

## *Meet the Family*

This book is the intensely personal and moving account of the life of one family – told in their own words. Our story is extracted from the 800 letters, written between February 1943 and August 1945, by the five members of the Minker family of Wilmington, Delaware: Lee Minker, his parents Edna and Ralph Minker Sr., and sisters Shirley and Bernice. Lee’s letters chronicle the transformation of a young college student into a seasoned bomber pilot; the family’s letters are a portrait of the home front during the most crucial time of the twentieth century. We introduce the family briefly here, their individual relationships will emerge on the coming pages.

### **The Minker Family of Wilmington, Delaware**

#### **Ralph “Lee” Minker Jr.**



A high school senior in 1940 when the rumblings of aggression came from both Europe and Japan, Lee entered Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in the fall of 1941. The news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor changed everything for young people in the nation. Along with millions of young men, Lee registered for the draft but the army lacked the bases, officers and equipment to train them. In February 1943 he received orders to report to Miami Beach, Florida for basic training. Lee Minker was four months shy of his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday when he left Wilmington, Delaware to begin the journey that would make him one of the youngest combat pilots in the Eighth Air Force.



#### **Edna Minker (Mother)**

Ruth Edna Jones married Ralph Leland Minker on March 31, 1923, their first child, Ralph Leland “Lee” Minker Jr., was born June 16, 1924, and Shirley was born December 7, 1926. The family was completed with the birth of Bernice on November 22, 1928. Shortly before her 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in 1943, Edna Minker saw her 18 year-old son off to war. Edna’s letters gave her son a strong link to the family and the Wilmington community. She wrote to him several times a week for two and a half years, during 18 months of training and 11 months of overseas duty in England.

### **Ralph Leland Minker Sr. (Father)**



Ralph L. Minker graduated from Dickinson College in 1920 and then attended Boston University Theological School. After serving several pastorates in New England, Rev. Ralph Minker Sr. became the Superintendent of the Ferris Industrial School for Boys in Wilmington, Delaware from 1936 through 1945, where the family lived on the school grounds. He also served as part-time pastor at Grace Methodist Church, as Civilian Defense Warden for New Castle County, and was an avid fan of the Wilmington Blue Rocks baseball team. Rev. Minker's letters to his son were filled with pride and advice on each step of his progress from private to pilot.

### **Shirley Minker (sister)**



Lee's oldest sister, Shirley Minker, was beginning her last semester in high school when he left for the service in early 1943. That June she graduated from Alexis I. duPont High School, in a class bereft of boys, and went on to attend Dickinson Junior College in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. From college she wrote encouraging letters to her brother and worried along with him about his progress with flight training. Shirley's letters are a record of the pervasive effects of the war on young people as she reported on friends in the service: the boys killed, wounded, or taken prisoner of war.

### **Bernice Minker (sister)**



A teenager of 15 when her brother left for training, Bernice possessed a lively sense of fun. Her letters supplied Lee with knock-knock jokes, humorous escapades of friends and family, and news of classmates. During Lee's service, Bernice completed high school, hoped and prayed he would make it home for her graduation in June, 1945. When the war was finally over, her vivid descriptions of V-E Day and V-J Day let us experience the celebrations through the eyes of a teenager.