

# Chapter Seventeen

## Hong Kong: October, 1938

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Herb's first letter from Hong Kong<sup>1</sup> opens with a description of their entry into the port, adding comments on the Japanese presence there.

*This morning around 6 a.m. we started into port, through a winding channel through small but high islands. And on all sides were thousands of Chinese junks about thirty or forty feet long putting out to sea. They all look alike with their same pattern of sails and high poop decks which almost makes them look like a shoe floating along.*

*We passed some close aboard and got a good look at these most seaworthy craft, some of them a hundred or more years old. The average was about ten persons to a junk, or an entire family or more. You could see little babies tottering close to the edge of the deck. (October 13)*



*A Japanese destroyer offered a grim reminder of what goes on up here, as it almost seemed to slink along the horizon. It so happens, as we found out after we read the newspapers in port, that that was just one of 80 Jap warships which are landing an army about ten or twenty miles north of here. They are going to start a drive on Canton<sup>2</sup> and try to cut the Canton-Hankow railway line.*

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<sup>1</sup> It consists of [Hong Kong Island](#), ceded by China to [Great Britain](#) in 1842, the southern part of the [Kowloon Peninsula](#), ceded in 1860, and the mainland area lying to the north, together with 230 large and small offshore islands. The entire territory was returned to China in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Canton is now Guangzhou, on the Zhujiang River north of Hong Kong, and is the capital of Guangdong Province.

*Canton isn't right across the bay from Hong Kong as I thought it was though. It is about fifty miles up river from here. ... Yup, the Canopus no sooner gets up here than the Japs start their southern China drive on Canton!*

*It was a pretty trip into the port and the port itself is one of the most picturesque I have ever seen. The port is surrounded by extremely steep hills a couple of thousand feet high and spread out on the side and at the base of the steepest hill is Victoria, the largest city of Hong Kong. You see Hong Kong is an island, not a city. And it is the Victoria mountain which rises above the city of Victoria. And it is a real city full of tall, modern buildings and warehouses. It really surprised me. The British have the island strongly fortified and are responsible for most of the built-up part. (October 13)*



*And it sure is a busy port with ships of all nations tied to buoys, and junks alongside of them loading and unloading. Back and forth across the water speeds junks, sampans, and ferries. We weren't anchored more than a few minutes when there were sampans all around us. Some with kids diving for money, some with garbage pickers, and some with our laundry men who soon came aboard and started doing a rushing business. (October 13)*



Two days later Herb typed his next letter, because "I have a lot to write this afternoon and also because I can stand some practice" (October 15).

*I had quite a time ashore yesterday with a couple of pals of mine. ... The first thing we did was to change our U.S. currency into Hong Kong Meks. ... We then proceeded to the tram that goes up to the top of that mountain. ... In no time we were at the top. The car which is pulled by a cable ascends the 1300 feet in about ten minutes. We then got out*

*and some rickshaw boys pulled us around a winding trail which led around the mountain. The scenery from up there was almost breathtaking. (October 15).*



*Below us lay spread out the entire city of Victoria and we could see the entire island of Hong Kong. We could see all the coves and bays for miles around. There were the men of war and the merchant men in the bay adjoining the city and out farther in the channel lay the junk fishing fleet, thousands of these Chinese craft. (October 15).*

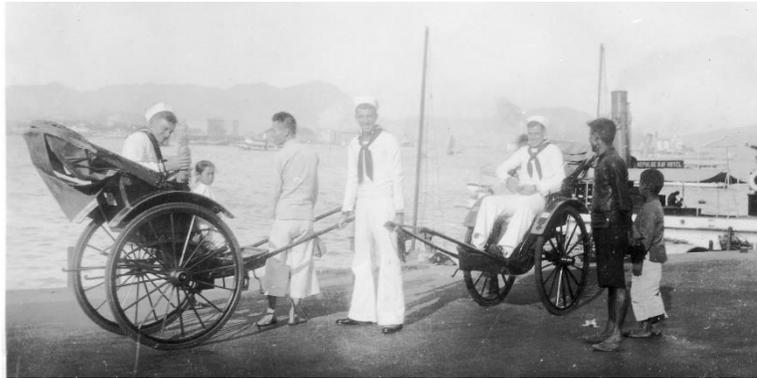
Next Herb writes about their adventures in the city that day.

