train over to Georgia probably to Macon and fly north. I guess I'll just have to wait till I'm about ready to go before I'll really know for sure.

Well, I got a letter from you after all. I'm sorry, I know it seems silly to say I didn't have time to write but doggone it, it's so true it's pitiful. Everyone's been griping about it, so tonight we all write! There was a big mail mix up this week and no one was getting any. Saturday, we leave for the main base, pack and all, and then Monday and Tuesday we'll have maneuvers at the "boondocks."⁶⁰ Wednesday, we're at the gas chamber, assault course, and obstacle course all in one day! Then after that maybe I'll be able to write again. Don't give up hope in me, Gal.

I'll be seeing soon, Mom.

Your lovin son,
Ray



I finally got to throw my hand grenade. . . . Tomorrow, we're supposed to get our third issue and to get our greens fitted and tailored. I don't care if I'm a private all my enlistment, I'm going to look like a damn Marine and have my uniforms fit me just right.

18 August 1946
0538 hours
(Early, ain't it!)

⁶⁰ The term *boondocks* dates to the Philippine-American War (1899–1902). It derives from the Tagalog word *bundok*, which means mountain. Tagalog is one of the two official languages of the Philippines. American soldiers stationed in the Philippines adopted the word in the early 1900s, shifting the meaning to refer to an isolated or wild region. The location would gain national attention in 1956 due to the horrific training incident at Ribbon Creek that caused the death of six Marine recruits. See *A Brief History of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot: Parris Island, South Carolina 1891–1962* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1982). For more on the boondocks, see Hanson W. Baldwin, "Parris Island Trains New Breed of Marine; Some Fear Softening of the Corps under Eased Program," *New York Times*, 15 November 1959.

Hi Mom,

Well, we're back at the main base now. We pulled in last night. I finally got to throw my hand grenade. I was in the first relay and didn't know quite what to expect. But even though I was nervous as hell, everything went off with a bang! The ring now adorns my dog tag necklace.

Yesterday, the whole range was fouled up, and I don't mean maybe! Boots that haven't even fired for record were issued emblems and were flown out in four hours' notice. I still can't understand why they didn't take us, seeing as how we were all packed up and ready to go. Nine plane loads, at the least, took off in the afternoon and more are leaving today and tomorrow. We think they are going to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, or to San Diego, California, to take different advanced training than they would here. It is plain for everyone here to see that this "Parris Isle" is so damn overcrowded, they would have to start putting up tents. So that is one main reason why they are shipping 'em out. If ever they suddenly decide to ship us out, don't worry, I'll write you a "special delivery air mail, postcard" and tell you all I know about it. But chances for something like that are very slim for our platoon, so don't worry or think about it.

It seems like yesterday that I wrote that we only had four weeks to go and now there is only two short, but important, finishing up weeks left to my career on PI—unless I get stationed here.

The other day, I received a letter from Keith Jardine. He's still at school in Virginia. He mentioned in his letter that a lot of Marines were in his school studying to be engineers. So I see there is a slight chance for being sent there, that is if I get shipped into the engineers instead of line duty. More than likely, I'll just get general duty like about 80 percent of them.

We're living in PB huts now, and the one we have is pretty nice. Hardly any or no roaches yet, and we have new bunks to sleep on. We're in the AT area and some of these ATs are salty as Virginia baked ham! They think their stuff don't stink just because they have emblems and we don't.⁶¹

Being Sunday, I've got all my washing to do again. At least I can say I've always got a clean change.

⁶¹ In this context, AT could refer to some type of active transfer (AT). At this same time, Parris Island was also being used for the discharge of World War II Marine veterans though a separation company. See *A Brief History of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot*, 12. The latter explanation would make sense given the reference to "salty" Marines, which refers to someone with experience.

Figure 18. Marine recruits practice throwing grenades at Parris Island, ca. 1941



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

I haven't had any pogeys for about four or five days and my face has cleared amazingly. Now, if I can only keep it that way.

When we were marching back here last night, I saw Merve and Don as they were marching in the opposite directions. That was pretty good luck. When I yelled at them, their eyes about popped out of their sockets. I think they were sort of surprised.

As one last favor, could you send me one quart jar or maybe a couple of Peter Pan jars of peanut butter instead of a cake or peanuts or candy? See, a jar of peanut butter will last me all week, where as a cake will only last overnight and the DI takes some too. When I get out of boot camp, I'll be able to get all and everything I'll need and want and I've only got two more weeks of boot, so one good-size jar will do me fine.

I'm going to get me a nice silver Marine ring to wear instead of that thing Starkey gave me.⁶² It's all bent up anyway. You know, she only wrote

⁶² Boot camp graduation rings were personal purchases made by individual Marines. The rings varied in style and finish, but typically were silver and carried the EGA and Marine Corps motto *Semper Parati*.

me four letters since I left home, so I don't reckon she's worth too much in the long run after all.

Tomorrow, we're supposed to get our third issue and then get our greens [service uniform] fitted and tailored. I don't care if I'm a private all my enlistment, I'm going to look like a damn Marine and have my uniforms fit me just right.

All boot camp leaves after 31 August are canceled now. So unless they let us out a little early, I probably won't get home like I planned. In other words, don't plan on anything in advance of 24 hours or you're liable to be surprised. I think you told me that in one of your letters. It's good advice and I'm having to follow it too.

If you see Leon, tell him to write me. I really love his letters. They make me feel just like I was there talking to him. He's even brazen in his letters and you can't talk him out of anything, even through the mail.

Five Curtiss C-46 Commandos just went over.⁶³ They're after more of the lucky Joe's out at the range. I don't know, but I think maybe Bud Bennet might be among that group. He's in Platoon 214, and I now 215 left yesterday or . . . who knows?

I'll see ya soon, I hope.

Your lovin keed,
Ray



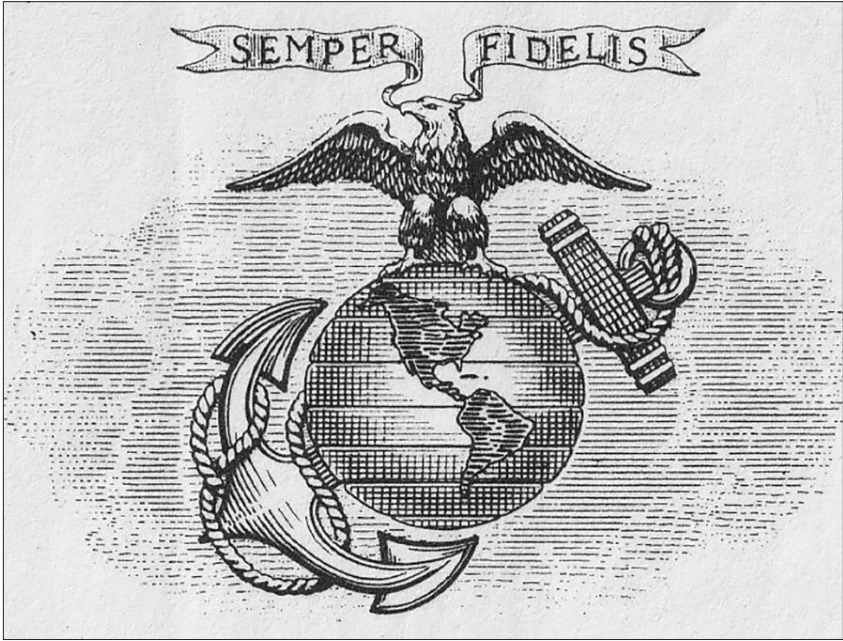
Dad, I hope I meet you on the street and you don't recognize me and you salute. That is sort of an ambition of mine and then yell at you after you passed. We'll see.

19 August 1946
Monday morning

Hi Dad,
Isn't that emblem pretty? Probably you don't think so, but I'm getting to [like it]. At first, I really hated this outfit, but slowly but surely I'm beginning to like it very much.

⁶³ Commandos saw significant use during World War II and were known as the largest and heaviest twin-engine aircraft that saw service in the Pacific theater.

Figure 19. The official Eagle, Globe, and Anchor of the U.S. Marine Corps, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Our platoon has no schedule today. We are all on standby order.⁶⁴ This whole post is all fouled up. Some platoons are going on like nothing happened and others are all split up and half of them shipped out, mainly Army Air Corps men are being taken. I'm supposed to be headed for the engineers, but you don't have much choice anymore.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Standby refers to a preparatory command, usually to alert a unit that it will be receiving some kind of marching orders—be ready and wait.

⁶⁵ It would have had to be a major crisis for the Marine Corps to pull recruits out of boot camp early as it did in 1950 for the Korean War. The Greek Civil War occurred in 1946, and the United States responded by sending advisors but not large formations of troops. The Soviet Union also demanded control of the Turkish straits, and the United States sent naval forces as a show of force. There is no evidence of recruits being pulled from boot camp for either of these events. This could have been a partial evacuation due to expected inclement weather or the overflow of personnel Parris Island that is alluded to in earlier letters.

Murve and Don's platoon was split up and they were put in Platoon 156 and the rest of them were shipped out. I went back to the rifle range to see them yesterday, and we went to Bud's hut and I'll be damned if his folks weren't there! We all had a nice talk, and they took Bud off the post to dinner, I guess. His sister took a picture of all four of us together, and his mother said she was going to call Mom up when they got home. So I guess you be hearing from them soon.

I've finally discovered a way to shape my cap so it looks fairly well done, and so I like it too. For two months, I've been experimenting and at last I found the right way. I hope I meet you on the street and you don't recognize me and you salute. That is sort of an ambition of mine and then yell at you after you passed. We'll see.

I've got to close now and wash some more clothes.

I'll see ya soon, I hope,
Ray



My schedule for the last week has included my first movie, getting our third issue of clothing, getting our last shot in the arm, and a session in the gas chamber (Ugh! Never again!) with and without the mask, singing "Her tears flowed like wine!" and us crying like hell.

23 August 1946
2245 hours

Hi Mom, Ole Gal,
Well, only God and General Alexander A. Vandegrift know what's coming next; no one else does!⁶⁶ Tonight, all of our "fly boys" left for aviation units (minus their 10-day boot leave). That left 30 of us, so half of another platoon minus their "aviation" joined us. More new faces and people.

Don't write me anymore until you get word, because I don't know if we're leaving for duty in 4 hours or for home in 10 days. The standing

⁶⁶ Stice is likely referring to the ongoing battle in Washington, DC, about the unification of military Services and the future of the Marine Corps. See Gen Alexander Vandegrift, Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Bended Knee Speech," Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, U.S. Congress, 6 May 1946.

rule is the GDs—not what you’re thinking!—general duties get their boot leave and aviation doesn’t. I’m a GD, so more than likely I’ll come home in about 6–10 days from now.

My schedule for the last week has included my first movie, getting our third issue of clothing, getting our last shot in the arm, and a session in the gas chamber (Ugh! Never again!) with and without the mask, singing “Her tears flowed like wine!” and us crying like hell.⁶⁷ Tear gas, the assault course, the obstacle course—our two days at the boondocks/bivouac area, getting paid (\$105 dollars, \$25 out for insurance, \$130 all together at first) and having several inspections. Pretty full week, don’t you think?

Today, we got our pants back from the tailors. The guy did a fair job on my greens, but I’m bitterly disappointed in my four pairs of khakis. They shifted the back pockets, so they are only less than an inch apart. They look pretty sorry to me. And my first two pairs are too long. Maybe I’ll end up wearing my greens most of the time, even though I have to choke on a field scarf. Even my shirts are size 1 where size 0 fits perfect.⁶⁸ My shoes are fine though, and tomorrow morning I’m going to the cobbler to get my boots after being repaired. My locker box is so full of clothes now, I have to bounce on it in order to close it.

I hope you can fix my shirts and pants, so they look a little neater when I get home. I want to send them all to the laundry and have them cleaned and starched so they will at least be halfway decent.

We hadn’t had any mail for more than four days; and then tonight we had mail call and I got three letters and two cans of peanuts. Thank you! From you, a letter from Grandmother Stice, one from Mrs. Valen-

⁶⁷ Anita O’Day, vocals, and Stan Kenton and His Orchestra, “And Her Tears Flowed Like Wine,” by Joe Greene, recorded in 1944, Robbins Music, NY.

⁶⁸ Modern size 0 clothing, fits measurements of chest-stomach-hips from 30-22-32 inches (76-56-81 cm) to 33-25-35 inches (84-64-89 cm). Size 00 can be anywhere from 0.5 to 2 inches (1 to 5 cm) smaller than size 0. Modern sizing conventions have changed significantly since this period due to increasing body sizes. So, a 2011 size 0 is equivalent to a 2001 size 2, which is larger than a 1970 size 6 or 1958 size 8. Military clothing measurements are more accurate than those for civilians. The average male servicemember during World War II was 5’8” tall, 144 pounds, wore a 36R jacket, 32 x 32 trousers, and 9D shoes. Today, the average American male is 5’9” tall, weighs 197 pounds, wears a 42R jacket, has a waist of 40” and 10D shoes. Note, that most servicemembers during this period were much younger than today’s comparison population. See Eudora Ramsay Richardson and Sherman Allen, *Quartermaster Supply in the European Theater of Operations in World War II*, vol. 3, *Outfitting the Soldier* (Camp Lee, VA: Quartermaster School, 1948).

tine—very nice—and one from Joan that made me madder ’n hell. That was quite nice of the mailman, meaning you all. I’ve been waiting for the news of a wreck on California Street, though it didn’t surprise me at all. I’m glad neither one of our cars was hit or scratched up.

Does Dad’s car still run fairly well, or is he still awfully hard on it, or does he even drive it?

Thanks a lot for the airplane schedule. I’m still only a lowly boot and I don’t have the kind of money to fly anyway, so I reckon I’ll just take the train and go like I’m supposed to. It’ll only cost me about \$24 round trip that way and that’s very cheap.⁶⁹

I hope Mrs. Bennet or her daughter got to call you. Their visit was very nice. I’m going to try to go see Bud, Murve, and Don again day after tomorrow if I’m still here.

If someone gets a “wild hair” and wants to send us to duty instead of home, I’ll either telegraph you or write you another letter like this one. The chances of us shipping out to duty are very slight, if not improbable at all, so I don’t reckon I’d worry if I were you. No other GDs have left without boot leave yet, only aviation. Even skin heads who have been here a week are being outfitted with greens and being shipped out. An emblem doesn’t mean anything anymore! I’m glad I came through the hard part without skipping any of the tough stuff, because I believe I’ll be a better Marine for all the discipline alone.

Maybe, maybe not, you can tell me if you think the Corps has changed me when I get home. I’ll see you soon, Mom.

Your loving son,
Ray



We have completed our boot training now (at last!) and are just standing by doing details. . . . I think I’ll try to get him to “join” up with the Corps like Phil Reed influenced me. I’m glad I joined up for more reasons than I could list.

⁶⁹ Though Amtrak did not begin operations until 1970, we can make some assumptions about transportation costs. Inflation calculators show that \$24 in 1946 would equate to approximately \$386 USD in 2024.

26 August 1946
Monday, 1425 hours

Hi Mom,

I don't have much time because we're waiting for our final 48-day inspection, and it is two hours late already.

The other day, we signed for our train tickets. I suppose we'll get them in four or five days. We have completed our boot training now—at last!—and are just “standing by” “doing details.”

I've been to four or five movies in the last week and to the PX several times, but about the only money I've spent was a \$2 contribution for our DIs.

For the last several days, I've been shining my shoes, so now I could shave with them (reflection of my mug). They had to be dyed just so and then we polish them several hundred times. Next weekend, we'll probably get to wear them, I hope.

I received a very nice letter from Mrs. Valentine the other day. I'm glad she answers my letters. I haven't seen Bill Stephens since the first time about seven weeks ago or Phil Reed either. I've tried, but I can't catch them, maybe I will someday.

We are anxious and ready to leave on a minute's notice now, and everybody's getting nervous about whether we will “slip” and cuss in front of the wrong people, because all everyone uses is foul language here—even all the officers and DIs naturally. I hope I can watch my speech.

Last night, I bet it hit 60°. I darn near froze! After being used to an average of over 115° all the day long, that is awfully chilly. I'll bet it's pretty cold in Illinois now, but I'm hoping it hits a warm streak while I'm home. Don't make hardly any plans for me when I do get home, because you know how much I'll stay in one place. Say I leave here on the third (just for an example). My leave starts at 0800, but we don't leave here till 1230 and I don't leave Yemasee till 1530 in the afternoon, so I'd get home in time for supper the night of the fourth, allowing for 26–30 hours traveling time at the very most.⁷⁰ But don't expect me till you see me, because we might not leave until the fourth or we might go on the first. The cost is about \$23.50 round trip. Now, what's this about driving back? That will

⁷⁰ Yemasee, SC, is a small town 48 kilometers north of Parris Island with the nearest train station, which serves as the primary rail access point for the region.

cut my number of days at home, won't it? Why don't you write me one more letter (I'll probably still be here in time to get it) and tell me more definitely what you had in mind.

See, I have to leave here with a round trip ticket or not leave at all, so I may as well use all of the ticket.

I don't especially want to be showed off to the Hewett's anyway. I never did like to do anything like that, especially when time in 10 days is so short.

Is [Joan] Starkey going to school this year? I understand she is in some form of trouble, and her folks may take her out of school between semesters this winter? Or have you heard anything like that?

Squeak finally did write me! I think I'll try to get him to "join" up with the Corps like Phil Reed influenced me. I'm glad I joined up for more reasons than I could list.

Write me another letter if you get time. I believe I'll receive it okay. I'll see ya soon, Mom.

Your lovin keed,
Ray
X on the snozzel.



Last night was the first time I've really made a long-long distance phone call. . . . Don't worry about me not wanting to go to an advanced school of some sort, because if I get the chance, I'll jump on it. . . . Today, we turn in our 782 gear, with rifles, bayonets, canteens, mess, etc. and have a clothing survey.

28 August 1946
0600

Hi Mom,

Last night was the first time I've really made a long-long distance phone call; 1,400 miles isn't to be sneezed at. I'm glad you're paying the bill! I would have talked to Lucile and Dad, but I couldn't think of anything interesting to tell them. I just got back from the movie when a fire watch tells me to report to the guard house. It was very nice I could hear you so well, and I hope you are cleared up on what I'm going to do.

Bill Stephens is probably in L Ward and that means "isolation" be-

cause he has pneumonia, but I'll see if I can get permission to see him. Things like that aren't too easy to arrange.

Don't worry about me not wanting to go to an advanced school of some sort, because if I get the chance, I'll jump on it. But it's like I said, we have very little or no choice at all, and if you do get a good deal, you're just plain lucky. We'll see about that after I come back here after my 10-day leave.

When I come home, I think I'll bring my greens and two sets of khakis. I don't like to wear the green blouse so much, but if it's cool up there, I reckon I'll have to.

Will I have access to Dad's Ford while I'm home, or does he use it all the time?

I have two pair of khaki pants I'm going to have altered (the seat and waist taken in and the legs shortened). Do you want the job or will you try to make an arrangement at some tailor to have them done say on the morning of the fifth (is better) or sixth, no later if possible.

Some Joe from Alabama bought an old iron for \$1.50 and is making a small fortune charging 35 cents an hour for its use. I'm signed up for 70 cents worth next Saturday.

Your voice sounded so close and just like I was calling you from Champaign or next door. I don't reckon my voice has changed any either. I'm beginning to wonder if boot camp really has done me any good. I don't feel any different or look any different as far as I can see, except my hair doesn't have any wave in it and is awfully short.

Four other fellas and I just finished swabbing down the deck. I'll at least make a good janitor when I do get out.

Dad really is collecting a lot of leave, isn't he? Three and a half more months, that's quite a bit. How many months has he had already? Will he make 30 years, or will he miss it by a year? Time flies.

At 0800, about 15 of us just secured from scrubbing and swabbing the head. It is quite a large building, but none of its various jobs are hard, so we just took our time.

Today, we turn in our 782 gear, with rifles, bayonets, canteens, mess, etc. and have a clothing survey.⁷¹ Also Platoons 170, 171, 172, and 173 are

⁷¹ The term 782 *gear* refers to pack, canteen, poncho, ammo pouch, etc. used when in the field. The number 782 refers to the DD form that the servicemember signs when the gear is issued.

leaving for home today, so we're first on the list for next Tuesday. I'll be home Wednesday evening with luck.

I understand school starts on the fourth. It will be fun to visit school one of the days I'm home.

I'll see ya later, Mom,
Ray



I'm all packed and ready just in case I won't have to send anything home. We can't wash clothes—no time—so when and if I do get shipped somewhere I'll have one heck of a washing.

16 September 1946
Parris Island, South Carolina

Hi Mom,

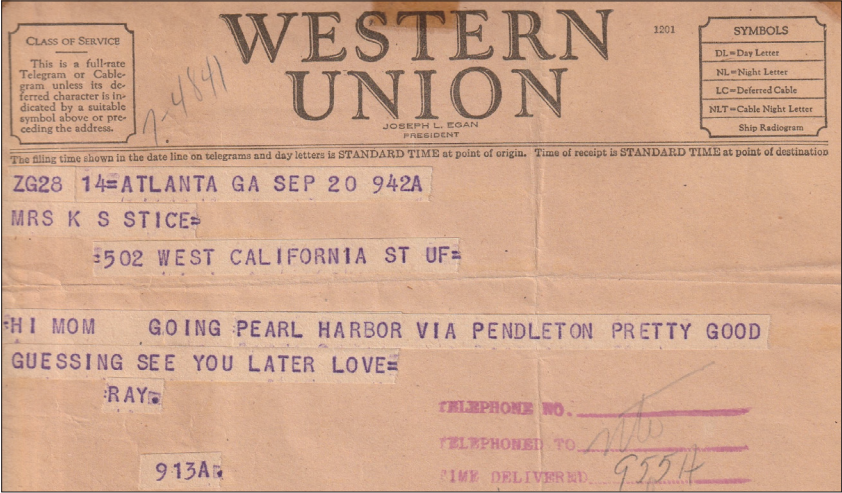
They read off my orders to go to Platoon 180, and naturally I didn't get them. They were to some Special Service (radio, I'm quite sure) School MIT, Washington, DC.⁷² All the fellas who got their orders there took a test on radio, math, and science but I didn't, because I didn't know I was supposed to. About 60 fellas from our AT outfit are leaving in the morning at about 0100 and the Washington detail leaves Wednesday afternoon (if not tomorrow noon.)

Money is no great worry to me yet, I still have \$38 or more. Last night, I looked up Merve and Don and we had a fine time. We were supposed to meet at the show, but the show was called off and I was left holding four quarts of milk, four pints of ice cream, and four jelly rolls. But I ate two pints, two cakes, and one quart, sold the rest like "hot cakes" and went to Murve's hut. We had a fine time shooting the bull. I feel like Santa Claus every time I go see them; it really makes me feel like I've done my Girl Scout deed for the day.⁷³

⁷² During wartime, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology opened or altered many of its programs to support government training for war-related work. Stice is likely referring to the MIT Radar School. See "Guide to the Government War Service Student Records of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Office of the Registrar," AC-0094, 1917-1949, Department of Distinctive Collections, MIT Archives, Cambridge, MA.

⁷³ The term *Girl Scout deed for the day* refers to the official Girl Scouts slogan, "Do a good turn daily," which has been used since 1912.

Figure 20. Telegram from Ray Stice to his mother, alerting the family of his change of station, September 1946



Source: Stice Family Collection.

I'm all packed and ready just in case I won't have to send anything home. We can't wash clothes—no time—so when and if I do get shipped somewhere I'll have one heck of a washing.

I'll send you a card if I leave Wednesday. If not, I'll write you again. Tell everyone hi for me family, Lee Dyer and C. R. and even Irene!

I'll see ya, Mom.

Yer lovin keed,

Ray

P.S. Thanks for letting me have so much fun on my furlough. I really had a wonderful time right up to the last second of it, especially the last night at home.



ORDERS TO HAWAII

(but ended up in Midway Islands)

I can't say I'm not sorry to see the last of PI because I'm not. I did learn an awful lot there and I'm still not sorry for what I got there. . . . When we get to Hawaii, we will be entitled to wear a 1st Marine Division shoulder patch. Then if some

Ooh Rah!

of us are lucky enough and get stripes, our uniforms will look pretty fair.

20 September 1946

Atlanta, Georgia

Hi Mom,

I'm in Atlanta now. I didn't get a chance to send you the other letter, and we have another layover here, so here goes.

Enclosed are three snaps I made just a minute ago. They are flattering, I think.

Just a minute ago, I sent you a telegram giving you a clue about my not writing before. I've been getting ready for this and when we weren't packing or cleaning up the barracks, they put us on a detail and kept us busy every minute right up to the end. I can't say I'm not sorry to see the last of PI, because I'm not. I did learn an awful lot there and I'm still not sorry for what I got there.

We have a nice platoon sergeant in charge of us—red hair, good looking, tough looking, and is very good natured and very nice to us.

In charge of the movement is a first lieutenant that looks to me like a little kid who had his way all his life. But that isn't fair criticism I guess, to be a Marine officer, you have to be pretty good.

When we get to Hawaii, we will be entitled to wear a 1st Marine Division shoulder patch. Then if some of us are lucky enough and get stripes, our uniforms will look pretty fair. I'm right proud of the way you fixed my shirts. "My Mom fixed mine" is what I tell 'em!

Disregard these addresses on my envelopes, because I don't have any real address right now. I just have to put something so I can save 3 cents.

I never got a chance to send you any Spanish moss, so maybe I can snag some in New Orleans if we get liberty there. So far, we have been restricted to certain rooms or areas, so maybe I won't be able to after all.

I did get a chance to see Murve and Don several times before I left, so they're on mess duty now and are eating but not sleeping. Tomorrow is their last day of mess. They'll be home in about three weeks. They will

probably get “Eisenhower greens” and maybe blues too.⁷⁴ I’m getting used to my green blouse, but I still hate the way it fits.

I’ve got to close now, so I’ll be seeing ya later, ole gal.

Your lovin son,

Ray



I have finally cut my hobby down to one heading, “Meeting and Talking to Different People.” Ever since hitchhiking to North Carolina, I’ve liked to meet people and it really is sort of a hobby now. I like to try to figure out their character, background, and experiences. I think it is interesting.

19 September 1946

2200 hours

Hi Mom,

I’m in a troop sleeper sitting in Augusta, Georgia. We can’t leave the car and an engine doesn’t hook on till 0210, so here I am.

I’m not bragging, Mom, but I must be psychic or something because I told everyone I would stay in PI about a week and then shove off to Pendleton, and I told Hank Bothwell that I was hoping to get duty in Hawaii. Well, I’ll be damned if that isn’t exactly where I’m going! Pearl Harbor (September rotation movement) no less. We’ll probably stay at Pendleton a week or so and then shove off. I’ll be able to write you, at times like right now, but I don’t have an address yet, so you can’t very well write me.

The only thing I don’t like about this trip is that we wear “full greens” as that is the uniform of the day in California. I’m going to have the back of my blouse taken in a little and I’ll be satisfied wearing it, I hate it right now. You probably don’t know it, but my emblems were on wrong when my picture was taken! I guess it isn’t too important though. Send me one of two of all the pictures taken at home, will you? While the train is mov-

⁷⁴ Eisenhower greens refers to the style of the U.S. Army uniform that was developed during World War II because Dwight D. Eisenhower believed the issued garments at the time were not functional. The waist-length olive drab coat had a pleated back, adjustable waistband, fly-front buttons, bellows chest pockets, slash side pockets, and shoulder straps.

ing between cities, we are allowed to wear dungarees, so I'm trying hard to keep my greens nice, so far so good.⁷⁵

My orders were finally put in last night. I guess I'm pretty lucky. There are only 2 of us from 174. Me and some Joe from Washington, DC. All together there are only 45 of us on the trip. You ought to see us march on and off to chow. People stop and look.

I have finally cut my hobby down to one heading, "Meeting and Talking to Different People." Ever since hitchhiking to North Carolina, I've liked to meet people and it really is sort of a hobby now. I like to try to figure out their character, background, and experiences. I think it is interesting.

There are four fellas from Platoon 180, but I don't know them personally. At least I know which (out of the 45 fellas) to watch out for and which ones to halfway trust.

Oh yes, I sold my garrison cap for what I paid for it, so I still got about \$44 and that ought to last me awhile till we get all paid up.

I'll write later and maybe call up from New Orleans.

I'll see ya, Mom.

Yer lovin keed,

Ray



I'm going to keep track of the mileage I travel while I'm in the Corps. I'll bet it will really add up in two years. So far, in just three and a half months, I've gone more than 7,400 miles—all by train. Pretty soon, I'll add on another 3,500 miles to Hawaii, and then . . . who knows!

⁷⁵ *Full greens* refers to the Marine Corps service uniforms: Service A, B, and C. The basic service uniform is khaki and green and was adopted in 1943, making it the oldest uniform in use today. Alphas for male servicemembers at this time consisted of a green coat, green trousers with khaki web belt, khaki long-sleeve button-up shirt, khaki tie, tie clasp, and black shoes. Bravos were the same as Alphas, but without the coat and the ribbons were worn on the shirt. Charlies were identical to Bravos, but consisted of a short-sleeve shirt and no tie. For more on the visual history of the Marine Corps uniform, see "Common Threads: Marine Corps," Department of Defense, accessed 1 August 2024.

Figure 21. Camp Joseph H. Pendleton base and barracks, ca. 1949



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

25 September 1946

1500 hours

Camp Pendleton, California

Hi Mom,

Well, after six days we're finally here. The people are so nice to us compared to PI that we really are flabbergasted!

The trip was nice, of course, but we didn't get any liberty at any of the stopovers. Tonight, our first real night here, we are getting liberty. I won't because I don't have an ID card, and I won't get any weekend passes either. But I guess I'll find enough washing to keep me busy.

This morning, I was so mad if it was night, you could see me a mile in the fog. I had to have five shots all at once! Three in my right arm and two in my left, including another vaccination. It seems some GD "swabbe" corpsman didn't enter in my medical records all the shots I'd had. I had 9 shots already, but only the last 2 were entered in the record, so now I've had 14 shots and I've only got credit for 7. If I get some disease now, it will be a damn miracle. My writing arm is so stiff that I can't barely write so I can read it, let alone you.

Ooh Rah!

What chow we get here! It's really good. Everything is so much better than in PI. I really see what a "hole" it is back there now. Today, we got shots, held clothing inspection (very informal), 782 gear inspection (canteens, belts, etc.), and they are going to have a clothing survey. But I still have all my gear luckily, so I don't have to worry about that, and we're going to sign payroll this afternoon and after 1630 we have liberty—everybody. We can do anything and go anywhere—well almost.

We had good meal connections, all at Harvey Houses, and I feel fine, except for my arms.⁷⁶ I was so mad and nervous when I found out I was going to get five shots and some of them weren't getting any, I was shaking like a reducing machine.⁷⁷ But when they started shoving the needles, I just looked ahead and cussed, but they never even hurt especially. I was still mad, and it took about a half a mile of marching back to the squad room before I cooled off. I know it didn't do any harm, but it's just the idea of the whole thing. As I look back at it, I shouldn't even have gotten nervous, but I did.

We ought to get paid tomorrow or Friday, so maybe I can send \$25 or \$30 home, or how about me buying bonds and sending them home? I may as well buy bonds, unless you need a little extra to help out now, you're building, because I haven't bought any in quite a while.

Be sure and remind me of Lucile's birthday so I won't forget it!

I'm going to keep track of the mileage I travel while I'm in the Corps. I'll bet it will really add up in two years. So far, in just three-and-a-half months, I've gone more than 7,400 miles—all by train. Pretty soon, I'll add on another 3,500 miles to Hawaii, and then, who knows. They say we leave here a week from today, so you can write me once or twice before I leave if you send it air mail.

If you can spare it, how about sending me that small iron just as soon as you get my Hawaii address card. I think I can save money if I iron my

⁷⁶ Harvey Houses were a chain of restaurants, travel stops, and hotels across the Southwest known for their higher-quality meals and the ubiquitous Harvey Girls. Founded in 1876 by Fred Harvey, Harvey Houses served customers along the railway system. At the time of his death in 1901, the family inherited 45 restaurants and 21 dining cars across 12 states. When the company was purchased by Amtrak in 1968, it was the sixth largest food retailer in the country. See Fred Harvey Company Records, 1889–2018, NAU.MS.280, Northern Arizona University Archives, Flagstaff.

⁷⁷ A *reducing machine* refers to a countrywide trend of "slenderizing" exercise equipment at women's salons purported to offer weight loss effects.

own clothes. They say we might be an MP [military police] outfit “home based” at Pearl Harbor. We’ll see. Of all people! All the fellas that went to Camp Lejeune flew out here and are going to Guam and China, they are in something entirely different from us.

I’ll write you later on when my arm will write the letters (a b c) that are supposed to come out.

I’ll see ya later, Mom. I was very glad I got to talk to you from New Orleans and that you weren’t disturbed by the call.

Your one and only son,
Ray



Wednesday is supposed to be our shipping out day. We go out through San Diego, so I hope I get a view of the famous, ‘Sissy Boot Camp at San Diego.’ They only have eight weeks of boot, no mess, and hardly anything except the rifle range. They spend two weeks of drill and one week of details—pretty soft.

29 September 1946
5th Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force
Camp Joseph H. Pendleton, CA

Hi Mom,
Well, it’s another Sunday rolling by, and this time I’m at the Pendleton Reception Center. This base is more than 20 miles long and almost as wide, so I don’t think I’ll really know it as well as I did PI.

This evening, I’m going to some beach here on the base—I still don’t have an ID card—where they serve beer, soft drinks, and food and you can swim, so it looks like I’ll have a little fun tonight.

Wednesday is supposed to be our shipping out day. We go out through San Diego, so I hope I get a view of the famous, “Sissy Boot Camp at San Diego.” They only have eight weeks of boot, no mess, and hardly anything except the rifle range. They spend two weeks of drill and one week of details—pretty soft.

I’ll find out tomorrow if I’ll have to get any more shots, or whether they’ve forgotten about me—here’s hoping!

Please tell Lucile not to open her package until her birthday. I thought I’d better get something while I was still stateside, so it will probably be

Ooh Rah!

there shortly after this letter arrives. I hope she has a black evening gown or a black almost strapless top so she can wear “it.” I hope she isn’t too disappointed, but it is the best I could do.

I put in an allotment for a \$50 war bond every month.⁷⁸ Here is my budget. I get paid on the 5th and 20th each month (supposedly) with \$90 overseas pay a month so \$45 each pay day. Take out \$6.40 a month for insurance and I get \$41.80 a pay day. Then take out half a \$50 bond, which is \$18.75, and I get paid \$23.05 each pay day, which averages \$1.53 each day of the month for extra laundering, pure entertainment, and pocket money, which is plenty, I think. And at the end of two years, my cash on hand will be around \$1,200 bonds cashed at face value (\$37.50 each) with mustering out pay. Don’t you think that is a pretty wise plan? I am entitled to another day of furlough because I only had six days at home, and I was entitled to seven with three days travel time. I’ll collect that along with all my other time that will add up if I’m a good little boy the next 20-odd months. It adds up at two and a half days a month and depreciates at the same rate if you’re serving brig time.

My ID card will be finished tomorrow, but it won’t do me any good as far as liberty is concerned. At least I still have my pay, where some are already looking for ways to get more money. I was paid \$80, so I have \$104.01 now. I bought a real nice regulation brown leather belt with a heavy brass buckle, so now I’m just about complete. Yesterday, I washed all my skivvy shorts and shirts and all my socks, and today I washed two khaki shirts, trousers, field scarfs, and a cap so all my clothes are clean again, and I feel much relieved that my seabag isn’t full of dirty clothes. I washed them with Rinso and soaked them in hot soapy water before, and they really came clean nicely and easily.⁷⁹

Try and give me some suggestions as to what Dad might like for a birthday present.

⁷⁸ Between 1942 and 1945, there were eight war bond campaigns to support Allied efforts during World War II. By the end of the Eight (Victory) War Bond campaign, the program had brought in more than \$21 billion. To continue the momentum and to encourage Americans to continue the focus on long-term savings and investments, the U.S. Treasury established the U.S. Savings Bond Division in 1 January 1946. See *A History of the United States Savings Bond Program* (Washington, DC: Savings Bond Division, Department of the Treasury, 1991).

⁷⁹ Rinso was one of the first mass-marketing soap powders. Created by Robert Hudson as Hudson’s Soap, it was sold in 1908 to Lever Brothers in England. It was introduced to U.S. markets in 1918 and widely advertised on national radio programs.

We won't know where we are going until we hit Pearl Harbor some time around 6 or 7 October, so don't expect to hear from me for quite a stretch after you get my last card.

All we have to carry is a huge field transport pack with steel helmets and carry our bed roll; but we'll wear dungarees and boots, so I'll be comfortable at least when all the pack and stuff comes off. Here's me, back view and side view. Thank God, we don't have to carry rifles along too.

I'll write you again from somewhere else, Mom, so be a nice gal and have a couple of nice birthdays with Lucile and Dad and don't worry about me. I'll be pretty well taken care of for the next 20 months.

I'll see ya later, Mom.

Your one and only lovin son,
Ray
X on the snozzel!



You know, if the next 18 months pass as quickly as the last three and a half have, I think I'm going to be pretty satisfied in the Corps.

1 October 1946⁸⁰

Hi Mom,
The stationery isn't so fancy, but the writing is still fouled up (meaning from me).

I guess I won't have to have any more shots since we will be on board in less than 24 hours and I haven't heard anything new yet.

This morning, I went to the bank and bought a \$50 War Bond. It will be sent to you tomorrow. I put your name as co-owner in case you needed to borrow some cash from me then you can use it. All the bonds I'm having taken out of my pay will read the same way.

We got our address just now. It is:

⁸⁰ On 1 October 1946, Naval Air Station Parris Island was deactivated and reactivated on 1 December as a recruit depot. Carolyn A. Tyson, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1935–1946*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1965), 138.

Pvt R. B. Stice (607636) USMC
14th Naval District
Navy No. 128, SF FPO
San Francisco, CA

So, you can write me there, and by the time I get there, an air mail would probably beat me.

You know, if the next 18 months pass as quickly as the last three and a half have, I think I'm going to be pretty satisfied in the Corps.

Have you heard from any in my class last year? Murve and Don ought to be home by the time this gets there. Give Murve or his mom my address, and tell him to drop me a line as to where he is going. I'm pretty sure he will know in advance as to where he is headed. I hope it is to Pearl Harbor like us. There are several hundred Joes from Parris Island who have been waiting for more than a month to ship over and now total over 1,000 strong. They are in the 109th Replacement Draft. Guam, China, the Philippines, etc. to be scattered all over. There are only 50 of us Pearl Harbor replacements.⁸¹ We'll go on board before everyone else will, and we'll probably get all the mess duty and guard mounts for the whole trip. I guess it's about time I hit mess anyway, I've been lucky long enough.

If you see Leon, give him my new address because we don't have change of address cards to send out and I haven't time to write anymore. One of the next people I want to write to is Hank Bothwell. I'll bet he'll be surprised to learn I'm really going where I wanted to.

I'll write you from Pearl Harbor. I'm awfully glad I called you from Louisiana now since everyone's trying to call home at the last minute.

Write me soon and I'll do the same. I'll see ya later, Mom.

Yer keed,
Ray

⁸¹ For more on replacements during this period, see Tyson, *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1935-1946*, 130.

·2·

MIDWAY ISLAND, “THE ROCK”

Radar School Letters¹
10 October–29 December 1946

Now for the slightly unpleasant news. I'm not going to stay here at Pearl Harbor. About 35 of us are shipping out to Midway of all places. . . . From what we hear, we won't stay at Midway more than six months. I sure hope so. There are 2 small native tribes and 200 Marines. Population no more.

10 October 1946

Hi Mom,

We finally pulled in here last night about 2000. We are in very nice wooden barracks, chow this morning was on plates, and food was on dishes waiting to be devoured, just help yourself is the way now.

We had such an interesting trip; I could never start to tell you all that happened. After pulling out Friday night, I was seasick, so I threw up every time I got off my back. I'll just forget about those next two days. We

¹ According to Stice's Chronological Record of Duty Assignments, he was a corporal serving in this function from 19 June 1946 until 21 June 1948. However, there is no unit designation noted in the records. Maj Ray B. Stice, "Chronological Record of Duty Assignments," 19 June 1946–31 March 1970, Stice Family Records.

had movies every night (two different ones each night) until we had a fire the last night and burnt up the projector and films. It was quite a blaze. I helped pass the hose and fire extinguishers some.

Of all people, who do you suppose I saw the first night I got aboard? Jim Lustig! He went in with Carrol and Bill. We had a wonderful time together, believe me! He had just finished sea school at San Diego and they came out here to get assigned to a ship.² The last time I'd seen him was the second week I was at PI [Parris Island]. We ate together and really made up for lost time.

Now for the slightly unpleasant news, I'm not going to stay here at Pearl Harbor. About 35 of us are shipping out to Midway of all places. I thought I had a very good chance of going to a mechanics school, but that's out now. From what we hear, we won't stay at Midway more than six months. I sure hope so, there are 2 small native tribes and 200 Marines. Population no more.

We are right next to Hickam Field, planes zoom over every minute.³

We will stay here at Pearl Harbor at least four days and pull out Monday, because they said we'd stay over the weekend at least. I hope I get liberty so I can see a little bit of Honolulu.

They gave me back my application for a war bond allotment because I got shipped out. So, whenever I get settled someday, I'll either put it in again or ask for a voluntary allotment of almost \$40 a month. I won't need much money if I'm not going to stay here.

I'm sending my meal card and a sample of the news sheet we received on the ship. By the time I get out, I'll be I have a pretty good-size scrapbook made up.

My khaki's need ironing, so I better run while I can borrow one. I'll send you my address and give you the "scoop" just as soon as I possibly can.

I'll see ya, Mom.

Tell Lile and Dad and everybody hi!

² Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego is responsible for several training locations, including what has been called *sea school*, which prepares Marine detachments for service aboard Navy ships.

³ Hickam Field sits adjacent to the naval base at Pearl Harbor. It was established in 1935 as the region's primary Army Air Corps airfield and bomber base. See, "History of Hickam Field, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii," 15th Wing, Air Force, June 2010.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. If you call Jim's mother, tell her we will very likely stay for at least two months, because there are a lot of his sea-going outfit and they don't take them very often. They have only taken two out of the group that came a month ago. They even put eight of them with us.

He really looked fine too, especially to me.

Her address is:

Mrs. or Miss?

Florence Brown

904 West Clark St (next to Lincoln school)

Urbana, IL 7-2228



*They say the first six months here, you look at the gooney birds;
the second six months, the gooney birds look at you; and the
third six months, you look at each other and, by that time,
you're both crazy and probably draw up a marriage license.*

15 October 1946

1200 hours

Hi Mom,

Well, I guess I can safely say I'm finally settled down. We flew out of Ewa air station Saturday night, and it took us six hours to get here at Midway, more than 1,920 kilometers, I believe.⁴

Guess what? I'm in radar, no less. We have two types of radar school here: range finding for the 90 mm defense guns and airplane detection. This morning was our first "school day." We just sat around and shot the breeze about "preservice" days and called up a truck (one of the five or six on the island) to take us a kilometer back to the barracks. Some stuff!

They really go by the book here; pressed khakis and rifle inspection every day with haircuts, shined shoes, snappy bunch. I think there are only about 200 of us along with about 100 "swabbies" who run a small sub base. I guess they have an air strip too and a couple of planes.

For as well-known as this place is, the Midway Islands are the most

⁴ Marine Corps Air Station Ewa was located on Oahu, HI, approximately 11 kilometers from Pearl Harbor. It was officially closed in 1952.

forgotten far out of the way place in the world. We even have to send out fishing parties to get enough food for the mess hall. Chow is lousy, to say the least, but maybe I will learn to eat more foods as a result.

Swimming is wonderful with soft, cool sand, small waves, beautiful blue water, and stinging Portuguese man-of-war—little things that sting the hell out of you if you touch the strings hanging from them.⁵

I can expect to be stuck here the rest of my enlistment, because the average tour of duty here is at least 18 months. Oh well, I wanted something different, so here it is. I hope I can learn enough about radar and radio so it will do me some good when I get out.

I haven't had any mail or letters since just before I left on my boot camp furlough on 1 September, and the fellas say mail usually gets to you after you've been here four or five weeks. I don't know if you've been getting my letters or not, but I write every time I get a chance, which isn't very often anymore.

They say the first six months here, you look at the gooney birds; the second six months the gooney birds look at you; and the third six months you look at each other and, by that time, you're both crazy and probably draw up a marriage license.

It's a court-martial offense to molest any of the birds here; it's some refuge or something.⁶ They (the gooney birds) come in the barracks to sit and (what rhymes with it) on the deck and your sacks—more fun. You slap them on the head and they just sit there—dumb!

I'll send you some snapshots as soon as I borrow a camera.

How's the house coming? Is Lucile going with anyone in particular. I didn't get a chance to buy Dad anything for his birthday, because I didn't get liberty at Honolulu and every PX I've been to so far is pitifully understocked. Our PX here has just the bare necessities and not even ice cream or candy.

⁵ The Portuguese man-of-war is a species of jellyfish with neurotoxins that are released from their cells at contact. The sting is very painful but rarely deadly to humans.

⁶ Though still under the purview of the U.S. Navy, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge was officially established in 1988 to protect the region's natural, cultural, and historic resources. When Naval Air Facility Midway Island closed in 1993, the mission shifted from national defense to wildlife conservation. In 1996, full jurisdiction of the area was given to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 2000, the refuge was designated the Battle of Midway National Memorial. Nearly 3 million birds nest on Midway Atoll, including the world's largest population of albatrosses, nunulu (bonin petrels), and endangered koloa pōhaka (Laysan ducks).

Figure 22. Laysan Albatross (gooney bird) colony on Midway Atoll, where more than 1 million albatross return to breed annually



Source: Wieteke Holthuijzen.

I just want to wish you a very happy birthday, Dad, and I'm sorry I can't be home to do something besides write.

Lucile ought to be getting hooked by now—20 years old tisk, tisk. Happy birthday, Lile, anyway.

I'll write again when I get a chance.

Your loving one and only keed and brudder,

Ray

P.S. X on the snozzel for all of you. Tell Woody to write if he remembers how!



They are trying to make a radar operator out of me.

19 October 1946

Hi Dad,

Now it's my turn to send you letters from overseas! Like I wrote before,

Midway Island

Figure 23. Ray Stice poses in one of the many pineapple fields on Midway

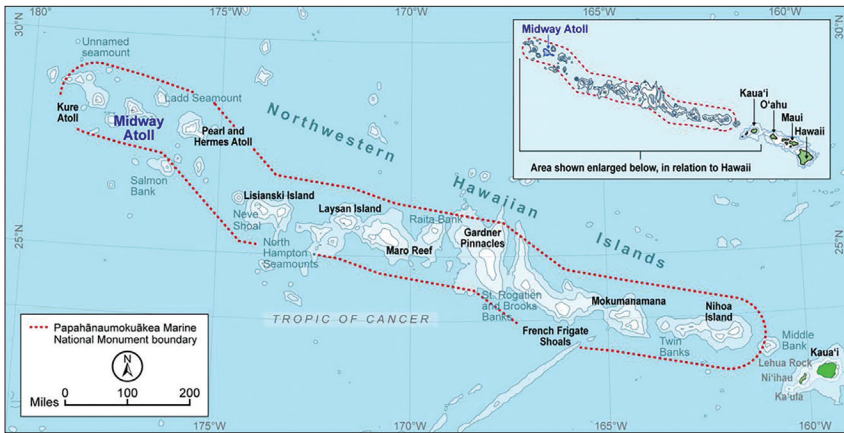


Source: Stice Family Collection.

they are trying to make a radar operator out of me. Before, it didn't sound interesting at all to me; but in the last week, I've found so many things I don't understand and want to find out what they are and what happens that I've changed my mind completely.

Yesterday, I even enrolled in the Marine Corps Institute (MCI) to take a course in "The Fundamentals of Electricity" so I might understand better some of the things that are taken for granted "as are," and for the

Figure 24. Map of Midway Atoll and the surrounding islands



Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, adapted by MCUP.

many things I can't explain. It's a correspondence course and you go just as fast as you want to or are capable.⁷

Also, I took out (finally) a war bond allotment of \$37.50 a month, which leaves me more than plenty and maybe I'll be able to send some additional money along.

Being Saturday morning, we had a big "colonels" inspection by the CO. You do a snappy inspection of arms and he looks you over. I was lucky, he just stepped on to the next Joe. Then a major stares you up and down, then a captain, then a sergeant major comes along with a pencil and paper and takes down the names of the guys who have something wrong. I happened to be very lucky in the respect that a guy from Michigan cut my hair last night and that they somehow didn't notice the button gone from my cuff in the right sleeve.

This week has passed very quickly. If the time goes this fast all the rest

⁷ The Marine Corps Institute was founded in 1920 as part of Marine Corps Barracks Washington, DC. It supported enlisted education, with a curriculum that included infantry strategy/tactics, leadership skills, MOS qualifications, personal finance, and mathematics. Coursework was often a requirement for promotion in enlisted ranks. In 2015, MCI evolved into the College of Distance Education and Training as part of Marine Corps University in Quantico, VA.

of the time and they really teach us something, duty won't be bad here at all.

Have you ever heard of the 270-type radar (stationary)? It has a 230-foot tower, a scope range about 209 kilometers.⁸ That is what we are learning on, or observing. Next month, we will start working on our Mark 20 Radar for search light direction.⁹ Its range is only 56 kilometers, I think, because all we do is find the plane and give the search lights the positions (two men run it). The lieutenant in charge says everything on the whole island is very obsolete, so maybe you've heard or worked with the same stuff before at the start of the war. There doesn't seem to be any secrecy about any of the installations of the island, what they are, so I don't think I'm stepping out of turn telling you what little I have.

How's about sending me a large box of vitamin pills. I'm not too particular, but this lousy chow is really something. Bread, toast, coffee, and water for breakfast. I can't see where I'm getting any good out of that kind of food, so I just want to keep stored up bodily. I just want to get all the vitamins I should.

Tell Mom not to throw my favorite overalls away. If I dye them, I can wear them here. I'll send a sample of what color dye will be needed so they will halfway match my dungaree jacket. That is just one way I can suggest (and hint) to get rid of my clothes. I got a new pair of shoes the other day, so I'm all set up now. When I can buy an iron, I'll have about everything I need. They don't have laundry or pressing service for us.

Our mail hasn't come yet, so I'm still waiting. Tell that big 20-(almost)-year-old sister of mine she better write me every once in a while.

I've got a lot of washing to do yet, and I want to go swimming this afternoon too, so I better close for the time being.

Take it easy, Dad, and have a nice time in the new house when it's done, and "Happy Birthday."

Your lovin son,
Ray

⁸ Midway had a SCR-270 radar station on the western end of the island known as Sand Island. The SCR-270 was one of the first early warning systems that could detect incoming air attacks. This system was in place on Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked. It had detected the incoming planes 45 minutes prior to the attack.

⁹ Mark 20 tracking radar operated between 1 and 2 gigahertz (ultra-high frequency) to provide range, azimuth, and elevation indications for searchlights on a selected target. It was developed at the end of World War II, predominantly in the Pacific theater.

P.S. Did I get your serial number right?

P.P.S. How about sending me some air mail stamps. We can't buy them here either.



I got the living hell scared out of me yesterday. . . . I was on top of the tower inspecting the antenna . . . over 150,000,000 amps running through the transmission lines and there's no telling how many volts were along with 'em. . . . I was afraid to touch the ground, thinking I had a lot of electricity stored up in my body. . . . Radar men shot himself in the hand night before last.

27 October 1946

Sunday, 1400 hours

Hi Mom, Dad, and Lile,

I'm in the guard house waiting to go on duty at 2000 tonight. This is the first time I've ever been an MP and had a .45. One of the smartest one of our Mark 20 radar men shot himself in the hand night before last. Nothing serious, but someone will get a court-martial for it one of these days.

Yesterday, I took a bunch of pictures of the island, 30 in all. They will come back to me next Sunday. I doubt if they are too good because they are so small, but I'll send them along anyway.

We are all getting used to the routine now, so all these inspections are not as bad as they were at first, at least they seem more natural, and we don't gripe about them anymore.

The chow is better this week because a ship came in a few days ago. We even had real eggs and turkey today. I didn't like the eggs, but I ate some anyway.

We will get paid in a couple of weeks, I guess. My payroll amounts to \$92.50 or something close to that, and I'm only going to take \$30 of it leaving \$62.60 in. I'll get that out in back pay when I get out. My war bond allotment won't start till November or maybe even December. In the last four months, I've saved \$100.10, and that is in keeping with what I planned out in boot camp. So, if I don't spend any more than I have, which seems impossible, I'll have quite a nice roll when I get out.

We've had quite a lot of excitement as far as the airplanes go. In the last week, more than \$40,500,000 in gold has flown through here in three

installments. Two \$20,000,000s and one \$500,000. From the Far East somewhere. There's nothing secret about it now anyway.¹⁰ Next Wednesday, we're having some vice admiral come visit the islands for something and I'm going to be part of the MP [military police] honor guard to greet the ole boy. Big thrill.

I made an 81 on a radar test the other day, "which is very good considering how short a time we've been here," says the lieutenant in charge.

I got the living hell scared out of me yesterday. I was on top of the tower inspecting the antenna for the lieutenant when I heard something humming then some other queer noises and all of a sudden, the antenna started to revolve and make a sweep. By then, I was wondering why I wasn't dead. All the steel parts are all connected, with more than 150,000,000 amps running through the transmission lines, and there's no telling how many volts were along with 'em. Then as I climbed down 207 feet, I was afraid to touch the ground thinking I had a lot of electricity stored up in my body, so I just jumped down the last foot and nothing happened. The lieutenant said nothing would have happened as long as I didn't touch the transmission lines and then I'd only have been burned a little. I asked which ones of the many lines were the transmission lines and lo and behold if I wasn't standing right next to them when it first started to move. More fun!

I'm going to make some kind of a radio next week if I can find the right parts. Tell Richard that if he remembers, one day he told me a lot about different kinds of tubes and explained a lot that I didn't know about radios, what little I've remembered has made it much easier to understand what the lieutenant tries to teach us. Couldn't he (Richard) get a job repairing radios somewhere? It's a shame that he knows so much and can't use that knowledge.

Did Lucile like her choker? Or can't she use it? I wish I could have found Dad something. Half our radar equipment has "U.S. Army Radar Set etc. Redesigned at Fort Monmouth, NJ, Signal Corps School" or

¹⁰ See, for example, ENS John L. Dettbarn, USN, "Gold Ballast: War Patrol of USS Trout," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 86, no. 1 (January 1960); and LtCol Frank O. Hough, Maj Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, *History of U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II: Peral Harbor to Guadalcanal*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1958).

something to that effect written on the sides of the panels.¹¹ Maybe Dad had something to do with them?

It's been two months since I've received any mail whatsoever from anyone! Someday, it will catch up with me, I guess. I wish it would hurry up though, it's kind of nice to hear from home once in a while, you know. I guess Dad was in the same fix when he went over in 1941.

I'll write later on, People.

Ye one and only keed and brother,
Ray



*Since that fella shot himself in the hand, I've been having
"school" on the .45. I can take it apart and put it together
blindfolded now, I think.*

31 October 1946
0955 hours

Hi People,

I'm on MP duty again. I guess I'll get it every four days from now on. The admiral's plane came in on schedule okay, and he no more than stepped off the ladder than he inspected us. He said we had a "pretty snappy guard." He should have seen us in boot camp if he thought that was snappy! As long as he was pleased and the colonel was too, everything's okay and maybe things will be a little easier around here. About five minutes after his plane came in, another plane carrying a small USO troupe landed. The dames even served our supper chow, and the show they put on was the funniest, craziest, burlesque show I've ever seen. The gals looked good, and the men were terrific. The acts sailed right on without any breaks. They are going to make a complete tour of the Pacific, I guess. The admiral looked just like one of those movie stars (I mean his arrival).

¹¹ Fort Monmouth, NJ, was one of the original homes to the U.S. Army Signal Center and School. See, Susan Thompson, "Major Changes to Signal School-50 Years Ago This Month," Army.mil, 24 March 2023. Established in 1917, the curriculum included physical training, dismounted drill, pitching tents, first aid, cryptography, heliograph, semaphore and wig-wag. When the final class graduated in 1976, training focused on operating, repairing, managing, and engineering satellite and computerized systems for global communications.

He jumped out of the plane spry as a 10-year-old, no field scarf, mussed clothes, but *** [three stars] on each collar. He surprised me as to how young he looked. Tall too, I bet he was 6'2" or 6'3" at least. He reminded me of General Douglas MacArthur. I never will forget the way he looked into my eyes, quickly but long enough to seem as if he said, "How are ya, Son?" or something like it. I guess he leaves this morning.

Tonight is Halloween and Dad's Birthday! I've gotta stand a four-hour post from 2400 to 0400 instead of raising a little hell like the kids back home. But I guess that's the way life goes; one day you do one thing, the next you move on and do something entirely different. One of these days, I hope to get some mail. All of us radar-searchlight guys are in the same boat. No mail for two months.

Since that fella shot himself in the hand, I've been having "school" on the .45. I can take it apart and put it together blindfolded now, I think. He ought to be back with us next week.

By now, I've met a lot of the sailors and Seabees, going to their show and gym, etc. I think all this difference between sailors and Marines is ignorant. (Is that the right use of the word Dad?) We all work together, choke on beer together, and whatever else comes up and we actually are part of the Navy anyway!

Those pictures I took last week didn't get developed, so I guess I'll just send the rolls along and you can have them developed and send me a set of prints.

The other night, I finally learned how to solder correctly. I'm going to send a wire home to put in my scrapbook. You can really see an improvement between the first and second try.

It's pretty hot right now. I'm about to sweat my shirt right off my back.

I can't think of anything interesting to tell you about anymore because we just do the same thing or nothing interesting happens. The time flies like jet propulsion though, thank the Lord.

I'll see ya, People,

Ray

P.S. Write soon!



Tomorrow, I'm going to take a radar test to decide whether I'll be one of 3 out of 20 to go back to Pearl Harbor for four months

Figure 24. Ray Stice in an aviator's hat, hinting at his future as a pilot



Source: Stice Family Collection.

to go to a Radar Technicians School, so I've been studying all afternoon.

3 November 1946

Hi Mom,

Yesterday, my first two letters came! One from you written on 22 and 23 October and one from Jean Ash (Danville) from her school in Oklahoma. I was glad and relieved to hear from someone finally.

Tomorrow, I'm going to take a radar test to decide whether I'll be one of 3 out of 20 to go back to Pearl Harbor for four months to go to a Radar Technicians School, so I've been studying all afternoon and all I can think of are [P,~,Q, _^_, R, K @, ~] and such.¹²

We are making an athletic field, and yesterday we started clearing the field of weeds, trees, rats, birds, and junk steel. Being Saturday, it was supposed to be our day off. But who are we to question, so about 1600 a jeep drove up with 10 cases stacked on its hood. Then a sailor brought out a can opener and the mad rush for a line started. You can bet I wasn't very far back from the head of it either. Beer—free beer—pop, pop, pop as each can was cut open and everyone grabbed a can before it could foam all out. All in all, at least 20 cases of free beer (at least \$48 worth of beer) was passed out. The line looked like this can opener and start of line . . . just one complete circle of swabbies and Marines, and the noncoms couldn't have a drop because they just supervised and didn't do any work. I swear, I've never seen anything or heard anything such as that before in all my life. I wish someone had taken a picture of it.¹³

Also yesterday, my MCI course on electricity came so I've gotta start studying now. I'll never have to worry about not doing anything. I mean just losing time. My time is so completely taken up now, it isn't funny. Like today on Sunday. Set up at 0600 and eat. Come back and clean up and wash clothes all morning, borrow an iron, dry some of them, and eat at 1205. Then I came back and studied for three hours. Now, I'm here writing this. When I finish here, I'll go get a Coke or clean my rifle then

¹² Stice inserted hand-drawn radar symbols.

¹³ Beer presented a challenge in the Pacific theater during and after the war. The heat and humidity affected the taste and storage life of the final product. Max Hauptman, "This Warship Was Converted into a Floating Brewery for Allied Troops during World War II," *Task & Purpose*, 10 May 2022.

eat at 1700 and at 1800, I'll start my MCI course and hit the sack around 2000 and get a good night's sleep. Not even time for church this morning. It was raining all day anyway. Everything can (and usually is) be planned, so you have plenty of time to do a certain thing and then move on and do something else.

