

The Spanish River Papers

July 2018

Volume XXIV



World War II Letters from Shirley and Robert Barnes

The Spanish River Papers

July 2018

Volume XXIV

World War II Letters from Shirley and Robert Barnes



Boca Raton
Historical
Society &
Museum

Introduction

In 1942, the Army Air Corps relocated its technical school for radar training to Boca Raton, Florida. Amongst those who were stationed at Boca Raton during the war were women who enrolled in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) and Women's Army Corps (WACs). These women served at BRAAF as nurses and in other technical capacities. In September 1947, a category 4 hurricane demolished much of the base; it was then followed by a second hurricane one month later essentially flooding what was left of the Air Field. By the end of 1947, radar training and all non-essential personnel were transferred to Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi. Today, the old runways are occupied by two important modern installations—Florida Atlantic University and the Boca Raton Airport.

The following selections of letters were donated to the Boca Raton Historical Society & Museum, all of which were written between Robert Barnes and Shirley Armstrong Barnes. The letters follow both Bob and Shirley from when they first met during World War II, in 1944, to just after they married in 1948. Both Bob and Shirley served during the war. It is unknown exactly what position/job/tasks Bob held while in the military only that he worked in the S2 section (intelligence). Shirley, however, was an army nurse. The earliest letters are to Shirley from Bob while he was stationed both at home and in France. Later letters are to Bob from Shirley primarily from when she was stationed at the Boca Raton Army Air Field. These letters provide an interesting look into what life was like for those in service. They offer a narrative that is both male and female, both at home and on the frontlines, and finally what life was like for service men and women both during and after the war. Of particular interest are the letters from Shirley during her time in Boca Raton. Topics covered in these letters range from her daily chores and her work schedule to her battle with the pests, mold, and weather.



The first three letters are from Bob to Shirley while he is stuck stateside in training and in non-combat positions. In these letters, he is eager, young, and excited to join the warfront. It is not until the last of the letters where the reality of war begins to sink in.

To Shirley Armstrong from Robert Barnes, Esler Field LA, 27 July 1944 1400

Dear Shirley,

I hear that we are in now are air maneuvers. We are not going to have any time to ourselves, but I don't mind too much. Not much to do anyway when you do have the time off. One good thing about it is that I enjoy the work very much and so keep interested. Last night we were doing some photo interpretation and I could have stayed with it all night long. It is fun hunting for stuff in photos that you are not supposed to find.

I can really say for once that I enjoy the work and it is the best setup in relation to a job that I have had since getting into the army. If they will top it off with overseas duty next spring I will really be happy. [...] Met a friend of mine in town last Sunday, who is stationed at Camp Livingston. We had a good time talking about old times and what was going on in the army. We had not seen each other in two years. It's probably about the last time as he expects to ship out soon. [...]

Please write soon,
Bob

To Shirley Armstrong from Robert Barnes, Esler Field LA, 30 July 1944 1900

Dear Shirley,

I worked today and have finally finished, so will do something to please myself for a change. My eyes are rather tired as I have been typing all day. Had to copy the Tech Order for-baiten (sic) for the allowance of a couple of squadrons under us. [...]

When I finish this I am going to work on my navigation as I am very rusty. One of the officers in operations is going to fly another officer to Kansas City tomorrow. I helped him plan the trip on the maps. He said that he would take me along if he doesn't get a load of ranks. So I am hoping. [...]

If I can navigate and not get sick might be able to talk him into flying more often. He is interested in navigation and wants to learn more about it and the only way is to fly. If we can fly to Kansas City should be able to make it to St. Louis. I am working on it don't worry if that is what is bothering you.

Got a letter from home telling me about a very good friend of mine that got killed in the invasion on D-Day. A fellow that was with him got hit and is back in the states and his unit saw him and learned how my friend got it. He was in the first wave to hit the beach or he was in the combat engineers. As they hit the beach a shell hit their barge killing 31 out of 37. He was one of the six not hit so took off for the beach, it was a sniper got him. He never knew what hit him.

Saw by the paper where a fellow on your street got killed also. [...]

How is the weather there for sleeping in the daytime? Here it is way too hot, in fact doesn't cool off too much at night even. I am in a sweat all the time and it is not over my work either.

I was lucky and did not have to march in the parade Saturday. They tell me it was a good parade, but I am happy not having a part in it. One of the boys just brought me some ice cream. I can see though that it is going to be a race to eat it with a spoon or drink it from a cup. I am holding my own.

[...]

