Abstract: This collection consists of 58 letters written by Henry J. Southmayd, Jr., to his family between 1940 and 1945 while serving in the 65th Fighter Squadron, 57th Fighter Group of the 12th Army Air Force. The letters detail his recruitment into the Army Air Corps and subsequent training as well as the events and conditions experienced while participating in the North African and Italian campaigns of the European Theater during World War II.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 666
Title: Henry J. Southmayd, Jr., World War II letters to the Southmayd family
Inclusive Dates: 1940-1967
Bulk Dates: 1940-1945
Extent: 0.33 linear feet (1 box)
Language: Materials in English and Italian.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 666, Henry J. Southmayd, Jr., World War II letters to the Southmayd family, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 1: Shelved in SPEC MSS Manuscript Boxes

Location: Special Collections, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/

Source: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alan W. Southmayd, August 2013.

Processing: Processed and encoded by E. Evan Echols, September 2013.

Access Restrictions: The collection is open for research.

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Biographical Note

Henry J. Southmayd, Jr., was born on March 8, 1915, in Springfield, Ohio. His mother died not long after his birth but, soon after, his father Henry J. Southmayd married Elizabeth ("Bess") Weltner, and the family grew to include two younger siblings: Dorothy Southmayd (b. 1918) and Alan W. Southmayd (b. 1930). In the early 1920s the Southmayd family moved to White Plains, New York.

In October 1940, Southmayd enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps and underwent radio operator training. During World War II, he served at the rank of Sergeant in the 65th Fighter Squadron, 57th Fighter Group of the 12th Army Air Force, which participated in the North African and Italian campaigns of the European Theater.

Southmayd re-enlisted, serving a total of 22 years and retiring from the military on May 31, 1963. He died on January 26, 1967, at the age of 51.

Sources:

Biographical information derived from the donor.

This collection consists of 58 letters written by Henry J. Southmayd, Jr., to his family between 1940 and 1945 while serving in the 65th Fighter Squadron, 57th Fighter Group of the 12th Army Air Force. The letters detail his recruitment into the Army Air Corps and subsequent training as well as the events and conditions experienced while participating in the North African and Italian campaigns of the European Theater during World War II.

Southmayd's letters to his family began on October 29, 1940, and discussed his enlistment and training at Mitchell Field, Long Island, and assignment to the radio section of the Army Air Corps. The letters discussed several aspects of his duties at Mitchell Field including guard duty, living arrangements, and the lack of time off for the holidays. In May, 1941, he traveled to Scott Field near Belleville, Illinois, for a five and a half month course at "radio school." While at Scott Field, Southmayd frequently wrote about a lack of pay (for months at a time), disorganization of the military, and the need for money and supplies. He also mentioned his intention to visit family in Ohio, where the Southmayd family was from originally.

After graduating from radio school on October 24, 1941, Southmayd was assigned as a radio operator in the base radio station (First Air Force Net), at Winsor Forks Air Field in Hartford, Connecticut. After the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States entry into World War II, he moved to Trumbull Airport in Groton, Connecticut. While at Trumbull, Southmayd was promoted to Corporal (January 1942) and Sergeant (March 1942). He achieved an A.M. (Air Mechanic) rating, second class in March and served as a teletype operator in May. In June, 1941, Southmayd wrote that he was "hand picked" to do a job and within a month he arrived in North Africa. Because of security precautions, he was unable to give his specific location, often writing the phrase "somewhere in..." and listing a country or general region. From his initial arrival in North Africa, he traveled to Palestine (July) and Egypt (August).

In his letters, Southmayd described life in the desert including the weather, supply conditions, the slow delivery of mail, radio programs available to the personnel, and Christmas celebrations in the encampment. Though he mentioned some locations that he had visited such as Palestine, Cyprus, and Alexandria, his conversation skirted around exactly where he was located. Southmayd encouraged his family to make educated guesses as to his current whereabouts using his descriptions of the native people, nearby geographic features, and publicly available information about troop movements in the newspapers.

In early to mid 1943, Southmayd wrote that he was constantly moving around in the Middle East and North Africa. By August he had arrived in Sicily, via Tripoli, Libya, and Malta as part of the Allied invasion of Italy. While in Sicily he wrote about seeing USO shows featuring several entertainers including Jack Benny, Bob Hope, and Ella Logan. Much of Southmayd's correspondence with his family during this time regarded movies viewed, books read, and the need for camera equipment and film. In November 1943, he developed Yellow Jaundice and was hospitalized in North Africa. He was released from the hospital and returned to his unit in Sicily on December 24, in time for their Christmas celebration.