We get paid this week. I'm going to sell my gold Marine ring. It isn't exactly the right fit, and I can sell it for the same price I paid for it, so maybe I can send that extra money home. Will \$30 buy all three of you some kind of a present for Christmas? Especially Dad because I couldn't get him a present for his birthday. I'll send it along if I sell my ring this week, and you think up what ought to be done with it.

How old is Dad now? I'm not exactly sure whether it's 52 or 53 or what.

They have some nice irons for \$7 at the PX. I saw some like them at Parris Island for \$14! I'm going to try to get one. I sure can use it, Lord only knows.

You ought to see the candy and cigarettes they sell here—mold and mildew all over! The only good things are peanuts and marshmallows (when they are available) and Life Savers.¹⁴ I guess we weren't sent over here just to smoke (which I don't) and eat pogy bait so, to heck with them.

What school is Lee in? College or high school? I'll probably hear from him next week.

I'll close now and write more later when something else happens.

Yer one and only,

Ray

P.S. That sounds like I'm bragging doesn't it?

P.P.S. Well, I am.



Last week, two fellas got caught sleeping on ship watch out on the docks. One pleaded guilty and got five days bread and water and fined \$40. The other lied and got 40 days bread and water

¹⁴ Life Savers were first introduced in 1912 as a summer candy because it was not susceptible to heat like the more popular chocolate bars of the day. As a result, many of the candy manufacturers at the time donated their sugar rations to ensure that Life Savers could still be made to support the war effort and boost troop morale.

*and fined \$120 bucks! I can understand why they stepped out
of the wind and rain, but sleeping is something else.*

10 November 1946

Sunday

Hi People,

This morning, I had my breakfast in bed—no fooling. My buddy from Pennsylvania brought me two oranges and two pieces of cake. Being Sunday and the U.S. Marine Corps' anniversary, I slept late. This noon, we're going to have ham sandwiches, beer, Hawaiian Cokes, and cake, sitting table fashion and no long chow lines or anything.¹⁵

We just had a spurt of excitement when one of the fellas opened a desk drawer and a huge rat jumped at him. After a mad chase around the barracks, some Joe hit it with a book, and I closed in with a deadly Coke bottle and the fun was over. We were going to put it in one of the guys pillow slips, but the majority ruled so, "Out the Window He Must Go."

Yesterday, I had three mild surprises: a letter from Mom written on Dad's birthday with all the snapshots in it, we got paid, and I sold my ring for \$25. I only paid \$28.20 for it and the setting had been scratched, so all's well that ends well.

Starting when you receive this, will you number your letters? A lot of the fellows get numbered letters and you'd be surprised how many are missing.

We had a colonel's rifle inspection at 0900 yesterday that passed off nicely and then we had a surprise "on the sack clothing inspection." The little major officiated this one. He made two favorable comments while he was in the squad room: "Have the others take a good look at your sack, Brueser" (our corporal NCO) and "That's very good, Stice." I about fell over, no kidding! I tried to say, "Thank you, Sir," but my collar was too tight and I was almost choked, so my lips moved by themselves. That's the first time I've ever gotten acknowledgment for doing something right since I've joined up. One Joe from Texas found a cap and put it on dis-

¹⁵ The tradition of celebrating the Marine Corps' anniversary is typically done with a formal presentation that includes the reading of Gen John A. Lejeune's 1921 birthday message and a birthday cake, cut by a ceremonial sword, where the oldest Marine present is served the first piece of cake and then passes a piece of cake to the youngest Marine present.

play. The major looked at the name inside of it and it belonged to the sergeant who was taking down names for EPD (extra police duty). He asked the sergeant if it was his and he said yes. Texas is in the brig now doing five days bread and water. I see how they keep the brig so full now.

Last week, two fellas got caught sleeping on ship watch out on the docks. One pleaded guilty and got five days bread and water and fined \$40. The other lied and got 40 days bread and water and fined \$120 bucks!¹⁶ I can understand why they stepped out of the wind and rain, but sleeping is something else.

Four of our boys got PFC [private first class] stripes yesterday. One of them is only 16 years old, but they've all been in 7-9 months.

I can sure use an iron. I'll be glad when mine comes. Maybe it's a good thing we couldn't buy any if you sent me one.

I've got some work waiting for me to do, so I reckon I'll close now.

I'll be seein ya, People,
Ray



We have good officers when they're off duty. . . . None of them would have us do anything they wouldn't do. They are all pretty fine men as far as we can tell. As officers, there's none better or more military or strict. They are in closer contact with their men than any naval officers I have yet to see.

14 November 1946

Hi Mom,

Well, some people have their ups, and some have their downs. It seems I had my accumulated downs all at once this morning. I was out on the antenna cutting some bolts way out on the edge of a bay (cross bar). My bolt was severed but the pieces didn't separate so I kicked them loose. They parted and all of a sudden, I was flying. I hit the deck a few seconds later when a board I was sitting on hit me in the head as I got up. Almost made a hole in the roof, but I only fell about 25 feet. I gotta thank you for giving me such a limber body, especially my head, or I'd have probably broken

¹⁶ For reference, \$40 in 1946 equates to approximately \$645 in 2024; \$120 in 1946 equates to approximately \$1,933 in 2024.

my neck. All I did was cut my hand and knee. I landed on my right side and can point out a bruise for every square inch of it. My nose feels like it did right after the operation, but it's okay.¹⁷

The major was driving up just as I started my short cut to the deck. The same guy that gave us our inspection Saturday. He drove me over to sick bay and some Navy officer gave me a very complete check. They sure don't take any chances.

What happened was this . . .

It's afternoon now. We took the rest of the tower apart and folded it up and disconnected all the power lines so all that is left is a crane to lift it off the building roof. This afternoon, I learned how to operate a power winch, and how to disconnect the receiver, keyer, transmitter, and transmission lines. Like I gave a speech in my last year, experience is the best teacher.

When we secured at 1600, we started up a sandlot football game down on the beach (the whole island is almost a beach). I refereed for a while, then the lieutenant came out and wanted to play, so I thought if he could play, I could too, so I'm really sore now.

Don't get this SCR-270 we're working with today confused with the 270 on the 200-foot tower. They're one-quarter of a mile apart. We haven't started work on it because the Navy is going to take it over sometime.

We have good officers when they're off duty, the "ole man" colonel picked up a missed grounder for me in baseball yesterday. The "shorty" major comes around and watches us play, work, and helps out. "To hell with my uniform," says he, as he grabs a rope. The captains both play baseball with us and one gets drunk with us too—"Slim"—and two or three or the lieutenants do all the dirty work and play ball with us. None of them would have us do anything they wouldn't do. They are all pretty fine men as far as we can tell. As officers, there's none better or more military or strict. They are in closer contact with their men than any naval officers I have yet to see. Of course, there aren't so many of us, maybe 200, so I guess a lot of coolness can be forgotten or at least set aside temporarily. The Marines are in three groups: Headquarters and Service (typists, mechanics, etc.), Alpha Battery (90 mm guns), and Charley Battery (searchlight and radar). Those good for nothing salty Airedales don't count with

¹⁷ When Stice was in high school, a car accident required surgery on his nose.

us linemen.¹⁸ There must be more than 100 of them, and more come in every week.

It's about 1800 and I've got some washing, an MCI lesson, and a couple of letters to write, so I guess I'll close, Mom. Clyde wrote me.

On guard the other night, some gook raided our meat locker.¹⁹ We got four rounds off at him. Another MP also saw him, but it was pretty dark at 0300 and they run like rabbits anyway. He won't be so lucky next time. A gook is a native (imported by Pan Am), in case you thought he was an animal or anything.²⁰

The gooneys are starting to lay their eggs. "Winter" is here.

I'll see ya, Ole Gal,

Ray

P.S. I decided Ole Gal wasn't so nice I guess, so I apologize.

P.P.S. Texas walked in free again. I guess he won't find anymore hats. We've been here over a month, and I've gotten four letters. Not too bad, I guess.

Did the money make it there okay?



It's funny how my mind changes. When I came in, I wanted to fight things and wanted to resist, but now you take things as they come more or less and accept them as they are and think how they could be worse or different. . . . There goes colors. It sure is beautiful. They're right outside the window. The flag slowly settling down to the Earth as the bugle plays. Now it's over, and the trucks gun their engines and smoke off.

¹⁸ The term *salty Airedales* refers to salty (cranky) dogs or servicemembers with more time in service.

¹⁹ The term *gook* is defined by Merriam-Webster as "an insulting and contemptuous term for a non-White, non-American person and especially for an Asian person." Though its origin has not been documented, the military use may date to U.S. Marine Corps participation in the Philippine-American War (1899–1913).

²⁰ Pan American Airlines (Pan Am) was incredibly active as a civilian contracted company to create transportation lines between the United States and the Pacific. In this context, Stice is likely referring to the fact that Pan Am had set up a refueling station on Midway to support these efforts. See, Megan E. Springate, "Pan American Airways on the Home Front in the Pacific," National Park Service, accessed 6 August 2024.

November 1946
1800 hours

Hi People!

I don't know how long I can keep up this every four days writing right on schedule, because even though I'll try to write every four days or so, the letters don't leave here till after they've been written three days sometimes. The planes don't go and come regularly.

Instead of bringing us mail and our long-awaited pay, yesterday's plane brought 30 more men, all Airedales, so to hell with them. We haven't been paid in over a month and a half and everybody but two others and I are flat broke; but we are too, as far as they are concerned.

Two days ago, 25 planes flew in from a CVE [escort aircraft carriers] or something. Anyway, it was an aircraft carrier, and it was quite a spectacle watching them land from up on the tower (radar). You could sure tell they were used to landing on a carrier the way they dropped to the closest end of the strip. All brand new Vought F4U Corsairs.

I did miss that test the other day after all, but I found out later that that isn't to be the only one. I guess the lieutenant is going to average all of the tests together some day in the far future and pick the three to go. The more I think about it, the more I think I'm better off at "Mighty Midway" than at Pearl. This isn't so bad when you get used to things.

Our slop chute is all dolled up now—fresh paint, nice soft chairs, tables, a sort of bar, gooney birds, emblems stenciled all over, and a few very good drawings painted in the bulkhead. Also, a jukebox is continually playing records long buried and forgotten, so no nickels are wasted on it—it's automatic.²¹

This morning, I mailed in another MCI lesson (number 2). I figure the quicker I learn the course, the quicker I can understand the radar better.

Someday, I'll get those films on the way to you; here almost two weeks have gone by, and they are still in my locker.

Tomorrow, I've got the worst guard watch there is—a ship watch. I've

²¹ Jukeboxes originated in the late 1880s, with the first patented design by Louis Glass in 1889. The 1940s saw the machines reach their heyday. In fact, the term *jukebox* derived from the reference to juke joints, which originated from Gullah culture with the word *juke*, which means rowdy, disorderly, or wicked.

Figure 25. Vought F4U-4B Corsairs of Fighter Squadrons 113 and 114 aboard USS *Philippine Sea* (CV 47), ca. October 1945



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

gotta stand guard over a ship load of beer from 0800 to 1200 and 2000 to 2400 tomorrow night, plus the chow reliefs to some other MPs. Altogether, by Saturday morning, I'll have stood at least 10 hours of watch. Before on the other posts, I was the only one on my post for a four-hour watch. Now we carry, U.S. M1 Carbines, .30-caliber. They are the "pea shooters" that I wrote you about from the range on PI. I guess the .45-caliber Colts aren't accurate enough, and they won't fire so many rounds.²² I don't care, as long as I don't get any grease or cosmoline on my uniform.²³

In a month or so, I ought to have a pretty nice brown tan. Every afternoon, we have some form of athletics. Yesterday, it was football and baseball, and today we played volleyball. It's a lot of fun when everybody gets in the mood, and everyone has a pretty good time. That kind of program is one hell of a lot better than early morning calisthenics and warm-ups,

²² Stice is likely referring to the Automatic Pistol, Caliber .45, M1911A1.

²³ *Cosmoline* refers to an oil-based corrosion inhibitor commonly used by the military to protect weapons.

and we get more exercise besides looking at it as sports and fun instead of “calisthenics” and “physical drill.”

You said the days are getting shorter. They are here too. It’s only 1830 and the sun will be down by 1900. It doesn’t rise till about 0635, when we’re coming back from chow.

It’s funny how my mind changes. When I came in, I wanted to fight things and wanted to resist, but now you take things as they come more or less and accept them as they are and think how they could be worse or different.

This Marine Corps is naturally fouled up, as the Army and Navy is too, but it isn’t too bad it seems.

In my last letter, I wrote that I was selling my ring and was going with to send about \$30 home. Well maybe I’ll be able to and maybe not. The Joe who wanted it changed his mind, so I’m looking for someone else. Time will tell.

There are so many hundreds of things I’d like to tell anyone and can’t think of them at the right time. Never before would I think of writing a five-page letter.

There goes colors. It sure is beautiful. They’re right outside the window, with the flag slowly settling down to the Earth as the bugle plays. Now it’s over, and the trucks gun their engines and smoke off.

If you (any of you) ever find time, get a copy of *Up Front* by Bill Maudlin (Willy and Joe, the dogfaces). That book describes everything we feel over here better than we could write it, even though it’s about the Army in Europe and has a little action in it.²⁴

I’ll see ya in my dreams, People.

Yer one and only keed and brother,

Ray



I’m pretty sure of what I want to do for my future. I would like to be a Marine officer somehow. I don’t want to be an Army or

²⁴ Bill Maudlin was an Army infantry sergeant and cartoonist who created the comic strip “Up Front” for *Stars and Stripes* during World War II. Willy and Joe represented the soldiers on the front lines, including all their trials and tribulations. The book, *Up Front*, is a biography of Maudlin that includes many of his best cartoons, images from the front, and a look at the private life of a soldier who threw caution to the wind to tell the story of the Greatest Generation. Bill Maudlin, *Up Front* (New York: n.p., 1945).

*a naval officer, but I'll take one of the two as second choice. I
hope Dad won't feel too bad about my choice.*

22 November 1946

1300 hours

Hi Mom,

I haven't heard from anyone in more than a week but maybe the mailman will be better to me today. The weatherman sure wasn't. This morning I stood ship watch out on the pier and it rained to beat hell for two hours.

The other night about 90-100 gooney birds were killed and now the 2200 curfew is in effect again and the slop chute stops selling beer at 1930 and closes at 2000 as a result. When I was guarding the ship (a tanker), the colonel, the major, a captain, a lieutenant, and a corporal came aboard to pull a surprise inspection on the crew to find out if they had anything to do with the dead birds. They boarded 15 minutes before sailing time and came off 3 hours later. The ship sails tomorrow, they (the crew) hopes. They are going to make a nonstop trip to the states. It should take them about 10 days. They've been all over the Pacific, Japan, China, and Australia, and will be home for Christmas.

While the officers were aboard, the two stern lines parted, and the boat almost started on its own. All in all, we had quite a bit of excitement as compared to the usual guard duty. I go on again from 2000 to 2400 again tonight. I wish I had kept track of the number of hours of guard duty I've had. I bet it will be quite a bit by the time I get out.

Will you please send me a new point for my pen. It is Esterbrook and the point always digs into the paper. I can't buy one here.²⁵

I'm pretty sure of what I want to do for my future. I would like to be a Marine officer somehow. I don't want to be an Army or a naval officer, but I'll take one of the two as second choice. I hope Dad won't feel too bad about my choice.

I read where Congress is appointing a lot of schools to take the over-

²⁵ Esterbrook Pen Company specialized in dip and fountain pens. Created in 1868 by an English immigrant in New Jersey, it operated until 1971.

load from Annapolis.²⁶ Could you or Dad find out which schools these are? I do know one thing, the summer I get discharged, I want to buy a motorcycle and take a tour of the northwest. It's the only part of the states that I haven't been to, and after two years of being tied down and the prospect of the next 20–30 years in the Service, I want to have a little fun. Then I will be ready for school sometime that fall, I hope.

By now, I imagine you are living in the new house. Do you like it as well as you expected to or are you disappointed? Did it cost anymore (if possible) than you figured on at first?

Is Jean Latimer living at the house with Lucile. I often think about her.

If you see Leon, cuss him out for me properly! I haven't heard from him in three months (a letter).

There is a lazy good for nothing so and so in our outfit that I went through boot camp with. I swear, he's never done a lick of work in his life except read, play tennis, and get fat. He was supposed to help me clean out a warehouse yesterday, and he was doping off as usual. I got hot and told him off but good. He wouldn't fight, but he was so upset that he actually did his share of the job. I can't see how big guys like him can be so worthless at times.

As far as radar goes, I don't know any more than I did when I last wrote except what little we learned while dismantling and crating up machinery. They have some civilian technicians out here putting most of the radar into better working condition. I hope they have time to look at our Mark 20 sets before they leave.

²⁶ The end of the war marked a time to trouble and highlighted the need for change at the Naval Academy. Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal submitted a plan to convert the academy into a two-year postgraduate commissioning school for those who had already completed three years of college. A board, headed by RAdm James L. Holloway, considered options that might increase the Navy officer corps, including Forrestal's plan. Ultimately, the Navy proposed expanding the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps at civilian colleges and universities to fill the manpower gap. It was approved by Congress and offered scholarships and stipends to students in programs at more than 50 schools in exchange for two years of service after graduation. The new NROTC program would produce as many officers as the Naval Academy (and eventually more) and made it possible to preserve the academy as a four-year academic institution. John Derrell Sherwood, "Winds of War, Winds of Change: The U.S. Naval Academy during the World War II Era," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, 2 October 2020; and 79th Cong., Pub. L. No. 729, 1946.

Starting 1 December, we have to wear our green trousers if it's too cool, but thank the Lord we don't have to wear our blouses!

It's hard to believe that three months ago there were only 20 Marines here and now there's more than 350! And more coming all the time. During the war, there were 3,000 of them. God only knows where they stayed—probably in bird holes! The majority of the 350 are no good Aire-
dales.²⁷

I'm going to try to get some sleep now. I sure won't get any tonight. So, please tell everyone to write, and I'll see ya later, Mom.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Did I tell you about the iron you sent me? You sent it by Railway Express!²⁸ That was just fine as far as San Francisco; but there, the land ends and water is the means of travel, and the day hasn't come yet that a train has water wings. So, they held it and sent me a card telling me about it. The only thing I could do was to tell them to send it back to you, so you ought to get it one of these days. Maybe it will get here by fourth class mail or something. I can buy a good \$14 one here for \$7.50 at the PX if it gets lost on the way. Oh well, try again and we'll all keep our fingers crossed and hope it gets here.

I'll see ya, Mom,

Ray

P.P.S. Another request, can you send me some airmail stickers to put on envelopes? I've run out and they make a letter look much more colorful when I write to my gal, if you get what I mean. And how about those pictures from Duncan Eurbbers?

Good bye for now,

Me



²⁷ For more on the history, development, and Marine presence on Midway, see LtCol Robert D. Heinl, *Marines at Midway* (Washington, DC: Historical Section, Division of Public Information, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1948).

²⁸ The U.S. Postal Service was the only carrier at the time allowed by law to transport letters. The Railway Express Agency was one of several commercial carrier companies who transported larger packages across the country via the expansive railway system.

We are still playing cowboy and Indians, only with real stolen trucks, and real orders to shoot when positive or in doubt.

27 November 1946

1600 hours

Hi Mom,

Where's that letter Dad was supposed to have written me? Mail service isn't any good here at all. It's been two weeks since I've heard from any of you.

My wisdom teeth decided to make me smart all at once and all four of them started raising hell, especially the lowers. They are all the way in now. The tops just have a good start. One of them (lower) got infected somehow, and I couldn't chew for the last four days or sleep for four nights. But the dentist has been treating it each morning, and I could eat comfortably today and slept last night when I got off guard. So, he won't have to pull it like he wanted to at first. I have good teeth, and I want to keep them, thanks to you and Dad.²⁹

I did pretty well economically this month. If I hadn't bought a fur-lined jacket for \$5, I would have only spent \$6! Soap, toothpaste, beer, peanuts, Cokes, and everything for only \$6.

Someone said I have a package down at the mail room. Right now, I can't find out. I don't have anything on!

Bill Stephens wrote me. It tickles me to see him stuck at PI. I wish we could all be stationed at the same place.

The temperature is about 85° or 87° now. I'm getting used to tropical weather. It will be hard to get accustomed to cool weather when I get out.

Last night on guard about 2330, I saw someone running across the road about 50 yards ahead of me. I slid my carbine off my shoulder, whistled "Halt" as loud as I could, and started running. I yelled, "Halt," a second time and almost knocked down a sailor standing in my way. I was

²⁹ The U.S. Navy Dental Corps was established by Congress in 1912 to deploy with Marine Expeditionary Units much like medical corpsmen. At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, there were approximately 800 Navy dentists. By the end of World War II, there were more than 7,000 dental servicemembers who produced and deployed the first mobile, self-contained operating units to bring dental care to isolated areas. See R.W. Elliott Jr., "Organization of the Navy Dental Corps," *International Dental Journal* 25, no. 4 (December 1975): 266-75.

so surprised that the other guy got away. This swabbie had on his blues, and I don't think he was even breathing he was so scared. I hadn't even seen him before. I told him to take it easy and asked where was he going. (There is a very strict curfew on.) He was really shaking. I can imagine myself in his spot. I'll bet I'd be shaking too. I took his name and let him go. He worked at Pan Am.

I had been stopping all vehicles too, as our orders said to after 2000, and this one truck just came on. So, I politely stepped aside and was just about to load the ole "bean" when I saw the red paint on the back of it. The fire trucks on Midway don't have sirens, I discovered. We are still playing cowboy and Indians, only with real stolen trucks, and real orders to shoot when positive or in doubt.

On the back of my next letter, I'll draw a picture of our Mark 20. Maybe Dad has worked with them or seen them before.

I've got to close now, so keep writing, People. You too, Lile!

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Could you send me some Colgate toothpaste. They only have one kind here and I don't particularly like it, although I use it. It's really funny. Everyone smells the same because they only have one aftershave lotion at a time, one toothpaste. While it's really the shipping shortage to here, it is ironically GI—one for all and all for one.



*Tomorrow, I'm going to see the sergeant major to see if I can
interview the captain to get a recommendation from the colonel
to go to Pearl Harbor to take an OCS test!*

1 December 1946

Hi Mom,

Your package and letter came yesterday. You must have been reading my mind when you sent the toothpaste and ironing cloth. I need both and put the rag into instant use, because today green pants are the uniform of the day. The vitamins won't be put into use right now because we've been getting very good chow lately; but next month when the food runs low, they will help out a great deal.

The cigarettes ought to last me all the rest of my time on this sandpile.

Midway Island

And they have a stateside flavor that these 5-cent packs here don't have.

Between yours and Lucile's candy, I'm pretty well stacked up for the future.

Tomorrow, I'm going to see the sergeant major to see if I can interview the captain to get a recommendation from the colonel to go to Pearl Harbor to take an OCS [Officer Candidates School] test! There are two of us who want to be officers someday, and if I get a recommendation (which he already has) we are going to study and cram together for the exam. Getting past the sergeant major will be like getting an appointment to see the president. But there's not too much harm in trying. Wish me luck, because I'll be needing it.

I'm glad the money got there, and I'm sorry I can't send you any Christmas cards. But unless the PX gets some at the last minute, you'll have to do without.

We get paid again next Saturday. Time sure flies past. Did that war bond from Pendleton ever get home? It was for \$50. You never mentioned it in your letters. Have my bond allotments started yet?

I'll write more next time.

Yours,
Ray



Wouldn't you be surprised if I came home on furlough on my way to a college out East to go to school and came out a Marine officer? So would I! But that's what I'm going to start working toward tomorrow. It's a long hard road to becoming an officer, and I'm going to try it anyway.

1 December 1946
0905 hours

Hi Lucile,
How's my big sister? Is school keeping you busy all the time, or do you still have plenty of dates?

I want to thank you ever so much for the box of pogie bait. That is the thing we never see around here, so I value it very much. I eat one bar a day, so they ought to last for a while if the others don't find out about them.

Yesterday, five of us went underwater swim fishing. We caught a big spined fish that filled itself full of water and blew up as big as a basketball! It had two-inch thorns sticking out like a porcupine. I swear it was a scary looking thing under water. We gipped it with a spear-like rod.³⁰ I was going to go again today, but I'm on guard duty. The water is really cold at first, but you get used to it and it seems warm. We use underwater masks and sometimes rubber fins for your feet, but they wear you out. The ocean is like a lake and just as clear in the lagoon, so it's nice for swimming.

Is Jean Latimer there at the house. She owes me a letter if I'm not wrong. I think I wrote her from PI and never got an answer. Everyone else has almost stopped writing. When a person leaves, people soon stop thinking about them. Even Lee hasn't written (Woody to you, Gal).

Last night, *A Night in Casablanca* with the Marx Brothers was here.³¹ It really was a scream. The theater is outdoors between two wings of our barracks, and every once and a while birds come and sit on your shoulder and often do something that rhymes with it. The next morning, the deck is littered with dead birds, tisk, tisk.

We listened to the Army/Navy game yesterday on a Joes shortwave. I only got the final score—good for Army! Even though I'm part of the Navy, I still am glad to see West Point beat them.³²

Wouldn't you be surprised if I came home on furlough on my way to a college out East to go to school and came out a Marine officer? So would I! But that's what I'm going to start working toward tomorrow. It's a long hard road to becoming an officer, and I'm going to try it anyway.

Write soon and ask Latimer too if she isn't married or something.

³⁰ Stice is likely referring to a species of pufferfish or blowfish common in the tropical waters of the Pacific islands. Spiny pufferfishes or porcupine fishes have sharp spines that cover their body. The spines are actually modified scales and lay flat against the body most of the time. When the fish is frightened or in defensive mode, it inflates with water causing the spines to stand erect on the nearly spherical body.

³¹ *A Night in Casablanca*, directed by Archie Mayo (Los Angeles, CA: United Artists, 1946). The Marx Brothers—Groucho, Harpo, Gummo, Zeppo, and Chico—were an American comedy family known for their work on Broadway and vaudeville.

³² Official records of the annual Army-Navy football game date back to 1890. The record stands at: total games: 124; Army wins: 55; Navy wins: 62; and tie games: 7. The 1946 game was placed at Municipal Stadium in Philadelphia, PA, with Army winning 21-18. See "Army-Navy Game Scores," Naval History and Heritage Command, 11 December 2023.

Yer one and only ha-ha (brother that is!),

Ray

P.S. Did I get your address any near right?

P.P.S. Who's your fella of the present or are you satisfied with one yet?



One of our boys from C Battery fell asleep last night on GSK watch (ship). The Corporal of the guard got his rifle before he woke up and now, he's PAL waiting on a summary court-martial. He just made PFC. It's his own fault for sitting down though, so I guess he won't do that again for quite a while.

5 December 1946

0935 hours

Hi Mom,

Last night, I got letter number two but not number one. I didn't think I was getting all your letters. Thanks loads for the clippings. That slightly burned me up to read about Carol getting to go home, but he's an Airedale, so breaks like that are to be expected. Bennett probably will get home for Christmas too. Do you know his address?

I got a swell letter from Maxine Knapp. She's at Stillwater, Oklahoma. Jean Ash is at Enid, Oklahoma. I hope they never meet and compare notes—whee!

Today, two generals and an admiral are flying in. I'm on guard duty, so I won't have to be on the honor guard.

Boy was I surprised to hear Barb Valentine is married! She's only 16, isn't she? I don't know her husband, but seeing as how he was a Marine, I guess he's okay.

Just as soon as you get Murve and Don's addresses, send them, will you? It's comforting to know I'm not the only one out here.

The gunny [gunnery sergeant] said he would see the sergeant major for me, but that was four days ago. I'll keep pestering him till he finally sees him, and maybe things will start popping. The other fella got as far as the ole man, but the colonel said, "He didn't show enough previous leadership experience." I hope I can remember enough things to satisfy him if I ever get that far. This is the first time I've tried something big by myself, so I hope I don't fail.

Figure 26. Naval Air Station Midway, main base area, ca. 1945



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

Say, Woman, when are you going to send me those pictures I had taken when on furlough? Are there going to be several small ones so I can send them to my “pen pals”?

That radar of ours is one fouled up mess! It’s been sitting for a year, and I guess some of the tubes are shot. It sure doesn’t operate correctly. There was a civilian technician out here last month and he fixed all the other radar on the island but ours before his time ran out and he left.

The general’s inspections are a pain in the neck. Extra field days, extra police calls, extra starched shirts and field scarfs, and all he’ll do is run through the barracks hump and haw and hmm and run out and never even notice the clean deck or shiny windows.

One of our boys from Charley Battery fell asleep last night on [general ship knowledge] GSK watch (ship). The corporal of the guard got his rifle before he woke up and now, he’s PAL [prisoner at large] waiting on a

summary court-martial.³³ He just made PFC. I hope he doesn't lose it. It's his own fault for sitting down though, so I guess he won't do that again for quite a while.

Since the Airedales and swabbies don't eat at our mess hall, we've been getting pretty good food on plates, and we all eat at the same time! It's really nice now. Also, we turned the Airedales squad bay into a theater, so it's only 20 paces from where I sleep—pretty nice. This rock seems to be getting better than it was when we first came here in October. We even have bottled beer now that has a real stateside flavor to it. You ought to congratulate me. I haven't smoked or touched one drop of suds in over a week, mainly because we've been so doggone busy the last week. Every night, I wash a pair of socks or starch and press a shirt or something else and go to the movies two or three times a week—they are free naturally.

I hope you folks have a nice Christmas in your new home. Do you have a roomy basement or is it filled up with furniture like the house at 502?

Did you send me some of those "via air mail" stickers?

I've run out of stationery again, so I reckon this will be the close—you're probably asleep by now anyway.

I'll see ya later, Mom.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. We get paid tomorrow, so you ought to be getting my bond allotments soon.



Boot camp was really soft compared to what this place does to you mentally. The captain knows I want to see about being an officer, so he said he would call for me when it will be convenient to see the major, then I might get to see the lieutenant colonel . . . maybe . . . someday.

³³ *Prisoner at large* refers to a member of the military who is being disciplined and forbidden to leave the barracks or ship where they are stationed.

10 December 1946

Hi Mom,

This rock sure is getting tough. A general inspected us a couple of weeks ago and really read off [reprimanded] the officers. Now, we're getting it because they got told off. We have troop and stomp with rifle inspection every morning of the week at 0800, and every afternoon at 1630, we have locker and locker box inspection. This morning, we wore greens and leggings, tomorrow it will probably be dress blues and tennis shoes.

Last month, they cut our beer hours to 1730-1930 daily and now there are only 27 out of 197 Marines who can drink beer and only about 10 or less (you have to be age 21) who can drink at our noncom slop chute. For the last four days, there hasn't been any cokes! There is no gym or recreation hall, or a good library, or anything else on this damn place, so everybody's about ready to go mutiny or go nuts.

We don't even have a writing room anymore. Boot camp was really soft compared to what this place does to you mentally. Pan Am doesn't bring us mail anymore, so we only get mail once a week now.

I could think of hundreds of things wrong with this overgrown sandpile, including the dumb head in charge of our radar now. The only good thing about Midway is the chow and movies. They are all very old and we've all seen them before, but they take your mind away and relax you for a while.

The captain knows I want to see about being an officer, so he said he would call for me when it will be convenient to see the major, then I might get to see the lieutenant colonel . . . maybe . . . someday.

Happier thoughts now. I told my gal, Jean, who is out in Oklahoma now, to come out and see you folks if she ever came to Urbana. She is going home for Christmas, so don't be alarmed at what she says if she comes to see you. Just tell her I'm a good little boy and keep her guessing. What she doesn't know won't hurt her!

We got paid last week, so I bought an expansion bracelet to go on my watch. Lucile's last year's present served very well for a year, but it was ready to break, so I bought a new one. It only cost \$3.85, so it didn't hurt.

I get a great kick out of watching these guys gamble their pay away. At the end of the month, the unlucky ones are the first to be around wanting loans. I only draw \$30 a month out here, shouldn't even need that much.

Probably won't from now on. A corporal just walked in selling Christmas Seals, so I bought a buck's worth. I guess that kind of purchase isn't well spent.³⁴

I received a letter from Paul Hewett in Tokyo that made me so mad I haven't even answered him yet. Mom, he was a corporal for two months! You can't make corporal in the Marine Corps till you've been in 18 months now. It used to be 15 months!

A Joe from Michigan just breezed in and brushed by a freshly painted locker he and I painted, Now, one sleeve matches his trousers.

A Navy chaplain gave me a little sermon the other night. It was the first time I've gone to church in more than two months, almost three months rather.³⁵

One of the shoes that came back from the cobbler wasn't mine, so I surveyed them—it was a size 10; I wear 7.5—and I have new boots now. After we got our shoes and were marching, the next day, five Joe's had to fall out because their heels fell off. Such things like that show how completely and hopelessly this place is fouled up!

Maybe some of this will blow off in time, but all this stuff, guard duty every other night, and work every day is getting us slightly peeved and worn out! I'll see ya later, Mom.

Yours,
Ray



Well, I guess I'm potential officer material now, so I hope maybe things will work out the way they ought to.

³⁴ Early in the 1900s, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death around the world. Several countries—Denmark, Sweden, Iceland—began the Christmas Seals program in 1904. The movement shifted to the United States when a small treatment facility in Delaware fell on hard times and faced closure, an innovative fundraiser came up with an idea to help raise awareness and money to keep the hospital open. Emily Bissell designed the first U.S. holiday seal in 1907 and sold them at the post office for a penny each. See Barth Healey, "Pastimes: Stamps," *New York Times*, 24 December 1989.

³⁵ For more about Navy chaplains at this time, see Capt Clifford M. Drury, *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy*, vol. 2, 1939–1949 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1948).

12 December 1946

Hi Mom,

Well, I saw the ole man this morning. He said I was too late; I would have to be in the states and have taken the entrance exam by 17 December and five days wasn't enough time. He also said if I got transferred between now and next December, to come to the office and they would give me a written recommendation to OCS to give to my next commanding officer. He was really nice about everything, and he said he thought a year more in the Corps would probably do me a lot of good. It probably will, but by then, I'll have forgotten the little I know now. If that so-and-so gunnery sergeant had seen the sergeant major the first week I asked him, I would have been able to take the test. But now I have to wait till next year.³⁶

The lieutenant in charge of our radar hasn't come out to see us in two weeks, so we don't know any more about it. I'm the only one of the five who cares or wants to know anything about it, so maybe if I learn enough about it, I'll get the chance to be in charge of it . . . maybe . . . someday.

Someday in the far future, this outfit here might get organized into a defense battalion like it's supposed to be.³⁷ We don't even have a Baker Battery to fire the other four 90mm guns. All this island has is eight guns, three searchlights, and a bunch of no-good radar. The searchlights are the only active things running. Wouldn't we be in a sweet pickle if another war started

The captain that came with us two months ago left this morning. I guess he had enough too. Mail flies in tomorrow. There sure would be a lot of it after a whole week's accumulation at Pearl Harbor.

I wonder if people ever are satisfied for a real long time? We're all so fed up with this place. It's awful. Maybe things will change in time.

What's the matter with Leon? Has he forgotten how to write? He's the last guy I expected to stop writing. Well, I guess I'm potential officer material now, so I hope maybe things will work out the way they ought to. Keep writing, People.

³⁶ For more on the current process to apply to Officer Candidates School, see "Officer Candidates School (OCS)," [Marines.com](https://www.marines.com), accessed 9 August 2024.

³⁷ According to the official history, the 6th Defense Battalion arrived on Midway Island in 1942. It was redesignated Marine Barracks, Naval Base Midway, in February 1946. See Maj Charles D. Melson, *Condition Red: Marine Defense Battalions in World War II* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996).

Yours,
Ray



Five-and-a-half to 6,000 miles is a long way to say merry Christmas, but the feeling doesn't know distance. So, here's wishing all you people the very best.

22 December 1946
1530 hours

Hi Mom,

The iron you sent finally got here this morning. It came just in time to make a swell Christmas present. Also, I got a package from Mrs. Sporleder, Starkey's grandmother. Of all things to send me, she sent me five cans of various peanuts and a small fruit cake—the one thing we can buy here! The thought was very nice though. Only I don't know why she sent me anything, I don't even write to Joan, and I've only dropped her one letter since I've been here. I guess the Railway Express people read my sob story and sent the iron parcel post right on over.³⁸

Hey, who is Miss Phillips? Is she my age or size? I mean is she a friend of yours or should I remember who she is? I swear, I can't remember any Miss Phillips. Send me her address and description and I'll look her up when I go to Pearl Harbor. I'm working on a deal where I can go for 8–10 weeks to Radar Technicians School; and even if I don't get that, they started last week a rest and recreation liberty to Pearl for five days. My name ought to come around in a couple of months or three at the latest.

The other night, I went on post at about 2400 and was still sleepy when the OD [officer of the day] came around checking posts. I challenged him and recognized his jeep and was thinking of how I was going to report my post. I said, "Who goes there?" He said, "OD." "Private Grier?" I slipped! I promptly apologized to the officer and reported my post, "Private Stice reporting Post Number 5 secure." He got a big kick out of it luckily for me. He is our radar officer, and I work with him almost every day.

³⁸ *Parcel post* refers to a postal service for mail that is heavier than letter post and it is much slower. The development of parcel post was closely connected with the development of the railway network, which enabled parcels to be carried in bulk, on a regular schedule, and at economical prices.

Yesterday, I went swimming with a guy from Miami, Florida. We have a lot of fun together. We met some Navy chief and his wife and fished with them for a couple of hours. That was the first time I've talked to a woman in three months since I left home. There is a lot of tuna and other nice fish, but they certainly are well schooled on how not to be caught.

We also caught two Airedales killing gooney birds. I sure wished I had a carbine and was on guard. Guys like them are the cause of a lot of trouble around here. After a scuffle they left, and we didn't get their names, but we recognized them both. I hope I see them again.

I haven't heard from my girl since she wrote at Thanksgiving. If she comes to see you, cuss her out for me.

Five-and-a-half to 6,000 miles is a long way to say merry Christmas. But the feeling doesn't know distance, so here's wishing all you people the very best.

Yours,
Ray

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PEARL HARBOR FLEET TRAINING CENTER

*Electronics Maintenance School Letters
2 January–27 May 1947*

*Honolulu isn't what it used to be, they say, but it is paradise to
us after being on Midway.*

2 January 1947

Hi People,

Well, Sunday morning, we boarded a NATS [Naval Air Transport Service] plane and flew into Honolulu.¹ The trip was very successful because I learned how to play Cassino.² I got air sick on tomato juice, but that was quickly remedied. Then we were taken to the Peral Harbor Navy Yard next to Hickam and put in transit barracks.

We've had liberty every night and three of the days since, so I know Honolulu and Waikiki pretty well now. I only spent \$12 in all too! This morning, we loaded up our seabags and drove out here to Aiea [Honolu-

¹ The Naval Air Transport Service was created by the U.S. Navy in 1941 to create a logistical and transportation framework to serve long distances in support to the U.S. military during the war. "The Birth of the Naval Air Transport Service," *History Up Close*, Naval History and Heritage Command, 12 December 2014.

² Cassino is a card game of two to four people, using the standard 52-card deck, and dates back to 1792.

Figure 27. Naval Station Pearl Harbor, HI, June 1941



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

lu]. We're only about 8 kilometers from the city and the bus stops about 100 yards from our barracks.

We live in swabbie BOQ [bachelor officer quarters] barracks, no less! There are four of us in our room. It's about 10' x 14', with two double sacks, two desks, four bureau drawers, instead of lockers, and four built in wall lockers. There is a sink and mirror sunk into the wall, and the west wall is all screened in. Very nice to say the least.

We took some God-awful tests this afternoon to see if we are qualified to take the course; and brother, what I don't know about radio will fill the Royal Hawaiian Library!

In my room is a Joe from Minnesota, one from Chicago, and an Airedale from California. There are only about 20 Marines in the whole school. It's just the same as being in the Navy. The chow doesn't taste as good as at Midway, but it is richer in vitamins.

Honolulu isn't what it used to be, they say, but it is paradise to us

after being on Midway. The gooks are really out for the servicemen, especially the Marines, for what reason, I don't know. But you don't dare to step down any alley's or in any vacant lots and come out with your money or possessions. One huge Joe who flew to the states today got rolled the other night for \$90! I can't see that ole stuff. If you're careful and keep your nose clean, it's pretty easy to stay out of trouble though.³

Illinois did pretty good yesterday. I was sure glad to hear they won.⁴

I've seen quite a bit of Jim Lustig. He sure has a racket. He gets \$20 extra and he's private first class. He works in the PX, so he's pretty well set up now.

Maybe someday my mail will catch up with me, but it probably won't for another month or so.

The address stands for Fleet Training Center, Electronics Maintenance School. There are several things about this place that I swear I can't understand. One is that you don't use linens [sheets], just a mattress cover and a blanket. They don't even have sheets or pillowcases or pillows. I didn't think the Navy was like that! It's going to take quite a while to get used to the raw blanket.

I'm sending along a picture I got with a little "Chink" gal.⁵ I found out later that she is 28 years old. It sure is hard to judge their ages.

Every minute or so, you hear a string of firecrackers popping off. It's funny to hear all the noise and confusion after being in such a comparatively calm and quiet place like Midway.

I read in the paper about some soldier going berserk and killing some Champaign [Illinois] gal. I don't know either one of them, but it sure was odd to read about home in Honolulu.

Also, on the bus to Waikiki, I started a conversation with a middle-age

³ For more on pre- and post-war tensions, see "Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in World War II," National WWII Museum, accessed 9 August 2024; and "Japanese Americans and the Wartime Experience in Hawaii," National WWII Museum, 15 October 2021.

⁴ On 1 January 1947, the University of Illinois played UCLA in the Pasadena, CA, Rose Bowl, winning the game 45-14.

⁵ The term *Chink* is an English derogatory slur for people of Chinese, Asian, and Southeast Asian descent. The etymology for the term is varied, with some of the earliest known uses dating back to the late 1800s and were based on anti-Chinese racism that targeted immigration as a threat to the economy. The issue was not confined to just the United States but also was seen in Australia, India, and the United Kingdom. Depending on the source, the term may have come from bastardized forms of the actual word China or Qing (Ch'ing), referring to the Qing dynasty.

Figure 28. Stice enjoying the local culture in Pearl Harbor



Source: Stice Family Collection.

man, and he turned out to be from a town next to Mattoon, Illinois. This sure is a small world, isn't it?

I hope you people had a very nice holiday, so to speak, and are enjoying your home and friends a lot. I made up for the 11 hours of guard duty I stood on Christmas day the night before last so I'm happy too.

I'll see ya, People.

Yours,
Ray



These dames here are all married or should be. I swear, they won't even smile at you. It is nice to see them around anyway instead of gooney birds.

8 January 1947
1900 hours

Hi Mom,
Today was the first day of school. We sure covered a lot of territory; in four

Pearl Harbor Fleet Training Center

hours, we covered what it took a whole year of freshman algebra to teach me. It all comes back easily, so this first month's work won't be too extremely difficult. We have a chief and a seaman second class who are very patient and nice as instructors. We are lucky in the respect that we have a small class of 32 men, 10 gyrenes, 3 Army lieutenants, 5 doggie sergeants, and about a dozen swabbies.⁶

You should have seen your industrious son yesterday. Three of us painted our whole room and repaired where necessary, and then got liberty cards and went to Honolulu to eat.

We went to a hotel-lobby-style Chinese restaurant, and I ordered vegetables and sliced pork. You should have seen the indescribable pile of food they brought me: lettuce, peas, celery, carrots, two or three small pieces of pork fat, a bowl of rice, and a cup of tea. Ordinarily, I would have just pushed it away and drank water, but the guy stood there watching me. So, I tried a little of it, and I'll be darned if that mess didn't turn out to taste pretty darn swell. I swear, I wouldn't trust my luck by getting another one, but that is one more experience I can chalk up in my memoirs. No, I didn't drink all of the tea, that is still one thing I can't get to like no matter how many times I try.

I should be getting some kind of an answer by the end of next week, so keep on writing. Neither your little tree nor the package with the blades and toothpaste have arrived yet. They probably are out to Midway by now . . . someday.

Say, Mom, if you think of it, how's about sending me my 620 camera? I may as well take some nice remembrance pictures of my "home" town.⁷

These dames here are all married or should be. I swear, they won't even smile at you. It is nice to see them around anyway instead of gooney birds.

I wish you would give me the dope on Miss Phillips. I've been racking my feeble brain trying to remember if she was our maid, a friend of yours,

⁶ The term *gyrene* is slang for someone in the U.S. Marine Corps. Dating back to the late 1800 to early 1900s, the etymology is mixed for the term. Some believe it to be a combination of GI and Marine, though with an altered spelling using a Y that has not been explained. Others believe it was first used by the British Royal Marines in the 1890s. For more on this and other Marine Corps "names," see " 'Gyrenes,' 'Jarheads,' and 'Grunts,'" National Museum of the Marine Corps, accessed 9 August 2024.

⁷ Stice may have been referring to a Kodak Brownie Target 620, or similar model, that used 620 format film developed by Kodak in the 1930s on a thin, narrow spool.

a relative, or a friend of mine. Do you know anyone else in Honolulu or pretty close around here? I don't know how much time I'm going to have for liberty, but I'll have every weekend to go out, so maybe I can say "hi" to some of your acquaintances and friends for you.

Well good bye for now, Mom, and you too, Dad, yeah and you too, Lile.

Goodnight.

Yours,
Ray



The surfboard riders are every bit as good as they look on the moving picture shorts. It sure is comical to watch them get up on a wave and then fall in the water. . . . As long as I get to move on about every four months, this Marine Corps won't be so bad.

12 January 1947

[Written transcript of a voice recording spoken into a microphone at the USO.]

Here is a reasonable facsimile of the "dialogue" on the recording. We had to have our words written down before we could make the record, so here it is in case you can't understand what I said.

Hi Mom, Dad, and Lile,

I'm at the USO in downtown Honolulu now.⁸ I can't hardly believe I was born right here. This city sure isn't like good ole Urbana. I haven't been swimming at Waikiki yet, but I will one of these weekends. When this electronics school I'm going to is over, there is a chance that I might get

⁸ Prior to World War II, USO services were not formalized in the Hawaiian territory and often sponsored in local civic buildings. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the first official location in the islands was called the USO Army and Navy Club. At its peak, there would be 51 clubs in the territory. Honolulu's USO Victory Club was a popular Japanese department store before the U.S. joined the war. With its unique design, it was the only USO with a rooftop garden and escalators. The five-story-high center could serve as many as 447,000 people in a month. See "How the Attack on Pearl Harbor Changed Hawaii, WWII and the USO," USO.org, 6 December 2021.

to come home for a furlough, because by then I'll have been overseas for almost eight months. I'm just guessing, so don't count on it. Tomorrow, we have our first weekly exam. We sure covered territory fast. I swear, it took our instructor only four days to cover all the math and algebra that Ole Lady Nelson could teach me in three years.

I sure will be happy when the mailman catches up with me and brings me some mail. I haven't heard from my gal in Danville since Thanksgiving. I reckon I can say ex-gal now. I'll make up for all the fun I've missed when I get discharged. Jim Lustig and I really have some high-class bull sessions every once and a while. It sure is swell to talk to someone from the same place as I am.

Well, People, how do you like your new home? It sure is nice to have a house you can call your own, isn't it? It will really be nice to come home too.

The surfboard riders are every bit as good as they look on the moving picture shorts. It sure is comical to watch them get up on a wave and then fall in the water. I'll have to try it sometime. Hee hee.

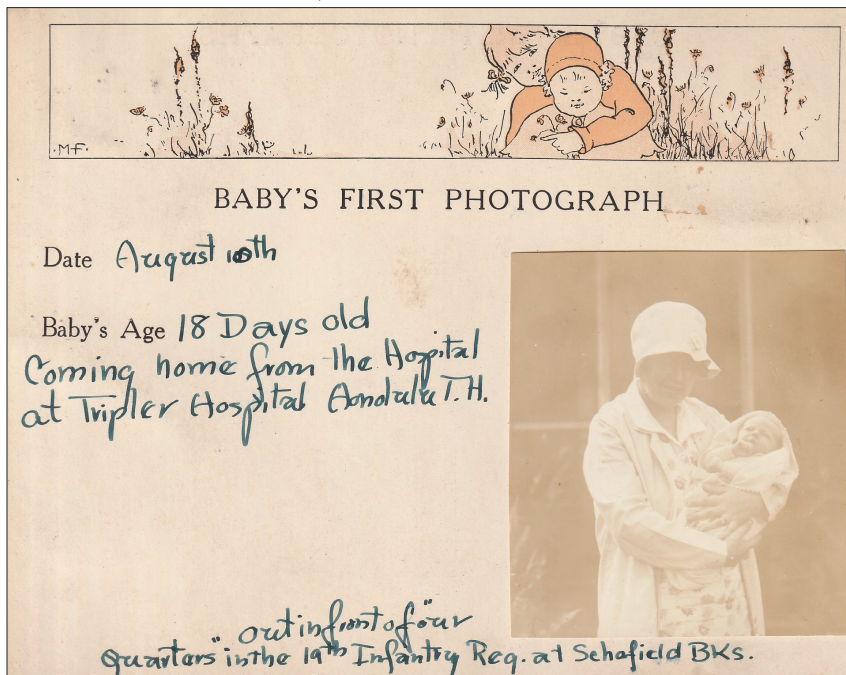
Mrs. Hamilton would really be peeved if she could see me now. To think, all the speech work that boy has had, and he still has mic fright. Tisk, tisk. It sure was nice to hear your voice when I called from New Orleans. If I had about \$10 that I could spend, I would not only be talking to you, but you would talk back. They have swell overseas phone service downstairs. Maybe I'll surprise you sometime and call up. I sure could use your little Ford, Dad. This town is pretty big. I reckon you were right about Paul, Mom. I'll write him tomorrow. Have you people heard from Merve or Don yet? Neither Jim or I have heard anything.

Maybe if we don't come home after this school, we will get to go out to some other small islands. As long as I get to move on about every four months, this Marine Corps won't be so bad. We sure have a good deal here, living in BOQ barracks with the swabbies. I sure won't be sorry if school lasts more than four months with this act up. Well, it's time I shut up or put up because the record is going to quit, so be good, People. It's been swell to talk to you. I'll see ya later.



Today, we went on a USO sponsored tour of the island here in Oahu. The island is huge compared to Midway. We went in two buses, and stopped at the Pali, Diamond Head, the Upside-Down Waterfalls, Bottomless Pool (the pool of beauty) where gook boys dived for coins, all the cane and pineapple

Figure 29. Birth announcement showing Milly Stice holding Ray in August 1928 in front of Milly and Kenneth's quarters, 19th Infantry Regiment at Schofield Barracks, Honolulu



Source: Stice Family Collection.

fields, and even a wrecked car that went off a high cliff—messy. We saw Schofield Barracks and Wheeler Field and their USO and naturally the harbor, which we see four times a day going to school. The island is huge compared to Midway.

12 January 1947
2025 hours

Hi Mom,

Well, the Lord blessed me with three letters tonight: two from you and one from Starkey. I sure was pleased to hear from you at last. It sure is lousy mail service we are getting out here. I wondered why I hadn't been hearing from anyone, and here all the letters to me have been being sent back.

I know New Year's comes only once a year, but I hadn't had a liberty

in about four months, so you can't blame me for having a good time. I didn't get any liberty back on the West Coast like everyone else because of my ID card.

When I joined up, the rule was that in six months, you would be promoted to private first class, but since then, they have changed that to nine months. Remember, I told you about that in another letter. Probably when I've been in nine months (March), they will make it a year!⁹

No, it's not because of any so-called linen shortage that we don't have sheets. It happens to be this particular—peculiar is how I would have put it—base.

Today, we went on a USO-sponsored tour of the island here in Oahu. We went in two buses, and stopped at the Pali, Diamond Head, the Upside-Down Waterfalls, Bottomless Pool (the pool of beauty) where gook boys dived for coins, all the cane and pineapple fields, and even a wrecked car that went off a high cliff—messy.¹⁰ We saw Schofield Barracks, Wheeler Field, their USO, and naturally the harbor, which we see four times a day going to school.¹¹ The island is huge compared to Midway. A perfect comparison is the Champaign Country Club. It is even shaped like Midway and somewhat larger, I think. We spent a lot of time at the beautiful Mormon's temple.¹² The whole trip was well worth the \$4 I spent.

Tonight, I mailed a record I made downtown. I hope it gets to you all right.

⁹ For more on officer and enlisted ranks, see Bernard C. Nalty et al., *United States Marine Corps Ranks and Grades, 1775–1969* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1970). The current system for promotion to private first class is six months' time in grade or time in service. Boot camp counts toward this requirement. See *Marine Corps Order P1400.32D, Marine Corps Promotion Manual*, vol. 2, *Enlisted Promotions* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 14 June 2012), chap. 2.

¹⁰ Pali refers to the Nu'uana Pali lookout over a windward cliff (*pali* in Hawaiian); Diamond Head refers to a volcanic cone prominent on the landscape; and the Upside-Down Waterfall refers to Waipuhia Falls, so called because the winds are strong enough to blow the water in the opposite direction of the water flow; the Bottomless Pool was in Laie, and was actually a pool connected to an underground cave system that was filled with water.

¹¹ Schofield Barracks is an Army installation established 1908 as part of the islands mobile defense and is home to the 25th Infantry Division. Wheeler Field (a.k.a. Wheeler Army Field) is part of the U.S. Army base and was once an Air Force base.

¹² The temple is called the Laie Hawaii Temple that was built in the early 1900s. The first Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in the territory in 1850. By the 1940s, there was a population of approximately 15,000 Mormons in the islands. "Facts and Statistics," ChurchofJesusChrist.org, accessed 11 August 2024.

Don't you read my letter when you write me? It seems to me that I asked you a lot of questions, about Dad's Ford and my pictures, and you didn't answer them.

I only made an 88 on my test, but that tied to lead highest of our Midway group. My IQ is 64 of 72, it compares to 133 out of 150 in the Army.¹³ Not so smart, I guess, but it's supposed to be a little higher than average and, considering I hadn't studied in six months, it wasn't too bad. What is Dad's IQ? And Lucile's?

I had a pleasant surprise last night when I met several of my Midway buddies here on rest and recreation downtown. We had a fine time. Midway is just swell now, no more EPD [extra police duty] and the inspections aren't as often (not twice a day anymore or as hard). They would make it better just as we left. We do have a wonderful deal here though, and I'm glad they are having it better out there. I don't like to have it so easy and them still have it tough.

They even are firing the Thompson submachine gun (M1), and the 90 mm antiaircraft guns are firing, and it is really a better deal all around. It won't be so hard to go back to now.

It's morning now, and we are almost ready to catch our trucks and go to school, so I had better move out.

Keep on writing, People.

Yours,
Ray



I never could see—before, that is—where people got it that the Service teaches one to take care of himself and think for himself, because someone is always in charge of you. But since boot camp, I've learned a lot. I'm still not sorry I joined up, but it sure would be fun to be home on my own for a while.

¹³ A study of individuals found that the average estimated IQ score of people in the early 1900s was 70 and for those born in 1940 was 100. These changes were likely a result of the availability of formal education. Lea Winerman, "Smarter than Ever?," *Monitor on Psychology*, 44, no. 3 (March 2013).

14 January 1947

Whatcha say Sis,

Your most welcome and lovable letter arrived a few minutes ago. I thought you knew that I'd received your many authored letter because I got Ziegler's address from it. I am very anxious to hear from her. Hint, hint.

That "chink" was actually strictly from the amusement joints. No, I didn't pick her up. It cost me a buck for four pictures.

I got a letter from Grandmother Bickmore addressed to "Ray Stice, Radar School, Pearl Harbor, Oahu T.H." How in hell it even got to me is beyond all comprehension! She gave me the scoop on Miss Phillips too. I'll go look her up—don't read that wrong—next weekend. Our homework is so long and hard. I had to study three-and-a-half hours steadily last night till lights out. This school is certainly tougher than we expected, but I'll sure try my best.

If you write to Strong, ask him if he has any suggestions as to how a Joe would get in the U.S. Naval Academy. After this radar school is over, I'll sure be up on my math. My English is terrible now. It was bad enough before! Tell him I would rather go there than West Point, because I want to become a Marine officer—I guess—more than an Army officer.

Pearl Harbor and Honolulu as any other city was Heaven compared to Midway. I wouldn't take it before any two-bit stateside town any day. The people go head after heads for your money, little that is, and are not the least bit friendly. They are polite, but they sure don't put out with any "Hawaiian Hospitality" as the song goes.¹⁴ The only females we can even talk to are some of the old restaurant workers. They have seen enough servicemen to appreciate their trade, I guess, so they will talk to us at least. The younger ones sure as heck won't.

We have a very nice laundry service here also. My shirts came back with all the buttons last time.

I'll see what I can do about getting someone for you to write to. I don't know enough people to get you a good one right now. But I'll do something about it, right quick like.

Tell me more about Ziegler, will you? I probably won't get her letter if she addressed it to the "Rock," because it seems all my mail has been sent

¹⁴ This song was widely recorded during the period, most notably by such performers as the Mills Brothers and Louis Armstrong.

back to the senders from there. Cuss his hide (the mail clerk out there).

Do you like this George Godge (as you spelled it)? It takes a pretty good man to be a sergeant in the Marine Corps—believe me—and usually several years of service.

Did you get my record all right? I don't think it sounds like me, but the recorder said it sounded perfect. So? I never realized I talked so slow or with such an accent either. I don't guess I do ordinarily, just when I'm serious about something.

I hope you appreciate this. I missed chow so I could answer you. Doesn't sound like me, does it? I also have to stay in and study tonight, as every weeknight. That doesn't sound like me either, does it? I "figger" I asked for this school, and no one is going to ask me to study. And if I don't, I'll flunk out in two weeks anyway, so it's up to me all around. I never could see—before, that is—where people got it that the Service teaches one to take care of himself and think for himself, because someone is always in charge of you. But since boot camp, I've learned a lot. I'm still not sorry I joined up, but it sure would be fun to be home on my own for a while.

I'll see ya later, Lile.

Your one and only—brother that is!

Ray



We had a lot of fun ducking the surfboards and their riders as they zoomed over us and wrestling near the beach. We secured early, but I can't remember when I've had more fun since I joined up!

19 January 1947

Hi People,

Part of the long-lost mail arrived in a package from the mail clerk on Midway yesterday, so I received Mom's letter written on Christmas Day and two of Lucile's. It was really swell to finally get them. Also, yesterday I received two more letters: one from Lile and one from Mom written on 10 and 14 January—pretty fast for them.

I only made an 86 on Friday's exam, but that was better than I had hoped for, so it's okay.

Friday night, Miss Phillips picked me up and we drove all around Honolulu, and I got a good chance to see the nicer parts of the city that the average Joe doesn't get. Then we ate dinner—on her since I'm just about broke—and she let me out downtown and I hit the sack early. I really had a very nice time with her.

Yesterday, a swabbie from New York and I went ashore and, while it was hot, we saw an ancient film on submarines and then headed out to Waikiki.¹⁵ We rented suits and went swimming. The water was so warm compared to Midway, and the coral is just as rough on your feet though. We had a lot of fun ducking the surfboards and their riders as they zoomed over us and wrestling near the beach. We secured early, but I can't remember when I've had more fun since I joined up! It sure is nice that we don't have homework over the weekend so we can enjoy ourselves. I think we are going swimming over in a pool at the Navy yard this afternoon.

Two of the guys in here went aboard the USS *Queenfish* (SS 393)—a submarine in the Navy yard submarine base—and ate chow yesterday afternoon. You should have seen them describing the feast. The sub crews have the best chow this side of the president, I guess. Next week, I'm going to see if I can go on one and "case the joint."

After I've been here a while longer and get to know how some of the officers "are," I'm going to "attack" one of them about the U.S. Naval Academy [USNA] or NROTC or something like that and find out what the scoop is here. It might be different than at Midway.

If you (anyone) ever see Mrs. Valentine, tell her I couldn't ever tell her how nice her letters are. I swear, she writes so sincerely, it sure is nice to hear from her.

I'm sorry I missed Latham down at PI. I would have liked it very much to see him. I always did think he was a pretty swell Joe.

I hope all these pictures get there. Some of them are pretty blurred, but they were enlarged several times. If that one was better, it would be nice to try to send it in to the [*Chicago Tribune*] C. T. for their Sunday section. It isn't so good though.

Your Christmas tree finally came, Mom, and your cookies, Dad. Both

¹⁵ A number of films were made well before the World War II period; more than 45 were made between 1915 and 1946. The "ancient" film Stice refers to could have been: the *Secret of the Submarines* (1915), *Submarine Pirate* (1915), *Gung Ho* (1943), or *We Dive at Dawn* (1943).

are swell. I set the tree up on my dresser, and if anybody laughs at it, I'll deck 'em. It does seem funny to have a Christmas tree in the middle of January. But I have it now, so it's set up. Thanks a lot for everything!

