

Chapter Twenty-One

Philippines: January-February, 1939

January, 1939

Happy New Year darling! Now, next year, in fact next spring, won't we be happy honey. Oh boy, are we on top of the world! What's a short year like 1939 between two lovers like we. We had better start planning now. We really have little time left for final preparations.

Oh darling I love you so much, and I hope that you'll stay well and happy, and breeze right through it, this year, just like nothing; with your chin high and a smile on your face. You will, for me; wont you please Mary Lou? And by doing that you'll make it a short happy year for me too.

Resolutions! What did you resolve to do hon? I made several. I resolve to continue loving you with all my heart and soul and be faithful to you all this year; and forever after too. And to try to make a better man of myself in thought, word, and deed this year. Oh yes hon; you've no idea just how much room for improvement there is. And to study some more and at least go up for second class near the end of this year. And here's a last, special resolution for your benefit darling. I do resolve to send you pictures at every opportunity; when I have some to send and I won't pass up a chance to get some taken for you. (January 1)

The next evening he writes about what he got for her in Manila, for her birthday, which is February 2nd.

Your birthday present should also make the ship that this letter makes, and it will be late which fact I'm sorry for. But I sure had a time getting it this morning. I might as well tell you what it is too. I got over there this morning and I couldn't for the life of me think of what you might like. The first thing I knew I was looking at some dresses and I came across an outfit you might like. (January 2)

The Canopus arrived in Olongapo Monday night, then Tuesday morning they set to work on it. At the end of the day Herb tells Louise what they were doing.

What a day, what a day darling! We entered drydock early this morning and over the side I went with all the rest, and for the rest of the day we scraped off barnacles, wire-brushed, chopped, scraped, and painted the bloomin' sides of the "good?" ship Canopus. ... And then, down to the ice-cold showers at the bottom of the dry dock. Brrr! Boy is that water invigorating! I feel like a new man now. (January 3)

Two days later Herb writes “This morning we put the final touches on the sides and bottom and tomorrow morning we go out of drydock. However, we will be here in the bay yet until January 14 when we go back down to Manila” (January 5).

Herb writes about his work in the office. He was having difficulty getting his books to balance.

Boy those books, and looking at figures all day long is enough to drive a guy crazy. But the rest of the fellows here in the office are having their troubles too. All day long all you hear is adding machines and calculators clacking away. Now and then a yell of triumph or despair. (January 5)

In his letter the next evening Herb responds to Louise’s concerns about his attitude about when he will return home.

I’m not saying I wouldn’t want ... to come back sooner. Whew! You can certainly bet that I’d sure fall all over myself to get back to the states tomorrow – if I could! To be with you; what wouldn’t I do! (January 6)

Herb was required to spend time at the rifle range at Olongapo, and afterward he shares with Louise his ordeal.

I decided this morning that I was not cut out to be another Buck Jones. We got up at five and after breakfast the first rifle range party went over to the range on the beach. ... Boy those Springfield rifles are heavy and on my first five practice spots I found out that my rifle kicked like a mule.

Well, I didn’t do so bad on my first few shots until once my gun went off before I was expecting it to; and my score was ruined. With each succeeding shot my shoulder was getting sorer too.

The last ten shots we had to fire rapid fire from the prone position. By then I was disgusted and didn’t care what score I made and I was really exasperating the old timer who was coaching me. I put three of that five into the dirt. My shoulder felt like it was broken and for the last five I just dug that blunderbuss into my shoulder and blazed away, emptying the five shots in about 10 seconds.

Well, that was my firing! And I hope it’s all I’ll ever have to do. But some think its great sport! ... The most you could make on the runs we fired today was 150. Some good shots got around 135; most men qualified as marksmen by getting over 120. Know what I got hon! 68! Yeah! A fine Daniel Boone I’d make, wouldn’t I? I can think of lots of things I’d rather do than fire a rifle. I’d rather fire a five-inch gun any day. Now I’m afraid they are liable to send me over for some more practice because I’m so “lousy.” Oh well, its experience isn’t it. (January 7)

Because he got such a low score at the rifle range on Saturday, he had to go back over again on Monday. He writes

Well I raised my score 6 points this morning. But still the Gunnery Officer hasn’t had enough of me. Tomorrow morning I have to go over again. But at least I found out how

to hold a rifle so it doesn't bother my shoulder any more. Though my arm is still black and blue from Saturday. (January 9).

