

Strathman - Continued from Page 2

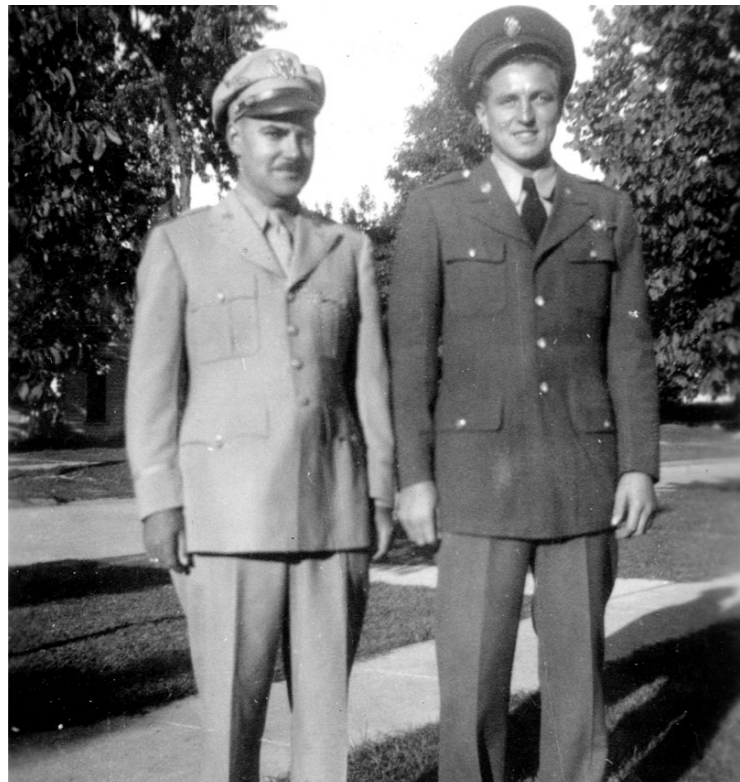
These missions are the longest, over-water combat flights (more than 2,000 miles round trip) yet attempted in World War II, and return trips in addition to battle damage when enemy aircraft and anti-aircraft fire are encountered, are further impeded by diminishing fuel supplies, and the tricky Aleutian weather which can turn home landing bases into stormbound, fog-lashed traps while the mission is away.

Sgt. Strathman has served with the Eleventh Army Air Force in the Aleutians three months and has participated in three combat missions. He has received awards including the Asiatic-Pacific Ribbon.

Joining the Army Air Forces at Camp Dodge, Iowa, on February 28, 1943, he graduated from Army Air Forces schools including the radio school at Sioux Falls, So. Dakota, and Gunner School at Kingman, Arizona. In civilian life he was employed with the Douglas Aircraft Corporation, Long Beach, California.



Joyce Strathman with her brother Gene in Manning



Dr. Merlin Wyatt, Gene Strathman

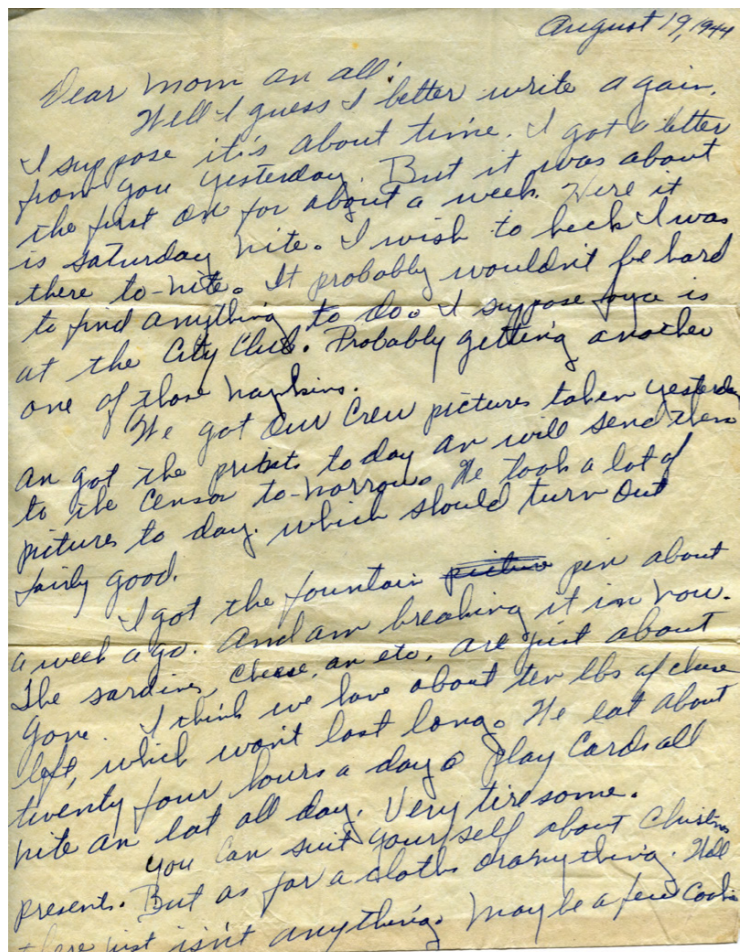
Now we'll show you some of the most wonderful documents and letters that fortunately survived time, some of which will be used in Gene's section of the Manning Veterans' book.

