

Toward Sanctuary

William J. Barnes, Jr. was a pilot in the 766th Squadron. His aircraft, Dwatted Rabbit #53, was ditched off the southern coast of France on Mission #60 to the Marshalling Yard at Nines, France. All members of the Barnes crew were lost. The following is the report on this mission:

“By the 12th of the month several of the crews had completed their fifty sorties. Upward of 100 combat crew members had been sent back to the United States on a rotation basis. Other crews were at rest camps. The number of crews available, consequently, was limited. For this mission it was decided to fly a formation of four flights instead of the customary six flights.

“For the first time in its history the 461st Group was really hit on the bomb run by a formation-concentration of enemy fighters. Twenty-eight enemy fighters hit the last flight of six planes and knocked down four of them. Three of the planes went down over the target at Nimes, France, and the fourth apparently failed in an effort to ditch within the sight of Toulon. The planes lost over the target were those piloted by 1st Lt. Richard S. Fawcett, 2nd Lt. Frederick L. Dunn, and 2nd Lt. Chester A. Ray Jr. Lt. Fawcett's plane was in bad shape when last seen. From all three planes, never the less, chutes were seen to open. 2nd Lt. William J. Barnes, the youngest officer in the Group, was pilot of the plane which attempted to ditch in the Gulf of Lyon.

“The fighter attack split up the bomb run with the result that the mission was scored only 24 percent on the big Marshalling Yard. Seven enemy planes were shot down. It was apparent to all that evil days had at last caught up with the hitherto invincible 461st.”

The following is from a book published by Bill's family and friends in 1945.

This is a sacred book. Give it no casual care. Please treat it as if it were Bill coming into your home. In a way it is Bill. Honor it as you would the man himself.

A collection of just a small group of the letters written by Bill Barnes to his family and friends during the time he was in the U.S. Army.

Dates in the Life of **William J. Barnes, Jr.**

June 27, 1924

1926 to 1939

1939 to 1941

1941 to December 1942

January 13, 1943

Born in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

In Englewood, New Jersey

Two years in the Choate School

Freshman and part of the sophomore years at Haverford College

Began his active service in the U. S. Army at Camp Dix,

	<i>New Jersey. The sudden termination of voluntary enlistment found him with his papers not quite in order for enlistment in the Army Air Corps. He came home, requested immediate selection by his Draft Board, and was sent off in the next group from Englewood on January 6, with one other eighteen-year-old.</i>
<i>November 3, 1943</i>	<i>Awarded his Pilot wings, and commission as Second Lieutenant, at Stuttgart, Arkansas.</i>
<i>December 1943 forward</i>	<i>With the 766th Bomb Squadron, 461st Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, Italy.</i>
<i>July 7, 1944</i>	<i>Promoted to First Lieutenant (He probably had not learned of this at the time of his last flight.)</i>
<i>July 12, 1944</i>	<i>Lost in action over Southern France.</i>

Persons Mentioned in His Letters

<i>Mom and Daddy</i>	
<i>Kitty and Molly</i>	<i>His sisters, older than he.</i>
<i>Richard</i>	<i>Usually "Richie", his younger brother</i>
<i>Boof</i>	<i>Miss Ruth Malliet, R.N., in the family through his Daddy's office, during all the period of Bill's memory.</i>
<i>Beans</i>	<i>His Haverford roommate and continuing pal; as of November 1944: Naval Air Cadet, C. W. Matlack.</i>
<i>Bob</i>	<i>Robert Boardman – Choate chum and steadfast friend.</i>
<i>Trig</i>	<i>Trygue Sween – Englewood chum at all times – entering the service as a Marine at about the time of Bill's induction.</i>
<i>Johnnie</i>	<i>John W. Taussing, Jr., Englewood next door pal, now a Marine.</i>
<i>King</i>	<i>J. Kingsley Noble, another Englewood pal – now in U. S. Coast Guard.</i>
<i>The Head</i>	<i>Dr. George St. John of Choate School.</i>
<i>Dean Mac</i>	<i>Dr. Archibald MacIntosh of Haverford College.</i>
<i>Mr. Niehaus</i>	<i>Mr. H. Dayton Neihaus, his Physics Master at Choate, through whom Bill first learned to enjoy reading.</i>
<i>Betty</i>	<i>A fictitious name of a girl to take the place of a girl's name that occurs in his letters, but whose real name it seems best not to include.</i>

When Bill went away he did not expect to come back. He hoped to come back – as the time for coming back seemed to be approaching a great eagerness to come burst over him – but he seemed to know that the thing he was doing contained in it all that he was going to have in life.

We all understood this feeling of his, and we had a very definite kind of bargain with him. If he did not come back we would do our best to help him carry on his living here.

We cannot believe that those who have made the greatest sacrifice will be penalized by an ending of their living. Rather we believe that Bill's life has just burst out into full bloom. And so to help us at home, and all who belong to that inspired company who know his beautiful life, we are putting together this little collection of parts of Bill's letters written during the short year and a half while he was in the Army.

It will help because it is almost the only way those of us here at home know the Bill of 1942 grown into the one of 1944. All of this rapid growth took place away from all of us, and we must add these letters to what we previously knew to see him as he stepped from a cramped cock-pit into the spaciousness of God's free Life.

In making our selections for his letters our worst error would be to pick unwisely so that he would seem unreal. What we want desperately to keep is Bill, Bill as we know him, not any celestialized resemblance. We speak of unusual beauty as being unearthly, but we prefer to think that people on earth can be beautiful, to a superlative degree.

Maybe that is just quibbling, for it is probably true that heaven and earth are not far apart at all, that heaven is always right at hand. Bill was a boy's boy – in the rough and tumble he roughed and tumbled. He also had a spiritual quality that sometimes made you catch your breath. Heaven can have few lovelier things than Bill's smile.

Bill's awful struggle was the inevitable struggle between cleanness and dirtiness. His cleanness made him suffer when exposed to dirtiness in any form. The worst criticism we have heard of him from an Army associate is just, in effect, that Bill was disturbed by evil. Implying that Bill's attitude was the opposite this critic assured us that his own philosophy was: "I am not my brother's keeper."

We have no clear proof that Bill was killed. First he was reported "missing" then, after elapse of time, "killed in action." Suppose by some miracle he should have escaped from that plane, which was hit by gunfire in the air and then wrecked and engulfed by a landing in the sea – suppose he should again walk in among us. Would he be embarrassed by finding these letters printed and in the hands of his friends? We'll risk it.

For Bill has completed a chapter in his life. He is a great spirit, now. Fundamentally it will not make much difference whether we see him in his pilot uniform or not. Bill himself will be here all right. He was glad when he went away that he could leave with us some nice photographs of himself. He knew they helped. And he'll understand that this is just a talking picture.

There is one other question that we must expect to hear raised – it is implied in some of the counsels we received on ways to manage our sorrow: wouldn't it be better to leave these letters in their envelopes and let time and forgetfulness soothe our grief? All that is living in the hearts of Bill's family cries out: "No!"

There is only One other than Bill, Who has died for us, to Whom we will acknowledge any greater indebtedness, and it is only when we have forgotten Him that we have suffered real defeat. That which was in His life was likewise in Bill. If we keep Bill with us the way Bill had Him, we shall be all right, for They together will be with us.

We want with all our hearts that Richie will not have to go to war – but we want much more deeply that Richie will have what Bill had, so that nothing, absolutely nothing, can hurt him. And what we want for Richie we are sure Bill wants for everyone who reads these letters.