

Haddon Hall
Eng. Gen. Hosp.
Atlantic City, N. J.
May 18, 44

Dear Mrs. Colwart:

Believe me when I say I don't know how to begin this letter. But I've put it off long enough now so I will try and do the best I can. There is not much one can say to the mother of a man whom you have seen die so valiantly. I say Man because that is the way I feel toward Louis. I say man because of the missions I had flown with him even before that fatal day. He had proven himself very well. In all the time I have spend in combat I have never met anyone I could trust to hold on to his nerve, shoot straight and come up with a laugh and a smile on his face and that is what made you like Louis so much he was always like that. All the while I knew him I never saw him when he wasn't trying to make a joke out of something. But you could always depend on him to take excellent care of his guns on his gun position.- The Ball Turret - He loved that turret better than any other part of the airplane. I remember when we first got to England. Lt. Snyder wanted to change Louis and I around because of the fact I had flown in the turret in combat in the Pacific. When Louis heard about it he had tears in his eyes. And if Lt. Snyder had made the change it would have broken his heart. And it was not hard to see even on our first mission that he could handle it better than I or anyone else on the crew. And even in the thick of everything he was always laughing and getting a great kick out of it all. On Feb. 8, 44, as you know we were bombing Frankfurt, Germany. It was a beautiful day and we could see our target very plainly. The Germans of course could see us just as plainly. Therefore the flak was very accurate. And right in the midst of all the flak I heard Louis on the interphone. Wow! Look at those buildings fly apart! He could see our bombs bursting right down through the center of the target and was telling all of us in the upper part of the plane all about it. As I said the flak was very accurate and the explosions were rocking us about. I could see we had been hit in the left wing. I called and asked Louis how it looked underneath. He said - there's a hold down here so big I could crawl through it. But not once did he ever sound scared and to hear him talk was an inspiration for the whole crew! Well we had hit our target successfully and were on the way home - everything was running smoothly until we crossed the German French border. Then we were attacked by a squadron of German fighter planes. We were the last ship down under our formation. Therefore they singled us out and they kept coming in one right behind the other until they had us on fire and we had to abandon the ship. Mrs. Colwart,

Louis was killed instantly the same time as Kahler the radio-man. I know cause I saw them both. A full burst of 20 MM cannon shells come right through Louis turret. From my position at the waist gun I could see Kahler fall behind the door at the same time I saw Louis get hit. I started to go forward to see if there was anything I could do cause they had also shot my gun position clear out of the ship. I only took about two steps when I was hit with a direct burst in the left leg. It tore my leg completely off. There was nothing more I could do but crawl back to the escape hatch and beil out cause the plane was a blazing inferno. And I had to get out before I lost consciousness from the lack of oxygen and the loss of blood. I don't till this day know how I ever got out and to the ground alive! It was just one of those miracles of combat. When I was strong enough to feel anything I felt lost that I should be still alive while Louis and Kahler and the others whom I learned of later were gone. Mrs. Colwart, it may be of little consolation to you, but this is the way I've taught myself to feel. We all must die someday. But not all of us can die fighting for something!! As Louis did - for something very great - to rid the world of cruelty and Nazism - so that others can live in a world of peace - full of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. That's what Louis died for to give us. I feel very proud that I knew him and that he considered me his friend. And so long as I shall live his memory will never leave me.

I am to be operated on Monday or Tuesday of next week. They are going to take four more inches off my leg because the Germans did not do a good job. I will be confined in bed for three weeks at least. After that I will have to remain on crutches until I can wear the leg they give me. Believe me, Mrs. Colwart, this is the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my life. I will close now hoping that you may find in this some consolation in knowing how great a man your boy has proven himself to his fellowmen.

My love to you and yours and may
God bless you

Sincerely,

Joe