Be good and don't work too hard. Pleasant dreams tomorrow morning.

Nite Shirley,

Bob

To Shirley Armstrong from Robert Barnes, Esler Field LA , 6 August 1944 1800

Dear Shirley,

Also I have the same trouble here as you do, that being having my arm stick to the paper as I write, due to the heat. I have never taken up swimming standing up, but I am thinking about it so that I won't drwn (sic) sometime.

That was one swell trip I had Monday, and was in a rare state of mind. [...] I did not get the least bit sick which made me feel good, as I want to get the Flight Surgeon to write off the airsickness that is in my record now. A few more trips and no sickness and maybe I will be able to talk business. [...] Gee, I really had one swell trip, and as you might expect it had rather an (sic) sorry ending. You know this is mean of me to tell you about the nice trip, I had when you were working hard no doubt.

I mentioned it did not end well, it is rather a long story, but will make it short. It seems that while we were away another B-25 plowed into the woods killing all the four men aboard. The plane went to Middletown Pa. Sunday and was to return then, but bad weather forced it to remain till Monday. I had a chance to go, but had planned on going Monday, and figured that I could have more fun as I knew the pilot, and they would not be able to stay. They were to load up some camouflage paint and then return. So decided that I would not go with them but go Monday as I had planned. As it turned out it was a very good thing. It crashed about ten miles from the field. It was sure lucky for me that the other trip had been planned and that they were not going to the Rome Depot instead. [...]

This afternoon I was doing some work, am going to have to do some more work when I finish writing to you, after all the war is not over as yet. Talking about the war reminds me of something that happened yesterday. It is the job of the intelligence section to keep the Col. maps up to date on the war. He has one for every battle front. It is rather a job and I am not too eager about starting on it every day. Saterdag (sic) was worse then (sic) other days I did not get around to it till about noon, and in the meantime the Col. did them himself. He is to (sic) excited about the war so goes right ahead and does it himself if I don't get there. It is a good thing that he is not figuring out moves before they take place or I would be holding up the war, and I don't want to

do that. Tomorrow I will have to be on the ball, can I help it if we are on the move in France.
[...]

I see that I have to hope for cool weather not only here but in St. Louis, so that my correspondence does not drop off completely. Talking about the pool. We can't go to the pool that we used to but they still will let the WACs go. [...]

You are not kidding when you say that we must make sure that our children don't have to go through this. I worries me enough that my brother having to go in the 1st of the year. For one that writing letters is too much like work in this hot weather, you did Ok you deserve a coke. In fact now that you mentioned it I think that I will walk up to the PX and get some ice cream. If that poor A/C is lonesome in Houston it is his own falt (sic). I spent some time there myself and that is just about the twon (sic) and post going. He has no excuse to be lonsome (sic) but I have. Of course I can see his point and it is not a bad one either.

As I said once before I am off to the PX.
By now,
Bob

In the next three letters Bob is stationed in Europe. In these letters he describes his daily life, including his struggles with the mail, his description of when peace was finally declared, and the reality of post-war Europe.

To Shirley Armstrong from Robert Barnes, Haguenau, France, 9 May 1945

Dear Shirley,
I wish that this was V-Day instead of just V-E Day, but you can't have everything. It is a beautiful day for such an occasion. It is one of those days you would like to be spending at Green Lake or up in the mountains. [...]

We had just arrived out in the field when last wrote and shortly after we got under operation. During our period of operation up to the end of the war we were really on the go. I was half asleep most of the time and in a fog but it was interesting and exciting. Working in intelligence you can watch the war progress along to the finish and it was really something. I would explain some about how we operated, but I know from experience that it would be cut so won't bother.

During our period of operation the "birdmen" did a good job and we did not lose anyone which is really very fortunate. We are of course taking credit for finishing this war off so quick. It was just after our initial operation date that things really started rolling, and kept rolling until; the final curtain [...]

Whether we are going to move to Germany or stay here for awhile (sic) we don't know as yet and the way we are told things probably won't know for some time yet. It was not hard to realize the war was over, because with its notice of finish, we also heard notice of the old way of life like back in the states. [...]. A rather interesting thing happened here Sat. nite. (sic) Early Sat. nite (sic) group called and said the war would officially end at 1200 Sun., so we notified the

Squadron and need I say any more. It did not take long for the boys to really get happy, drunk and sick. Then when Sun. noon came and no official announcement of surrender the boys were rather irritated but took it in a good way. So when the real McCoy came last night they remembered the experience of a few nites (sic) back so were very calm after hearing a news commentators report last night I can see where the war could have ended at noon here. The only reason it fell through was because the German general that finally signed, tried to hold out. So all in all our celebration was not in vain. [...]