Mail call is going now, so I'll go see if Mr. Mailman knows we're here for sure.

Be good, People, and keep writing.

Yours,
Ray



Our studies keep us very busy every weeknight. But it's for our own good, and we only get out half of what we put in, they go so fast, so we have to keep studying. It's good training for me especially, because I never did learn how to study efficiently.

20 January 1947
1840 hours

Hi Dad,

Now I'm completely snowed! Someone at West Point sent me a folder—really a book—describing entrance qualifications to the Point. I read it cover to cover, and I didn't realize how tough it is to get in a place like that. I could probably pass the physical, and the math wouldn't be too much of a stumbling block, but I am awfully down on English and history. From the sample tests, I'm positive I couldn't pass those two subjects, and they were very important, I understand. If West Point is that tough, how on Earth is Annapolis?

My mind—that's what it is—is made up as far as the type of career I want to follow, but in which of the three main Services, I can't decide!

I know that if I am going to try for one of the academies, I must act fast because recommendations and qualifications must be sent in by 15 February.

If I had known about the time element before, I probably could have decided much quicker, but that's that.

My problem is, what to do? If I wait till this school is over, it will be too late for West Point; and next year, I'll be overage for a Service entrance appointment. I don't know what the score is at the USNA. If

you have any ideas, please tell me because I don't know what to do.¹⁶

Do you know Ora Delivou well enough to ask him about my predicament or what I would have to do to get an appointment?

The main detail that would stop me from getting—or even trying—a Service appointment into West Point is that I'm the same as in the Navy. The Marine Corps is just a large branch of the Navy. Maybe I would be able to try for an appointment to Annapolis in the same manner that men in the Army take competitive exams to get to attend the U.S. Military Academy [West Point]. Is there such a thing, for those in the naval Service like that?

I sure hope you can help me out, because now that I have actually decided what I want to do for the rest of my life, I'm more confused than ever!

Today, I received another letter from Lucile telling about my record. I'm sorry it got bent, but it's only aluminum, you can bend it right back. It came in four days! The service to the school sure is better than it was on Midway.

The way everyone writes, the new house must be wonderful! It would be nice to be there sharing it with you. The pictures came too, and the house is 100 percent cuter than the Allen's, and what I expected ours to look like.

We sure have it soft, as far as living quarters are concerned. One of the guys even has a paper brought around every morning. And about 2100 every night, an ice cream man drives up and sells ice cream. We can't always afford that, but this place sure is a contrast to Midway. Our studies keep us very busy every weeknight, but it's for our own good. And we only get out half of what we put in, they go so fast, so we have to keep studying. It's good training for me especially, because I never did learn how to study efficiently.

I have plenty of homework to do, so I better close and "practice what I preach."

Here's hoping you can let a little light on "the subject."

Your loving son,

Ray

P.S. Thanks an awful lot for the cookies!

¹⁶ By comparison, see more about the current Service academy process at "Steps for the Service Academies Application Process," White House, accessed 12 August 2024.



From the way your letter reads, Mom, you have the wrong idea as to where I'm stationed. If you think I was transferred from Midway, you're wrong. Six of us were brought here from Midway to go to school (maintenance radar) to learn to repair radar gear so we could put all of Midway's gear into operation. We didn't even bring our health or service records with us, so we are still and probably always will, be stationed at Midway!

25 January 1947

Hi Mom,

Well, yesterday I managed to keep my weekly average up by making an 88 on the exam. My average for three weeks is 87.3. I sure hope I can keep it that high. Next Friday is our final exam for Fundamentals I and 62.5 is failing.

Jim Finical and I finally got together Wednesday afternoon. His ship pulled in Tuesday, but I didn't even know about it. It had been seven months, four days, and two hours since we'd seen each other the day before we left in the co-ed theater. We both got sworn in the same day—19 June 1946—so we'll both get out the same time. We went to Honolulu and shot the bull and some pool and went out to Waikiki. We didn't do much but talk, but we had a swell time. We went to his ship about 2200, and I was permitted to go aboard. He showed me the whole ship from the two planes on the stern to the anchor chains on the bow, and from the bilge water to the gun tubs. I've never seen a more beautiful ship, and it was so miraculously clean for its size. He especially pointed out the firerooms and boiler rooms where he works. I'll bet there were at least 30 gyrenes on it too, in their seagoing outfit. His ship pulled out Thursday afternoon. I guess they are heading for Guam.

I found out that as Jim Lustig and I got aboard the USS *Anderson* (DD 411) in San Diego, Jim Finical was disembarking. And none of us knew either one of the others were anywhere near the place. And here at Pearl Harbor again, the three of us were here and didn't know it.

Thursday, I tried like a fiend to find someone who knew anything about OCS or one of the academies, but I just got a large-scale run around. In the first place, I'm not stationed here, so there is no certain officer in charge of me, and I had one heck of a time finding anyone who

Figure 30. Ray Stice's childhood friend, Jim Finical, was sworn in on the same day



Source: Stice Family Collection.

knew what he was talking about. I did find out though, that it is too late for OCS this year, as I found out on Midway, and no one knew about the academies. So, I may as well forget about them till I finish school.

From the way your letter reads, Mom, you have the wrong idea as to where I'm stationed. If you think I was transferred from Midway, you're wrong. Six of us were brought here from Midway to go to school (maintenance radar) to learn to repair radar gear so we could put all of Midway's gear into operation. We didn't even bring our health or service records with us, so we are still and probably always will, be stationed at Midway.

I don't know who, how, or why, but I received a pamphlet from An-

napolis the day after I wrote Dad. Maybe it would be better if I waited till I got out or till next year at least.

I'll write more later.

Love,
Ray



Dad, you are off track on one thing: this is a technicians and maintenance school I'm going to, not an operator's course. Anyone can operate radar gear, it's so simple, but it is a tough, stiff course and job, learning to repair and rebuild radar gear.

27 January 1947

Hi Mom,

Well, today I received a letter written on 30 December with a lot of clippings and pages from both of you and Dad in it. It was very nice, even though it was old.

Dad, you are offtrack on one thing: this is a technicians and maintenance school I'm going to, not an operator's course. Anyone can operate radar gear, it's so simple, but it is a tough, stiff course and job, learning to repair and rebuild radar gear. Next Thursday, I'll have completed Fundamentals I. We covered everything up to resonant circuits and inductive, reactance and capacitive and reactance and combinations of all three. We practice finding power factors, current flow, impedance, voltage drops, power expenditures, and things like that. This is where all the math comes in, using and solving formulas. I've learned a lot in the last three-and-a-half weeks, but I'll sure learn a lot more in the next three months!

My CO at Midway will recommend me for next year's NROTC okay—if I don't get any dumber—he didn't mean Annapolis.

I would like to hear your *Naughty 90s* album, Dad!¹⁷

It's nice that the wool comforters are being put to use. I'm sorry I couldn't send home more money so there could be three of them—one for each of you.

If you ever see Dr. Ford, tell him I think of him every time I blow my

¹⁷ Stice is referring to an album released by Beatrice Kay on Columbia Records in 1940. The big-band style album offered eight songs.

nose (if you think he'd appreciate that). He's a swell doc, I'm very glad he didn't get hurt in the train wreck.

No, I haven't written to Grandmother. I didn't even have any idea where she was. I could use the stamps.

I've got a lot of problems to do, so I better close now.

Be good, People, and keep writing.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Hey, Mom, send me my yellow and brown plaid shirt (the wool one) and my brown gaberdine trousers, will you? And one of my small plain white T-shirts. We can wear civies on liberty now, so I'm sure going to. Will you please send me those clothes? No more though, because I will just barely have room for them when we leave. I'll have them cleaned when they get here with overnight service downtown.

Thanks a lot, I'll be glad to get them.

Ray



*Broke as I am and was then, I've never been so embarrassed (in a way) and had so much hilarious fun in all my short life. . . .
The girls were beautiful, and the man was a scream, and the whole show was a riot!*

2 February 1947

Hi Mom,

You should have seen your boy last night! Broke as I am and was then, I've never been so embarrassed (in a way) and had so much hilarious fun in all my short life. An Airedale and I went to the USO-YMCA in Honolulu to see the hula show. Naturally, we took the center seats on the front row. The girls were beautiful, and the man was a scream, and the whole show was a riot! This real huge hula gal—about 65 years old, I guess—grabbed me, a swabbie, and some doggie sergeants and the four of us flew onto the stage. Much to my surprise, I loved every bit of it! She put her colored straw hat on top of my head, and we were supposed to follow her antics, and all do a hula. Every time we moved, the audience roared, and my buddies said my face kept getting redder and redder every time I moved. I swear I was laughing so hard and having so much fun, I could hardly

follow the ole gal. Everybody had fun. But the next time, I believe I'll view the show from the second row.

The \$30 that I signed the SMK fare on Midway certainly didn't last its expected time here at Pearl Harbor!¹⁸ I've been broke for two weeks now, but the pay officer from Midway is coming in this week to get the pay, so we're all hoping like mad that we'll get paid. If he doesn't bring us any money, there is nothing we can do about it until next March. So, if that is the outcome, I wonder if you could send me some money? I'll let you know if we get paid or not. I'll either get more than \$230 or nothing, whatever they decide to do. If we don't get some money, you could send me a couple of my newest \$18.75 bonds or that \$37.50 one I sent from California, and I could cash it here.

Hey, has my war bond allotment started yet? They are supposed to be taking out a \$50 bond every month, and I don't know if they've started or not. Please tell me the day they start coming, for what amount, and every time one arrives too.

They are worth so's I can have a general idea of how much they owe me, and I owe them. Up to December, they hadn't taken one payment for my GI insurance yet. They are supposed to knock \$6.40 per month for that. Someone somewhere is certainly fouled up!

Here's my average for Fundamentals I: first week 88, second week 86, third week 88, fourth week 82, lab 80, and final average 84.8. That is so much better than I'd expected that I'm marveled at it. Here's hoping I can keep the second month's work just as high, and if barely possible higher, huh?

I'll see ya, People. Be good!

Ray

P.S. The reason we spent so much money the first month is because we'd never seen the place, and naturally after being on Midway, we wanted to shoot the works and see the town. So now that we've seen it all, or almost, we won't be spending anywhere near as much. I know Honolulu as good as Urbana almost by now.



Oh yes, I'm a big wheel now. I made private first class last

¹⁸ SMK may refer to St. Michael Airport in Alaska, which may have been used as a transfer point between the United States and the Pacific Islands.

month! I passed out cigarettes instead of cigars. I'll pass them out when I make corporal, if ever.

5 February 1947

Hi People,

Seeing as how I owe all three of you letters now, here I be! It only took Mom's letter three days to get here, and it took Dad's two weeks (22 January). I don't remember about yours, Lile.

The snow is piling up so deep in our classroom that I can barely see the instructor! Now, we're really getting down deep into the theory illustrating the differences between radar waves and radio wave forms, and I'll be darned if I'm not completely underwater. We have enough notes though, so maybe tonight I'll be able to dig myself out. We Marines are the first ones to ever attend this Navy school here, so we have a standard to keep up too, and I'm not going to be the one to drop out if I can possibly help it.

Thanks a lot for sending me all my high school credits. They will probably come in handy if I need something like it to present to some interviewing officer. I know you went to a lot of trouble finding out about the schools and academies, so don't think I don't realize it. Thanks a lot! After looking over the sample entrance exams in both pamphlets, I know that I'd have to attend some sort of prep school. I don't believe I could pass the exams with as much as I know now. Are you considering the age angle when you suggested my attending the University of Illinois for a year or a year's worth of classes? I'll be 20 about a month after I'm discharged, and I'd be 21 before I got to one of the academies—and I more than likely would have to—if I went to school a year. Everything is going to be awfully close together whatever does happen. We can count on that!

To say this course is rather difficult is putting it so lightly! Most of the students have had several years as radio and radar operators and know quite a bit about the theory that we are now having. Us people from Midway just got as far as setting the equipment up in the field. We didn't even get to operate it because it didn't work. We played around, but that's as far as it went. From what I gather, the average person in the class is just as snowed, so I'm not alone anyway.

Oh yes, I'm a big wheel now. I made private first class last month! I passed out cigarettes instead of cigars. I'll pass them out when I make cor-

poral, if ever. Yesterday, a lieutenant and a corporal from Midway brought us the pay roll and paid us on the spot at school. No strain, no pain, and I now am the proud possessor of \$100 (and PFC stripes). They still owe me about \$140, so I'm not worried anymore about cash.

About my camera, it came last week. But it is so cracked and broken, it wasn't worth the postage on the outside. How much was it insured for? Send me the slip, and maybe I can collect from the Fleet Post Office. I'm sorry you all went to so much trouble, and it came out broken after all.

Urbana [high school] better snap out of that ole stuff—61 to 30 is pretty bad. Champaign always did have an edge over Urbana it seems.¹⁹ How are the grapplers doing . . . Eddie . . . Mason?

The waters in the Mormon temple were blueish as I remember. It sure was a ritzy place to worship. You mentioned the winding road going down from the Pali, Dad. I'll say it is windy. We were in a bus, and it took up the whole road on the hairpin turns. We all got a real thrill going down! They have a nice modern wide highway from Honolulu all the way around Pearl Harbor now. Schofield Barracks really looks like a swell place to be stationed. Hickam has a beautiful main gate too.

When you people read "Life Goes to an Aircraft-Carrier Party," you'll read all about the USS *Tarawa* (CV 40).²⁰ It's here waiting to take part in the war games this month and next. I watched two of the boys win dates in a "Darts for Dates" program put on the air by the USO. I'm going to try my luck one of these weekends.

Mom, what on Earth have you sent me that requires \$75 insurance on it? If you sent me a suit, I'll die. It's awfully warm here, even though it is winter. We are all sweating around noon.

I'm very glad you are going to the convention, Lucile. You ought to do things like that more often. I'm so deeply grateful that I was allowed to travel around, I can't say. It all adds up to a lot of wonderful and educational (in millions of ways) experiences.

My swabbie friend (one of many now) got your letter today. Why did you send him that picture of you? I looked in a mirror and put a towel

¹⁹ Stice is referring to the high school basketball teams from Urbana and Champaign.

²⁰ "Life Goes to an Aircraft-Carrier Party," *Life*, 3 July 1944. This reference is a bit confusing because the article mentioned is from 1944. The USS *Tarawa* arrived in Pearl Harbor on 24 January and remained in the area until 18 February when it departed for Fleet Exercises in Kwajalein. See "Tarawa I (CV40), 1945-1967," Naval History and Heritage Command, 24 July 2024.

around my head, and it looked like me. That's no slam on your hair or anything. I sure was surprised by how much we look like each other.

Tell Zeigler she better get hot and write me a letter! Now, Mom, don't use the word wrong. In the Corps, it means to "move out" or get busy. Now, I'll probably get a letter from her tomorrow—I hope! We're going to take some pictures of ourselves (Larry and I), so you'll get a snapshot soon.

Some of the first swabbies I made friends with were a couple of the guys in the chow line, so I'm eating much better now. I know a lot of submarine and can men, we all get along fine. Ironically, the only one I don't agree with very much is the Airedale Marine in our room. He is always right, never wrong, and he even tries to tell the instructor what goes how. A pain in the neck at times. He is brilliant, as far as comparing my knowledge of electricity to his, and a help at homework. But, oh boy, what trying situations we argue ourselves in sometimes!

I'll see ya later, People. Keep writing and be good (or have a good time).
Ray



This Sunday, I'm going on a picnic put on by the school. Only 24 of us can go, and all we do is go to a nice beach, swim, drink free beer, and rough house, as you would put it, and just have a good time and a lot of fun.

12 February 1947
1940 hours

Hi Mom,

The other day I got a letter from Merve. He's on mess duty, but he says he doesn't like Saipan at all. I don't suppose it's much better than Midway, only larger and more to do.

We have either two weeks or two months left here as far as we can foretell. If the four guys who failed last week's exam fail this Friday's too, they go back right away. Otherwise, we have a month and a half more of fundamentals and two weeks of gear. There is a possibility—there always is—that all of us won't have to go back, but that's out of our hands, so time will tell.

This is the first time I can remember that I can't think of much to write! This Sunday, I'm going on a picnic put on by the school. Only 24

of us can go, and all we do is go to a nice beach, swim, drink free beer, and rough house (as you would put it), and just have a good time and a lot of fun.

I put PFC stripes in ink on my dungarees, and you should hear all the ribbing I take off these Joes! All the swabbies make the equivalent rate just as soon as they leave boot camp, and they sure like to kid me about them. I tell them they ought to see the stripes tattooed on my arms and embroidered on my skivvies, and we all have fun anyway.

It's going to be a sad day when I fly back to Midway, but I've sure been lucky to be able to get to come here and stay for a while. If we get rates out of this school, it won't be so bad back there. But otherwise, it'll be just like it always was.

Your iron certainly is coming in handy. I can make one pair of khakis last almost a week by keeping them pressed and wearing dungarees in the afternoons to school. That cuts down on my laundry bill considerably.

Did you read where Pan Am won't stop at Midway anymore? That sure will make the mail calls a long time from each other out there.²¹

Did my [car] accident insurance pay for Dr. Ford's operation? I've often wondered how that bill got paid.

Do you people have a real fireplace? The Allen's wasn't if I remember correctly.

I'll write more when there's more to write, Mom, so be good and take it easy.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. It slipped up on me. Be my Valentines, People, please!



If it hadn't been for some swell swabbie, my life wouldn't have been worth two cents. Two of us on a school picnic got caught right in the riptide where the monstrous breakers were breaking and were getting the stuffing beat out of us. Somehow, the guys ashore quit waving back at us and heard us yelling for help . . . but I couldn't see having any headlines "Young Marine Drowns

²¹ Pan Am ended service to Midway in 1947 as the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) took over the remaining airport operations on Sand Island until 1950. See "World War II Facilities at Midway," National Park Service, accessed 12 August 2024.

Figure 31. Ray Stice's Urbana, IL, high school wrestling team (front row, fourth from left)



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Off Oahu,” so I kept above till another guy came to me. I hung onto his suit and we tried to fight our way back to shore. The next thing I knew, I was next to my buddy.

16 February 1947

Sunday

2200 hours

Hi Mom,

Well, your little boy almost cut short his great career today when Ole Lady Nature said, “Come here, Joe.” If it hadn’t been for some swell swabbie, my life wouldn’t have been worth two cents. Two of us on a school picnic got caught right in the riptide where the monstrous breakers were breaking and were getting the stuffing beat out of us. Somehow, the guys ashore quit waving back at us and heard us yelling for help. Over a dozen of them tried to get out to us and were stopped by the waves. Shupe, my buddy (a swabbie from Michigan), was going down for good in the boiling sucking water after a huge wave pinned him under a reef. He passed out and was washed ashore where they grabbed him. One guy got out to me, and I held onto his hand, and we tried to swim in then a breaker broke over us and we came up 30 yards apart. It was all very discouraging, but I

couldn't see having any headlines "Young Marine Drowns Off Oahu," so I kept above till another guy came to me, and I hung onto his suit and we tried to fight our way back to shore. The next thing I knew, I was next to my buddy. That curtailed all swimming activities for the day, so we all collected nice sunburns and were all very happy to be alive.²² I've never had such a trying experience in all my life! Then, to top my weekend off, I had \$70 stolen from the room last night sometime. It's a good thing you sent me those two bonds after all. We had a shakedown on the only suspect, but didn't find anything. About the only happy things that happened was that, after 10 years, I learned how to do a back dive without flopping too much, and I finally got a letter from Nancy Ziegler, which was very nice. Do you happen to know her? She sounds like Jean Latimer, and she's really on the ball. I hope my letters don't sound too dry. I'm a little out of practice of writing to a dame I would like to know better.

Oh yes, the other night (Friday), I danced my first dance since I was home. I was scared to death and nervous, but it sure was better than watching other people dance.

As to the test Friday, I passed, which is a miracle as far as I'm concerned. But it doesn't sound good to you people because the number is low. I only made a 67. Three of the four who failed last week also flunked again. One from each kind of year out there. We'll find out tomorrow for sure whether or not they will be sent back right away or whether they'll go on to school.

Hey, Mom, did you read the part of my request that you should only send me one shirt and one pair of pants? I have a lot of trouble getting all my gear in my seabag now, and we won't be staying here forever.

I signed up for a school deal where people go to a 44-week special electronics maintenance school in the states. They have a school in Corpus Christi, Texas, and one at Great Lakes.²³ I put in for AETM (aviation gear)

²² According to the Hawaii State Department of Health, drowning is the fifth major cause of death in the area, which averages almost 40 deaths per year. Most injuries for nonresidents are primarily caused by drowning. "Drowning Prevention," Hawaii Injury Prevention Plan, 2018-2023, accessed 12 August 2024.

²³ This school is likely part of the U.S. Navy's Electronic Training Program. Originally housed at Annapolis, the Bureau of Navigation decided to move the school and its new aviation component to a more secure location in mid-1941 to Ward Island, near Corpus Christi, TX. The electrical engineering component would be housed in downtown Chicago in early 1942. See Capt L. S. Howeth, USN (Ret), *History of Communications Electronics in the United States Navy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963).

because, even though I hate the Airedales, I know a better deal when I see one.²⁴ The only catch is they want us to ship over. I can see extending but not signing over, even though an OCS school right afterward would get me out of that, and I'd be really set. In four years, I'd be an officer, have a spec [?] number, and know my trade pretty well with all this schooling. We ought to find out if we'll get to go or not next week I imagine.

It's so much trouble so let's forget about the camera. I bought it six years ago for \$3.50 and, even though it still was good, its paid for itself pretty well.

I give my diary a workout every day, and it really ought to bring back many memories in the years to come.

I ought to be safe for another year or so now after last year's wreck and today. I won't worry till next year I guess, as if I ever worried about things like that.

It's sack time, People, so I'd better be hitting the rack.

All my love, Mom and People,
Ray



That fire was one of the most exciting and interesting events in all my life. Fifteen of us volunteered from the school, and I mean we really put out some work! The paper says only 500 men fought, but I know darn well there was over 1,000 men down there.

2 March 1947

Hi Mom,

I just got back from another school picnic and found a letter from you waiting and I realize I haven't written you for quite a while.

By now, you've read about our fires here at the harbor. Believe you me, they weren't to be sneezed at!²⁵ I helped and fought in the dark fires

²⁴ AETM likely refers to aviation electronics technician's mate.

²⁵ News reports are scarce, but the quarterly report for Naval Air Station Honolulu indicates the Navy Fire Department's activity, though not in detail. Local newspapers do offer some coverage. See Charles E. Hogue, "Fires that Burn Water," *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, 1 March 1947.

for about six hours Thursday night and turned right around and made a 92 on Friday mornings exam! My average is 67 for Fundamentals II, so tomorrow I start Fundamentals III with a clean slate.

I'm very glad you like Ziegler. Her letters are truly wonderful, so I can well imagine what a swell girl she is. Is she really cute?

Today, I had one of the freakiest accidents I've ever experienced. I was standing next to our cook fire, drying myself, and pow! One of the rocks forming the side of the reflector exploded and a chip of it dug into my ankle. More fun!

Yesterday, I bought a 25-inch wing-span flying model just to see if I still had what it took. I guess I do, but the glue is such a cheap grade it doesn't stick even after drying overnight.

Don't think about that 44-week school anymore. Seeing as how I'm a student, it's out of reach for me. So, I guess I'll just go back to Midway and finish my job and time out there.

That fire was one of the most exciting and interesting events in all my life. Fifteen of us volunteered from the school, and I mean we really put out some work! The paper says only 500 men fought, but I know darn well there was over 1,000 men down there. The broken axes were piled all over the dock. I finally got to run a jackhammer—one of those pneumatic air hammers that street builders use—and I was on a base a good time too. Many of the fire fighters were burnt or smoked out, but by the time I got there, the fire was only burning under the pier.

In the fire, when I was on my base and soaked to the bone, some Joe comes around passing out Navy field jackets. So, me being slightly cool, gets one. There was no one to give it back to, so I kept it and just now traded it to another gyrene for a pair of khaki trousers. Now, I have three pants and three shirts that fit, and that I like!

I'm slightly worn out after having so much fun at the beach today, so I guess I'll close now and hit the sack early so to be all peppy and cheerful tomorrow—joke that is. Anyway, I'll see ya later, People. Tell everyone "hi" for me.

Yours,
Ray



If I can ever get a really good basis of electronics, I'm pretty well convinced that that's what I'd like to be in for the rest of my

useful days. And even though I can't see it now, I will try to go to Annapolis. Do you people think I'm old enough mentally to go to the academy?

7 March 1947

Hi Mom,

I'm at school now and, while we're waiting for the inspection to get under-way, I'd better catch up on my letter writing. Today's exam was a stinker! No one made over 90, not even the officers, and I only made a 68 luckily. I found out two of my classmates are VMI [Virginia Military Institute] and West Point graduates, so that will give you an idea of what a mixture of brains and men we have in our class.

How's Lucile coming along in college this semester? I haven't heard from her in quite a while, so I imagine she is pretty busy. Thanks for sending along Jim Strong's letter. It set my mind into thinking about the future again. I can't see studying for four long solid years with no break. Like always, I'm still afraid of work—mentally—as you always said. Although, I am studying like everything to keep in school here. To me, my future is one huge question mark. I grant you one thing, unless I have an exceptionally good deal next fall, I'll hit up my CO for a transfer to the cram school in Bainbridge and get ready to try for the exams in March. After four years at Annapolis, all this school will be wasted because I'll probably forget it all by then (if I do make it.) If I can ever get a really good basis of electronics, I'm pretty well convinced that that's what I'd like to be in for the rest of my useful days. And even though I can't see it now, I will try to go to Annapolis. Do you people think I'm old enough mentally to go to the academy?

Thanks for sending my short-sleeve shirt. I'll get a chance to wear it tomorrow, I guess. Tonight, our division has duty, so no liberty.

No, there are only 16 Marines and 231 swabbies. One Airedale from Ewa Beach had to go home on emergency leave just like Jim Strong.²⁶ It sure is too bad.

My laundry cost me 70 cents this week; that fire got all my clothes filthy.

²⁶ Ewa, or Ewa Beach, is directly west of Honolulu and southwest of Pearl Harbor along the coast.

We have a new swabbie in our room. He's off a minesweeper, so we know a lot more about how to take Hanlan's place. He's back on Midway now, I guess. From what we hear, all the staff has left Midway and rates are flying. Even the ole man had enough; he's getting off it before he goes off his head.

My diary sure is getting full by the end of each week. Every week, something interesting happens. This Sunday, a bunch of gooks are holding motorcycle races around Diamond Head somewhere near the blow-hole. Guess we'll watch the fun.

I'll see ya, People.

Yours,
Ray



I'm sorry you thought I got hurt that one day Ole Lady Nature gave me a bad time in the surf. Nothing ever came of that, except good experience and a couple of bruises. . . . I guess I'll try for that cram school in Bainbridge, but I still can't see going to a hard college like Annapolis if I ever do get there.

[This letter has no date on it as it is the written transcript of a record Stice made, but Milly's birthday is 14 March 1947 as a frame of reference.]

Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, and may you have many, many more even happier ones too, Mom. I'm sorry you thought I got hurt that one day Ole Lady Nature gave me a bad time in the surf. Nothing ever came of that except good experience and a couple of bruises. Today, we had another school picnic. Ole Sol [the sun] gave me a workout today. I'll really look like a local yokel soon.²⁷

I guess I'll try for that cram school in Bainbridge, but I still can't see going to a hard college like Annapolis if I ever do get there.

We got paid yesterday, so I'm into the chips again so to speak. If I plan things right, I'll be able to send another \$50 bond along. I sure hope

²⁷ The term *local yokel* was a slightly derogatory reference to someone from a rural area or a native resident. The origin of the term is not well documented. Some hold that this slang term was first used by military personnel in the early 1900s for natives in their deployed location. Other sources claim that it may be of English origin for the yokel, a green woodpecker.

so. This place is no good for saving dough, and I'm falling down in the amount I planned on saving. I hope my others are coming in all right. My pile should amount to well over \$1,200 easy enough all right.

One of our group from Midway got caught copying on Friday's exam, so he'll probably be seeing the goonie birds again soon. As far as we can guess, if we keep on passing, we'll stay here for another two months. Here's hoping so, as I'm in no terrible hurry to get back there.

Have you seen Nancy again? If she is anything at all like her wonderful letters, she sure is one in a million. Say Watson, I'm expecting a huge letter from you today telling me all about your birthday. What did Dad and Lile give you? Oh yeah, that sister of mine, Lile, you better drop me a line someday instead of one of your boyfriends. Of course, I guess I could write to you. Would that help any? Yesterday, I got five letters—really six because one was a double decker and only two of them were written in the last four months! Lee finally broke down and wrote, bless his little hide. He told me to hurry up and get stateside. Boy, if only I could!

Hey, do you realize I've been here about as long as I was on Midway, and that I've been overseas five-and-a-half months? That means that rightfully, we'll all be entitled to overseas leave as they call it by the time school is over for us. Here's one kid who is sure going to try for it. Of course, my overseas time doesn't even show next to yours, Dad, but give me time. I'll catch up with you someday.

Mom, you ought to write a book called "My Day," by Milly B. Stice. Why, I bet ole lady Eleanor Roosevelt would stop writing her column and listen to one who knows!²⁸ Okay, so I'm a little prejudiced! I still think it's a good idea.

I don't know how this record is going to come out because I'm not at the USO. They closed their little booth, and I'm in some Hotel Street flop joint taking a chance on what I can find. Sure hope I won't have to

²⁸ From 31 December 1935 to 26 September 1962, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote a nationally syndicated newspaper column called "My Day." She did not keep a regular diary, so this column is the only consistent account of her public actions, which chronicle her evolution to the skilled advocate for the New Deal, civil rights, the United Nations, and other domestic and international concerns. See "My Day," Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, George Washington University, accessed 12 August 2024.

disappoint you. One of these days, I'll send you a picture of your one and only—son that is—in his high class civies. They sure are swell and so cool and comfortable too. Of course, everyone can still tell I'm a gyrene by my heavy shoes. But I don't care, they sure feel better than a hot uniform. I still act the same way when I'm on liberty. Smith and I rent a locker, and only costs \$1.50 for a month. I guess I'll have to send them home when we leave here. Only officers can wear them out on the rock.

Times about up, Mom, so I'll say goodnight, good morning, good day, hello, hi, and take it easy. You're my one and only too!

I'll see ya later, Mom.

Nite.



Friday night I went to a USO dance and actually danced! Got a haircut, played Japanese records, and had a lot of fun. . . . Then as 6 of us (3 swabbies and 3 gyrenes) were waiting for a bus, over 100 gooks came out of this building and surrounded us. One drunk gook pulled a razor and the others all put on brass knuckles and really attacked in the dirtiest, lowest, filthiest way I've ever imagined! We were so taken by surprise, we didn't know what to do. Only two out of the six of us had face bruises or cuts; one swabbie lost two front teeth, and a Marine got a banged up nose. The only place they hit was in the ears or in the back of the neck and head.

16 March 1947

0900 hours

Hi Mom,

I sure hope your record got to you without being all bent up like the other one was. If it is bent, bend it back. Don't use heat!

Yes, I did get the other shirt, and I wear it during the day and the wool one at night. Makes it very nice!

No, I haven't been able to find out anything about my GI insurance.²⁹ Now, I'm in charge of the Midway gang (now that Hanlon left)—big responsibility!

This weekend tops them off. Friday morning, I made an 85 on the exam that flunked one-third of the class. That's what comes from my sitting up in front and paying more strict attention and taking more complete notes. Then in the afternoon, I worked in the mailroom and was the only student to get mail—BTO [big time operator]! My mail has been very satisfactory now that so many different people are writing back. We have two more weeks of Fundamentals III and then one three-week gear course in S.P.I.M. and a two-week gear course in N.T.P.S.³⁰ Makes sense huh?

Friday night, I went to a USO dance and actually danced!³¹ Got a haircut, played Japanese records, and had a lot of fun with the barbers—gals, natch! Then as 6 of us (3 swabbies and 3 gyrenes) were waiting for a bus, over 100 gooks came out of this building and surrounded us. One drunk gook pulled a razor and the others all put on brass knuckles and really attacked in the dirtiest, lowest, filthiest way I've ever imagined! We were so taken by surprise, we didn't know what to do. Only two out of the six of us had face bruises or cuts; one swabbie lost two front teeth, and a Marine got a banged up nose. The only place they hit was in the ears or in the back of the neck and head. The SP [shore patrol] broke it up luckily, and it only lasted about a minute, but the whole school was ready to go into town and hold a "field day" when the word got around!

Then I thought I'd lost my liberty card and could see 10 days restriction coming, but I went to town again and found it and got out of that. As we were walking down King Street, I met two guys I went through boot camp with and we shot the bull for a while. As we crossed the next street,

²⁹ The National Service Life Insurance program was created in October 1940 to support the needs of WWII servicemembers. Maximum value of a term policy was \$10,000 and new policies were no longer accepted after April 1951. See "Additional VAL Life Insurance: National Service Life Insurance (World War II program)," Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed 13 August 2024.

³⁰ NTPS may refer to nonlinear time-periodic system, which is used in the context of systems that exhibit nonlinear behavior and periodic variations over time studied in control theory, signal processing, or circuit design.

³¹ For more on the history of the USO and its operations in Hawaii, see Michael Case, "Inside the Archives: Down Honolulu Way: The USO and The Navy in Hawaii 1942–1947," *International Journal of Naval History* 13, no. 2 (August 2016).

someone grabbed my arm. I turned around and there stood a swabbie and it dawned on me that it was Jack Noonan. He was in Lucile's class. He's going back to the states Tuesday and, while his can [submarine] is in drydock in San Diego, he'll be home on leave—lucky stiff! We got a chocolate milk shake and I told him I'd come down to his can this afternoon and see him. So, after another swabbie buddy and I go down to his sub and eat noon chow, I'll go over and see Jack while I have the chance. Jim Lustig shoved off for Saipan or somewhere, and he didn't look me up, so the heck with him.

Mom, I'm glad you told me how pretty Nancy looked, but I sure wish you hadn't said anything about her date. I guess if I was home, I couldn't compete very well with those older guys anyway. I don't care, I'll catch up someday!

Later. . . . The chow on the sub was super! I swear, I've never seen so much in so little a space as on board the *Queenfish*. Also, I went aboard the USS *Turner* (DD 834)—Jack's ship—and we shot the bull for a couple of hours. If he comes out to see you people, give him a beer and let him talk—very interesting. We had a fine time just talking. A can is really much larger than I always looked at one, so is a sub. If I ever join the Navy, that would be the real duty—small ship, small quarters, small crew, and plenty of travel. Dreams are funny, huh?

It's sack time now, so I'd better close before the lights go out.

I'll see ya, Mom and Dad, and you too, Sis.

Yours,
Ray



Okay, so I guess I'll agree to try for Bainbridge. It's up to my CO as far as that goes. I'll worry about all that after I get back to the "rock" and finish my job there.

23 March 1947

Hi Mom,

Another week, another grade, another liberty, and another week again. I only made a 66 on the exam Friday. No alibis except I was pretty well snowed during the week.

Your letter telling me about your birthday was very nice. I'm glad you liked your record. Yes, I did cash the two little bonds you sent. I had to keep from going broke, but bought a money order for \$37.50, which I hope you found enclosed. I would appreciate it very much if you would buy a bond for me with it so I can still keep up on my savings. The banks and post offices are always closed when I get to town.

Okay, so I guess I'll agree to try for Bainbridge. It's up to my CO as far as that goes. I'll worry about all that after I get back to the "rock" and finish my job there. After such a long, wonderful, easy (except for mental strain and work) "vacation" from the Marine Corps, I guess going back to Midway won't be too bad. After all, it isn't too long before my tour of duty there is terminated.

Today, we had another beach party. A doggie lieutenant from Danville was in charge, so we had a fine time talking things over. He used to stay at 909 West Columbia when he was going to school. He was in our class at school too.

I guess Don was lucky after all—Don Clinard, that is—with all those Japs raising cane around their patrols. Sure hope he is out of sick bay and gets one of them for me. I'm very "bitter" to gooks and Japs.

You should have been here last week when the fleet was in. Poor swabbies go down the wrong alleys and get rolled all over the place. The police force had a big shakedown last month, and they have a lot of rookie cops that are very helpful. It's the old ducks who won't arrest the gooks when they should.

Has either Carol or Bud been home lately? We hear that Congress has dropped all Marine Air Corps appropriations, and they are discharging all men that are supposed to get out in 1948.³² The Airedale in our room has been acting like a butterfly for the last three days.

Are they ever really going to make Hawaii a state? Speaking for

³² Stice is likely referring to the National Security Act of 1947, or more formally, Public Law 235, 26 July 1947 (61 STAT. 496), an Act to promote the national security by providing for a Secretary of Defense; for a National Military Establishment; for a Department of the Army, a Department of the Navy, and a Department of the Air Force; and for the coordination of the activities of the National Military Establishment with other departments and agencies of the Government concerned with the national security.

Figure 31. Mrs. Hasty's home room class photograph. Don Clinard is standing top row, third from left



Source: Stice Family Collection.

several hundred thousand servicemen: "The whole idea is rotten."³³

Did I tell you about my glasses? I'm supposed to wear them when my eyes get tired—usually late in the afternoon—and they help an awful lot for studying at night. My eyes are always 20/20, but the goggles sure help.

I'll see ya later, People. Yeah, you too, Sis.

Yours,
Ray



Boy, I could write volumes on all I've learned and been exposed

³³ There were many arguments for and against the annexation of the territory. President William McKinley endorsed the introduction of Hawaii as a state when he took office in 1896. However, racist perceptions of the Hawaiian people further motivated the opposing side, because they feared annexation would give native Hawaiians, along with the islands' sizable Chinese and Japanese immigrant population, a pathway to American citizenship. Though several attempts at a treaty were submitted to Congress, it was not until the Spanish-American War (1898) that favor tipped toward annexation of the islands. On 15 June 1898, the House of Representatives passed the resolution by a vote of 209 to 91; three weeks later, the Senate passed it by vote of 42 to 21. See "Timeline of U.S. Diplomatic History: Annexation of Hawaii, 1898," Department of State, accessed 13 August 2024.

to since I've been here, but there would be so many more millions of books telling about things I don't know about. Ain't life grand—so nice and confusing!

27 March 1947

Hi Mom,

Today, the mailman was nice to me seeing as how he brought me three letters: one from you, one from Leon, and one from some gal in Milwaukee.

Ha! Good for me and my 85. Oh yeah, then made a 66 . . . whee. Now, tomorrow is our final exam in Fundamentals III. Monday, we start in on SPIM long-range, early warning radar. Very complicated and hard to say the least, and what gripes me is it's Navy gear and something that I'll probably never see again except on the mast of some cruiser or a wagon. Oh well, gear is gear, and I'm plenty in the dark yet as to maintenance and repairing of such. So, SP, here I come.

No, Jim didn't go with the group that went to Guam to relieve the garrison that sent Joe's to Peleliu. He left over a month ago. I saw some seagoing buddies of mine from the *Tarawa* (carrier) and they told me he left a long time ago. I sure would have given a lot to go with those replacements.

Yes, it is nice to know these swabbies for more reasons than one. I'm learning all the different ships, including their initials and several of their names. We often go down to them and visit the ships. Why, this Sunday afternoon, I'm going to eat chow on a minesweeper. More fun!

If you see Nancy, tell her to get hot and write me again. It's been over three weeks since I've heard from her. Did you let her hear the second record? I still don't think I have as much accent as the records say back. It sure is not put on!

Thanks an awful lot for sending me another camera. Now, if I can get the shutter to work right, I'll take some pictures. It is a swell camera, but the shutter stays open all the time.

Hey, Woman, if you keep playing the record, you better have a copy made before it wears out. You know what? I listened to a man in Indianapolis talk today, and the chief next to me talked back to him—only 5,000 miles away—and they were chatting like they were face to face. Yeah,

shortwave sets sure are powerful playthings.³⁴ Maybe someday I'll be able to arrange it so you people could go out to this farm outside Danville, and we could talk for a while. Sounds nice, huh? I can't get over how powerful it was.

Boy, I could write volumes on all I've learned and been exposed to since I've been here, but there would be so many more millions of books telling about things I don't know about. Ain't life grand—so nice and confusing!

My studies are calling, it says here, so I'll be seein ya later, People.
Be good and write.

Yours,
Ray



Today, we reached Sheffield, England, on our shortwave set out here. You should have seen the chief who was operating it. For seven months now, he's tried to get a British Isles contact, and he finally made one. He was really very happy.

1 April 1947

Hi Mom,

Hey, your letter written on 28 March came today, and you sent me a sheet telling me I had \$267.30 worth of bonds up to date and quote, "Today, your letter came so I'll get a little one," \$18.75. How come? The money order I sent was for \$37.50. I sent that much so I could start making up for the six months that my bond allotment wasn't started. Did you make a mistake when you cashed it or something?

Today, we really had fun. All morning they explained schematics, and this afternoon they put "troubles"—easy ones compared to the ones we'll get later on—in the gear. We finally got it back in operating and running condition just in time to track several planes and have a little fun for a

³⁴ Shortwave radio was developed in the 1920s to be used for communication over very long distances, because radio waves of higher frequency, which travel in straight lines, are limited by the visual horizon, or about 64 km (40 miles).

change. It isn't anything at all like the old Mark 20 on Midway, but that will seem like child's play when we get done with this gear.

I guess I told you my Fundamentals I, II, and III overall average was 78. The class overall average was about 70, so that one 66 wasn't too terrible after all.

Yes, I did get your camera, and I want to thank you again very much. It works fine now, and I'll send some snapshots home very soon.

We have a pretty large class of 16; 8 swabbies and 8 of us. We work out in the school compound on the gear in the trailers and they work indoors. Only four of us troubleshoot at the same time, and only two of us in our group give a damn, so here's hoping it sinks through my thick skull.

We saw a fine movie at Waikiki Sunday: *Song of the South*. I thought it was very good.³⁵

We ought to get paid again in about four days, so I'll send another money order for another \$50 bond while I still have the cash.

We had fun hypnotizing each other last night with a spiral disc. We're going to put on a show at the school some week for the "unbelievers." One guy has the wheel and the patience to talk to a guy under, and there are several of us who can concentrate hard enough to go under, so we had quite a large audience, to say the least, last night.³⁶

Miss Phillips left last week, and I called her one day too late, so I doubt very much if she even knows your address.

Today, we reached Sheffield, England, on our shortwave set out here. You should have seen the chief who was operating. For seven months now, he's tried to get a British Isles contact and he finally made one. He was really very happy. It was the English Joe's first Hawaiian contact also, so they were both satisfied.³⁷

³⁵ *Song of the South* (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1946) was a live-action/animated film produced by Walt Disney featuring Uncle Remus's stories about Brer Rabbit and his friends.

³⁶ The popularity of public hypnotism surged in the 1940s and 1950s likely due to Hollywood movies that inevitably featured someone with a swinging watch encouraging the person to focus and relax. See Peter Lamont, "Hypnotism and Suggestion: A Historical Perspective," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 31 March 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.635>.

³⁷ Sheffield is approximately 7,080 miles or 11,396 kilometers from Pearl Harbor.

This Sunday is Easter again. I sure hope you people have a very pleasant and eventful Easter day.

Be C N you.

Yours,

Ray



Did you people read about those Marines in China getting killed off? If that stuff keeps up, there'll be another war for sure.

6 April 1947

Easter Sunday

Hi Mom,

We don't know what our grades are till tomorrow, so I can't tell you about them.

This morning, I'm in the duty section, so no liberty, so no church. I will have to make up for it next week, I guess.

What ever happened to Nancy? She hasn't written me in about six weeks. Are Jack Vanimin or however you spell him and her going steady or something?

That Starkey really snows me. I got a nice letter from her grandmother thanking me for her "nice birthday card and such nice wishes." I haven't even written to Joan in well over two months!

Yesterday, I learned why—primarily this is now—we were allowed to come to this Navy electronics school. We were going to be a special SPIM radar team and to go to farther overseas as a unit with a Marine captain in charge of us. The captain and two others are getting discharged next week, three of them flunked out, and another one is home on furlough. So, Midway awaits us with open arms.

It's been raining off and on and for the last three days, so liberty wasn't too good yesterday. The sun stays out, it pours down cats and dogs for five minutes, and then it's dry again. Peculiar, but nicer than the storms you people get.

Did you people read about those Marines in China getting killed

off?³⁸ If that stuff keeps up, there'll be another war for sure. I wish someone could straighten those chinks out. The guys who just came from where they're fighting says they knock off for chow and at night to sleep, but during working hours, there's slugs flying like hail. Looks like Peleliu will finally get cleaned out, too, if we take the offensive like the reports say.³⁹ Ask the Clinard's if Don is getting any of it, or is he stuck in sick bay still? I haven't heard from Merve or Don in an awful long time. Also ask the Finical's if Jim expects to hit Pearl Harbor in the very near future. Tanks keed.

Have any of the Airedales come home to get discharged yet? Carol and Bud can get out if they want to. A lot of them are leaving the islands—here this week and they'll be civilians next week. I can't say as I envy them on that point, just that they are going to the states. From letters from Midway, they're getting worse than it was when we were there. They even have to wear greens during all the morning. The only time they can wear dungarees is from 1330 to 1630, and then, only if their work calls for it. How such a small forgotten base can be so chicken is beyond me!

I'll see ya later, People,
Ray



Mom, after four years, I've finally discovered which muscle will pull my shoulder blades in. The Marines has made me, so I want to stand straight, and now I've got to do the rest. Before, I never worked on my back muscles, just arm and chest.

³⁸ According to news stories, 5 Marines were killed and 16 wounded when armed Chinese attacked the 1st Marine Division ammunition dump near Tientsin. See Benjamin Welles, "5 Marines Killed in China in Attack by 'Dissidents'," *New York Times*, 5 April 1947. The official histories state that 350 Chinese Communists were part of the attack as U.S. forces had begun withdrawal activities in the region. See Henry I. Shaw Jr., *The United States Marines in North China, 1945–1949* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, rev. 1962), 21–22.

³⁹ BGen Gordon D. Gayle, *Bloody Beaches: The Marines at Peleliu* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996).

8 April 1947

1915 hours

Hi Mom,

You asked next time to send some stationery that you could “see,” so here it is! I received your April Fool’s Day letter today. Thanks for writing such a nice long letter.

Oh yes, here’s a picture of me taken inside our room. Hogan in the sack is striking a typical pose. He’s the short guy from Chicago. It was taken with the new camera, so you can see it works very satisfactorily.

I’m glad you bought two little bonds after all. Thanks a lot!

We haven’t heard much about the Army-Navy merger, but whatever it is, I don’t like the sound of it.⁴⁰

Last week, our SP class average was 62.3 (62.5 is failing), and I made a 56—the first time I’ve failed so far. Only one guy in my group passed (us five from Midway), and he’s the one who’s been getting excellent grades so far. He only made a 66.

Like you said, now I’m beginning to understand many of the things that we were told in Fundamentals I and now they’re just beginning to take shape. It also is nice having this swabbie in our room too, because whenever we help him, we’re also helping review ourselves. I went down to Cliff’s minesweeper last night and we saw a movie. He showed me all the radar gear and sweeping gear, so now some of my curiosity about minesweepers is quelled.

It sure is a good thing you told me about final exams. Nancy hasn’t written me in over six weeks. I sure hope she does write soon. I’m very glad you “approve” of her because I think she’s wonderful, even if I haven’t seen her!

About my use of “seen” instead of “saw,” my rhetoric isn’t what it should be by any means. That’s one thing the Marine Corps hasn’t improved me—speech and swearing—tisk, tisk, such language.

It seems to me I just wrote you Sunday, but I guess there’s always something to write or talk about.

Mom, after four years, I’ve finally discovered which muscle will pull

⁴⁰ See the National Security Act of 1947, which merged the War Department and the Department of the Navy into a single Department of Defense and created the Department of the Air Force.

my shoulder blades in. The Marines made me, so I want to stand straight, and now I've got to do the rest. Before, I never worked on my back muscles, just arm and chest. Last week, Cliff and I decided we were going to do some physical work instead of just all mental work like we've had to do so far. It's been raining every weekend for the last month, so my suntan almost isn't.

The more I think about trying for the cram school instead of an OCS course, the more I like the idea. I still think it's an awfully big step to be taking. I guess if I'm ever going to do it, next fall is the time to act, and now is the time to decide. Right?

I hope my stationery hasn't shocked you. It's my very best "come on and get friendly," and "write back soon" stationery. No, the sheets from now on aren't different; the others are all the same.

Now they tell us the tour of duty on Midway is one year instead of eight to nine months like it was when we got there six months ago. And also, our time here counts toward that year, so we'll only have five months to finish out. And to think I was a nervous wreck after three months! Oh well, I've got a different outlook on certain things now, so some things won't seem so overburdening. Such is life, huh, Woman?

Some letters need answering and I need sleep, so this'll be all for tonight.

Good night, sleep tight, and write. Please!

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Hey, Mom, will you also tell me the month that each bond is dated as it comes, so I'll have an idea where I stand in my savings? I'm determined I'll have at least \$1,300 when I . . .



Mom, ask Dad if he has another Annapolis requirements pamphlet. I seem to have misplaced the one sent to me. Should I wait till I get back to Midway next month before I start asking my CO if I can take the exams to go to the cram school? From what I hear, those primary entrance exams are pretty tough.

24 April 1947

Howdy Mom,

How's every little thing? Just fine I hope. Today, your letter written on 8 April came with the stamps—much needed—and the post card. I'm glad you did get the message finally.

About the "peace offering" candy; I haven't seen it yet. You didn't need any peace offering, Mom. Let's just say I like your candy, and you were swell enough to send it to me. Okay?

About Alva Starkey, probably Dad wouldn't see anything different about him. He's okay most of the time. I actually had a very nice talk with the old duck before I came over.

Enclosed is the top half of my last week's exam. It is much more improved over last weeks, isn't it? As you can plainly see, I talked our Jewish instructor out of three more much needed points.⁴¹ Oh yes, the class average was 65 this time. Next week, the instructor says he expects the class average to be below 60 from preceding classes.

It doesn't look like this school will do me much good as far as getting a rate is concerned. In less than nine months after I made PFC, I hope, I'll be on my way to Bainbridge for more school. It sure has been a wonderful vacation from Midway, and I've learned so much about such varied subjects. It sure has been beneficial to me, even if I haven't been doing the Marine Corps any good since December.

Oh yes, we finally got paid on 10 April. The payroll officer couldn't find us and went to Midway, paid them, and then when the receipts came back here, the guy finally got hold of us and I collected the neat \$90. My savings on Midway are just about done for by now. Included, I hope you found another money order for \$37.50 so you can buy me another bond to add to my savings. Next month before we head back to the "rock," I'll send one more. Are they coming every month consecutively now?

Over the weekend, I saved money by buying another model airplane and building it. I've been flying it tonight. I better hurry and take a picture of it before I finish it off. It's an awfully cute plane, green and white.

Mucho nice. I started something all up and down the hallway. The guys who used to make models are laying down formers and papering

⁴¹ The term *Jewish*, here, is a derogatory stereotype for stinginess and not the religion of the instructor.

wings. It's strictly a weekend bad though; radar and model making don't mix well here.

Mom, ask Dad if he has another Annapolis requirements pamphlet. I seem to have misplaced the one sent to me. Should I wait till I get back to Midway next month before I start asking my CO if I can take the exams to go to the cram school? From what I hear, those primary entrance exams are pretty tough and that the 100 EM [enlisted Marine] quota is hardly ever filled completely.

We'll see.

All my love,
Your Ray



*Speaking of chow, my favorite liberty chow is chicken chow
mein at Wo Fats in Honolulu. Very good!*

21 April 1947
1700 hours

Hi Mom,
Recognize the stationery? What's wrong, don't you appreciate my finer type of writing material?

Thanks an awful very much for the gum, candy, and stationery. We still must have mental telepathy, even at this great distance!

Oh yes, I made a fine and dandy 76 on the exam Friday—very good for me. My overall average is about 71. Weissner and I were the only two from my group of five who “qualified” in SPIM. Not so good for the other three, but we'll all have another chance to make good next week in TPS [thin power system]-IB. I asked the “man” if we could take some “fire control” gear after we finished TPS. No was the answer. We had a fine discussion on the subject, but he can't act without orders from Midway. See, fire control is what we'll use chiefly, not long-range search gear. Then too, it would lengthen our “vacation.”

No wonder Finical's folks don't hear from him very often. He's way over in Shanghai, China. That's what some Joe's off his ship say.

It's nice that Lou can get another job so quickly. He's a real swell man, but Urbana sure will miss the guy.

This letter is going to get sliced short. It's almost chow time and I've

got to answer four other letters that piled up on me. Then tonight, I've got to paper the wings and body to a beautiful three-foot glider I built Saturday and Sunday part time.

We're very lucky. This week will also be entered in our records as "instrument repair" and with a grade. So, it's not a week wasted after all. Today, Weisser and I made a test demonstration board of a multivibrator (free running) for fundamentals classes. A lot of practical, soldering and wiring.

Chow time, People, so I'll be seeing you later.

Your Ray

P.S. Speaking of chow, my favorite liberty chow is chicken chow mein at Wo Fats in Honolulu. Very good! But no fried shrimp, no sirree, not yet!⁴²



You'll be glad to know—I hope—that I signed up for the prep school to Annapolis here at school. Only two swabbies and myself were interested from the whole school. Here's hoping everything turns out right!

28 April 1947

Hi Mom,

Today, I received two very informative letters from you telling all about the train wreck and everything else.⁴³ Also I received a letter from each one of my pen "gals": Maxine in Oklahoma, June in Wisconsin, and Nancy at home. The mailman was very, very nice today!

You'll be glad to know—I hope—that I signed up for the prep school to Annapolis here at school. Only two swabbies and myself were interested from the whole school. Here's hoping everything turns out right!

⁴² Until its closure in 2009, Wo Fats in the Chinatown District was the oldest operating restaurant in Hawaii. It originally opened in 1882 but had to rebuilt twice after fires destroyed the structure in 1886 and 1900.

⁴³ On 19 April 1947, a passenger train for Illinois Central Railroad derailed at Champaign when it entered a crossover at a high rate of speed because the system was giving inaccurate signals. Two people were killed and more than 100 injured. See *Illinois Central Railroad Company, Report in RE Accident Near Champaign, Ill., on April 19, 1947*, Investigation No. 3097 (Washington, DC: Interstate Commerce Commission, 1947), hereafter Investigation No. 3097.

Also, we asked for more gear—in a different way this time—and all that is holding up the deal is orders from the rock. We will need this extra gear very much when we start repairing the gun systems out there.

Today was the first day in TPS. This gear is a highly portable, very powerful gear for its size and very easy to maintain. It looks like a toy next to the beautiful SP we just finished—two entirely different gears! Your guess is as good as mine when it comes to telling what AN/TPS-IB and SPIM mean. Each gear has different number and letter names like Mark 34–57 (20 for instance) 63 etc.⁴⁴

Paul is very lucky to get to come home, but it's too bad he's sick. I can't see him making sergeant just for that though.

I'm very glad my bonds are still coming in so nicely. I haven't been keeping track of my savings, but I'm glad I can save finally. I've about caught up with all the money I saved on Midway, so my pay next month probably won't be enough to send another money order. Last (this) month, I got paid \$90 instead of the usual \$100. I'll write to the bond officer in Washington, DC, and have the address changed correctly. Don't expect any results till June though. They're pretty slow about such things.

Just because I got a nice pile of mail today, don't stop writing. That only happens once in a coon's age!⁴⁵

You know, if I get this prep school, it means studying. I joined the Marine Corps to get out of studying. And ever since I joined, I've been going to one form of a school or another. Ironical, isn't it? And to top it off, it's been my wanting to get out of something else that started it off. Usually when you try to get out of something—in my case, Midway—you get yourself into more work! In this case, I think it's going to turn out okay, I hope!

Does Lucile live at home or at the house? Sound confusing? Wouldn't it be cheaper for her to live at home? Another thing I've been wondering about, when in the far future do you think the new house will be fully paid for? Curious, aren't I?

Wow, when I get "back to the Marine Corps," I won't even know how to give a snappy inspection arms. I'll probably do it like Joe Boot.

⁴⁴ Stice is referring to multifunction radar and air defense systems.

⁴⁵ The term *in a coon's age* comes from colloquial use in the 1800s as the rural population believed that raccoons lived a long time, though in reality the average lifespan is two or three years in the wild.

Sack time now, People, so I'll see ya later on and soon, I hope.

Yours,
Ray



I'm really progressing along in this prep school deal.

5 May 1947

Howdy People,

Today has proved very exciting for me. In the first place, we get to stay here for more gear after all. Our orders came last week. Second, I'm really progressing along in this prep school deal. This morning, we got reviewed and passed by a Navy board of examiners—a commander, a lieutenant commander, and a lieutenant. “We” is Cliff, my roommate, and I. Now in the morning, we were told to be in uniform of the day to see the commanding officer of the Fleet Training Center, I believe.⁴⁶ As soon as the CO from Midway, Colonel Holmes, puts his okay on the application, we will be considered recommended to take the school entrance exams or about 1 July.⁴⁷ That is our next main obstacle. We are supposed to get material from somewhere to study for the exam, but I don't know where yet.

Sunday was supposed to be the day for a big school picnic. It was called off at the last minute because some dope didn't get a chit for chow, so six disgruntled swabbies and myself made up our own picnic party. We put on our civies in town and out at Waikiki we got mucho assortments of sliced meat, bread, pineapples, pickles, fried potatoes, etc. We stayed and played at the beach all day and hit a movie—Gary Cooper in *The Plainsman*—and hit the sack.⁴⁸ We all had an awful lot of fun for such a broke bunch of Joes. The swabbies finally got paid today, so I collected back all my money.

Oh yes, I made an 86 on the TPS exam Friday. Much better for a change, huh? The class average was 75 this time. This gear is much easier

⁴⁶ According to official records, Capt Albert C. Perkins was the commanding officer of Naval Air Station Honolulu at this time.

⁴⁷ Stice may be referring to LtCol Merlyn D. Holmes as the commanding officer at Midway.

⁴⁸ *The Plainsman*, directed by Cecil B. DeMille (Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1936), was a Western about Wild Bill Hickock.

to work with than SP and easier to understand how all the various circuits function.

Thanks for sending along the clippings about the wreck, etc. Will the driver get in much trouble because of the two girls' deaths?⁴⁹ I knew two of the boys and two of the other girls. Lundeen was Finical's gal, remember?

About this rumor on all the draftees getting discharged, is there any truth in that? If so, Urbana ought to be seeing a lot of familiar faces again.⁵⁰

There's not much more on this end for the time being, so I guess I'll close now and go to chow. It's about 1730 now.

Oh yes, I looked up that Al C. Stobl from Monticello at the enlisted men's club last week. Neither one of us knew the other, but we shot the breeze anyway.

Be good, People, and write soon.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. What's this about my "rating" as you put it, Mom? Just because two of us qualified in SPIM, that doesn't make me or my PFC rate any different. All it means is that I'm a qualified SP and SP-114 radar technician. To a swabbie, that means a third-class rate—the same pay as a buck sergeant—but this chicken Marine Corps doesn't hand out rates. You have to put in mucho time for one! If you see Nancy again, whistle at her for me. You know the kind (such evil thoughts). On second thought, you can't whistle, can you? Have Dad do it!

Again,

Me.



So, I've been studying like mad, reviewing what I'd forgotten or didn't learn in high school. Tonight, I've got to buy a chemistry book somewhere because they didn't have any and I never had chemistry in school—it's on the exam. This exam is really going to be tough. In the first place, its fleet competition, and only

⁴⁹ According to the official report on the train accident, the engineer was well within the posted speed for trains in this area. The signals on the tracks failed to notify the upcoming crossover section, where the posted speed was much lower. See Investigation No. 3097.

⁵⁰ The Selective Service Training and Service Act expired in 1947. A year later, at President Harry S. Truman's peacetime draft legislation passed to supplement voluntary recruiting.

about the highest 200 men will go to the school. Then only the highest 100 will enter Annapolis. I'll need a world of luck and mucho many hours of studying!

9 May 1947

1300 hours

Hi Mom,

It's afternoon now and I'm at school just wasting time till the field day starts. This morning, we had our final exam, and the results were very nice for me. I made a 90, highest in the class; and my average for the course was an 88, highest in the class. Next week, I'm starting Mark 57, I believe. It's a much more complex system so my grades won't be so high probably.

