

Letter received December 3, 1943 from Lt. John D. Noack, O-672857,  
306th Bomb Gp. 369th Sq. A.P.O. 634, % Postmaster, New York N.Y.

Typed by a sister-in-law who saved  
the letter for me.

November 5, 1943

Dear Mrs. Vaughter,

Your letter of Oct. 30th arrived today, which is quite remarkable as most of the mail takes about three weeks now.

I probably should apologize for not writing you much sooner than this, but maybe I can explain. First I think the most important thing I can say is that I can almost certain that Jim is O.K. I will try to give you as clear a picture, of what happened that day, as I am able.

No doubt you have read that we had the biggest air battle that has ever been. It was my second raid with my own crew, so I can thank God that he permitted me to get safely through it. I was flying on the right wing of the lead ship of the Group--Ralph Peters and Jim were on the left wing, so I had them in constant view. Almost immediately after the attack began, Ralph's ship dropped back in the formation, however, they soon pulled back into position. After flying along for a few minutes, the ship pulled out slightly to the side of the formation and opened the bomb bay doors. They dropped the bombs, closed the doors and rejoined the formation, apparently in good shape. This would indicate that Jim was O.K. because if the pilot had dropped the bombs, he would have been unable to close the doors.

After their bombs were away, they came back into formation and went to the target with us and then started on the homeward journey. At some time after that ( I can't say just how long because things were happening too fast) I noticed Jim's ship pull off to the side and then lost sight of them completely.

When the fighting had subsided, I started questioning my crew as to the whereabouts of Peters ship. It was then that I learned they had abandoned the

Here is the story as my Navigator and tail gunner told it. When the ship pulled over behind us, and to the side, the pilot apparently set up the automatic pilot and gave the order to jump. My navigator said that it was very orderly--they jettisoned the escape hatch doors, and the fellows started jumping out of the ship. At that point, he also lost sight of the plane. My tail gunner added that he saw all ten of the chutes open. Of course, there may have been some injuries, however they could not have been very bad since they were all able to jump and get out O.K.

It was quite a relief to get back to the home base and talk to my crew and having them tell me that all of the fellows got out O.K.

We were very lucky on that raid. Only one of our crew was wounded, the engineer was hit by a piece of flak which broke his leg. He is getting along very well, however. It was the roughest thing I have ever seen, and it was three days later before I was able to sleep normally again. For quite awhile I had great difficulty writing letters to anyone, even my wife. I am sorry that I didn't write to let you know sooner, but I hope you won't feel too harshly toward me.

Perhaps by the time you receive this letter you will have heard from Jim, however, if you don't get the word that he is a prisoner of war, don't give up hope because he may even now be making good an escape from enemy territory. We have had quite a few men get out of there, so I am hoping that they are on the way out now. If you should receive word that Jim is a prisoner of war, won't you please write me about it? I would appreciate hearing from you from time to time even though you may not receive word from Jim. If we hear anything over here, you may rest assured that I will let you know of it as soon as possible.

I sincerely hope that this letter will somewhat lighten the burden you have been carrying and I also hope that it will be a comfort to Jim's mother. Please tell her for me that I am certain he is alive

and that we shall all see him again when the war is over, if not before.

Thank you so much for the very kind remarks in your letter. I am looking forward to the day when I shall be able to meet all of you and to talk to Jim again to compare notes with him.

Sincerely,

John

After 50 years we did meet at the SSMA 50th Annu. Reunion in New Orleans, La. Last time we had seen each other was early morning hours of Oct. 14, 1943.

John was our Co-pilot through B-17 Training phases at Depew and Ephrata Washington and Glasgow, Montana. Was a crew member until we reached 206th Bomb Group Thurlough, England via Prestwick, Scotland.

On our 1st mission Aug 12th, 43 to Gelsenkirchen, John Flying Co-pilot on another crew was wounded.

Flak fragments came through the Co-pilot, lost penetrating John's buttocks - resulting on John having to do all his resting in the hospital on his stomach. Some initiation to Combat Flying.

19 January 01

Dear John:

The January issue of Echoes is at the printer, and my public apology for the inaccurate information spread about you in the last issue appears. There was also something of an uproar among other readers of Echoes, as I got several tributes to you, each person accounting for having seen you, talked with you or corresponded with you between the alledged date of death and the date they received Echoes.

I was tracking down information on Richard Butler, received a reply to my inquiry today, and now that I am through with it am sending it along to you for SSMA's archives. It is rather detailed!

You'll get some copies of the new Echoes shortly, and I do have a second mention of you in it in an ~~SSMA~~ article.

All the best,