These are more examples of what we are looking for to preserve in the Manning historical database and use in the Veterans' book.

If you have letters, documents and similar types of memorabilia for any Manning connected Veterans, please get them to Dave Kusel so he can scan them.



Letter from Gene Strathman to his mother, Clara.



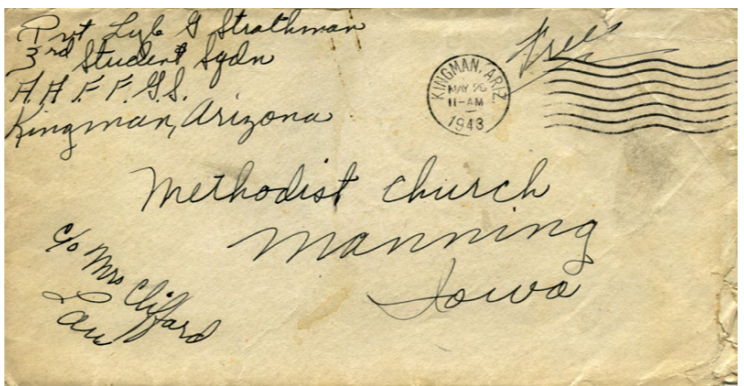
Besides having the information from personal letters that Veterans wrote, it is also very important to get digital scans of the actual hand-writing. So many of these letters were thrown away years ago. While most of the letters won't have very many details about the Veteran's service, it will give the flavor of the era and also some time frames.

August 19, 1944 Dear mom an all: (page 1)

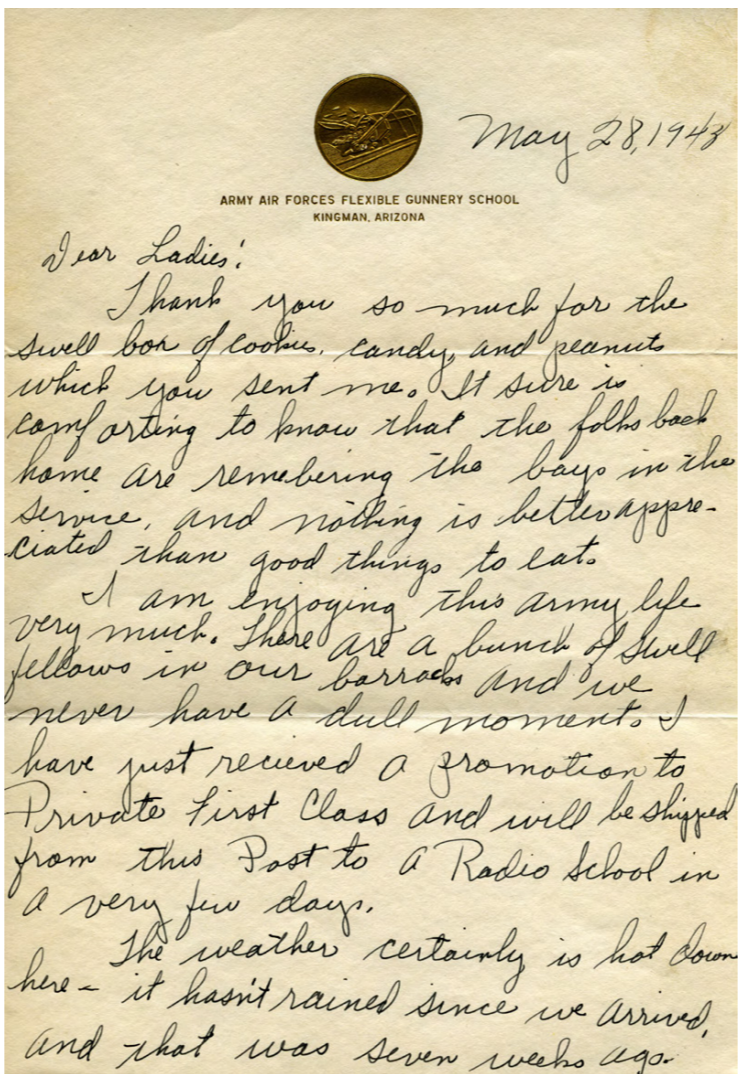
Well I guess I better write again. I suppose it's about time. I got a letter from you yesterday. But it was about the first one for about a week. Here it is Saturday nite. I wish to heck I was there to-nite. It probably wouldn't be hard to find anything to do. I suppose Joyce is at the city club. Probably getting another one of those napkins.