They are talking about having schools for us over here if we stay around any length of time, and one of them is going to be Pilot training. Here is one boy who has his name on that list. Sure would like to be able to fly when I get out of this Army, would be OK.

I hope you have not shoved off for the Pacific in the meantime, as I have not heard from you, probably just keeping you busy. I have been sweating out hearing from you. This is about all I can think of right now to write about and have covered anything I guess so will say, so long for now. By the way how do you think you will make out on a furlough rather than leave this year; will you get one?

By for now,
Bob

Letter from Robert Barnes to Shirley Armstrong 24 May 1945, Haguenau, France

Dear Shirley,

You are about to be honored, or should I say bored with the first letter I have been able to write without local censorship since the latter part of January.

Starting today we can seal our envelopes ourselves which makes it very nice. Not that we will say more, but makes one feel much more at ease when writing. Also makes me feel better as I am told by various people my letters looked like paper doilies by the time they got them. Also our mail will get right out instead of being delayed a day or two while going through the process of censorship.

Our mail situation is still messed up, but they checked with Paris a couple of days ago and Paris is going to take a reading on the situation over here and back at New York. They hope to have it straightened out within a week or so. Might seem like a long time, but to us won't seem so long. I was very fortunate though to receive 4 letters, one being from you, while away in Germany. [...]

One spot along the autobahn we saw where they were in the process of a cement strip in place of the grass strip that divides the traffic lines. They camouflaged it as they put it in. They were planning on using it for a landing strip as they did other ones, but never did get the chance here. We are going to see the Black Forest from the autobahn and that is a sight but nothing that can't be equaled back in the states. Just before entering XII TAC Hdq. At Darnstadt we saw several badly damaged ME 109's they had hid in the woods. Think they were planning on using them on the strip they were building down the road a ways. We got setup at the Hdq. there had supper

and decided to take a ride into Darnstadt about two miles down the road. We spent about an hour riding around looking over everything.

The air force really laid this town out through. They did not leave the walls standing like in the other two towns. The people there really have a job ahead of them in rebuilding that city. The cities on the whole are fairly modern, a lot more so than the French cities. [...]

Tomorrow is the group day off, so think I will get some extra rack time. Don't ask me why it is thur. and not Sun., it is beyond me. We have a review sat., something to look forward to. Drill every day, so you see our basic training course is picking up every day.
By Now! Always, Bob

Letter from Robert Barnes to Shirley Armstrong 7 June 1945 Haguenau, France

Another week is drawing to a close, and not too much has taken place. I was on all day guard duty yesterday, so didn't get the holiday that was declared by Gen "Ike". Quite a few trucks went into Germany yesterday, but did not but did not cover much territory that I have not already seen. I was off today but shot the breeze with a couple of my friends in group hdq., this morning, and went swimming this afternoon. [...]

We had a little unexpected excitement last night, in fact that is the reason I did not get this written last night. Was just getting out my pen preparing to start when I heard a small explosion and a puff of smoke. Did not pay too much attention to it because that happens all the time around here. But right after saw some of the fellows on the line running over into the woods where it came from, so I took off on the run also. When I got within shouting distance of the other fellows they told me to get the ambulance. So turned around and went for the medic tent and the ambulance. Then had a wild ride across the field to a bridge over the RR tracks just on the other side of the wooded area. It was there I saw a sight not pretty in the least. It was four French kids injured by a 20 mm explosive shell they had been playing with, which they got from a marked off salvage ammo dump near our area. The same thing happened about a week ago but never knew about it till it was all over. I won't go into the details about it as far as the kids looked as you get enough of that in your work to more than last you. Due to the fact that the nearby hospitals only have nurses in them and not doctors we had to go all the way to Strasbourg. The nurses they have here are not like the American nurses. I would say a good share of them right now are about the same level as the Nurse's aides back home. Well when we did get to the hospital we were lucky to find a French doctor that could talk English. Two of them were brothers and they died on the way in, in fact was holding the one kids head and shoulder on the stretcher so he would not bounce all over, due to the rough road. I felt his pulse stop on the way in so knew we were minus him, and the other one we figured would not last out the trip and he didn't. So out of the three one made it alive to the hospital with stomach injury and from there on it is up to the French. Let me tell you now, we GI's don't know how lucky we are in having fancy American hospitals, equipment, nurses and doctors. If you ever have any trouble with some guy complaining just ask him if he has ever seen the French hospitals in action. I have and don't want to see them from a stretcher either. Don't know whether the one kid will make it or not. [...]

