

June 6, 1945

Dear Folks,

Your efforts to help identify the little bird, including the admirable sketches of the trogon, now obviously not even distant relations, are most appreciated. Though I'm a little embarrassed you sent my completely unscientific description to the American Museum, since they will make me appear as the roughest of amateurs. It may very probably take what is left of the specimen to identify the species if not the family. A new family, ^{by the way,} is of course always of more interest than just a new species, and knowing that there are many families strange to me on the various islands out here is tantalizing indeed. Hawaii added several, and though two were represented by introduced species, one ^{other} that of the Hawaiian Honey Creeper, I was especially pleased to meet (through three species), it being one of the most remarkable and striking bird families in the world. Guam added one (possibly two) more, so you can see I haven't done very well, even though about as well as could be expected. The New Guinea region, with its cassowaries, megapodes (curious birds

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Garnate
attached;
book read

that leave their eggs in mounds of sand, or
decaying leaves, etc., and, like reptiles, forget
about them, the young being completely in-
dependent upon the hatching of the eggs);
hornbills; birds of paradise; parrots and lorises
and many other less well known families,
would probably be best for my purposes,
though the Philippines wouldn't be bad!
Checking the records I find that Florida
in two years plus produced two seven
new families for me (skimmers; cranes;
stilts; storks - represented by the wood ibis,
not a true ibis; anhingas; oyster-catchers
and man-o-war birds), and California in
six months three or four (wren-tit;
barn owl; albatrosses and true petrel -
the storm petrel, a representative of which
I had previously seen sometimes being
considered a sub-family of petrels,
sometimes a separate family). And so
go the ambitions and experiences of a
still budding ornithologist!

Your past guesses about my activities
have caused me considerable amusement.
The commissioning ^{anniversary} party was of course
nothing to do with the ship's date of com-
mission, being given by the ship to the air
group, so you still have plenty of choices
as to which flat-top is ours. Remember
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that there may even be some which you have never heard of. Though with jabs around, this seems doubtful. Just what the papers at home are saying or not saying these days I just don't know. I know they mention ship landings but I don't think they mention commissionings, which of course occur many months later in the case of larger ships. It will be interesting to read newspapers again, especially for miscellaneous ^{news}. We get the main dispatches and much restricted and confidential matter too, and most of us read Time and even other magazines, though the latter are always months old.

It must have been fine to have Ham and Edie and their brats longer than originally expected. And Nance has been up even more recently! I hope she does get another week, for Squam, and when I'm there. People on leave, I understand, got a gallon of gas per day recently, and what with V-E in the bag I don't see this being reduced. That should mean at least 30 gallons for me, which should help along any Squam plans. Though it may be tough on my sea legs, I'm gunning for more than just Morgan or Perival once one of them has taken the birds out. Time allotments and said legs will be all to keep me back.

Jack's composition on, more exactly, the extracts from same both amazed and amused me. You might tell him that we don't have to

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get dressed in the dark. Though we may occasionally have to scramble up on decks and into our planes in predawn darkness. And for the sake of exactness, if he's interested in some, the "voice" (actually that of the assistant air officer) prior to calling, "Start engines", calls, "Stand clear of propellers," rather than "Stand clear of engine mechanics," but I must say it's a small point indeed. While on this subject I'd like to give a lot of credit to the plane captains, the "mechs", the radio men and the various members of the flight deck crew, all of whom work under very hazardous conditions when the planes' engines are going and especially when the latter are being "revved" up. The danger of being blown by the blast of one "prop" into another is, of course, what I mean, and when working at top speed the "chock" men, taxi directors, etc., can afford to be only so cautious.

Last time while describing the routine of a typical flight I mentioned something about the more exciting moments without elaborating further. I might do so now. The first, naturally enough, is during your own take-off when you're wondering if you'll have enough air speed by the time you reach the end of the deck to give you flying speed. Actually you may often be airborne before reaching the very end of the deck, but it's never with very much above stalling speed. Joining up in formation is pretty much routine unless the visibility is very bad, and the same holds true when you are already in

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formation, only in the latter case it takes
pretty thick clouds to make the situation
become really interesting, and clouds can
usually be pretty well avoided.

