

THE LETTERS



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The following pages are selected passages taken from a direct transcription of letters written by Russell Eugene Longnecker to his wife, Erma Violet Crawford Longnecker. Russ and Erma were married in March 1941, only four days before he reported for active duty, first to Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana, then to

Camp Lee, Virginia, then on to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. At the time these letters were written, both Russ and Erma were thirty-one years old. They were both originally from Pennsylvania, but had been living in Cleveland, Ohio for the previous twelve years.

Russ was assigned to Company D, 71st Quartermaster Battalion, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, from May 1941 to September 1941.

Letters transcribed by Diane Larsen, daughter
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(Postmarked May 31, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

Camp Claiborne, La.

Well, we finally got here. We were two days and two nights on the train. We came through Va., N.C., S.C., Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. We are about 18 miles from town, Alexandria, and what an awful hole this is. We live in tents, five fellows in a tent and mud. It's knee deep. It's rained for four days, I guess. There isn't any walks or anything. You just have to wade through. There is a shortage of water here and we can just take a bath between 4 and 6. That's if you can get in. 200 men for 10 showers. Don't that beat hell. Camp Lee was a bitch, but it sure was heaven compared to this damn place. We have to sleep on army cots. I'm sure not going to like that. The average temperature is around 125 degrees I guess.

I want to go to town to-nite if I can. I have to buy some underwear and socks. I haven't any clean clothes and lord knows when I can get any laundry done. It costs 50 cents to go in town on the bus.

We have so much work to do here before this place can be made fit to live in, so I guess I better say bye and get busy and do my share. I don't know anything about this place yet. Mebby I can tell you something about it later on

(Postmarked June 1, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

Well, all I've done is work to-day. Got up this morning and started to shovel the mud out of our tent, then we

scrubbed the floor and got it fit to live in. Then I shined all my shoes and started to wash out some things. Before I was through I washed eleven suits of underwear, twelve pair of socks, two bath towels, three face towels and five handkerchiefs. I've got them all hanging here in the tent now. It rained a little shower this p.m. and it's all black and cloudy. Now looks like a good one coming. This climate is so damp here that you can scarcely keep your cigarettes lit. In the morning your clothes and blankets and everything is wet, regardless of whether it gets 140 degrees during the day or not. You just feel clammy all over. Your flesh feels just like a dead person's all the time.

I don't know what this place looks like yet. I was just up to the PX and left one of my uniforms and a pair of coveralls to be cleaned. When I get them back, all my clothes except those I have on and one uniform will be clean.

There is several rumors going around. I don't know how much truth there is in any of them. One is we are only going to be here two weeks. The other is we will be here 45 days and then we are going to move, probably out into Texas. Another is we are going on maneuvers from here and will return here when we are through. I don't know anything about it and I don't believe anybody else does. I just know they won't make me mad if we move out tomorrow. I'll let you know the set up when I can find out so you can start making plans. I want to know if we are just going to be here for 45 days and then mebbly go north again.

I nearly missed chow setting here writing to you. I didn't hear them yell. Everybody was through when I got there.

I've got to go now and see if I can buy some stamps off somebody. We haven't got a post office here that I've been able to find. There probably is one here though. I'm going to send this into Alexandria to be mailed. You will probably get it two or three days ahead of time.

And now I'll say bye bye to the sweetest darling a guy ever had. I love you so much Sweetheart, and am so damn lonesome for you I just don't know what to do.

(Postmarked June 3, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

It's nice here this evening. There is a nice breeze blowing I imagine right off the ocean.

We are getting our camp to look like something. We built board walks to-day, one main walk right down the middle of the street, with walks going in to each tent. We have four rows of 6 or 7 tents each. A couple of rows have more tents in them. There is 168 men in our outfit. We dug ditches around our tents to drain the water away from them and raked the ground around each tent. We're getting ready for our first inspection, which will be in a couple of days. I built some clothes hangers inside to-day and fixed our screen door and in general we have the place fixed up about as comfortable as we can get it. One of the fellows has a radio and we have a gas stove in each tent, which we don't need no how. Half of the sides of each tent is boards and the upper half is screen wire with the canvas over the top. I'll send you a picture in a few days of our hotel.

I found out to-day that we will go on maneuvers about the 19th and return about the 30th and won't go out again until Sept.

This is the damndest country down here. All it wants to do is rain. It's getting all black again. The radio said thunder showers to-nite and I guess they will be right.

(Postmarked June 3, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I just know I would give my right arm to be out of this damn army. I can't see any point to all of this stuff from now on. We've had our training. All we need anyway. I can't see why they don't leave us go on home where we could do some good and live like human beings. At least take us out of this hole.

I'm waiting for mail call now and looking forward to getting a letter from my baby. Then I have to go up and get a

hair cut. They are even telling us how we must have it cut. 1 inch long in front. American liberty, justice, equality my ass. We have to pay 20 cents a pack for cigarettes here and everything else we have to buy they rob us on. I'm just so fed up. If I thought for a minute I could get away with it I would go over the hill for keeps. A couple of the other married men here in camp are going to find out if there isn't some angle us married fellows can use to get out of here. I sure wish there would be.

There isn't much to write about to-nite. We are stranded out here in the swamps and are only lucky if we can get to town and nothing happens here, heavens knows. I've been to Alexandria once. There isn't much to see when you do get there. There is so many soldiers you can hardly move. There is four or five camps around here within a radius of 20 or 30 miles.