Just finished playing ball, alright don't get inquisitive, I'll admit it, we lost, but had a lot of fun any way. The boys got a pump hooked on the shower so am going to take advantage of it. Will close here for now. Hope to hear from you soon.

By now, always Bob

In the following letters Shirley is writing to Bob. At this point Bob is no longer in the military, he is pursuing a degree in engineering in New York. Shirley has been re-assigned and has moved from Keesler Air Field to the Boca Raton Army Air Field. She is less than pleased with her new location with perhaps good reason. She arrives in a small town overrun by bugs, smelling of mold, and having to contend with Florida's unique weather from the heat and humidity to hurricanes and flooding.

Letter from Shirley Armstrong to Robert Barnes, 19 April 1947, Boca Raton Air Field, FL.

Dear Bob,

Yes, you are right-I am on night duty again. This is my first night- and you are first on my lists of letters to be answered. You noticed my new address I presume. However the field is closing, so I hope it will be changing again soon. [...]

You have never seen a place as Boca Raton. It's extremely small- the field is spread over the remaining country. Time and termites here have done their work well- and it's painted all those horrible camouflage colors. It's miles from the hospital to anything- a car is a necessity. Morrison Field is also closing. I've been to Miami and West Palm Beach. I like West Palm much better. Everything seems so clean down here. I'm crazy about the ocean-it was the first time I had ever seen it. Haven't been in swimming yet as it was full of seaweed- and someone told us there were also lots of jellyfish- but I love to go look at it. And I did go wading- couldn't resist.

That's all tonight. Bye now. Shirley



Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong 17 Sept 1947, Boca Raton, FL.

My dearest Bob,

Well, we survived the hurricane, but there were times that I doubted it. At first it was expected that the "eye" would hit Delray Beach- but it didn't, hit Fort Lauderdale instead, and then turned south to Miami. The winds reached about 100 miles an hour here. It's still blowing and raining slightly. A lot of the slate shingles blew off the Club [Boca Raton Hotel and Club] roof. The

place leaked like a sieve, except in the bar- our quarters. One of the shingles hit the car, put a fairly large dent in the roof. The boys said it's quite scratched up. I'm hoping to get the insurance company to pay for a new paint job- which will be blue if it's done.

Wards 8 and 7, the nurse's rec hut, medical supply, base supply and the hangers and shops are flat. Our quarters are ok- though things may be wet. We can't go out yet- it's not clean yet. I'm working tonight in a green uniform, white borrowed buttons, ankle socks, saddle shoes, no cap. There's another nurse on, which is good as I don't know one pt. from another.

We had a baby here today at 1245 practically the height of the storm. All the 6 ½ month and over pregnant women are here, so we may have more. I didn't sleep much- the shingles rattling off and the wind made so much noise. I expected a tree thru the roof any minute or the chimney bricks. Lots of trees are down around the building- it's quite a sight.

As far as I know, no one was hurt. We've had good food, the water's okay, and the lights work- due to an emergency generator. It's been quite an experience- but not one I want to go thru again. Of course we are all hoping that the place will move quickly now- especially with both supplies gone. I missed you terribly- especially last night. I wanted to reach out and hold your hand so bad. I didn't sleep too much- no one did- waiting for the hurricane to hit.

Oh darling, I love you so very much. Way down here, next June seems so far away, but I guess I can stand it. My ring reminds me of you every time I look at it I love you- with all my heart.

Goodnight darling,

Always, Shirley



18 Sept 1947

My darling,

I'll try to put things down in chronological order. First- last night I scrubbed for an appendectomy at 10 o'clock. We were just thru with that when a woman decided to have her baby. I fixed her and watched her all night. She had a boy at 0550. Finally got to bed at eight this morning. At eleven they got us up to move back to quarters.

Unfortunately, wards 7 & 8 are ok, but the field is 75% ruined I guess. Our quarters were quite wet, but my room is completely dry. I'm lucky, because all of Capt. Long's clothes are ruined. But there's no electricity on the field yet, so we moved back to the Club around ten. I went to sleep finally and slept till six thirty.

I drove into Boca before coming back to the Club. Palm trees were down all over the place. Coconuts are easy to get now. The fir and other trees are stripped. It will be at least ten years

before it looks the same down here, then another big wind will come along- and they can start over again. We heard that lots of the beach houses just completely disappeared.