Herb was elated to get three letters from Louise today, and that evening he continues writing.

I've been so snowed under lately; I was just about in a daze. Between getting up at 5 a.m. and spending all morning on the range; then coming back to the ship and working overtime trying to catch up a little. I was getting grouchy and angry about the whole thing, but your letters settled me down.

Huh! What did I shoot this morning" I'm getting worse. I shot two whole relays this morning; and on one I got a 62; the other a 67. And still the Gunnery Officer won't call it "quits" with me. I guess I have to go over again tomorrow too. Fooey! I'm sick of this range business.

But now for your letters. ... Thanks so much for the pictures darling. They are swell and you are a dear to keep sending them to me when I so rarely reciprocate. (January 10)

The next evening Herb writes more about his experience at the rifle range and the effect it has had on him, and on his relationship with one of his coworkers in particular.

I suppose I could help one fellow in particular; I had intended to last evening but he came out with some remarks I didn't like and now we aren't on speaking terms. The dope insinuated that I had been getting low scores on purpose so that I could keep going over every morning. The idiot! And I really told him a thing or two even though he's a first class! I'm almost tired of working here in the office with a couple of these fellows.

As far as my firing this morning; I improved a little. An unprecedented score (for me) of 101! ... Darn this firing business! It's really ruined the whole week for me as far as my work is concerned. And it didn't help improve my diplomatic relations with my associates; I've been so cranky and rude lately. Nor did it do my shoulder any good. (January 11)

Friday evening Herb writes "It seemed good to be back in Manila today. And I'm getting more caught up on my work; so I'll be able to write longer letters again" (January 13).

Sunday evening Herb begins answering the letter he just received. "Oh I thought you saw 'Love, Honor and Behave.' It sure was good. ... Don't worry; I'll never, never think of slapping you hon; maybe I'd spank you, but no more than that" (January 15).

Monday evening Herb continues writing, and gives her an update on their basketball team.

Just got through working because I had a little work to catch up on since I went over and played basketball this afternoon. Two days before fleet competition starts; and now we are trying to whip a team into shape. This morning the Squadron basketball officer called me up to his room and he told me that he and the assistant basketball officer had talked it over and decided that I would make a good manager for the team. Ahem! Now I'm a big shot! But I'll do my best and it really was a compliment, I guess. Hope I'll make a better manager than a player. (January 16)

Then he responds again to what each of them did during Armistice Day celebrations.

That was a coincidence, wasn't it; the way we both felt that we did something wrong on Armistice Day. But neither of us really did I guess.

Darling how can you say what you did was more wrong than I did? It's just the opposite way around. Everything about what you did was innocent at least. I was in a bad place to begin with; oh, why go into details. (January 16)

Saturday afternoon Herb writes "It seems like an age since I last wrote. I hope it doesn't seem that way to you. But I've been extremely busy during the last few days" (January 21).

When I'm not working, I'm rounding up the basketball squad and giving them all the dope on workouts and games. We play our second game tonight. (January 21)

Sunday morning Herb writes about their basketball game the previous night. His team won the game, in which "both sides played ragged and rough."

I had a guy get sore and turn in his suit last night because he was being imposed upon. Well, we don't need anyone when they feel that way, regardless of how good they even might be. And I told him so in few words. At times this managing job is a headache.

Now I've got to write up a very poor game so that it will sound like a good one, and continue the program of trying to revive a little interest in sports. Seven hundred men in the squadron and there weren't more than a dozen at last night's game. (January 22)

The next morning Herb writes "I succeeded in bringing that one fellow back into the fold. Whew, what a job, to keep the team intact" (January 23).

A few days later Herb has a couple of hours to write to Louise. "Tuesday night we won another game; I played half of that one and accidentally made a long shot. Our starting five is really a pretty good combination" (January 26). He then tells her about his work load.