Between being fed up with this and being lonesome for my darling, I'm in a hell of a shape, Honey. I'd give anything if we could be to-gether. I'll certainly be a happy guy when this is all over, but in the meantime I guess I'll just have to keep plugging and waiting.

(Postmarked June 10, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

Did you get a letter from Mrs. Heil yet? She was going to write to you. Bob and I planned to have you two get to-gether and drive down and the four of us would spend our vacation to-gether but it looks like that is all over. Friday nite Bob had a bad accident. Somebody hit him on his motor cycle. I guess he won't live. I feel terribly bad about it. He was a good friend. I went up to see him to-day. He was still unconscious but they wouldn't let me in. They said if we were good friends I wouldn't want to see him. His hands are partially burned off from sliding on the cement. Part of his face and head is gone too. I guess he has a double compound fracture of the skull. No one seems to know just what happened. Vic Matthews, that fellow that was home with me last time, found the bike to-day and he said from what he can figure out he was run into from the rear and when he seen what was going to happen jumped off the motor cycle. He said Bob has regained conscience and the dr. said if he fights he has a chance to come through, that his pulse is normal. I imagine she is on her way here. Vic tried to call her but there was no one there so she must be on the way.

(Postmarked June 11, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

Am just loafing around this afternoon. In fact, all day. It rained so hard last night that there was so much mud around here we couldn't do anything. There isn't much to do anyway. We are still waiting for our equipment. We're just killing time.

Honey, there is something I want you to find out for me. We can't find out anything here. They don't want us to know much about what is going on, but I want you to find out if the following is true. We have heard rumors of these things here in camp.

1. All married men will be discharged by July 15th. Congress has passed the bill and it is in the Senate now.
2. All men will be let go as soon as they have had six months service.

Find out what you can about this and write me right away. I would rather believe the last one and am just holding my breath. If that is true, I'll be home Sept. 5th and boy, will I be glad.

I haven't heard anything from Bob yet to-day. His wife got here last night. He would recognize her, then he wouldn't. Poor devil is in bad shape.

(Postmarked June 12, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I'm just going to write a short note to-nite. I've been so busy all day with figures and papers. I started to work on the accounting job to-day, and will have to work a while to-nite I guess to get things going.

I'm going to have a whole sleeve full of stripes I guess. Near as I can find out, I'll lose this (drawing of stripes) and get this (another drawing of stripes). That is, private first class specialist. It is really something to get that rating. It is just as much money as the other and lots of fellows would rather have it than Sgt., etc.

I have to go up to the hospital to-nite and see Heil. He isn't any better. Guess not so good. I'm leaving Mrs. Heil use my car for a few days. She has quite a lot of running around to do, and I want to do anything I can to help.

Look in the paper. I saw it. All men over 27 will be discharged if they wish.

(Postmarked June 14, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I have lots of work to do tomorrow. I have \$10,000 worth of parts to check and put away and make entries for. This is a madhouse around here this week, getting our supplies in, setting up our accounting system, and racing against time. Every day we are expecting word to shove off on our maneuvers and we aren't ready yet. I have 10 trucks leaving at 5 in the morning for San Antone, Texas for parts and equipment. They will be back in early Mon. morning and it wouldn't surprise me if we took off Monday. We will only be gone two weeks, then we won't go again until Sept.

I talked to Mrs. Heil last night. She was looking forward to our vacation to-gether. She said she was just getting ready to write to you when she got word of Bob's accident. I was up to see him last night. He isn't busted up like they said. His palms are pretty badly burned but not deformed in any way and he hasn't any marks on his face. Every stitch of clothes and his shoes were torn off him. He can't see very well nor hear. The Dr got his pictures back last night and said it was only a miracle he was still living. He has three bad fractures of the skull. Behind one ear it's just as black as the ace of spades. That's where the worst one is. He's pretty goofy. When I went in, he seemed to recognize me and he started to laugh and hide his face under the pillow and kind of play peep with me. He has no idea of time. He told me he had been there for three weeks. He always wants to go and when she talks to him he'll tell her he'll sleep for two more hours then they will have to leave. I looked at his bike and I think I know what happened. He was driving pretty fast and either hit a cow or pig or horse or something. This is all open range down thru' here and they just wander around over the highways or lay right down on them and his headlight wasn't very good. We came out from town one night about 100 miles per hour and I told him be better be careful. If a pig or anything ever got in front of him it would be curtains and I think that is just what happened.

This damn place seems to be cursed. A boy was hit last Friday nite out on the highway and he died last night. Then Bob, and just now one of the boys came in and said lightening just struck one of the latrines and killed three boys. There has been a couple other deaths in the last few weeks. Something must be wrong.

(Postmarked June 15, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

Here it is another lonesome Sunday, but another week closer to the end of the year and another week closer to your vacation time. I'm looking forward to that very much.

I just got through writing to Dad. I told him the mosquitos were so big they could stand flat footed and spit into a G.I. can. A G.I. can is about a 30 gallon garbage can. He wanted to know all about this country down here, so I wrote him about five pages.

It rained some this morning and it looks like it might rain some more. Course, that's nothing. It rains nearly every day.

(Postmarked June 16, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I haven't done anything to-day except sleep. It rained hard all day yesterday and to-day. Mud is just about knee deep this evening.