The car radio aerial broke off completely, and a new paint job is imperative- soon- it's rusting already. But I'm mighty lucky since some cars were completely destroyed.

Gen'l Kepner was down today, on an inspection, so we're hoping we get orders soon. As long as I leave Florida, I really don't care where I go, since now I can look forward to being your wife. Darling I love you so very much. I miss you my heart.

Goodnight, all my love Shirley



**Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 28 Sept 1947, Boca Raton FL.
2330**

My darling,

Just a note- to say- I love you- and miss you- very much. I was very busy last night, and was so tired this morning. I went off duty with intentions of falling right into bed- to find my new room flooded from hard rains all night. So I spent an hour and a half shoving furniture and closets from an empty dry room and my things into it. I really was ready for the sack then! I'm so tired of moving from one place to another- though it doesn't take long anymore. Each time I move I discard something else I feel is non-essential. This place is really flooded tonight- the frogs are loud right outside. The chief carpenter came today and drilled holes in the corridors to let the water out-there was too much to mop up- and it kept coming in. Lovely place we live in.

Darling I must go and feed my preemie, he's so cute. The boys tease me about the flock of children I've have- though I still say only four.

Goodnight my heart.

All my love, Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 12 October 1947, Boca Raton FL.

“Boca Raton Lake”, Boca Raton Field, Florida

Or- as Jim says

“Maternity by the Sea”

My Own Darling,

You probably know that we had another hurricane. It wasn't as bad as the last one- the wind only blew about 75 miles an hour- but it rained torrents. This place has had it! It already was nearly flooded- now it is. Fish swim under our quarters- snakes crawl in- and more queer bugs. Wild cats and alligators are coming out of the 'glades and the whole place smells. We cannot drink any water without boiling it- which isn't satisfactory either. They set up a few Lister bags- but most of it they are distilling- for the hospital, that is. For a while we couldn't use the latrines, had a can- but that didn't last long, thank goodness.

Last night at 1900- we moved to a BOQ- permanent structure- thru all the rain. It was much better than the Club. We had a lot less patients- and more practice- so it didn't take long. A field range was set up in one end of the building, a few refrigerators were moved in, the generator was connected and we were all set. They made doughnuts last night on the range. For breakfast this morning I had half a can of cold ration meat and noodles, a doughnut and a cup of coffee. Was good- and I was hungry.

We moved back to the hospital at 1100 this morning. A detail had mopped it, so it wasn't too bad when we arrived. The only good way to get to our quarters and the wards is thru the main entrance. The water has gone down some tonight, but this morning it was about a foot deep.

[...] Oh- I got it Friday- arrived back here at 1800 to be told – “you're restricted- a hurricane coming”. I wish you would give up working in the lab. Don't worry about saving money, get your school work done-eat enough- have some recreation- that's more important. We'll manage.

[...]

Our barracks did not get extra wet this time- but we are prepared by putting footlockers and stuff up on the beds, and covering them and our closets with rubber sheeting. But I'm so tired of everything smelling so moldy.

Every time the bus turns in front of the hospital it sounds more like a boat. The waves slash and splash.

We didn't have any babies during this storm, but we did have one at 1255 today.

Well darling if this is going to make sense, I'd better close now. It's been rather a hit and run affair.

I love you so much- and miss you more each day.

Goodnight sweetheart.

All my love, Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 17 October 1947, Boca Raton FL.

My Darling,

[...]Well there's another hurricane brewing down near the Turks Islands. We'll probably get it again- about Monday. It's about 870 miles from Miami. This seems to be Florida's year. And the Seminoles said we wouldn't have any at all. They are evacuating the field rapidly- but will be here at least another month according to today's reports.

Perhaps I can find out what happens to wires from one of the radar boys. And perhaps the lab officer knows about the mold- though I doubt it- since he is also the psychiatrist. Surely someone has already done such experiments. I can tell you it grows very rapidly on shoes- takes about three weeks for it to appear at first. It was the same way in Mississippi- it's even more damp there. [...]

Golly I hope I can get to church this Sunday. If that hurricane heads this way, we'll probably be restricted at least 36 hrs in advance like last time.

Got two books from the Book of the Month Club. One was a dividend—which I was glad to receive. It's "Human Destiny" by Lecomte du Noüy. Hope I get to read it soon. I have so many books that I haven't read—it will be something to do while you study.

Oh Bob I love you more every day. I'll be so glad when I can be with you. I miss you so much.
Goodnight darling.
All my love,
Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 20 October 1947, Boca Raton FL.