We got our crew pictures taken yesterday an got the packets today an will send them to the Censor tomorrow. We took a lot of pictures today which should turn out fairly good.

I got the fountain pen about a week ago. And am breaking it in now. The sardines, cheese, an etc. are just about gone. I think we have about ten lbs. of cheese left, which last long. We eat about twenty four hours a day and play cards all nite an eat all day. Very tiresome. You can suit yourself about Christmas presents. But as far as clothes are my thing. Well there just isn't anything. Maybe a few cookies...



Letter from Gene Strathman to the Methodist Church.



May 28, 1943 Army Air Forces Flexible Gunnery School - Kingman, Arizona (page 1)

Dear Ladies: Thank you so much for the swell box of cookies, candy and peanuts which you sent me. It sure is comforting to know that the folks back home are remembering the boys in the service, and nothing is better appreciated than good things to eat.

I am enjoying this Army life very much. There are a bunch of swell fellows in our barracks and we never have a dull moment. I have just received a promotion to Private First Class and will be shipped from this Post to a Radio school in a very few days.

The weather certainly is hot down here - it hasn't rained since we arrived, and that was seven weeks ago...



Post Cemetery Fort Richardson, Anchorage, Alaska - temporary burial site for Gene Strathman and dozens of other US military men.

ONLY SIX MEN CAME BACK

B-24 Burns, Explodes Over Rugged Alaskan Wilderness
By GEORGE L. PETERSON of the Star Journal Editorial Page Staff Fort Richardson, Anchorage, Alaska.

AN HOUR OUT of Anchorage, early Sunday afternoon, September 3, the port inboard motor of a B-24 bound for the Aleutians caught fire. The pilot, Lt. Robert Geatches of Oklahoma City, went into a dive in a futile attempt to put out the blaze. The pilot alerted his crew.

The co-pilot, Lt. Robert Moss of Chicago, asked the navigator, Lt. Richard Chapman of St. Paul, the best way out of the mountains. Chapman suggested flying south. They were then at 9,000 feet. Sitting with Chapman in the nose of the ship was the bombardier, Lt. James Lawrence of Pacific Grove, California.

The fire spread. Geatches gave the order to abandon ship, but the men aft couldn't reach the escape hatches. Then the plane exploded.

Moss had just put on his parachute, and his safety belt was not fastened, so he was thrown about. Geatches appeared dead, and Moss climbed to the opening in the top of the cockpit. He said the plane seemed to drop away from him. He pulled his ripcord and floated safely to earth.

Further back in the plane most of the crew and two passengers - Lt. William J. Grace of Buffalo, New York, photographic supply officer for the Eleventh Air Force, and Sgt. Roy, both of Chicago, Eleventh air force staff photographer, had been dozing. Awakened by the smell of smoke, they donned their parachutes. Sgt. Llewellyn Thiel of Camden, New Jersey, waist gunner, jumped from an escape hatch. The others were caught by the explosion.

THE PLANE RIPPED APART AND SEVERAL OF THE MEN WERE THROWN FREE.

THEY PULLED THEIR RIPCORDS, AND THEIR CHUTES EASED THEM DOWN.

Sgt. Lyle Strathman of Manning, Iowa, was at his post on the flight deck, pounding out SOS messages which apparently never were picked up.

Staff Sgt. Oscar Windham of Butler, Georgia, landed in a tree. He counted seven other parachutes in the air, though only six men in all found their way out. Sgt. R.W. Smith of Lafayette, Indiana, didn't have his chute fastened.

TO HOLD IT IN PLACE HE BRACED HIS ELBOWS BY BITING HIS THUMBS TO THE BONE.

Grace said fire had got to the waist of the ship just before the explosion. He thought the plane had hit a mountain. When he found he was in the air, he thought the plane had bounced from the impact.

When he realized he had been falling a long distance, he pulled his ripcord. Two pieces from the plane cut through his parachute but he came down with only scratches, on the wooded mountain slope.

"I started to yell," Grace told me at the Fort Richardson hospital where he is recovering from 10 days in the wilderness, "and I heard another fellow yelling. He was Sgt. Smith and we soon got together. We headed for a stream below us.

"Then we saw a chute in the trees and decided to investigate. We spread my chute on the ground for a landmark. Thiel and Windham saw it and came to us. The four of us followed that stream until it joined a bigger one. We followed that downstream and three hours later came across Lt. Moss."

The men carried their parachutes and slept under them two nights.

On the fourth day they discovered Staff Sgt. Martin Woogen of Brooklyn, New York, first engineer, across the river. Next day, when he tried to cross the swift stream, he almost drowned. Windham went into the water and saved him.