It's just about supper time. I hope there is something to eat to-nite. The food is terrible here. We don't get enough to eat half the time. A letter will be on its way to the President to-nite in regards to this camp. About a dozen of us composed it this afternoon and it is being written now. I'll mail it in town to-nite. It looks like they have pushed the boys around about long enough. They are really all up in arms here. The same thing happened in a northern camp and the President cleaned it up and made it fit to live in.

I'm listening to the news broadcast now. It sure doesn't sound very good, but if it has to come, I would sooner it gets started so we could get it over with and come on back home.

Honey, if you could see this place to-nite it would make you sick. It's the loneliest place in the world. Another soldier died this morning from snake bites. That's seven in two weeks. I don't know what kind of snakes they are. This last one was bit in his tent.

We were supposed to move out to-day but now nobody seems to know when we go. It will be soon tho' and I know for sure we will be back by the time you are ready to come.

You wanted to know how big Alexandria is. It's about 30,000 or 35,000 I guess. The Red River runs through it and to-nite has reached a 34 ft. flood crest and is still rising due to so much rain.

(Postmarked June 16, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I'm in charge of quarters to-day and haven't anything to do this afternoon so I'm writing my letters.

It's been terribly hot to-day, but again it's getting black and looks like it might rain a good one.

The colonel was just here raising hell. The company has to drill again just like they were rookies because everything didn't suit him. The company area wasn't cleaned up and raked and all that B.S.

(Postmarked June 17, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

Well, another day is nearly over. You had better start putting A.P.O. 305 on my mail along with the rest of my address. That is army post office, so when we go on maneuvers I'll get my mail when I get back.

They are going to try and move Bob to Columbus to the army hospital there. He'll be much better off if he can stand the trip. They aren't doing anything for him here.

There isn't anything to write about. Our trucks haven't got back from Texas yet. I don't know what happened to them. So we don't have anything to do, just lay around and go nuts. It looks like it's going to rain again to-nite. Wait until you get a letter telling you I am on maneuvers before you put A.P.O. 305 on my mail. I just found out about that.

(Postmarked June 19, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

It's so damn hot I'm just melting. We had general inspection by some big nuts this afternoon, personal and quarters. After we had cleaned our tent up and had everything just perfect, he didn't even come over on our street, but we had to stand in formation while he inspected the whole company and I just about melted away. The sun was coming straight down the short way.

I just took a nice shower and am setting on my bed with just shorts, socks and shoes on now. In about 20 or 25 minutes we have to stand retreat so I must hurry and get dressed.

Honey, I wish you would get me something if they don't cost over 50 cents. That's a pair of rubber shower room slippers about size 7 1/2 or 8. I need them to get back and forth from the shower room and they keep you from catching athlete's foot too.

We got our first car today, a command car. Our convoy isn't back yet. Don't know what happened to them.

Bob is much better. He was almost his normal self last night, but then to-nite he may not be so good. He fades out and comes back like that.

(Postmarked June 20, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

It's been raining again this afternoon so we have been shining shoes, scouring mess kits and getting ready for another inspection to-morrow morning.

We got some more clothes again to-day. I now have four pair of light pants, 2 pair of wool serge and 1 pair of wool breeches, 2 wool shirts, 2 lightweight cotton and 2 heavy or closer knit cotton shirts, 1 field jacket, 1 blouse, 1 raincoat, 1 garrison hat, 1 field cap, 1 summer dress hat, 1 fatigue hat and have a khaki field cap coming, 2 suits of coveralls, 10 pair of socks and about 8 suits of gov't underwear, 3 pair army shoes, etc. I don't know where to put them all.

(Postmarked June 22, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I'll write a line now. I've been busy all day. Time out, Honey. Someone is calling me. Just made a quarter. Took a guy down the road. I monkeyed around with my car all afternoon, just tinkering. It's so damn hot to-day you can't breathe. It rained yesterday and mud is still about knee deep.

I worked all day yesterday. Our trucks got back with their loads so I'll have a busy day tomorrow and probably all week. At least it will help the time to pass a little quicker.

I hear now we won't go on maneuvers until Aug 16th. Personally I don't think we will go at all.

(Postmarked June 24, 1941, Forest Hill, Louisiana)

I'm writing to my darling wife in the middle of a big business afternoon. I have a desk of my own now and have been doing more work the last day or two. Just kind of got caught up on my work so decided to write my honey.

I don't suppose I'll get a letter to-day. One mail call is over and I didn't get one but we had a mail call yesterday and I had a letter from my honey. That helped pass away Sun. evening.

It surely is hot here to-day. I'm working without a shirt on. The radio said fair and warmer to-morrow.

Honey I got the cutest little dog under my desk. He belongs to one of the boys here. He rode around with me everywhere I went yesterday and he slept on my bed last night. His name is Jo-Jo. He is a little Mexican something or other. One of the fellows took my picture with him last evening. If I can get one, I'll send it to you. This fellow said we could take him along with us if we wanted to.

(Postmarked June 24, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

There is at least two things nice about this new job of mine. I don't have to drill no more and I can write my wife her letter every afternoon without hurrying up.

It is clouding up for a big rain again. This is the damndest country down here. It rains every day a little bit. Anyway, if it didn't I guess we wouldn't be able to stand the heat.

Some of the boys are down unloading some trucks. We are getting six this evening. Guess we won't get all of them until about Sept 16 and I think that means we won't go out on maneuvers which of course makes me very mad (like hell).