Work has been keeping me from writing more than anything. Never seem to get caught up; it comes in faster than I can put it out; it hasn't slowed up in this year yet. Between that and basketball my poor sweetie has been neglected I'm afraid. (January 26)

Herb answers Louise's latest letter, in which she wrote about Anita and Bernard.

Did I meet Anita I wonder? I can't seem to place her so I guess I didn't. No, I don't suppose Bernard would like her much; or any other woman. He is so preoccupied in his work; really a little too much so, don't you think dear? It's keeping him from being more like a normal person at times. I'm different; I'm pretty shallow and practical most of the time and I could never be like him. (January 27)

The next afternoon Herb writes to Louise

Well, enclosed you will find "a" picture, the net results of all the arduous photography last Sunday. I feel like throwing that screwy camera over the side. ... I don't know what to do now; here I promised you pictures and you are only getting one. (January 28).

Louise wrote about going to dances, and Herb responds.

I'm glad you have such a nice time at those dances. I'm in favor of anything that you enjoy to help the time go faster.

Well, I can't much blame Ivan for acting or trying to act as he did. Any fellow that wasn't blind would tell you, you had a nice smile and that you were pretty; and he would try to take you out. And I don't suppose even the fact that you are engaged would make much difference to most fellows. Seeing that you are blonde they would expect you to be fickle. But that's where they would all be mighty disappointed; right darling? It sure is swell to have a sweetheart like you who I'd trust with my life about anything.

Of course, I don't mind if you go to those dances. But you know that by now. You have to have some fun. I guess when you like to dance, it is nice when you run across a fellow who is a real good dancer. My, but you are going to have to coach me a lot. (January 28)

Patty is my buddy! Will you tell her I thank her and appreciate the way she looks after you at dances? I can imagine just how that fellow felt. ... When you tell a fellow you're engaged; and he doesn't care about it; that doesn't make him so nice, does it! I know I've always respected married or engaged girls. (January 31).

Then Herb writes about the office where he works.

A lot of different things are done at the five desks in here. It consists of all sorts of Navy business too numerous to mention. Andy is a storekeeper striker now too, in the pay office. He, Red, who is a yeoman striker in the Captain's office, and I hang out together a lot. (January 31)

I'm still trying to get caught up on my work, from last December. I never saw such a busy month [as January]. But this morning the subs all went out for a nine-day patrol run so I've a hunch that I'll at last get caught up one of these days. (February 1)

February, 1939

He continues answering her latest letters.

Honest, sweetie, even without you're having to remind me, I'll try to get some pictures of myself every chance I get.

Honest, hon, I'm sorry; but I didn't mean to be pessimistic about returning home earlier. Sure, I hope I get home sooner! Yes, darling, it is possible; but you don't know as well as I do how improbable it is sweetheart. You don't know this Navy. There aren't any if's and but's in it. I care very much but its no use giving myself false hopes and then being disappointed later.

Here's the set up as it looks now. I might possibly catch a transport in December, but no sooner. But most likely after December, the first one whether it be January or April. So, let's hope that a transport comes out in December or January. Really dear, would it

bother you too much if I didn't catch one until April or May? After this coming Christmas is past, a few months wouldn't be so bad, would it be sweets.

Oh dearest hon, I do want to be with you as soon as possible, but let's set an estimate of when I get back so you won't be disappointed if you have to wait a month or so longer.

(February 1)

The next day is Louise's birthday. Herb writes "Congratulation's darling! Happy Birthday; and I wish I were there with you right now to give you twenty-two kisses!" *(February 2)*.

I haven't much time tonight but I'll try to get some more of your letter answered. This is awful lately, the way I am writing. I don't seem to have any spare time at all on account of going over to practice every night. But I'm really in shape and feeling good these days! (February 2)

You know, I'm not getting very far, am I sweetheart? Here I've been answering your last letters all week, and I still haven't answered them yet. So, I'll finish this tonight and then start another letter over the weekend. (February 3)

Sunday after dinner Herb went ashore and strolled around the parks. He writes

I came upon a bunch of five and six year old kids playing ball and having a great deal of arguing about each play so I volunteered to umpire the game for them. They got along swell then and got a kick out of a sailor calling balls and strikes for them. At five o'clock they all had to go to church and they thanked me before they left. (February 7)

Next Herb went over to the home where a fellow storekeeper, "Red" and his wife lived. She had just recently joined him out here, and they were glad to have a visitor.