My dearest Bob,

Well, so far, the last hurricane missed us. We were all packed and ready to move, but we didn't have to, thank goodness. Every weekend—it gets monotonous. Each time I pack less—soon I'll just take my toothbrush.

Yes—it's quite dry here—hasn't rained in a week—since the last hurricane. Even the main canal has gone down a lot. But the bridges have really had it. Big holes in most—some are closed completely—they had guards patrolling them to see that only one vehicle crossed at a time.

I asked about the wires in the radar equipment molding, and was told it is sprayed with something to keep it dry. It's the same stuff that was used in the Pacific during the war. [...]

OK Bob—I miss you so much—I'll be so happy when we are together. I'm so proud of you—and want to be your wife so much.

All the love poems and songs express the way I fell about you—yet all I can say is—I love you—with all my heart.

Goodnight darling.

Always, Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 6 November 1947, Boca Raton FL.

Darling,

This has been a lovely day—but I slept thru most of it. Got up at three, moved slowly—went to Delray to eat—had a wonderful supper—sea trout. I had intended to go to Miami—but just didn't get up. [...]

The moon is all gone—it's quite dark here now—so the big urge to go smooching is gone—it's easier to be away from you when there is no moon. I never cared much for the sea wall at Keesler—usually it was rather smelly—but I usually sat there for a while when I went bike riding on the beach road.[...]

Perhaps I would do more PT if someone made me—and if I have someone to do it with. That's one reason I am going to keep my bike—though I think I'll need a new saddle—as this one is green with mold. I never uncrated it after I got it here.[...]

Just one more night after this one—its now 0130, 7 Nov. So far things have been quiet—I've read so much I feel that I have indigestion—a whole Time [magazine] tonight.

Goodnight darling.

All my love,

Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 16 November 1947, Boca Raton FL

Dearly beloved,

It was so wonderful to talk to you last night. I couldn't say everything I wanted to, because of being in such a public place. I love you so very much. Each day I miss you more and more, and think of you so often—sometimes at rather incongruous times. Everyone was sure you were calling because it had been so many days since I had a letter. You have no idea what a big impression it made when I said it was because you were lonely—and made me more ashamed for not having written. [...]

Guess I'd better get you caught up on what's happened lately.

Tuesday night I went to Bingo—didn't win a thing—would have been very surprised if I had. It's gambling, I know—but there are very few people here to go now—and they have some wonderful prizes.

Wednesday morning I was on duty, when Operations called that there was a plane going to Scott Field. I got Jones to work for me, Capt. Long said I could go, I flew over, and dressed and packed, and was there about five to ten. They called me at 0915—so I really moved. We were supposed to leave at 1000—but as usual were delayed an hour. We had a fine trip up—though it got colder and colder. We arrived at Scott at 1700 - C.S.T. I stayed at the nurses' qtrs that night—it was 44° there. I was up at 0700—in St. Louis at 0905—where I frantically shopped. I left there at 1230, and was back at operations at 1430. Lt. King had said he wouldn't wait if I didn't get there then—so he didn't get in from Chicago until 1537. By the time the ship was

gassed it was 1700. This field is closed from 2400 to 0600—so he decided to wait until 0130 to take off.[...] . We left around 0130—arrived here at 0830. I went to bed—didn't have much sleep on the plane—it was so cold. Didn't have to go to work until 1500. Went to bed around 2100.

Yesterday, I worked—from 1100 to 1900—we have a very sick mother. I went right back to bed after I talked to you—slept until 2330—got up—did up my hair and bathed, went back to bed. Today I worked from 0700 to 1100—1500 to 1900. The baby isn't very well either—so one of us specials the mother, the other the baby. Had dinner at the Club—it's only a quarter—was quite good—for that price we can't complain—and its better than the hospital for 44¢.

No—I'm afraid that it will be about the end of January before I can get out—and I will have to go to a separation center probably, as I don't think Keesler can separate women. Most likely it will be a general hospital—perhaps Oliver—at Augusta, Georgia.

Well darling—I didn't expect you to get a permanent place for several years. I can stand moving if only we don't have to come very far south—these bugs get worse every day. Capt. Long just had one of the big ones bite her.

Darling—if they ask you—like they did Lloyd—you'd best tell them you think you should get \$350—and work down from that if necessary. Don't forget--\$200 a month is less than \$50 a week—which won't go far these days of inflation—especially since you will be married—and I want to start our family about September. Having a baby is expensive—and so is the upkeep. Capt. Long has been playing records, and selecting good music for me—as I can write much better then—and she thinks you deserve a letter. So do I.