They are moving Heil down to New Orleans where a Dr. don't do anything except work on head injuries. This week some day.

(Postmarked June 26, 1941, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana)

It's near midnite Honey, and I'm still at my desk with work piled up all around me. I'm just snatching a little rest now. I promised to write a big long letter to-nite but I just can't do it. I'm entering stock on stock record cards to-nite. There is about \$10,000 worth and it must be straight by Saturday noon. I have to take a shower when I get through and I'm just dead. Been here since 7 o'clock this morning.

(Postmarked June 28, 1941, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana)

For the time being we have some of our work caught up. We are getting straightened out little by little. This won't be a bad job at all when we get everything running as it should. Right now everybody piles everything on my desk and expects me to know about it when they want it, and the different departments haven't learned yet how to do their paper work. They haven't really had time to do any of it yet but eventually everything will iron itself out.

It's raining here again to-day, pretty hard. Right now I'm setting here looking out over acres of flat level country, red clay, an occasional pine tree, the kind you like at Xmas time, but mostly just flat land where the trees have been cut and the stump left standing. Grass is growing about a foot high everywhere among them.

Mrs. Heil is going home to-day. They are taking Bob to New Orleans to a gov't. specialist who doesn't bother with anything except head injuries. He is going down there some day next week and I guess he will be discharged from there when he is able to travel.

I have a telephone on my desk, Honey. The number is Camp Claiborne 681. Call me some afternoon. It will only cost you about \$4.00, to be exact, \$3.75 for three minutes.

(Postmarked July 3, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I was to New Orleans yesterday. Boy, what a town. Here's what happened. One of the fellows here in camp was helping me fix my car and when we were through we took it for a ride to see if everything was alright. When we got back about 9 o'clock Tues eve there was a telegram for him telling him his father had died. We went to see the Lt. He wanted me to take him home to Dayton but the best we could do was to get a three day pass and I just couldn't make it. I tried to get him to give me until Mon. That way I could have been home for the 4th with you, but he couldn't do it. He gave me and another fellow a 24 hr pass to take him where he could catch a plane and New Orleans was the best place to make connections. We left around midnite and got there about 7 in the morning. After his plane left we looked the town over. We stayed until about 6 last nite. I bought a pair of 600-16 tires for my car. One of my other tires had the inner tube sticking out when I got there.

Gee, Sweetheart, I'm going to take you there first thing when you come. There is streets lined with palm trees, just beautiful. The quaint old Spanish and French districts with their funny old buildings, the little narrow streets in the old quarters, the Gulf, etc.

And here's some good news, Darling. My furlough starts Tues morning, July 22nd for 10 days. Boy, will we have fun. I'm really sweating out the days now.

This picture is your honey, his tent and his best friend Jo-Jo. X marks the place where I sleep (inside of course). If the sun shines, we roll the sides up. There is screen wire all around under the canvas on the sides. Jo-Jo weighs 5 pounds. Isn't he cute? 5 of us fellows live in one tent.

(Postmarked July 5, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

I'm writing now because I didn't get back until 4:30 this morning and it was just a little bit too late to turn on the lights and write then.

Here's how I spent my 4th Honey. First I went to town Thur nite and bought a pair of slacks and a polo short so I would have something cool to wear when you get here. Got a bargain, wholesale, mebbby \$2.50 for shirt, pants and a new gloss belt. The color is pale green. They're nice.

Then I got up yesterday morning and all my clean clothes in my suitcase was damp from just setting around. We have an iron in our tent. We bought it, so I ironed all my underwear and pajamas and towels dry and put them away, pressed my new slacks and ironed a couple shirts and neck ties and pressed a pair of pants and shined my shoes. By that time it was noon. After dinner, about one o'clock, a couple other fellows and myself started for a ride and wound up in New Orleans. We got caught in a terrible rain storm and didn't get there until about six thirty. We had something to eat and walked around awhile and left about 11:30. We had Jo-Jo with us and went into a pretty nice cafeteria to eat and there was a cat in there that came looking at Jo and boy, they just about wrecked the place. He chased hell out of that cat. The cat would make two of him.

I just got kissed, Dear. Someone let Jo-Jo in. He hasn't seen me yet today. He just made one big jump onto my bed and he's all over me. He sure is a nice little fellow.

I'm going to take some fellow's uniform up to the hospital for him before one o'clock. He's getting discharged today. Sure wish it was me.

Fourteen more days, Dear, two more Sat nites then you will be here. I'll sure be a happy guy for two weeks. It will be heaven, Sweetheart. I love you so much and have been so terribly lonesome for you I won't know exactly what to do when you get here.

(Postmarked July 7, 1941, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana)

I am going to write just a short letter to-nite. I'm all alone here in the tent. Everybody else is out somewhere. All the radios are going to-nite playing all kinds of songs, old and new, some of our favorites. The one next door is playing, "Darling, I Am Growing Old." The one across the street is playing some Boogie song.

Gee, it was hot to-day. My arms are burnt to a crisp and to-nite the moon is shining down through the pine trees. It's just beautiful Darling, but it sure don't do a fellow who is so much in love with his wife and so far away from her any good. I've been so lonesome for you honey. The last couple of days I just haven't been able to think about anything else much.

Honey Darling, the radio just now said all men over 27 years old can be discharged from the army. I didn't get it all but I think he said all men who had reached 27 years before July 1st and who could prove they had someone to support. Mebby when you get here, Darling, you will be spending your vacation with your civilian husband instead of your soldier husband. Keep your fingers crossed, Honey.