His wife is nice. They were married when he was only a seaman and they always got along all right. I told her all about my girl and they started giving me some helpful advice. ... We talked a while and then went downtown to see a movie. (February 7)

Herb continues this letter with his thoughts on whether or not to stay in the Navy after they are married.

You know its easy to see why a person can be so content with Halcyon with such understanding and friendly neighbors all around you. Then at times I feel as though I'd be content to go out of the Navy and start living there right away, if I thought I could get some sort of steady work in that vicinity. I'd love seeing all those people often; taking part in your plays and conventions, and things. But I don't suppose it will pay to give up the Navy, will it? But we shall see; during that one year. (February 7)

Then he again responds to Louise's mention of how much time is left for them to be apart.

It's not a false cheerfulness that I have about that "time." We really only have a short time left Louise, so why not be cheerful about it? Sure, you should be cheerful about it too! It's really the only way to be. (February 7)

The “spanking” issue comes up again.

Oh, you must not necessarily be punished but all things seem to be leading up to it because of a certain amount of doubt, and curiosity, and agitation on your part. You taunt me by doubting my ability to do it at times; you even seem to be curious about it all at times; and some times you seem to take action warranting the punishment that I've warned you about. So, you see – what will the logical result be – some day???
(February 7)

Herb became very busy again. He writes to Louise that he had to do some extra work for the Chief Pay Clerk; he explains that their basketball team has something every night, either a game or a practice. “With the days so completely occupied, I don’t even get a chance to count them lately” (February 10). But there was an upside to being so busy. He writes “It just seems that the work days fly by in a few hours. Oh honey, I wish they’d go that fast for you too” (February 10).

Sunday morning Herb writes about their next cruise.

Oh yes, some “official” dope came out yesterday. When we leave here in April we won't get back until October. First short stays at Saigon, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, and then we spend from June to October up at Tsingtao which is a North China port, on the Shantung Peninsula. Anyhow if no trouble starts to keep us from our schedule it sure will be swell because Tsingtao is cool in summer time; and finally, I'll really get to see as much of China as I'd like to.

The only thing I'm wondering about is the mail situation. I think our letters will be a little delayed at times because shipping is irregular and under Jap supervision on the China coast. (February 12).

He reads in Louise’s latest letter that she was glad that he did not tease her about what she did with Ray [aka Tom] on Armistice Day. He replies “I wouldn’t have teased you about Ray, Louise; because it might have hurt you and you know I’d never do anything to hurt you. And I wouldn’t get angry, you know that too” (February 12).

Tuesday evening Herb feels he needs to reiterate when he might return. “You know it’s highly improbable that I will really reach there before March or April. You must come to resign yourself to that time, if you haven’t yet, hon” (February 14).

He proceeds to vent his frustration over so many things he’s doing.

Gosh it was hot today. And busy in the office here! I'll be glad when April comes and we start out on our cruise. Boy its one thing after another that seems to keep me busy all day long.

The Chaplain came in and had to have an article on the swim meet, the golf match, and the basketball games. Then I have to look up most of the basketball players every day and tell them what time practice is and what boat we must catch. Then I have to look after the gear, basketballs, etc.; handle the various cab fares we use every night – boy do I have fun. Whew!

This business of practice every night is making me miss some good pictures on board, too. ... And the only satisfaction that I really get out of this hustle and bustle right now is the fact that it makes time go fast.

It has its drawbacks. If I weren't so darn busy, I could write to you more often and I'd feel more like writing a real pleasant letter. This way, when you're tired or weary its hard to get that certain note of cheeriness in your writing.