In addition to writing the family as a whole, Southmayd wrote letters to individual family members, including his mother, father, and sister Dorothy, or "Dot," who lived on her own. His letters to Dorothy
discussed her various jobs, including her appointment as a nurses’ aid in 1943, and her eventual enlistment in the American Red Cross. In 1944, she was stationed in England to assist with the war effort.

By April 23, 1944, Southmayd was assigned to Corsica, where he participated in the operation of Armed Forces Radio. During this time, he continued to discuss the need for a camera and film, his non-attendance of church despite daily prayers, a visit to Rome in November, and an ongoing desire to meet Dorothy while she was stationed with the American Red Cross in England. The collection contains three Christmas Cards sent by Southmayd in 1944 including one from the 57th Fighter Group addressed to his mother, and two from 65th Fighter Squadron, dubbed "The Fighting Cocks," addressed to his mother and brother Alan.

The collection also features examples of Victory Mail (V-mail) letters which, during World War II, were photographed, transported as microfilm, and then re-printed onto paper for the recipient in order to expedite correspondence with soldiers stationed abroad. There are two letters written by Henry on a V-mail form, to later be photographed (folder 6) as well as a re-printed V-mail letter received by the Southmayd family, dated February 21, 1944 (folder 5). Also featured is an inscribed picture of Henry in uniform (folder 3). The last letter from Southmayd to his family was a V-mail sent from Naples, Italy, on the day of his return from Europe (August 18, 1945). The final letter in the collection (and only letter not written by Henry) is from his parents, dated August 22, 1945, and was returned to the sender because by this time, Southmayd had departed for the United States.

The last two folders of the collection contain Henry J. Southmayd's service records from 1945-1967 and a yearbook from The Artillery Center, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, featuring the personnel of the 5th Field Artillery Group and 17th Field Artillery Battalion. Alan W. Southmayd served in the Headquarters of the 17th Field Artillery Battalion.
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**

Southmayd, Henry J., Jr., 1915-1967--Correspondence.

Southmayd family--Correspondence.

**Corporate Names**

United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 57th.


**Topical Terms**

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Africa, North--Correspondence.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Italy--Correspondence.

World War, 1939-1945--Aerial operations, American--Correspondence.

World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives, American--Correspondence.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Europe--Correspondence.

**Geographic Names**

Africa, North.

Belleville (Ill.)

Corsica (France)

Cyprus.

Egypt.

Groton (Conn.)

Hartford (Conn.)

Italy.

Malta.

Palestine.

Sicily (Italy)
Form/Genre Terms

Black-and-white photographs.
Christmas cards.
Letters (correspondence)
Military records.
Yearbooks.

Occupation

Radio operators--United States.
Soldiers.

Personal Contributors

Southmayd family, correspondent.
Arrangement

The letters are arranged chronologically.
Detailed Description of the Collection

Letters, 1940 October 29-1941 November 24 [Box 1 F1]

Letters, 1941 December 10-1942 May 27 [Box 1 F2]

Letters, 1942 June-December [Box 1 F3]
Contains an inscribed picture of Henry Southmayd in uniform and a Christmas postcard sent to the Southmayd family while Henry was stationed in the Middle East.

Letters, 1942 December 30-1943 July 22 [Box 1 F4]

Letters, 1943 August 14-1944 April 5 [Box 1 F5]
Contains a V-mail letter dated February 21, 1944.

Letters, 1944 April 23-1945 August 22 [Box 1 F6]
Contains a "Buon Natale" Christmas card from the 57th Fighter Group and two Christmas Cards from "The Fighting Cocks" (65th Fighter Squadron). Also contains two V-mail letters and a letter from Henry Southmayd's parents dated August 22, 1945.

Henry J. Southmayd, Jr., service records, 1945-1967 [Box 1 F7]
Also includes two pamphlets "Genealogy and Family History Resources at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania" and "Military Service Records in the National Archives of the United States."

Yearbook: The Artillery Center, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, 1950 [Box 1 F7]
1950 yearbook for the 5th Field Artillery Group and 17th Field Artillery Battalion, trained at The Artillery Center, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The yearbook includes a photo of Alan Southmayd, who was in the Headquarters of the 17th Field Artillery Battalion.