Woogen was ill. Friday morning Grace and Smith hurried on ahead to get aid. They walked along the river five days. Though Grace and Smith did not know it, the others took up the march Friday afternoon when Woogen felt better.

None of the men noticed his hunger, but feet were beginning to blister in the loose flight boots.

The remaining 30 matches had been divided when the party split up. At night the men took turns sleeping and keeping a fire. Clothing was burned from rolling in embers.

"On Tuesday night we saw a bay," Grace said. "We thought we were near help. Wednesday morning from a ridge we saw buildings and hurried on. The first place we got to was the Iliamna radio station. The operator sent a message to Fort Richardson and then we went to the lake nearby where Babe Allsworth, an old time bush pilot, had some seaplanes. He set off with a couple of Alaskans to hunt for the others."

The other group had seen one of Allsworth's planes earlier that day.

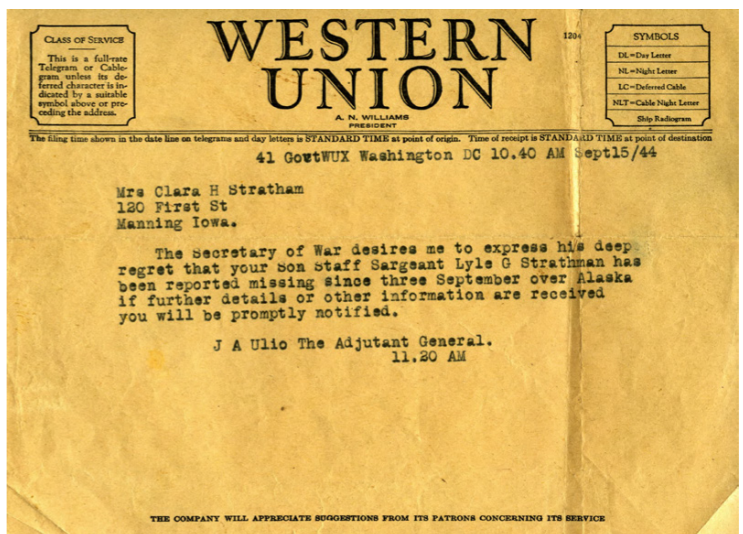
When Allsworth discovered them, he flew within a hundred feet and yelled, "Lake!" Then he headed for the water, four miles away. The men on the ground yelled back, "Food!" They went toward the lake.

A mile from it, they met one of the Alaskans, carrying hard-tack, chocolate bars and canned orange juice. They all tried some, but were more interested in cigarettes, which they smoked chain fashion. At the lake, they were taken aboard Allsworth's plane and flown to Iliamna.

They were a grateful bunch of men, but far from hilarious. They talked often of the men who didn't come back. "Chapman was a darn good pilot," Moss said. "He had reported just before the explosion that he and Lawrence had their chutes on, but I didn't see if they got clear."

Chapman, an orphan, had been raised by an aunt in St. Paul, Mrs. A.P. Roberts.

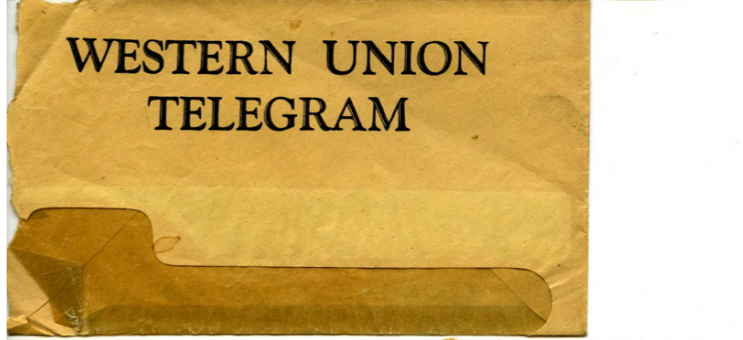
The crew, which had made several bombing missions over the Kuriles, was organized last November, coming to Alaska on April 15. The day before they left the states, Sgt. Strathman had joined them. Besides Strathman the missing are Sgt. John Eubanks of Kennett, Missouri, engineer gunner, Sgt. Both, Lt. Chapman, Lt. Gaetches, and Lt. Lawrence.



September 15, 1944 Mrs. Clara H. Stratham (sic) 120 First Street Manning, Iowa.

The Secretary of War desires me to express his deep regret that your son Staff Sergeant Lyle G. Strathman has been reported missing since three September over Alaska if further details or other information are received you will be promptly notified.

J.A. Ulio The Adjutant General



September 29, 1944 Mrs. Clara H. Strathman 120 First Street Manning, Iowa.

The Secretary of the War asks that I assure you of his deep regret in the loss of your Son Staff Sergeant Lyle G. Strathman who was previously reported missing report received in the War Department established the fact that your Son's death occurred three September in the American Area letter follows.

J.A. Ulio The Adjutant General