

# Chapter Three

## San Francisco to China, Sept-Oct 1937

The trip to China was on the U.S.S. Henderson, a transport ship. Prior to leaving California waters, the ship spent a few days in San Francisco Bay, at Mare Island.

While Herb's ship was still in California waters, one evening he found a quiet spot up on deck where he could sit down and write one of his first letters to Louise. He reminded her of how much she meant to him. "Take a look in the nearest mirror to you and there you will see an image of all that is dear and holy to me; all that there is in life for me; my everything" (*September 13*).

In closing, he wrote "How peaceful the hills look across the channel. And it's warm too, so I'll sling my hammock on topside. So, with the stars above me and the cool night breezes around me I'll fall asleep thinking of a peaceful little village where the sweetest angel who ever graced the earth is thinking of me too, I hope" (*September 13, 1937*).

Herb reminisced about their last night together and how she sang a song to him: "The First Time I Saw You" and how he fell "madly in love" with her. He recalled how she encouraged him to talk a lot, because she gave him confidence and courage (*September 17*).

Herb's life was quite the contrast to Louise's. In his early letters he explains why he made the decision to request the assignment to go to China. He wrote "I was such a young kid, I let the glamour and excitement of traveling to China appeal to me" (*September 14*). He also explained that going to China was an opportunity to see things one would never get to see normally (*September 16*). He reassured Louise that now, because of their engagement, he wanted to work hard, stay aboard ship, and get advancement (in rank/pay).

### **Herb's Navy Life and Activities**

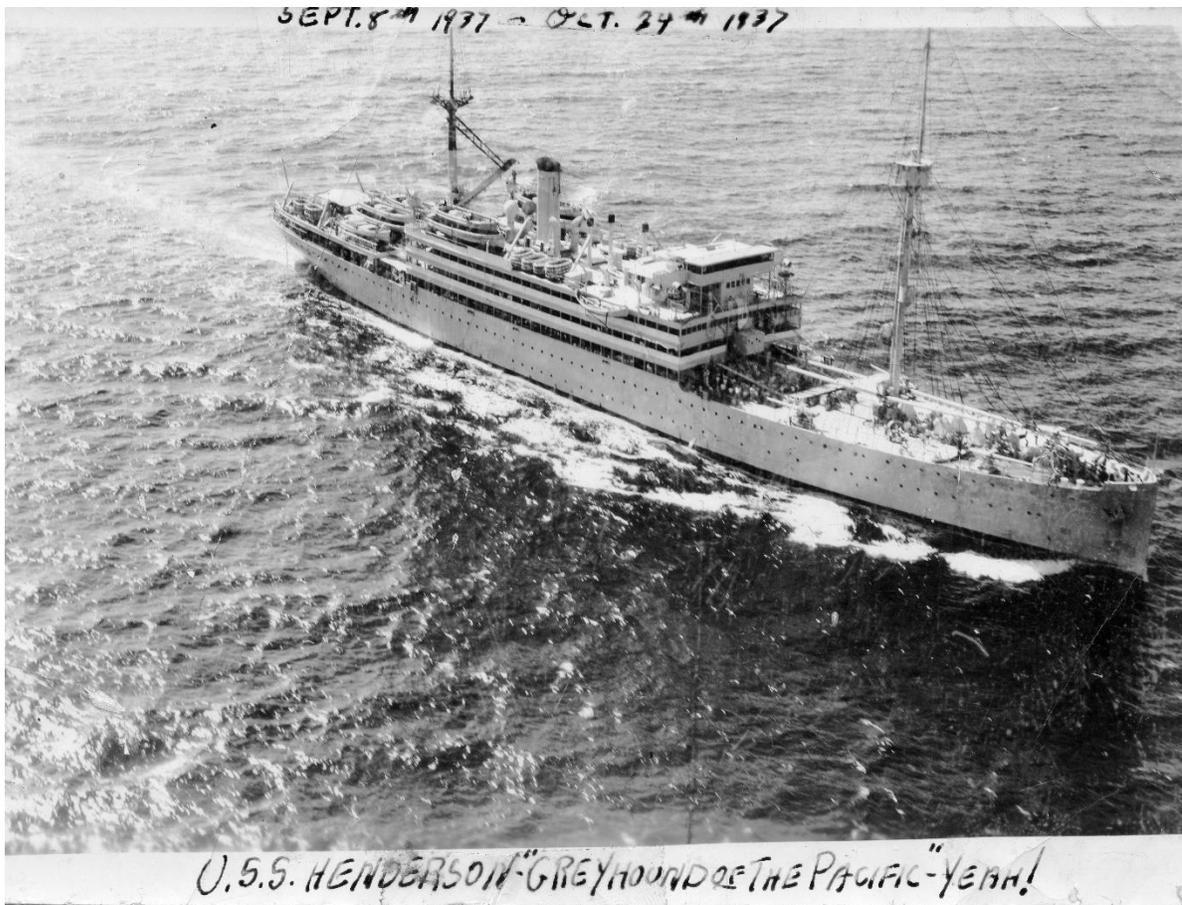
Herb often wrote to Louise about his activities and life in the Navy. While at sea, he tells her about how they rigged their hammocks, leading to a story of a playful incident.