I don't remember if I told you or not, but I passed my physical exam all right and now all I have to do is wait till 1 July to take the entrance exams. I asked for some material to study, and they gave me 15 new textbooks and 3 workbooks! So, I've been studying like mad, reviewing what I'd forgotten or didn't learn in high school. Tonight, I've got to buy a chemistry book somewhere because they didn't have any and I never had chemistry in school. It's on the exam.

This exam is really going to be tough. In the first place, its fleet competition, and only about the highest 200 men will go to the school. Then only the highest 100 will enter Annapolis. I'll need a world of luck and mucho many hours of studying!

We went to that Army beach at Waikiki again Wednesday afternoon—no school.⁵¹ My “tan” is now a “brown.” I sure hope it's plenty warm there when and if I ever do get to come home. A cool day to you would be freezing to me now.

Did I tell you I went out to Fort Shafter and Tripler General hospital last month?⁵² I was really surprised to find it was exactly where I told all the kids back in grade school it was! They call it the 147th General Hospital now.

Our dear new radar officer left without paying us Wednesday. I sure

⁵¹ Stice is likely referring to what is now called the Fort DeRussy Beach, south of Honolulu.

⁵² Tripler Army Medical Center is north of Honolulu and the main hospital in the area. Fort Shafter is the headquarters for the U.S. Army Pacific.

hope he pays us next week when he comes back. I've got \$5, and all the other guys are flat.

The dentist said Cliff had 10 cavities and I had 8! They are all very small pin points and won't be any trouble to fix up. My appointment on 13 May ought to get at least five or six of them, I hope!

Nothing interesting has happened for about 48 hours, so there's not much to tell about.

Say, I want to wish you a very happy and pleasant Mother's Day, Mom! It sort of slipped up on me this year, but late wishes are better than none I hear. Okay?

Last night, I tried on a swabbies sport coat his mom sent him. Wow, what a difference! No wonder the dames don't like gyrenes. Don't let Lucile wear mine out. I may get to use it some more yet. I don't know what I'm going to do with my civies when I leave for Midway. I guess I'll check them at the YMCA till I come back. Only officers can have them out here.

Mrs. Sporleder sent me a nice package: peanuts, of course, and a box full of brownies. They were stale naturally, but I'd forgotten just how good brownies did taste. I still like the way you make them better than anyone else's I've eaten yet. Your Wrigley's gum and Hershey's bars are still going strong. I've got about five more of each left.

If you ever have the occasion, thank Dr. Ford on another count. I can't stand cigarettes or any kind of smoking now. I used to like to smoke a little at Midway, but no more. They don't taste right anymore. I'll bet I haven't had a pack in the last six months. The last ones were the ones you sent me on Midway.

I bought a new wallet last week. The one you gave me two years ago had just about seen its day.

Do the records I made still play? Someday, maybe I'll make another. Time to go to work now, so I'd better close and get hot. Write.

Yours,
Ray



Well, 11 months ago yesterday, I left dear ole Urbana. . . . We were spear fishing out on the reefs off Waikiki and, as I was swimming along in the coral, I saw this funny thing and let him

have it. When I jerked him out of the water, he shot black ink all over me! That's the first time I've ever seen a squid. It's a lot of fun to hunt like that.

18 May 1947

2100 hours

Hi Mom,

Well, 11 months ago yesterday, I left dear ole Urbana, and I hope to see it again before another three months go by.

Remember, I told you once about all the fish and squids etc. that we were swimming around with at Waikiki? Well, today I speared a squid. We were spear fishing out on the reefs off Waikiki and, as I was swimming along in the coral, I saw this funny "thing" and let him have it. When I jerked him out of the water, he shot black ink all over me! I knew what it was quick enough then. That's the first time I've ever seen a squid. It's a lot of fun to hunt like that. I gave it to the gook lifeguard. He said he'd eat it for chow tonight. Oh well, if he wants to, that's his stomach.

I guess Wednesday night and possibly next Friday night will be my last liberty nights for a while.

Oh yes, about that radio message. I owe almost \$10 out now, and I'm sure not going to send laundry and not go on liberty my last week here, so I do need a little money. I'll pay it back when we get paid next month.

On Friday's exam, Mrs. Stice, I'll have you know I got an 88. Very lucky and nice of the instructor! There's only four of us in the class, which makes it very nice (ask questions and stuff) and two of us got 88s, one 79, and a 74. Our teacher is a Navy chief and he's really one swell Joe! There's something I like about him. He's teaching a very precision gear, and he likes it and he's very thorough and helpful in everything.

What's this about Dr. Kelley being so sick? I hear he's very bad off. What's the correct scoop on that?

By golly, it's been well over a week and a half since I've heard from you there, Woman. Better get hot! I guess I haven't been too punctual about writing myself.

It's hard to believe I've covered so much time in such a short length of apparent time. It's going to be hard to go back to the Marine Corps after being in the Navy for five months.

We saw a couple good movies here last night: *Flame of the Barbary Coast* and *Nora Prentiss*—both shows were good.⁵³ It makes me homesick to see all those White girls sitting in the show sitting in the “Officers and their guests only” section of the theater; brings back old memories too.

Yesterday, I would have sworn on a stack of bibles that I saw Helen Maier—wrong though—just some gal who worked in the Navy yard.

It’s time I made out my laundry list now. I’m sending almost everything I’ve got, so I guess I’ll be shoving off for the time being.

Be good, People, and write!

Yours,
Ray



Today is our last night at the training center. We go over to the transit barracks in the Navy yard in the morning.

26 May 1947
1900 hours

Hi Mom,

Today is our last night at the training center. We go over to the transit barracks in the Navy yard in the morning.⁵⁴ We got paid, so I didn’t have to cash my bonds—on the contrary—I bought two more! I’m almost caught up with myself, and my goal is up to date. A \$50 bond for every month in the Corps. You send me \$37.50, plus the \$5, and I send you back that plus \$75. I sure wish I could do that every month. We get paid on Midway in about 10 days again with the regular payroll, I think.⁵⁵

Oh yes, I saw Don Clinard Saturday night. He’s been at the sick bay next to the school for the last two weeks and I never even knew it. We actually ran into each other as he was going into the YMCA, and I was

⁵³ *Flame of the Barbary Coast*, directed by Joseph Cane (Los Angeles, CA: Republic Pictures, 1945), was a musical/drama starring John Wayne and Ann Dvorak; and *Nora Prentiss*, directed by Vincent Sherman (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1947), was a film noir starring Ann Sheridan.

⁵⁴ Stice is referring to what is known today as the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam Transient Personnel Unit.

⁵⁵ For more on military pay rates, see “1942–1946 U.S. Military Base Pay Charts,” Navy CyberSpace.com, accessed 14 August 2024.

leaving. Mom, I couldn't believe my eyes! We shot the bull for a while, and I'll see him again tomorrow. He'll be in the same room as I will.

I can't understand why Ziggy [Nancy Ziegler] didn't write. I never told her that I was leaving soon, I don't think. She must be awfully busy. I hope she likes her birthday present.

My average was only 73.5 (76.5, I figured), the chief says. He gave us all 65s—no exam, no nothing. He says we doped off in troubleshooting. Two out of three gear course highest averages is mucho better than my Fundamentals III grades.

You better use the Midway address. Now it's:

PFC Ray B. Stice 60736 USMC

Marine Barracks, Naval Operations Base (NOB)

Midway Islands, Navy 1504

FPO, San Francisco, CA

No, on second thought, by the time this gets there and I get there, it will be the correct address. Maybe there won't be this long wait for my mail like there has been every other time.

I have a little more packing to do yet, and to tell the truth, I honestly can't think about anything to write about at the moment. Those books will cause me to have to carry my knapsack; I can't get them in my seabag on top of all my gear. Before, I could squeeze everything but the clothes on my back in my seabags.

Be good, People, and write soon.

Yours,

Ray

4

BACK AT MIDWAY

3 June–1 November 1947

Midway has changed a great deal like everyone here, including myself. It isn't paradise, by any means; but with a different outlook on my future both near and far, things seem generally better at the present.

3 June 1947

Hi Mom,

I don't remember when I last wrote you, so here goes anyway. Midway has changed a great deal like everyone here, including myself. It isn't paradise by any means; but with a different outlook on my future both near and far, things seem generally better at the present. We catch guard duty every third night and have an awful lot of daily inspections and school on various weapons and tactics. We are trying to get out of a lot of the petty stuff and work on the gear like we were trained for, but things aren't settled yet. We almost got carbines instead of the heavy M1 rifle. No soap though—someone fouled up somewhere.

We had a very nice interview with the ole man yesterday—one of the “new” things. He even said, “He was going to have to see about getting some promotions for us people.” And I have to be an NCO [noncommissioned officer] to go to this prep school. So, if you see me someday in

August or July, I'll be a two stripes no less. Everyone was very surprised to see that we weren't already corporals for some reason.¹

Today, we had a clothing survey, the first one I've ever had really, so I've got some nice fitting trousers now. I had all my shirts cut down in the sleeves, so they look swell now thanks to you.

It is really nice to shoot the stuff with Don. It makes the place seem different. He is so much like Leon, only worse, it's killing me! If that's the way he wants himself, that's his business.

Tomorrow, some admiral is shoving off, so I'm on the honor guard.

Say, you ought to see the beautiful big orange moon coming over the scaevola.² It's one of these big things with just a wisp of a cloud across it. Like this—O. We're full of pretty sights. Some VMF [Marine fighter squadron] pilot just shot a brilliant red flare from his plane and another.³ Maybe the poor lil lieutenant is in trouble. We have planes buzzing around all the time to break up the monotony. I had forgotten how noisy the darn birds were though.

We get paid next week—\$50 bucks to me—and I found out about the GI insurance. Yes, they have been taking out the \$6.40 per month ever since I came in, and yes, my serial number is all correct. So, I've been insured all along and couldn't even notice the difference in money.

I'm reading all about the colonization of America now. Next week, I'm going to study English and composition. I sure hope we make corporal before 1 July so I can get to take the exams.

We saw *Undercurrent* a couple of nights ago.⁴ It was really a swell mov-

¹ Ranks of E-4 and E-5, or corporal and sergeant, are considered noncommissioned officers; E-6 through E-9, staff sergeants through sergeants major, are considered staff NCOs

² Scaevola belong to the Goodenia family or Goodeniaceae, of which there are over 130 species and there are 10 native species of naupaka (*Scaevola* spp.). The featured species is the only indigenous naupaka, or scaevola, and the only one to produce white fruit in the Hawaiian Islands. The others are endemic and all produce dark purple fruits. The generic name Scaevola is derived from the Greek *scaevus*, left-handed or awkward, perhaps in reference to the awkward appearance of the half flower or to the signature flowers resembling an open fan or hand.

³ Stice may be referring to Marine Fighter Squadron 115 (VMF-115) who was based in Hawaii after the war. See Capt John C. Chapin, USMC (Ret), *A History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1988).

⁴ *Undercurrent*, directed by Vincente Minelli (Beverly Hills, CA: Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 1946) starred Katherine Hepburn, Robert Taylor, and Robert Michum.

ie. Oh yeah, my buddy who flunked out in March is now a corporal. He's working with radios and really has a racket.

Too much to do to write more, so I'll see ya later, People.

Yours,
Ray



Wish me luck, I'll sure need plenty of it in the near future especially.

8 June 1947

Hi People,

This record was entirely impromptu, believe me. I even had on my bathing suit and slippers when it was made.

The blanks were sent to Marsh by his dad, not by Special Services like they say.⁵ Do I still have so much of a drawl?

Wish me luck, I'll sure need plenty of it in the near future especially.

Yours,
Ray



By golly, this Marine Corps has made me do so much thinking for myself. I'm probably more independent than ever . . . 17 men are trying for the prep school. And I really believe I'm the only one who honestly wants to make a career in the Service. All the rest want off Midway primarily. So far, only two of us got past the examining board and saw the colonel.

12 June 1947

Whew, am I tired! We've been painting all morning and this afternoon, and tonight I've got guard duty.

It's pretty hard to study for the prep school, study for the corporals'

⁵ Within the Marine Corps, this was known as the Special Services Division, which was stood up in March 1943 to support morale and recreation for servicemembers.

test, study interior guard again, and relearn all the various weapons we use and try to fix and learn a crapped-out radar gear system.

I got a nice letter from you yesterday explaining why Nan hadn't written. Thanks for telling me. I sort of expected it sooner or later. I've got a woman in Milwaukee who keeps my hopes up though to make up for her.

There are 17 men are trying for the prep school. And I really believe I'm the only one who honestly wants to make a career in the Service. All the rest want off Midway primarily. So far, only two of us got past the examining board and saw the colonel.

Tell Jim Strong I said congratulations, and I'm trying hard to get as far as he has. He's getting a nice ship as far as it looked to me in Pearl Harbor.

Mom, where did you get that dope on why Clinard couldn't find me in Pearl?⁶ You underestimate Don Clinard! You ought to hear us talk about things if you don't believe me.

I hope Carol does get out if that's what he wants. I don't want out, just some good stateside duty for a change.

Hey, what \$20 you sent after that letter? I only got the bonds and a \$5 bill in one letter, not \$20! Maybe it will come at a later date—let's hope—so I can send it back.

No Mom, I only had four cavities fixed at Pearl Harbor, but we have an excellent dentist out here, so I'll get them fixed when I find time.

Hey, what's the "E" in Spanish for Lile? Better get hot and fix that up, huh?

By golly, this Marine Corps has made me do so much thinking for myself. I'm probably more independent than ever. You probably won't like that so much will you, Mom? I've got to grow up and be on my own sometime. I hope we see things the same way.

Pardon this up and down writing, I can hardly read it myself. See, I'm writing on my sack.

Talking about Clinard, he's right here. "Runt" comes into the conversation as much as anything . . . Valentine that is.

I guess that's all for right now. There's a gallon of paint and a big brush waiting for me in the new guard room, so I'll be seeing ya, People.

⁶ The term *dope*, or *straight dope*, refers to information. It was first used in the 1910s, but during World War II it specifically referred to information about the war.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Please note the envelope. That's what you get for trying to talk to someone and write a letter at the same time, mainly Don!



By now I'm all settled down and am getting used to the ways of the Marine Corps again. Honestly, now things seem so much brighter than they did when we first came here. I'm awfully glad we got that school in Pearl Harbor. It brought me to my senses so to say.

14 June 14, 1947

Hi People,

Today is Saturday again and the last two weeks have gone very fast. By now, I'm all settled down and am getting used to the ways of the Marine Corps again. Honestly, now things seem so much brighter than they did when we first came here. I'm awfully glad we got that school in Pearl Harbor. It brought me to my senses so to say. We still have inspections every morning and big ones each Saturday, and guard duty every third day, but mail comes regularly every Wednesday and Friday nights. Last night, I got letters from Mom, Ziegler, Ristow (Milwaukee), Sporleder, and Starkey, and today I got your registered letter with the \$20 enclosed. That was very thoughtful, but I really don't need any money at present and, rather than keep money here, I'll send it back with a big thanks!

We gave the major the hot dope on us fixing the radar and standing guard the night before, and he's going to put us to work running the radio station KMTH.⁷ That includes mostly playing transcriptions and making station announcements, and we get that from 1630 to 2200 every third day instead of guard duty. It will be different anyway, and that's what I like, something new. I'm glad there are so many things a person can learn.

⁷ The American Forces Radio Service (AFRS) opened a low power AM station on Midway Island as part of the Pacific Ocean Network under U.S. Navy control after the Battle of Midway. The callsign—KMTH—was defined as K Midway Territory Hawaii. The K prefix was in use in Hawaii for mediumwave stations and distinct from the WX and WV prefixes used by other AFRS stations in the Pacific area. See David Ricquish, "KMTH Midway (Territory of Hawaii)," Radio Heritage Foundation, 2000.

I have a great curiosity for most anything I don't know much about. Is that good or bad?

Your letter started in black and continued in blue ink; mine started in blue and ended in black.

Ask Lieutenant Colonel [Carl H.] Sturges if he knew a First Lieutenant Ingram or Ingraham in Okinawa. He was in our class in Pearl Harbor and was on Okinawa for a couple of years.

I can't get over how much Clinard and Leon are the same. Don doesn't argue so much, it's just that "he's done this," and "he's done this," etc. It sure is swell to have someone from home here though.

We went swimming today and caught two baby octopuses' (or octopi for plural). They were only a couple of inches across, but they sure could hang on tight. I'd hate to meet their ole man on even terms!

Able Battery wasn't as bad as we expected it to be, but that's only because we get to work on the radar and don't have all the school in the mornings.

I have a buddy from Canton, Ohio, who is going home next week. He's been over here 19 months, this is his first-time home in 2 years, and he said he'd gladly come and see you people if I wanted him to. He wants to take Dad fishing near Danville. You'll probably see him in a month or so.

By golly, it's so hot I'm going down and take another shower! My shirt is off and I'm still sweating. It must be about 125° or 130°. Nice and warm for 1800, isn't it?

That's about it for the time being, so good night, sleep tight, and write soon.

Yours,
Ray



We had combat training the other morning. It was very realistic, except we had no ammo. Naturally, it was raining and hot and the flies were thick around the dead birds—millions of them—but it was really fun. Everyone was so wet and dirty, no one cared how he looked. So, we marched in front of the ole man's window for a while, showing ourselves off.

20 June 1947

Hi Mom,

It's our third Friday here this time, right now, and another plane just landed with some more new fellas.

Mom, don't count on my making the prep school too much. We took our physical today. It wasn't very encouraging to either one of us. There's only two of us left now. Schappell has second degree flat feet, my eyes aren't exactly 20-20 anymore, and other little things.⁸ I'm going to still keep reading my books etc., because I still might get to take the exam.

How do Carol and Bud like the civilian life again? I still think they should have signed over to line company.⁹ Don and I like things just swell at the present.

Mom, I guess you never will understand this Marine Corps. Honor guards aren't so wonderful to get assigned to. You just sweat out a good set of clothes and scuff your shoes for some joker general who usually doesn't inspect you.

We gave the colonel the word today on why the radar wasn't fixed. With guard duty, school, and inspections all the time, we were lucky to get in three hours of work three days a week, and that isn't enough time to even warm the gear up and get started hardly. He's going to give us two weeks of "all day" to work on it. Right after rifle inspection in the morning, we can start work. Now, maybe we can get some results. The day we were going to start at the radio station, they took us off and put two other jokers in our place. Try and figure that out.

A bunch of people just came in from the plane. They've been on

⁸ In podiatric terms, there are three types of flat feet grades: grade one flat little arch, grade two lack an arch, and grade three a convex arch. Grade two, or *pes planus*, is relatively common and results in the base of the foot coming closer to or making contact with the ground. The arch of the foot serves as an adaptive support base for the entire body, dissipates weight-bearing forces, and stores energy during the gait cycle. It can alter the biomechanics of the lower limbs and lumbar spine, causing an increased risk of pain and injury, which is why the military, police, and other forces consider it an issue for certain service. See Col William B. Foster et al., *Physical Standards in World War II* (Washington, DC: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1967).

⁹ The term *line company* refers to a U.S. Army concept of light infantry battalions, usually designated A-D, that perform the traditional infantry role from the support companies, typically designated F and HHC, who support the line companies. See "Military Units: Army," Defense.gov, accessed 20 August 2024.

a five day “rest” leave in Pearl Harbor. What snow jobs they can spill!

I think our spec numbers were changed today, so we ought to be hearing more about the corporal’s test now. Lord only knows what type of an exam it will be like.

We had combat training the other morning. It was very realistic, except we had no ammo. Naturally, it was raining and hot and the flies were thick around the dead birds—millions of them—but it was really fun. Everyone was so wet and dirty, no one cared how he looked. So, we marched in front of the ole man’s window for a while showing ourselves off.

It’s chow time now, so I’ll close for the time being and go get filled up. Besides, we have mail call after chow. Who knows?

Be good, People, and keep writing.

Yours,
Ray



I like the way time is running short now. Only three months and one week and my year here is done. Three more (almost, not quite) and my 15 overseas is done; 3 + 2 weeks more in the states, and it’s time for my 2 months terminal leave to start next April. That’s the way I like to look ahead at things—always something different to look to.

1 July 1947

Hi Mom,

I received two more letters from you and a very cute card and two letters from Lucile. One of the letters was really a book! It’s hard to realize my birthday is this month. The birthday present I want is another stripe for ample reasons. Picked a nice one, didn’t I?

No, Mom, don’t send me any record blanks. Marsh’s [record cutter] machine doesn’t work like it used to and, well, I don’t like to make them. Although, I guess, they are different than letters.¹⁰

Finical sure gets around. Don about fell over when I gave him all the

¹⁰ Stice may be referring to Marsh Company, which was a chain of department stores that were part of Wigwam Stores in Hawaii. See A. V. Gullette, “Department Store Chain Grew from Tent,” *Arizona Republic*, 14 June 1970.

dope you gave me on Jim. Mrs. Sporleder sent me a Rosemary, so we both enjoy that more than I can say. It sure brings back memories.¹¹

I will miss Jim. Carruthers is his last name. He won't get home for at least three or four weeks, I don't believe, but he will come down and see you. Treat him real special because he is a regular guy and has been a swell buddy to me.

Has Carol Martin gotten out yet or is he going to get out?

We ought to take the exam for the prep school this week. There are a lot of people taking the test: 7 Airedales, Schappel and I, and several swabbies.

We are back on guard duty again for some reason. We don't go to weapons and first aid school etc. anymore. I'm giving school myself on radar. Runyan, my buddy in charge, is like Hadden, a weak sister to say the least so I give school for him. When and if we get another stripe, it won't make any difference who's in charge.

I like the way time is running short now, only three months and one week and my year here is done. Three more (almost, not quite) and my 15 overseas is done; 3 + 2 weeks more in the states and it's time for my 2 months terminal leave to start next April. That's the way I like to look ahead at things, always something different to look to.

We still haven't gotten our SCR-584 radar operating. I think it should be surveyed, it's so fouled up and old. We'll have four of us working on it this week, so maybe next week it will work. Let's hope so!

It's time for chow now, so I'd better run. Can't afford to miss that!

Be good, People, and keep writing.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Thanks for the stamps, Mom. I was out. Mental telepathy again!



Well, more excitement. We just had a regular gang fight almost, but only a couple of bloody noses and cut lips. Some guys never learn when and when not to wise off.

¹¹ Though the context is unclear, Stice may be referring to an image or record of Rosemary Clooney, a singer/actress known for popular hits like "Mambo Italiano" and "Sway" but also movies like *White Christmas* with Bing Crosby.

5 July 1947

Hi Mom,

Boy am I ever tired. We just secured from laundry detail—six hours on, six hours off for three shifts. It doesn't allow much time for sleep.

Don has Maxine again, so I guess I'll cross another name off my mail list. Sometimes, I wonder if she was worth writing to or not. She's changed a lot.

By golly, next Fourth of July I won't be working. You can bet on that!

We haven't heard any more about the prep school or our SPEC [specialist rank] numbers and rates. They don't want to give us a technicians spec number (774) because only two men in the Marine garrison forces hold that number and they are staff sergeants. We've held a radar operator's number (514-2) since Christmas we just found out. The one everyone gets out of boot is 521-infantry-general duty.

Both Don and Lucile seem to be pretty well fixed for the summer. Did Lucile finish up school all right?

Well, more excitement. We just had a regular gang fight almost, but only a couple of bloody noses and cut lips. Some guys never learn when and when not to wise off.

Don just came in. He has a birthday next month and, in case his folks don't know what he wants, I do. He would like to have a Ronson Windproof Lighter with "Mossy" written on it.¹² Just a little hint, you know. I'll be darned if I know exactly what I do want for my birthday.

Are my bonds still coming in regularly?

Well, well, here's the OD of our Battery Company. It's funny, no one knows anything about any fight. Tisk, tisk.

We have one of the Airedales we knew at school out here helping us with our 584, but it still isn't in operation. I'm working on the unit that synchronizes all the sweeps and trigger pulses (range unit and crystal oscillator). It's very interesting how many things could be so wrong in such a small space.

Ask Doc Viers if he remembers my varicocele and if something like

¹² The Ronson Consumer Products Corporation was founded in 1898 and known for its lighters and accessories. Stice is referring to their Whirlwind model, which was larger than the standard model and built with a windproof shield for use in windy environments. After serious decline in the 1970s, several parts of the company would be sold off. Zippo now owns most of the trademarked products from Ronson.

that can get or is bad, will you?¹³ It almost caused me to fail my physical. They said if I did make it, they would more than likely operate, and I don't want that any too much.

Time to go to chow again, so long for now, People.

Yours,
Ray



No, Mom, the Corps is not "lax" (or wasn't) on the physicals. The physical we took was several times as hard as our original entrance exams last year. They are pretty particular who they let get into the academy, that's all.

10 July 1947

Hi Mom,

Still no news about the prep school deal. Enclosed is another money order for another bond to add on my pile. One of these days, I ought to have 13 of them, then I'll be caught up. One for every month I've been in. About how many large ones do I have?

Oh yes, thank you very much for the fresh candy and gum. Your packages always seem to come at just the right time. Thanks again, Mom.

About my eyes, they are more than likely just strained by the intense sunlight. We don't have soil or grass to knock down the glare, only white coral sand to reflect it back.

The other 17 men didn't get a chance to take the physical, the ole man cut them off.

We are getting closer and closer to the end all the time on our radar work finally. We got it transmitting for a little bit, but the magnetron burnt out before we could locate all the troubles, so now we're almost back where we started. Those tubes originally cost more than \$500 a piece and that was our last good one; 21 others were broken mostly by careless-

¹³ Varicocele refers to a common medical condition in men characterized by abnormal dilation and enlargement of the scrotum, which drains blood from each testicle. Though not usually dangerous, it can cause impaired fertility, decreased testosterone production, or scrotal pain/swelling. See S. Cayan et al., "Can Varicolectomy Significantly Change the Way Couples Use Assisted Reproductive Technologies?," *Journal of Urology* 167, no. 4 (April 2002):1749-52, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0022-5347\(05\)65192-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0022-5347(05)65192-0).

ness before we saw them! Maybe they'll get us another one from Pearl Harbor or somewhere.

No, Mom, the Corps is not "lax" (or wasn't) on the physicals. The physical we took was several times as hard as our original entrance exams last year. They are pretty particular who they let get into the academy, that's all.

Don is out for some football team that will be transferred to the harbor. I hope he makes it. It will mean a good deal for him. He says he never met you, is that right? I know you know him or at least enough about him. We both have changed noticeably, not in the looks maybe but inside. We both agree on that, okay?

I hear Hank Green is a sergeant now. That's pretty nice.

No more ink, so I'll sign off now. Be good and write soon too.

Yours,

Ray



It's hard to take, but the prep school is out for Schappell and me. We couldn't pass the second physical. A new ruling just came out about entrance physicals. My trouble can be fixed, but Eddie has second degree flat feet. The doc said that the next time I went to Pearl Harbor to report to the naval hospital and get operated on. The doctor here only operates on cases of emergencies, and I'm not an emergency yet. . . . I'm sorry, Dad, I wanted more than anything else in the world to follow in your footsteps and be an officer. The cards don't seem to be stacked right anymore. All I can say is that I tried, and if I get another chance, I'll try again.

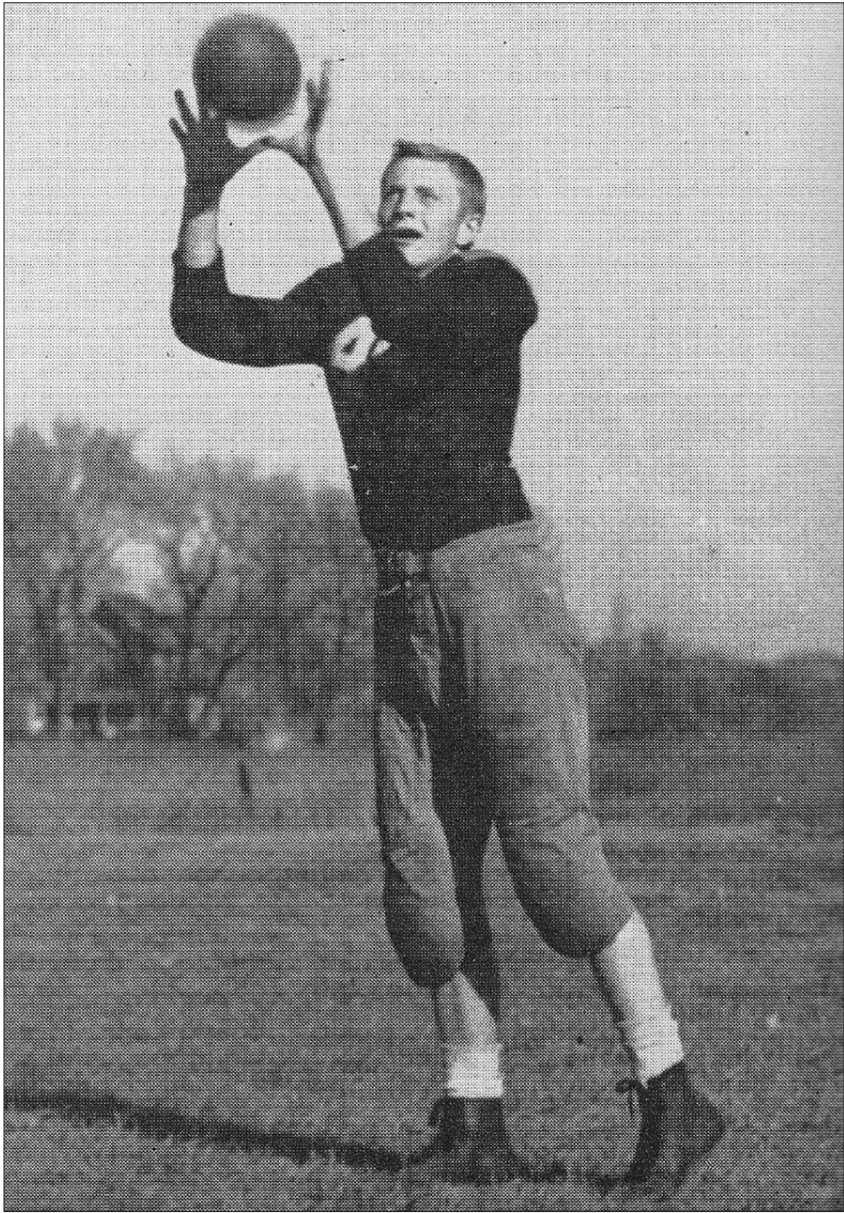
18 July 1947

Hi Mom and Dad,

It's hard to take, but the prep school is out for Schappell and me. We couldn't pass the second physical. A new ruling just came out about entrance physicals. My trouble can be fixed, but Eddie has second degree flat feet.¹⁴

¹⁴ Foster et al., *Physical Standards in World War II*.

Figure 32. Ray Stice's friend, Don Clinard, playing football for the Marine Corps



Source: Stice Family Collection.

The exam itself is something else. It lasted eight and a half hours and was pretty tough. We don't know our grades yet, but that doesn't matter now, I guess.

We almost got to go to Pearl Harbor to take our final physical, but they told us it wouldn't do any good. Tomorrow afternoon, I'm going to go see the doc and find out if my trouble warrants an operation or not.

I'm sorry, Dad, I wanted more than anything else in the world to follow in your footsteps and be an officer. The cards don't seem to be stacked right anymore. All I can say is that I tried, and if I get another chance, I'll try again.

Jim (Carruthers) will probably be in next month. They won't let him go for some reason. He knows both Don and I pretty well, so he ought to be interesting to talk to.

Don got off mess because of his ringworm, so did Jim come to think of it. There's a lot of ringworm, jungle rot, and skin "stuff" around here. None of it is serious.

I'll wait till tomorrow to finish this, so goodnight, People. I hope you aren't too disappointed in me.

It's Monday night now. The doc said that the next time I went to Pearl Harbor to report to the naval hospital and get operated on. The doctor here only operates on cases of emergencies and I'm not an emergency yet. He gave me a cute little [testicle] supporter that brings too many queries from the others.

We got paid again today. I drew \$25.

As far as we know, Don leaves in a few days. We're pretty sure he made the football team in Pearl Harbor.¹⁵

That's all now, People. So long for the time being.

Your son,
Ray

¹⁵ The local newsletter references a game between the Pearl Harbor Marine Team and the Ford Island Football Squad. The Ford Island team was part of the same league as the Navy and Marine Corps, for which the winner of the league would then play in the All Service Area Championship. See "Ford Island Football Squad Plays Two Practice Games in Preparation for Rough Season," *Ford Islander*, 5 September 1947, 4. Primary source records are available at All Marine Football Teams, 1947-1965, 8, Box: 424, Folder: 5, John Gunn Sports Collection, SC-MS-316, Special Collections, Center for Southeast North Carolina Archives and History.



My 15 months overseas is up 2 January 1948—only 5 months and a week anyway. I guess I can stick it out that long without going nuts. . . . You should see the fish around here: sharks, rays (big ones too), porpoises, squids, etc. Ole lady nature really pours it on as far as the ocean life is concerned.

27 July 1947

Hi People,

And a happy new rear to you too! I received the records in fine shape and two letters on my birthday so, thanks! I can picture Dad buying some of those. I took them to the movie booth and played them for the barracks.

Don is in Pearl Harbor now. He left Friday morning, so I'm alone again, so to say.

About Carruthers, don't expect him till four weeks after I tell you that he has left, and I haven't said he'd left yet.

I was surprised to read Joan was married (Schroder).

Is or was the county fair as good as it was last year? It sure better be good next year!¹⁶

Still no news on another stripe or my right spec number. I don't think our time here before and at Pearl Harbor count as our year out here either—"broken service" or something like that. Anyway, from what I gather, we are just starting our year here as of 29 May when we came back. As long as that 15 months deal stays good for us 2-year men, I don't care too much at the present. My 15 months overseas is up 2 January 1948—only 5 months and a week anyway. I guess I can stick it out that long without going nuts.

I was on guard duty this morning when my post left me. It was a ship and I only stood two and a half hours when it left. Lucky me. As it was backing down the dock, this little gook came running toward me carrying about 20 fish. He could hardly carry them all he was so tired. I helped

¹⁶ The first Champaign County Fair was held in 1852. The fair was not held during the Great Depression, but continued throughout World War II, though greatly adjusted for size and scope due to shortages. See Champaign County Fair Association Collection, 1878–2007, Collection 149, Urbana Historical Archives, IL.

him on the ship and threw his fish to him. The captain about blew his top when he found out he almost lost a man.

You should see the fish around here: sharks, rays (big ones too), porpoises, squids, etc. Ole lady nature really pours it on as far as the ocean life is concerned.

That's all for now, I guess. So, write soon and be good.

Your son,

Ray

19-year-old son, that is!



Yesterday, the whole rock was without brackish water all day. There was enough distilled water to run the chow hall, but that's all. We took "baths" in our helmets to get ready for the admiral. He was a tall man with a skinny, long hooked nose. I could imagine him saying, "30 days of cake and wine"!

31 July 1947

1930 hours

Hi People,

It's another Thursday night rolling by and tonight, I received a letter from you with the picture taken at the county fair and some more stamps. The stamps were very timely. I was out of stamps.

It's really been busy the last few days. Tuesday, I drilled all morning and worked on the 584 in the afternoon. Yesterday, I installed lights and wiring in our new bowling alley and stood honor guard for some vice admiral in the evening. And 20 of us 30 are falling out for two-hours drill right now for minor deficiencies in their appearance that the colonel didn't like! I guess I was just lucky. And all day today, I was loading and unloading trucks, moving a storehouse full of paper to another storehouse—very typical of this wonderful Corps.

Yesterday, the whole rock was without brackish water all day. There was enough distilled water to run the chow hall, but that's all. We took "baths" in our helmets to get ready for the admiral. He was a tall man with a skinny, long hooked nose. I could imagine him saying, "30 days cake and wine!"

I still have the four skivvies I got when I was home, Mom. Could you

send me four more? Plain white with a 28-inch waist—no more, no less. They are getting worn out and I still have four of the five shirts you cut down for me. Only one of them has gotten torn up in the laundry so far. I now have eight shirts—six tailored—so I'm fitted pretty perfect as far as clothes go finally.

With all the improvements in our PX, I can't save any extra money to send along. We get paid twice a month and it seems to go faster for some reason. But so does the time, so I can't complain at the present.

That's all now, I guess. Tell everyone I know that you see I said a big, "Hi!"

Your lovin keed,
Ray



I've been thinking about my future a lot lately. I could try the Army (up through the ranks), go to school when I get out, go right to work somewhere, or just be a bum. I don't know which road I'll take. Ask Dad what course in what school would best equip me for the wide field of electronics.

2 August 1947

Hi Mom,

I received your letter saying you knew about the prep school last night. I agree with about everything you said, and I did ask the ole man about another try for NROTC etc., and entrance qualifications for them having changed so much, if it's impossible for me to try, maybe a year in college.

I've been thinking about my future a lot lately. I could try the Army (up through the ranks), go to school when I get out, go right to work somewhere, or just be a bum. I don't know which road I'll take. Ask Dad what course in what school would best equip me for the wide field of electronics. I seem to be very much interested in that sort of thing. I've got to admit that electrical things do fascinate me as long as there's something new, unknown, or different about them. And electronics covers a very large field, right?

Only five (five that is!) more months on this little sand pile, and they

have to let us go. And one of these five will be spent in sick bay at Pearl Harbor.

None of us like the sound of this Army-Navy merger, but I don't know enough about the thing to comment.

Our battery is on guard duty again today, and I luckily got the first relief. I have to walk eight hours tonight, but I get out of inspection this morning and can sack in all day.

I wonder, does Westinghouse or GE [General Electric] have trade schools to prepare men to work for them or would a college diploma be better.¹⁷ I think a job like that would be well worth working for, because the more you learn and take in and remember and put to use, the better job and pay you make. It would be nice to make enough to have your own home and family where and how you like it . . . someday.

Here comes the major to inspect us.

So long for now, People.

Ray



*Don't get in such a rush about this electrical engineering school.
There's a whole year to pass before that comes. And, don't push
Dad, maybe he's like me and has to think a lot about something
before he makes up his mind.*

16 August 1947

Hi Mom,

By now, I'd hoped I'd have some good news as to our rates, but we haven't been told anything definite yet. A lot of us went up for corporal and took the test last week, but the results aren't public yet. Our battery sergeant told me I had nothing to worry about as he was pretty sure I made it. So that's pretty encouraging anyway. I've taken a corporal's sack (off next to the window) and am put in charge of our range section

¹⁷ The George Westinghouse Career and Technical Education High School opened in 1912 in Brooklyn, NY. GE did not offer a trade school at this time, but trade schools for plumbing, electrical, construction, etc. have existed for some time to prepare people not interested in traditional college for technical careers.

Figure 33. Opana radar site near Pearl Harbor similar to Midway, ca. 1941



Source: official U.S. Navy photo.

whenever the WO [watch officer] wants something done. So, at least I'm "acting corp."

Don't get in such a rush about this electrical engineering school. There's a whole year to pass before that comes. And, don't push Dad, maybe he's like me and has to think a lot about something before he makes up his mind.

It wouldn't do any good to have a correspondence course out here. With general quarters and guard duty all the time, all our spare time is taken care of, and when we do have a few hours to do what we want too, it's spent sleeping, playing pool, or just shooting the bull.

Now I know how the height finder, director, gun system works. I've been working with the finder and director a lot lately since the other radar set was secured. Never will understand why it was secured. Our system sure is antique compared to the set ups they had in EMS [Equipment Maintenance Squadron] at Pearl Harbor. The Navy always has better gear and equipment anyway. I personally don't think the colonel will let me go. If he does, maybe others will want to go to Pearl Harbor and get theirs operated on. It's purely a matter of policy. If he wants to, he will; if not, he

won't. Tonight, 32 enlisted and 4 officers are due in as our replacements. Maybe the sudden increase in men will influence him into letting me go. We'll see. I'll write you as to what he says if I ever get to see him.

Thanks for trying to help so much.

Your loving son,

Ray



First of all, I want to thank you for going to all that trouble in finding out the answers and solutions to the big question marks in my mind. Your letter was very complete, and it gives me an awful lot to think about. . . . It looks like a congressional appointment is the only remaining way to Bainbridge Preparatory School. And like you said (or hinted), "There's more than one way to skin a cat," meaning NROTC or, last but not least, the electrical engineering course at the University of Illinois. Surely, I can make one of these work for a career. . . . No, don't worry about my being a bum like I suggested once. There are too many opportunities for a young man such as myself. It's very surprising what a person can do when he really tries. The best motto I can think of is "Where There's a Will, There's a Way." Up to certain limits of course.

17 August 1947

Dear Dad,

Your very informing letter on 12 August arrived a few minutes ago, and I thought it would be best to write back real soon.

First of all, I want to thank you for going to all that trouble in finding out the answers and solutions to the big question marks in my mind. Your letter was very complete, and it gives me an awful lot to think about.

Today is Sunday and I wouldn't be surprised to be called in to see the colonel tomorrow morning. I've forgotten my exact grades on the exam, but they weren't high enough to do the least bit of good, even if I had passed the physical (I found out later). The exam and the material I studied for the exam with were two entirely different things.

It looks like a congressional appointment is the only remaining way to

Bainbridge Preparatory School.¹⁸ And like you said (or hinted), “There’s more than one way to skin a cat,” meaning NROTC or, last but not least, the electrical engineering course at the University of Illinois.¹⁹ Surely, I can make one of these for a career.

I’ll wait till I see the CO (by the way, his name is Lieutenant Colonel Merlyn D. Holmes, and I asked the sergeant of the guard, the OD, the sergeant major, and half a dozen others how to spell his first name and no one agrees, so I’m making it “Merlen” for the sake of the argument) before I mail this. I was wrong; he says his name is Merlyn.²⁰

No, don’t worry about my being a bum like I suggested once. There are too many opportunities for a young man such as myself. It’s very surprising what a person can do when he really tries. The best motto I can think of is “Where There’s a Will, There’s a Way.”²¹ Up to certain limits, of course.

It seems to me I wrote Mom last night. I was in sort of a bitter mood, you might say, at the time. That’s all for the present. It’s time for me to go back out on post again . . . sweat . . . sweat.



I went to sick bay this morning.

¹⁸ Congressional appointments to the military academies is fairly common now. Each district has a set number of candidates they can nominate for consideration and the process typically requires a letter to the student’s congressional representative and an application with an essay, multiple academic and nonacademic recommendations, candidate fitness assessment scores, high school transcript, and SAT/ACT scores. See “Service Academy Nomination Process,” White House, accessed 21 August 2024; and “The History of Bainbridge,” Bainbridge95.com, accessed 21 August 2024.

¹⁹ The University of Illinois keeps extensive historical records of their academic programs. See Book Lists and Course Descriptions, 1947–1977, Series No. 11/6/10, Archives Research Center, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

²⁰ According to the official history, LtCol Merlyn D. Holmes assumed command of the 12th Defense Battalion in February 1944 and on 15 June the battalion was redesignated the 12th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, which moved to Russell Island in June and then to Peleliu in September, where it remained until 1945 when it was decommissioned on Guam. It is not clear in the records how Holmes was assigned to Midway. Stice’s record of duty assignment simply states that he was assigned to USMC, as a radar repairman, from 19 June 1946 to 21 June 1948. See Maj Charles D. Melson, *Condition Red: Marine Defense Battalions in World War II* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996), 32.

²¹ The origin of this common English idiom dates back to 1640 by George Herbert, *Jacula Prudentum* (Outlandish Proverbs and Sentences), where he wrote “To him that will, ways are not wanting.” It has since been altered to the current modern version.

20 August 1947

It's the next Wednesday now. I went to sick bay this morning, and the doc said it was entirely up to the ole man if I was to go to Pearl Harbor or not.



A lot has happened in the last 24 hours. I made corporal, was transferred here to Aiea [Naval Hospital], and here I am just like that. . . . I want to thank you for all you've done, Dad (before I start being sore after the operation).

24 August 1947

Hi Dad,

A lot has happened in the last 24 hours. I made corporal, was transferred here to Aiea [Naval Hospital], and here I am just like that.²²

The corpsman said I'll probably be operated on either tomorrow or Tuesday. They don't waste much time here. The hospital grounds are beautiful, all freshly painted and nicely landscaped. It sits on top of a hill overlooking the ocean from Diamond Head to Pearl Harbor, Ewa to Barbers Point. The breeze is nice, and the chow is very good. If I get to stay here for a couple of weeks, I'll surely gain weight, I hope! I was very lucky this time in that I got all my clothes from the laundry a few hours before the plane took off, so I don't have any soiled clothes except what I have on. And four of us are here all from the same original boot camp platoon. One from China, one from Guam, me from Midway, and another from Pearl Harbor. Isn't that a coincidence?

Have you heard any new dope on a congressional appointment of any kind? I told the colonel before I left that, even if I couldn't get an appointment, I was going to go to NROTC in college. He sort of liked that.

I'm going over to the Red Cross building and shoot some pool and call up Clinard, so I guess this will be all for today.

I want to thank you for all you've done, Dad (before I start being sore after the operation). I'll write you again tomorrow or the next day.

²² Construction on Aiea Naval Hospital began in 1939 to meet expected need caused by the war. See "Aiea Naval Hospital History," DVIDS, 24 July 2019.

Figure 33. Aiea Naval Hospital, ca. 1945



View of the U.S. Naval Hospital, Aiea, Oahu Island, HI, during World War II. Adm Chester W. Nimitz, USN, Commander-in-Chief Pacific, Pacific Ocean Area awarded medals to hospital personnel on this occasion. Source: *Naval History and Heritage Command*.

Your loving son,
Ray



Those spinal injections are wonderful—no strain, no pain at any time. I had two operations: the varicocele and a hernia. The latter no one knew about until the operation itself.

28 August 1947

Hi Dad,

Yesterday morning, I was rolled into the slicing room at 0830 and rolled out at 1030, feeling just as happy as ever all the time. Those spinal injections are wonderful—no strain, no pain at any time.

I had two operations: the varicocele and a hernia. The latter no one knew about until the operation itself. I was too doopey with morphine, penicillin, and sleeping tablets to remember much about the post-operation hours. Then all of a sudden this afternoon, I snapped out of it and ate an apple and some bread.

Don volunteered to guard the two nips in our ward, so he was there when I came back. It sure was nice to see him. They are POWs [prisoners of war] off a nip ship in the harbor.²³

Ouch, I just got my last (I hope) penicillin shot. They've been giving them to me in the arm, first one and then the other every three hours. I'm in a wheelchair now just taking it easy. They encourage patients to start walking at an early date. This is sure early, isn't it? No more than 30 hours after the butchering!

I'm sending along another money order for another bond to add to my collection. I have quite a few money order stubs in my wallet now. We get paid again tomorrow, so money's no worry at the present.

This won't be a very long letter. I'm pretty tired for one thing, and I can't think of anything else at the present.

All I can say is this modern world is sure wonderful—air transportation, spinals—pretty nice.

So long for now.

Your loving son,
Ray



The doc took out my stitches this morning and we both are very pleased with the results. You see, he doesn't encourage this type of operation because it is more or less in the experimental stage. I was the 15th one to have it done this new way.

3 September 1947

Dear Mom,

It has been a week since I was operated on now. The doctor took out my stitches this morning and we both are very pleased with the results. You see, he doesn't encourage this type of operation because it is more or less in the experimental stage. I was the 15th one to have it done this new way.

²³ The term *nip* is a derogatory ethnic slur specific to those of Japanese origin. The derivation may be an Americanized abbreviation of the term *Nippon*, which is Japanese for Japan. The first known use in print was a *Time* magazine article in 5 January 1942. The term was used extensively by many of the Allied nations in wartime propaganda, including from Australia and the United Kingdom, and by Warner Brothers in one of their 1944 Looney Toons cartoons, *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*.

They make the incision in your abdomen and pull the main trunk vein up to where it belongs and then cut out the extra part and join the two ends again. It's much simpler this way than cutting into the side of your testicle. And when he was looking around, he found a hernia and repaired it too.²⁴

Last week, I received a letter from McMillen telling me he hadn't had the opportunity to look at candidates for either one of the Service schools yet, but he would in the next six weeks, and he'll write me again.

Who is the person in Tuscola who said told him I was interested in the school?²⁵

Another Marine from Midway came in last Saturday. He had varicose veins in his legs. He just wanted an excuse to get off the rock he says. Can't blame him for that.²⁶

I'm going to try to get a weekend liberty this Saturday. Clinard and I have a big time planned.

We get paid Friday, I hope!

You know, I've gone through twice as much as I did when my appendix was taken out and haven't suffered half as much discomfort. You undergo a lot of treatment the first 72 hours and then you're on your own. You get up when you want to, walk as much as you think you can take safely, and I eat as much as I can safely. My clothes fit really nice now!

And it's time for chow now, so I guess I'll run—walk I mean—and get filled up.

Write soon while I'm still here.

Yer keed,

Ray



Last night, I had a very long and detailed talk with a Navy

²⁴ Stice may be referring to the new surgical technique for varicocele introduced by Dr. Alejandro Palomo in 1947. See Alejandro Palomo, "Radical Cure of Varicocele by a New Technique: Preliminary Report," *Journal of Urology* 61, no. 3 (March 1949): 604–7, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5347\(17\)69113-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5347(17)69113-4).

²⁵ Tuscola is a very small city directly west of Indianapolis, IL.

²⁶ Vascular issues were common with servicemembers during World War II, likely as a result of long periods on their feet and the extreme environment troops served in. Varicose veins is now considered a disability by Veterans Affairs. See Fiorindo A. Simeone and Robert W. Hopkins, "Peripheral Vascular Disorders," in *Internal Medicine in World War II*, vol. 3, *Infectious Diseases and General Medicine*, ed. Col Robert S. Anderson (Washington, DC: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1968), chap. 17.

chief about the advantages and disadvantages of having a commission. He had several good points and helped me to understand a lot of things I wasn't sure about. We both agreed that it is best by far in the long run that an officer is much better off financially (our topic in discussion—finance) and otherwise.

15 September 1947

Hi Mom,

I'm still at Aiea but go back to duty on 17 September. More than likely, I'll go back to the rock. I don't know for sure.

A very nice and welcome ALNAV came out yesterday that says all men will be discharged 60 days before the date of expiration, meaning that I'll get out next April.²⁷ They had knocked off all terminal leaves and then this came out. I sure hope it doesn't change, because that only leaves me seven months and four days, instead of nine months and four days. That will give me two more months to catch up on all I've missed and some of the things I want to do myself.

I haven't heard from you people since the first of the month, except for a package. It came about four days ago. Two cans of swell almond chocolate, a carton of Wrigley's gum, a box of cookies, and the two packs of cigarettes. They all taste wonderful, except the cookies had been all eaten by some bugs!

Don broke his finger last week in football practice. I went on liberty with him several times.

Someday, remind me to tell you all about my second liberty here and the sailing off Waikiki at night! Slowly but surely, I'm getting my tan back. Swimming really helps to get my strength back.

Last night, I had a very long and detailed talk with a Navy chief about the advantages and disadvantages of having a commission. He had several good points and helped me to understand a lot of things I wasn't sure about. We both agreed that it is best by far in the long run that an officer

²⁷ The ALNAV may be in reference to the Office of Personnel Act that was passed in 1947, which focused primarily on commissioned personnel in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. It established the procedures required by the Congress for promotion, grade distribution, and retirement or separation from service. See RAdm David L. Martineau, USN (Ret), "1947—A Very Good Year," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 103, no. 9 (September 1977).

is much better off financially (our topic in discussion—finance) and otherwise.

I'll write in a couple of days and send you my change of address.

Yours,
Ray



That extra stripe helps out quite a bit—a little here, a little there, especially when the police details are called out in the mornings.

22 September 1947

Hi Mom,

I'm in the transient barracks again—have been since Friday afternoon. Don's right across the parade ground and there's plenty of people I know everywhere I go, so I'm happy for the time being. I don't think they're going to send me back to the rock. So far I'm still "unassigned." Subic Bay in the Philippines sounds good to me, so I've been trying hard to be sent there.²⁸ Japan and China are out—not enough time to do. I've just been washing clothes, swimming, and wearing my civies while I still can. They were checked at the YMCA, so they help save my uniforms. That extra stripe helps out quite a bit—a little here, a little there, especially when the police details are called out in the mornings.

Some character stole some guy's khakis, so we had a big shakedown this afternoon. I wanted to repack my seabag anyway.

I finally found a watchband that suited me, after nine months of looking. It is silver and has small dragons on each side. A swabbie had it on his wrist, and when I asked him where I could get one like it, he took it off and gave it to me. He said he wanted to get rid of it anyway, and he wouldn't even take a couple of bucks for it, so I have a band.

There's really not much to write about, besides it's almost time for

²⁸ For more on Marine Corps activity in the Philippines, see J. Michael Miller, *From Shanghai to Corregidor: Marines in the Defense of the Philippines* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1997). A 1947 U.S. military base agreement ensured U.S. access to bases in the Pacific, including Subic Bay, expiring in the 1990s. See *The Key Role of U.S. Bases in the Philippines* (Washington, DC: Asian Studies Center, 1984).

chow and I haven't ironed my clothes. So goodnight, People, and write soon when I send my address—pleez!

Yours,
Ray



As you can guess, I'm back on the rock, much to my disappointment. . . . Hey, if I did get to attend the prep school next fall, I'll be 20 years old then, and I'll be 21 soon after the entrance exams to Annapolis. What about that entrance age limit?

28 September 1947

Hi Mom,

As you can guess, I'm back on the rock, much to my disappointment. I'd hoped that I would never see this place again, but I guess the cards aren't stacked that way.

All my buddies or half of them left last week, and next week the rest of them will be rotated. It does make it easier, working with new people instead of the guys who were here when I was a private and PFC, but I sure am going to miss some of them.

It's cooler here than it is in Pearl Harbor, so I guess we'll be wearing undress greens in a couple of months. About four of us went shark fishing last night, but we never caught anything. We saw two large six-foot-plus ones swimming by, but we couldn't snag them.

They put me in H&S [Headquarters & Service] Battery, so I'm pleased about that anyway, especially because we don't catch guard duty now.²⁹

You know, I never did get any *LIFE* magazines. I sent them a change of address card once, but it didn't do any good.

What's Leon doing now? Has he changed any, or is he still undecided about things? I wrote to him, but he never wrote back. If you see him, tell him he better get hot and write to me.

Do you ever see any of the gals I used to know?

Hey, if I did get to attend the prep school next fall, I'll be 20 years old

²⁹ The H&S Battery was likely a unit with the 6th Defense Battalion that was redesignated Marine Barracks, Naval Station Midway in 1946.

then, and I'll be 21 soon after the entrance exams to Annapolis. What about that entrance age limit?³⁰

Is Lucile going to live at home this year or at the sorority?

Did you know I lost 15 pounds at Aiea, and I've only gained 5 of them back? When I left here, I weighed 151 pounds with clothes on and now it's 141. Now it's getting cooler, I'll probably get the rest back.

Carruthers is still here, in fact he's right next to me writing to his folks. They fouled up his school in the states, so he won't be in for another three or four weeks. Then he'll have two years over and they'll have to send him back.

What does Lucile want that I can get her? Her birthday isn't too far off now.

I sent my civilian clothes on home. Would you have them cleaned for me and put them away where Lucile won't get them, so if I get sent to the harbor someday I can use them again?

That's all for now. Please write soon, People.

Yours,
Ray



I'm on the range detail now. We fire for record two weeks from tomorrow. I really have a swell looking rifle for once. Sure hope it fires well.

2 October 1947

Hi Mom,

It's Thursday noon now. I just put away my rifle and canteen, so "Hi." Oh yes, I'm on the range detail now. We fire for record two weeks from tomorrow. I really have a swell looking rifle for once. Sure hope it fires well.

In the afternoons, I work on my "project." I'm in charge of the AN/TPS early warning search radar. We built a tower and shack on top and hauled most of the components of the gear to the top. See, we want to clear the buildings and still operate from the deck, so the indicator unit

³⁰ According to Title 10. Armed Forces, 10 USC 7446, "Cadets: Requirements for Admission," candidates must be at least 17 years of age and not have reached 23 years of age by 1 July of the year of entrance.

Figure 34. Example of a Marine Corps radar site, ca. 1950



The “Edith” on the sign in the foreground denotes the callsign of the unit at the time.

Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

is all that is left below. It’s a lot of good hard work and the colonel put it all up to me, so I’m happy for the time being. Range in the mornings and radar in the afternoon and some evenings if we feel like it.³¹

Did I tell you I was in H&S Battery? We don’t catch guard duty anymore, thank heavens.

Hey, Mom, I’ll be here quite some time now. How’s about fixing up a box for me? You know, peanut butter, Ritz crackers, pears, chocolate, etc.³² And send it air mail so it’ll get here in not too long a time. Whatcha say? Pretty please with cinnamon on it.

It hardly seems possible, I’ve finally got a definite job to complete and start, continuous 24-hour operation, and no guard duty yet.

³¹ Stice is likely referring to the earliest version of radar used by the U.S. military at this time in the Pacific, the AN/TPS-1s, which were developed by MIT and Bell labs during the war.

³² Ritz crackers were put on the market by Nabisco in 1934 as a new snack option that were intended to pull people out of the Great Depression era of food scarcity by offering consumers “an affordable taste of luxury.” See Joseph Klein, “The Story of the Ritz Cracker Is the Story of Capitalism,” Foundation for Economic Education, 3 June 2024.

Figure 35. USS *General A. E. Anderson* (T-AP 111) entering San Francisco Bay during a Magic Carpet voyage in 1946



Source: official U.S. Navy photo in the collection of the Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum, Vallejo, CA.

Oh yes, you'll be happy to know I finally wrote Starkey a letter telling her off but good! Carruthers helped me write the minor masterpiece. No cussing, just straight telling. Dog one, but the ole list is getting thinned out!

It's time for chow now. So, so long until next time.

Write soon.

Yer lovin keed,

Ray

P.S. I got aboard the USS *General A. E. Anderson* (T-AP 11) 12 months ago tonight.³³

³³ The USS *General A. E. Anderson* was a troop transport ship. After World War II it was assigned to occupation and service in the Far East. At the time Stice was shipped out, The ship was part of the Magic Carpet operations from San Francisco to the Pacific region.



We just tromped in from the range very hot and tired. I'm still not up to par after the operation, but I can keep up with them okay.

4 October 1947

Howdy, howdy!

How's my sister getting along? It sure was swell to hear my name called at mail call last night, Lile. Thanks for writing.

Hey, Cupid, where's some of these perty damsels in distress you were to have write to me? I'll be coming back to the states someday, and I want to be all lined up as far as dames are concerned. I've got a lot of catching u to do. Mom probably wouldn't appreciate that statement!

We're finally getting my radar set all squared away. When I get through with the range, we'll probably start almost continuous operation. This morning my buddy and I slipped over and put up the antenna before chow. Today is Sunday and everyone says we're "Corps happy" when we work at night.

It's the next afternoon now. We just tromped in from the range, very hot and tired. I'm still not up to par after the operation, but I can keep up with them okay.

I sure hope I fire a good score this year. Last year, I got all fouled up. I broke my firing pin, but that's easily replaced.

All my buddies that I came out here with last year have left or are leaving next week. Our 12 months here on the rock is over next Sunday. The Lord only knows how much longer I'll stay here. I don't care now, because I have an agreeable job right now.

Chow goes in a few minutes, so see ya later keed.

Mighty fitting chow! Whenever I leave the table filled up all the way—at least twice a day—I think it's good chow. Taste doesn't matter much anymore.

Enclosed are two pictures. The one of me was taken one day when we had GQ [general quarters] several months ago, against the generator.³⁴

So long for now, Sis. Please write soon too.

³⁴ *General quarters* is a naval term for conditions of readiness where all crewmembers should be in their regular stations and prepared for battle or response.

Yer brudder,
Ray
P.S. What's your right address?



The chow is really lousy now. I'm always hungry. This food rationing is really hitting us hard out here. I'm afraid we don't have much sentiment for "the people of Europe."

18 October 1947

Hi Mom,

It seems quite a while since I last wrote, but I've been so darn busy I don't have any extra time. After the range all day, Hanlon and I go over and work on our radar set up. The days are rather full and long, but I can't kick yet.

Oh yes, I didn't get to fire for record. Preliminary day, I was on the 500-yard line and plugging out slow fire when all of a sudden I couldn't get on the target anymore. The coach fired off a few and gave up himself. Then on record day, the range officer gave me a couple of "spotters" at the 200 and still I got "maggies drawers."³⁵ Somehow, my barrel bent between rounds the day before. No one could figure it out. I start on the range again tomorrow with the Airedales and with a new rifle.

