

18-2-42

Dear Mum and Dad,

The exams are over and I guess I can write a letter now without thinking of a big pile of swot in the background. The worst has come to the worst, as far as we are concerned, and our course here has been extended by four weeks, leaving us six weeks more during which time we will probably have nothing much except extra flying time. I have quite a swag of hours up already, having completed over 100 hours since we arrived.

The exams were not too tough, but somehow I don't expect any very wonderful marks. However, I guess I'll struggle through, as I struggled through that wings test a week or so ago.

To-day I had my first dose of formation flying; it was rather exciting (especially for the instructor) and not nearly so easy as it looks when you see it in the newsreels. I also had what they call a height test; it just consists of going up to about 15000ft and taking a note of instrument readings and so on - you get a good view.

After that big bunch of mail last week

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letters and parcels have been trickling in for us in dribs and drabs; there were two little parcels from Joan and a letter from Hazel in which she enclosed a clipping from the Auckland Herald about Arthur Delaney, whom you may remember as my room-mate at New Plymouth. He has collected a commission at the age of 18 years and 1 month - good luck to him. Over here, though, this course extension has made us pretty mad, as we haven't even got our wings up while all the chaps we knew in camp at home have finished their courses months ago.

You wrote about a couple of chaps who went missing on cross-country from Ohakea, Tum; one of them turns out to be a chap who was at Levin when we were. There was a cross-country mishap here yesterday, too; you'll remember my mentioning Henry Cotton, a friend from Taiari who went halves in a camera with me - he and a Canadian whom I know quite well were out on a trip in the morning and crashed rather badly - we don't yet know how. Both are in hospital with broken legs, cuts and so on. They were out in a pretty wild part of the country for several hours before some passing

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farmer found them; we had a pile of planes out searching the countryside for several hours without any luck. They'll be all right now, I think, but will miss this course.

This is a strange country in some ways, Dad, and I'm sure you'd get a shock if you saw how the roads are laid out. Ninety per cent of them run straight north and south or east and west from place to place; where they simply have to make a turn it is nearly always a right-angled one, and from up top you can frequently see a great long road perhaps ten, twenty or thirty miles at a stretch, running straight as an arrow across the plains. The surface is not very wonderful, though; some chap was talking to us one day and quoted statistics for tar-sealed roads. I think it was some appallingly low figure like 40 or fifty miles for the whole province, outside the main towns, of course.

There's another thing about it which seems odd until you can get used to it, and that's the way every tinpot little village of maybe half a dozen houses has its precious grain elevator. What they're

like close to I don't know, but from above they seem to be brick structures shaped from a side view like this (well, more or less, anyway): . They must be as high as say a ^{2 or 3} three-storied house, very nearly. Every town on a railway has from one to half-a-dozen of them, and the whole district is honeycombed with railways. You can just about estimate the size of a town by the number of grain elevators; if there are four it's about the size of Elgin; if there's only one it's a pretty hick sort of a town. Of course, this must just about be the middle of the grain-growing land in Canada. Saskatoon has a single huge elevator which would dwarf the Farmers' in Hastings.

I recall that Bill Keill, the policeman to whose home we went for Christmas dinner, told us you could buy flour cheaper in England after your shipment had gone there all the way from Canada than you could buy it in Canada itself, so that sounds to me just like New Zealand butter used to be.

There's a joke about these grain elevators, by the way - they tell us, before we go on cross-countries that we are not to fly

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low and read the names off them to find out where we are. So far I haven't found it necessary, anyway, but you never can tell. Map-reading here is not really hard but there are hordes of little towns which all look alike from three thousand feet up.

The weather has been wonderfully mild for a long time now - even above freezing point, and this is supposed to be the worst month of the year. It was supposed to be a bad winter, too, but that hasn't come to pass yet. We've been here ten weeks and it has only been 40 below once or twice. Most of the snow is off the ground, and they promised us it was here to stay all winter.

One or two of the boys got copies of an Auckland Weekly with a photo in it of a parade on the boat when we arrived at "Frisco; you won't see me, but it was of our section. I was in the middle some place, I think.

By the way, in case I haven't mentioned it, don't make me jealous again by writing about green peas, cabbage and broad beans; after the hash here, it's the last straw - and Sunday night is the worst in the week. P.S. - keep me

Love from

Arnold.

posted about how
Charlotte goes, if you can
still get gas to run her, Dad.
J.