*We usually sling our hammocks in the same place, on deck and talk for a while before we fall asleep. Boy, do you have to sling your hammock high on this ship. The overhead is about 8 feet off the deck. You sling your hammock on hooks on the beams of the overhead, about ten feet apart. Then you unleash your hammock, smooth it out and haul it up as tight as you can. When you are ready to turn in you take a flying jump for the overhead and catch hold of a beam and swing yourself into your hammock. Then you are about 7 feet up in the air.*

*Last night we were in a frolicsome mood and started trying to dump each other out. Hal and Vernon ended up on deck in a pile of blankets, pillows, mattresses and hammocks. Then they were about to get me when someone on watch yelled at us to keep quiet, it was time we were asleep, so I was saved. Boy they were mad! (September 16)*

One evening as Herb's ship was nearing the Hawaiian Islands, he wrote extensively about the beauty that surrounded him, and about his desire for their reunion.

*The skies are so pretty out here Louise; I hope someday you can see them. Especially at sunrise and sunset. All the colors are so soft. White fleecy clouds are always around to frame the most beautiful pictures imaginable. The sparkling waves are starting to glimmer and shine with a bright blue hue and pretty silver flying fish dart from wave to wave, and swoop and glide a few feet off the water. It's almost sunset now. A golden aurora fills the western horizon. It reflects off the clouds, back into the sea and makes it look like a golden ocean. And the clouds are golden! In a few hours the moon will create new wonders. Shimmering in between clouds, its silvery rays bounce along the darkened sea and – it's beautiful.*



*Every night when movies are over, between nine-thirty and ten o'clock; I lean on the life-line for a few minutes before turning in and I think of you. I wonder if you are looking at that same old moon. And the heaven above is so quiet and peaceful; I pray that a merciful God will watch over you and protect you and someday find it fit to unite us with our undying love, to live forever after in joy and happiness. It's so much to ask for; but never have I so badly wanted to deserve something. And I will work to deserve you sweetheart! (September 22)*

### Crossing the 180<sup>th</sup> Meridian, North Pacific Ocean

There is a ritual practiced by sailors in the U.S. Navy: Whenever a ship crosses the 180<sup>th</sup> Meridian, "first timers" on board are put through an elaborate initiation. Herb enjoys writing to Louise with all the details of this ritual.

*Yesterday morning instead of blowing revile on a bugle to awaken us as they usually do, a brass band paraded around the ship and woke everyone up. Then at 8 A.M. the Golden Dragon and his court came aboard (hypothetically speaking), and conducted the initiations which lasted all morning. There were a whole band of dragon backs who initiated us dressed as pirates, dragons and what not. You see once we cross the 180<sup>th</sup> meridian we are in Asiatic waters or in the realm of the golden dragon and we must be duly initiated into the royal order of dragonbacks. It is all taken quite seriously and everyone must go thru with it.*

*The officers who were initiated really had some funny things to do. One had to stand up in the crows-nest with a sheepskin coat on and yell every ten minutes 'Oh, Friday; where art thou?' You see we lost Friday when we crossed the line [International Date Line]. Another had to wear a hula skirt and do a dance. A couple had to cart big telescopes up the mast on the rigging and keep a sharp lookout for 'the line' and the golden dragon. Another was dressed in a mandarin robe, had a Stetson hat on, a rifle and bayonet over his shoulder; and every ten minutes he had to shout 'Oh golden dragon please forgive me, this poppycock is not against Navy regulations.' Others were dressed funny and had different crazy jobs to do.*

*When they came to all us fellows, they had to initiate us quickly as there were almost a thousand of us, 'Neophytes,' as they call men who have never been across the line. We were marched in single file up on a platform where the golden dragon interviewed us.*

*Some of us had to sit in the electric chair, others had pie or spaghetti smeared on them by the Barber. The Dentist sprayed some awful stuff down your throat. Then you had to kneel down and kiss small idol of Buddha whereupon you were soundly whacked with canvas clubs. Then we had to jump into a big dragon's mouth when we landed on a pile of mattresses; and last, had to get up and run a gauntlet of dragonbacks armed with canvas clubs. I guess some of the fellows didn't sit down at the movies last night. But it sure was lots of fun! (October 3)*

