

From the Pilot Factory, 1942

Sample Pages

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CHAPTER 1

A GOOD DAY AT THE FACTORY

It is a Thursday night in early May, 1942. I am an aviation cadet in the Army Air Corps' pilot-training program. I am writing to my parents from Garner Field in Uvalde, Texas. It is one of many new primary flying schools established by the air corps. I am poised to make my first solo flight.

Dear Folks,

I really got a workout today—an hour and three minutes of takeoffs, landings, stalls, spins, and one slow roll, which was done by my instructor. It boosted my time to seven hours and eight minutes, and I should solo Saturday, providing everything works out OK.

I did five landings today, and three of them were of the grasshopper variety—three skips and a jump. When we're shooting landings like we did today, we do what is known as racehorse landings. We come in, touch our wheels to the ground, then gun the throttle and take right off again. We have landing flaps on our wings to slow our speed down when we come in to land, and we just use half flaps, unless it's a forced landing in a very small field. As soon as we land, we are supposed to raise the flaps again, because the plane is harder to handle with the flaps down. We were in the midst of a racehorse landing, and were taking off. My instructor told me to raise the flaps, and for some dumb reason, I lowered them to full flaps. Boy, the plane kind of waltzed around, and I really fixed those flaps in a big hurry. I just sat there then and waited for the

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instructor to start bawling me out good and proper, but he just sat there and laughed. He said that he should've told me off but it was so darned funny that he just couldn't.

There was a strong wind blowing this afternoon, and it was almost impossible to make a smooth landing.

We went up to five thousand today for spins and stalls. We were about a thousand feet above the clouds and it sure was beautiful, and the air was just as smooth as silk. My instructor really felt good today, and we played around a little bit. We were following the main highway, and we'd zoom down at cars and wiggle our wings at buses—it sure was a lot of fun.

I'm beginning to get the feel of the plane now, and it's beginning to feel like my old Victory Six [a 1926 Dodge coupe I drove to work].

I guess you've noticed that in all my letters all I talk about is flying. That's not all we do, by any means, but it's all I can think about, and I'm really crazy about it. We have ground school, athletics, drill, inspections, and Saturday nights and Sundays off, but I don't give a hoot about any of them. I just can't keep my mind off flying.

General Marshall, chief of staff of the U.S. Army, will be here tomorrow, so I'd better buckle down and clean this place up.

Love to all,
Billy