

Chapter Thirty-Four

Manila: Fall, 1939

October, 1939

The China cruise lasted about six months, and included stops at Shanghai and a four-month stay at Tsingtao. Herb had thoroughly enjoyed his time in Tsingtao. The U.S.S. Canopus arrived back in Manila Bay on October 24.

Finally, Tuesday morning after a week at sea we were glad to pull into Manila Bay. With all its heat and everything else it is good to be back here for a change. Then yesterday, naturally one of the first things we did was to get mail.... And now I can settle down and answer the two letters that I was overjoyed to receive from you. One a little short, but the other a great big, sweet, long one. (October 25)

Herb responds to Louise's concern about his possible involvement in the war in Europe.

No, I really don't think that there is much chance of our becoming involved in it darling. Not now, anyhow, the way politics have been developing over in Europe. ... Why hon, even if we did get in a war very few sailors would ever see action in it; and particularly none of the ships on this station. So that is one thing you never have to worry about. (October 25)

Herb writes about what it is like, being back in Manila.

Sure seems terribly hot here after Tsingtao. But the ship feeds better here, we get better laundry service, so Manila has a few good points. And you can't beat the beautiful sunsets. One really had me awed the other evening. Don't know when I'll go ashore. Never did care much for liberty here. I think I went ashore more in Tsingtao in three months than I did in Manila in a year and a half. (October 27)

On Sunday evening Herb writes "An hour ago I got back from my first Manila liberty since we got back. Manila is still the same hot, dusty Manila to me and I still haven't got much use for it" (October 29). He went ashore with a couple of buddies; they went to a show.

After the show we had supper and then went out to a cabaret where the manager was throwing a free beer party as a sort of home coming affair to the Canopus. Amidst all the merriment just about everyone had to get up and sing or do something, and I wound up singing "You're A Sweet Little Headache." Wasn't so good either because I didn't hold the mike right and I sang too loud into it. (October 29)

He stayed at the Y that night, then the next day went downtown to do some Christmas shopping for Louise, to no avail. Later, in his letter he writes “Darling would you mind if I just sent you some money with which you could get yourself something?” (October 29)

November, 1939

He writes about his chances of being rated second class.

They aren't going to rate people on the 16th of November. They are going to on the 16th of December instead, and now I think I stand a swell chance of making it. It will be a darn nice Christmas present if I do. (November 2)

A week goes by. Herb writes “Darling, I’m awful; I don’t believe I’ve written since last weekend. But there just hasn’t been anything new to write. Just a lot of hot weather and long days” (November 9).

Herb becomes very downhearted when he learns that the fleet will give out only one second class storekeeper rating next month. “And I won’t be that one, I’m certain. It will be some old duck with about ten years in the outfit” (November 9).

He writes how he is dealing with the heat of Manila.

It's hot here as usual, especially down here in the storeroom where I'm writing now. Whenever you do any hard work at all you fairly "melt," and we have been doing quite a bit of that lately. Even now its evening and I've got two fans trained on me, and I've barely got anything on, and it's still uncomfortably warm. We can't sleep down here in Manila. Always on topside now; the rain drives us out once in a while. (November 9)

Earlier that day Herb read the world news. He shares his thoughts with Louise about the war in Europe, and its effects upon the U.S. economy.

Well they finally passed the neutrality law.¹ It's a good law all right. ... [But] it will be a happy day when Germany is crushed, and Poland and Czechoslovakia are restored, and the German people are made to feel some of the things they forced the Jews and other persecuted people to feel. And Germany can't win; Russia is even laughing at her now.

Too bad I'm not in the aviation industry. With those war orders, all the airplane factories in Southern California are really reaping in the dough! I guess in general, business conditions there are picking up as a result of the war. (November 9)

Saturday afternoon Herb writes again about world issues.

Well, here it is Armistice Day! Though just why it should be celebrated this year no one seems to know. It is ironic when you get down to it; all the men in the World War dying for nothing. Up to this year there was every reason for Armistice Day to be a great holiday but that's gone with the wind now. (November 11)

¹ The Neutrality Act of 1939 passed by the U.S. Congress sought to ensure that the U.S. would not become entangled in foreign conflicts. It limited the government’s ability to aid Britain and France against Nazi Germany.

A conversation with a coworker causes Herb to remember events from a year ago.

Speaking of Armistice Day, I was just talking to the third-class storekeeper who comes from San Luis, and last year he was on the Memphis for transportation when it stopped at Avila Beach on Armistice Day. That was pretty handy for him. I don't suppose any ship stopped there this year, did one? (November 11)

Herb was really happy when he received a letter from Louise. It was dated October 6. He reads her answer to his question about where they might like to live when he is assigned shore duty.