The chow is really lousy now. I'm always hungry. This food rationing is really hitting us hard out here. I'm afraid we don't have much sentiment for "the people of Europe."³⁶

³⁵ The term *Maggie's drawers* is military slang for the red flag waved across the target by a marker on the range when a shot has completely missed the target. The term first came into known use in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

³⁶ Beginning in 1942, the U.S. Office of Price Administration was responsible for the rationing system that would restrict and govern consumption of certain goods in the United States, including food, shoes, rubber, metal and paper, to ensure availability for the war effort. A set number of points were issued for each person in the form of stamps, which would then be used to "purchase" goods in stores. The rationing program came to an end in 1945, though sugar continued to be rationed until June 1947. Stice may be referring to early rationing as part of the Marshall Plan, which was enacted in April 1948 and would provide aid to 16 European nations, including Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, West Germany, and Norway. See Act of 3 April 1948, European Recovery Act [Marshall Plan], Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives.

I followed a plane out to 128 kilometers this morning before it faded out and on to 160 kilometers last week. The radar receiver needs complete tuning, whenever I get that much time. That still is d-good reception for the altitude they fly at.

The colonel and the major seem awfully interested in that radar. They're always over there seeing how things are progressing.

Have you heard any news about the other "jarheads" (Marines to you) of "46"?

My stomach and I will be very anxious to get that package, Mom—hint, hint!

How's Dad and the ole Mercury getting along. And how's Lile coming along this year in school?

Chow time. So long.

Yer keed,

Ray



This morning I saw the first returning gooney bird, 10 minutes too late to collect the \$25 reward. . . . I'm listening to the short-wave set now. Some hicks in Texas are raising cane with popular music! It sure will be nice to go to a dance again someday.

21 October 1947

Hi Mom,

I have some time, so here goes. Two years ago tonight, I wasn't feeling so good. Remember, my lord? Oh, tell Lucile happy birthday and give her a big kiss and 21 good smacks on the rear end! I couldn't even get her a card this time.

Yesterday, I drove for the first time in about 14 months. It was really swell to get behind the wheel again. Also, Sunday I went skeet shooting. That is a real sport now. I really like that. I only made 10 my first time, but I'll improve I hope.³⁷

This morning, I saw the first returning gooney bird, 10 minutes too

³⁷ Skeet shooting was developed in 1920 by Charles Davis and William Foster in Massachusetts. Both avid grouse hunters, they created a game that was originally called "shooting around the clock."

late to collect the \$25 reward. I'm building a nice radar indicator room, my buddy is building a radio room, then comes the plotting room and we're all set.

The colonel surprised me yesterday when he had all the NCOs and officers in the Marine barracks over for a demonstration. Whew, was I in my glory! I love to talk shop, and I sure had the questions fired at me. It was unexpected but fun. Now, he's going to have everybody attend radar training films, starting tomorrow. Can't figure out what got into the ole boy.

I'm listening to the shortwave set now. Some hicks in Texas are raising cane with popular music! It sure will be nice to go to a dance again someday.³⁸

By golly, that's just about all right now.

Tell Lile I'm sorry I can't be there to wish her happy birthday . . . next year! Write soon pleez!

As ever, your loving, Ray



I'm being transferred to "Marine Barracks, Naval Activities, Naval Gun Factory, Washington, DC." It doesn't sound like the prep school, although I am sure it must be. Did you people obtain an appointment for me without telling me? I sure was surprised to hear I was to be transferred.

1 November 1947

Hi Mom,

Don't expect to hear from me for another week. We have a general's inspection coming off here on 5 November, and we are working day and night trying to get all squared away.

³⁸ World War II had quite an impact on the Texas music scene, particularly for those who spent time overseas. T-Bone Walker brought a new electric blues he had used to entertain the troops on his tours of Army bases. His work attracted other musicians in Texas like Ivory Joe Hunter, whose hits subtly changed American perceptions of R&B. The Memphis explosion of rock and roll ignited the creativity of young musicians in the Texas Panhandle, particularly artists like Buddy Holly in Lubbock. After the war, Texas music trends had significant influence on the country music scene in Nashville. See "Texas Music Source: Our Guide to Eighty Years of Texas Music," *Texas Monthly*, 31 December 1969.

We have to finish repairing the bulkheads inside downstairs, paint the entire building, and we'll be ready.

I'm very much snowed at a report that came to me from Headquarters Marine Corps. I'll tell you more about that next week when I know myself.

It's getting rather chilly at night anymore. We'll probably start wearing greens next week.

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir played here tonight. It was a "different" movie, I can say that much for it.³⁹

You people have been in the new house a year now, haven't you? Does it still seem as nice?

LATER . . .

I'm being transferred to Marine Barracks, Naval Activities, Naval Gun Factory, Washington, DC. It doesn't sound like the prep school, although I am sure it must be. Did you people obtain an appointment for me without telling me? I sure was surprised to hear I was to be transferred.⁴⁰

There isn't much time left, so I have to run. I'll write you soon.

Yours,
Ray



It seems funny that I've left Midway for the third and last time. Mom, do you realize I've made that flight between here and the rock six times! That's more than 36 hours flying time and 11,580 kilometers over water. . . . What on earth happened? I mean, why am I being sent to the prep school without being examined in some way? Does that come later? Did you obtain an appointment somehow for next year? I'm really snowed, but happy about the whole thing.

³⁹ *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, directed by Joseph Mankiewicz (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 1947), was a supernatural romantic fantasy that starred Gene Tierney and Rex Harrison. It received mixed reviews in the United States.

⁴⁰ The Naval Gun Factory was located at the Washington Navy Yard and included the Naval Ordnance Laboratory, Naval Radio Station, Marine Barracks and Receiving Station, Naval Ordnance Schools, and Diving School.

2 November 1947

Pearl Harbor, HI, waiting for transfer to San Francisco, CA

Hi Mom,

I'm in Pearl Harbor now waiting for transportation to Frisco. Probably I'll catch a plane Tuesday or Wednesday night and arrive the next morning to catch a train, probably, the rest of the way.

There is a very distracting radio program on now, and I have to read every sentence twice to see what I put down.⁴¹

Clinard and I got Joe Lustig off the USS *General A. E. Anderson*—the same ship I came over on with Joe's brother Jim—and went on liberty. I'm trying to conserve on money because of the long trip ahead (so I came in early), and I don't have too much. A buddy who was in the hospital with me finally got some Chinese silks for me, so I will have a couple souvenirs anyway.

It seems funny that I've left Midway for the third and last time. Mom, do you realize I've made that flight between here and the rock six times! That's more than 36 hours flying time and 11,580 kilometers miles over water. And if I fly from here, the total will be close to 15,500 kilometers over the Pacific. Only 644 kilometers more and I'd be a short snorter, wouldn't I?⁴²

Carruthers will follow me by a week. He has 24 months "over" tomorrow, so he ought to be down to seeing you people next month at least.

What on earth happened? I mean, why am I being sent to the prep school without being examined in some way? Does that come later? Did you obtain an appointment somehow for next year? I'm really snowed, but happy about the whole thing.

Writing about snow, I'd better stash up on nose drops and handkerchiefs for the colds that are coming. It will be like stepping out of the frying pan into the icebox. I'll bet it's even showing in Maryland now.

I was very pleased about my record book: 5, 5, 5, 5, and 5! All the way across. I've got all my "staff returns" along with my orders.

⁴¹ There were a number of popular radio programs at this time. Stice could have been hearing *Fibber McGee and Molly* (husband and wife comedy show) or the *Fred Allen Show* (another husband and wife comedy entertainment show).

⁴² The term *short snorter* originated in the 1920s and refers to a collection of bills taped together and signed by everyone on the plane. It came from pilots, crews, and passengers who had made transoceanic flights.

Things sure run smoothly at times. I listened to Notre Dame beat Navy, boarded the plane, and seven hours later stepped off at John Rodgers Airport and into a station wagon to stop at a drive-in and get a chocolate shake.⁴³ Then off to the barracks, and 10 minutes later, I went on liberty. Very nice. Liberty still isn't any good per usual, but I can wait, I have this long.

I'll write you from Frisco, whenever I get there.

Yer lovin keed,
Ray

⁴³ The John Rodgers Airport was considered one of the largest airports in the country in 1946 and was under control of the U.S. Navy for most of the war. The airport was named for a pioneering naval aviator John Rodgers, who was related to Commo John Rodgers and Commo Matthew C. Perry.

•5•

BAINBRIDGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL LETTERS

1 November 1947–10 May 1948
Bainbridge, Maryland

Honolulu was perfectly beautiful at night from the air, but the plane had bad bucket seats and the 12 hours seemed a lot longer. I had time to come into San Francisco and see this gal I'd been writing to for a while. . . . The Pacific sure looks different to a guy on this side of it.

Hi Mom and Dad,

I finally made it okay after the seven-hour flight to Pearl Harbor on 1 November.¹ I waited six days until time was getting so short, they had to give me a class two air priority to get to Moffett Field, California. We left Pearl Harbor at 1800 Friday night and arrived in California at 0800 in the morning. They tried to get me out that afternoon, but there were no DC-bound planes. Saturday night, we left California on the Washington “hot shot” and flew nonstop to DC. Then today, we caught a train and a taxi out here to the school.

¹ According to Stice's Chronological Record of Duty Assignments, he was still a radar repairman until June 1948.

Figure 36. In 1943, the Tome School became the Naval Academy Preparatory School, preparing candidates for the U.S. Naval Academy



Source: courtesy of Bainbridge95.com.

Honolulu was perfectly beautiful at night from the air, but the plane had bad bucket seats and the 12 hours seemed a lot longer. I had time to come into San Francisco and see this gal I'd been writing to for a while. Her brother and I went to the electronics school together. We had time enough to ride the roller coaster twice and drink a chocolate milk shake, tell each other goodbye, and I had to go catch my plane. The Pacific sure looks different to a guy on this side of it.

The trip to Washington was wonderful. We had soft, plush chair seats and the sound and cold air were perfectly insulated. The 12 hours seemed more like 5 or 6. Believe it or not, it was snowing in Kansas and Illinois. Did any of it get to the deck there?

Here in DC, I met an old buddy—Pete Beasley. Lucile knows his brothers. He's really changed for the good.

I'm very bitter toward this Marine Corps. I wasn't here more than three hours, and they issued me those GD blues and a green jacket like I had when I was home! I have a short one too, which is regulation, but not an authorized liberty uniform here.

Figure 37. Capt Russell's house on the campus of what would become the U.S. Naval Training Center Bainbridge, ca. 1943



Source: Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

We only get liberty three out of four weekends and no nights in between (which is okay) but the nearest large city is 80 kilometers away. And to top it off, after the first of next year, blues will be the only liberty uniform! I see where I don't go out much. And we only draw \$5 a pay day until we have \$100 on the books. So, please send me right away two of my large bonds to pay for my uniform's tailoring. It probably won't take all of it, but if that's the case, I'll send them back. Okay?

That's all up to date, People. So, write soon.

Your loving son,
Ray



I hitchhiked up to Philly Saturday afternoon and came back last night at 2300. Much fun. . . . They aren't teaching us any chemistry, just English, American history, physics, algebra, and geometry. . . . The only subject I don't have trouble in is algebra.

17 November 1947

Hi Mom,

I received your last letter okay with the bonds and stamps. I'll just hang on to them and use the cash as the needs arrive. I received my appointment permit to participate in the entrance exams too. Rather than even try for the substantiating exam and cause a lot of needless trouble, I'm going to take the regular exam.

In my letters, I used the word "we" because I don't think it looks right to have so many "Is" in it.

You were wrong. I did know about the Ashley's okay, but seeing as how I was awaiting the first available air transportation out of Pearl Harbor, I couldn't even go on liberty or be away from the barracks more than two or three hours at a time. I didn't think that would be enough time. I did call from the base once or twice, but no one ever answered.

I hitchhiked up to Philly Saturday afternoon and came back last night at 2300.² Much fun. It will be better in Urbana, Illinois, I think. I'm going to try to get home for Christmas, but time will tell.

Oh yes, "Nach" as you thought I said on the record was "NATS" or Naval Air Transport Service. Savvy?

They aren't teaching us any chemistry, just English, American history, physics, algebra, and geometry.

We have an hour study period from 0800 to 0900 and then English, history, and physics in 45-minute periods. Then from 1300 to 1400, we have another study period and then algebra, geometry, and athletics in 45-minute periods. Then from 1900 to 2100, we have a long study period again. It sure makes the day long. They don't give homework, but they have quizzes every day. The only subject I don't have trouble in is algebra. It sure is hard trying to catch up and understand what's going on every day at the same time.

There are three instructors and one more student from the electronics school at Pearl Harbor all here as students. A large percentage of these characters were "sea going," stationed aboard ships for Europe, Asia, etc., and it's like trying to horn your way into a fraternity to get to know and

² The distance from Bainbridge, MD, to Philadelphia, PA, is approximately 96 kilometers.

understand them. I hadn't even been here 24 hours when some page took my watch out of the head, and this morning my pen was gone. I don't know, most of them are such nice guys. A lot of them were here last year, and they flunked the exam just to come back again to get out of such duty as Midway and other places and not go to the academy.

Notice the change in address when you write again, okay?

Be good and take it easy when the streets are icy, pleez.

Yours,
Ray



I heard Merve finally made PFC. It seems like all the boys are making out pretty well—Jardine and Green are sergeants; and Martin, Lustig, and myself are corporals. Are any of the other Marines rated yet? Has Finical made his rate yet, or Ray Cramer, Dick Oshmke, Ted Williams, Reed? How's about trying to find out about all those guys, will you, Mom?

22 November 1947

Hi Mom,

Don't buy me another pen or even think about buying me a watch. I didn't ask you to replace them.

That's mighty nice of you to have the beer stashed away. Maybe if I do get to come home sometime over Christmas, we'll see about getting "rid of it."

Leon wouldn't be a bad influence on me. As a matter of fact, I want to see him very much. One reason is to compare how we've grown up and changed, both being under far different influences. I wondered if Starkey hadn't blamed that "affair" on Lee, but I've never heard one way or the other.

What's the matter with Martin, I mean about being afraid to take the exams? He sure won't lose anything.

I thought you said Reed was out? I heard Murve finally made PFC. He shouldn't have too much trouble making corporal now. Saipan is loaded with rates as several buddies from there tell me. They knew all about the "incident." It seems like all the boys are making out pretty well—Jardine

and Green are sergeants; and Martin, Lustig, and myself are corporals. Are any of the other Marines rated yet? Has Finical made his rate yet, or Ray Cramer, Dick Oshmke, Ted Williams, Reed? How's about trying to find out about all those guys, will you, Mom?

How far is Evansville, Indiana, from Urbana?³

I won't mention much about school, except it's pretty hard right now.

Who are the neighbors to the right of the house? Does the "Pop" house have nicer girls there than they did a couple of years ago?

You know, when I get out, half my time will have been in schools. Pretty lucky, I say.

That's all for now, People.

Write soon. You too, Lile!

Ray



Did I tell you that I've given up the idea of becoming a Marine officer? A naval officer doesn't have as much respect, tradition, or "esprit de corps" as a Marine, but he sure has a better deal. What do you think, Dad? What's your opinion?

26 November 1947

Hi Mom,

That sure was a very thoughtful surprise package. I can't get over the pictures of those girls! Besides being very nice looking, the ones who were a year behind me have caught up and are now a year ahead of me. Lucile must graduate this spring, right?

Did I tell you that I've given up the idea of becoming a Marine officer? When I decided on making the Service and being an officer a career, I was thinking of the family and dependents that I may have in the next 10-20 years, not about myself so much. The Marine officers I've seen so far have been so poorly equipped and shorthanded in everything they do. And the duty they get, especially like Midway, no sir, I can't see it. A naval officer doesn't have as much respect, tradition, or *esprit de corps* as a Marine, but he sure has a better deal. What do you think, Dad?

³ It is approximately 290 kilometers from Urbana to Evansville.

Oh yes, ALMAR 113 came out at 1300, 25 November 1947, stating that all enlisted personnel whose enlistment expires from 11 March through 31 May 1948 will be discharged from the Service at the convenience of the government.⁴ In other words, Stephens, Martin, Lustig, and Reed will be home and out before Christmas. A lot of the fellas left here this afternoon for the Naval Gun Factory to be discharged. The ALMARs have been coming out approximately every two months (the last three have) so the next one, that will undoubtedly include me, will come out around the middle of January. It will include Murve and Don also more than likely. They will be glad to get it I'll bet, especially Murve. He's had the worst luck of the three of us. When the next one does come, I'm going to have the most thorough physical checkup I've ever had. If there's still some unknown defect, I'm going to take discharge; but if there's nothing wrong, I'll naturally stay in and take the exams. I think you people will agree to that, won't you?

If things run along right, and I do pass both of the exams, I'll come home for a 15-day leave after the exams—that's already been promised anyway—and return to Bainbridge. Then I'll take all my excess leave and come home again until I'm discharged. There, if I'm sure that I'll go to the academy, I'll reenlist in the Marine Corps, draw reenlistment pay (to make up for the money I spent on my leaves), be transferred to Annapolis and discharged from the Marine Corps, then start plebe summer. Sounds confusing maybe, but it sounds good to me.

That's it, People. What's your opinion?

Yours,
Ray



I fulfilled my half of the bargain that if I got home first, I would look up my buddies' folks. They live near Washington, so I hitchhiked down Sunday. They were awfully worried about him, and it took me three hours to explain to them that you just don't do what you want to do in this outfit. . . . I thought I would end up with pneumonia, but my cold just started up

⁴ According to the report, the release had to be approved by the commanding officer and Headquarters Marine Corps. Once requested, the Marines could not change their mind. See "New ALMAR Releases Men," *Cherry Point Windsock* 4, no. 36 (26 November 1947): 1.

*strong again. It sure gets cold here, averages around freezing
most of the morning and night.*

1 December 1947

I had a very pleasant but cold weekend. I fulfilled my half of the bargain that if I got home first, I would look up my buddies' folks. They live near Washington, so I hitchhiked down Sunday. They were awfully worried about him, and it took me three hours to explain to them that you just don't do what you want to do in this outfit. George finally made it to the states, along with about 5,000 other Marines. All of them either getting out or going home on furlough, but have to be reassigned first. They seemed plenty relieved by the time I left.

And I'm in good with a swell group of people in Baltimore too. All of the girls graduated in 1946 too, so we are all the same age and really have fun. You would be pleased at the way I'm dating. Taking it that you didn't appreciate my going steady in high school.

Still no news about any leave.

Oh yes, tell Lucile NOT to OPEN her package from Baltimore. It's her Christmas present, although I don't know how they wrapped it. She can probably tell what it is. If you get it before she does, Mom, hide it until the night of 21 December. Then she may open it if she wants to, but not before then.

Thanks a lot for telling me all about the boys. Anytime you hear anything else about them, pass it on.

My roommate landed in sick bay with the flu this morning. I thought I would end up with pneumonia, but my cold just started up strong again. It sure gets cold here, averages around freezing most of the morning and night.

Hey, Mom, do me a favor, would you? Get my top coat, corduroy shirt, both flannel plaid shirts, my sport coat, a white shirt, my winter trousers, and a couple of nice ties cleaned for me, pretty please. Here's the scoop. I'll want some of them after the first of the year because our liberty uniform will be those "blessed" blues, and I wouldn't be seen dead in them. And just in case I do get home, I would want them to wear.

Every 3 hours I'm in the Service, I get 15 minutes leave time or 2.5 days a month or 30 days a year, and I have 38.5 days as of this date. My boot camp leave knocked some off.

Oh yes, I knocked off my bond allotment, so don't expect any more to be coming through. Besides not getting overseas pay anymore, things out here seem to be very expensive, so there was nothing else to do. That will sort of knock a hole in the savings I had planned, but then again, I'd expected to stay out on Midway all the rest of the time.

Well, People, it's chow time again so this is all for right now.

Be good and write soon.

Yours,

Ray



I'm passing in two subjects now anyway, and I hope the others are coming up too. That's not a good report I know, but that's the scoop.

8 December 1947

Hi Mom,

I don't know how long it's been since I last wrote, but here goes anyway. I'm passing in two subjects now anyway, and I hope the others are coming up too. That's not a good report I know, but that's the scoop. It doesn't make any difference if you pass the subjects or not, except if you're passing in all five, then you don't have to go to study hall every night, you can study in your rooms, which is much better anyway.

I wrote Joie Keilholz last week, and she wrote back. She's very cute from her picture. I doubt if I get to see her before next year, but I'll go up one of these weekends.

It still hasn't snowed out here. It rained for the last two days.

Are you having those clothes cleaned up like I asked last week? I want to be sure to get them right after Christmas.

Tomorrow, our section has the duty; I get mess duty all day.

Oh yes, the doc down at the local sickbay said my eyes were just a borderline case, so they sent me down to Annapolis last Tuesday and I got a complete exam. Results were: seven cavities (some very small) and everything else okay. They even said my eyes were 20/20. That was because the exam was in the morning though, or they would have been more like 20/17. And they didn't see the astigmatism, so who was I to tell them about it.

I hope next time I'll have more that I can write about.

Write soon,

Ray

P.S. What's this all about, Mom? How's about cutting me in on the scoop?



The trip back was very uncomfortable, but the weather was nice, and I made connections without a great deal of trouble and got back with \$8 and 1 hour and 45 minutes to spare. . . . I haven't had a chance to ask about the fleet appointment, but I think it will be all right.

5 January 1948

Hi Mom,

The trip back was very uncomfortable, but the weather was nice, and I made connections without a great deal of trouble and got back with \$8 and 1 hour and 45 minutes to spare. I still have my bond, so maybe I'll send it back if we get paid this week.

Now, this time please have Dad sign this and mail it in right away please. I haven't had a chance to ask about the fleet appointment, but I think it will be all right.

This morning our lieutenant asked me if I wanted a discharge! The darn ALMAR had been out since 22 December, and we would get out and be on our way or back home before the 15th of this month! I signed it "no" and everyone thought I was crazy, so that's that. It only covered the month of June, so Don and Merve aren't included this time, but it won't be long.

No trouble about uniforms either, so everything went okay. How's about sending me the three prints of the birds and myself?

Write soon,

Ray



This morning we—all the students failing in four or more subjects—were called in to "mast" one at a time. It seems I failed in all five subjects and conduct to boot, and so help me, there isn't anything else to "bilge" in! Naturally, the captain was POd

Figure 38. Bainbridge Naval Training Station drill ground, ca. 1943



Source: Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

[pissed off] before I even got in, so he proceeded to read me up one side, down the other, and across sideways a couple of times—much fun. . . . That’s the story, People. Live and learn, right Mom? Give me a little time and I’ll get straightened out again okay. Right now, I’m slightly fouled up.

8 January 1948

Hi Mom,

Here comes the sad story of Corporal Stice . . .

This morning we—all the students failing in four or more subjects—were called in to “mast” one at a time.⁵ It seems I failed in all five subjects

⁵ Nonjudicial punishment is covered in Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Mast is one such action where the commanding officer conducts inquiries into issues with those serving under their command. This allows them to ask questions about an incident, offer the accused an opportunity to speak, and determination whether to dismiss charges, impose punishment, or recommend a court-martial. In a more casual setting, the commanding officer holds mast to hear concerns, complaints, or requests.

and conduct to boot, and so help me, there isn't anything else to "bilge" in!⁶ Naturally, the captain was P^Od [pissed off] before I even got in, so he proceeded to read me up one side, down the other, and across sideways a couple of times—much fun. After discussing my case one-sidedly, he let me utter a few words. I told him how very little I cared for school when I was in high school, and yes, I'd been exposed to the subjects, but not a drop apparently had been absorbed. I explained how I "made up my mind" after school, and not during school (Urbana that is), and he asked me if I thought that they should kick me out. I told him I didn't think it was quite fair to judge my grades, the result of what I didn't learn in high school, to my attitude now. That I wanted very much to be in naval service as a career, and that all I could do would be to try to improve my academic record. And that I could and have definitely improved my conduct record. I told him it was purely personal differences in why I got "run up" and got so many demerits and that since then I'd "wised up" so to say, and it wouldn't happen again. I asked him to look at my record book and he could see that my record in conduct had been perfect up to the time when I first got here. He agreed it must have been or I wouldn't have made corporal and was satisfied on that count anyway.

That seemed to satisfy him or at least he cooled down after that a little anyway. Then they started asking if the teachers were doing their jobs well enough. Sure, they are doing the best they can to help us, but as this course is designed as a fast but thorough review course, to refresh our memories in the subjects that we were once supposed to know, I was having one very difficult time. I have to learn most of the subjects while 90-80 percent of the class is only reviewing. He said they were glad to hear I wasn't "passing the buck" for my deficiencies and that they would watch my case very closely for improvement. If none is shown, I "get the boot."

The way I feel now, I wish I hadn't already signed that ALMAR on Monday. The captain didn't seem to think there was much chance left. I'm beginning to wonder if there is or isn't myself.

Finis [the end].

That's the story, People. Live and learn, right Mom? Give me a little time, and I'll get straightened out again okay. Right now, I'm slightly fouled up.

⁶ The term *bilge* is Marine slang for nonsense or useless talk.

Gotta tell someone, so it may as well be you. No one else cares surely, and the Corps isn't that personal.

Write soon and take it easy. Don't let this worry you about anything.

Your one and only,
Ray



In the first place, I ask for—and get—help every spare minute I have. . . . There just isn't time enough to learn four years of high school in four and a half months. I'm doing the best I can, so I'm not going to say anything else about it. . . . It looks like I should have gone to a prep school instead of the Marine Corps, but of course, I wouldn't have appreciated it at the time if it had actually happened.

14 January 1948
1630 hours

Hi People,

Your letter came this afternoon, so here is my reply. In the first place, I ask for—and get—help every spare minute I have. We have six subjects and only four study periods, so they are well crammed full. You can see that. And the little time we have before chow is in the evenings. I have one of the better students help me on something I'm stuck on. There just isn't time enough to learn four years of high school in four and a half months. I'm doing the best I can, so I'm not going to say anything else about it. We don't have any spare time. That's all there is to it. I'm not (and couldn't anyway) going to sacrifice my eight hours sleep to read more!

And as to my low conduct, Dad, I told you all about that. I'd flunked conduct before I'd been here three weeks and haven't been in trouble since. My civies are in Baltimore, so I'm not breaking any regs. We are authorized to wear them on liberty, so we can't have them on the base.

I fixed the collar on my blue blouse myself, so it's okay. And we don't wear greens on liberty, so my green jacket is and was all right to wear. I had an authorized permit to wear it on liberty and leave from our first lieutenant. It wouldn't have been issued if it was nonregulation.

On 27 January, three of us have appointments to go to Philly to have

our eyes examined to get glasses. So after that, I'll be able to see what I'm reading anyway.

Everybody who got called in got the same speech and warning. No one got kicked out, and I doubt if anyone does, unless he's a steady dope off and troublemaker. And what made you think I was "busted"? It was a captain's interview or mast, not a summary court-martial!

My grades in physics, algebra, and trigonometry are passing, but English is still way out of sight. History and geometry are coming up slowly, and conduct has been up all the time. When we have our marking period exams again, they might go down again. Who knows. They only want a very small percentage of the class to have passing grades anyway, so they make the tests purposely harder.

I've got to go eat now, so this will be all I guess. Maybe I've said too much anyway.

Love,

Ray

2130 hours

P.S. I was talking with one of our physics instructor junior officer here tonight, and he advised I should go to a (two-year probably) advanced high school course if I really intended making electrical engineering a major in college. That was in case I didn't make the academy.

I can't tell if I'm actually finding out the truth or whether I'm just becoming discouraged.

If I pass the exams, everything will be okay. If not, and I do have reasonable grades here, then college naturally will be the first immediate alternative. But as the instructor said, "How do I expect to take up an electrical engineering course in college, if I can't get in the academy?"

What's the best thing to do? Forget about everything except the academy as a goal, and then at the last minute, switch to another if it doesn't pan out?

Yes, I guess that seems like the most reasonable outlet for the trouble.

He said the same trouble I had in high school—not wanting to study—would follow me all the way up, unless somewhere along the line, I stopped and got caught up fully and then went on. It looks like I should have gone to a prep school instead of the Marine Corps, but of course I wouldn't have appreciated it at the time if it had actually happened.

Such is life, huh, Mom?

Write soon,
Ray



*Sorry about not writing last week. I knew it was quite a while,
but I could never get time to finish a regular long letter.*

2 February 1948

Hi there People,
I don't have any stationery here, so this will have to do for right now. Here are my new grades compared to last marking periods:

Algebra	2.03	2.62
Geometry	2.08	2.31
Physics	2.41	2.42
History	2.21	2.23
English	2.19	2.03
Conduct	2.13	4.00

My only decline in marks was English and that was to be expected. There they aren't good or too bad. Generally, they improved, but not good enough to be passing yet.

Say, Mom, I was awfully sorry to hear you hurt your back. I know you always did have a lot of trouble with it before, and now this. What happened, did you fall on the ice or something? I sure hope you feel better by now.

Our eye tests are over and will get our glasses in a couple of weeks. I have better-than-average vision, but the astigmatism makes long reading difficult.

I didn't realize I was starting something when I introduced Joe to Lucile or vice versa. Tell him if he sees Carruthers, to tell him to send me my \$10. I can use it very well.

I haven't seen Reverend Gardner yet, and I probably won't get to Baltimore for another four or five weeks, I doubt if I ever see him.

A guy came in today that was sworn in 6 January 1948, no less! He didn't even finish boot camp and is he ever a BOOT! He is pretty smart though, because he's just out of school.

My roommate got a package the other day—many nice cookies!

I hope Lucile did okay on her exams. One of us should be doing okay!

Sorry about not writing last week. I knew it was quite a while, but I could never get time to finish a regular long letter.

Write when you can.

Love,
Ray



Quite a few of the Marines and swabbies were disenrolled here, mostly from the physical exams but some for academic reasons. The captain saw I made an improvement apparently, and I wasn't called before him this time. If you are still making sort of a scrapbook for me, Mom, put these in there too.

9 February 1948

Hi Mom, Dad, and you too, Lile,
Well, how did you come out on your exams, Sister Suzy? And Flow Mo? Maybe we'd better wait till next month before we try to arrange something, then I'll be home before she's tired of writing to me.

How's the house and car and Grandmother and the weather? And what's the latest on "G-M" [Grandmother Fannie B.] Bickmore? Is she any better?

Now that I'm the only Marine left from our class, what are all the rest of the bums doing? Did Mister Donald L. Clinard come over to see you people? He better had or I'll shoot him on sight. What about Murve, has he been over? I'll bet he really looks swell now. It's been an awful long time since I've seen him. Did anyone else make corporal, maybe Jim Lustig? Did Lucile and Joe have their final big date? I'm full of questions it seems.

Mom, you'll be glad to know that neither Starkey nor Sporleder have written since Christmas. I don't remember for sure. And Mrs. Sporleder was the person who sent me this fine stationery. As you can see, she had one box made when I was still on the rock and then had another made when I was sent out here.

Quite a few of the Marines and swabbies were disenrolled here, mostly from the physical exams but some for academic reasons. The captain saw I made an improvement apparently, and I wasn't called before him this time.

If you are still making sort of a scrapbook for me, Mom, put these in there too. This is going to be cut short. It's almost time for chow.

I took Joie Keilholz out on Saturday. She is a very cute looking young lady, dresses well, is a lot of fun, doesn't like to be kissed goodnight or have her picture taken in clip-joints, and her ideas about spending money are considerably broader than mine are as a couple.⁷

Did I leave my extra head scarf at home? I don't know where it is if I didn't. It was the light blue one that had TSINGTAO on it, I think.⁸ See if it isn't in my drawer? If it is, will you please airmail it out right quick like?

I've got to run now, so write me soon somebody.

Love,
Ray



The sun came out and all the snow is melted now. It really feels wonderful to get outside every once and awhile. It sure reminds me of high school, when all you had to do was jump in your car and drive out in the country somewhere and go swimming. I sure had a lot of fun, I guess, but I'd sure do a lot more in so many things if I had it to do all over again! I like to look back and laugh at the things I thought were so important or difficult then. I wonder if I'll do the same thing someday, at these last two years. I'm glad I'm still just a kid, life's too interesting to pass in such a hurry.

18 February 1948

Hi Mom, Dad, and you too, Lile!

Thank you very much for the money, Mom. Yes, it will help out a lot. I'm starting to save up enough to buy a real nice watch and band at the Ships Service [PX] here. I'm sorry I didn't send any Valentines, we had the duty, I couldn't go to town, and they didn't have any at the SS.

⁷ The term *clip-joint* refers to a nightclub or place of adult entertainment where customers are systematically tricked into paying more for subpar services or products, particularly alcohol and women. They were widespread during prohibition and outlawed in many states, but many remain in operation around the world today.

⁸ Tsingtao likely refers to a city in China, where Marine Corps units were stationed from 1945 to 1949. Stice may have picked up the scarf from a China Marine.

School seems more interesting than it did before, but the record and mind breaking pace hasn't slowed down any. I have my new glasses now, too, so that helps me a lot. They are quite a bit stronger, but they are purely reading glasses, and that's what I need not a correction of any kind just a little help. My eyes last all day now without getting tired.

I still have the scarf. For some reason, the gal I was going to give it too stopped writing, so the heck with her, at least until I have a good excuse from her. It was her birthday. I quit fooling around with Ruth. Her job always interfered with the little time I had in town.

I don't think it was very considerate of Clinard not to come and see you, but by now, he probably has. What are some of the guys doing now that they're out and free again?

The sun came out and all the snow is melted now. It really feels wonderful to get outside every once and awhile. It sure reminds me of high school, when all you had to do was jump in your car and drive out in the country somewhere and go swimming. I sure had a lot of fun, I guess, but I'd sure do a lot more in so many things if I had it to do all over again! I like to look back and laugh at the things I thought were so important or difficult then. I wonder if I'll do the same thing someday, at these last two years. I'm glad I'm still just a kid, life's too interesting to pass in such a hurry.

What's all this talk about prices going down in the food market? Is it sort of a voluntary action by the grocers? We don't have much time to read the newspapers or listen to the radio.⁹

Next Monday is a holiday, but we have the duty so no liberty.

How's the Mercury and the house coming along? And how is your back, Mom? Does it feel all normal again?

A lot of my buddies passed the NROTC exam. I could shoot the sergeant major on Midway for giving me the wrong dope about that.

For a Naval Academy Preparatory School, Bainbridge sure has a lousy atmosphere, so to say. Hardly anyone wants to really make the Service a career. I'll bet there's only 3 or 4 in my class of 40 who honestly want it as a lifetime job.

⁹ According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics report at the time, food prices for 1948 were actually 1 percent higher than 1947, though retail food prices trended down in February and March due to historical declines in food commodities like wheat, corn, soybeans, and pigs. See *Retail Prices of Food, 1948*, Bulletin No. 965 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor, 1949).

Write soon people.

Love,
Ray



Did I tell you I was a squad leader now? I have been for a month now. I have 11 men in my squad. . . . If you thought my old shoes used to shine, you ought to see my new ones. I have to wear dark glasses at night to keep from being blinded by the light reflected from the stars!

2 March 1948

Hi Mom,

I was very sorry to hear about Richard. When I was home, I did think he was worse, so I wasn't too surprised. I hope the people, wherever he is now, can help him. How do Grandmother and Hilda feel now he's gone?¹⁰

Thanks for the pictures. I think they turned out very well. Did we ever take any pictures of me when I was in uniform? I would like to have some if we did.

Have you heard anything about any of the other former Marines yet, meaning Merve and Don mainly.

You know what, Mom? I'm afraid you're counting on my passing the entrance exams too much I think. I wish you wouldn't, because I don't want you to feel hurt or disappointed if I don't come through. I've been thinking on another angle if that happens to be the case. Why wouldn't it be a good idea to go to some civilian prep school like Bullis in Washington on the GI Bill of Rights?¹¹ A former Marine major advised me on that also that an electrical engineering course is hard enough without having

¹⁰ Stice is referring to his cousin Richard Stice, who was the son of Kenneth Stice's brother.

¹¹ Bullis School was opened in 1930 by Cdr William F. Bullis as a preparatory school for the U.S. Naval Academy and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. It moved to Potomac, MD, in 1981 and offers a co-ed environment. The GI Bill, or more formally the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, was passed by the 78th Congress and signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in June 1944. It provided a number of financial benefits to veterans returning from World War II, including life insurance, low-cost mortgages, loans to start businesses or farms, and covered educational expenses. The original bill expired in 1956, but new bills have since been passed to fill the gap.

NROTC also. He implied I should do one thing and do it right, not two and only half right. I think he had something there too. I guess the only thing that we can really do is just wait and see how the exams turn out.

When is the latest time I can enroll at the University of Illinois? We won't know the exam grades until May sometime anyway, not until after we report from leave.

Did I tell you I was a squad leader now? I have been for a month now. I have 11 men in my squad. It sure helps out when we have cleaning details each day and every other week. I assign them instead of getting assigned, but it feels good to have a little responsibility again.

If you thought my old shoes used to shine, you ought to see my new ones. I have to wear dark glasses at night to keep from being blinded by the light reflected from the stars!

Oh yes, my grades, this time I passed physics and bilged everything else except conduct. Physics 2.99, conduct 4.00, trig and geometry 1.99, algebra 2.3, and English about 2.3. I'm not positive of any of those grades exactly, but that's the general location of them. Algebra was pure carelessness, English was forgetfulness, and trig was a big-time snowstorm all period. I'll try to be more careful, remember what I studied the night before, and to learn more or rather understand more. I kept my nose pretty clean this time too; although, I almost got run up the afternoon I bought my watch for being late to class. It is a beautiful Benrus 17-jewel, gold watch and expansion band that cost me \$28.¹²

Oh yes, thank you very much for the extra \$5. It came in very handy. Was there any special occasion for sending it?

Write soon people.

Yours,

Ray



*As you probably know by now I'm on probation again.
... When I get one more unsatisfactory effort grade from any
teacher, I get the boot, canned, kicked out, finis, par, done!*

¹² Benrus opened in 1921 as a watch repair business in New York City. Benrus is a blend of the cofounder's name Benjamin Lazrus. They eventually switched to watch making, particularly for military servicemembers from World War II until the Vietnam War. For a young student, \$28 would have been quite an expenditure, equating to about \$365 in 2024 dollars.

They kicked out about 25 guys last week to show I'm not fooling.

8 March 1948

Hi Mom,

It's another Monday now. This morning, I had another tooth filled. What a monster it turned out to be, and I have ample more. I'm sure glad I'm not paying for all this. My jaw will be all fillings before I'm 21 at this rate.

As you probably know by now, I'm on probation again. The captain says I have shown a varied and indifferent attitude toward all my class-work. The teachers can't possibly grade "effort" grades when they don't know you from Adam. I had two unsatisfactory trig and history, two average history and algebra, and 1 satisfactory physics effort grades, which I thought was very unfair. When I get one more unsatisfactory effort grade from any teacher, I get the boot, canned, kicked out, finis, par, done! They kicked out about 25 guys last week to show I'm not fooling. They don't take your appointment away, but they sure do send them back to duty regularly.

I remember when I could sit down and write four pages as easy as not, but not anymore I'm afraid. Besides, they're having clothing survey upstairs now, and I have to run to get another pair of shoes. We can have two pair of dress shoes now.

Everyone take it easy and have a good time, but write soon.

Love,
Ray



You darn right I resent being told off. . . . I particularly didn't appreciate the part where you thought I had an "unbalanced gratitude to the Service by failing school." I'm still a kid, 19 years old and not in any way as mature as you and Dad, so how in the devil can you expect me to act and think like you do? You had to learn by time and experience, so why is it unnatural to expect me to develop in the same way? It takes years of experience as a leader to obtain those traits. I'm just a peon with two years as an enlisted man behind me, at the bottom of a pretty high ladder.

5 March 1948

Hi Mom,

Well, I've read your last letter over about 10 times. Pretty soon, I'll be able to read it without seeing a little red.

You darn right I resent being told off. You show me one red-blooded boy with any gumption or guts that doesn't! But I don't resent being corrected. I did when I was home, because for 15 days out of 18 months I wanted to live like I wanted to, with no interference, and that still goes. You never could understand that. Just 15 short days out of a year and a half and you seem to be judging my whole character by those last few free days.

I'm still a kid, 19 years old, and not in any way as mature as you and Dad, so how in the devil can you expect me to act and think like you do? You had to learn by time and experience, so why is it unnatural to expect me to develop in the same way? You say, "the cream of the crop, a perfect man physically and mentally," and just think over again what you're asking of me. It takes years of experience as a leader to obtain those traits. I'm just a peon with two years as an enlisted man behind me, at the bottom of a pretty high ladder. I'm in no particular hurry to get to the top, because it wouldn't do me any good if I was. It's a long, hard trip up.

I particularly didn't appreciate the part where you thought I had an "unbalanced gratitude to the Service by failing school." Not because I take it as a slight on my character, I just don't think it is a true or just opinion. I can see now where you'll always hold it against me if I don't get into the academy. Neither you nor anyone else can answer that question now, but we'll all know in a couple of months.

The records show I have 35 days leave owed to me up to 1 May. That means after my 15 day leave, they'll still owe me 20 days, plus 3 days to be acquired yet.

I was gung ho as everything about the academy for quite a while, but now I'm beginning to wonder again. The atmosphere around here is far from what an outsider would think. All everyone, including a good part of the instructors, thinks about is getting out and living again, and I don't blame them one bit.

What made Lucile change her mind about Monroe? I thought she was all set to be engaged or something. Does she know what she wants to do the rest of her life? Or is her mind being made up for her? Don't get mad, I'm serious.

I have to study now, so I'll close. But try to see things the way I do, and maybe you can really understand my thoughts and actions. I don't know.

Love,

Ray

P.S. I hope you had a pleasant birthday, Mom, and will have many, many more. Just because we don't see some things in the same light, that doesn't stop me from always loving you, Mom.



When I look back two months and remember how much I hated this place and wished I'd never left the Pacific, I laugh. Now, I'm getting used to—but not the weather—the base and the people I'm with every day. It doesn't seem quite as bad.

17 March 1948

Wednesday night

Hi Mom,

This won't be long. I have loads and loads of work to do. We are taking our exams this week—much fun—and I missed all day yesterday because we had to go up to Philly to have the second and final eye check. I have better than average vision okay, but the astigmatism in both eyes sure wears me out when reading. The doc said he gave me the "\$50 special refraction!"

I think my grades will be generally better, not very much in English and history though. We'll know by next week anyway.

When I look back two months and remember how much I hated this place and wished I'd never left the Pacific, I laugh. Now I'm getting used to—but not the weather—the base and the people I'm with every day. It doesn't seem quite as bad. I still associate my blues (uniform) with cheese, mayonnaise, and other unmentionables, but as we have to wear them on liberty (to and from anyway) I'm slowly getting accustomed to them. Darn slow!

This isn't very long, but neither is my spare time tonight. Write soon and tell me all the latest.

Yer keed and one and only,

Ray



School is coming along a little better it seems. I usually go to study hall 30–45 minutes early in the evenings so I can put more time in on my work.

18 March 1948

Hi Dad,

Thanks a lot for writing and for sending the application card along. I'll mail it right away. I've been debating with myself whether to take this 15 day leave or not. If I pass the exams, I'll wish I had taken it and, if I don't, I'll wish I hadn't. If I just let them ride, I'll get paid an extra \$55.24 when I get discharged, which by the way is only three months from today. If I take them, I'll more than spend that \$55. Naturally, I'd like to come home, but 15 days sure goes fast.

Next month, we start wearing khaki instead of greens and, as the word goes, we'll wear them on liberty too. My neck looks like it went through a meat grinder after a weekend in blues.

School is coming along a little better it seems. I usually go to study hall 30–45 minutes early in the evenings so I can put more time in on my work.

Physics is harder now. The one test I got a 4.0 on so many failed it, he didn't count it; and yesterday, I failed an easy one and he counted it—that's life I guess. A lot of tests only have one question in it. Several of us put in a "bitch" about the grading, but the "full ensigns" word is law.

Tell Lucile to write someday if she can.

Love,

Ray



About my being confused about going to the Naval Academy. That comes and goes I guess. I'm still one of the few Marines who wants to make this outfit a career. If the Service makes me into an egotistical, obstinate, SOB—like several of the officers here—I don't want any part of it. It's the good officers here who make you feel like making the Service a career, and the bad ones make you not want it. Doesn't that sound reasonable?

19 March 1948

Friday

Howdy Mom,

Thanks loads for writing back so soon. You made me feel very happy. I was sort of worried as to how you would take my last letter, so thanks.

You darn right I had “a bright spot or two” that you planned when I was home. We just didn’t agree on a few things other than them.

It sounds like Lucile is sort of fouled up too. At least I don’t have any “love life” worries or troubles, that’s for sure!

I’m glad you’re pleased with the heating pad. I figure Lucile could probably use it too on some days.¹³

I was sort of surprised at the notation that Captain O’Donnell said about making passing grades in all subjects or being disenrolled. He didn’t tell me that. I’m sure working hard to come up to those standards. By the way, the last marking period is up next week.

Is Uncle Hobie [Hobart Hewitt] a colonel now? How come he dropped back a rank?¹⁴

They haven’t called me back to the dental clinic yet, but they ought to soon. That’s one place I like to go because they can sure save you a lot of discomfort with only a few hours of work.

Say, when did you learn how to type? I don’t believe you have ever typed me a letter before.

About being confused about going to the Naval Academy. That comes and goes, I guess. I’m still one of the few Marines who wants to make this outfit a career. If the Service makes me into an egotistical, obstinate, SOB [son of a bitch]—like several of the officers here—I don’t want any part of it. It’s the good officers here who make you feel like making the Service a career, and the bad ones make you not want it. Doesn’t that sound reasonable?

¹³ Heating pads were originally intended to help treat tuberculosis patients as early as 1912.

¹⁴ Stice is referring to Col Hobart Hewett, who was a member of the Coastal Artillery Guard during World War II. See Col Homer Case, “Inspector of Antiaircraft,” *Antiaircraft Journal* 92, no. 3 (May–June 1949): 16. According to Army records, Hewett’s rank during the period was lieutenant colonel on 18 September 1941, colonel on 21 November 1942, brigadier general on 11 December 1942, lieutenant colonel on 11 December, at some point he was reinstated as a brigadier general but terminated on 5 March 1946, and finally a colonel again on 11 March 1948. No explanation is given to explain these drastic changes.

You were wrong on one point, Mom. My disenrollment would not mean a discharge. Once I passed that up (Christmas), I still have to serve out my enlistment. It's up at 1600 on 18 June.

Nothing is definite about my leave yet. The way I feel today though, I think I'll take about 15 days anyway.

We start taking the practice exams next month. One exam a week. It will be wonderful practice and as they are actual (former) tests, they will give us a fair idea as to what to expect when the real McCoy rolls around.

I guess this is all for the time being, so be good and don't let the Mercury get too banged up.

Write soon.

Love always,

Ray

P.S. Thanks for the stamps. I have quite a few now.



I got called before the ole man again. This time he really told me off. . . . He told me that with my grades in high school, I had too much ambition. I should go to VMI or some other college if I wanted a Marine Corps commission, not the academy. . . . He said just as good if not better Marines come out of colleges than Annapolis. He thinks I don't have the chance of a plug nickel of getting into the Naval Academy.

23 March 1948

Hi Mom,

Quite a bit happened yesterday. We got paid (\$45), I turned down leave this month, and I got called before the ole man again. This time he really told me off. Surely Dad didn't prompt you to write that letter, he would know better. It sounded so much like I asked you to write it that he's all the more convinced that I'm just here to dope off. Don't ever write him again, it just makes things worse. Let's learn by our mistakes, not make them again. I know that you wrote it with very good intentions, Mom, but you just don't know the Navy or this captain here. You shouldn't have repeated what I put in my letter either. I won't tell you things anymore if they're going to bounce right back at me again. He told me that with my grades in high school, I had too much ambition. I should go to VMI [Vir-

ginia Military Institute] or some other college if I wanted a Marine Corps commission, not the academy. He is partly right there. No Marine officer needs to know steam and navigation or shipboard subjects like they teach at the Naval Academy. He said just as good if not better Marines come out of colleges than Annapolis. He thinks I don't have the chance of a plug nickel of getting into the Naval Academy.¹⁵ I just about believe him now too. Well, to hell with him and what he thinks, another month or two and I'll never have anything to do with him again.

Easter is next Sunday. We don't even get Friday night or Sunday night off, just the same short weekend. I'm glad time goes fast.

I'll probably send that application for the University of Illinois in today or tomorrow, whenever I get time.

Write soon (to me).

Love,
Ray



We take our first practice exams this week. The first three days we take exams, the last two we review them. All that for three weeks and then comes the real thing.

28 March 1948

Happy Easter!

Another weekend has passed. Last week, I tried my darndest, and I still only passed physics, maybe history, I don't know. I guess maybe it is too much to learn in such a comparatively short time.

I passed up the chance I've been waiting for, for two years this afternoon—a maroon 1938 Ford convertible, five-passenger, good Mercury

¹⁵ The term *plug nickel* has been used in various formats since the 1880s, where it was first seen in the *Daily Nebraska State Journal*, 14 September 1883. Generally, it indicates something of little value or worth. The origin of the phrase came from a time when people would drill holes in coins to collect the metal and then fill it with one of lower value.

engine, good top, body, and new tires for \$750.¹⁶ I would have bought it if it wasn't for the possibility of my passing entrance exams. You'll never know the temptation, but my head won out over my heart this time. It sure was a snappy looking rig. They are pretty rare now.

Our lieutenant says he doesn't believe the captain will be kicking any men out for grades this time because time is so short. I sure hope not, because if he does, I'll more than likely be the first one. I won't mail this right away until I know for sure.

We take our first practice exams this week. The first three days we take exams, the last two we review them. All that for three weeks and then comes the real thing.

On second thought, I may as well mail this now.

Write soon.

Love always,
Ray



I take it from your letters that you are pretty confident of my passing the examinations. Don't try to kid me or yourself. It's better to look at things as they are, not how we want them, right? If I make it, swell, if I don't, that's okay too. They have certain, high educational standards and if I don't come up to them, they sure aren't going to lower them to mine.

7 April 1948

Hi Mom,

I just finished the second practice exam. We had the physics one this morning. I thought it was a very good exam, maybe a 2.0 or a 3.0's worth. The history exam, maybe a 1.9 or a 2.0; English and algebra exams, maybe 2.6 or 2.5; the geometry and trig exams, about a 2.4 maybe. We'll find out tomorrow. If I can cram enough history and trig and not be so damn

¹⁶ In 1938, Ford reduced the new lineup of cars due to poor response to the previous year's looks. Stice may be referring to the Ford Model 81A DeLuxe five-passenger convertible sedan. At the time of production, it cost \$900 to purchase new and only 2,743 were made. See Auto Editors of Consumer Guide, "1937-1938 Ford," HowStuffWorks.com, 11 September 2007.

careless in algebra, I might make it. We'll know in a couple of weeks; not for sure until about a month from now though, when the grades come out. I'm not going out on liberty this weekend.

Your box with the "piece" of fudge and carton of gum came yesterday. Thank you very much. I'll make good use of both of them!

I have a couple of snapshots of myself in blues that I'll be able to send along next week. Today is Wednesday, and I still have a ring around my neck where it got so sore last weekend. Just like the mat burns I used to get in wrestling. Believe me, it won't wash off!

We don't have to go to study hall at night, and we are allowed to return to our rooms when we have finished each exam, so everyone is in much better spirits than before. Each one lasts from 2 to 2 hours and 30 minutes. I used to really feel shot after a long exam, but not anymore, it is very good practice.

I take it from your letters that you are pretty confident of my passing the examinations. Don't try to kid me or yourself. It's better to look at things as they are, not how we want them, right? If I make it, swell, if I don't, that's okay too. They have certain, high educational standards and if I don't come up to them, they sure aren't going to lower them to mine.

My laundry is waiting on me so, so long for now. Write soon.

Love,
Ray



*The last exams didn't turn out as well as I had expected.
I passed English and trig and failed the rest. Most of them
weren't under too far.*

10 April 1948

Hi Mom,

The last exams didn't turn out as well as I had expected. I passed English and trig and failed the rest. Most of them weren't under too far.

There isn't much new to tell about anymore. Some men from the *Saturday Evening Post* were around base last week taking pictures.¹⁷ They

¹⁷ Stice may be referring to the issue that came out in the *Saturday Evening Post*, 11 September 1948.

asked for five men to take pictures of, but I was too slow. It will probably come out next June.

It's raining outside today. Maybe it's a good thing I didn't go on liberty after all. They don't issue us raincoats, and I can't see buying a military one to only use for two months. We usually have good weather. My seabag is so full now, it wouldn't hold anymore anyway.

How much do I have in bonds? I'm trying to figure out how much money I'll have when I get discharged. I'll get \$300 from mustering out pay, \$100 on the books, \$100 for not going on leave, another \$40 for travel pay, plus whatever I get paid, \$20 or \$40. All that plus what I have at home in bonds. How much is that?

The fudge is gone, but the chewing gum will last quite a while longer. Write soon.

Love,
Ray



Well, two down and four to go. . . . It's quite odd how fast these examinations came. It only seems like a month or so since I was out in the Pacific and here it's been half a year (five and a half months).

21 April 1948

Hi Mom,

Well, two down and four to go. Today, we took the aptitude test (three hours long) and this afternoon we took the geometry and trig exams (two hours). I thought I would be able to tell if I passed it or not, but I'm not sure. It was awfully hard; tricky describes it better.

I sent away for a radio receiver kit to build while everyone is on leave. It's about time I built a radio anyway. We will probably get liberty three out of four nights, so I'll have plenty of time. Leave will last until 9 May. After everyone returns, we'll hold school in the morning and go fishing and sailing in the afternoon till 1 June. Then we'll go back to the Naval Gun Factory in Washington and await final (in my case) orders. The ones who passed will stay, also the ones who are to be discharged, and the ones who failed will be sent to other bases. It's quite odd how fast these examinations came. It only seems like a month or so since I was

Figure 39. Boat docks at Bainbridge, ca. 1943



Source: Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

out in the Pacific and here it's been half a year (five and a half months).

I figure with the bonds at home and what I'll get here, I should be worth about \$1,200 even. That's pretty close on what I planned when I first came in.

Write soon people.

Love,
Ray



The exams are over and done with now. It won't be too long before we know the final outcome. . . . I think Dad would like the English theme I wrote on him. The topic was "The Person I Would Like to Write a Book on." Last weekend, I went to Philly, and on Sunday I took a little hitchhike over to the Jersey shore. It sure seemed natural being in the sand and smelling the ocean again. I doubt if I'll ever forget the beach after being on Midway.

27 April 1948

Hi Mom,

The exams are over and done with now. It won't be too long before we know the final outcome.

You should see me now. I'm the MAA [master at arms] today. That's the same as sergeant of the guard. I'm in charge of the gym and recreation hall. I've been playing pool all afternoon.

Seeing as how our section leader [SL] is on leave, the assistant SL is in charge, and I've been acting assistant SL. It's even better than being a squad leader, which I still am.

Last weekend, I went to Philly, and on Sunday I took a little hitchhike over to the Jersey shore. It sure seemed natural being in the sand and smelling the ocean again. I doubt if I'll ever forget the beach after being on Midway.

Now that the exams are over, I'm having a little more fun on liberty. I'm glad I stayed on here over leave. Almost half our section did, so we don't have it too bad. Liberty three out of four nights and duty one out of four. The other days, we just work in the barracks or go on working parties all day. We have plenty of time to do anything that might come up.

I hope my radio kit comes tomorrow. I'd like to get started on it.

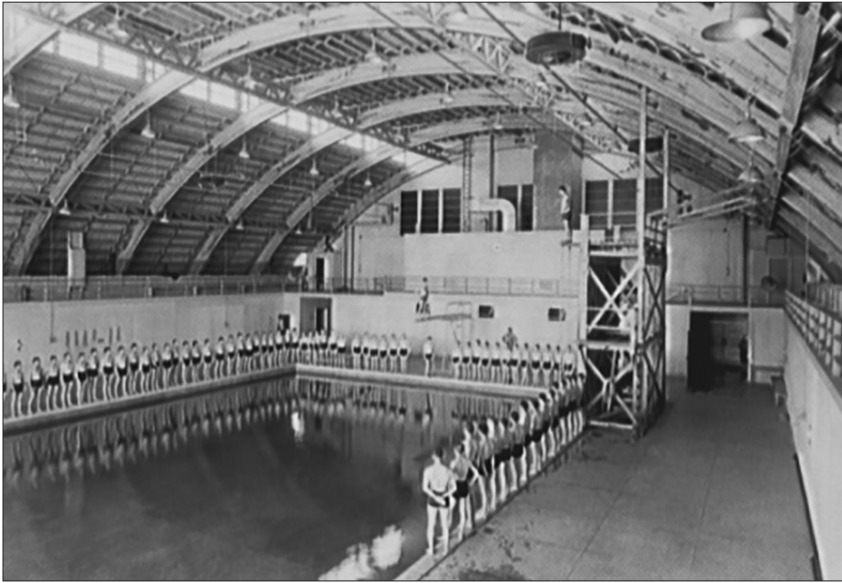
This daylight savings time sure fouled up everybody. Most people forgot about it and missed their buses and trains.¹⁸

Ask someone who knows in the University of Illinois to see how hard it would be to change courses. I mean in case I changed my mind about electrical engineering and wanted to take mechanical or some other type of engineering.

When we know for positive about the exams, I have several other choices that have come up that look equally as promising. They (the exams) were easier than the practice exams, so I think I passed English and physics without too much strain, but algebra was much stiffer and history was rather difficult. Geometry is a big question mark as far as I'm con-

¹⁸ Many U.S. states and most other countries ignore the concept of daylight saving, though some do adjust for summer and winter in some fashion. Daylight saving time and time zones in the United States are codified by Congress in U.S. Code, Title 15, Chapter 6, Subchapter IX-Standard Time. Clocks in most of the country are adjusted ahead one hour in the summer months (daylight saving time) and back one hour in the winter months (standard time).

Figure 40. Drill hall, pool 1, at Bainbridge, ca. 1943



Source: Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

cerned. It was hard okay, but I can't say how hard. The aptitude test alone took three hours! Friday morning, we took physics and history, so that was a rather concentrated few hours to say the least.

I think Dad would like the English theme I wrote on him. The topic was "The Person I Would Like to Write a Book on" (or a biography I think it was). I thought it was pretty good. Everyone else wrote on FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] or some other person. Oh my God, I wonder if "biography" means the life of a dead person or whether he can still be alive? They'll get me for not following directions if that's the case. I better look that up pronto.

Tell Lucile to tell "Flow Mo" to get hot and write me a letter!

Mom, send me a newspaper from home that has a lot of used cars listed. I'm trying to find out what part of the country has the lowest priced used cars, because I intend to buy one if the exams didn't turn out like we wanted. I figure I can put up to \$700 into one without stretching my capital too much.

Write soon and tell me what's coming off at Urbana.

Love,
Ray



In a recent letter, you told me I was to run my own life because I was the one who was going to have to live it. That's swell, but there are still many things that I depend on you and Dad for; one of which is one of you two's permission, on paper, for me to buy a motorcycle. In Pennsylvania, minors have to have their parents' consent to transact any business deal."

May 1948

Hi Mom,

In a recent letter, you told me I was to run my own life because I was the one who was going to have to live it. That's swell, but there are still many things that I depend on you and Dad for; one of which is one of you two's permission, on paper, for me to buy a motorcycle. In Pennsylvania, minors have to have their parents' consent to transact any business deal. I've passed up a lot of good deals in the past, but not this one. It's a 1947 Harley Davidson, 45 horsepower motorcycle with 2,000 miles on it. It has saddlebags, spotlights, taillights, buddy seat, and chrome crash bars fore and aft. Will you please send me as soon as possible all my bonds and if feasible enough to cover \$700? The sale is for \$650, and I want to have ample enough for tags and license. It was a toss-up for it or a Ford convertible, and the cycle won out. I'm going down tonight and put a small deposit on it so they will hold it for me until you write back.

Please do this for me, People.

Your lovin' keed,
Ray



I finally bought a '36 Ford convertible coupe (five passenger) for \$500. The car is as cute as a bug in a rug, but under the hood, it's about ready to go. Gas is .23-.25 cents per gallon here. How much is it there in the Midwest? . . . We started school again this morning.