Boy I feel awfully ornery lately sweets and I have a job getting along with people. Your presence will always be enough to keep me from being that way when I'm back there however. (February 14)

Saturday afternoon Herb is feeling more relaxed as he begins writing to Louise. He fills a long letter with daydreams of their being together, doing things and having so much fun, living life together. He begins with

Hello sweetness! How are you today? I hope in the best of health and spirits. I've come to call on you this afternoon. I can spend the entire afternoon with you too. So, I really see no reason why we should not be able to carry on a long and delightful conversation this afternoon. (February 18)

After writing four pages of happy scenarios of their daily life together, he concludes

After that written daydream do you still think I'm sane darling? But it was fun, wasn't it? Only sigh – we can't have it yet. But we will! We will! It just goes to show you how much I am living in the future. I can close my eyes and see it all. (February 18)

On Tuesday Herb picked up his mail. That evening he writes to Louise "That Presidents liner got in today; boy was she good to me! Five wonderful letters from you; a letter from my step mother, one from Maisie, and two papers" (February 21).

First, he comments on Louise's dilemma regarding her brother's relationship with Dorothy.

Sure, you were right darling, you shouldn't be the one to tell Bob; or anyone else, except Dot. If Dot loves Bob and wants him bad enough, she should tell him everything, from start to finish. (February 21)

Wednesday morning, he writes "Now, with the whole day¹ before me, I can settle down to answering all your letters which almost overwhelmed me last evening" (February 22).

Remember darling, the less you think about the remote possibility of my coming home this year, the better off you will be. Oh, I don't mean to be rude sweets; but you know now after all I've told you; how impossible it is.

He wrote a long paragraph about Maisie, and a tragedy that occurred in her family. He gave Louise her address, saying "I think you would like to write to Maisie ... She said that she would like to write to you too" (February 22).

¹ Washington's birthday was an official holiday.

Then Herb tells Louise all about the situation with his family back home in New York, and his feelings about his brother.

And the letter from home yesterday was about as full of cheer as Maisie's. My stepmother and the kids all had the flu from which they are just recovering. And they are all feeling pretty bad yet. Oh honey, it's one thing after another for them. Sickness, poverty, it just doesn't seem fair. That's why, I was wondering if Bernard got the kind of letter I did.

She received your cards and your letter which she liked Louise, and she will try to write as soon as possible. It weakened her just to write my letter. So, it's just existing for them. I do as much as I can, now it seems that other members of her family are almost in the same predicament.

Once Dad had such a stable existence there, then it was 1929, sickness, one thing after another; now, charity. Of us four boys, the one who always had everything he wanted, who was spoiled and given his own way; and never had to want for anything; he has done the least to ever help out any. Yes, honey, I mean Bernard.

Oh, he's a pretty fine person now; he has gotten over his youthful selfishness; and there isn't much he can do now, but – He had some swell opportunities when he was younger, Dad had prominent friends; but Bernard just tossed them aside; had to go down to Cuba and mingle with his Spanish friends – oh, I could go on for hours but I won't.

Gee Louise I never meant to write the things I did on these last couple of pages but it's the truth so I'll let it stay. Only don't ever mention it to anyone, least of all Bernard. It's just between you and I.

(February 22).

Nearly overwhelmed with emotion, Herb then realizes how important Louise is in his life.

I really don't know what I'd ever do without you. I couldn't live, that I know. And do you know if I hadn't met you before coming out here, I probably wouldn't even be sending any money home. I'd be leading one fast, wicked life out here to the tune of wine, women, and song; and I know what the result of that would be; so you see sweetheart how much you really have done for me already. There's just no saying how thankful I am that you came along; how wonderful it is that you fell in love with me. You saved me in other words Louise, and it's only proper that we belong to each other as soon as I get back there. Darling – I love you! (February 22).

Herb continues answering Louise's letter, and finally admits something to her that she has begged for.

And the Chaumont could possibly to get out here in late December and back there by Feb. '40. The optimistic fellows who I came out with expect to catch that one back. But I refuse to open myself to possible disappointment by stating definitively that I expect to catch that one. I think I might; but it's uncertain. But honey; I hope with all my heart and soul I will be brought back to you on that one! (February 25)

This page intentionally left blank