### What Herb Thinks of Halcyon

Herb's and Louise's perceptions of the town of Halcyon and specifically the Temple as a religious entity, would naturally differ. When they met, Louise had been living there since January 1, 1929. For Herb, it was a totally new experience. He writes that Halcyon "is a most interesting place with its background and its characters." He confesses that he believes in it all "but cannot quite grasp it all yet" and he writes it was wonderful how "Temple members work together in such harmony, and so uniformly grasp the truths that are offered" (*September 12*). Later he tells Louise about his belief in God, and how it is consistent with the Temple Teachings. He writes that of what he had learned so far, he very much liked the general philosophies in the teachings. However, he also writes that he never could devote himself to it the way some of the members did. "I mean the way they so completely sacrifice everything for its cause" (*October 3*).

### Island of Guam

*We pulled in here early yesterday morning at sunrise and it really was a pretty sight. You might call this the emerald island of the Pacific with its bright green jungle and vegetation all over the place. And a lot of the shores are actually sandy beaches with palm and coconut trees lining them.*

*Then, yesterday afternoon I was ashore for a few hours. The people are quite fair looking and very friendly. They live in houses with grass roofs; no window panes in the windows. Everything is spotlessly clean and law and order prevails everywhere, since the government, naval officials and marine officers keep a strict discipline everywhere.*

*Very few ships stop here besides the Navy transports and the clipper planes. Most of the natives have never been off the island or even out of their tiny villages. Now there are schools and churches, roads and cars, stores and taverns, but they have not put too much of a civilized air to the island. (*October 10*)*





*The natives raise rice, fruit and gather coconuts; and use wagons drawn by a species of water-buffalo. Much to the delight of most of the 500 sailors who spent the afternoon ashore, beer and other drinks were available in most taverns and lots of them made up for the 12 days at sea. As for myself darling, one cooling glass of beer will suffice; and I bought a few pictures, wrote a few postcards, and walked around a bit. The only trouble is that it rains 20 times a day, but then, that is why the island is so beautiful. (October 10)*

*Photo at left shows Herb eating a coconut.*

### North Pacific Storm

For several nights before arriving in Manila, the USS Henderson and crew endured a fierce storm.

*Immediately after leaving Guam we ran into rain and heavy winds which lasted for five days. At times the waves came over the bow and sides of the ship. At night it would blow the hardest and it felt like I was going to get blown out of my hammock any time. You see a bunch of us have our hammocks slung on topside near the side of the ship. The rain and spray from the waves almost splashed in them. But it was fun lying there listening to the roar of the wind and splashing of the waves. The old Henderson felt like she was going to fall apart at any time. However, she didn't and Sunday morning we sailed into Manila. (October 17).*

### Why the U.S. Navy was in the Philippine Islands

Herb had earlier explained in a letter to Louise what they would be doing there. He wrote that the presence of the U.S. Navy Asiatic Fleet in the South China Sea was to protect U.S. commerce, and not to engage in war. He reassured her of this because she read the news about military threats by the Japanese, who were at that time attacking China's key coastal cities. (September 16)

He wrote that there are over 7,000 small islands in the Philippine Islands, and "No wonder the Japs covet them." They comprise 100,000 acres of land. (October 19)

## Herb's Career

Upon arriving in Manila, Herb finally learned that the ship he would be assigned to was the USS Canopus, "a submarine tender, fairly large, and now it is at Shanghai" (October 17). They were to sail from Manila to Shanghai, then to a port in Woosung, China where he would transfer to the Canopus.

He was glad to be getting onto the Canopus, because it was large enough to warrant "every rate in the Navy on it." (October 19). "As for my work: just plain deck work for a couple of months, I guess. Painting and scrubbing and sweeping" (October 28). He believed that if he worked hard it might even be possible to rise to the position of Chief Pay Clerk (equivalent to Chief Warrant Officer) – which receives a very high pay rate. (October 28)

His immediate goal would be reaching Storekeeper. "Storekeepers have charge of the storerooms on a ship, and also keep the accounts in the Supply Office and the Pay Office. It's about the thing I'd like to do most in the Navy" (October 28). He looked forward to making Storekeeper 3<sup>rd</sup> class. "It won't be much of a jump but it will be the start of a series of jumps" (October 28). His plan for future steps upward included attaining Chief Storekeeper, then Pay Clerk and finally Chief Pay Clerk.

Herb projected that when returning from China he would have saved up \$500, and once they were married his income would be \$60 / month (October 6). In her reply, Louise compared his earnings to what people in Halcyon lived off of, and called it "a fortune" (October 27).

## Shanghai and Japan's War on China

The trip from Manila took them up the coast of China – past the rugged mountains of Formosa. They arrived at the mouth of the Huangpu River, whereupon a pilot came to take them to Wusong<sup>1</sup>.