Well, I'm glad you'd like to live in Washington hon. It makes up my mind to a large extent that I'll put in for shore duty in Bremerton. Yes it has a rainy climate in the spring dear, but its beautiful country during the rest of the year. (November 13)

He responds to her comments about the girl he went out with in Tsingtao.

I'm glad you didn't mind my going out with that girl in Tsingtao. And it even seems that our acquaintance was rather short lived. Only went out with her once or twice before she left for Shanghai. But she wasn't so interesting anyhow. So, I wrote you a letter, and it was all about Tamaro? That wasn't very polite of me, was it darling? (November 13)

Next Saturday evening Herb begins a new letter. He had been very busy this past week – and he saw several good shows this week. This afternoon several of them went ashore and played a game of softball. (November 18)

Louise had wondered when they would have to stop writing letters. So he tries to answer by explaining the ship schedules.

I'm also enclosing a schedule for you to go by because President liners are about the only ships that bring our mail out here now. This letter will go out on the 29th of November on the Pres. Taft. It will arrive in Frisco on December 21st so you won't be able to write very long after you receive this.

Or, you can write up to about January 6th so your last letters go out on the Pres. Cleveland on January 8. Then they'll arrive in Manila on February 3 in time to catch me on the Henderson when it makes second contact here. So, my dear, the Pres. Cleveland is the deadline!

It will also be my deadline. I'll try to get my last letters on it which will beat the Henderson in by a week or so. However, after I'm on the Henderson I'll write you some air mail letters.

Gee, but it doesn't seem possible that this last stage of our waiting has arrived. ... I guess you won't be able to write during the last month and a half. I sent you a copy of the Henderson schedule. And I believe it has been delayed two days making it arrive in Frisco on March 6th.

You know hon it's great to start figuring like this because it shows how our time apart will soon be over. (November 18)

Three days later the Canopus is in drydock, in Olongapo. Herb writes in detail about the process going into drydock, and preparing for the work to be done, and how they scraped barnacles and painted the bottom and sides of the ship. The crew worked long hours, and it was the type of hard work that Herb was not used to doing.

Just as I was about finished I "slopped" a gallon of paint in one eye and I couldn't see for about five minutes. It sure did burn. I felt my way out and wiped off most of it with kerosene and then got my eyes rinsed out at the sick bay. (November 21)

The day after the ship returned to Manila was Thanksgiving Day. "We had a pretty fair dinner today" (November 23). After dinner several men went ashore to play softball.

Well, I made out a lot better than usual today. Our side won. I played second base, made only one error and got five hits out of six times at bat. And boy did I pull one good one! I was running from second to third, playing with no shirt on at all, and I over ran third and thought I was out. But the baseman had dropped the ball and I dove for the bag head first. And, I landed and slid on my stomach on a bunch of gravel! But I made it. And did my stomach feel good; wow! You see I was sunburned on it to begin with. Guess I'll at least play with a shirt on from now on. Sailors are just a bunch of kids when they get over on a ball diamond like that. We always have lots of fun though. (November 23).

Herb tells Louise what he did ashore on Saturday. His first stop was to see a show at the State Theater. After the show he visited Red and his wife, and they talked for a long time. They went out together to a restaurant for supper, and he saw another movie with them. "You'll really like the McCoy's when you meet them, Louise. They've been married eight years now, ever since Red was a seaman, and they get along all right" (November 26).

The next morning, he and several others got up earlier than usual.

It was to hear the direct broadcast of the California-Stanford game which started at 6 A.M. our time; and on Sunday morning. That, I suppose was around 3 P.M. Saturday afternoon your time. And it's the first game I've heard in about two years. It was rather lopsided as you probably know, 32-14 in favor of California. (November 26)

On Monday Herb received two letters from Louise, which were written in late October. She had written out the details of their wedding plans, and Herb responds.

As for a veil; I'll bet that I could get a lovely one for you in Shanghai, which I'll do! You must be complete from tip to toe my sweet.

I'm glad I don't have to wear anything formal. In fact I wonder - how about a dark brown suit; the one I got in Tsingtao! It's a sport model but not too much so.

Sounds so wonderful darling, doesn't it; talking about "our" wedding like this!

Gee whiz honey, whatever you want to get, or do; don't hesitate for a second to draw out some of our money. Because I'll have a little extra for that anyhow when I get there. You will please get whatever you want for our wedding, won't you dear! What a day that will be - the happiest day in our lives! (November 30)

December, 1939

The squadron had been quite busy lately.

To begin with, we had a lighter full of stores, and not many men to handle them, and we were kept plenty busy getting them down into the storeroom.