10 May 1948

Hi Mom,

I finally bought a '36 Ford convertible coupe (five passenger) for \$500. It was too much to pay, I know, and the engine is a lemon I found out too late, so as soon as I get out I'm going to drive to Florida and sell it for some ridiculously high price. That way I'll get the use of it for a month and a half and still get my money out of it. Then on the way back, pick up some good deal in some small backwoods place. My insurance is costing plenty—\$74—and that's not collision or upset. Everything else is included that you asked for though. The car is as cute as a bug in a rug, but under the hood, it's about ready to go. I'm surprised at all I'd forgotten about Fords. Oh well, we always did say experience was the best teacher. Gas is .23-.25 cents per gallon here. How much is it there in the Midwest?¹⁹

We started school again this morning. Everyone was falling asleep in class today. The way I feel now, I'm about ready to drop off. I can't even see what I'm writing, so goodnight and write soon.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Thanks for sending me my bonds. I got \$639 for them I think.

¹⁹ Average gas prices in the United States in 1948 was .26 cents. See Energy Information Administration, *Annual Energy Review*, Table 5.4, and *Monthly Energy Review*, Table 9.4.

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U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY PLEBE SUMMER LETTERS

8 June 1948–March 1949
Annapolis, Maryland

[W]e have to be in full uniform of the day to even cross the passageway to the head or for a drink of water! Everybody is collecting demerits right and left for the most minor “offenses.” Today, I flew a Consolidated PB5Y-5A patrol bomber like we used to see in New Jersey all the time (Catalinas). . . . Also, I’m out for wrestling, and every little bone in my body tells me they know it. . . . We’ve been pulling whaleboats, and in a few weeks when we are “ready,” we’ll start sailing small sailboats . . . tomorrow we start having troop and stomp with rifles. . . . So far, I’ve only read about 4,000 of the regulations.

8 June 1948

Hi Mom,

Your first letter arrived today. Next time, you don’t need to be so specific

Figure 41. Ray Stice (fourth row, far right) with U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen class of 1948–49



Source: Stice Family Collection.

about the fourth class; please just put “4/C” like on the return address.¹ That’s like adding insult to injury, Ma’am.

Patty said you came down and took her out for a Coke. she thinks you’re pretty swell, too, so at least everyone likes everybody!

Oh lord, yes, pajamas go on the ridiculous list too. It’s killing me. We have to be in full uniform of the day to even cross the passageway to the head or for a drink of water! Everybody is collecting demerits right and left for the most minor “offenses,” if you can call them offenses and still feel right about it.

Today, I flew a Consolidated PBV-5A patrol bomber like we used to see in New Jersey all the time (Catalinas) for about a half hour. Next week, I’ll fly a smaller single-engine trainer. We can do anything except take off,

¹ Stice is referring to his status as a plebe or fourth-class midshipman in their freshman year at the U.S. Naval Academy.

Figure 42. Ray Stice wearing Navy whites at the Naval Academy, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

land, or put the big box in a spin, and I really liked it. It's quite a jump from passenger to pilot of a big two-engine plane, believe me. Then all afternoon, we snapped in with 45-cal automatics. We'll fire them a lot in the near future.

Also, I'm out for wrestling, and every little bone in my body tells me they know it. There's not much in it for me because there's only one other flyweight in the plebe class who is out and I can beat the pants off him. I weigh from 131 to 134 pounds, so I'm in a good class. It will take me a month of Sundays and a hell of a lot of work to get in condition though.

We've been pulling whaleboats, and in a few weeks when we are "ready," we'll start sailing small sailboats. We are through the first couple of phases in infantry drill too, so tomorrow we start having troop and stomp with rifles. With all the former servicemen, we move along quite quickly in some fields of work.

The engineering course looks very intriguing at the present, but they say it is a very rugged course.

So far, I've only read about 4,000 of the regulations, and I have another 2,300 to go in the next few days, so I'd better cut this short and break out my reading glasses and get hot!²

The other night, I found time to spit shine my shoes too, so they're old now. You can tell with remarkable percentage the former servicemen here by just looking at their shoes.

I have about \$240 saved up now, but I'm going to see the financial advisor before I "invest" any more money. It's a very minor detail for another year yet.

Write soon, People.

Your one and only former gyrene son,
Ray



The sergeant major and I had a big blow out over my mustering out pay. He said he'll hold me over my enlistment COG until after I take my physical, then discharge me like the others no matter what type of appointment I hold.

² For more on the Naval Academy at the time Stice attended, see Earl Wentworth Thompson, "The Naval Academy as an Undergraduate College," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 74, no. 3 (March 1948).

16 June 1948

Hi Mom,

Well, I'm here finally, but is this hole ever fouled up! I'd better backtrack a little first. It was about 1400 before I got a ride out of Chanute [Air Force Base, Illinois] to [Wright-]Patterson [Air Force Base] in a Douglas C-47 Skytrain, then I finally got a hop to DC in a cute Beech C-45 Expeditor, but way too late to see the people.³

I saw Rita yesterday, and it just proved that Pat is the right gal for me (you can "hint" that to her next time you see her), and I reported to DC when my leave expired. Then this morning, two of us were driven down here to Annapolis. We were quartered on the hangar deck for "how long God only knows" on Army cots, no liberty at any time, and we can't leave the ship. Sounds like fun, huh? The sergeant major and I had a big blow out over my mustering out pay. He said he'll hold me over my enlistment COG until after I take my physical, then discharge me like the others no matter what type of appointment I hold.⁴ If he does do that, I'm going to write one hell of a letter to Mr. McMillen and find out what the scoop is.⁵

I have a lot of writing to do, so this is going to be cut short.

As ever, yours,

Ray

Tell Patty hi for me, Mom.



We went sailing the other day instead of pulling whaleboats.

We spend one week on each new subject; sailing, boxing, 45-

³ Chanute Air Force Base was situated north of Champaign, IL, and was closed in 1993 as part of the Base Realignment and Closure process and all lands were returned to the community. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base is in southwest Ohio near Dayton. It was originally considered two facilities: Wilbur Wright Field, and Fairfield Aviation General Supply Depot. The two were joined in a merger in 1948 and became Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

⁴ According to the GI Bill, COG refers to convenience of government, which is a reason for separation from active duty that allows discharge before completion of the obligated period of service and is a factor in determining eligibility under Title 38 U.S. Code, Chapters 30 and 32. Servicemembers must have served at least 20 months of a two-year enlistment or 30 months of a three-year enlistment to retain eligibility when released for COG.

⁵ Stice is likely referring to Senator Rolla C. McMillen (R-IL), who served in Congress from 1944 to 1949.

cal pistols (three weeks), molding, and casting. Next week, we start welding. At the same time, we've been learning all about marine boilers and steam turbines. I think these classes are very interesting, but most of the fellas I've talked to don't agree. I'm glad God made me very curious, otherwise I wouldn't give a damn how and why things worked. I wish I also had a good memory so I could remember what I learn. Maybe there's a way to develop one's memory.

18 June 1948

Hi People,

I wanted to thank all of you for the three very nice gifts! This pen is like a charm and the alarm clock got its first workout the very next morning when I had to get up at 0520 to work off an hour's extra duty. I got caught outside my room without a jumper or a hat—five demerits and one hour. The swell pencil hasn't got its workout yet, but it sure will when school starts.

We went sailing the other day instead of pulling whaleboats. We spend one week on each new subject: sailing, boxing, 45-cal pistols (three weeks), molding, and casting. Next week, we start welding. At the same time, we've been learning all about marine boilers and steam turbines. I think these classes are very interesting, but most of the fellas I've talked to don't agree. I'm glad God made me very curious, otherwise I wouldn't give a damn how and why things worked. I wish I also had a memory so I could remember what I learn. Maybe there's a way to develop one's memory.

Enclosed is a mimeographed sheet that is the first of our 4/C newspaper. It's very plain that a civilian wrote most of the articles.

We have to be ready for church in a few minutes, so I'd better finish this later.⁶

Did you ever get my seabag? When it does come, how about having the green trousers and flannel shirts cleaned and pressed along with the

⁶ Chapel attendance was mandatory for U.S. Naval Academy cadets until 1972. See Samuel Limneos, "When a Religious Sea-Change Occurred at Annapolis—Two Parts," *Naval History*, April 2023.

jacket and blue trousers, minus the red stripes (cut them off). Lucile may have my blue coat and buttons and green overcoat to convert if she wants them. Keep all the shoes except the one most beat up pair of field shoes. Keep all the skivvies, socks, and khakis for the time being. Keep all the emblems. I want all of them—gilt and dull. I want Patty to have the large “guilt” emblem on my blue or white cap frame for a coat ornament or something. Keep all my dungarees, belts, and caps too please.

Oh yes, there’s no need to send back my discharge paper. I got the wrong dope when I said I wanted it back.

Anything I haven’t mentioned, use your own judgment about or write and ask please.

We wrestle Tuesday in our first match. I threw my right shoulder for a loop the other day, but it’s okay now. I have some pretty strong people to work with, and they are all about 10 pounds heavier. I wish I had someone my own weight to spar with.

I’ll write you soon and tell you all the results. Thanks again for the presents. You always did give me very useful and nice gifts.

Write soon, People,
Ray



I report to take my physical on 28 June, and I’ll know tomorrow if and when I’ll get mustered out. Most of my buddies are discharged and sworn in the academy already.

18 June 1948

Hi People,
Well, the long-awaited and much expected day has finally arrived, but (ah yes . . . but) nothing has happened yet. When I was told I was about to lose all my money, sparks began to fly because I can’t see letting the Marine Corps get away with about \$400 that they owe me. The way things stand now, I report to take my physical on 28 June, and I’ll know tomorrow if and when I’ll get mustered out. Starting today, I’m drawing double pay because they are holding me over my enlistment COG. I doubt it if I stay here aboard the USS *Block Island* [CVE 106] more than

Figure 43. USS *Block Island* (CVE 106), ca. 1943



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

another two days at the most, so I'd best not give you any address yet.⁷

Most of my buddies are discharged and sworn in the academy already. One buddy, Lloyd Ames from Connecticut, lost more than \$1,000 in back leave pay, states bonuses, and mustering out pay. He had a fleet appointment though, so he would have lost his appointment if he'd gotten discharged. Anyway, he had time to do. I would have declined and come back next year if I had that much at stake. I might anyway if they aren't going to give me my money.⁸

I'll write again tomorrow if I can.

⁷ The USS *Block Island* was an escort carrier during World War II. After the war, the ship saw use as a training ship for Naval Academy cadets. See "Block Island II (CVE-106), 1944–1959," in *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, 8 vols. (Washington, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, 1959–91).

⁸ For more on various military pay situations during the period, see Title 37, Pay and Allowances of the Uniformed Services, Pub. L. 87–649, §1, 7 September 1962, 76 Stat. 451.

Love to all,
Ray



This is undoubtedly the most military outfit I've ever latched on to, and so far, I love it. So far . . . listen to me, I've only been here two days. But what we haven't done in two days . . . wow! Even six short months will do wonders for any fellow here, I can see that now. They really see to it that you keep in physical shape (and improve tremendously too). . . . The attitude of the officers is wonderful because they don't know who was what (and don't care anyway), and everyone is treated very much like a gentleman. We are used to a lot of the regulations, but they are so darn much more strict here. It's actually fun for the time being!

1 July 1948
2030 hours

Dear People,

Here is my uniform, so take all you want for granted as to what happened. Dick Rossie of Aurora, Illinois, the mail clerk at Bainbridge I told you about, is my roommate. Lucky, seeing as how all the other gyrenes got shoved off separately with civies. My beautiful curly locks are only one-half or one-third as long as they were when I left home. Who cares!

This is undoubtedly the most military outfit I've ever latched on to, and so far I love it. So far . . . listen to me, I've only been here two days. But what we haven't done in two days . . . wow! Try to explain to Patty how awfully busy I'm going to be, especially after September. I'm only average and this school is for better-than-average students, but I want Patty to wait for me because she is a very extra special kind of a gal, Mom. You know what I mean, and I have great hopes for a nice future if things work out smoothly.

Good chow, nice snacks and rooms, and more clothes than we can stencil in the allotted time.

Even six short months will do wonders for any fellow here, I can see that now. They really see to it that you keep in physical shape and improve tremendously too!

Today, I got one of my checks from the Marine Corps, so don't look for it. Send me one more as soon as you get it, and I'll be able to pay off my debt in full. That way, I'll be able to draw more money for leaves, I hope.

Oh yes, send my discharge back to me when you get it registered at the city hall. We might have to use them sometime.

The attitude of the officers is wonderful because they don't know who was what—and don't care anyway—and everyone is treated very much like a gentleman. We are used to a lot of the regulations, but they are so darn much more strict here, it's actually fun for the time being. As long as I can keep this attitude about the "jernt," everything's okay, except for the Miss Adams situation.

I see my old buddies everywhere I look, and it's very gratifying. No fooling.

I've been away from things too long as it is, People, so pardon the abrupt halt in this epistle.

Write soon and see Patty, please.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Almost didn't make it!

P.P.S. I couldn't resist this. Can you see me wearing a deck apes uniform and garters? Damned if I can, but that seems to be the prevalent custom out here, so I do!



This morning, we also had a formal room inspection. But with two salty former Marines in the same room, they aren't going to find much dust. We hope. . . . I've got to hand it to a lot of these civilians. Most of them catch on to the military angle pretty nicely. After all, this is an awful lot different than boot camp. They treat you with respect, and are very courteous. But once you step out of the very straight and extremely narrow line, you get tromped all over so fast it makes your head spin. They really are on the lookout for Navy and Marine juniors (brats) too. I'm glad I came here as a former Marine.

10 July 1948

1000 hours

Hi Mom,

I just wrote the other day, but we have a few minutes so here goes. We got another shot today, and luckily they've looked up our records, so we don't have to get all of them again.

This morning, we also had a formal room inspection. But with two salty former Marines in the same room, they aren't going to find much dust. We hope.

Yesterday, we went to the foundry, made our own sand molds, and poured our own cast-iron pieces. Mine came out good enough to go to the machine shop, so it was quite an interesting period. Then we went down to the boat docks and pulled whaleboats. We got in a race and came out a soaked second. It was our first day out and the other boats had been out before. We all got a big kick out of that. Also, we had swimming tests in which 13 out of 40 of us qualified. Then one of them was a race of 120 yards in three different strokes, which I came in second with a time of 2 minutes, 10 seconds. Very lucky to say the least.

We now have two other people in my weight class, so I'm really going to have to work to win in the battalion wrestling meet.

The civies have caught up well enough to use the rifles in our troop and stomp now, so while at present, it's still a lot of fun, pretty soon it's going to get boring.

Talking about shoes, they inspect us before each chow, and today the officer told us that only three men in the platoon had shined shoes: Whiteside (a former swabbie), Rossie (my roommate), and me.

I've got to hand it to a lot of these civilians, most of them catch on to the military angle pretty nicely. After all, this is an awful lot different than boot camp. They treat you with respect, and are very courteous. But once you step out of the very straight and extremely narrow line, you get tromped all over so fast it makes your head spin. They really are on the lookout for Navy and Marine juniors (brats) too.

I'm glad I came here as a former Marine!

I admire a lot of these people for their remarkably responsive memories too. That's just the caliber of men we have here, I guess.

Do you ever hear from Jim Strong? Give me his address before the

academic year starts, and I'll have time to write to him. He'll probably be as surprised as we were that I actually did make it.

Oh yes, don't be afraid to send me anything, Mom, in the way of eats that is. Hint hint!

Write soon, People.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Do you have an extra alarm clock (small) that you don't know what to do with?

P.P.S. Did you know that if I'd been one-pound lighter in the physical, I'd have been under the minimum for my height and wouldn't have gotten in?⁹



Wrestling competition is very keen now, thank you, but I'm working on it.

13 July 1948

Hi Mom,

Your letter came today, so I figure I'd better write back. Although I think I just wrote, I don't know or care about time, Mom, you know that, just so it trots along smoothly like it should. We have been so darn busy all the time that I hate to think about what the academic year will be like. As a very small and insignificant example, just look over the form I had to have filled out just to have a canker sore in my mouth fixed. I had to sign out in two places to see the OOW's [officer on watch] messenger and two more people before I got his "H.C. Flt."¹⁰ Hell, it would have been easier to put it in myself! Then I had to reverse the procedure on the return trip, which

⁹ According to current academy standards, the minimum height is 58 inches for all candidates, and the maximum is 80 inches. The minimum weight standard varies between 91-131 regardless of gender at 58 inches; at 80 inches, men must weigh in between 173-241 and women 173-227. Because body composition plays into these considerations, estimated body fat percentage is also considered. See "Appendix A: Medical Considerations for Admissions," U.S. Naval Academy Admissions, accessed 28 August 2024.

¹⁰ Based on the context of the sentence, H.S. Flt likely refers to Stice obtaining the signature of the fleet hospital corpsman.

by the way, was only down four flights and over two wings. No fooling now, this is nothing at all. Someday, I'll tell you all about the time I had to go across the river to get my check from the Marine office.

Wrestling competition is very keen now, thank you, but I'm working on it. After downing so much "suds" and smoking so darn many "reefers" this 134-pound frame of mine was in very poor physical condition.¹¹ I haven't touched a beer or cigarette for two weeks, one day, and two-and-a-half hours, Ma'am. Just pat me gently three-and-a-half inches down and four inches over on the left shoulder blade please.

Write soon, you characters, to your keed,

Ray

P.S. See Patty for me, Mom. Please?



Happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me, yeah! Today, I cease to be a teenager, no less, Ma'am. This is funny as hell, Mom. Two years ago today, I was in the exact same situation, going through some rugged training that was all new and tough and lying flat on my back in sick bay with cat fever!

24 July 1948

Hi Mom,

Happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me, yeah! Today, I cease to be a teenager, no less, Ma'am. This is funny as hell, Mom. Two years ago today, I was in the exact same situation, going through some rugged training that was all new and tough, and laying flat on my back in sick bay with cat fever!¹² I felt sort of fouled up ever since the wrestling matches Tuesday, so I finally went to sick bay, and they checked me in for a couple days. I'll be

¹¹ Though modern slang uses the term *reefer* to mean marijuana cigarette or joint, the term has a long history not related to drugs. In the 1930s, the term referred to pickpockets, but even earlier the term referred to something rolled up like sails. See "Reefer (n)," Etmonline.com, accessed 28 August 2024.

¹² Current medical science would identify *cat fever* a common cold or flu, but the term during historical periods was a basic naval term that sailors applied to most issues with achy symptoms that could not be readily identified. See "Medicine: Cat Fever," *Time*, 20 December 1943.

out Monday morning. Tuesday, we wrestle again, but I haven't decided if I'm part of that "we" or not.

I'm glad you tell me about Patty, Mom. I think she's a very important, though temporarily somewhat distant part of my life. Her letters and yours really help a lot. I like the way her hair curls all over too.

Your suggestions for the plebe paper were a bit late, but I got a big charge out of them, especially "Plebe Bilge" (the scum like us and water below decks), "Plebe Pulley," and the "Wheel Business."

How come Dick Sutherland is always around? That's about the third time you've seen him, and I haven't? Does he live in Illinois somewhere?

No, I haven't yet written to Senator McMillen. I thought I should wait until things were a little more settled and secure before I did write.

This morning, I went to the dentist and had a whopper of a cavity filled for a birthday present from him. I bought myself a milk shake and a carton of Peppermint Patties!¹³

Oh, yesterday I went to regular chow hall for the heck of it, and I noticed all the officers looking at me. But I thought maybe I looked like I felt, so let it go at that. Then when all the people marched in, my roommate (who is always kidding me anyway) started laughing at me! I laughed along for a while for the hell of it and still didn't get it. Then he started kidding me about not having any neckerchief. I looked down and, by golly, I didn't and I got through the whole meal, with officers swarming around like flies, without getting caught. All the people in the surrounding tables really got a big charge out of it, especially whenever some hell-raising ensign would sail by.

My headache is gone, the fever is down, and everything is okay I think now. When my head begins to weigh something, I'll be all set to leave here.

By the way, here's a lousy snapshot of yours truly. How about sending me back a couple of prints?

Write soon.

¹³ The York Peppermint Pattie came originally from an ice cream company, York Cone Company. Henry Kessler was experimenting with chocolate-covered candies, but the taste and consistency was an ongoing issue. Finally, in 1940, he was able to put a dark chocolate and mint confection on the local market in the Northeast that was firm and crisp. The company would change hands several times once the product went national, with Hershey finally acquiring the product in 1988.

Your one and only 20-year-old “keed,”

Ray

P.S. Tell Aunt Hilda “Tanks”



I swear, there's so darn many spectators around here. No matter what you're doing, or where you are, there's always some character with a movie camera clocking your every move. We feel like putting up signs, "Please Do Not Feed or Molest the Midshipman" and "Girls, Please Don't Flirt—It's Been So Long." You know, on Midway, there just weren't any dames. It was swell, but here they're all over the place and we can't even talk to them.

28 July 1948

Hi Mom,

It's so darn hot here it's pitiful, especially with tromp and stomp all afternoon! Yesterday, I was about ready to quit. We had this terrific program all day ending with two hours of drill and our wrestling meet was scheduled at 1700. I don't know how, but I pinned my man in the first period, so naturally I felt much better. We won every bout with pins except the last two, which we lost by pins. Then last night, we had the interbattalion boxing matches—we won there too—all bands present. I swear, there was more bell ringing and spirit from the audience there in one night than there was in four years of Urbana High. Next Tuesday is the last day of competition. All this is to see which battalion gets two or one extra Saturday with town liberty at the end of plebe summer.

They are starting to fill in every once in awhile with a little more and more academic work now.

Patty sent me a wonderful picture of herself for my birthday. It sure is cute!

Lucile, my dear loving sister, didn't even send a card. Her memory must be as bad as mine!

I guess all the fever is gone now, but I still feel sort of weak. We are keeping a pretty fast pace here anyway, so that has a lot to do with that old, tired feeling.

We have been practicing mass battalion drill lately, and today we had

Figure 44. Ray Stice's girlfriend Patty, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Figure 45. Ray Stice's locker at the Naval Academy, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

a practice parade. From the ranks, it always looks sloppy, but I guess the civies thought it was pretty fair.

I swear, there's so darn many spectators around here. No matter what you're doing, or where you are, there's always some character with a movie camera clocking your every move. We feel like putting up signs, "Please Do Not Feed or Molest the Midshipman" and "Girls, Please Don't Flirt-It's Been So Long!" You know, on Midway, there just weren't any dames. It was swell, but here they're all over the place and we can't even talk to them. Those damn ensigns will stand beside a crew and clear their throats or something, and then put everybody on report who looks or turns to see what's up. More people just love the Naval Academy. Sometimes this country club is okay, and most of the time, it isn't. Let's hope I never change my mind like so darn many are and have.

Write soon, People,
Ray



We have our last wrestling meet day after tomorrow. This time, I have to fight one of my former Marine buddies. If I can keep off my back, it should be a pretty good bout.

1 August 1948

Hi Mom,

“Does this raincoat have any pockets?” “Is the post office open?” “What time is it?” (with a clock right over his head!) “Has there been a mail call yet?” Wow! Some of the characters you come in contact with when you are the mate of the deck! Yes, we have duty again.

How’s every little thing in CU [Champaign University] these days? Is the county fair still going strong? The last time I went to one of those was when I met Patty and her sister in 1945. If things go right, I probably won’t see another one for a good long time.

We have our last wrestling meet day after tomorrow. This time I have to fight one of my former Marine buddies. If I can keep off my back, it should be a pretty good bout.

Today is one of those weary rainy days when no one feels like doing a darn thing, and I’m no exception. I was going to give my new camera a workout today, but I guess I won’t get to.

I’ll send the insurance gizmo back to you, because all they actually wanted was the number of my old policy.¹⁴ See, I have taken out a new policy and seeing as how we flew twice, we are considered to be having flight training, so my insurance for the next five years will be government paid. Nice, huh? It saves me \$384. Otherwise, if I keep my old policy, I have to pay for it myself.

Wow, in the last 58 minutes, I’ve passed eight different “words” on my deck. At least our time is completely used up, and I’ve managed to write this much too.

This is about all I’ll be able to write, too, it looks like.

Be good, People.

¹⁴ Now a common term for gadget, the term *gizmo* was a Marine Corps or Navy term for something that could not be named. One of the first uses in print was *Life* magazine, 30 July 1945.

Yours,
Ray
P.S. Tell Miss Patty “Hi!”



Oh yes, here are a couple of pictures I took last week to put in my scrapbook. By the way, Mom, you are still keeping that book for me, aren't you? Someday I'll really appreciate being able to look back and sort of reminisce. Somethings we always forget and pictures help remember old times.

6 August 1948

What Say, People,

It's Friday night and we just came back from a scheduled “sing fest” in the gym. Everybody gets their weekly shot of blue and gold and yells their fool head off over nothing.¹⁵ The admiral tried to sneak in in civies, but someone spotted him.¹⁶ They didn't play the Marine Corps hymn, so afterward there were about 20 of us giving the leader hell. Next week, we'll have the “Marines' Hymn!”¹⁷

To hell with all this Navy stuff. I'm still sold on the Corps, even though I got run up this morning by a lieutenant colonel for not turning back my sack. What burned me up, and almost caused me to “toss my dear naval career to the winds,” was the fact that I had just started to turn them back when he charged in. My wits just aren't all collected about three minutes after I wake up, especially to the fire alarm they ring for 30 straight seconds in 12–3 second blasts. It just made me so damn mad, I threw my PJs to the deck and steam blew out my ears! If ever I was in the mood to tell anyone off, it was then. I don't know why, but he turned and waddled out—he's real short and fat. It sure is a good thing he didn't stay, or I'd probably be in the brig tonight.

¹⁵ “Navy Blue and Gold,” is the alma mater of the U.S. Naval Academy.

¹⁶ Stice may be referring to Adm James L. Holloway, who was named superintendent of the Naval Academy in 1947. At 48, he was the youngest person to be appointed as superintendent of the academy.

¹⁷ For more on the history of the Marines' Hymn, see Lauren Bowers, “‘The Song They Lived By’: The ‘Marines’ Hymn’ during World War II,” *Marine Corps History* 8, no. 2 (Winter 2022/23): 23–71, <https://doi.org/10.35318/mch.2022080202>.

Oh yes, here are a couple of pictures I took last week to put in my scrapbook. Mom, you are still keeping that book for me, aren't you? Someday I'll really appreciate being able to "look back" and sort of reminisce. Somethings we always forget and pictures help remember old times.

It's the next morning now, and if I don't send this before breakfast, I won't get a chance till the middle of this afternoon. This time, I got my sack torn up before I was out of it, just to make sure!

Oh yes, Tuesday we won our wrestling in all weights except one, and we tied there. What a meet! I pinned my man twice. As for name, Corporal R. L. Rossie is my roommate. Private First Class F. Grimes, Corporal P. K. German, Corporal R. L. Campbell, Marine Corps Corporal C. Henery, and Private First Class R. W. Johnson (roommate at Bainbridge) are all good buddies. Corporal D. B. Johnston or something was the guy I pinned. Oh yes, Private First Class Carl Webb is the best wrestler in our battalion. There are a lot more; Corporal Jerry Koger and Corporal Harold Fischer are another two.

Write soon, People. Thanks for the stamps. I do have ample for the time being.

Yours,
Ray



I know these people, and we all get along swell, so I don't think I'll have any regrets. Also, we were all corporals, overseas, and want the Marine Corps when we get out, so we have pretty much the same outlook on things. . . . The upperclassmen are starting to come back from their leave now, so we can all feel the nooses slipping about our necks!

7 August 1948

Hi Mom,
Your latest came today. Don't worry about not writing regular. The time goes so fast, it doesn't show up much.

It seems like a long time since we were last in a classroom, but actually it was Saturday morning. Monday, we had liberty and today our crew had the watch. We were in the main office again.

As far as being a crew coxswain, I still am and so far it hasn't added any more demerits . . . pause while I knock on wood!¹⁸

Yes, I guess if I was home going to school, it would be pretty hard to keep my mind on my studies, especially with Patty around. When I get home again, you'd better be planning on seeing an awful lot of her too!

I thought I told you that I am taking Italian. As far as roommates go, at the last minute, I found out that two of my buddies from Bainbridge were taking Italian too, so we all asked for the same room. I know these people, and we all get along swell, so I don't think I'll have any regrets. Also, we were all corporals, overseas, and want the Marine Corps when we get out, so we have pretty much the same outlook on things.

Yesterday, I had only four beers all day, believe it or not, and actually didn't want any more—or I'd have had it—so I was a good little boy after all.

The upperclassmen are starting to come back from their leave now, so we can all feel the nooses slipping about our necks!

Patty keeps saying she's going to sabotage me and wear a pink angora sweater when I come home. I guess you'd better have the vacuum sweeper overhauled and ready for action!

When you mention people like Dean Stewart, they seem so far off and detached anymore. I'm still interested and curious about them, but they seem to be in an entirely different world.

You can stop sending me stamps for a while. My box looks like a post office now. Thanks a lot.

I just read the article on Bainbridge in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Most of it is pretty good, but they sure miscued when they said we came down here and dreamt of the day we would be wearing middies uniforms! The house with the Marines and soldiers in front of it was where I lived.

I've got to study now, so be good, see Patty for me, and write soon.

Your loving son,
Ray



I'm out for plebe yawl sailing now that wrestling is over until

¹⁸ The coxswain on a crew team serves as the onboard coach and eyes of the team, steering the boat and giving the crew instructions.

November. Luckily, I got the second and largest and the fastest boat that we are going to sail. . . . Thursday, we're going aboard a new sub here and learn all about it. I'm especially interested in the sub radar—some of which I have worked on in Pearl Harbor—and the air breathing snorkel device that enables the sub to run its diesels under water, and air-conditioning in a sub. . . . Sunday I learned Morse code, semaphore, and 70 signaling flags.

10 August 1948

Hi Mom,

It seems that I just wrote you yesterday, but here goes again anyway. I'm out for plebe yawl sailing now that wrestling is over until November.¹⁹ Luckily, I got the second and largest and the fastest boat that we are going to sail. The name of it is the *Highland Light* and it's a 62-foot yawl with plenty of sail and lots of class.

Also, I sort of got railroaded into this individual championship wrestling deal, sore arm or not, and I drew a bye today, so my first match is tomorrow. Then Thursday, I wrestle again, and those two bouts will decide if I am the best or worst wrestler in the 126–34-pound class among the plebes. Everyone expects me to win and that sort of makes it hard, but you can sure bet it doesn't make my hat too small, nothing would in this place.

We were doing some turning on metal lathes the other day. I guess we do some more tomorrow. A couple of weeks ago, we were working on wood-turning lathes. Thursday, we're going aboard a new sub here and learn all about it. I'm especially interested in the sub radar—some of which I have worked on in Pearl Harbor—and the air breathing snorkel device that enables the sub to run its diesels under water, and air-conditioning in a sub.

Sunday, I learned Morse code, semaphore, and 70 signaling flags; and by Monday, I couldn't remember half of any of them.²⁰ Oh well, we have a couple of days yet before we're tested on them.

We went through the Naval Engineering Experiment Station here a while back, and in two hours we covered what it took the Navy 30 years

¹⁹ *Yawl* refers to a small two-masted sailboat.

²⁰ *Semaphore* refers to the use of flags in each hand for visual signaling.

to build up.²¹ It covered everything from underwater welding to testing by torch; to pull, twist, and strain all sorts of metals and materials; to running new and old Japanese, German, and American engines from motorboat to battleship size until they fell apart; to new developments in petroleum and plastic fields; to the experimenting of electric antiaircraft guns or just about anything you could possibly wonder or guess about.

We (our company) are getting pretty good in infantry now. I just hope that we win the battalion competition, which would help a lot toward our winning an extra Saturday afternoon's liberty in Annapolis—great thrill!

I'm sorry, but I'll be darned if I can think of much to write about, so I'll close now and wait a couple three days. Okay?

Write someday please,

Ray

P.S. If Lucile is really repenting, she could buy me a large bottle of Blue Black Parker Quink.²² We can't get it here. Hint, hint!



You damn right they should play the "Marines' Hymn." For years, the top 10 percent of each class went to the Corps! It's as much a part of the Navy as the Seabees are. . . . You should have seen us over at the rifle range last week. It had been raining like mad for three days and the whole range was just a sea of mud and middies. Wherever you saw the white hats and a puff of smoke, you knew someone was firing there. . . . We made it a law at our table in the wardroom that anyone who is heard swearing at the table should lose his dessert. After practically starving for two-and-a-half days, I finally began to eat, and now I haven't missed a whole meal in quite a while.

²¹ The Naval Engineering Experiment Station, though part of the U.S. Naval Academy, is not colocated with the school but on a 10-acre tract across the Severn River from Annapolis. See LtCdr A. P. Calvert, USN, "The U. S. Naval Engineering Experiment Station, Annapolis," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 66, no. 1 (January 1940).

²² *Quink* refers to a new popular fountain pen ink introduced by Parker Pen Company in 1931 that was known for its quick-drying, nonclogging properties.

14 August 1948

Hi People,

I get a big kick out of you, Mom. I write and tell you I did something, and a day or so later it's all forgotten, and then you write back and give me hell for something else about 10 days—or like on Midway, about 2.5 weeks—later you bring it all up again. I didn't even get any extra duty; it was such a minor offense, it just caught me when I was half asleep and off guard.

The name of our paper is the *CLEW* for the after corner of a sail.

No, our battalions aren't by height. Each day, new men go to each battalion. All of them are temporary until the other men come back and we join the brigade.

You damn right they should play the "Marines' Hymn." For years, the top 10 percent of each class went to the Corps!²³ It's as much a part of the Navy as the Seabees are. Also, my "mater" for the Air Force is not part of the Army. It's a separate branch as far as I've heard. Right, Dad?

Hey, just for the books, please don't try "to snap me out of my dreams" as you put it. I get more than enough of that stuff here without getting it from home too. Let's keep everything our way nice and dandy. Maybe that's why I was so belligerent last Christmas. I figure home should be something different and not one person trying to tell another what to do, considering that all concerned are old enough to know what to do and how to do it the right way. Do you agree or not?

How do you like the new stationery? Believe it or not, I have already used up a large box of the other kind.

Our sailing really gets into full swing the first of the week, so I'll probably have some nice experiences to tell about later on.

Oh yes, I got railroaded into the wrestling deal after all and came out third place as you can see on the ribbon. I lost my first match, which knocked me out of first and second place automatically. It was a very tough fight, and I thought I was winning, but actually I lost five to six. I won the next one, putting me in third place. We don't have any more wrestling now until November.

Today, we have the watch again, and I was the telephone messenger. I like the work, but you sure are kept busy. Not much like walking a dark

²³ According to *The Blue and Gold Book*, almost 30 percent of Naval Academy graduates may be commissioned into the Marine Corps.

lonely post with 15 rounds in your belt and a carbine and 100,000 birds laughing at you all night!

Are you still keeping some sort of a scrapbook for me, Mom? If you're not, would it be too much trouble to start it up again?

You should have seen us over at the rifle range last week. It had been raining like mad for three days and the whole range was just a sea of mud and middies. Wherever you saw the white hats and a puff of smoke, you knew someone was firing there. I got a huge charge out of the whole affair, because actually I thought it was fun, and it brought back very familiar memories of maneuvers last year on Midway. I always did love to fire the pea shooter (carbine) anyway, and the situation just topped everything off.

We made it a law at our table in the wardroom that anyone who is heard swearing at the table should lose his dessert. After practically starving for two-and-a-half days, I finally began to eat, and now I haven't missed a whole meal in quite a while.

This absolutely sexless, beerless, life is getting me down. I'll be glad when we at least get one afternoon's liberty next Labor Day. They have a beach near here where we all went on 5 July that has some cheap suds. Last time, about a third of our class was out there.

About every 10 minutes, a couple of jets sizzle overhead. They sure look beautiful. Last Sunday, about 45 of them went by in one huge formation.

Write back soon please.

Your lovin, ex gyrene,
Middie,
Son,
Keed,
Ray



Our plebe class is 970 now. . . . I'm our crew leader. That means I'm responsible for 14 men all day every day, marching to and from classes, musters, and lectures, etc. . . . About wrestling, the season is over until the regular wrestling season starts in November. . . . We are having an academy race all day across the bay and back. We know our boat is the fastest, but I guess they need proof. Last week, we got becalmed and the Highland Light (our boat) had to pull four yawls and another big class A

Figure 46. Ray Stice wearing Navy whites at the Naval Academy, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

*boat in from the bay because we are the only one that has an
auxiliary motor.*

26 August 1948

Hi Mom,

It's about 103° and I'm dripping like a jellyfish. My laundry needs to be put up, and I owe yea many people letters, but I swear I've tried to write for the last four days and haven't had time!

This week and next, I guess I'm our crew leader. That means I'm

Figure 47. Ray Stice's class sailing off the Maryland coast, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

responsible for 14 men all day every day, marching to and from classes, musters, and lectures, etc. It really adds a lot of responsibility. I never did mind that, because it makes you think things out, but it sure makes a lot more chances to get put on report for something.

Sunday is a big day for the boat crews on the yawls. We are having an academy race all day across the bay and back. We know our boat is the fastest, but I guess they need proof. Last week, we got becalmed and the *Highland Light* (our boat) had to pull four yawls and another big class A boat in from the bay because we are the only one that has an auxiliary motor.²⁴ I got a good picture of it that I'll be able to send to you next time I write.

Have you seen Patty yet? When you do, take a good long look just for me! Where did you get the idea about only plebes wearing the blue-

²⁴ Class A boats are less than 16 feet long.

Figure 48. Ray Stice at the helm off the Maryland coast, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

trimmed hats? All classes do. It's part of the summer working uniform.²⁵

I had the watch that Friday, so I don't know if they played "our" hymn or not.

About wrestling, the season is over until the regular wrestling season starts in November.

Our plebe class is 970 now. It probably won't get much larger, maybe 1,000 we hope, then when all of them resign, we'll still have a pretty large class. So far, about 55 have resigned.

Today, I got my haircut on top again, so it's finally grown out to where it always was. One good thing, they encourage neat but not too short hair around here, so we won't look like boots all the time.

I'll send you a copy of the "log" to see if you like it, and also a copy of our summer schedule so you can get an idea what I've been doing and what I'll be doing until the academic year starts.

This picture of the studious looking soul was taken in front of the chapel. Note my shoes and no rings—strictly taboo among us lowly plebes.

I'm sorry, but even though I have millions of things to write about that are interesting, I just don't have time. Sorry.

Write soon,
Ray

²⁵ For more on the required uniforms at the Naval Academy, see Billy the Goat, "U.S. Naval Academy Uniforms: What Each Means and the Differences Between Them," *On the Yard* (blog), Naval Academy Tourism, 13 January 2023.

7

THE U.S. NAVAL ACADEMY LETTERS

A Middie
September 1948–March 1949

I swear, sometimes I get to wondering about things. Of course, I'm on the right road being here at Annapolis, but I shouldn't have planned so much. I was so dead sure that I wouldn't make it even if I tried my darndest, which I did . . . that I even had two jobs all lined up: one as a wiper on an oil steamer to a trip to Italy, Egypt, and back; and another job as a deck hand on a banana ship going to South America (United Fruit Company) and back. Both trips would have ended before 1 September, so I could have gone to the University of Illinois. Isn't it funny how plans turn out? Maybe my adventurous imagination was running away from me, but I had everything ready anyway.

1 September 1948

Hi Mom,

Wow, September already. Let's hope December rolls around as fast. Mom, I must have planned on my discharge too much there toward the last. I swear, sometimes I get to wondering about things. Of course, I'm on the right road being here at Annapolis, but I shouldn't have planned

so much. I was so dead sure that I wouldn't make it even if I tried my darndest, which I did—you know about the car deal—that I even had two jobs all lined up: one as a wiper on an oil steamer to a trip to Italy, Egypt, and back; and another job as a deck hand on a banana ship going to South America (United Fruit Company) and back.¹ Both trips would have ended before 1 September, so I could have gone to the University of Illinois. Isn't it funny how plans turn out? Maybe my adventurous imagination was running away from me, but I had everything ready anyway. About once a week somewhere, we get into these huge drawn-out discussions on why we're here, and what we want out of life, etc. They are very different from the typical barracks bull sessions on "liberty and dames," and everyone really puts in his two cents worth. A lot of guys are resigning every week for various reasons, but I haven't seen one of them so far that wanted to make the military Service their life's work, so why not quit. I think it would be almost a waste of time to be here if you weren't going to make it a career. There are a lot of Army and Navy juniors here too, and I'm usually more interested in their outlooks quite naturally.

We are allowed to pick our roommates for the academic year as long as he is taking the same language. I'm going to room with an Italian, Larry Iannotti, and another man who has a year or so at college by the name of Gagliardo or something. Larry and I get along swell ever since we first met on the opposite ends of a pool table in June, and the other guy has the needed brains, so I guess we're all set.

Our big race was a flop. Our skipper took the long course, when we should have taken a shorter one! We went 8.3 miles farther and only came in one hour after the winner, so I think we would have won hands down. This week some officers are taking the boat on a 100-mile race. It lasts overnight, or we would be the crew. The following Sunday, we are taking her to Baltimore for a big race up there. We have to get up about 0400, so we'll get there in plenty of time. I sure hope we bring home the bacon this time.

Enclosed are some pictures of the boat for my scrapbook.

¹ United Fruit Company was an American company that traded in tropical fruit from Latin American countries. The company often came under fire for its business practices and criticized for exploitation of the political and economic development of South American countries it worked in. See Marcelo Bucheli, *Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899–2000* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

Figure 49. Midshipmen rowing and sailing on the Severn River, ca. 1950



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

Write soon, People,

Ray

P.S. Does Dad know a Colonel Keichel in the JA [judge advocate office]?



We join the brigade of the midshipmen 25 September of this final month and then the common ole stuff will really begin to fly. We've been getting away with murder and we know it. We might as well while we can, because we'll sure have our ears pinned back after next week. Say, I'll have you know your son shot next to high man on the rifle range Monday, actually up in the expert class for a change.

17 September 1948

Hi Mom,

Yesterday, I got into a funny legal mix up. When I came back from drill, there was a note for me to call a Professor Bland. I called him, and he said when he was in New York last week, a representative of the Keuffel & Esser, a slide rule company, asked him to look me up. It seems that he thought I'd ordered a K&E rule in Urbana, and the store sluffed off a rival company's rule on my order, and somehow it was a very important

factor in a big lawsuit between the two companies! He wrote a book on the slide rule for the K&E Company that we use here. Kind of funny in a way, wasn't it?²

Today, there was a wonderful wind, and we had all kinds of water coming over the bow and our lee rail was under half the time we were out—more fun! I really should have taken my camera along, but they say the wind is always like this in the fall. Writing about the fall, I swear it's getting awfully darn cool at night. They can have it and send it back to the Eskimos as far as I'm concerned!

We join the brigade of the midshipmen on 25 September of this final month and then the common ole stuff will really begin to fly. We've been getting away with murder and we know it. We might as well while we can, because we'll sure have our ears pinned back after next week.

Say, I'll have you know your son shot next to high man on the rifle range Monday, actually up in the expert class for a change. It doesn't mean anything actually, but I felt good anyway.

Our roommate chits were approved and after 23 or 24 September for you, write to room 4743 instead of 5263. Okay?

The best news yet . . . Patty is supposed to come east about the time you receive this. I'm praying that I don't get it on either day, by golly! Here's where we see if my streak of good luck has finally played out. It sure treated me extra good in the last two years.

Boy, am I ever clumsy in drawing. You should see my lettering—wow, what a mess! I try hard anyway. Also, I'm completely snowed under in trig. That stuff always did get me. Italian is fun so far. I get a big charge out of it, and it really ties your tongue into a pretzel at times.

I'm sorry it's been so long since I wrote last, but time goes so fast, I didn't realize it had actually been so long.

Write soon,

Ray

P.S. Do you still know how to make Toll House cookies and brownies?³

² Keuffel and Esser Company started selling drafting instruments and supplies in the United States in 1867. With the invention of pocket calculators, slide rules became obsolete.

³ The Toll House was a restaurant open by Ken and Ruth Wakefield on the old toll road between Boston and New Bedford, MA, in the 1930s. She created the dessert now known as Toll House chocolate chip cookies by accident, when the pieces of chocolate failed to melt during baking.

Figure 50. Watercolor depicting the Naval Academy rifle range by Salvatore Indiviglia, 1968



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

Hint, hint!



Today has really been hectic! We've been moving and getting our new rooms all squared away and trying to keep out of the upperclassmen's way. Today at 1600, all the fourth classmen rate fourth-class rates, which means the stuff has hit the fan, and we're right in the middle of it all.

23 September 1948

Hi Mom,

Today has really been hectic! We've been moving and getting our new rooms all squared away and trying to keep out of the upperclassmen's way. Today at 1600, all the fourth classmen rate fourth class rates, which means the stuff has hit the fan, and we're right in the middle of it all. I've been looking for my company office all afternoon, and no one seems to know where it is, so to hell with it. It will pop up somewhere. All the upperclassmen are back from leave now. I've never seen so darn many cute

gals around this place before! Speaking about cute gals reminds me—as if I could ever quit thinking about it—Patty should be in Ohio or somewhere about now if she caught the right train. Boy, I’m going to be so darn happy to see her again. Baltimore will never be so upset! Did you see her before she left? I don’t even know for sure that she’s on her way out. I haven’t heard definitely yet.

Do you people want me to get Army-Navy tickets for you? I think all concerned would have a swell time. Maybe you might even root for Navy a little? It’s a little far off right now, but it’s something to think about.⁴

I swear, or rather I’m about to do a little more of it, these upperclassmen keep popping in and out of here every other minute for a million different things and after just looking up at the first one, we now pop up ourselves and sound off just like they were GD officers. What a bunch of stuff’n things.

We had another race yesterday, but there wasn’t enough wind for the big boats, so we only came in sixth.

What a scenic view we don’t have. Our window overlooks “goat court” and there’s ole Bill down there chewing old tin cans—old ammo cans naturally.⁵ I hope he has a little respect and digs little holes or something. Oh well, it’s going to be winter soon, and they say the wind often times blows the other way.

Some jerk wants a “little help,” so I guess that cuts this off.

Write someday.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Do you still know how to cook brownies and Toll House cookies?

⁴ The annual Army-Navy football game was played in Philadelphia, PA, on 27 November 1948. Army entered the game without a loss, and Navy without a win, but food poisoning impacted the entire Army team less than 48 hours prior to kickoff. The game ended in a tie at 21–21.

⁵ The reference to goat court here is unclear in that the goat was the Naval Academy mascot, but the “court” on the grounds is named Tamanend Court, based on the figurehead of the chief of the Delaware. For more on the history of Bill, the academy mascot, see Todd South, “Why Does the U.S. Naval Academy Have a Goat as Its Mascot?,” *Navy Times*, 20 November 2023.



Boy, I'm glad there's so many Marines here. No fooling. Some of them are really gung-ho plus, and I always did eat that stuff up. I was very surprised to come across so many upperclassmen who were Marines. I was afraid to mention the fact for a while before I found out I was "among friends" at times.

29 September 1948
2005 hours

What say, People,
What a joint!⁶ My emotions are pretty much intensified now. Either I'm ready to quit entirely, or I actually like the darn place. As long as things keep up in that fashion, it will be okay. I just hope it doesn't get so I don't "like" it all the time, that would be hard to take. The meals are the causes of most lowly plebes' sad depressions. What you aren't asked or asked to do shouldn't happen to a mongrel pup!

It's wonderful to be able to call Patty every once and awhile. She's always so darn cheerful, that really helps a lot. If I don't have the watch Sunday, we're going to have a swell time Saturday night. We play Cornell in Baltimore.⁷ Then I've got a dining out chit for all Sunday afternoon too luckily, so I'm really praying I don't land on the watch list.

John, Paul, and myself pooled our resources and invested in a new Remington 5 Shaver.⁸ We figure we can all shave in about six minutes this way and have time to clean our room before chow. Look up PK [Paul] German and LL Ames [both from Annapolis] in the Bainbridge book of mine. They're my two wives.

We actually had fun at chow tonight. All the first and second class got in a milk and water fight that ended up with some third class two tables away getting a very slimy piece of peach pie down the back of his neck. It really felt good inside to smile and laugh really hard again.

As far as academics are concerned, I'm really snowed under in trig and chemistry. The instructors are either so old and decrepit they can't

⁶ *Joint* in this context refers to a term from the 1920s for a place or establishment.

⁷ The Naval Academy played Cornell on 2 October 1948, losing 7–13.

⁸ Remington, though known for its firearms, branched into personal care products, including their first razor (model E) in 1937.

Figure 51. The annual Army-Navy game for 1948 ended in a 21-21 tie



Source: Naval History and Heritage Command.

talk, or they talk and figure so dammed fast it makes my head swim, and my brain just doesn't work that fast. Italian isn't moving along at any snail's pace either, but I think I can keep it under control. We haven't had much English yet, and marine engineering is just mechanical drawing, so it is tedious but not strenuous. I sure wish I had some of your artistic talents, Mom. My lettering especially is very poor.

For a sport, I'm out for dinghy sailing. They are really cute with one sail, row boats practically. We set up the aluminum mast and carry the boat out of the water each time we go out.⁹ After about 24 races, the team will be decided on and by then, I'll have finished my last carton of cigarettes and be ready to go out for battalion wrestling anyway.

⁹ Dinghies are small, light sailing boats that are more maneuverable than larger vessels. Early development in the sport began with the initial design in the early 1900s that reduced friction and increased speed. By the 1930s, trapezing had been introduced that allows the small crew to keep the sails vertical and deliver maximum power.

Boy, I'm glad there's so many Marines here. No fooling. Some of them are really gung-ho plus, and I always did eat that stuff up. I was very surprised to come across so many upperclassmen who were Marines, I was afraid to mention the fact for a while before I found out I was "among friends" at times.

My first class just found out that we three (his plebes) were Marines and another plebe he has also was a Marine. No fooling, he about fell over! Actually, we have three first class all in the same room. We go to them when we get in trouble, play their radio and records, wash hats, etc. in return. He was in the Navy!

Write soon,
Your Ray



We should have last week's grades tomorrow. They publish a "tree" that is less than 2.5 in all subjects and three days later they put out the "bush" and the rest of the grades together. If you're below 2.8, you're "on the bush" and can neglect athletics and study instead if you want to, and if you're "on the tree" in any subject, you have to attend extra instruction. So far, I have kept off the tree and stayed in the bush.

20 October 1948

Hi Mom,

I'm sorry it seemed so long between letters, but in another way, doesn't it show how fast time has flown?

Don't worry, I didn't forget Lucile's birthday. I mailed her present yesterday. I hope she is able to get a lot of use out of it. I thought it looked pretty anyway, and then when I found out it had so darn much in it, that did it.

I was especially floored to read about Bud, Lee, and Foote. What's the matter with those guys anyway? In the old days, I was going to be Lee's best man. Who is now?

It was funny, as I looked over the pictures of the cheerleaders, there were only a few of them that I knew, and I knew a heck of a lot more in the college list. What the heck? I guess that's the way it should be though.

Wow, it sounds like our little house should have been knocked off

its foundation with the party you people had. That sounded like quite an expensive deal too, and I wonder how much was spent afterward on aspirins and sodium bicarbonate.¹⁰

Dyer must be the only one out of my class besides Keith Jardine who is still in the Service, right? Find out what Keith finally did do, will you?

We should have last week's grades tomorrow. They publish a "tree" that is less than 2.5 in all subjects, and three days later they put out the "bush" and the rest of the grades together. If you're below 2.8, you're "on the bush" and can neglect athletics and study instead if you want to, and if you're "on the tree" in any subject, you have to attend extra instruction. So far, I have kept off the tree and stayed in the bush, but those are just daily grades. They are always higher than your exam grades. See? In other words, I'm actually doing a little better than I had expected. So now, I can set my goal at a little higher standard than just to be passing in all subjects. I'll let you know if and when I ever pull down a 3.0 average.

One of these days, I'll tell you the story, he sad, sad story of Vice Admiral Saaks and when I had dinner with him Saturday after the game. Our table of four cost him more than \$20, because I for one really took advantage of his kind offer: fried chicken (milk fed and young no less!), naturally apple pie and chocolate ice cream, and a bottle of Schlitz to top it off. Even the waiter made out; we gave him a \$2 tip. We were going to make it \$10 just for the hell of it! He [the admiral] turns out to be a phony! The cops picked him and his aide up about two hours after we ate with him.¹¹ What a riot!

What is Lucile taking this year? Is she still an Alpha Phi? Did you ever switch over to Mr. Valentine for garbage? Do you ever get any reports on Richard? How are the prices? Have you ever thought anymore about a new car?

Write soon, People.

Yours,
Ray

¹⁰ Sodium bicarbonate (a.k.a. baking soda) has been proven to reduce acid in the stomach caused by food or alcohol.

¹¹ The Saaks that Stice refers to was a 32-year old man who impersonated a vice admiral. He was arrested at the Park Plaza Hotel after the group of midshipmen became suspicious of his actions.

P.S. Did you get the first Log?

P.P.S. Isn't Patty wonderful!



All the former Marines are very concerned about the fact that there are so many more of us that want the Corps than there will be commissions to go around at graduation. Believe me, it's worth thinking about too.

31 October 1948

Halloween

Dad's Birthday!

Hi People,

Wow, how time flies! Tomorrow is the beginning of November—that's good. If you people think you're going to see a lot of me when I'm home, you're going to see Patty too, because we're planning on being together quite a bit.

I just finished writing a themed essay. Last week, I wrote on "Finish-ing a Bow" and today I wrote on "Pacific Atoll"—Midway quite naturally. I could write a book about that darn place, I believe. There were a few nice things about it.

I'm glad you liked your gift, Lucile. I hope you don't use the cigarette side excessively. I still thought it was cute whether you smoked or not.

That second class from Champaign turned out to be a pretty nice guy in spite of his picture. I looked him up a week ago. He knows Winn Skel-ton quite well, and they are in the same class of 1950; that I didn't know. We will probably come home together for Christmas.

What date do you plan to be out here at the academy, 24 November?

We registered for the draft here a couple of weeks ago, I believe.¹² I guess you can forget about it. Enclosed is the clipping about the fake admiral. He was charged with passing bum checks. It's a wonder I didn't have to pay for my chicken by washing dishes.

¹² Draft law expired after the end of World War II, though it was reinstated two years later to prevent gaps in service to support the Cold War. The draft remained in effect from 1948 to 1973 to create standby forces in the case of emergency. In 1975, registration was suspended and Selective Service entered a period of "deep standby." See "History of Selective Service," Selective Service System, accessed 29 August 2024.

You know, two short months from tomorrow and I'll be getting on the train at Champaign to come back to this ensign factory!

All the former Marines are very concerned about the fact that there are so many more of us who want the Corps than there will be commissions to go around at graduation. Believe me, it's worth thinking about too. Besides all the former jarheads, there are a lot of Marine juniors who want the Marine Corps.¹³ The leftovers can't resign at that stage, and they'll just get sluffed off into the Navy. I for one wouldn't want that at all. This isn't one of those deals where you can just wait and see what happens. It won't make any difference one way or another for eight or nine months, but starting then it would! I couldn't see spending all my time here and then getting put in the Navy—no.

It's chowtime, so I've got to run, literally! Write soon. I hope you had a happy birthday, Dad!

Your one and only son,
Ray



I ran up against my first obstacle the other day when I found out I failed chemistry last week. My average is still passing, but my weekly dropped. I've sworn off wrestling this week so I can go to extra instruction and try to catch up.

2 November 1948

Hi Mom,

This is going to be really short, but I need some gear I had when I was a Marine. I need both pair of my white gloves; and I want a pair of gold (yellow) corporal chevrons taken off my blue blouse, and an FMF [Fleet Marine Force] patch and my Victory Medal. All those go on my bathrobe. I need the gloves for parades and Sundays, etc. I've already ruined one pair I had.

¹³ The term *jarhead* originated during World War II in reference to Marines' resemblance to a Mason jar when wearing their dress blue uniforms. Use of the word has expanded since, as both an insult and stereotype, particularly when referring to recruits with their "squared" heads as a result of their close-cropped hair. See "Gyrenes, Jarheads, and Grunts," National Museum of the Marine Corps, accessed 29 August 2024.

Next, I need both pairs of shoe trees and the pair of Marine shoes that looks the newest. I believe I have one pair that hasn't been double soled. Anyway, please send me my best pair so I can dye them and put them to use. The new pair I have here are too narrow and are raising hell with my feet! Also, I wonder if you would include two pair of good sweat socks and a good jock strap. Oh yes, I believe I have a whisk broom that would come in very handy here.

Do I have another silk head scarf, or did I waste my last one on that Wop gal in Philly?¹⁴

How many bonds do I have in the strong box?

I have enough money to last me until Christmas and to get me home on I think. But for the life of me, I can't remember how many bonds I have. I think I have three \$50 ones.

The gear I need is:

Two shoe trees and one pair shoes (Marine)

Two sweat socks and one jock strap

Two yellow corporal chevrons and an FMF patch and Victory Medal

One whisk broom

Two pairs white gloves (Marine)

I've been waiting quite a while for these to pile up, but for now it is imperative that I get the shoes and gloves. I hope you don't mind, but I can't see why I shouldn't have you send me what I already have, rather than buy new gear. Right?

Oh yes, if you get time, maybe you could throw in a couple cookies. Yeah, throw in the old Mercury too!

How is Lucile doing this year? I ran up against my first obstacle the other day, when I found out I failed chemistry last week. My average is still passing, but my weekly dropped. I've sworn off wrestling this week so I can go to extra instruction and try to catch up.

The pictures we took last Sunday didn't turn out well at all. Either John was disgusted or Paul had his eyes closed or I was moving. We shot

¹⁴ Though there are a number of derogatory slang meanings for this term, Merriam-Webster states that the term wop originated in the early 1900s from the Southern Italian word *guappo* for dandy or good-looking. It has no connection to slurs against the U.S. Italian population during early immigration to America.

up another roll in the room the other night, and they'll be ready this afternoon. Maybe they'll be good.

Paul Busey must not be very spectacular. I've never heard of him here yet. How much would it cost to get one of the newspapers sent out here for the next six months?

Chemistry calls so, so long.

Write soon.

Yours,

Ray



Well, well, only a few more hours and it will be the 173d Marine Corps Birthday. All the former gyrenes are planning a big beer bust if anyone can find the stuff. . . . This college chemistry course has been giving me lots of trouble. I must be thick headed.

9 November 1948

Hi People!

Well, well, only a few more hours and it will be the 173d Marine Corps Birthday. All the former gyrenes are planning a big beer bust if anyone can find the stuff!

Today, my shoes and stripes arrived. Thank you very much. I was surprised at the gloves. They are exactly the same except for the buttons, which are much better anyway, and the shoes are exactly the same also, except for the soles, heels, and color. Today, I dyed them black and tomorrow I'll have the cobbler take the thick sole off and put rubber heels on, then I'll be squared away at last. What sort of shape are my other shoes in?

I also wanted to tell you that the whisk broom is most excellent. For some reason, it is so darn much better than the corn broom I've been borrowing.

This college chemistry course has been giving me lots of trouble. I must be thick headed! I failed the last two weeks, but my term average is still passing, so I'm not required to go to extra instruction. Although, I have been going instead of wrestling.

Are you coming to the academy by yourself, Mom, or are you bringing someone along?

Oh yes, do you still have my cedar statuette? How about bringing it along when you come please. We rate liberty all day Thursday and dining out liberty to boot, so I guess I'm all set. What do you want to see in particular? Besides your wayward son!

I sent Leon a telegram. I hope they both are very happy.

Patty made me some delicious Toll House cookies. I thought it was very sweet of her. We're planning on really having a wonderful time when I get home, and believe me we will.

Guess what? They are going to take 7 percent of the '49ers and commission them in the U.S. Air Force. This darn unification—40 percent of the U.S. Naval Academy will go to the Air Force—it really looks like they're going all out for air superiority. By the time 1952 rolls around, they'll probably take half of our class too.¹⁵

We rate liberty tomorrow night and the all-day Armistice Day.¹⁶ That makes a nice break in the schedule, especially so because I had the watch all day Saturday.

Who is Lucile's latest? I always liked Hutch (someone asked me in their letter). He is the only one I really did like enough to say anything about since Don Dun.

Do you know anyone on the Illinois 150-pound football team? They are supposed to come out here to play our team one of these days.¹⁷

We've been having wonderful weather for November. We haven't even been wearing our reefers the last couple of days.

The Mercury sounds like it's taking quite a beating. Save some for me to tear up when I'm home please!

Write soon, People.

Yours,

Ray

¹⁵ Stice is referring to the impact of the National Security Act of 1947, signed by President Harry S. Truman, which created a single national defense establishment within four Armed Services.

¹⁶ On 28 October 1948, President Harry Truman signed Proclamation 2820: Armistice Day, 1948, to mark the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice ending World War I.