(Postmarked July 14, 1941, Camp Claiborne, Louisiana)

There isn't much news to-nite. I'm thinking about next Sun nite. I'll be walking back and forwards marking time. Gee Honey, I just can't wait. The only thing, I haven't any money. My car has cost me a bunch. I think I'm through with it now. I have just \$1.65 to my name. That will probably keep me in gas next week. Gas is 23 and 25 cents a gallon down here. In fact, everything costs like hell. A room will cost about \$3.00 if we are lucky enough to find one. If I had the money I would reserve one for Mon. nite. I just want to give you an idea so you better bring all you can. I can help next month because we will get paid for our grade at last. That's what they say. I hope this week flies. I'm so damned anxious to see you Darling. I'll be counting the hours this week.



(Postmarked Aug 4, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

God knows where, La.
Sun nite

Here I am, Honey, way out in the woods. You left just right. We got our orders and left Sat afternoon. We have been busy all day making camp. Another fellow and myself have our tent pitched in a grove of pine trees. It's getting dark now, but I guess we are just about through. It's about 30 miles to the closest village and I don't know its name. A rail head is about two miles from here, just a siding. They are building a loading platform for us.

I've been so busy, Dear, I haven't had time to get lonesome yet, but you can bet your life I'm missing you now.

I don't know what address to give you so just send them like before. I don't even know when or where this will be mailed. Dark, so I can't see no more.

(Postmarked Aug 5, 1941, Ragley, Louisiana)

If the lines are crooked I can't help it. I am writing this laying in my pup tent holding a flash light in one hand and slapping chiggers with the other hand. I can't sleep. This is just the most uncomfortable place I've ever been in. We worked until about 9 to-nite at the rail head and will be there from 7 am till heavens know how late to-morrow nite. We are moving again to-morrow. I don't know how far. It rained hard here to-day and everything is damp and musty to-nite.

(Postmarked Aug 8, 1941, Ragley, Louisiana)

Here I am again Darling. I'm stealing a few minutes to write to you. We sure are working hard. I'm making up for the good time we had a couple of weeks ago.

I haven't worked less than 16 hours a day this week. Yesterday I worked from seven in the morning until 3 in the morning. I just laid down on the floor, didn't even bother to go to the tent because I had to be back at six. I haven't had a bath or shower all week. In the first place I haven't got time and there isn't any place to take a bath anyway. I had one meal yesterday and one to-day. Someone brought me coffee this morning and then I didn't have anything until just a little bit ago.

And chigger bites. I'm just covered with them. They are little red bugs. You can scarcely find them. When they bite you they swell up and itch just like mosquito bites.

We moved our camp. They brought it down here right across from the school house where I work. It's a much nicer place than the other one was. There is a gas station, grocery store, post office, school house and the principal's house here in this place. Guess they have the pupils here.

I saw a whole bunch of tanks going past this morning. Gee, there is an awful lot of men and equipment in here. My strength went from 4,171 to 10,545 over night. That's the way it's growing every day. Mebby you know why I'm so busy.

(Postmarked Aug 11, 1941, Ragley, Louisiana)

It's about 9 o'clock. Just got through a few minutes ago. I didn't have any dinner to-day until 4:30. We're just working ourselves to death. It's getting worse instead of better. I got the first good night rest I've had since we came down here. I threw my blanket in a truck last night and just died. There wasn't any bugs crawling around all over me up there.

(Postmarked Aug 13, 1941, Ragley, Louisiana)

Got time to drop you a few lines now, so here goes. First of all, it's raining here to-day. That adds to the pleasure of it all. Then I'm so tired and sleepy I can scarcely stand up. We have to work like horses and if you ever tried to sleep on the ground or a piece of steel, then you know about how much rest you can get. I sure will be glad when the President gets back from his fishing and signs that bill. I'll probably be the first one to the orderly tent to put in for my discharge.

I think I told you this is the third place we have made camp. We had to move from the other place to let a co. of M.P. in. Well, last night a snake killed one of them. I think it must have been a rattler because Roberson said he heard one rattling like the devil outside of his tent one night while we were there. This morning some of the boys run down and killed an armadillo. We have lots of pets down here.

I had a letter from Mom yesterday. She had a dollar bill sewed on to it, said it was for cigarettes.

I'm hoping they don't try to hold us just because they can. I had an argument with Mezza. He said if we got discharged we wouldn't get any travel pay because we were getting out for our own convenience. I told him I didn't ask to be brought away down here or into the damn army and by the barefooted Jesus, somebody was going to pay my transportation home if I had to sue the gov't personally. I think they draw that money and split it up between them.

(Postmarked Aug 14, 1941, Ragley, Louisiana)

I just have a minute but I must write to you. Here's the set up. I went to the office to-day to apply for a dependency discharge. They told me I would have to serve a year before I can get out on the age bill, so I told them I wanted a dependency discharge, so here's how it is. You must write Lt. Wittenberg a letter telling him you need my support at home, then he will make out the proper papers and send them to the Cleveland chapter of the Red Cross and they will investigate. If you still have a copy of that letter you sent to the War Dept you can change the names around and use it, but whatever you do, send one.

I'm going to check on that year stuff. I think it is for immediate discharge. Here is the address you will use: Lt. Wittenberg (Commanding Co D, 71st Q.M. Bn M) Camp Claiborne, La.