To open his letter of, 1937, Herb explained "The events of the last week had me all befuddled and this is the first chance I had to write." He continues:

*First, we sailed thru part of the Japanese fleet which is blockading Shanghai, and at intervals the ships run up the Whangpoo and bombard the Chinese lines. From the start we could hear the crashing of the big guns at the front! Once Japanese planes swooped low over us and we held our breath; but a big U.S. flag was stretched on the top of the deck and the pilots recognized it.*

*The Whangpoo was alive with Japanese ships, both war ships and merchant ships bringing supplies to the Jap soldiers.*

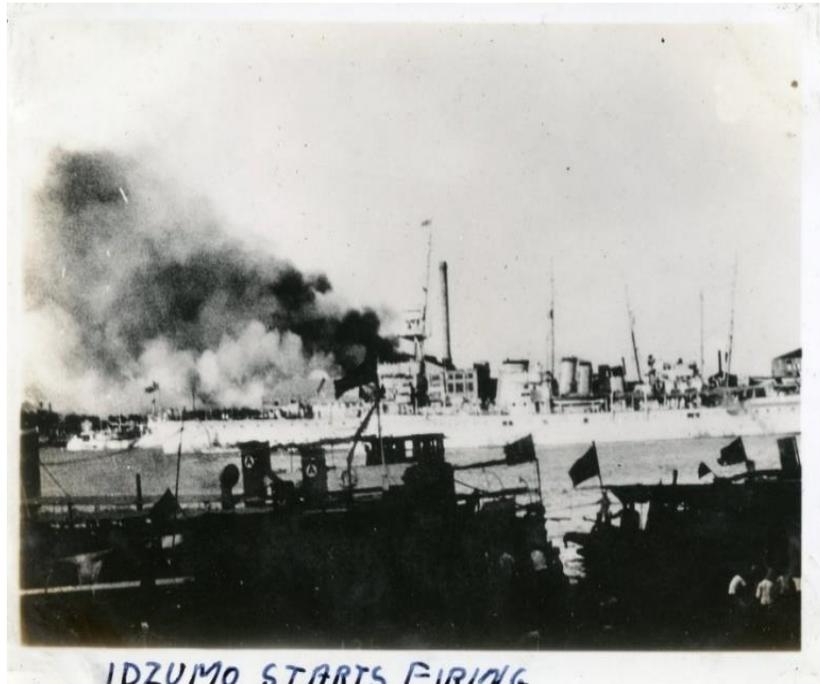
*Then we approached Woosung, a small city. Or shall I say what was left of it!*

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<sup>1</sup> The Huangpu River flows through Shanghai into the Yangtse River (dividing the city east and west). Prior to the city's expansion, Wusong was a separate port town located 14 miles down the [Huangpu River](#) from Shanghai's urban core, situated at the mouth – where the Huangpu flows into the Yangtse.

*It was where the Japs fist landed, and prior to landing they bombarded Woosung almost to bits. Nothing but wrecked homes everywhere; blown up streets, factories.*

*(October 27)*



Woosung became the Japanese army base and airport, and they operated from there. Herb continues:

*We could see their army trucks hustling back and forth, as we anchored right off Woosung. Also, we could see the Jap planes continually taking off, loaded with bombs; to fly off over Chinese lines and cities; to unload their deadly cargo; to return to Woosung for more bombs. Around the bend in the river was a Japanese cruiser systematically bombing the Chinese lines to the north. The reports of her guns and the ones at the front kept echoing in our ears all day long.*

*In the evening a tug transferred a hundred of us from the Henderson to the Canopus. And what a madhouse the Canopus was at the time. ... The Canopus had just arrived herself from Chefoo and Tsingtao, with a bunch of refugees on board, and these we are now taking back to Manila. And now the Canopus is crowded with extra men and passengers, and as yet we haven't been assigned to divisions.*

*One day and one night in Woosung was almost enough however. Because Sunday night Chinese planes tried to bomb the Jap base; we could see the anti-aircraft guns firing at them; and Jap planes took off to fight the bombers. So, we saw a battle in the sky which became invisible as the planes drifted away from us.*

*I still can't get over all that I saw in one day on the Whangpoo. Bodies floating downstream; ruins; and Chinese women in small flat-bottom boats, their tiny children beside them, fishing up the garbage that was thrown down our slop chute after each meal. ... They would almost fight to rescue boxes, tin cans, cloths, and food stuff that was thrown overboard. Whew, what a country! (October 27)*

A few days later Herb wrote to Louise about how he hated "the Japs" for their aggression in China, describing the Chinese as "a friendly, peaceful race" (November 1).

