

## Chapter Five

### Manila: Nov-Dec, 1937

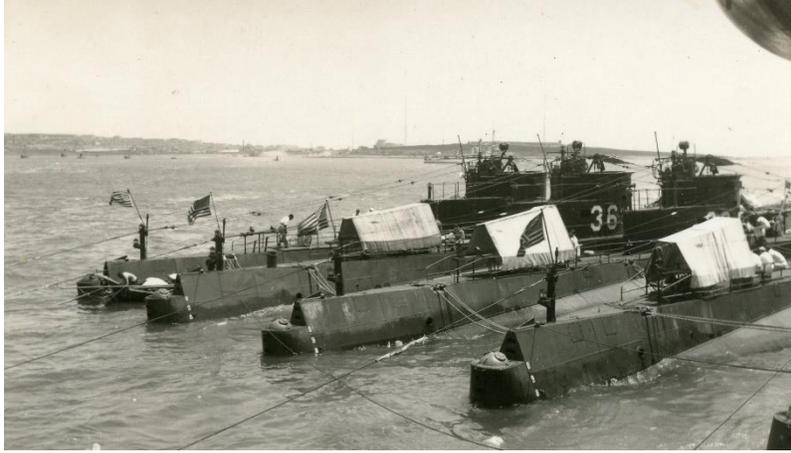
#### The U.S.S. Canopus

Herb writes to Louise about his ship, the U.S.S. Canopus.

*The Canopus is a sub tender, a fair-sized ship about 400 feet long, with a crew of about 450 men. This ship used to be a German banana boat, but the U.S. confiscated it during the World War and converted it into a sub tender. Sub squadron comprises the Canopus, five submarines, and a mine sweep about the size of a tug (November 6).*



*The subs tie up alongside of us when they need repairs, or batteries charged, or anything like that. We also carry all their supplies and stores. They have their offices on board the Canopus and the men on the subs keep most of their things in lockers aboard here. ... In peacetime the Canopus divides her time between Tsingtao, China and Manila; and cruises around the Asiatic coast (November 6).*



**Submarines assigned to the USS Canopus**

## **Navy Life in Manila**

Herb's ship returned to Manila, Philippine Islands, after a two-week cruise up the coast of China to Shanghai. In Manila this time of year the heat remained oppressive, even after sunset. Most of the men spread their cots on "topside" and "the sleeping isn't so bad except for a few mosquitoes" (*November 1*).

One evening (*November 1*) preparing himself to retire for the night, he wrote how he hoped to dream of Louise during his sleep.

*To make it a perfect sleep I'll need to dream of you dear as I often do. A dream of caressing those pretty golden curls of yours; looking into your beautiful eyes; and once again kissing those divine lips, that are a part of a divine personality. Sweetheart, I could almost go crazy when I think of how much I love everything about you.*

*Who said "parting is such sweet sorrow?" I sometimes wonder about that. The "sweet" part of it is hardly noticeable, don't you think? I even hate to part with you in a letter. But it must be. Forever, Herb.*

Herb provided more information for Louise about his earnings and savings. Each month he sent a third of his salary to his stepmother, and he wrote that he would not continue that once they were married (*November 9*).

Herb had not been participating much in Manila's night life up to this point. He had previously written to Louise about his socially very modest adventures. In response to Louise's letters in which she wrote about going dancing, Herb indicated that he planned to go dancing at the cabarets in Manila, in order to "get practice" at dancing. (*November 9*)

He adds, in a subsequent letter, that he would prefer in the future that they only travel within the USA. He wrote that Hawaii<sup>1</sup> and the Philippine Islands were "overrated" (*November 13*).

---

<sup>1</sup> Hawaii officially became a state in July, 1960.

On November 11 there was a bad storm, and Herb wrote about it in detail, in his letter of November 13, 1939, including how a man drowned.

*Thursday afternoon it started to get very windy and rough, the barometer fell, so we prepared for some stormy weather. Although we were tied to a buoy, we stationed our sea detail and we were ready to get underway to ride the blow out at sea, if it got too bad. Then the wind grew stronger and blew the pouring rain around so that you couldn't see ten feet. The section leader told me that I had a 6 – 8 watch on the bridge so after I ate supper I started up to the bridge. As soon as I walked up the ladder and reached the topside deck the wind almost knocked me over. I tried to see where I was going but the driving rain stung my eyes so much, I just about had to feel my way up to the bridge deck and over to the wheelhouse. Another lookout and myself took turns standing a watch aft on the bridge deck out in the open where we could see if we were dragging our buoy or running into any other ship. The harbor was quite filled up with merchant men, and a couple of big freighters dragged their anchors and almost ran aground. They had to put out to sea.*