And yesterday morning the six new subs arrived from Honolulu and tied up on the other side of the Canopus. They sure are large, and streamlined, about the latest and best types of U.S. subs. They make our little old S-boats look like ash cans. The [new] P-boats are almost as long as the Canopus. With the S-boats on one side and the P-boats on the other side, you can bet this ship looks like a hen with a bunch of chicks for sure now. Yes, six more subs to keep supplied from our storeroom now. (December 2)

Herb writes about events in Europe.

I suppose, like the rest of the world, and myself, you are justly "indignant" as the papers put it, over Russia's despicable invasion and massacre of Finland. ... I didn't think they'd ever use their might in an aggressive manner but I see I was mistaken.

At this stage, Finland is desperately holding out but I suppose it's just a matter of a couple of days before the Reds overrun Finland. None of the other Scandinavian countries dare risk their existence by going to Finland's aid. And none of the large democracies are free to give her any aid either.

It proves further, that Russia is going to be the country for the rest of the world to watch out for, regardless of the outcome of the German-Allied war. They would like to see the whole world communistic, were it possible.

They ought to crack down hard on the Reds in the U.S. Don't you think so? Because they are meant to be an undermining influence designed to assist Russia at some future time. (December 2)

Then Herb reads in her letter that she plans to meet him in San Francisco when he arrives.

That will be swell if you can meet me in Frisco darling. Sure, you could even meet me at the dock and see me, even if I didn't get leave until the following day. It would be a little crowded with Navy families and relatives but I'm sure you wouldn't miss me darling, I'd see to that.

And hon, you take as much of our money as you think you'll need when you come up to Frisco. You might want to do a little shopping too, while you're up there. That will really be wonderful though sweetheart, you're meeting me in Frisco! ... As the Henderson slowly moves into the dock, I'll be looking for you and, boy, will I be nervous and excited; I know how I'll feel! (December 2)

Sunday morning Herb writes about listening to another football game on the radio.

Gosh am I tired this morning! Navy walloped Army decisively 10 to 0! We got up at 2 A.M. this morning to listen to the game, a most unholy hour me thinks. Though we got back to sleep at 5 o'clock, we still didn't get very much sleep last night.

Were you listening to the game darling? I hope so; because I know you'd enjoy listening to the Navy walk away with the Army. That makes up for last year, and the year before. Despite losing sleep, I still enjoyed listening to it. Since I slept in the office last night all I had to do was get up and turn the radio on at 2 A.M. and then we just laid in our bunks and listened to it. Luxury, isn't it? ... I didn't miss a play. (December 3)

He writes about his time remaining on this ship.

I think that in one month from today the Henderson arrives in Manila. So tomorrow I can say that I only have a month to do till I get transferred. ... But in view of the fact that we are short of storekeepers on board, it is possible that we may be held up from getting first contact.

However, ... I'll be so happy that I'll gladly take second contact and like it. I'll get back just as quickly naturally, only it means missing Shanghai and an extra month of work aboard here. I want to get to Shanghai mostly to get the few more things I want. (December 3)

Tuesday evening Herb continues writing.

Today was payday darling and I drew the hundred dollars I had saved up, and so I'm enclosing a money order for it. That completes my aims out here and though we haven't got all of the five hundred in the bank; what we have spent was more than well worth it.

According to the latest Henderson schedule it arrives here January 3, and in Frisco March 4th. (December 5)

Next Sunday morning Herb begins a new letter.

This morning I put your latest pictures in the little album that I have reserved for pictures of a very sweet someone.

Tomorrow we get mail; loads of it, so I know I'll hear from you Louise. Funny, but the thrill of getting your letters is just as great for me now as it was when we first started writing. ... Mail is still the biggest part of my life out here because it means letters from you.

Those six new subs have really increased our work load down in the storeroom. And for the last few weeks there have been just two of us down in the main storeroom to handle all the issues, paper work, and cleaning up. (December 10)

There was an accident in one of the holds in the storeroom. Herb tells Louise how he helped fix the problem.

We had a small flood in one hold when a pipe corroded away. When we opened up the hatch the place was three quarters filled up with water which had mixed with some of the chemicals stowed in that storeroom creating a strange gas.

First, they pumped the water out, and then the cans (calcium chloride) had to be hoisted out. With all the fumes one couldn't go down there without a breathing apparatus, and since I knew where most of the cans were, I was elected.

So, I became acquainted with the use of a rescue breathing apparatus. It's quite a gadget looking something like a Buck Rogers invention. Not quite like a gas mask. You have a clip in your mouth attached to a tube running to an oxygen cylinder. And the incoming foul air is purified by passing through some calcium phosphide and is then mixed with the oxygen. Its only good for twenty to thirty minutes. There's no mask to it. You just have a clip over your nose to keep from breathing through it. Which is hard to keep from doing at first.

