1958-09-22, Bette to Parents

Bette J. Barto

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Subject Terms
Women and the military, Women and war, United States -- Air Force, United States -- Army -- Air Forces, Photographs, Armed Forces -- Correspondence, Correspondence -- Vietnam War -- 1961-1975, Christmas

Summary
This collection contains 139 correspondence from Maj. Bette J. Barto, USAFE to her parents while serving as a nurse during the late 1950s and 1960s. Also included are three photographs, one special orders document, and one marriage license. In several cases, Bette refers to her parents as "Lizzie" and "Hugh Elmer," or simply "Elmer." Three letters from 1961 or 1962 are undated and placed in a separate folder.

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Dear Mom and Elmore,

Don't know if I'll get far on this letter - I'm sitting on the end of the active runway waiting for Ray to come down. He's hanging that last aircraft again. He checked at 3 as I was starting to report off duty.

(He just buzzed the runway and is now in the pattern - ready to land those. Looks like the plane may be O.K. now - if so he will be flying it to France soon.)

Anyway, he's hungry - plus 3 x's today and hasn't had a bite to eat. I fixed chicken for him to eat after please last night but he had gotten a sandwich on the way and wasn't hungry. So we will go eat cold chicken and a little while since Tom has study.

Last night I didn't get off duty until 8 p.m. - I was sent on an Air Evac ship 260 miles into the heart of the desert to answer an Air Force request for help. I was on duty 7-3 - got the notice to go at 1:35. I was relieved at 1:25 by a nurse who knew none of my house full of patients. I was dressed in my flying suit and gotten in the Ambulance to dash to the flight line at 320 m.p.h. to imagine my dressing in 7 minutes to go anywhere! She was off in 20 seconds and I knew ever nothing but sand to. This W.W.T evacuated, landing strip - No one on the plane (11 of us) had
been there before but we had
some maps showing what it looked
like, and pictures that in F.T.I.
showing us the areas that were known
to be mined. So we knew - not knowing
what our patients were or how badly
injured. I had enough first aid
equipment to stock the army. Then
she arrived there we landed on the
old dirt strip and by the time the wheels
were down we had hundreds of Arabs
running toward us from everywhere. So
we climbed off the plane a beat up old
jeep loaded up and 6 or 8 soldiers
complete with turbans and all - climbed
and began to gather with our
undergarments - a washer. They shook their
drums around and we learned that our
patients were two Arab oil company
grave loaders, 2 of 12 injured. And a
large gravel truck overturned on them.
It had to the load our stretchers
into their old truck that came up and
then we climbed on too and rode about
a mile off the strip to an Arab village
- to the hospital - It was a British red
hospital - Government owned - operated
by the lone German doctor - whose salary
is paid by the oil company presently
three all the desert. Close road. The
doctor was no were to be seen - his
wife was ill in Tripoli & he was back
here apparently. So the place was
run by a couple of English speaking
men.

Mom, of all the sights you’ve ever
seen as Lyons View, the K.N.C. Public
Health in all - you’ve never seen the
fresh we worked into. In one small
bare room the one other back porch
there were nine surplus Iran beds
with filthy green striped mattresses
on them. On each of the 9 mattresses (2 mattresses more lying on the floor itself) lay an Arab, ghastly beyond imagination, fully dressed in ragged clothing—down to his feet. Two were cruelly bandaged, some had ragged splints on broken limbs, two—the two we were to take—had fractured hips and were in bitter splints wrapped with all bandages. The few who didn't shoot over them evidently didn't bother to hit the wounds because the skulls were stunned beyond repair. There were a couple of crude pots and urinals sitting about half filled with urine and excreta on the top heater beside tables lay half chewed leaves of hard arid bread and some cardboard pitchers—for water—they were their diet. He got their names, examined their injuries and loaded them on our stretchers, good luck bands clutched tightly in their heads. A rather distinguished looking Arab stood waiting for us and asked if he might accompany us since one of the injured men was his brother—so rather than cause an international incident, we allowed him to come along. The loaded five patients in the truck and then, leaving one Arab with them, the rest of us struck out across the desert. Waiting for the plane you can't imagine the heat!

I got my first legitimate air evac patients loaded in their litter tracked aboard the aircraft and tied restrainers about them
Wars so they'd stay put or take off. They are strange people. They must have been tired but they never took their eyes off me or batted an eyelash. I only knew 2 or 3 dozen Waris wards so our bedside checks were sort of limited to "good" (ba-he) or (Amnu ba-he) - thanks (shukra) and (may-aq) which is Water. They never even looked out the window as we took off - one did put his fingers in his ear or face - he was just over the engine. They brought their own built-in pills and pills. My nursing care was strictly limited to drinks of water and using flight maps over the windows to shade them from the afternoon sun as we headed North for Irbilus.

The monotony of the flight was broken by one hilarous incident. One Arab began to squirm - the one who had drunk most of the water. I asked the interpreter to check his trouble. Naturally he needed a drink - something we didn't have (hot urine tent) - all eleven men took these turning red and all but wringing their hands. I tried to keep a straight face - reached up took two cups - proofed water - put one inside the other and handed them to my tech. With that I told him to go forward into the pilot's cabin so everybody's problem would be solved. You never saw such a relieved bunch of expressions on any men's faces!
Ray got down exactly on time and was really pleased with the aircraft's performance. He took it through Mach (1100 mph) and it stayed in one piece; so he will fly it once or twice more and then I imagine a trip to France will be coming for him.

He had studied to do last minute so after I got him fed, I had no time to finish the letter. He had Fried Chicken, all manner potatoes (cheese & onions), radishes, lettuce, cabbage, salad, and cranberry sauce.

He ate until he couldn't move. He's thin, so I have my work cut out for me to space out for him, he loves to eat.

Tomato was sauteed nite; so I got a Hormel ham (canned) and Fried sliced ham sandwiched with real lettuce, tomato, and onions (always potato chips, pickles). Then he dashed off to class for 3 hours. While I washed my clothes set up uniform, polish shoes, and wrote to you. He works from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. tomorrow too, so he will only stay a short while here after classes to write. There just aren't enough hours! He is so tired after flying 7 or 5 hours at high altitudes on 100% oxygen under all that pressure that I marvel how he can even sit up in class. I am almost afraid he won't be able to keep up with all the outside work. This course is so hard someone with a decent 8 hour day, I may beg him to quit if I see
It's giving discouraged. It's hard for him to study English grammar and composition after 20 years out of school. He gets completely bungled by the simplest thing, but I defy anyone to put take him. When it comes to the technical data and jargon of flying jet aircraft, Yanks are kinds to make a world, I guess.

Polly finally wrote me a nice card - apologized for leaving without saying anything - it was a shamen thing, I knew. They are staying Duke and taking a tour of Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and I don't know elsewhere. They sound like it's really fun. That's alright, Ray and I will go some day.

I got your picture of you & Hubba and the new 7-11. Thanks, they'll be fine. You really have slimmed down, Mom. Don't overdo it though.

Mom, I haven't sent just a thing. Will you get them some little something for me for a birthday gift when you go up? I am waiting for one more doll before I mail these Fatmas to them. They'll fight otherwise.

She's just fine now. I'm glad Mary Ann is walking a little. I can barely wait to see her. I guess we will rent a car if none of Ray's old A.F. Buddies are left in Knoxville - he knows everyone everywhere.

I'll enclose a letter of commendation I got from a patient a retired army Col. named Harris (also from Kentucky). He was really sick when we got him. He's 68 - I thought he was nice of him. Love, Betty.