*After we got back down, since some of the boys were thirsty, we steered a course to a saloon of renown to the Asiatic Fleet, a picturesque place called Nagasaki Joe's. we had to brush our way through a crowd of beggars, peddlers and girls to get into the place. (October 15)*



**At left: Sailors in front of Nagasaki Joe's. At right: Herb in market place.**

*We were supposed to go and take a look at the things we were planning on buying next week, but one beer followed another and we never did get started on our window shopping. We met a jovial Scotch Highlander who offered to show us around the cabarets and give us a look at Hong Kong night life. So we started out on our rickshaw again. (October 15)*



*Our first stop was the Dreamland, more or less of a taxi dance hall only, since only soft drinks are sold at dancing places here. I was by no means intoxicated but I was really feeling swell so I decided that it was high time that I practiced up on my dancing. There were about fifty Chinese girls in the place, all very cute and good dancers. So, I unlimbered myself and for the first time in over a year I did some dancing. I'm very hard to dance with but I made out o.k. with every one I danced with. They seemed to be nice girls too, I mean they were evidently just dancers and did not try to approach one otherwise. (October 15)*

Herb closes his letter by reassuring Louise, in a rather indirect way, that he is being faithful to her.

*You know I didn't know I had a reputation on here but it seems I did. Just because a bunch of the fellows I know real well saw me dancing last night and drinking a few glasses of beer, they seemed to think that I was finally succumbing to the lure of the Asiatics you might say. ... These pretty girls were really a treat for most of them, but for me they were just so many more human beings to look at and pass by. (October 15).*

Next, Herb writes about his adventures in the city on Sunday.

*I went ashore again yesterday. Me and my buddy (the other stocker) and we took a few pictures and walked all through the markets, window shopping for Tuesday's investments.*

*However, we had enough money to get some suitcases, which we did after looking around and bargaining with the Chinamen. ... So, we each bought a suitcase for 11 Chinese dollars which is about \$3.50 gold. (Imagine that!) Big, full sized cases too, real leather. ... I also got a pair of ivory chopsticks and a half dozen tiny ivory roosters on thin ivory sticks; you know, to use for cocktails the way you would a toothpick.*

*(October 17)*

A couple of days later Herb finished work early, so he had some time on his hands. He writes "I felt silly I guess and typed up a memo for you. But its rather a weighty document at that, and signed" (October 17).

U. S. S. Canopus—1-20-38—5,000.

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UNITED STATES ASIATIC FLEET  
SUBMARINE SQUADRON FIVE  
U. S. S. CANOPUS

Date 17 October, 19 38

SUPPLY DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

From : Mr. H. V. Lentz, Sea. 1/c USS Canopus  
To : Miss Louise Stenquist, Halcyon, Cal.  
Subject : Love, Concerning;

1. It is desired I make a statement of the condition that I have been placed in due to the amorous influence that yours truly has exerted upon me. I find myself overwhelmingly in love with your sweet self and exceedingly infatuated by your charm and loveliness.

2. I hereby officially and emphatically implore your hand in marriage, and beg you to honor me by consenting to be mine in matrimony.

3. I promise to love, honor, and obey the wonderful sweetheart you are and the like wife you will be forever and ever.

4. If there are any doubts concerning the greatness of my love for you will you kindly reply to this missive at your earliest opportunity; and then I shall send you documents to prove my claims.

Admiringly  
H/V/L *H. V. Lentz*  
H. Lentz

Dist; Miss Louise Stenquist  
CONFIDENTIAL MATTER

The next Thursday afternoon Herb writes "Darling sure was glad to get a long letter from you yesterday. And before I answer it, I'll tell you what I got for 'us' on my shopping trip Tuesday" (October 20).

*First of all, a pajama set for you, a three-piece suit. Bright blue, with white dragons on it. I don't think its quite a 34, it's a little larger because they don't make these pajamas to fit western people here. Since you wanted me to; I got a pair of pajamas for myself but they weren't as bright a blue and they didn't have dragons on it.*

*In the same place I got what looks like a mandarin coat, for you; only its shorter like a jacket you wear over a thin blouse. Its white silk, or satin, with colored flowers in the design and cute looking buttons. (October 20)*



**Sailors in Victoria Shopping District**

*In another shop I got a silk (supposedly) bed spread; rose colored. Then I cooled down a little and bought a linen table cloth and six napkins with some Swatow lace on them.*

*And then in an ivory shop I got something really unique. An ivory ball about two inches in diameter, inside it another a little smaller, and in that another, so on down; ten in all; all hand carved out of one solid piece of ivory. The ball sits on a little ivory stand about 8 inches high. The outside ball is carved with two dragons wrapped around it; part of the stand is composed of the figure of Confucius.*

*Next time I'm up here I'll get the silk for your wedding dress. (October 20)*

Over the course of several letters during the past year, Louise and Herb had been sharing their thoughts on planning for their honeymoon. In particular, they had to decide where they would want to go and how to pay for it. In this letter Herb outlines their plans from a practical standpoint, and with reference to his planned \$500 savings.

*Well, just as \$200 would get some kind of car, that would be all right. Car, honeymoon, odds and ends; you know hon, I'm afraid that \$500 isn't going to go very far. Do you think we can make a honeymoon on \$300, say to Sequoia or the Redwoods?*

*The honeymoon comes first! There must be that with its happiness and the memories it will leave us; and it must be a nice one; one that you want and will enjoy.*

*Can we be as sensible as we should be, and still have all the fun we want? That is the question. (October 20)*

Herb responds to her request for more photos, especially ones with him smiling.