¹⁷ Stice is referring to the Eastern Lightweight Football League was founded in 1934. It is now known as the Collegiate Sprint Football League. See Lea Gutmann, "Lightweights' Intrasquad Performance Pleases Coach, Receive Day Off," *Daily Illini*, 5 October 1948; and Army Sprint Football History, WestPoint.com, 29 October 2009.

P.S. Thanks for the candy corn. It's been a long time.¹⁸



It turned out to be a most wonderful game and one that I'll always remember. For the first time in my life, I really felt proud to be a part of the spirit behind the team and a member of the academy. And to top it all off, this afternoon when they came back, we rang the Japanese Bell so plebes rate "carrying on" up to Christmas. All that means is no double timing or squaring of corners or bracing up or taking a bunch of cheap stuff at the table for the next three and a half weeks. Then after leave, the old regime goes into effect again.

28 November 1948

Hi Mom,

Now aren't you sorry you missed the game? Didn't I tell you we would win! And we did win too—morally—in yardage, ground coverage, and pass reception. It turned out to be a most wonderful game and one that I'll always remember. For the first time in my life, I really felt proud to be a part of the spirit behind the team and a member of the academy. And to top it all off, this afternoon when they came back, we rang the Japanese Bell so plebes rate "carrying on" up to Christmas.¹⁹ All that means is no double timing or squaring of corners or bracing up or taking a bunch of cheap stuff at the table for the next three and a half weeks. Then after leave, the old regime goes into effect again.

Tomorrow, I'm going out for wrestling, and it's really going to be hard to stop smoking this time. I sure hope I can keep my academics up so I can stay out. Don't worry about my losing weight, that comes after Christmas.

You know, we forgot to ask the guy (second class) from Champaign out for dinner. I just thought about that today. I'll bring him over to meet you when we're home.

¹⁸ Originally marketed as "Chicken Feed," candy corn was a simple, waxy confection created in the late 1880s that continues to be sold during the fall and Halloween.

¹⁹ The Japanese Bell has been a fixture on the Naval Academy campus since 1858. In 1900, a new tradition was born, when the football captain rang the bell to celebrate the victory over Army. See Samuel Limneos, "The Japanese Bell and Its Many Travels," Special Collections and Archives, Nimitz Library, 5 November 2020.

I couldn't find either Winn or Fred Green after the game, much to my disappointment. Maybe I'll get to see them when I'm home too.

Tomorrow, we have to write a theme essay on "Profile," so guess who I'm writing about? Yep, Leon Woodworth. He affords plenty of material and, besides, I have plenty of imagination to fill in the dull spots.

You should have seen us coming back last night—this morning I mean. Nine out of 10 had been drinking to start with, and we had to be on the train in Philly at 0150. Believe me, at 0149, there was a mad scramble for the gates and at 0150 there wasn't a soul outside the train! We finally hit Baltimore and caught the buses waiting to bring us home. Then as soon as we got here, about 0515, it was up to you if you wanted chow. Otherwise, reveille didn't go till noon. I think about 50 of us felt like eating, I was hungry!

The academy will never be as alive as it has been the last few days. This afternoon, we had a huge meal and, after everyone else had left, there were two of us still eating. George Marrow was the other chow hound. We were always the last ones out at Bainbridge too.

I had intended to write a long letter for a change, but it's time for taps, so I guess not.

It was swell to see you again, Mom, and I hope you really had a nice time both here and at the Hewett's.

Write soon, People.

Yours,
Ray



Only two and a half weeks more and I'll be home again. I swear it doesn't seem at all like half a year since last time. It really makes me feel good when I realize the plebe year is halfway over with!

5 December 1948

Hi Mom,

You'd never guess who was conducting our strength tests in the gym the other day. Yep, David Busey. I spotted him earlier in the morning, but only thought he looked a little familiar and not as I had pictured Dave

Busey.²⁰ Can you help me out a little on his background? I only remember seeing him before, no more. His family is out here now, and he's going to have me out some weekend. He's already told me to be sure and come out for the 150-pound ball next fall.

Only two and a half weeks more and I'll be home again. I swear it doesn't seem at all like half a year since last time. It really makes me feel good when I realize the plebe year is halfway over with. Next year—let's all keep our fingers crossed, please—we will only have our academics to think about and will have a multitude of “rates” that plebes naturally don't have, and the situation will probably seem a lot brighter.

I hope you people are having the same fine warm spell we are. It rained ever since the game and finally ran out of water, so now we're having spring weather. Let's pray until my plane lands that it stays good.

Boy, I'm not the least bit ashamed at saying it sure will be wonderful to see Patty again. I hope that both Mom, and you too, Dad, realize that she means an awful lot to me and that she's one very special young miss.

I just started to make out a Christmas card list, and I swear my allotted 10 was soon swamped. Maybe I can get some more by buying them.

Buying . . . that reminds me, I'll go down to the store tomorrow and pick out the suitcase I want, and then tell you how much it is, and you can send me a check. Okay? I mean if it isn't too expensive.

One of these fine days, I'm going to write to [West Point cadet] Winn Skelton. I should have before the game, but that's over with now. Do you happen to know if he is going to be home Christmas or not?

Enclosed are a couple of sheets that might interest you about the courses here at the academy. If you can, Mom, how about writing up a sample average freshman's weekly course so I can compare it with ours? Please with a big kiss on the snuzzle.

Write soon, People.

Love,
Ray



²⁰ David G. Busey was from Stice's hometown (Urbana, IL) and a well-known football coach at Lycoming College and Penn State University, but he also coached the 150-pound team at the Naval Academy.

I don't know what to do about chemistry. Oh well, that's my headache not yours. I'm having much fun with Italian (me and my lovely memory) and math.

13 December 1948

Hi Mom,

Hey, if Patty is really having trouble getting me a present, how about suggesting that I might like a copy of that man you knew that wrote a book on the Boneyard I believe? Anyway, the book was all about thinking and spending one's time efficiently, doing things now instead of tomorrow. Do you remember which book it was?²¹

I dreamed about Mayor Hurd the other night. Is he still in office?²² This afternoon, I wrote a theme essay on "Curiosity." For once, I actually thought it was good.

Oh yes, I bought my suitcase. It cost \$22. It is plenty large enough and looks like it should last me a long time. Yesterday, I bought my plane ticket to Chicago. It seemed silly not to get trip insurance when it is so darn cheap, so for three and a half hours anyway I'll be worth \$20,000 with my GI insurance. I guess that would really plant me in fine style!

Only 10 more short days and our leave finally does start. Even though I've been out for wrestling, the time seems to have slowed down a little. It will sure go fast enough when I'm home.

Hey Dad, what do you want for Christmas besides a million dollars and a new Mercury? All we have here is Navy gear, and even I don't appreciate some of it, so I'm sure you wouldn't. Oh yes, I want to thank you for writing to me when Mom was out here. I want you to know, Sir, that for the next 10 days I won't touch a piece of candy or sweet stuff and my face will be as clear as the June sky. Okay?

This afternoon when I started this, it looked like I would have plenty of time, but after a look at tomorrow's horrible schedule, I have decided differently. I don't know what to do about chemistry. Oh well, that's my headache not yours. I'm having much fun with Italian (me and my lovely

²¹ The book reference is unclear, other than that Boneyard might refer to Boneyard Creek, which runs through Urbana and Champaign, and became a touchpoint for unrest due to the industrial neglect that polluted the waterway. This area was originally a burial ground for the local indigenous population, which is how the creek got its name.

²² Stice is referring to George F. Hurd, who was mayor of Urbana from 1942 to 1945.

memory) and math. Bull isn't giving me any trouble as long as all we do is write themes, and steam is coasting along the 3.0 line. When I come home, I'll bring my weekly average chart I keep on my locker door, so I'm constantly reminded of what a lousy job I'm doing in some cases and so you can see what I've been doing.

I have to study now or at least attempt to. One of these days, I'll learn how to study maybe.

Write Soon, Mom.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. Merry Christmas!

P.P.S. What is the Valentine's address so I can send them a Christmas card? They look kind of cheap, don't they? They only cost 10 cents apiece. Oh, has my package from Zamsky Studio in Philadelphia arrived yet? If so, do not open it, Mrs. Stice. Understand, Ma'am? Although, I am curious what color they tinted my hair and eyes.



We have one more week of lessons, one week of review, a week of tests, and about 60 plebes who will no longer be plebes. . . . Once you get used to flying, you can't beat it from any angle. Don't get me wrong, People, I'm not trying to get out of anything here at the academy. I want to stay out my plebe year and cruise regardless of what I make up my mind to do later on. The next three years are fruit compared to this one. Everyone knows that. If I make up my mind that I do definitely want the Air Force, I would be wasting my time staying on here. I want to finish this year because, even though I don't like it, I'm hoping that it's doing me a lot more good than if I went to a civilian college.

9 January 1949

Hi Mom,

I didn't dare write home all last week because it was so darn hard to come back here after having such a most wonderful leave. A week has gone by, and things aren't quite as depressing. Only four and a half months until June as of today.

We have one more week of lessons, one week of review, a week of tests, and about 60 plebes will no longer be plebes.

Somehow, when I was home, I gained five pounds. It couldn't have been all the sleep; it must have been all the chow I ate! I have only knocked off those five so far, but I have eight or nine more to go in the next five days. Then all I have to do is beat one guy again and another one for the first time in four tries and I'll wrestle on the first string Saturday.

I don't have one damn good thing to say about this place, so I'd better not say anything.

Yesterday, I reserved a room for Patty for June Week.²³ Four months isn't too far in advance for that, but I don't see what I can do for Lucile as that's her business to get dates not mine. Most of the people here already have gals back home and are too busy to be interested in writing to a new one anyway.

I wish we had had more time to talk. What little we did do wasn't enough to do a bit of good. I still feel that I'd be better off later on doing a job I really like than one no one likes, except an occasional bachelor. The Navy was before and still is definitely out of the question. It's between straight infantry duty in the Marines or flying in the Air Force. Once you get used to flying you can't beat it from any angle. Don't get me wrong, People. I'm not trying to get out of anything here at the academy. I want to stay out my plebe year and cruise regardless of what I make up my mind to do later on. The next three years are fruit compared to this one, everyone knows that. If I make up my mind that I do definitely want the Air Force, I would be wasting my time staying on here. I want to finish this year because, even though I don't like it, I'm hoping that it's doing me a lot more good than if I went to a civilian college. But comparing the Marines to the flyboys for a career, I'm getting more and more favored to the Air Force. I'll always be proud to say I was in the Marines for a while, but this is something far bigger to me than just a proud feeling that I got out of being given some rough treatment and lousy rock duty.

I know you're proud to have me here, Mom, and I'm very flattered

²³ The Naval Academy was founded in 1845 but did not graduate its first class until 10 June 1854. The period prior to graduation became known as June Week. In 1850, a four-year course of study was adopted, and in 1979, June Week was renamed Commissioning Week because graduation had been moved to May. See Public Affairs Office, "Commissioning Week Traditions," fact sheet, U.S. Naval Academy, May 2022.

that I ever made it in the first place, but concerning what I want for a career are “you with me or against me?” Do you agree or not?

Best I go over to the gym and work out for a while, so I won’t have to work twice as hard tomorrow. Write soon and tell me if you think I’ve got the holes in my head for wanting what I do—as if it would do any good!

Your loving son,

Ray

P.S. Can ex GIs learn to fly on their GI Bill at any of the airports there at home? If so, how much of the GI Bill would it use up? Like, for instance, I have 36 months of schooling coming to me on it.²⁴

P.P.S. Say a big “Hi” to Patty for me!



Naturally, my future will be on the officer level no matter what might happen. You can bet on that. . . . Okay, so you say I’ve changed a little for the better since I’ve been here at Navy. If so, I’m very glad, believe me, and nothing is ever so terribly bad after you’re through the mess and work. . . . Today, six plebes resigned, and yesterday, four turned in their chits. I’ll bet our class is close to 800 even now, so many have gotten out. . . . My wrestling bout Saturday actually lasted nine days, starving myself to lose 13.75 pounds and the actual 7.5 minutes with no rest wasn’t fun, but I finally pinned my man with 1.5 minutes to go.

19 January 1949

Hi Mom,

Well, that was quite a letter, Mrs. Stice, quite a letter. And I have to agree with you on many points; and the 1 cent stamps were most welcome. I was going to break down and buy some today anyway, so thanks. After reading over all your letters since this summer, I found about another 20 air mail stamps I had forgotten about, so now my supply is very complete.

Naturally, my future will be on the officer level no matter what might happen. You can bet on that.

²⁴ Flight training was covered by the GI Bill, but it was limited to about 60 percent of costs.

For once, your letter didn't make me fighting mad—no fooling—but I had to read it over and over and over to make sure I had everything straight.

Okay, so you say I've changed a little for the better since I've been here at Navy. If so, I'm very glad, believe me, and nothing is ever so terribly bad after you're through the mess and work.

My wrestling bout Saturday actually lasted nine days, starving myself to lose 13.75 pounds and the actual 7.5 minutes with no rest wasn't fun, but I finally pinned my man with 1.5 minutes to go. Even so, it still wasn't fun to go through just to look back at. I'm not going to make any predictions about next week's grades. I've learned that doesn't do any good. But my averages are very weak support, and if something does happen, I hope you people won't be too let down and hurt. You always did want me in and were more proud to have me in than I was, maybe I just don't appreciate the finer things.

Tomorrow is a big day for Harry S. Truman anyway. We have all academics knocked off all day and are going to Washington to parade for the dear boy. West Point and the Coast Guard Academy get liberty plus, but we hop right back into our buses and rush back to the ensign factory.²⁵

Tell Lucile I finally got a chance to look up Bill Galanger. He seems like a pretty swell character. He had a couple years in college to help him a lot.

Some joker keeps popping off firecrackers. The BOOWs [battalion officers of the watch] from all six battalions are all over the place trying to catch the guy.

Today, six plebes resigned, and yesterday four turned in their chits.²⁶ I'll bet our class is close to 800 even now, so many have gotten out.

I liked that part about "a fine girl waiting for you, etc." She is a most wonderful girl too, Mom. I hope that someday she will really be mine, because I don't intend to stay single all my life and she couldn't be a more perfect specimen of what I want in a wife. She helps a lot without even being around, because I can say to myself that a big part of my future might very well include her too, and that alone makes things seem

²⁵ The Service academies marched in review during the inaugural parade. See "Naval Academy Midshipmen in Inaugural Parade," Harry S. Truman Library, National Archives.

²⁶ According to the Naval Academy Lexicon, *chit* refers to a written request for approval to do something they would normally not be able to do. In this context, Stice is likely referring to cadets requesting permission to leave the academy.

a lot better. And don't you dare try to tell me I'm too young for such thoughts.

Next week, I'll write again in between exams somewhere. Somethings wrong somewhere. I should be able to write a book without stopping.

Write soon, People.

Your loving son,

Ray

P.S. Tell that sister of mine not to worry about her exams so much if possible. We take so damn many, it's second nature anymore. One of these days, I'll learn how to study, then I'll learn how to remember what I've studied. That will be the day! Thanks for the swell pictures.



Exam week. . . . In math, I think I have a chance. In chemistry, I don't think so, but they always give you re-exams, and if you fail them and have good "grease" grades (aptitude) your chances of a second re-exam are pretty good. They aren't very eager to bilge people out now that so many have resigned!

24 January 1949

Exam Week

Hi Mom,

Well, two down and three to go. At least here, we only have one exam a day and all the rest of the day to study for the next one. Lord, anyplace else, you usually take them all in about two or three days.

In math, I think I have a chance. In chemistry, I don't think so, but they always give you re-exams, and if you fail them and have good "grease" grades (aptitude) your chances of a second re-exam are pretty good. They aren't very eager to bilge people out now that so many have resigned! Those were my two worst ones, and I'm pretty confident about having a passing average in the remaining subjects. Today's chemistry exam was terrific to say the least. They gave us a 12-page booklet and believe me each page was full. They only allowed three hours and I could have used five easy, although certain end points of my body let me know they were very tired of staying in the same position so long.

I'm sure glad that next June's exams won't cover this last semester's work too.

There's been an awful lot going on around here, and I've been right in the middle of it, but I can't think of a darn thing to write.

I've always considered it an insult to write only a one-page letter before, but this is one of those exceptions please.

Write soon, People.

As always,

Ray

P.S. Have you seen Patty for me lately?



One part I really had to laugh at was the part where you said the West Point people only had a "canvassed in manhole" to relieve themselves. Hell, woman, all we had was a wooden fence behind a junk yard!

27 January 1949

Hi Mom,

Here I am peacefully studying my Dago, and your letter comes.²⁷ See what a troublemaker you are? One part I really had to laugh at was the part where you said the West Point people only had a "canvassed in manhole" to relieve themselves. Hell, woman, all we had was a wooden fence behind a junk yard!

Now, about wrestling, after losing so darn much weight, sleep, disposition, and studying, I decided to lay off a week and try to get on the ball again. I gained all my weight, slept 100 percent better, feel 200 percent happier, and have been able to concentrate on my studies much better, so finally I turned in my suit. It just wasn't worth it to me even if I did make the first team and pin my first man. I liked all the men on the team very much and especially the coach, he's really swell, but it just didn't make sense to me. They told me it would be successfully easier to make weight each time and after a while I'd get used to it. They even hinted it was my

²⁷ According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the term *Dago* comes from ca. 1823 as Spanish for Diego "James." Originally American English slang for "one born of Spanish parents," especially in New Orleans, it was also used to refer to Spanish or Portuguese sailors on English or American ships. By 1900, it had shifted to mean "Italian." Dago red "cheap Italian wine" was seen in use in 1899.

fault that the guy that took over in my weight lost the next week. It was his own fault; he didn't even look like he was trying to wrestle.

Yesterday, we had our bull exam.²⁸ It consisted of a 500-word theme essay and a 300-word theme. I really could have used some more time for rewriting.

This afternoon, we have our drawing exam and tomorrow morning Dago, then I've got to get hot and study for the re-exam on chemistry, which will undoubtedly be in store for me.

[the rest of the letter was missing]



*One of these bleak days, they will stop playing with our futures
and post our grades and averages.*

1 February 1949

Hi Mom,

Your latest came the other day. Thanks for the suggestion, but what on Earth made you think I had a goat to send to Patty? They do have them out here, but I never bought one.

One of these bleak days, they will stop playing with our futures and post our grades and averages.

The next time you see Patty, give her a big blast for not writing. No, on second thought, by the time you saw her, she surely will have written, but I haven't heard in quite a while.

Now comes the question our of finances. It seems as though your midshipman son is finding himself SOL [shit out of luck] or up the well-known tributary with no visible means of support! Also, if you did send me a bond to cash, it wouldn't do me a bit of good until June, because when we get out on Saturday afternoons, the banks are closed. What do you suggest? I've got \$5 worth while you're thinking up a rare solution.

As for our new professors, three are good, one poor, and one that is very questionable.

I checked my eyes last week and they are 20-20, no less. Miraculous but true, bless 'em.

²⁸ The context here is unclear for the term *bull* as it typically refers to the bull ensign, or most senior ensign on duty.

Last night, Patty's gal friend, Ginny, called me up from DC. Have you met her at Lewis's yet?

Did Murve go through with his plans and go south to go to school?

The icy trees looked very deceivingly pretty this morning after a snow-storm, rain, and deep freeze.

Write soon please.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. You said you didn't object to single page one's, of course, I could have stretched it out to two on one side.



One of these days in the near future, I'll tell you all about the huge lesson in living I just went through for the past three weeks. For the first time in my life, I caught myself right in the middle of making a big mistake, and just like seeing a hole to the sun in a big storm cloud, I snapped out of it before it was too late. It is a wonderful thing to be able to see yourself in an unprejudiced way and to correct your mistakes just before you make them. I wish I could do that all the time for little daily faults. A person would darn near be perfect if he could.

[2] February 1949

Next time you see Patty, tell her I can wear her scarf. They are issuing very similar white scarfs to wear on liberty now.

I keep telling myself that Dad said he didn't do so hot in high school either, and apparently he had about as much trouble as I'm having at the academy, so I keep trying anyway even if I don't know what I'm doing.

One of these days in the near future, I'll tell you all about the huge lesson in living I just went through for the past three weeks. For the first time in my life, I caught myself right in the middle of making a big mistake, and just like seeing a hole to the sun in a big storm cloud, I snapped out of it before it was too late. It is a wonderful thing to be able to see yourself in an unprejudiced way and to correct your mistakes just before you make them. I wish I could do that all the time for little daily faults. A person would darn near be perfect if he could. Don't press Patty for details. I'll explain better in a couple of weeks.

Next week, I'm going to shop around for another sport, so you can stop thinking about wrestling for a while unless the coach corners me and talks me into coming out again. Maybe I can talk to Busey, he probably could help me out quite a bit. He seems to be interested in me a little, at least he's understanding as heck anyway.

Write again soon, People.

Love,

Ray

P.S. Let Patty read this if she wants to.



When I came back from leave, the whole atmosphere of the academy had changed visibly. Even the walls and passageways looked gloomy. I could only eat enough to keep a sparrow alive in order to lose 14 pounds so I could wrestle on the plebe team and, as each day went by, my mood sank correspondingly to one of the lowest ebbs I've ever known. One thing was on my mind: "get the hell out while you're still whole." As an alternative, I was going to bilge out because I wouldn't ask you people to send me your permission to re-sign. There always was a doubt deep in my heart that I was making a mistake and believe me I really had quite a struggle with myself. Then all of a sudden, I realized I was just running away and quitting without a fight, and it really would have made a difference later on, because once you start running away from things you can't stop.

4 February 1949

Hi Mom,

A while ago, I wrote and told about a so called "great lesson" on one Ray B. Stice. Now, I can tell you the whole story, or as much as a letter will permit.

When I came back from leave, the whole atmosphere of the academy had changed visibly. Even the walls and passageways looked gloomy. I had just finished the most wonderful time I'd ever crowded into 10 short days and had 5 months of being holed up and being stepped on to look forward to. I couldn't see how the upperclassmen could dig their so-called friendship in such a short time, but believe me they did. I could

only eat enough to keep a sparrow alive in order to lose 14 pounds so I could wrestle on the plebe team and, as each day went by, my mood sank correspondingly to one of the lowest ebbs I've ever known. One thing was on my mind: "get the hell out while you're still whole." As an alternative, I was going to bilge out because I wouldn't ask you people to send me your permission to re-sign. I knew you would be hurt, but seeing as how I was having so much trouble in academics and couldn't keep my mind on my studies anyway, I thought maybe I could "get by with it." Patty didn't know quite what to say except "to make sure I wasn't making a mistake before I really made up my mind." There always was a doubt deep in my heart that I was making a mistake and believe me I really had quite a struggle with myself. Finally, on Monday night after we took our math exam, it came to a head. I even went down to see the chaplain to see if I really was "running away again." Remember high school? I swear I was really fouled up. Then all of a sudden, I realized I was just running away and quitting without a fight, and it really would have made a difference later on, because once you start running away from things you can't stop. I would have almost completely wasted a whole school year, because I wouldn't get hardly any credits if I bilged out, and it would have been too late to start in at the University of Illinois. So, that night, I burned the old midnight oil and scraped out a 2.5 on the chemistry exam. The grades finally came out today. That Monday, I had made a 2.35 average in math, which was bilging, but in a couple of weeks I'll take a re-exam in math and believe me I'll sure raise it above 2.5 this time. My other averages were 3.28 in steam; 2.81 in Dago (Italian); and a 2.85 in bull. I pulled down a 3.85 in conduct; 4.00 is perfect.

They say the grass on the other side of the fence is always greener, but this time the grass was so damn much greener I almost made a huge mistake, and I believe it did me a lot of good. Not that I'd like to go through with a similar experience again, thank you, but no harm has been done and a lot of good has been, so I'm glad everything turned out like it did.

That's the whole sordid story straight, so think what you may.

I didn't write home because I wouldn't have really been able to put my thoughts down in a letter anyway. Although if you had been here, I would have liked to have talked it over with someone. Now for the past 10 days or so, I've been able to sleep at night and eat during the days and try to look at the pleasanter side of the Naval Academy, which I still fail to see by the way.

Patty was wonderful about everything. Believe me, People, keep your eyes on that young lady. Someday, some most wonderful day, you can call her “daughter.” That’s the day I’m waiting for. That’s another reason or thing that brought me to my better senses. I want to do what would be better for us in the long run, not what seems to be the most appealing at the moment. She’s worth working for in more ways than one.

This week is what they call exchange week between the two academies. About 100 midshipmen went to West Point and the same number of cadets came down here to spend four days, seeing how each school operates, I guess.²⁹ I’m still glad I didn’t go there. I couldn’t see that uniform if it was the only outfit on Earth!

You know, I even had made out a list of all the clothing and gear I didn’t want to take home with me, complete with prices, and I’d left my name and room number at four different tailor shops in town to see if they could sell my blue service and overcoat for me.

And you said I “was hitting all the cylinders.” That did it. I got that letter the Sunday before the first exam. I couldn’t see how you and Patty could be so proud of me when I was about to pull such a thing.

Chemistry is still my downfall. Honestly, it’s like sitting in a foreign language class. I used to think I was getting snowed under at Pearl Harbor and Bainbridge.

Writing about being snowed, I’d better close this before it turns into a book and I don’t have time to study for math tomorrow. Guess what we are studying now? Solid analytical geometry, no less. Lord, in another three weeks, we’ll be through with that and in the middle of differential calculus. Still think we’re traveling at a snail’s pace?

“Got to go,” as my gal used to say in the horrible wee small hours of tomorrow.

Write soon please.

Yours,
Ray

²⁹ The origin of the Service Academy Exchange Program dates back to 1945, when West Point and the Naval Academy exchanged students for a week. By 1975, the program had extended the time to a full semester. Now, all four Service academies participate in an exchange of students for the fall semester each year. See Shannon Collins, “West Point Cadets Take Part in Student Exchange before Army-Navy Game,” *Army.mil*, 6 December 2023.

P.S. Let her read this one too. Maybe it will help explain a few of the rough spots when you try to figure out the behavior of one Ray B.



Last week or two have really been hell week plus! Wednesday is Hundredth Day for us middies here at the Navy, and 100 more days until we get rid of these '49ers. That day, we don't have to carry out any plebe rates and believe me the firsties are going to know it by waking up with about six gallons of water per each of them, aptly thrown from a GI can.

20 February 1949

Hi Mom,

Boy, that 20 up there sure looks good. Why? In another week, it will be March first already and then April and half a month in May and June Week is here and exams over with. Well, it sounds good anyway. I am now the proud owner of a Trident Calendar, so Mrs. Stice, I will write down "Wrote Mom Tonight" if it will help keep peace in the household.³⁰

Have you seen my gal lately? She writes that her hair is all rolled under and short now. Well, I can't do much about it, but it sure sounds different. She would look wonderful to me no matter how she fixed it!

The last week or two have really been hell week plus! Wednesday is "Hundredth Day" for us middies here at the Navy and 100 more days until we get rid of these '49ers.³¹ That day, we don't have to carry out any plebe rates and believe me the firsties are going to know it by waking up with about six gallons of water per each of them, aptly thrown from a GI can. They're going to have penny races, pushing pennies about 100 yards down the corridor with their noses, while we gently urge them on with our clacks applied on the correct cheeks. They aren't going to eat, get "shoved out," have to "fix knees," sing in the showers (in uniform

³⁰ The Trident Calendar was printed each year by the Trident Society for students at the U.S. Naval Academy. The leather-covered, spiral-bound volumes featured pages with a humorous cartoon, a quote from a famous or inspirational figure, and seven spaces for noting events and appointments throughout the week. School-sponsored events were already printed on the pages, such as social events or athletics games.

³¹ Stice is referring to what the Naval Academy refers to as Hundred's Night, where plebes switch places with the firsties (seniors) to celebrate that there are only 100 days until graduation.

naturally), and a million other things we've had to put up with. No, we won't get entirely even, but it will be fun, and when they're trying to put on their uniforms that will be very neatly stapled together, they won't be half as mad as they will as when they try to study and the aromatic spirits of sweet Limburger cheese sizzling in the overhead lamps drifts through their rooms.

The next day, we'll have "fried plebes" for chow probably! To get fried is to be put on the report.

Thursday, Cadet Skelton will arrive with full honors. He is going to stay with John McNarbney. . . . I don't think I've seen him in three years at least.

A week from tomorrow, I'll take my re-exam in math on 28 February. By all rights, I should pass it. Lord, I've been going to extra instruction, where there's only four to a class every day and studying an hour every night after taps, and then I spent all of two Sunday afternoons just working over the first exam alone. Now, we have finished solid analytical geometry and are on the second chapter in calculus, so that makes algebra, trig, plane and solid analytic, and now this stuff. Brother, and me in the middle of a class of students, 70 percent of whom have already had the stuff in college. Do you realize I was 1 of only 100 people who had never had chemistry before? And that 70 plebes failed the math exam, almost three times as large a number that failed the next greatest.

Could you send me another \$5 or \$10 from my bond? That "Bill the stinkin' goat" I bought Patty cost \$12. It sure doesn't look anyway near that expensive. I haven't had time to even think about athletics lately, but I'm a member of the boat club, so I hope to get in some more sailing and perhaps I'll be able to take Patty out come June Week.

Write soon, People.

Yours,
Ray



*I was one of 20 of the 45 who took the math exam and failed.
. . . You've got to believe me when I say I did my very best,
Mom. Every Sunday, all day, every night for an hour after taps,
and every afternoon for an hour at extra instruction, I studied
on top of trying to keep my other subjects up. There was no
quitter's spirit tied up in that exam.*

1 March 1949

Hi People,

Sit right down before you read any further, because if this will shock you as much as it did me. You'll wish you had.

I was one of 20 of the 45 who took the math exam and failed. I just found out a little while ago myself. Last night, I was so sure I had passed it. Everyone agreed that it was a lot harder, and I raised my grade an awful lot, but not enough apparently. From a 1.89 the last first time to a 2.39 the second. I had to have a 2.5 regardless of my previous average.

Patty called last night. Of course, it was most wonderful to hear her voice again, but now I wish that she'd have saved her money. I'll probably be home in a week or so, you might have someone clear out the basement room, Mom, as much as I hate to say it.

You've got to believe me when I say I did my very best, Mom. Every Sunday, all day, every night for an hour after taps, and every afternoon for an hour at extra instruction, I studied on top of trying to keep my other subjects up. There was no quitter's spirit tied up in that exam.

I'm awfully sorry to burst your balloon, Mom. I know how much it meant for me to stay here, and especially for letting your hopes in me down, Dad.

Goodnight. I'll write more next weekend when I have something definite to say.

Your loving son,

Ray

P.S. I'll make a hell of a birthday present won't I, Mom?



Good news first. We get our academic board appointments for Monday, 7 March. I am to report with group nine of nine groups of six men each. That, Mom, means I almost have a turn back in the bag and, since I'm in such an optimistic mood, possibly a consideration for a second re-exam! A very optimistic viewpoint, may I add. Mom, please don't think that whatever I do is your fault. That is quite impossible in this circumstance. If I can't raise my standards to meet theirs, that's my shortcoming not yours. All I can do is back up a little and charge into them again or try something else.

5 March 1949

2101 hours

Hi Mom,

Today has proved very interesting to say the least. Good news first. We get our academic board appointments for Monday, 7 March.³² I am to report with group nine of nine groups of six men each. That, Mom, means I almost have a turn back in the bag and, since I'm in such an optimistic mood, possibly a consideration for a second re-exam! A very optimistic viewpoint, may I add. Today, I was an usher for the Army fencing meet. It proved very dull, except when I got the admiral's hat dusty and a general and lieutenant's hat mixed up. I love to have fun, and it's surprising how much humor you can squeeze out of some of the country's highest brass sometimes. Even a drunk Navy captain cussed me out for another usher not being on the ball. That called for some high-powered tact, which is always good practice. Then tonight at extra duty, they couldn't find the key to the armory to unlock the rifles, so we got away by listening to the first quarter of the Army ball game before some unspeakable found the key.³³ Well, my extra duty is now over anyway. See, you can't leave here until your ED is all completed so I had to finish mine today.

Thanks a lot for the money. I'll probably be needing it since \$6 wouldn't have gotten me far. Hey, we won 42 to 40! What a game! Where was I . . . oh, very far. Look, I'll write you the minute after I get out of the board meeting, because I know you are just as anxious as I am to find out what's in store for me. Write to me as usual though. It will at least be six more days, maybe more, who knows. One thing you could do is find out how much I'd make if it turned out Sunny wanted me, and I wanted to work for him. I've got to make enough to keep me going, not just to have a soft, easy job and no pay.

³² For a brief history of the board and their academic role at the academy, see "Records of Boards/Records of the Academic Board: Journals of the Academic Board, 1845-1985: Finding Aid," Special Collections and Archives, Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy, May 2023. For more information on the current board process, see *USNA Instruction 5420.24G, Policies and Procedures Governing the Academic Board* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Academy, Department of the Navy, 5 January 2010).

³³ Stice is referring to the Army-Navy basketball game being played on 4 March 1949 at USMA Fieldhouse. "Navy Halts Army's Late Drive to Score at Basketball, 42-40; Barrow, Though Registering Only 7 Points, Is Annapolis Star—Cadet Riflemen Win but Fencers Bow to the Middies," *New York Times*, 6 March 1949.

Figure 52. Ray Stice and his girlfriend Patty at a formal dance, ca. 1949



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Mom, please don't think that whatever I do is your fault. That is quite impossible in this circumstance. If I can't raise my standards to meet theirs, that's my shortcoming, not yours. All I can do is back up a little and charge into them again or try something else.

Of course, it is going to be nice in a way to be home again. But what about Patty? Does she think me a failure as far as being a man? She better not! Somehow though, I don't believe she does.

Well, I'll talk to Lord Jim . . . and the board and then we'll know. Until then, goodnight all.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. How about looking for a second-hand metal locker for my gear? Don't buy it yet, but please have someone look for me.

EPILOGUE

by Robin Stice Maroney

Dad's last letter home to his family from the U.S. Naval Academy was written on 5 March 1949. That is not the end of the story of his journey to become a naval aviator. In March 1949, he was 20 years old, a midshipman plebe, struggling with chemistry, and barely able to pass his exams. We know that despite his best efforts, he continued to struggle in school. It took a sincere reckoning with himself to find the internal strength of spirit to persevere. This was evident when he wrote home,

all of a sudden, I realized I was running away and quitting without a fight, and it really would have made a difference later on because, once you start running away from things, you can't stop.

He continued using this self-assessment to continue to empower himself, and at no time did he consider laying the blame anywhere but at his own feet,

Mom, please don't think that whatever I do is your fault. That is quite impossible in this circumstance. If I can't raise my standards to meet theirs, that's my shortcoming, not yours. All I can do is back up a little and charge into them again or try something else.

Figure 53. Ray Stice later in his Marine Corps career



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Dad's ability to ask that question of himself—What do I have to offer the academy?—helped him transform from a plebe to a Marine Corp officer and finally an aviator. His self-determination left a mark on the Stice family and still gives me strength today.

CONTINUED CIVILIAN AND MILITARY EDUCATION

After the letters home presented here stopped, his studies continued an additional two years at the Naval Academy, where he was taking required courses including aviation, navigation, and electronics. He furthered his education at the University of Illinois, taking commercial pilot and aeronautical engineering courses, and he obtained his student pilot certificate. He was an active member of the University of Illinois Glider Club, improving his ability to make forced landings after engine power failure.¹ Dad's military education continued throughout his years of service, and he graduated from several special courses such as flight training, all elements of the McDonnell-Douglas F-4 Phantom II jet, including instructor assignments, military justice (law) courses, and nuclear, biological, and chemical courses. In 1962, he continued his Marine Corps college degree program earning his bachelor's degree in military science at the University of Omaha, Nebraska.

BECOMING A NAVAL AVIATOR

One year after leaving the academy in June 1952, Dad became a corporal, advancing to second lieutenant in 1953, had basic flight training, and then promoted to first lieutenant in 1954. He took advanced flight training the summer of 1955 and that same summer he married Elizabeth "Gig" Kirkpatrick. Three weeks after their wedding on 6 July 1955, he became a naval aviator, and Gig was there to pin his wings on. His first squadron as a naval officer was with Marine Fighter Squadron 312 at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina. The next few years were busy for the newlywedded couple, raising their family of four children and moving to various military stations. Dad flew with many squadrons including those at Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi,

¹ The club was established in 1948. See "Who We Are," Illini Glider Club, accessed 25 October 2024.

Figure 54. Capt Ray Stice with Marine Fighter Squadron 312



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

Texas; NAS Pensacola, Florida; Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 314 (VMF[AW]-314); and Marine Aircraft Group 15 (MAG-15), 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW) El Toro, California. He moved up the ranks to captain, serving as a naval aviator for one year in Japan in 1961. He served as a flight instructor at NAS Corpus Christi from 1962 to 1965. Dad then became a major and deployed to serve as an executive officer, building the military air base in Chu Lai, Vietnam. At the same time, he flew constant missions as a fighter pilot during the Vietnam War from October 1966

Figure 55. Ray Stice would later fly the Boeing F4B Phantom



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

to October 1967 with Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13), MAG-13. He flew 163 combat missions during the war and was awarded 12 Air Medals, including a Bronze Star and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry.

Ray and Gig's letters back and forth during the Vietnam War were published by Marine Corps University Press in 2023 as *From the Major to the Missus* and it inspired the publication of this new work, a prequel if you will, documenting how he became a Marine and an aviator.

His distinguished military career cumulated with his time as an executive officer from 1968 to 1970 flying the coveted F4 Phantom II with VMF(AW)-333 at MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina.

DAD'S STORY THROUGH 643 LETTERS

I am so thankful to have found and been able to transcribe dad's 643 handwritten letters home to his family covering the years between 1946 and 1967. They show he never stopped working toward his goals and doc-

ument for everyone how important it was (and is) to become a U.S. Marine and naval aviator.

From private to plebe, corporal to major, and radar operator to aviator, his focus remained forward-thinking, and he relied heavily on his family and God's rhythm for his direction in life. He kept the dream alive that he had as a young boy of earning his Eagle, Globe, and Anchor. He spent six steadfast years early in his career first as an enlisted radar repairman, then student at the Naval Academy, and finally worked up the ranks until he achieved the monumental feat of becoming a Marine Corps officer and naval aviator. His personal story is a reminder of the emotional, mental, and physical labor it takes to become

a Marine and how worthy the journey is and continues to be. Because of his excellent military training and education, Dad learned the true meaning of the military maxim: "Train hard, fight easy."²

Dad's greatest lesson to us all is that we all fail at certain times in our lives, but the ability to take responsibility for and learn from our mistakes, then rise again and keep trying is a worthy goal. I can hear him now telling me, "Don't be afraid of the discomfort. Do your very best!" The journey is rigorous, consuming, and involves risk, and when the odds are stacked up against you and you are feeling the fatigue and frustration, remember to "back up a little and charge into them again!"

These words could not be more prescient now as the Marine Corps looks toward its 250th anniversary at a time when recruit and accession numbers for all the Services are drastically low. It is our hope that these

Figure 56. Ray Stice at the U.S. Naval Academy, ca. 1948



Source: Stice Family Collection.

² Attributed to Marshal Alexander Suvorov, a Russian military genius who lived from 1729 to 1800. The concept is also known as *overreaching*, which refers to training at a higher level of intensity than what you would face during battle.

pages paint a vivid picture for those considering beginning or continuing in the service of the Corps.

My sisters, Karen Stice Ratliff and Kathy Stice Blanchard, along with our niece Bonnie Stice hope the letters from Ray Stice are an inspiration to anyone entering the military, especially aspiring Marines and aviators. Our entire family is indebted to Angela Anderson and the Marine Corps University Press for seeing the value of these letters and making them available to encourage future recruits and current Marines.

IN HER OWN WORDS: KAREN STICE RATLIFF

As was the custom, my father wrote letters to his loved ones in a time of no cell phones or emails. Reading his letters as a young teenager in *From Boot Camp to the Naval Academy* has taken me on a journey of understanding from many vantage points. I found myself realizing what it was like for my dad to be so far from home. Boot camp and the U.S. Naval Academy led him on an expedition to becoming a man. I had no idea the struggles he had gone through, and yet time and again, he rose to the occasion and succeeded. Writing letters to his family was a comfort while still trying to find his own way in the world and the U.S. military. My father married, advanced into a fighter pilot, became a major, and served in the Vietnam War. He had to deal with life and death situations and constant bombing runs, while also building an air base in Chu Lai. His letters in the first book published by MCUP, *From the Major to the Missus*, revealed details of a war zone that helped me understand the depth of character he had. By keeping in touch with his family, it allowed him to be at peace while at war. So many times, my father would write to my mother, giving her advice about raising the children. My favorite quote was “Tell Kirk I’m going to build a fire station, tell Karen I’m going to build a library, tell Robin I’m building a restaurant, and tell Kathy I’ll be right back! Show her on the globe.” I was deeply moved by my father’s letters, which were full of love, humor, and bravery.

IN HER OWN WORDS: KATHY STICE BLANCHARD

I was very young when my father served in the Vietnam War, maybe three or four years old, so reading my family’s letters as an adult has certainly been a revealing, heartwarming experience. In addition to allowing me to gain insight into my parent’s deep love and devotion to each other, the let-

ters have given me the opportunity to experience their unique parenting styles and a glimpse into what I was like as a child. Knowing more about my parent's relationship and how they navigated parenthood through long-distance letter writing also provided me a sense of peace. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know my parent's sense of humor and pragmatic approach to handling problems, especially during such a stressful period. My father passed away when I was only 13, so getting to know him better through his letters has been a very positive thing for me. I would have loved to have more time with him and hear his stories, especially when he was a young teenager, but I can see now that he lives not only within me but in my son and daughter too. We all still carry parts of Ray and Elizabeth with us, whether it be in our quirky sense of humor or our dogged "get it done right the first time" military mentality. Their legacies carry on and I am, and will always be, a proud military brat.

IN HER OWN WORDS: BONNIE STICE

As the granddaughter of Ray, I was born many years after his death and sadly never met him. These letters gave me the gift of meeting my grandfather. They also granted my long-held wish to come to know my own father, Ray's son. My dad, Kirk, prematurely passed away, taking his memories and stories with him. These letters allowed me to know my dad through my grandfather's eyes and to witness Ray's ambition and determination during a period of young adulthood that in some ways mirrored my own experiences of uncertainty and growth. I have found a sense of belonging within my own family thanks to these letters, and I will forever hold in my heart his words of wisdom and hope. Not often do we get the chance to connect with our loved ones of generations past, and I am lucky to have Ray's stories documented for my children and my children's children to one day read.

APPENDIX A

Letters from Ray Stice to Elizabeth “Gig” Kirkpatrick 7 February–7 June 1955

A small card box was found by Ray and Gig’s daughter Robin in 2023. Enclosed inside the box were the handwritten love letters below, still folded inside the original envelopes. These letters were found 68 years after being written. It was quite the gift to find this small box containing memories of Ray Stice from when he spent four months as a student naval aviator in flight school. They detailed his joy over falling in love while courting Gigi and all the excitement and anticipation they experienced as a dating couple leading up to their June 1955 wedding. The letters are provided here to fill the gaps remaining between Stice’s time at the U.S. Naval Academy and the time of his deployment to Vietnam in 1967.

From: Lieutenant Ray Stice
Student Naval Aviator
Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) Kingsville, TX¹

To: Miss Gigi Kirkpatrick
Austin, TX

¹ For more on the air station at Kingsville, see “U.S. Naval Auxiliary Air Station–Kingsville,” Historical Marker Database, 14 February 2023.

7 February 1955

Monday, noon

Hi Gig,

I'd better write a few lines while I have time, or you'll get neglected again. In the first place, I want you to know what a wonderful time I had with you the last two days. How long a respite do you want before I come up again? We could plan for sure on the weekend after if you want to and let this weekend remain tentative. Actually, I won't have anything to study for at least two more weeks. I got a 3.5 on today's final in-flight planning and publications. The aerology final is Wednesday, then all we have to do is fly links and the plane. I'd better explain. We have three phases here at Kingsville. The first is all weather flight—I'm more than halfway done now—that lasts about six or seven weeks then we transition to jets for another six or seven weeks. Then we get our wings and are transferred to who knows where.

That gives us plenty of time to find out if we might feel we want to become more involved in each other or whether "it's been swell knowing you."

When I got home last night, there was a phone call from home. It was, Mom. She was tickled pink that Shirley broke the engagement.² Apparently, they didn't hit it off too well. I'm just as well happy now myself, thanks to you. Mom sure spoke enthusiastically about you and your family. I told her you found her earring. She would really like to have it back.

Oh, how are you coming along on the handwriting analysis? Have you discovered it's cold as ice in here, and I'm standing up trying to write on the dresser while the Mexican cleaning woman is chattering in Spanish?

You would have been most welcome last night driving back. Better come on next time!

Got to go.

Love to you, Gig,

Ray



² According to Stice family history, Ray was originally engaged to another woman—Shirley—however, the children were not aware of her identity until the letters from Ray and Gig were discovered.

10 February 1955

Hi Gig,

Aren't you the popular one—phone calls, long distance, letters, private thoughts, dreams, the works. What's with you anyway?

Let me get one thing straight, Gigi, if I seem to be rushing things—like wanting to take up all your time and everything—and it all goes too fast for you, *tell* me to stop or I won't. It's not that you have me snowed or anything. I just like what I see and want what I like—you. I am glad you feel like smiling inside when I'm with you. If and when you feel that way when I'm *not* with you, then I guess the little sign no one would read would be true and that is nothing to rush or play games with.

What are you the campus queen, getting two pages? Tell me one thing Miss English Major—do you mind if I call you Engi for short?—honestly, what does your mom think of the *whole* situation? Has she made any comments about her feelings toward me?

I can see now that you are out of shape—misshapen would have been rather cruel. We'll have to take another walk this weekend. I get so darn much sitting time in my sitter is completely worn out by weekend time.

Yes, by all means you should be cooking up a batch of old Ma Kirkpatrick's home-brewed cookies. I can see now that this is going to be one of those cold day in hell deals.

Oh, oh, I just thought of something. This is your week to cook, isn't it? Maybe I'd better not come up until *next* week. We should have eaten Saturday night after your mom cooked for us. I think she was really disappointed.

I've been practicing up on the side on this "da" and "odder," that you casually mentioned a couple of times the odder day. Why don't I just quit smoking or swearing or something easy instead?

Well, at least this time I paid for the phone call. I guess I'd better complete my investment and come up on Friday evening. Wait for me, Gig.

Love to you,

Ray

P.S. How do you spell Gigi or Giggi or what?



14 February 1955

Hi Gigi,

I'll try out another one of these Monday afternoon deals. The last one worked pretty well.

The weekend went too fast. It's that Saturday afternoon nap of yours that did it. See, we wasted two whole hours at once!

Have you decided about next weekend yet? We are scheduled to have a big inspection one of these Saturday mornings. That will cancel any long-distance trips Friday night. I'll let you know just as soon as I do.

Today, I didn't get any cookies, but I got a letter from Mom. I shouldn't have asked her what she thought of you, she didn't write about anything else! She must have not only observed a lot for herself, but your mom and her must have talked about you quite a bit. Regardless, she sure thinks you're just about it.

I took off this morning and was practically headed for Austin when he changed our flight plan. What is your office phone number just in case I ever did get up there during the day?

If you come to Corpus Christi this weekend, you might like it enough to look for a new job. Am I hurting your arm?

Are your lips chapped? Must be this cold weather we're having, or did they get singed over the weekend sometime?

Yes, I miss you. How long did it take you to forget me this time? Were you still able to remember me when all the competition moved back in?

Let's go for a ride—it's real warm—put the top down, and blow your curly locks around. Then we could go for a *real* picnic by some nice creek instead of listening to other people slam car doors. That was really nice there by the water just sitting there close to you.

Ask Sandy if he found those two booby traps I set for him?³ Tell him to look really close before he sticks his grimy mitts anywhere. Actually, I didn't but let *him* worry about that.

Want to ask you a very important question, Gigi. Will you be my Valentine? You were yesterday, how about today?

You weren't *too* tempting as I drove away yesterday. No lipstick on and rosy cheeks. See if you ever get away that easy again!

³ Sandy (a.k.a. Ed Kirkpatrick) is Gig's younger brother.

It looks like I just missed a muster down at the hangar. Got to go, young lady. Write to me, Gigi. I really miss you already.

Love to you,

Ray

P.S. Thank your mom again for making me feel so much at home.



16 February 1955

Hello Gigi,

Your phone call certainly was a welcome break to the confusion. As I said, today was a red-letter day for flying. I really worked.

This is going to be short, so get ready to be kissed goodnight—everything *else* around here is simulated!

Hey, you know what? I sure could use some of your tender care right now. If, well, I'll see you Saturday, and we can stop making believe for another week. Okay?

If I make first lieutenant in the next day or so, and if I pass my check ride, we'll have plenty of reason to be thankful.⁴ A wetting down party will surely be in line.⁵

Next Tuesday, 22 February, is a nonworking day here. I wonder what kind of a deal I can cook up now.

I could use some of that nap you made me take Saturday. None of that this weekend!

I'll be waiting for you at the Breakers—still doesn't sound right—Hotel Saturday afternoon.⁶ Can I give you the welcome I had all worked up for last week and missed?

I'll see you in about 60 hours, Gigi.

⁴ A check ride refers to a practical aviation test in multiple parts to receive a pilot license, certification, or promotion.

⁵ A wetting down party refers to a wild party thrown to celebrate a military promotion.

⁶ The Breakers Hotel was opened in 1912 as the Corpus Beach Hotel. It was considered a luxury resort for the time and the region. During World War I, it was used by the Army as a hospital and convalescent home for soldiers coming back to the states. After World War II, the area saw significant decline in tourism, which along with hurricanes and the new Harbor Bridge impacted the long-term viability of the hotel. In November 1970, the hotel was finally demolished. See Robert Parks, "The Iconic Hotel Breakers," KRISTV .com, 2 May 2024.

Love to you,
Ray



17 February 1955

Hello Gigi,

It's late and I just got in from a night hop and very tired. I was thinking you might like to get a letter the first part of the week for a change. And at the same time, I want you to know what is uppermost in my mind at times like this—you. Do you mind if I spend most of my idle time thinking about you? How does it feel to have someone really thinking about you all the time? Does it help your ego a little? Men and their women can give each other so much more purpose in life if they mean a lot to each other. I don't like to read signs, but that on my car window is getting clearer all the time it seems.

I wish you had saved that picture about the Marines for me. Even you noticed the difference in the gentlemen that took you. If we are gung ho, like I am, you can't say we aren't a special kind of breed. Most Marines don't actually feel for the Corps as I do, but there are enough of us to keep it going.

What kind of job are you going to look for now that you've decided against the one you have? I sure wish it would be feasible for you to be somewhere in this vicinity. You know, Gigi, you have so much more poise and character and personality than any people I have met in years. No snow job, straight word. I can be proud of you if you don't mind.

Don just walked in, he said you should have brought another girl for him. Next time, okay? It was my mistake too, so don't fret.

Lord, it's time for all eager young nasal radiators—naval aviators—to kick up their heels three times, salute the south, and hit the rack.

Goodnight, Gigi. See you soon again.

Love to you,
Ray

P.S. How's my competition? Yours is about to get the best of me (flying all the time).



9 March 1955

Monday night

Hi Darling,

You sure look good to me. I'm looking at your picture naturally! Where did the last two weeks go? It only took a couple of hours last night and this afternoon to get all the details of living caught up to date, and here I am with no Gigi to be close to. We'll just have to remedy that situation someday in the near future.

Actually, I ended up with more money on hand than I expected, so you can dismiss the thought of my *not* coming back to Austin in two weeks.

You look very natural behind the wheel of my Ford. After figuring what I owe yet, and what the Thunderbirds cost, we'll be driving it for another year and a half.⁷

I haven't been able to round up extra dates for Houston so far.

After doing absolutely no work at all for two weeks, I found it very difficult to concentrate in class today. We started out with a full schedule and were exposed to so many tidbits of information, I don't know yet when they will apply. Oh well, let's face it, I hate to study period. I could use some of your speed writing in taking notes. What have you learned so far?

Every time I see an E, I try to remember how you said it should be E e; E looks terrible! In Mom's latest letter, she cautioned me to warn you about my appetite again. Shall I tell her how I was *forced* to teach you how to prepare decent scrambled eggs?

You asked if you could always call me or on me if you were ever frightened. Of course, you can. You should always call me when you need me; that again would help me feel that I am needed, we both need that feeling.

Guess what? I have two people to come up with me Saturday and Sunday. One of them is the one I was thinking about for the girl from San

⁷ The Ford Thunderbird was intended to be a sporty competitor for the Chevrolet Corvette. The two-seat vehicle was considered quite the luxury in postwar America. The Thunderbird went on sale in October 1954 and quickly outsold the Corvette. Ford offered the two-passenger Thunderbird in 1955–57 and the larger four-passenger model was offered during 1958–97. The base model was sold for approximately \$2,994, or \$35,000 in 2024 buying power. See J. "Kelly" Flory Jr., *American Cars, 1946–1959: Every Model Every Year* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

Antonio. Both of them are about 23, first lieutenants, in the Marines, and came up from the ranks like I did. I wonder what new predicament you and I will find ourselves in this time? In any case, we're looking forward to a nice time. If anything unusual turns up this time, we at least can probably face it squarely and make the best of it with no misunderstandings like we had before. The lights just went out. Is this the first letter you've ever received written by flashlight?

Gigi, I miss you and your love far more than I could ever write. I wish you could make me "jump" a couple of times! You should get a patent on those lips of yours. I've never kissed any so sweet or satisfying. The fact remains, it is a most lonely existence without you. I fully realize I don't have *all* the things you would like to have in a mate, but I believe you can help me develop the lesser characteristics and broaden the existing ones. You may not have exactly everything I would like to have in an ideal wife either; but if there *are* any undesirable traits, I sure haven't been able to recognize them as such. Everything we have so far points to one thing—a new life together that with a little patience and understanding can be more full and beautiful than most of the marriages I have observed. I pray we decide for sure at an opportune time to keep from any delay caused by a transfer.

Gigi, it is time for me to review today's work. I don't think this flashlight is going to last much longer.

I love you, Miss K.

Your own,

Ray

P.S. It's hard to stop writing to you . . . Goodnight, Sweetheart!



14 March 1955

Monday, noon

Hello Sweet,

I thought I would be able to write to you more times this week, but the workload they prescribed for us this morning will knock the planned quantity down to that of questionable quality.

The only trouble with these short double-dating weekends is the extended period of no loving for another week. It's fine for just marking time and meeting other people, but it sure isn't good for morale.

Next weekend is still on as far as I can see. I'll let you know the minute anything turns up if I can't come. Friday night naturally. I hope your car took you home safely. If I didn't think it would have, I would have told your mom. Actually, I would have had some work done first to make the trip more pleasant.

Gigi, I have a book larger than I am to read this afternoon and pass on to my section, so I had better stop.

Regardless of this inadequate display, I am always thinking about you and loving you.

Yours,
Ray



17 March 1955
Wednesday afternoon

Hi Darling,
Your letter lifted my spirits to a new high today. Of course, I flew an unusually good hop to start the day right and then came on your observations and comments on the past weekend.

Let me say here and now, you certainly have an attentive memory to pluck out the things you say after it is several days old—most observant. And I can see now that, if terrific differences of opinion do arise, you usually aren't too bull headed. And if the idea is sensible, you always come around in a very short time.

Actually, I was so quick to pay all the checks, in the long run it cost me \$10 more than it did Doug. He was pretty good about most everything.

Recognition at last! I said your car either had serious ignition trouble or a broken valve spring, which would give identically the same sounds and symptoms as your car was doing then.

Doug said he might go up to San Antonio if he didn't have anything else to do, so I hope Peggy isn't holding her breath.

I agree—temporarily that is—flowers are nice for some things. Look at the wonderful perfumes that are made from flowers manufactured by machines, I say.

To tell the truth, I don't think your Es look a bit better than mine (E!).

I miss you, Sweets. Truly, this is a meager attempt in size, compared to your long letters. Working is my only excuse. Got to go.

Your own,
Ray



18 March 1955

Hi Sweet,

Did you ever put me on the spot! While you wrote to Mom on her birthday, as I did, and probably wished her many more, which I didn't. Ugh . . . needless to say, I forgot it was the day. She will love that turnabout.

I'm glad you understand about the brevity of my letters, Gigi. About the only time I can really devote to writing is during the noon hour. Usually at night, I have too much studying to do. The extra effort is paying off as it usually does, so it's well worth it.

You had better tell me when the cotillion is supposed to be.⁸ Besides if that is the last time you are going to meet people and ignore all other men, I imagine you will want to circle it in red, white, and blue on your calendar and draw in a small thermometer to indicate how cold it is down there.

Mentioning the temperature reminds me that I sure could do damage to a box of Toll House (*home* baked) cookies!

Hey, only about 34 hours to go. See you real soon.

Your own,
Ray

P.S. Love peasant blouses . . . filled in that is!

P.P.S. Yes.

P.P.P.S. Who says so?

My *proper* address *could* include a dignified 1, an S, and a T. I worked so hard!



⁸ The term *cotillion* originally referred to an eighteenth-century group dance from France and England that was typically used to end a ball. Here, *cotillion* is used to refer to a Southern tradition focused on etiquette and dance. There was a Cotillion Dance Club active in Austin beginning the early 1900s that Elizabeth "Gig" Kirkpatrick may have been a member of at this time. See Maggie Burch, "What's the Difference between a Cotillion and a Debutante Ball?," *Southern Living*, 8 July 2024.

21 March 1955

Monday

Hi Darling,

I just finished a volume to Mom, so now it's your turn. Mom and I have always had some basic differences that would have made life more pleasant if they had been nonexistent, and she was worried that you and I might have the same trouble. I think I explained enough so she will understand that she is the *only* person in my life whose ideas always seem to bring rebellion in my actions. It is practically a sin I guess, because she is my mother, but that always has been the end result. It must have started out in grade school or maybe even before and increased in intensity throughout high school. Almost everything she would suggest would assume all the desirability of a broken leg to me (and a lot of times she would have wonderful ideas). We haven't seen each other except on short leaves for the last nine years, and I wanted her to know I had *never* been that way with other people. No matter who they were. She was worried about me not letting you have a side in an argument or listening to your viewpoint. Nothing could be more different. I think we both bend over backward to see the other's thoughts on a situation.

I've inquired around about leave policies after jets with no success. Everyone seems to be different. One good bit of news—the jet phase lasts about eight or nine weeks instead of six that I thought before. That would put graduation tentatively around 1 June. Have you done any basic figuring with the calendar yet? Unless the weather improves, it might be another week after that. We're still planning a cross country this weekend. Where I don't know, but anywhere out of Texas will be fine. Last night, the hail stones were as big as golf balls. I didn't have my clubs with me, but I pulled off under a tree and watched them crush on the highway. Then the rain was so strong, I could have made better time using my swim fins! And to top it off, today, the dust was blowing so densely (we couldn't fly also) that the car looked like it had been turned inside out in a giant vacuum cleaner. And the people around here say, "Texas" with a light note of *reverence*! Are you red with anger, Miss Austin 1929? The only part of Texas I enjoy is *you*!

Got to study *some* tonight. This isn't quite the book Mom got, but I actually think you know the present-day Ray Stice better than Mom does.

Well, we all have a lot to learn and could be more considerate of others thoughts. I love you, Miss K. Think about me when you have time.

Your own,

Ray

P.S. Hi to your wonderful mom.



24 March 1955

Hello Gigi,

Your man is sort of beat tonight. It's 2000 now, and we just came back from a second hop. With a full morning in ground school, a half hour to eat and get down to the hangar in flight gear, and two hops in succession. None of which leaves much time, or energy, to write to promised ones.

Hey, I miss you darling. I could even go for some of that "drowsy love" you talked about. If the mailman seems to be neglecting your house, please remember our fouled-up system here and figure that I am thinking about you every hour and writing a letter almost every day.

I'm very happy your mom and Sandy actually approve of the idea, especially your mom, you are the apple of her eye, young lady, and she has every right to be most particular in her choice of son-in-law. You are right, it surely will require a lot of thought, probably more than we can foretell at first glance.

Your gift from your aunt sounds wonderful. Tell her I could use a sterling toothpick for our evenings out.

Wow, what a headache! Better go get some "Lu-nch" as you say!

I love you, Sweet.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. I almost addressed your letter to Gigi Stice!