Better send this soon as you can for it will be a month or so even if it goes through before I can get out. Must go back to work now.

(Postmarked Aug 16, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

We're loafing around camp to-day. War starts at midnight to-nite. We have to work nights now at the rail head without any light. We are to be bombed. I don't know just when.

Starting yesterday we have to wear leggings, pistol belt and have our gas masks on us all the time (in their cases). We have to sleep with all our clothes on from now on. We each wear a red band around our left arm. The other army wears blue. A plane just flew over with a siren screaming. That's to tell us there is a tank attack on its way. Light tanks have been running up and down the road all morning. Squadrons of planes are zooming overhead. Pursuit bombers, reconnaissance, every kind. Some of them are taking pictures and are flying just above the tree tops. Armored cars with mounted machine guns, one 30 and one 50 caliber, that can be moved in any direction are as thick as flies this morning. A big anti-aircraft outfit moved in close to us last night. They have guns half as big as a city block is long. They are getting them in position at vital spots this morning, and Honey, there is thousands of the prettiest horses here you ever saw. Nearly all the same color. You should see them. They are from Fort Bliss and Fort Sam Houston (Texas). Tomorrow some time they are going to bomb the bridge here beside our camp then it will be counted out and the engineers will have to build a pontoon bridge across. They use 5 lb sacks of flour for bombs and tear gas for a gas attack. There is heavy and light field artillery pieces just everywhere. I imagine if you were to travel a 100 miles in any direction you would find just what I'm telling you about here. I've never saw so many guns, etc.

I go on guard duty unless it's changed on account of my job some time between 5pm and morning for four hours to-nite. Our camp is all camouflaged with limbs from trees. We are strictly on a war time basis. We may be taken prisoners at any time during the day or night. And that, Honey, is a brief description and a bird's eye view of what is going on down here. When I can write again there will be more action and I will tell you about it.

They killed an old she copperhead trying to crawl in back of my tent this morning. I don't sleep in it. I sleep in a truck just on that account. They cut her open to see what made her so big and got seven little baby snakes out of her.

Yesterday the paper carried a column about the 28 yr olds. That bill will become a law Monday whether the President signs it or not, and we can be discharged as soon as practicable, probably not before maneuvers are over, but they have been cut two weeks short, making them end Sept 15. There is a chance, tho' that I might be out before that. It just depends on how much warring our old man can stand.

I must be lousy. At least I feel that way. I've only had one bath in two weeks and then I had to go swimming in muddy water to get that. It's a great life.

It's just about time for chow so I'll cut off here. I got two of your letters yesterday, Sunday morning and Sun nite's. Keep your fingers crossed Darling. I'm enjoying this thing now since I know I'm going to get out.

I love you Honey and I'm coming home to stay just as soon as possible.

(Postmarked Aug 18, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

There isn't a lot to write about, everything is very quiet here to-day. We are about the only company left here in this area. They say so far we are losing the war. New troops were moving up to the front lines all day yesterday and last night.

We aren't doing anything to-day, just loafing around and cooking. It's terribly hot down here now. There is a story going around now that we will move out to-night, which is probably true. We are all waiting for the evening paper to come out. We heard the news reporter say President Roosevelt signed the bill to-day for us to get out. About 20 of us will leave this co. We are all going to line up and go into the office together to-night to apply for our discharge. I'm hoping it won't take too long for it to go through now. I would like to be home for Labor Day, so just keep your fingers crossed.

(Postmarked Aug 20, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

We are going to move Sun. I hear. Somebody said up around De Ridder. We were close to there when we was in Texas. The war starts all over again Mon. morning. I sure wish this damn foolishness was over so I could get the hell out of here.

(Postmarked Aug 25, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

Sorry you have to wait so long for a letter Sweet, but I have been too busy to even eat. I wanted to write yesterday but didn't get through until 9:30 last night.

The war started again this morning and we are head over heels in work again. It's been so damn hot here we just cook. Around a hundred every day and dry. It's only sprinkled once in the three weeks we've been here, but it's black and thundering now and it looks as if we might get a little shower.

My dependency discharge papers left here Sat morning. By the time you get this the Red Cross will probably have been to the house. Lt. Wittenberg sent them out and he said whichever one came first was the one I could take. Here's hoping one of them comes quick. I will be one of the first to get out here.

(Postmarked Aug 27, 1941, Ragley, Louisiana)

It's a beautiful morning. It will be plenty hot tho' in a few hours. It rained hard last night and everything is nice and fresh looking this morning. I'm off to-day. Don't have to go to work until 6:30 this evening.

I was just talking to the Lt. He said we are going to move to Dig Fork. That's somewhere north of Alex. If the truth was known I think we are going back to camp. I think our part of the maneuvers is just about over. The nigger outfit that brought us down here is all lined up here on the road having their trucks checked this morning. I may be nuts but I hardly think. If I'm right, I may be home in a week or so. Oh boy, oh boy, that would just be perfect wouldn't it?

Yesterday I went to Lake Charles for a truck. We had to wait two or three hours for it so we took a little ride out into enemy territory (we had a good fast car so we could get away if they tried to capture us). We were just trying our luck and we didn't see a blue anywhere but do you know where we went to? We turned around at the tourist camp where you and I stayed the night we came from Bay St. Louis. I forgot for a little while all about this damn army and everything except my darling wife and was seriously wishing our vacation was just starting and I had a discharge in my hands. It really hasn't seemed like four weeks since you went back home. I guess it's because we've been so busy and that I'm so excited about my discharge coming that I haven't noticed the days slip by, but I'll be glad sure enough when it's all over.