Oh Bob—I do love you so much. I shall try not to let such a long interval elapse again. It wasn't intentional, you know.

Goodnight darling.

All my love, Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 4 December 1947, Boca Raton, FL.

Hi darling!

Golly, I've spent so much time in bed lately that I'm beginning to feel like an invalid—not because I've been sick—but because my chair was turned in—I have no other place to sit—and its warm, too. I have a writing board (ex R.C.) that makes it very easy to write—and I put one behind my pillow for a good backrest. These are Hollywood beds—and I won't have mine against the wall because of bugs. I have a table behind the bed, and prop against that.

Two letters from you today—I just had to write—and besides—I miss you so much.

Went to the beach this afternoon with Bruce (the co-pilot) but it was much too cold for swimming, and rather cloudy anyway, so we didn't stay long. [...]

Darling, it's 0230—I must go to sleep.

Goodnight dearest.

Forever yours, Shirley

All non-essential personnel have been moved from Boca Raton Army Air Field to Keesler Air Field by the end of December 1947. Shirley went on leave just before she was expected to complete the move, while on leave she married Robert Barnes. She returns to Keesler only very briefly to complete the "separation" process in order to be formally discharged which takes longer than she had initially expected.

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong, 21 January 1948, Keesler Field, Miss.

My dearest,

The only explanation I can give for not writing to you last night is that I was not in the right mood. At eight o'clock I was—but at that time I was at the main PX—hardly the place to write a letter to one's husband. From there we walked to the Club. It depressed me so I just couldn't write. I felt as though some one had destroyed my illusion of Santa Claus. It used to be quite a nice place—I don't understand what is going on—unless they are in the middle of redecorating. All the old Club furniture was gone—everything there was from Boca—where it fitted—but just doesn't look right here—nor was there any apparent attempt made to even arrange it tastefully. And the whole place looked so dirty and dingy—it's no wonder that no one even goes there. People apparently drink their breakfast and leave—thankful to escape. I did see several people—yes—men—that I know—said they had heard I was married, and wished me the best. I am so glad that I am your wife, and I'll be so glad to leave here.

No one can understand why I prefer to stay in my room most of the time. All I can say is that I prefer it. For one thing, I feel that I'm just marking time here—and I refuse to be drawn in to all the petty quarrels and jealousies of this place.

Unfortunately for me, I live on the wrong end of the barracks, so I stay in my room. The girl across the hall has been nice, and I like her—but she is more O'Malley's type. [...]

My darling, I miss you so much. I will hurry home—its where I belong.
All my love,
Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong Barnes, 1 February 1948, Keesler Field, Miss.

My darling.

Your letter came describing (?) the apartment. Of course I didn't ask you—in fact didn't even think about it—just expecting you would—forgetting you are not a woman—tell me the kinds of chairs and colors, color of the rug, what kind and color curtains, are there drapes? Color? flowered? colors? are there end tables by the chairs – or will I be out begging orange crates from grocers – is there a table between the beds, chairs in the bedroom? You see a woman would naturally included that in her description.

I did not write last night because I went to bed before nine – just too sleepy to do anything, though I didn't work hard. My physical presence sat on OB today – bored stiff. I told Capt. Timmons there was no need for three nurses there – two are plenty, with two maids, two wardmen (who do the work, really) and two nurses' aides.

You should have gone skiing. The snow might be gone by the time I get there.

I'm going to need a trunk or a trailer to bring all the stuff. Guess maybe I'll express my footlocker full of clothes.

Did you find out anything about a garage? Wonder what condition the car is in now? I'm going to have my bike sent right there to Troy, because I'll want it this spring, and the gov't will pay for shipping.

Apparently most of my processing will be done here at the hospital – I'll only have to go to Finance and Hdqts and Transportation so it shouldn't take long.

Goodnight darling.

All my love. Shirley

Letter to Robert Barnes from Shirley Armstrong Barnes, 2 February 1948, Keesler Field, Miss.

Hello darling,

Everything got off to a flying start this morning, then came to a screeching halt. They discovered they needed my efficiency index – which is no longer put on any records here – only in Washington, so they had to wire Washington for it. Nothing more can be done until the answer comes. This has all happened because I am a guinea pig. It seems there is no longer a separation center on this field – as of last week. Now each squadron does its own separating – and they know very little about it. Orders can't be cut, finance can do nothing – no one can move until the answer comes.