30 March 1955

Hi Miss K,

I guess you can count on a little increased activity this weekend. I sure am starved for you. Just when did you capture my heart so securely? I think

you slipped up on me. Don't try to get away. Won't do a bit of good! Mom was curious when you were going to announce the blessed event. I told her we would try to settle that this weekend, if possible, but it would probably be in the next few weeks. I know darn well she wants to make several things for you, and knowing her able talent, you will be pleased.

Even the birds are casting big jealous eyes in my direction. I have been getting more flight time than they have lately. When I start dreaming at night that I'm still flying, that will be bad. Can't draw flight pay for that time.⁹

Lord, I sure miss you, you demanding creature. I'm certainly glad that you have such strong emotions. The pointed head has *got* to go! Can't be building up your ego *all* the time. Honestly, Gigi, we have so many things to talk over and get squared away. Letters are most inadequate at times. Keep your fingers crossed that this weekend is still unscheduled. I'll get to see you one way or another.

I love you, Gigi.

Yours,
Ray



22 March 1955

Hello Sweet,
You certainly do write the nicest letters, Miss K. Always does wonders for my morale.

One bit of good news, it looks like all Marines are having their choice of 30-days leave or a lessor amount if desired. That takes care of that item. We can set a date toward the last four or five weeks and adjust the leave period to cover it. I'm still curious to see which dates you will count out after checking the calendar.

We have decided to fly to El Paso, Texas, this weekend. Know anyone in particular I should look up?

I missed a good deal by going regular so quick. The reserves can get released from active duty when they finish their present schooling *if* they

⁹ Depending on years of service, an O-7 aviator was paid between \$115 and \$185 per month. See "Military Pay Table 1955," DFAS.mil, accessed 10 September 2024.

have already served two years of college to go back to school to earn their degree, and then come back to serve their obligated service, which means three more years in the case of flight training.¹⁰ We would sure have a rough time on the GI Bill anyway and, as far as I can determine, the law applies only to reserves. I'd be afraid to resign my regular commission and go back to reserve status for fear I'd never get it back again.

Got to study, young lady.

I love you, Gigi.

Yours,

Ray



27 March 1955

Hi Darling,

It's Sunday evening again, and as usual you fill my thoughts completely, only this time I haven't just left your moist lips. I did wave to you and throw you a kiss. Our cross country got cut down to a round robin today due to weather yesterday, and my leg was from Sonora, Mexico, to Austin.¹¹ Did you happen to see a flight of six of our yellow birds fly over the lake?¹² Lake Travis looks real near from the air. We could probably sail my craft out there in a few weeks. How far is it?¹³ Do you realize they are going to try to finish us up *this week*! We'll be flying everyday, all day if they succeed, not to mention the frayed nerves. It doesn't look like I can slow the steamrolling tactics down in this unit. Maybe I can waste a week in between it and the jet phase so we can still get married in June instead of May.

By the way, how does your cake taste now that you've had a little solo time at it? You are my cake and I love it. Actually, I get two pieces—you and flying—and both of you are certainly thought consuming.

¹⁰ Stice is likely referring to an update to the GI Bill, the 1952 Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act, that focused on education and training.

¹¹ Driving from Sonora to Austin is approximately 1,600 kilometers or more than 17 hours driving based on modern speed limits.

¹² Stice is likely referring to his squadron of North American T-6 Texans, which was a single-engine trainer being used by the Navy and Marine Corps at this time at NAS Corpus Christi.

¹³ Using modern measures, it is a four-hour drive from Corpus Christi to Lake Travis.

Got to be ready to fly bright and early tomorrow (0630 to be exact). Would you come to bed with me if we were ours? It's only 2000 so just for drill.

I love you, Miss K,
Ray



4 April 1955

Hello Gigi,
Elizabeth Lord Kirkpatrick, that is, to be proper! I wouldn't be too much good for you tonight. All afternoon, I thought there was someone following me. It was just myself dragging along behind!

The supper and related after-dinner discussions were quite a success. I actually got there in time (1805 hours) to let everyone else in. We've got to acquire a heavier car. My Ford takes a beating.

I checked with the local jewelers with no luck; will try Corpus on Wednesday. Selected a best man and informed him of his headaches. Now, we have to decide on the number of ushers. Does the church have a flight of steps leading to the main doors? If so, how many?

Do you have to work on Easter or will you get Monday off? There is a rare possibility that we may have the day off.

Gigi, do you realize that after my last hop tomorrow, I will be two-thirds of the way done with the advanced training? *Where* has all the time gone?

Rather than make a daily diary installment type of a letter out of this, I'll go ahead and mail it short. Okay?

Got quite a problem. I can call Sandy, Sandy, Don, Don, and you, well most anything decent I suppose. But *what* am I to call your mom?

It certainly will be wonderful to get all this squared away and get us married. I've talked to several more people. It seems Yosemite would be the nicest place for a honeymoon that we would both enjoy the utmost.¹⁴ If we go to the West Coast that is. Where, on the East Coast, do you think another place we would enjoy might be? I guess the prerequisites

¹⁴ Yosemite National Park was created by an act of Congress on 1 October 1890. Popular honeymoon spots in the United States during the 1950s included Niagara Falls and exclusive resorts like those found in the Poconos, PA.

would include woods, hills or mountains, cool summer temperatures, a lake, a cabin with a fireplace and icebox, and the blissful young (?) bride and groom.

Got to get some rest, Darling.

See you soon.

Yours,

Ray



11 April 1955

Monday

Hello Darling,

I miss you, Sweet. This weekend was a particularly different one. So many things came up that we hadn't seen before. Being in love is sure interesting. You're either learning something one way or the other, or you're being frustrated one way or another—or both!

I changed my duty request chit to read North Carolina first, California second, and Miami third. Now, we'll just wait and see what the Marine Corps prefers.¹⁵

When you write Mom, be sure and mention what a beautiful setting your stole [scarf] created. It's nice enough by itself, but the effect is even more wonderful.

I imagine you are thinking about a lot of the things we talked about Saturday and Sunday. Don't feel alone. I think one of the biggest things we can work on is not to wonder about the shortcomings of the other one, but more about "How can I help the other one build a better life?" It's not simply the ordinary expected *known* capabilities that make life the most pleasant, it's the *extra* efforts that really do the trick.

It's quite natural that I should dream about sailing my boat. The wind howling through here like a wind tunnel and my boat practically in bed with me. Best I finish this job before we get married or there'll be little enough room in a bed with us together let alone my boat!

My ears didn't burn much last night. Didn't anyone talk about me a

¹⁵ Stice is referring to a permanent change of station (PCS) request for his duty station at the completion of training. Servicemembers can make requests; however, the needs of the Service will always bear out in the final assignment.

little? I had to laugh at you when you were trying to see if I would get mad and leave if you didn't kiss me. Hell, let's enjoy it. Good to the last drop.

If my penmanship seems a little more erratic than usual, it's my misplaced boat and a lack of a place to write that are the basic reasons.

Needless to say, I love you, "Miss Freckles 1955." But right now, I need some sleep too, seeing as how you *aren't* here and my bed *is*. I'll see you.

Goodnight, Gig.

Yours,

Ray



13 April 1955

Hi Darling,

Your letters written Monday were heartwarming. By taking the attitude you did, you can learn things about yourself as well as me.

That was fine news about the church. Now I can try to figure out how many ushers and sword bearers I can use, or better yet, who has swords and dress uniforms. I am the only student officer here who has *all* his uniforms to my surprise.

I didn't forget the sail. I thought your mom was going to patch it up. If Pris will let me use her machine this weekend, I'll do it then. The boat won't be ready anyway. The undercoat primer I put on Friday hasn't dried yet. I did forget the band cleaner. I can see you in Austin on 19 June now, and me muttering about what I forgot *this* time!

By golly, I hope we start to work next week. Another week of this pool business would be almost too much time wasted. Not that I haven't been working. Everyday I've been the assistant unit duty officer, really learning a lot about everything except jets. I'm trying to figure a way to get Friday afternoon off for another early start "for the Austin Run" as it's getting known to be around here now.

You missed Sandy's leaving remarks Sunday, but it seems like maybe he feels a little closer to me now than before. Without a doubt, Pris sure makes me feel at home, really natural.

Mom's letter tells how wonderful she feels about us. She'll be down for the "squaring away."

She also mentioned talking to Dotty Templeton (and Mrs. Damon,

I guess) about us, Pris, and Sandy. Even though she beat us to it on the phone, it was still a swell Easter Sunday event for her. We probably wouldn't have been able to talk to Lucile. Mom promptly called her after our talk. How much did Pris say I should lay aside for phone calls each month?

At any rate—note your linguistic influence; hell, I always said “In any case”—I'll see you soon again. Oh, how well did your freckles photograph? Some movie star. What did you say he wanted? Anyway, *I love you any-time, anywhere* (there must be another any something), anyhow. How's that? Well, *I do*.

Yours,
Ray



19 April 1955
Monday

Hello Darling,
What a wonderful weekend that was! I'm still moved when I think about it. Better stop thinking period.

We made out . . . today we were assigned as a class, shown how to start and inspect the TV, and doubly warned about the compactness of this first week. Needless to say, I'm afraid you are going to be a “letter widow” this week. I barely got started today and my memory is already overtaxed. This way, you won't *expect* any letters and if one does happen to come, you'll just be overcome by it all, yes?

That was an unusual way to say goodbye, wasn't it? I kept seeing your face in the back of the car ahead of me, talking a blue streak, but lovely as no makeup could permit. I sure am glad I love *you* under all conditions and situations and not only when you're all dolled up. Miss Z, you're the most!

Mad, I mean I was downright upset last night. The guard wouldn't let me come aboard because I didn't have a 1955 Texas decal on my car. You told me so? Well, today I had it inspected. I heard the fine was more than \$200.¹⁶ That would have hurt our pocketbook.

¹⁶ During the 1950s, vehicle safety became a priority with new features like three-point safety belt, air bags, and vehicle safety regulations.

Isn't there anyway we could change the days to 36 hours instead of a paltry 24? I need some more time somewhere.

Got to clean my pistol, gather the laundry, unload my car, square my room away, study umpteen procedures, and count my shekels—pay day today—and I don't know what all.¹⁷

Oh, Lucile thinks she will be able to stop in for the wedding on the way to pick up Nancy in Jacksonville “if we'll have her,” she says. Wait until I write to her.

Got to go, I know you are lost for time too. I love you, Sweet.

Ray



26 April 1955

Monday

Hello Darling,

Well, another weekend flashes past. Every time I leave, I feel more indebted to Pris. The only way I'll ever be able to repay her kindness will be when she comes out wherever we are for a visit.

I just wrote to Lucile and I told her I came home for her wedding and, if she could arrange it, she'd better come to ours!

I've been congratulated by everyone from the gas station man in Three Rivers to all of the people around here I could show the picture to.¹⁸ What color did your ears turn to as they were burning today?

Those emergency procedures you helped me with came up again today. That's all we did this afternoon, and all we'll do the next *two* afternoons.

If we get assigned to Cherry Point, North Carolina, we could stop by the William's in Fort Walton, Florida. I want to show you off to a *few* of my friends anyway.

Mac Alpine is coming to the dance on Saturday. Snead hasn't made up his mind yet (about anything), so I won't be the only Marine there. What did I forget . . . my white shoes at home! Maybe if I wore my sword and kept my cap on, no one would notice the bare feet.

¹⁷ *Shekel* is Hebrew for money, but also one of the original measures of weight.

¹⁸ Three Rivers is a small town of about 1,400 people halfway between Corpus Christi and San Antonio. Stice likely traveled through it during his visits to Austin by way the old state road, Highway 281, which now merges into Interstate 37.

Almost goofed this morning. Alarm sounded off, rolled over, scratched I guess, and slept on and on. Terror raced uninhibited through my empty stomach as I next looked at the clock—15 minutes until class time. Amazing what a little adrenalin will do, so I made it. I'd much rather have you shake my shoulder, walk up to a steaming breakfast and a loving wife, and then go to work. We'll see about that.

I lined up another tentative usher today. This could be a problem.

Gigi, I've got to go. Try not to get lost in the details, Sweet.

I love you, my own,

Ray



28 April 1955

Wednesday

Hello Miss (temporarily) K,

The good thing about Wednesdays is I can look at my watch and figure in 48 hours I'll see you again—nice figure too. Anyway, Friday night let's take it easy, then shoot the works for the dance. I bet you will look stunning. That's one thing I can always count on, you being up to the situation and always looking wonderful.

I haven't ridden in the blow pipe yet. Weather has been lousy to lousier than lousy. Oh, I just found out "a jet is like being broke—no visible means of support." It *was* funny—no propeller.

Stand by to be measured this weekend. Mom asked for a few figures I couldn't produce, not without a lot of undue description anyway.

Happy day—the paint finally dried on my sailfish and we had the afternoon off but it rained.¹⁹

Sometime in your reverie, try to get an idea of how many clothes and personal items you will want to carry in the car so I can figure out how much I can't carry. I've got it all figured out how we are going to ship all my gear from here and all the gear from your house too. If you plan well, it's surprising how long a small amount of clothes will last. However, it might take upward to a month (or three weeks) to collect everything when we get wherever we're going, so you will need quite a bit. I bought a locker

¹⁹ The sailfish boat first appeared on the market in 1945. It is a small, board-style dinghy with a lateen sail.

trunk today to consolidate a lot of my things. On comes the light with a brilliant idea—why not remove the rear seats in the car and ship them along with the piano and bed and have all the more room for another trunk we might use? Got to be practical about these things.

Classes start early tomorrow, so I'd better get in bed.

I love you, my own,

Ray

P.S. Can we both eat on \$100 a month? That's about what I'm spending.²⁰



2 May 1955

Hi Darling,

Here I was thinking how wonderful it will be when we're finally on our way to our new home, and I haven't even started flying the last phase yet. They started three [pilots] today, with three more are scheduled tomorrow, and it looks like I'm next in line.

I just painted the part where we sit on my sailfish and sprinkled sand on it to keep from sliding off. Be sure to wear an old bathing suit the first time until we find out how much it will wear off. You'll look so cute!

Have you called Zales to see if they had my ring in yet? If and when they do, and the other company has the same thing, we could get it there.²¹

That was thoughtless of me to take the toothpaste last night. I worried about it all the way back. I hope Sandy got some for you.

I asked Doug *again* about the wedding. He seems like he's perfectly willing to be in it, but it's difficult to try to plan for it. I guess I'll have to ask some people I know but aren't close friends. If I get a chance to talk to the local chaplain tomorrow, so maybe we can get some more ideas on the arch.

You know what we forgot to do besides buy some toothpaste? Take

²⁰ In 1950, the average American spent approximately \$94 per month on food, including food prepared at home and at restaurants. The median household income was approximately \$3,000, so food accounted for about 38 percent of annual expenditures. See Laura Mae Webb, "Food Expenditures of Urban Families, 1950 to 1960-61," *Monthly Labor Review* 88, no. 2 (1965): 150-53.

²¹ Zales Jewelers opened its first store in Wichita Falls, TX, in 1924. They created the payment plan system or credit policy to keep merchandise affordable for the average American.

your measurements. How's about starting with your head, stopping by Moe and Joe, and all the way down to those big flat feet you don't actually have. Just write down all the sizes you can find and that ought to do it. Okay? Damn it, I always miss the fun.

Saturday night was both fun and educational. I think we both could try to be a little nicer—especially me—when a difference looms up. More family this weekend, so heads up!

Got lots to do, Gigi, and some sleep to make up. See you in my dreams, I hope.

I love you, Miss K,
Ray



4 May 1955
Wednesday

Darling,
Your letter yesterday was as sweet as I'll ever hope to receive again. This feeling of love you spoke of is greater within me now than I have ever known before, excluding none. In about six short more weeks, we will be each other's—just six more weeks! I can hardly believe it.

I hope you send me your aunt's address tomorrow or the next day or leave a phone message as you pass near here Friday night.

Guess what? Today, I finally got my ride in the TV.²² Lord, what a sensation. It's beyond all description. Sort of like riding on the head of an arrow or balancing on top of a greased bowling ball. So darn quiet and vibrationless, like having 100 souped up Fords pushing you into the air. I mean it's a real going machine. Tomorrow, I'll have another dual and then Friday I'll get to solo—that's the day. Those Air Force pilots at Bergstrom Air Force Base must be out of their minds not to love jets.²³ Today, I flew faster and higher than was even possible 10 years ago.

²² Stice is likely referring to the Lockheed TV-2 Shooting Star, a high-performance jet trainer. See "Corpus Christi, 1941-1956," *Naval Aviation News*, March 1956.

²³ Originally an Army installation, Bergstrom was named Del Valle Army Air Base at its opening in 1942, renamed Bergstrom Army Airfield in 1943, and became Bergstrom Air Force Base in 1948. Home of the 27th Fighter Wing and 12th Fighter-Escort Wing, pilots on the base did not fly jet planes until 1957, when the base transferred from a Strategic Air Command to a Tactical Air Command in 1957.

Enough of this. I've got to review for tomorrow, especially everything I forgot today.

I miss you, Gigi, but only for a couple more days thanks.

Your own,
Ray



10 May 1955

Hi Gigi,

Only five more weeks. The time is getting closer, thank God. You've been sort of neglected this week, haven't you? And from the lack of mail so far, I guess I have too. Guess what arrived today? My 10 volumes of *Popular Science* and 10 volumes of *Lands & People*. I promptly stamped them "not claimed" and sent them back. I wrote the people Sunday night, gave them a big sob story about "overburdening family financial obligations," and rested my case. Let's hope I can get off the hook!²⁴

This afternoon, I was tooling around in the clouds and decided to see how long it would take me to fly to Melba's house from Alice, Texas—took about 12 minutes!²⁵ We had more fun those two hours though. I was too high up to make out the farm, but I could see the road crossings out from Weslaco, Texas. Two more solos and I go under the hood for a week or so. No fun there.

Expect a rather tired man this Friday night. I'll probably be late, especially if the weather is good.

What time is the rehearsal dinner on 17 June? It will probably have to be quite late in order for us all to get up there in time. That's something we didn't think about. Just for drill, when do we have the chapel reserved for practice?

My boat is all done except for a wire bridle across the rear. I guess I can bring it up this weekend.

No word on my orders yet. Doug and Smitty still aren't sure. I've asked two more buddies, so if we can have all four it will be fine. This morning, I went to see the post chaplain, but he wasn't in so maybe tomorrow.

²⁴ Stice likely was the victim of a subscription scam much like Columbia House, which started in 1955 as part of Columbia House Records.

²⁵ Alice, TX, lies directly east of Corpus Christi, or about an hour's drive.

Got to write, Mom, Miss K.

I love you, Mrs. Stice to be,

Ray

P.S. Have you any rare ideas for the dance Saturday?



16 May 1955

How's My Gal?

I sure did have a fine time this weekend, Gigi. Every time I try to reminisce, I think of a different time you were especially thoughtful and sweet. Don't think you are spoiling me—not much—but don't stop either.

Today, I had my first instrument hop.²⁶ This is going to be work for a change. Also, I saw the local chaplain. He said it was proper to wear our swords inside if it was nighttime or inclement weather, provided the minister approved. Therefore, let's go see the minister next weekend. Which is proper, your Mom calling for an appointment or my writing to him? We could lightly discuss the whole ceremony and if I have any questions about the military part, the chaplain here will see me again next Tuesday or Wednesday. Let's try to make it Saturday morning so we can sail again.

Still want to go to the North Carolina coast? Well, I picked up copies of my orders today to the commanding officer, Marine Training Group 20, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Forces Atlantic, Cherry Point, North Carolina.²⁷ "Cheerless Point," the single people call it. We'll call it "Cheery Point." Okay?

Today has been a long one. My hop *was* early—0530 brief. I also saw the legal officer about the encyclopedia [subscription]. He suggested I just to continue to write to them, reiterating it is impossible to make the payments, and not to try to contest the validity of the contract I signed—they are legal in court. So, I wrote them another letter; maybe they will lose sight of us when we change addresses. Sure thought a literary mind would enjoy an encyclopedia set—teasing, young lady—just teasing!

²⁶ *Instrument hop* likely refers to aviation instrument approach procedures used in flight for navigation and approach to land.

²⁷ Ray B. Stice, Chronological Record of Duty Assignments, June 1946–March 1970, Stice family collection. According to Stice's record, he was assigned as the squadron officer for H&MS-32, MAG-32, 2d MAW, at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point beginning in July 1955.

I guess that's about all for today. Got to study procedures for tomorrow's hops. I know what you can give me for my birthday—a new pen point for each of my Parker 51s and a course in penmanship. Okay?

Love to you, Sweet,

Yours,

Ray

P.S. 16 May—one month and two days!



18 May 1955

One Month, Gigi,

The TU [University of Texas] program sounded swell, but I knew when I had to leave, regardless of how long I wanted to remain with you. I sure appreciate you letting me go when you know I have to. Why can't you sleep if I'm still on the road? It is about the sweetest thing you've said yet. Maybe my thoughts about you are so strong when I'm driving back that you can sense the feeling.

Partial bad news—if the weather continues to be as bad as it's been the past two weeks, we might not get to leave after the wedding. There is still sufficient time to make our completion date if we get to fly every scheduled hop and I don't see how that will be possible. Pris can save the bedroll in the backyard for me if we do make it in time. So far this week, I've only flown one hop and that was about sunup Monday morning. We painted our hard hats real flashy today, maybe that will help—white with a blue bordered yellow arrow.²⁸

This is short, Darling, since I had to write Mom too. It will probably be late again Friday, because I have ground school right up to 1700. Um, only 48 hours—that's nice—only a few hours by the time you read this—that's nicer!

I love you, my own,

Ray

²⁸ *Hard hats* refers to a slang term for a pilot's flight helmet. The evolution of military aviation from propeller planes to jet engines had a significant impact on flight gear technology. See Alan R. Wise and Michael S. Breuninger, *Jet Age Flight Helmets: Aviation Headgear in the Modern Age* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1996).



23 May 1955

Hi Gigi,

Yesterday was wonderful. You're a born sailor, I can see that. At least your expressions when we were sailing along said you were. If you can learn how to sail my tricky craft, you can sail *anything* I'll assure you.

I hope you have your ring back again. You looked incomplete yesterday.

Please have Sandy take my shoes back. They won't want them after a while and they sure aren't my choice.

If I don't get a chance to look at some suits in Corpus this week, I'll wear a uniform to the wedding next weekend. Okay? I've got to buy another pair of sunglasses too; when we start flying formation, they are necessary.

Just got a swell letter from Mom. She insists we are going to Norfolk, Virginia, too. The actual orders still say Cherry Point, so that's the direction we're starting in anyway.

She thanked us for our many comments on the decorations she made, and she's like a racehorse at the gate wanting to come to Austin. Even offered us the house for a week or so in Urbana if we wanted it. I think we'll go on across down south.

The weather is lousy again today. Dust mostly, so one hop scheduled.

Got to go, Elizabeth. Sure do love you, Sweet.

Your own,

Ray

P.S. Next weekend is Memorial Day, so I guess I'll have Monday included also so keep your fingers crossed so we can be together.

After seeing the wedding Saturday, we better not see much of each other (alone). We'll either be scared out of it or can't stand it one!



31 May 1955

Hi Sweet!

Well, I'm finally scheduled for another fam hop—it's been so long since I've flown—and my fourth instrument hop tomorrow morning. It doesn't look like—tell Pris to relax—I'll be able to get a cross country in this weekend. Don't count on it though.

They sold my Ford already to some dealer in the valley.²⁹ Another of my buddies (Chet Whipple, an usher) bought the hard top I wanted at first with the white top and trunk. I think our car looks a little more regal. Let's leave it alone for the time being.

What could be more appropriate to future naval aviators than their first set of wings? That's what I'd like to know. Anyway, that's what I bought for all my ushers. Okay? Only civilians give cuff links. Eight of them only cost \$14—1 for me too—and they'd have to buy some anyway.

Got to pack my winter gear; alas, moth balls just for you. *Some* of your suggestions are valid.

I love you, my own.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. The more times I write out that long name of yours, the more I'll be glad to change it, but for a *few* other reasons too, I guess.



7 June 1955

Hi Gigi,

Go ahead and have a blood test (by a state approved hospital) anytime you get a chance. I'll get one down here. I can also buy the wedding license here, but only *after* we both have doctors' statements that we are okay.³⁰

I can reserve a really nice motel downtown for us until we move or find something else; it is air conditioned, small stove and ice box, big double bed, all very clean and new for \$5 a day.

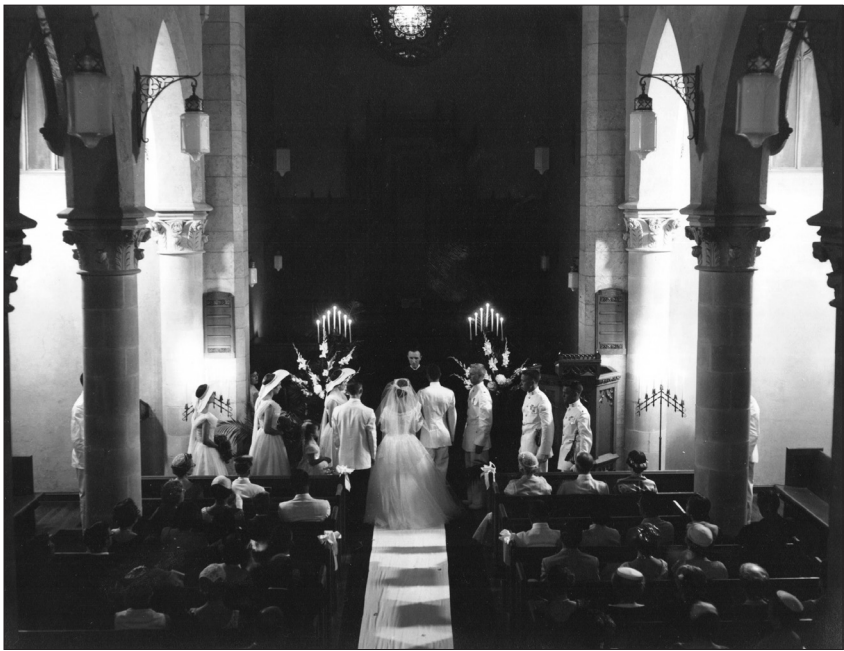
The other paper is fairly complete. We can talk about the date for the troops next weekend. Jerome T. Hagen is a new usher in place of T.K. Burke.³¹

²⁹ Valley refers to an area in South Texas known as the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

³⁰ In the late 1930s, most states passed laws requiring those applying for a marriage license to show proof that they did not carry the most urgent public health concern at the time—communicable syphilis. This and other premarital examination laws appeared discriminatory and invasive of private lives. The last remaining state with a law on the books—Montana—abolished the blood-test requirement in 2019. See Deborah B. Doroshow, "Before Wedding Bells: Premarital Examination Laws in the United States, 1937–1950," *Social History of Medicine* 34, no. 1 (February 2021): 141–69, <https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkz057>.

³¹ Jerome T. Hagen served in Vietnam and would retire from the Marine Corps as a brigadier general.

Figures 57/58. Ray Stice and Elizabeth Kirkpatrick wed on 18 June 1955



Source: Stice Family Collection.

Flying practically doesn't exist. All I've been getting is back seat gunnery tow hops (flying the target tow plane so the instructor can concentrate on the runs), and they aren't syllabus hops. No one is very happy about the situation. Sam checks out tomorrow.

Everything will seem different once you are down here. Gosh, the time is getting so short now I can hardly believe it. Ten more *single* days, so better live it up now or forever keep your peace!

I love you, my own,

Ray

P.S. *Where* did all that hideous rain come from?

NEWLYWED LETTERS
FROM ELIZABETH "GIG" STICE
TO HER MOTHER AND BROTHER

26 July 1955

Havelock, NC

Dearest Mom and Sandy,

Am sitting in my bare living room writing on the trunk, which is also the table as well as desk. Somehow, we are keeping house, though it is really kind of ridiculous. We moved in Saturday after renting Friday and our first task was to get a bed. We debated long and hard about what to do, considering we had one coming. It didn't seem right to buy one, but that's what we did. A waitress told us about a place where everyone went, and we found a lovely store that sold furniture at retail prices—the good kind. We asked if they had some "heritage" stuff, which we looked at in Fayetteville, and he had lots of it. The man said he'd fix it for us to have a bed, so we really got interested then. Selected a bedroom suite we liked called "Circa 60" made of walnut, which is contemporary style (see enclosed) and bought the headboard, a bed with rollers, foam rubber mattress, and two small chests of drawers as a start by putting down \$20 as good faith money. A third down payment will be due in 30 days and the rest gradually. I think I all it was about \$350.

We went to the PX and bought two sheets—oh, how it hurt to buy stuff we knew was coming—and pillowcases, but they were out of pillows and we were almost out of money. The bed arrived Saturday about 1700

and we then went to the store and began painfully to select the most for the least. After that, we had \$25 to last until the first of the month. I couldn't even buy Ray a birthday present! Came home and ate wienies on tin pie plates and drank milk out of two silver goblets—last minute purchase in Austin—on top of the trunk. Also splurged on two folding chairs. High style!

For a pillow, we used Ray's dirty clothes in a pillowcase. Ugh, hard! Sunday, we went scrounging for orange crates and I hid my face while Ray dug behind grocery stores. Carted them home and they made lovely bedside tables and suitcase holders. We were really scratching like two hens.

Sunday, I fried eggs in the pie pan, which was really unsatisfactory, so we bought a cheap frying pan yesterday. Drove to Morehead City on the coast and got sunburned at the beach looking for shells to use as ash-trays.³² A base movie for 20 cents and ice cream was the extent of Ray's birthday party.

Monday, needless to say, we borrowed some advance pay to last, and after some rough figuring decided we'd be sailing clear by September. By that time, he'll get the travel, dislocation, and flight pay, which will repay some of the expenses, and then we can get some more junk.

Can't tell when the furniture will come, so it'll be rough for a while. But with a soft bed and food in the icebox, we don't mind.

Yesterday (Monday), I was sitting on the steps when a gal walked up to me and introduced herself. A bride since April, her husband is a first lieutenant, and with the barest of rented furniture she hasn't much to do either, so now we can keep company.

Ray and I were going to call on them last night, when they knocked on our front door bearing two welcome pillows in their arms. We introduced the boys and had a pleasant evening together.

Got your letter of 6 July yesterday and got a kick out of Ricky's antics. It was great talking to you the other evening, though it sure is costly: six minutes were about \$2.95. We can't do that too often, but I'll do it when I can. We'll get a phone as soon as we apply for one.³³

³² Morehead City is a port city about 30 minutes southeast of Cherry Point and just across the river from Beaufort.

³³ Phone service in the United States has made significant strides since the days of rotary phones, single-line service, and operator-assisted calls. However, in the 1950s, only 62 percent of homes had telephones, and they had to be leased from the phone company.

I can't figure out how you can afford to send Sandy to New York, Mom. Surely that will cost several hundred dollars, won't it? We should have the double bed for him if he gets here, and the house will be fixed up so you can be assured I'll take care of him. He can go to the beach with us, and we'll show him a good time. Though after New York, all he'll need is a rest. Am anxious to hear more about it.

Milly sent us a clipping, which I'll forward you, I look like the original doting idiot! And Ray looks like he stepped on a tack.

There are 21 kids in this "V" shaped quarter of the village—wow! The apartment is surprisingly cool because of the two stories, and there's a good breeze through two large windows in the living room back to the kitchen dinette. The floors are all linoleum, and it's hard to keep the old North Carolina sand out, but I mopped them this morning. I think, as you say, I'll have plenty to do when I really start keeping house.

Cooked fried chicken, corn on the cob, boiled potatoes, and rolls (brown-and-serve) last night and Ray was delighted.³⁴

We're having lots of laughs about the trials and tribulations but are really very happy. Ray couldn't be more kind and sweet. I have to watch what I say, or he takes me literally and wants to do something about it, when half the time I'm just b—ing!

Milly writes that Texas spoiled her and she bought an air conditioner. So glad you have one too. Give Liz A. my love when she gets there and tell her to come see us.

Send me the clipping about Cathy Hudson's wedding and Mary E's too. Saw some pictures of our new friend's wedding and ours was immensely nicer. Natch!

We're going to get a dog soon, because I miss Guy. Wish I could get a mother and lil bro as easily!

Much love,
Gig



³⁴ Brown-and-serve rolls were the result of a happy accident by a Florida baker in 1949. Joe Gregor was baking a batch of bread and rolls when the fire alarm went off. The par-baked rolls were shelf-stable and could easily be packaged and baked by the end consumer. See Elaine Levey, "Avon Park's Gift to the World—Brown 'n Serve Rolls," *Highlands News-Sun*, 23 December 2022.

1 August 1955

Monday

Dearest Mom,

Before I get started writing those endless thank yous again, I want to talk to you, because I've been thinking about you all morning. You may not realize it, but (I am beginning to) I have really become a branch off you for the first time in my life. Somehow seeing the familiar old wicker, still cozy and homelike, the dear old piano, falling apart but still clear as a bell in tone, the piano bench crammed with old music of Don's, Scoshi's collar, odd pencils, Rod Eden's [Sandy's] music, a scrap of poem by Uncle Sam to Helen, and all the old lovable music I have played all my life, plus the old oriental rug made me realize the heritage I have that you have given me. Honestly, Mom, I wonder at it. It seems like my past is sitting in the same room with my present and future and I have a lot to live up to.

There are so many countless things you have taught me that I am using for the first time. Ray says, "Where did you learn that?," and I have to laugh to think I dredged it out of my subconscious learning habits. I just wanted you to know how truly deeply I appreciate everything you and Dad ever did for me. I see now that I need never say goodbye to you for I am you or rather you made me what I am today to put it tritely.

Ray and I have been so completely satisfied with what we seem to have done ourselves. In reality, so much was done for us and the truth is we now have a wonderful base to start from and it seems easy and right.

I didn't know having a home of my own would be like this. I suppose I expected everything new and different. It isn't really. Just a continuation—a branch as I said before—of you and Dad, modified but basically the same and that is very comforting.



3 August 1955

Ray came back at that point (of the previous letter) and wanted to know "why the misty eyes," so I had to stop. I guess he thought I was homesick, because we went out that afternoon and got a dog. Drove to New Bern, 19 miles away, to look for a \$5 dog, looked up a kennel and finally located it excitedly. The man said, "If you'll tell me how much you want to pay, I'll see what I can do." Ray gulped and upped it to \$15, whereupon the man

laughed very derisively and we said thanks and walked out. Next stop was the city hall, where a lazy policeman told us how to get to the city dump, where we could look up the dogcatcher. Found it and talked to a garbage man, who told us they had killed 30 dogs that morning. We started to walk away, and he called us back saying he thought there were 3 pups from a litter of 19 in the weeds someplace. After searching, we found two and they were still nursing but six weeks old. We chose a brown and white one, which was covered with filth, fleas, etc. Brought her home and after a bath she looked like a decent little thing and even wagged her tail once she stopped shaking. We couldn't stop watching her.

Yesterday, we took her to the vet to clear up some spots and get rid of some bad worms. He gave her a shot (\$3), but this morning she was much worse and is really weak. There's much more we have to do for her, but I reckon we will, softies that we are! We'll still "take" a boxer of Guy's with pleasure when and if.

Today, I got a colored girl to come iron the curtains after I starched them, and there was just enough to fit all the windows except the kitchen and kitchen door—eight even for four windows—and they look darling. But I was a wreck after finding work for the girl to do! Gosh, I never realized the work there is in cooking and housekeeping! My feet burn after the day is over.

Yesterday, for example, I stood two hours in the commissary line to get out then came home and baked candied apples and Swiss steak while the temperature was in the 90s—whew!

Your letter came today, and it was good to see it only took three days to get here. I'm glad you had a nice weekend in Houston. How I wish I'd been along on that shopping trip. We had such fun last time.

I will call you on 10 August as you say. I can imagine the plans are indefinite now, naturally. I feel he's so young for that long trip! Things happen that throw an adult (e.g., myself) much less a teenager. But I'm sure you know best about that.

We had some nice callers tonight. That makes five young couples we know, plus two dogs, and umpteen kids, plus neighbors on both sides. The piano lured one couple out and the dog lured the other. The piano is the hit of the neighborhood. All kids want to "play" it and then five or six troop in and pound.

That Grandmother! Just can't sit still, can she? Where's Melba now?

Not to change the subject, but speaking of travel, you have an invite

to spend Christmas with us. It would be fine with Don so close too. . . . Anyway, it's a thought and not but five months away.

I have put the pictures from Dallas on one wall and four prints with black frames on the dinette wall plus one by Gladys Thompson by the door and the painting we bought in North Carolina hanging unframed on the wall. The copper tray and Egyptian vases are all on top of the piano with that wooden bowl from Melba's. The oriental rug is in the living room and the small green one under the card table, which we are eating on. We have ordered a table and four chairs too. Finances are better now that the first of the month is here.

I wrote Mary Jane that I couldn't be in the wedding. I am jotting down things as I think of them. We really look very settled tonight considering we only moved in last Friday.

I keep thinking how glad I am that housekeeping is lighter for you now. How little I realized the load you have carried for so many years!

Tell Sandy that we bought him a belt in the mountains, which I will send soon. We haven't named the pup yet but are open for suggestions. What did the old man do in summer school? Good, I hope.

Ray has jealous eyes because I've written so long, so goodbye.

I love you both, and Ray says he does too.

XXXs

Gig

P.S. Thanks for the plug about Ray's airplane. Atta girl!



1 September 1955

Wednesday

Hi Mom,

Believe it or not, you were the reason I got out of bed this morning. I got to thinking about the fact that you got up cheerfully all the time to go to work, had housekeeping to do when you came home, and then it seemed that I didn't do so much at all, so the least I could do was fix breakfast for Ray. Course, I do that every day anyway, but I still have trouble getting out of bed. Thinking of you spurred me out and my own conscience probably too.

Got the Austin newspaper this afternoon and it made me mad. All those two-faced doctors were working for that hospital because they can

take their private rich patients there, while at Brackenridge Hospital they have to do the outside stuff, like training interns, caring for staff, patients, etc. in order to be on the staff. Naturally, they like St. David's better. They don't begin to have the complex problems that Brackenridge has, and they get paid for doing less. I'll bet it doesn't help their ethical consciences to neglect the poor for the rich though! Oh well, the public is always the fool in a case like that, and they'll pay for it double for expensive personal care and through support of the poor, which has to be given regardless somehow. Personally, I think there was no need for that hospital. It just takes the doctors to another place when they could save time by staying at Brackenridge Hospital and taking care of both—private and staff. If you see anyone from Brackenridge Hospital, tell them I know it will be the best by far when it's completed.³⁵

But enough, I had to let my steam off there. Got through the hurricane with flying colors. Again, the eye went right over us at about 0530 Monday morning after you called. We taped the windows, rolled up rugs, and went to bed. Then woke up about 0530 to look at the storm—really fierce (125 mile per hour storm) then and discovered we were standing in water. Ray immediately started mopping and wringing out towels that were across the windows. The green rug Gram gave you—still not cut right yet—was soaked, and we rolled it up. Decided to check downstairs then and found the funnels Ray had made with two rags at the windows on one side had worked and filled the ice bucket and a pan to the brim. The water leaked through the baseboard so, after mopping, we put the aqua rugs down to soak up the rest. The closet was full from the next-door neighbor's house and we're planning to air it tonight. Lights went out at 0200, ice box too, so we ate a hurried breakfast opening and closing the door as little as possible. By that night, the house was shining again, everything in place, and curtains up too. We had a good dinner and played cards with friends. Nice to be cozy and dry inside though it was still drizzling out.³⁶

³⁵ Brackenridge Hospital, built in 1884, was the first hospital in Texas that offered medical care to the public regardless of ability to pay. St. David's Medical Center opened in 1955 on the northeast corner of the University of Texas campus. See "Brackenridge Hospital," Texas State Historical Association, 3 July 2022.

³⁶ Hurricane Diane was one of three major storms to hit North Carolina during the 1955 season. The storm killed between 180 and 200 people and caused about \$1 billion (1955 USD) in damage. "Hurricane Diane, August 15-19, 1955," National Weather Service, accessed 12 September 2024.

Yesterday, we discovered on untaping the door that the screen door had blown off. Everyone was airing stuff like mad, but we had little to do because Ray did such a good job mopping, funneling, taping, moving, etc. Some of the other wives did it all themselves. He is so smart about doing things with his hands. We also had moved the furniture all around in order to free the heater, which was hidden behind the piano. He did all the moving, but I had to get things looking nice, of course. We brought the heavy overstuffed chair down to balance the room. It's on one side in the corner, plus the ottoman, with the big green wicker chair on the other side of the piano on the inside wall and the couch across from them. We put the new end table in front of the window with a lamp on it and a small green chair on the other side. Whew! I feel like I just moved it all again.

The pictures and ash trays all arrived last week. Thanks so much, Mom. I was delighted with the portrait of me and picture of the invitation in front. Everyone thinks it's lovely! Damn, dropped my pen. Ray glued the cigarette box together. It is really quite nice. How come she did that for us, huh? Gee, I thought the dish towels were enough. I use them every day.

Ray made me wash and iron the curtains last week, though I insisted I wanted to wait until winter came, and I was right for I no sooner hung them than the storm came. Men! [Ray writes, P.S. They were filthy! P.P.S. They were not (says Gig) P.P.P.S. Procrastination!]

Cooking is coming along okay. Am great on fried chicken, ham, and beef stew. It lacks a little variety, but what the heck.

The new pup is adorable, but Ray is having trouble getting her to come to him. He is trying to train her on a string, and it really is too funny to watch.

The room sounds darling, Mom. You sound like you've decorated it much as you would if I'd been there to give my superior help. Really, the pictures of the two grandmothers, the new curtains, paint, and lamps, plus the lovely flower picture must look grand together. Sounds dainty and sweet for a guest room. Do offer to put up relatives of Mary Jane's who come for her wedding if you can. I think it would be nice since they took care of Peg Healy.

Am glad you had such a nice birthday, but am mad that you called me before I could call you. However, I understand about the party and all. I could kiss the Horners for making it an occasion to celebrate.

Good for Ed, but lambie pie, why didn't you sign my name too?

That's the family secret, you know. When one can't or doesn't think to get something, the others fill in for them. That way we all get credit, and I used to do it for you. (Ahem!) Also, thanks for notes on Greenwood and Tom S. Very interesting. Gosh, I wonder if Greenwood will ever marry.

I suppose you'll be going to Houston to see the new baby soon. Give Nan my love. I bet they name her Pris.

What a blow that social security must have been.³⁷ Do hope you have enough to cover it. I never could tell whether you were dead broke or filthy rich. We'd be happy to help (joke, son!) morally, that is. Ray wants to add a note, so like an old windbag, I'll close.

XXXs

Ray here,
After all this from Gigi, I doubt there is anything left to say. I do want to thank you again for being the sweetest mom-in-law a guy could ever have.

Gig here,
My verbose husband! I never get a word in edgewise.

³⁷ Gig may be referencing 1954 and 1955 amendments to Social Security, which likely impacted her mother's monthly subsidy. See *Old-Age Insurance Benefits, 1955* (Washington, DC: Social Security Administration, 1956).

APPENDIX B

Major Ray B. Stice Chronological Record of Duty Assignments and Family Timeline

19 June 1946– 21 June 1948:	Ray B. Stice enlists as an active-duty U.S. Marine, radar repair.
30 June 1948:	Stice is appointed a midshipman in the United States Navy, Annapolis, MD.
2 February 1951:	Stice is discharged from the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD.
26 March 1952– 26 June 1953:	Stice serves as an active-duty Marine, radar repair, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA.
April 1951:	Stice attends aeronautical engineering and commercial pilot courses at University of Illinois, Urbana.
May 1951:	Stice serves as a student pilot.
July 1951:	Stice earns a temporary student pilot certificate.
May 1952:	Stice receives an operator permit for trucks up to five tons.
June 1952:	PFC Ray Stice receives clearance for top secret matter; temporary additional duty orders to the University of Illinois, Urbana, for three weeks in connection with Marine Corps Equipment Board matters. ¹
October 1952:	Cpl Ray Stice, radar repair, receives temporary additional

¹ The Marine Corps Equipment Board was established in 1933 at Quantico, VA, to test and develop materials for landing operations and expeditionary service.

Figure 59. Ray Stice at Wright Field in Dayton OH, ca. 1951



Source: Stice Family Collection.

- duty orders to Harrisonburg, VA, for long-range tests of radar equipment.
- January 1953: Stice receives temporary additional duty orders to Lakehurst, NJ, in connection with Marine Corps Development Center matters.
- 26 March–
26 June 1953: After acceptance of commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Stice is assigned to duty in excess of 90 days and reports to the commandant of Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, VA. Stice receives orders for special training program in rifle marksmanship and range management.

Figure 60. The Basic School firing range, Quantico, VA, ca. 1950



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo by Charles Wolf.

- July 1953: Stice reports to the rifle range detachment at Marine Corps Base Quantico.²
- 13 September 1953–
13 February 1954: Stice is assigned to duty under instruction (DUIN) with the 3d Recruit Training Battalion at The Basic School for a period of approximately 20 weeks.
- 14 February 1954–
15 March 1954: Stice serves as the squadron officer to assist training at the Aviation Engineering Squadron 12 (AES-12), Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Quantico, VA.
- 22 March–
9 December 1954: Stice changes duty station to the Marine Aviation Detachment at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola, FL, to serve as a student naval aviator for approximately 18 months.
- May 1954: Stice completes swimming tests at Naval Air Basic Training Command (NABTC), NAS Pensacola.

² Though this contradicts Stice's duty record, the Stice Family Collection holds a certificate for honorable discharge on 26 June 1953 for Stice to accept immediate appointment as a second lieutenant at The Basic School at Quantico on 27 June.

December 1954:	Stice is promoted to second lieutenant.
3 January– 6 July 1955:	Stice changes duty station to Naval Air Advanced Training Command (NAATC) at NAS Corpus Christi, TX.
May 1955:	Cherry Point, NC, Group 20, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic. ³
18 June 1955:	Ray Stice marries Elizabeth “Gig” Kirkpatrick in Austin, TX.
6 July 1955:	1stLt Ray B. Stice is designated a naval aviator.
July 1955:	Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Kingsville, TX completed Jet Training. ⁴
23 July– 3 August 1955:	Stice serves as the squadron officer at Headquarters and Maintenance Squadron 32 (H&MS-32), Marine Aircraft Group 32 (MAG-32), 2d Marine Aircraft Wing (2d MAW), at MCAS Cherry Point, NC.
4 August 1955– 12 November 1957:	Stice reports to Marine Fighter Squadron 312 (VMF-312), MAG-32, 2d MAW, MCAS Cherry Point.
7–13 May 1956:	Stice reports for temporary additional duty in flying status for operational or training flights (DIFOT) at NAS Chincoteague, VA, in connection with <i>Wide Wide World</i> television coverage. ⁵
7 July 1956:	Karen Stice is born in Havelock, NC.
30 August 1956:	Stice receives orders to Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma City, for approximately seven days to participate in the Oklahoma City National Aircraft Show at Will Rogers Field on 1–3 September.
14 May 1957:	Stice reports to VMF-235, NAS Patuxent River, MD, in temporary active duty status for approximately five

³ The duty record is unclear here; however, Stice typed this on his personal record: “August 1955 to November 1957, Marine Fighter Squadron 312, Cherry Pt., N.C. Personnel Officer, 200-man squadron.”

⁴ The duty record is unclear here; however, the Stice Family Collection holds a letter from C. D. Brown authorizing Stice’s change of station for Corpus Christi.

⁵ *Wide Wide World* was a 90-minute documentary series hosted by Dave Garroway that ran from 1955 to 1958. “Power for Peace,” *Wide Wide World*, directed by Dick Schneider, hosted by Dave Garroway, aired on 13 May 1956, on NBC. As part of Armed Forces Week, this episode was intended to offer a documentary view of how American Services support peace. It featured a simulate atomic bomb detonation, and demonstrations of how the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard protect national security.

Figure 61. Ray Stice (left) at the Cherry Point, NC, airfield, ca. 1956



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

	days in connection with an Armed Forces Day event. ⁶
24 October 1957:	Robin Stice is born in Havelock, NC.
8 November 1957:	The Stice family moves to Jacksonville, NC.
25 November 1957– 9 January 1958:	Stice is on orders to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, NC, for duty in DIFOT status for 30 days with Headquarters and Service (H&S) Company, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, 2d Marine Division.
10 January– 11 August 1958:	Stice reports to H&S Company as the air liaison officer.
11 February 1958:	Stice reports to the commanding general, Landing Force Training Command, Naval Base Little Creek, Norfolk,

⁶ Armed Forces Day is celebrated annually on the third Saturday of May; Armed Forces Week is celebrated on between the second Saturday of May and ends on the third Sunday of May. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson announced the creation of Armed Forces Day on 31 August 1949 to replace separate Army, Navy, and Air Force Days. The new single-day celebration resulted from the unification of the Armed Services under one department—the Department of Defense.

Figure 62. Ray Stice at Naval Auxiliary Air Station Barin Field, AL, 1957



Source: Stice Family Collection.

- VA, for two weeks in the Air Support Course for Tactical Air Control Parties.
- 12 August– Stice transfers to the H&S Company in 1st Battalion
- 5 November 1958: for one month as the air liaison and then as the forward air controller for two months.
- 16 December 1958– Stice transfers to the West Coast with H&MS-15,

23 September 1959: MAG-15, 3d MAW in Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, CA.

24 September 1959–
10 November 1961: Stice serves as a squadron pilot with VMF (All-Weather)-314, MAG-15, 3dMAW, at MCAS El Toro.

9 October 1959: Kirk Stice is born in Santa Ana, CA.

1960: Stice serves one year in Atsugi, Japan.⁷

1 February–
18 August 1962: Stice is listed as part of Headquarters Battalion, Headquarters Marine Corps, in order to transfer to the University of Omaha, NE, as part of their college degree program.

18 September 1962–
23 July 1965: The Stice family moves to Beeville, TX, while Stice serves as a flight instructor with the Marine Aviation Detachment, NAATC, NAS Corpus Christi.

16 November 1964: Kathy Stice is born in Beeville, TX.

11 August 1965–
28 January 1966: Stice is assigned to DUINs at the Amphibious Warfare School, Marine Corps Education Command, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, VA.⁸

29 January–
11 March 1966: Stice remains in DUINs status with Company A, Headquarters Battalion, Marine Corps Schools, in a six-week course on nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons.

12 March–
27 August 1966: Stice serves as the commanding officer of H&S Company at Officer Candidates School, Quantico.

September 1966: The Stice family moves to Austin, TX

15 October 1966–
3 November 1967: Stice deploys with Marine Air Base Squadron 13 (MABS-13), MAG-13, 1st MAW, serving as the executive officer at the base in Chu Lai, Vietnam.

9 December 1967–
25 September 1968: Stice returns from deployment and serves as the executive officer and squadron pilot with VMF(AW)-333, MAG-32, MCAS Parris Island, Beaufort, SC. The family relocates to Beaufort on 9 December.

⁷ Stice's year in Japan remains a mystery. The Stice Family Collection holds many receipts from his tour there and a military magazine dated 10 April 1961 shows VMF-314 with Capt Stice written on it. According to family records, he was there from November 1960 to November 1961 but it does not appear in his official records. According to the MAG-11 Lineage and Honors, MAG-11 relocated in September 1953 to Atsugi and reassigned to 1st MAW, where they remained until being redeployed in July 1965 to Da Nang, Vietnam.

⁸ The Amphibious Warfare School was originally established as the Company Grade Officers Course in 1921, renamed the Amphibious Warfare School Junior Course in the 1930s, and finally renamed Amphibious Warfare School in 1964. In the early 2000s, it was combined with another course and became the Expeditionary Warfare School.

Figure 63. Maj Ray Stice and Maj Phillip Jacobs, Chu Lai air base, 1967



Source: official U.S. Marine Corps photo #70114.

26 September 1968–
31 March 1970:
1970:

Stice serves as the S4 logistics officer for H&MS-31, MAG-31, 2d MAW, MCAS Parris Island, Beaufort, SC. Stice retires from active duty as a major. Stice family moves to Austin, Texas

APPENDIX C

Stice Family Military History

COLONEL KENNETH S. STICE

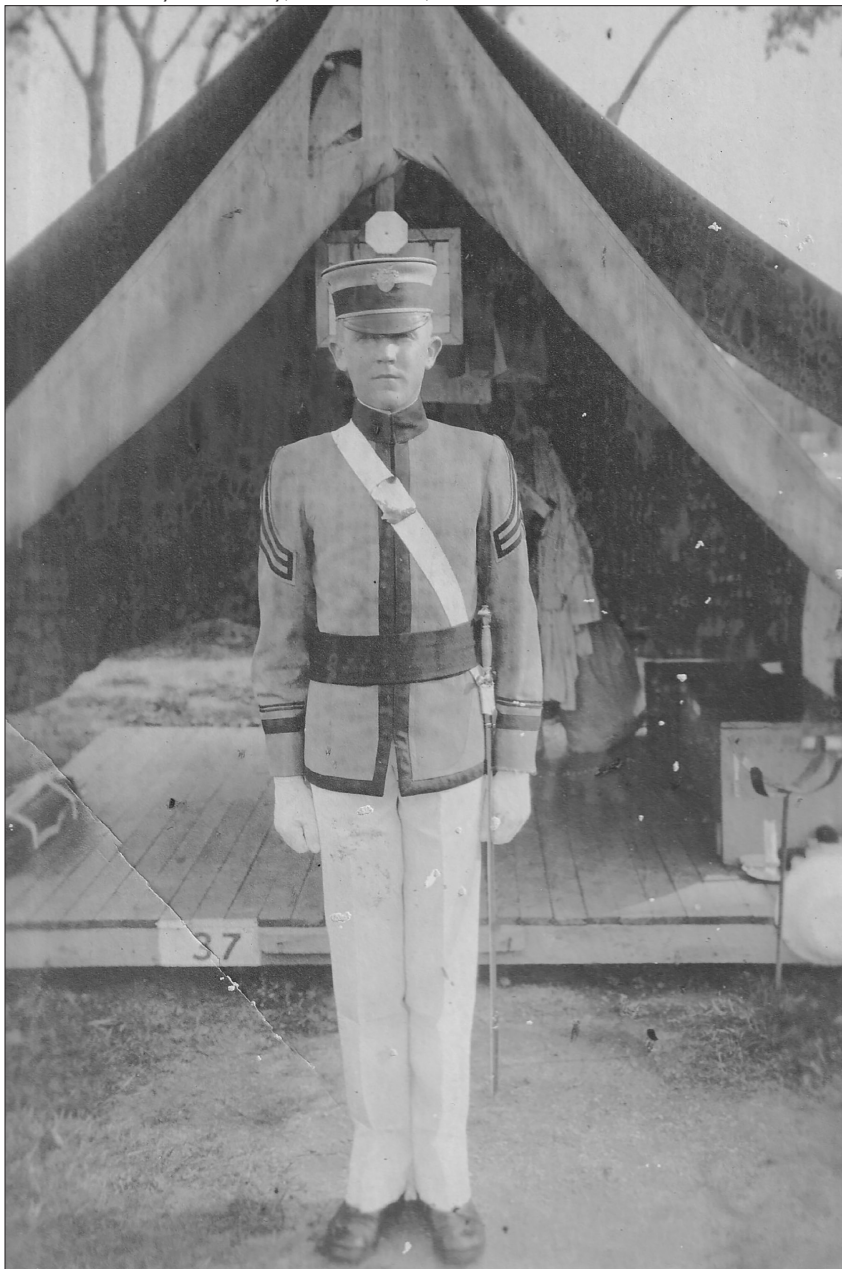
Ray Stice's father, Colonel Kenneth S. Stice retired in November 1946 from the U.S. Army after serving honorably for 30 years, just as his son was beginning his military career the same year. Ray Stice's fierce patriotism ignited when he was in high school, when his own father served on the European front during World War II (WWII). Ray Stice grew up hearing stories about his father serving in two different wars.

Colonel Stice was born on 31 October 1894 in Waverly, Illinois. In 1915, straight out of high school, he signed up with the Illinois Army National Guard, when volunteers were called on to put down a skirmish on the Mexican border. Kenneth was exceptionally good on horseback, and at the young age of 21, he volunteered and took his own mount to join the cavalry troop fight on the Texas/Mexico border after Pancho Villa attacked the United States.¹

In 1918, Kenneth Stice graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at

¹ On 9 March 1916, Mexican rebel Francisco "Pancho" Villa led a raid against the small border town of Columbus, NM. In retaliation, the federal government activated the National Guard, including members of the Illinois National Guard, and sent U.S. Army Gen John J. Pershing out to capture Villa. The mission ended when the United States entered World War I and Pershing was recalled to other duties. See Julie Irene Prieto, *The Mexican Expedition, 1916–1917, The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War I* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 2016).

Figure 64. Cadet Kenneth Seymour Stice in June 1916 at the United States Military Academy, West Point, NY



Source: Stice Family Collection.

West Point with the war emergency class (graduating two years early) and immediately served in World War I (WWI) with the coast artillery in the battlefields of France and Italy.²

Kenneth was sent to England in March 1942, and he was among the first American officers to serve in WWII. He was named commanding officer of the electronics training group, which devised the plans for the communications for the D-Day invasion of the continent. In 1944, Kenneth was the director of Radio Counter Measures Division, European theater of operations, and was responsible for the founding and direction of a program for control of constant message volume trends, on a scale unprecedented in size or scope of operations in any previous military undertaking. The deception unit planned the coordination of communications of American forces for the Normandy invasion. Its most secret work included the establishment of decoy stations in the European battlefields through false messages and feigning movements of the actual deployment for the D-Day rush across the English Channel. With the cooperation of the English, the deception continued throughout the war. By jamming radio stations and using false codes, the Allies deceived the Germans as to the actual location of the units. German reports have been found in France that confirmed the Nazi miscalculation of Allied defenses and their bombing of the decoy stations.³ For meritorious services in connection with military operations, Colonel Kenneth Stice was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.⁴

The similarities between father and son are noteworthy; both men had a strong desire to join the military straight out of high school, and after two years of enlisted status, applied and were accepted to military academies—Kenneth to West Point and Ray to the Naval Academy. Both men advanced through their respective ranks, married and had children, furthered their education, and became officers. Both father and son honorably served their country in multiple wars, and we are honored to acknowledge some of their legacy through these letters.

² See Brandon O'Connor, "The Great War's Effect on West Point Still Permeates Today," Army.mil, 8 November 2018.

³ See George Raynor Thompson and Dixie R. Harris, *The Technical Services—The Signal Corps: The Outcome (Mid-1943 through 1945)*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1991).

⁴ General Order 49, 10 April 1954, HQ Com Z, ETOUSA.

Figure 65. Ray Stice (front row, middle) with VMFA-333, ca. 1968



Source: Stice Family Collection.

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

Major General Jason Q. Bohm was commissioned a second lieutenant in May 1990 after graduating from the NROTC program at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

Major General Bohm had the honor of commanding at many levels. He served as a rifle platoon and 81mm mortar platoon commander with the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines; 5th Platoon commander with the Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (FAST) Company; commanding officer, Company G, 2d Battalion, 1st Marines; commanding officer, Recruiting Station, Charleston, WV; commanding officer, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines; commanding officer, 5th Marine Regiment; commanding officer, Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response-Central Command; commanding general, Marine Corps Training Command; and commanding general, Marine Corps Recruiting Command.

Major General Bohm's staff assignments include: executive officer, FAST Company; operations officer, 3d Battalion, 1st Marines; assistant division training officer, 1st Marine Division; G-3 current operations officer, 1st Marine Division; and ground combat operations Officer, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward).

Within the supporting establishment, Major General Bohm served as the director of the Marine Corps Legislative Liaison Office, United States House of Representatives; and director, Expeditionary Warfare School, Marine Corps University.

Major General Bohm's Joint and Coalition assignments include: planner, Joint Task Force Skilled Anvil; strategic planner, assistant executive assistant to the director; director, Strategic Initiatives Group for the Strategic Plans and Policy (J-5) of the Joint Staff; and chief of staff, Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO) in Oeiras, Portugal.

Major General Bohm participated in the following contingencies and named operations: Restore Hope, Uphold Democracy, Fairwinds, Sea Signal, Unified Assistance, Iraqi Freedom, Inherent Resolve, an antiterrorism mission to Bahrain, and a deployment in support of U.S. Support Group Haiti.

Major General Bohm is a graduate of The Basic School, the Infantry Officer Course, U.S. Army Infantry Officer Advanced Course, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and the National War College.

Major General Bohm's personal decorations include: Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit (2), Bronze Star with combat distinguishing device (2), Joint Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (2), Joint Service Commendation Medal, Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medal (2), Army Commendation Medal, Joint Service Achievement Medal, Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and Combat Action Ribbon (2).