I'm having trouble with my pipe – can't keep it lit. A bought a 10 cent corn cob the other night. Everybody was smoking my cigarettes so I thought I would just fool them a little bit. I think mebbly I fooled myself some though.

Just had to move to where there was some more shade. The sun was getting too hot out there. I just ask one of the nigger drivers where we was going. He said, "I don't know Suh, but uses is gwine somewhere sho' nuff."

(Postmarked Aug 30, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

I just got up a little while ago. It got so hot I couldn't sleep any longer. I'm working nights again this week. We still are at the same place. We were all packed up to move when they changed their minds. Now we are supposed to stay here until further notice. They don't know what in the hell they want o do. This damn place is driving me screwy. I surely will be glad when these maneuvers are over and I can come home where I belong. Gee, it's hot. It's so sticky. There isn't any air going at all. My blood must be like water from this climate. I'll probably just freeze up when I get back to God's country, but that will be all right with me.

We killed another snake this morning right outside the mess tent. You should have seen it squirt venom when they hit it. They have a pig pen built back here in the woods and you can hardly live here for the odor the last week or so. The damn pigs are always out running around the tents and licking the guys' faces at night. What a hell of a life for white men to have to live.

There goes the chow whistle Honey, so I'll say bye now.

(Postmarked Aug 31, 1941, DeQuincy, Louisiana)

Well, here is another Sunday. A whole month we've been down here in the woods. There still is another four weeks to go yet. I was back at camp to-day. We took some stuff up and brought some new machinery back along. It was a nice trip. I took a good hot shower, first decent one in a month, and put on some clean clothes.

My papers have been gone for a week now. They should be back this coming week or next for sure. If the papers come back approved, that is, if the Red Cross says you need me, then we don't have to fool around sending them to Washington and waiting three or four weeks or a couple of months for them to O.K. the discharge. This new bill gives the company commander power to issue your discharge by having it signed by the corps General, which won't take over two or three days at the most.

(Postmarked Sep 5, 1951, Ragley, Louisiana)

The war has started again yesterday at noon. We are the blue army for this one. Part of our outfit left yesterday. They went to Elizabeth, Pa. I don't know how long they will stay. Slim and Tennessee and Petie Plink are camped up the road about 5 miles. I haven't seen them yet but I'll probably go up in a day or so.

Just got orders-pack up. That means we're moving. So bye bye Sweet. I have to hurry.

(Postmarked Sep 7, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

I'll see if I can get a letter written between rain storms this morning. I went to take a shower and it came up a hell of a storm. I just got my laundry back and everything is just soaked inc. my blankets.

We moved up the road about five miles. We have a much nicer place to camp. It's on kind of a little hill in a big

pine grove. I have my tent pitched on a platform I built out of slabs. I raked up a big pile of pine needles and made a tick out of them. It makes a pretty good bed. I have so damn many bites on me of some kind. You can scarcely lay your finger on my body without touching them. I have to try and get my clothes dried out now so I'll say bye for now.

(Postmarked Sep 10, 1941, Oberlin, Louisiana)

As you can no doubt see by my stationery, I am visiting my first U.S.O. We moved again to-day, just about a half mile out of this town. We moved the rail head right into the center of town and just took over. We are only about twenty five miles from camp to-nite. All the 71st corps troops are centered right here, co's A, B, C, D. The rumor is that we all return to our bases by the 15th and rest until Nov 1st, then go to North Carolina for winter maneuvers. It's pretty authentic. It come from the major's headquarters. All the fellows in camp to-day signed their discharge papers. I guess they are getting ready to let us go just as soon as we get back to camp. I'll probably sign mine in the morning. I wasn't at camp all day, was busy at the rail head.

When we got through to-nite we went to the town's only show. I've been to shows then I've been to shows, but this one really beats hell out of me. When you went in you had to climb up steps and set on wooden benches and you couldn't understand a word they spoke. The picture was "Too Many Girls", a college picture. I like them too, but we walked out on the show.

It's about 9:00 o'clock now and I haven't got a place fixed up to sleep in yet. Guess I'll grab a truck to-nite.

Heil came down to camp to-nite. His wife was with him. He got out of the hospital Sat. and is on co. duty at camp. She got here Sat. too. He's expecting his discharge soon now too. He doesn't look very good. He was in the hospital 99 days. That's a long time, isn't it?

(Postmarked Sep 13, 1941, Ragley, Louisiana)

If I can keep my head above water long enough to write, I'll try and do it. It's rained for two days and two nights down here and is still raining. These tents are practically just floating around.

I was back up at camp yesterday. I was one of the guards of the pay roll, real Jessie James with a big 45 strapped around my waist and not just to scare somebody. There was slugs in it.

(Postmarked Sep 15, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

I have everything fixed up just like home. I have a truck all to myself. I sleep in it, keep my clothes and everything in it. There is two chests for small parts and tools in here with nice smooth wood tops and they are just desk high. I have two candles burning in here. It's just like living in a trailer. No one moves this truck except me, so I always know everything will be OK.

The new and last war started at six this evening. I don't know whether we will stay out for all of it or not. We have heard we will and then that we won't so I couldn't say but I do know I certainly will be glad when it's all over and we can get back to camp and get our discharges.