*Oh, I can't smile any more than I do in those pictures. Try as I may, honey! And I just haven't taken any lately. I've lost interest in picture taking somehow. I can't seem to take*

*any decent pictures of anything anymore. The pictures we took the other day didn't turn out so hot somehow. I think something's the matter with my camera. (October 20)*

He writes about playing basketball in Hong Kong.

*After weaving in and out of alleys last night we finally found the Chinese YMCA We were heading for. It was rather a small court too which I soon found out. I dashed in under a basket and plunk, into the stands I went scraping several square feet of hide off each leg. (Graceful as a crippled baby elephant; that's me.)*

*But the Chinese were very hospitable, and are thankful for the 4-game schedule we are giving them. They even put a big story about us in the Chinese newspapers and I'll bet there will be a crowd up there tonight. (October 21).*

Herb closes this letter by describing the effects of the Japanese attacking Canton. "A lot of refugees from Canton are starting to wander into Hong Kong now. Some of the side streets are crowded with sleeping people every night now" (October 21).

Sunday morning Herb writes a long letter to Louise, opening with an account of his activities the day before.

*Didn't do much yesterday, just went ashore and took a ferry over to Kowloon which is the big city on the mainland, across from Victoria. Most of the English people here live in Kowloon while Victoria is mostly the Chinese settlement and the business district. (October 23)*

Herb was enjoying taking some extra time in answering Louise's latest letter. He explains what he knows so far about when he will get to return home.

*I won't know before January, 1940 probably, just which transport I'll get. But it will be between January and June! ... The trouble is I've got over a year to do after my tour of duty [in Asiatic Fleet] is up and therefore it won't matter to the Navy if I'm kept out here a couple of extra months. Don't mind me hon, I don't want to worry you; I was just saying what could happen. (October 23)*

Herb responds to Louise telling him what happened at a dance she went to.

*Of course I wouldn't be jealous about the man who took a liking to you at the dance. ... I couldn't blame anyone for talking a liking to you. And it's nice that I can be so confident of you. ... And I know a girl enjoys a dance with a real good dancer now and then. Just so I always get the last dance sweets! (October 23)*

Herb's next opportunity to write to Louise is the following Saturday afternoon, as the Canopus is leaving Hong Kong on its way back to Manila. He explains "Before I start on your letter, I'll summarize the last few days we spent in Hong Kong" (October 29).

*I went ashore a couple more times since I last wrote, mostly to the basketball games. I'm sorry to say that we did not fare so well at the hands of our Chinese opponents. ... We played some of the best teams in South China. ... Well I have one consolation, I at least played part of the game we won.*

*After one of the games a bunch of us went dancing in one of the local cabarets. The rest of the fellows were drinking some of their beloved junk but I stuck to soft drinks myself and the result was that I couldn't dance very well. I can only dance a stupid looking fox trot step to any music regardless of whether it is a waltz, rhumba, or a real fast piece of music.*

*On another afternoon me and Smitty went shopping again. Just for a few small odds and ends. ... And I have my eye on the things I'm going to get the next time we come up here. One of them is a blue kimono to match the pajamas I bought. (October 29).*

Now Herb turns his attention to answering the latest letter he received. He had been enjoying reading the book *Gone With the Wind*, and because he knew that she had read it, he writes extensively about his reactions to the characters. "You mustn't mind if I sound like Rhett at times. I so thoroughly approve of most of the things he does I almost find myself imitating him at times" (October 29).

The next morning he continues responding to Louise's letter, and writes "This morning I finished *Gone With the Wind*. Good to the very end, wasn't it .... In a way the ending leaves one in doubt. ... All in all, the book was quite tragic, wasn't it; just one tragedy after another all the way through" (October 30).

Herb writes about the ship's progress getting out to sea.

*Whew, this tub sure is bouncing around like a cork. It's a swell day out but there are huge swells in this part of the ocean and its uncomfortable. A couple of the fellows are seasick. The thing is vibrating so much its hard to write. (October 30)*

Then he returns to answering her letter.

*Well, why should I have minded your going out with Bob, Byron, and Dot? I'd have minded if you didn't go out and enjoy yourself now and then. Just as you didn't mind my dancing with some cute Chinese girls, did you! So ----! (October 30).*

Then he comments about the ship again "Wow, a big wave just came over the port side and drenched some fellows who had their cots spread on the port side. It is quite rough tonight for some reason" (October 30).

The next afternoon Herb continues to answer Louise's letter.

*Ah, I see you have men sized up right. Yes hon; at a dance when men come stag, they usually do keep asking girls to go home with them until they find one who will. That's the precise technique that most sailors employ too in the different ports they hit. A good girl usually isn't appreciated either by the stags. They are looking for a girl who they can take lots of liberties with, usually. (October 31)*