We finally got it all fixed up. None of us were responsible for the flood. It was a rusty pipe that had a big leak in it. But it just added to the work of us two. However, yesterday we received a first-class SK who will be in charge of the storeroom, so that takes a little of the load off of us. And it means another man who can be spared to go back on the Henderson. (December 10)

Monday morning Herb received another letter from Louise. In answering, he suggests that she postpone writing after this, because she will receive this letter when it may be too late for her reply to reach him. (December 11)

He felt the need to clarify something he previously wrote, about "abstinence."

I guess I wrote something confusing dear. Because there really is nothing that could detract from whatever accomplishment abstinence from sexual contact is. Besides, it isn't an accomplishment when a person loves another as I love you. It's something that should be done, I think. Guess I must have mixed up whatever it was I wrote sweets. (December 11)

He writes next with disappointing news about his career.

The other day, as I expected, I did not get rated when the rates came in. Since this time they were rating only one second-class storekeeper on the Asiatic Station I hardly stood the slightest chance of making it. ... We'll be able to get along just as well as if I had made it, I'm sure. (December 14)

A few days later Herb writes another short letter, explaining again how the timing of his letters is determined by ship schedules.

The next mail doesn't get here until December 23 and it goes out on the 25th. That's the Pres. Pierce and it arrives back in Frisco on January 18th. So I don't suppose that you'll get this letter until around the 20th.

Anyhow, it won't be but less than two weeks after you get this that I'll be on my way to you darling. (December 17)

A couple of days later Herb has good news to share with Louise.

After days of anxious wondering, this afternoon a dispatch came in on what the Henderson is taking back, and lower rated storekeepers fall into the category due to go back on her. So now it's "in the bag" sweets, and we don't have to worry about my being held over any more. ... In 72 days, I'll be in San Francisco.

As they say, it isn't the two years or so out here that just about drives a fellow crazy; it's the last few days when you are wondering whether you are really going to catch it or not. (December 19)

Herb was intensely longing to be with Louise.

I need you badly; I need a sweetheart with me, a companion, someone to put meaning in life for me. And when it's someone who I love as much as I love you Mary Lou, that makes it all the more demanding. Because I am inclined to, oh be a weak person in some respects, by myself. Guess it's just that I was meant to have a wife, to sort of put me on balance. (December 19)

Next Sunday morning Herb begins a new letter, confirming his status.

The other day I put in my official request for shore duty and put Bremerton, San Diego, and Frisco in that order, as the places I'd like. But I doubt if I'll get it for over a year or so because they aren't taking many more men on shore duty lately, I hear. They are using more reserves on shore stations.

Sure was glad when the official list was posted on the bulletin board of those catching the Henderson and my name was on it! (December 24)

He is still uncertain as to whether he will get first or second contact with the Henderson.

At first I thought I was going to get first contact but now I think I'll get second contact because I'm eligible to take the exam for second early in January and people eligible aren't supposed to be transferred. So, perhaps that is for the best though I might only have a very slim chance of making second. However, I shall bear down and do some studying in the next few weeks. What I wanted to get in Shanghai I shall try to dig up in Manila. (December 24)

On Christmas Eve Herb received a long letter and a Christmas card from Louise. On Christmas morning he writes back to her.

Merry X'mas Louise; and I hope it was a very merry one for you.

Imagine darling, though we are ten thousand miles apart you still sent me a X'mas card that arrived on Christmas Eve, two hours before midnight. Doesn't that make you happy hon? It made me very happy! (December 25)

Then Herb tries to explain where he might be stationed next, and where they might live; and he hopes she will accept dealing with the uncertainty of life while he is in the Navy.

Honey, I feel for you. It must be awful trying to keep up with my changing plans. But the Navy is usually responsible for making me make most of the changes. I'm not really quite "that" bad darling.

About the most convenient thing to do upon reporting in off leave will be to report in at San Diego ... but maybe I'll have to report in at Frisco. Quien sabe? ... That is one of the most irksome things that a Navy wife has to contend with. I'll bet you are learning that fast darling.

Yes, if I only can get home every other night or weekend, I guess we'll have to make the best of it. And as you say, we'll appreciate being together all the more. It won't always be that bad anyhow. Someday I shall get shore duty and then we'll be together all the time. (December 25)

Louise wrote something about "spanking" to which he responds. "Oh, if I wanted to spank you bad enough, I think I could probably catch you. Just wait and see! I used to be a pretty good runner" (December 25).