Of course, if I had known anything about all this I would have really kept after them, but they've been so nice I just left things alone. They feel bad about this delay, because they had almost promised I could leave here tomorrow. Oh well – longer I stay, more money I get – and we can use it.

Hazel and I went to see "Magic Town" tonight. It was very good, and gave us needed relaxation.

Please don't feel or grow too impatient, my dearest, for I will be with you soon, for a long time. This really didn't surprise me, knowing the army.

I love you so much Bob, and will be happy when I'm with you again.

Always, your wife, Shirley

The following letters are from Bob to Shirley. At this point Shirley has been discharged from the military and is expecting their first child. She is staying with her parents, as it is a difficult pregnancy, while Bob is in New York for a few weeks completing his degree. These letters give a brief glimpse into what life was like post-war/military for young ex-servicemen and women.

Letter to Shirley Barnes from Robert Barnes, 22 April 1948, Troy, NY

Shirley my lovely wife,

As you can see it is rather late and I still have hopes of getting this into the mail so you will have it tomorrow.

Stark and I worked most of the morning on our jig getting it mounted on the tunnel and taking a couple of bugs out of it. We will get part of it back from the plating works tomorrow and then it will be ready to use. We have hopes of getting our tubes also tomorrow and will spend the day Sat. putting them in the tunnel. We have to make a couple of runs first before we put thme (sic) in to see just how much good they did if any. They better do some good. Had Applied Design of course all afternoon and then after supper and up to just short time ago was out putting up direction signs so people can fine their wau (sic) to school for the open house weekend they are having. It lats (sic) Fri. night and all day Sat. and also Sat night.

Stark had an interview with Curtiss Wright today and he said it was the best interview he had to date so some of who were not interested after went down and signed up. So I have an interview tomorrow morning. I am afraid that he is only interested in fellows for the propeller plant in N.J. but I am going to look into the setup at Cornell.

I hope that I hear from Pratt & Whitney before next week rolls to a screeching halt.

Things ar3 (sic) well under control otherwise and I got work to keep me going without even looking or thinking about the thesis. The first draft for the thesis is due the 10th. I hope you are feeling better sweet and are able to get up a bit at least. I want to come home this weekend more than anything else but right now I don't see how I am going to be able to do it.

I am rather tired I guess as I am dozing off right now while writing this and you know what happens when I start doing that so I better close for now my darling and will carry on tomorrow.

I miss you so very much my darling wife and I want you close to me, not so far away.

Always your loving husband, Bob

P.S. I love you Shirley

Letter to Shirley Barnes from Robert Barnes, 27 April 1948, Troy, NY

My lovely wife Shirely (sic),

I hope that you are feeling as good today as you were yesterday darling. If you can get feeling half way decient (sic) so that you can get out in the back yard or the like I think that will help you out.

I had a good trip back and stopped at Georges on the way home to let them know how you were and also to see if anything exciting had happened. When I got home Marie was waiting to tell me that she got a letter from Bob, and of course I had to hear parts of that. My my how touching!!

I am writing this now as I want to take the car and get the oil changed and will have to probably leave it while I go over to school and still have to pick it up after. Had a little time so thought this would be the best time to write. I am going to work on my seminar paper tonight making up the rough draft etc. Peg, Dr. Luce's secretary (sic) said that she would make the final copy for me and that will save me time that I can use for working on my thesis. Ten apges (sic) won't take her long at all, and I will get the spelling, punctuation etc corrected at the same time.

I got the shock of my life today. Herb, don't think you met him is going to get married in July. That will make the town of Bridgeton, N.J. happy as the families have been trying to swing that deal for years. Harry says I am to blame for that. The gang says they are all going to. Soriee [Soiree?] think it is the 15th of May; shall we go, I know it all depends on how Jr. behaves. The only trouble is a baby sitter won't do us any good. The Senior Ball will be coming up in June also, which is a closed dance. Just mentioning them so that you can do a little thinking on the subject.

Oh, I forgot to say something to your Mother when she got home yesterday but in the right hand kitchen light there is a short or something. Turn the engineers loose on it.
I guess I better go darling so will writ (sic) tomorrow, I hope this finds you better.

All my love sweet and I miss you more than ever.
Always your devoted and loving husband, Bob



Bibliography

Gillis, Susan, Richard A. Marconi, and Debi Murray. *Images of America: Palm Beach County During World War II*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2015.

Ling, Sally. *Small Town, Big Secrets: Inside the Boca Raton Army Air Field During World War II*. Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2005.