*Well then, I was standing up there looking down on either side of the ship and I was almost (day) night-dreaming when I heard some faint cries which almost sounded like a seagull or something. Then suddenly someone yelled "man overboard" and pulled the lever that dropped a big life-buoy with flares attached to it. They turned a flashlight on and there out on the churning waves was a bobbing head. A man, who looked like a native, was frantically trying to stay afloat. But the waves were large; swells broke over him; the rain was driving all the harder; and he couldn't swim to any of the life buoys that were thrown to him. They kept the big searchlights trained on him and the buoys until, they all drifted away into the dark. It was too rough to lower a boat to go after him.*

*It blew over a few hours later; and on Friday morning the damage was estimated. About 20 had been killed and over 100 were missing along the waterfront.*

Herb writes about how the local economy is supported by the presence of so many ships in the harbor. Many locals regularly would come on board and sell their services – such as clothing, uniforms, laundry, mending, newspapers, shoes, garbage collectors. "On some mornings the deck almost looks like a marketplace" (November 20).

To get more exercise, Herb decided to go out for the ship's basketball team. They practiced every evening over at the YMCA in Manila. The Canopus basketball team beat an Army team last night. Herb even played a bit and made a few baskets (November 27).

A few weeks later on a calm morning, while sitting on his cot, Herb describes his surroundings.

*It sure is a nice morning and it isn't so warm yet but as usual I suppose it will get very warm and also rain some before the day is over. Below me here on the port side of the ship, four subs are tied up alongside us, just like four chicks nestling besides a hen.*

*The air is so clear that I can see for miles into the interior of the island where some mountains are visible. Everything is green and there are also many trees along the part*

*of the beach that I can see from here. Between some trees can be seen some large hotels which are the finest in Manila. This is a busy harbor and there are always lots of ships in it (November 21).*

## Letter Writing

In October Herb described how the mail took so long to reach them: it was dependent upon the schedules of various ships traversing the Pacific Ocean. There were long stretches of time neither of them received letters. Then sometimes several arrived all at once (*October 19*).

Herb writes again of the awkwardness of their letters taking so long to reach each other – answers to questions asked were greatly delayed, up to two months, usually. Regardless, he writes that he would try to thoroughly answer each of her letters. “Yes I shall always keep your letters for they comprise my favorite literature.” “So if you keep mine, someday we can put them all together and laugh over them” (*November 14*).

Again, Herb acknowledges the difficulty with letters. As on this day he finally got her last two letters addressed to his former ship. “Now it is Nov. 19 and when you get this it will be the middle of December. All that time, just to ask and answer a few questions” (*November 19*).

It becomes evident in reading their letters to each other that the act of reading one of their letters, as well as the act of writing a letter, was for each of them a means for feeling close to each other. It was almost as if they were with each other, as they were reading or writing.

One of Herb’s letters concludes with “Well sweetheart, I guess the time has come when ***we must temporarily part once again***. Give my regards to Pearl and best wishes and love to all of your family; I love you! Herb” (*November 27*).

## Herb’s Career

At the beginning, Herb’s assignment on board the Canopus consisted of ordinary deckhand work. Then in early December he was assigned a new job: mess-cooking for the officers. This assignment came with a few advantages: “The chow in here is sure swell. The chiefs eat much better than the rest of the crew” (*December 11*). Also, his new job was at a higher pay rate. He wrote that the extra \$8 each month could go toward their savings. “The job will keep me busy until I succeed in getting into the storekeepers division” (*December 11*).

Herb writes about a conflict that erupted on his new job, and how he dealt with it. He got upset with a coworker because Herb felt he was not doing his share of the work. Herb writes that he wanted to “knock his block off” (*December 12*), but he worked through their differences without getting physical, and in a few days the man was cooperating more (*December 17*).

## Adventures in the Philippine Islands

“Yesterday afternoon I went out sailing. It’s one of the best sports there are and someday I hope to own a small sailboat” (December 4). He had been out on a 30 ft. whaleboat rigged with a 50 ft mast “which carries a swell spread of sail.” They took the captain out sailing outside the breakwater. Then about a mile from the ship the wind died down. They had to send a motor boat out to tow them in. he wrote that he picked up quite a lot of sailing practice in the last two years.



**Canopus Sailboat**



**Sailboat Crew**

In early December Herb’s ship headed out to Olongapo, located on the smaller Subic Bay on the other side of the peninsula from Manila Bay. “It’s a small port about 90 miles from here and the reason we are going up there is because of the rifle range which is up there. Our rifle and pistol teams will get two weeks practice” (December 11). The rifle range was near the beach, on a flat stretch of ground between two hills. The Canopus would be there for the next few weeks.

Herb enjoyed this location very much. "This is a pretty little cove here with hills all around covered with trees and other vegetation. Coral reefs in different parts of the cove make the water seem variously colored. All the beach is sandy and in one place there is a big coconut grove on it" (*December 11*). There was a swimming enclosure "on the best part of the beach and boy, is the swimming swell" (*December 11*). Later Herb wrote that he swam there every day that the ship was there. The enclosure was made of bamboo and the fence was needed to keep sharks out, because "those were shark-infested waters."