The approach to and retirement from the
target is always a time of tension because
you have to concentrate on so many things
in quick succession and often with people
shooting at you. It may be a job in itself to
stay in formation on the final approach since
you are all the time picking up speed and
may be on the outside of a turn. After making
sure all the bombs are armed, the guns charged
and the sight working, you might get a chance
to glance out and at least get a glimpse of the
target area if not of the target itself. Then
comes the moment ^{for a split} to drop back a little and
open the bomb bays all the time looking
out for a better view of the target. In no
time you have pushed over and are opening
the diving flaps (unless it is a glide bomb-
ing attack). Now comes the toughest and
obviously most critical moment of all when
sinking the plane and trimming it up so
as to avoid slip or skid you try and get
things set for a smooth release at the
proper altitude before you have to pull
out. Seconds are really split and precious
along in here, but since they're just as
precious to the opposition, the thing to do
is to get in and out as quickly as possible

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with a fair degree of bombing accuracy.

After pulling out, at the same time closing the dive flaps and then the bomb bays, you may get a bit of a breather. It may be advisable to offer anyone who might be shooting at you an meagre target as possible by jinking, but such a danger zone is usually soon passed and you're going straight again. The plane will go only so fast so there isn't much else you can do before reaching the rendezvous point, though there may be strafing targets along the way. If so, this is where the fun begins, but it never lasts long. There would be further excitement all along the line if there were heavy fighter opposition, but it would have to be something to be more than our fighters could handle.

As I said before, there's never any trouble finding the carrier upon returning, the only people having any worries being those with badly damaged planes. These are always accompanied even when separated from the formation, and if they have to make a landing in the water they are circled until picked up by a seaplane or a ship. Landing aboard is still something of an event because it is always a little tricky. Without a landing signal officer it would be downright foolhardy.

My ^{own} most exciting moments to date are those experienced over the Yamato. We got separated in a cloud, and soon after that I found myself

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half in the clouds half out of them right over the ship at low altitude and all alone (except of course for I ver). Since we were the first outfit to go in, my impression was that I was the first individual to attack (actually it turned out I probably wasn't). The clouds were so thick it was difficult to manoeuvre into an attacking position, but after playing a hide-and-go-seek game with the AA gunners of the various ships below during my approach, I ^{had} reached a spot that seemed about right, and, catching a glimpse of the big boy through a hole, I pushed over into a steep glide. Unfortunately we ran through some more clouds on the way down and broke out a little astern of the Yamato going approximately at right angles to it. Looking back at it now it seems likely that ^{in my excitement} I forgot to allow for the rapid forward speed of the ship, which after all I didn't have sight of most of the time. At any rate all I could do was yank the plane around and try ~~to~~ to aim in ^{the} right direction before pulling out of what was now a shallow diving turn, practically at release altitude. The result was, not surprisingly, at least one great big miss, which showed only too plainly in the form of a splash! Photographs indicated the possibility of one of my two bombs hitting home, but it seems more than likely that the Yamato and I broke even! They were doing their damndest too by the way.

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and it's positively astonishing that most of us came through completely or nearly unscathed, and ^{that} none of our squadron didn't come through.

I've carried this along further than usual because it's been dawdling upon me that I've been getting behind in the news. To bring another subject up to date, I'll mention the latest books read. After lending it to various people, as I've been doing with those few ^{of my} books of ^{more} general interest, I finally got around to the Sea Witch myself, Ma.

It's a splendid tale indeed and concerns an era of special interest to me. The Green Years, Cronin's latest, is the only recent one borrowed from some one else. No more depressing than the average Cronin, it has a swell ending. The Warden I found pleasant enough if less interesting. Perhaps Barbaste Towers amounts to a little more, but it is longish and will have to wait. Moby Dick is the current volume off the shelves (of metal, Ma!), and though Melville has his brilliant moments, he gets sidetracked to a degree exasperating to one who has just read a more modern sea story. H. G. Wells' little history and several thrillers complete the list. I very much look forward to seeing what in the way of both books and magazines have collected at home in my absence. The record collection won't have grown I suppose but it's a good one already, and ^{as} long as I'm rich, there will be occasional additions.

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