Heil and his wife was here last night. He went home to-day on a thirty day furlough. He doesn't know whether he will be discharged when he gets back or not. He doesn't look a bit good.

We have received half a dozen telegrams saying a hurricane was on its way. Was supposed to be here last night. It

looks and acts like it might be to-nite.

(Postmarked Sep 16, 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana)

We are getting ready to move in about an hour. I'm all set. We are moving to Forest Hill. You know where that is – about a mile outside of camp. We won't be allowed to go into camp to stay, but we might sneak in to take a shower once or twice.

We just about got drowned out yesterday. Boy, did it rain here, a regular downpour.

(Postmarked Sep 18, 1941, Alexandria, Louisiana)

Just a line now, Dear. There is quite a bit of activity around here now. Something is in the air. Don't know what it is. Probably another move. Our forces has advanced about 40 miles last night and to-day.

(Postmarked Sep 22, 1941, Ville Platte, Louisiana)

Here's another Sunday and I hope it will be the last one but I can't be sure. All I need is the Red Cross papers and I'm through. I may have to stay until maneuvers are over because after to-nite we won't be able to get through to camp. The red army will have us cut off. We moved yesterday. We are seven miles from Ville Platte now and may move again this evening.

I have had a big morning. All the people who live around here never saw any soldiers before and they were all over this camp this morning. Some of them can't speak a word of English. They come in horse and buggies and on horseback. I've been riding all morning and another fellow and myself have horses for all afternoon. They are real cowboy ponies, wilder than deers. I got throwed once this morn. That was all of that. He took me by surprise. I got back on him and rode him till his tongue was hanging out.

One old woman came over this morning to talk to me and she couldn't talk any English at all. I could understand enough of what she was saying to know that she was telling me. She had a son in the army. I had a hell of a time trying to talk with her. You know how good my French is, altho' I have improved it some out here since that is all these natives speak. Well, the wind up is her and her husband gave us saddle horses for this afternoon and invited us to their house for supper to-nite. I was riding about two miles from camp this morning and stopped to talk to a fellow. He invited me in and gave me a big glass of French wine, the finest I've ever tasted. These people are just tickled to death to have us here. We have never been treated so well anywhere before. It will be OK if we just stay here for the balance of these maneuvers. We are about 40 to 60 miles away from camp now.

I was in to camp on Friday and got all my clothes separated except those I have out here. I am practically ready to leave, all but collecting my money. I will get 60 or 65 dollars travel pay beside my regular pay. I was going to make a little extra coming home, but I guess I'll be traveling by myself now. I should have around 75 bucks left when I get there if nothing happens, which will be OK too. We sure will be able to use it, don't you think?

I don't know when this will go out. I might even beat it home. Only the good lord could find us. We are really out in the wide open places now, snakes and all (killed two this morning).

(Postcard postmarked Sep 24, 1941, Ville Platte, Louisiana)

Just a line Sweet. We just came through a small hurricane. There is more water standing around here than there is in Lake Erie. Everybody and everything is soaked. Tents are upset and mud is knee deep. They had plenty of trouble with it in Shreveport I guess. I'm still sweating out the Red Cross. It hasn't come yet. The post office blew away this morning so there wasn't any mail here. Hoping my discharge wasn't in it. We are going back to camp Friday I guess, so meebby a week from now I can be home.

(Postmarked Sep 27, 1941, Forest Hill, Louisiana)

We are back at Forest Hill again. I don't know where they are going to leave us move in to camp. These damn maneuvers should be officially over to-day. They probably will just forget about us out here. Everyone else has gone but we just set here.

We haven't had any mail for three or four days again. They went out to see if they could find some to-day. My Red Cross is probably laying at some field post office somewhere while I just set here and eat my heart out. I haven't had a bath now in about two weeks. I actually stink, just smell sour. We are only about two or three miles from camp and they won't let us go in and take a shower and put on some clean clothes. I haven't had my clothes off for just about two weeks now. The other day when I got soaked they dried right on me. The only thing I did was change shoes and socks.

We moved over here Thursday, I guess it was, and just followed that hurricane part of the way. We were traveling over old dirt roads that were axle deep with mud. I was driving a big Diamond T ten wheeler truck with 2,000 gal of gas on it, all in ten gal. barrels. My steering apparatus broke loose and there almost was a calamity. Fortunately, I got it stopped inches from an upset and without a doubt an explosion that would have rocked the whole south. I didn't know when we started out anything was wrong with it, but when it happened the co. commander said "That's the reason I wanted you on that truck. We haven't had time to repair it and we needed a good driver for it." You should have heard what I told him in good plain English. One of the other boys wasn't so lucky. He upset his down into one of the bayous. They had a hell of a time fishing it out. It wasn't smashed up any too hurt tho'.

These are beautiful fall days down here. We almost freeze at night out here in the field but during the day time it gets up around 90, too hot to wear clothes. I expect I'll leave some day next week. Here's hoping. Until you hear from me or see me again, bye bye, Dear.

(Of course, you know what happened next – Pearl Harbor. Following Pearl Harbor, Russ was recalled in January 1942. In February he sailed for Ireland, and spent the next 26 months in Ireland and England. In February 1944, he was hospitalized in England for bleeding ulcers. He was sent back to the States and eventually in June 1944, received a medical discharge.)