**Herb Posing in Canoe - Olongapo Beach**

**December, 1937**

While in Olongapo Herb and one of his buddies went on a hike to a coconut grove, taking pictures along the way. Unfortunately, when they came down to the beach earlier, Herb left his shoes at the pier while they were swimming. When they headed out toward the coconut grove, he forgot about his shoes. This made walking difficult, because "to get to the coconut grove we had to cross some rocky coral stretches, climb a cliff, and walk over some briars and weeds" (*December 18*).



*We finally got there and we each climbed a tree and tried to get a coconut but a native came out of a grass hut and told us they weren't ripe yet. We took our pictures up in the tree, and I'll probably look like an ape when you see the one he took of me. We took some pictures of the grove, the beach, the cliff, and the grass shack, and the native. Here's hoping they come out. This tropical sun is so strong, its hard to take clear pictures in it.*

*As we climbed down the last bunch of rocks, a pretty picture confronted us. A long stretch of blue water, lapping at a smooth sandy beach which was fringed with tall coconut trees. Out in the bay were some pretty little islands, and off in the distance we could see tall, rugged, vegetation-covered mountains. As we walked along with the sun warming us up, a breeze in our faces and the water coming up to touch our feet, I said to him "Just think Ordway, look at all this, and if the people back in the states, where most of them are freezing, could see a picture of this they would give their right arm to be here; but here we are and we would give anything to be back there."*

*(December 18, 1937)*

One form of entertainment available to sailors onboard was watching movies. As Herb was writing one of his letters, he described how setting up for watching movies actually worked.

*I'll have to stop for a minute soon, and take my chair up to the movie platform. That is the bad part of most Navy movies. You have to bring your own chair, bench, stool, bucket, or blanket, or whatever you want to sit on, with you. To get a good seat you take your chair up early. If you leave it there, no one will bother it. For that would be committing the unpardonable sin in this Navy life of ours.*

*You should see the grand rush and jam after the movie ends. You know how bad it is to get out of a theater in a crowd? Well, just suppose each one of those people had a chair or something to take with them. Wow! Guys get rapped over the head or poked in the eyes with chair legs and what not. The mad rush descends down a narrow ladder with a*

*line forming that seems endless, if you are unlucky enough to be caught in the rear. The result is that everyone tries to be first. The second "Finis" is flashed on the screen, it's almost like a starter firing a gun for a 50-yard dash! Oh well. I have survived all the movie rushes thus far in my naval career. The idea is to take your chair up early and put it near a place that affords a quick and easy exit. (December 25)*

Herb wrote that he was supportive of her going out (dancing and movies), saying how it will help her remain happy and will be good for their own relationship – as long as she stayed "true" to him (December 26).

When the ship was back in Manila, Herb got a 72-hour liberty for the New Years holiday, so he went ashore with his camera. He writes this letter while on shore.

*Yesterday afternoon I walked all through the crowded section and slums of Manila and took a few pictures. For a while I thought that I was lost but I was traveling in a big circle and finally arrived at downtown again. I passed districts of poor Chinese, Spanish, and Filipino people. They really live in very unsanitary and filthy homes and it's a part of Manila that all people don't see. But I didn't feel like celebrating, and ... I marched past the joyous sounding beer joints without so much as a look backwards. And so on thru the park I strolled.*

*I arose at about 9 a.m. this morning, ate breakfast in the restaurant here, and then with my faithful camera at my side, I set out to see the nicer side of Manila. It was a long hike past some beautiful government buildings, past the University of the Philippines, and then the residential sections of rich Americans, Chinese, Spanish and Filipinos. A great deal of old, beautiful Spanish architecture is prevalent in that section. Moss and vine covered buildings with their open courtyards in the center of them; large open windows draped with laces; and canopies above them and flower boxes beneath them. I took quite a few pictures this morning. (January 1, 1938)*

After returning to the YMCA early that evening, Herb thought about New Year's Eve the previous year, and he reflected upon the past year's events.

*How different it was last New Year's Eve. Gee, I was in Halcyon then. I first saw you about a year ago, but even before last September, I had never completely forgotten you. If I'm not mistaken, Bernard and I went to a short meeting in the Temple last New Year's Eve, and after it, Cethyl and Pat [Mallory] invited us down for a glass of wine. And of course, I'll never forget the few minutes I spent with you and how sweet I even thought you were then. If only we would have come up to play cards like you wanted us to, perhaps we might have gotten to know each other. I'll never forget 1937 for that.*

*Although in worldly respects it's been a very unhappy year with its wars and other catastrophes. Isn't it strange how people like to think that a new year holds such wonderful things in store for them. I foresee a repetition of 1937, speaking of the world. How can it be otherwise with the Chinese, Japs, and Spaniards still fighting away; and Europe's egotistical dictators jealously eyeing each other's development. For us though darling, let's hope it's a quick year. (January 1, 1938)*