Louise also wrote something about the photo of Tamaro that he sent to her. And she made a reference to how often Herb went on liberty while in Tsingtao. He jokingly suggested it was because there were Russian girls there. "But really, Tsingtao also had nice beaches, good restaurants, etc." (December 25).

He closes his letter with remarks about spending Christmas on the U.S.S. Canopus.

Thank God this is my last Christmas out here and so far from you Louise. X'mas is utterly empty; without meaning, in a place this far away from the one you love. Yes, right now I am very lonesome for you. Just another day, with the same fellows; same cussing; dirty jokes; heat; dreariness. Hu, what a joke for X'mas.

But it's not that bad darling; for at least I can be thankful that I am leaving here so soon and I can think of how nice next Christmas is going to be when we are together. Sweetheart darling, you know how much I love you and need you. (December 25)

A few days later Herb writes another letter, responding to a short one from Louise that he just received. He tries to clarify what their life might be like right after their honeymoon.

Because we won't have too much money left after our honeymoon. We have to consider that we'll be supporting ourselves for a whole month regardless of when we get married. And what a wonderful month that will be darling! Then when I come back off leave, I'll have a month's pay "on the books" so we'll be able to get off to a pretty good start. (December 28)

Then he writes about having to decide when to get on board the Henderson; at first contact or second contact in Manila.

Most important, and it's final I think; is that I get first contact now. And it was for me to decide. This morning the Chiefyeoman in the Exec's office had me up there and he asked

me which I'd like. He pointed out that I could go up for second class if I wanted second contact. But after hurriedly thinking it over I said "Nope, Chief; I'll take first contact if you please." It was a weighty decision to have to make so suddenly.

I'll give you some of the pro's and con's of it. Perhaps I wasn't so sensible about it but there's nothing like doing what you really want to do most. First contact means that I can get to Shanghai where we spend over a week; and I can get the things I wanted to bring back. And it will make that extra month go faster.

If I had to spend it aboard the Canopus it would seem like six months. Remaining on board here for second contact would have meant a shot at the exam but then there's always the question of my not passing it; or not making a high enough mark to get rated. Or worst of all; get overlooked through a yeoman's error which was what happened to several of us this month.

Yep; seems like I'm almost jinxed for second class. After the Augusta sent out the rates for December 16 the error was discovered which the Chief Yeoman had made over there, but they didn't want to call the rates back after some other fellows already had been rated. That's a disgusting mess and it makes me feel like I don't care if I never get rated.

So I thought I'd wait until I got back to the states to go up for second class, and I gladly took first contact. (December 28)

He writes about the Henderson's schedule.

We get transferred to the Henderson on the 6th [of January]. ... Then, on up to Shanghai, Chingwangtao, and Hong Kong. It's going to be cold way up there in China but I'll be glad to be off this tub. (December 28)

On New Year's Eve herb writes his last letter from Manila. He is eager to tell Louise about the evening he spent with two couples.

Well yesterday I made my last liberty in Manila. I went over in the evening and dropped in on Red and his wife, and we all saw a show. ... Then we went back to their apartment and had some coffee and cake. The fellow, whose wife just arrived here last week, and his wife also came down; and the five of us talked for two or three hours.

Red, and his wife Evelyn, are a sweet couple, darling and if we can meet some more Navy people like them after we are married, we'll have some good friends. I sure hope you can meet them some day.

Red and his wife have always given me a lot of assurance that you and I will be able to get along all right because they got married when Red was just a seaman. They gave me a lot of "info" on various things that come up in a Navy couple's lives. They have been married over seven years. Red and the Mrs. Have exactly a year more to do here now; and they said they sure envy me going back. It was nice knowing them, and having a place to drop in on and visit once in a while. (December 31)

Then Herb reflects upon his own feelings about marriage.

Gee darling, seeing two couples together like they were last night, and talking, over coffee and cake, makes me realize just how very much I want that sort of life too. I know how happy we are going to be and how much more life will mean to us. Marriage is wonderful; why it's the meaning in life. I just can't picture people not wanting to get married. (December 31)

He closes his letter with great anticipation of the coming events.

Next Sunday I'll be on the Henderson going to China! Oh boy but I'll be glad to get started and leave here. I won't have the slightest regret over leaving this thing darling. And in but sixty-five days we'll be together honeybunch; joy of joys! From now on I'll be just one bottomless, bubbling, well of happiness; nothing could take that away from me.

I won't get any more letters from you until the Henderson hits here the second time because we leave here before the next mail gets in. But it's great to be so "short" darling.

I love you so! It won't be long now sweets. A million hugs and kisses! (December 31)

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