

Chapter Seven

Philippine Islands: Winter, 1938

“One year ago today,” Herb writes, as he recalls one very special evening when he first met Louise. “I’ll never forget the few minutes I spent with you and how sweet I even thought you were then” (January 1). This particular occasion was New Year’s Eve; after a service in the temple, Louise had invited he and Bernard to play cards with them, but they declined.

Herb then answers Louise’s question about how his senior class ring tore his finger. “No, I didn’t hit anyone, “accidentally.” He continues “You see when two fellows have a disagreement, they aren’t always able to settle it peacefully. But I never really started a fight unless it was for a darn good reason or a principle. Naturally no man with any backbone will take a lot of guff from another guy without trying to do something about it” (*January 3*).

Turning his attention to the work he is doing onboard the ship, Herb writes that he wants to advance quickly within the US Navy, in order to reach higher rates of pay. In December he had put in a “request chit” to get in the Storekeepers division. The result was getting placed on a waiting list with four others. Then on January 1st he set a goal for himself to reach Storekeeper 3rd Class this year. A few days later he finally was able to get his hands on a book to study for the Storekeeper 3rd Class exam. He had to talk with at least a dozen officers to get ahold of it. (*January 3*).

Herb wrote at length how he believed it was okay for her to go out with someone because he trusted her. Then he proceeds to explain how he had written to four of his friends (that happened to be young women) about their engagement. He said that he’d keep writing to two of them, because they were “long time pals” – one from NY, whom he went to school with; the other from Wilmington, near San Pedro, whom he went out with – but just as pals. (*January 9*).

In answering Louise’s letters of December 13 and December 14, Herb writes “Do you think you were foolish when you were young? Gee, you should have seen some of the things I did! Then when I got in the Navy I was away from the restraining influence of my parents and I guess I really cut loose. I’ve really only come to my senses since I’ve been in love with you” (*January 9*).

Most of their time in early 1938 was spent in Manila, Olongapo or Cavite, all part of the Philippine Islands. Olongapo is a small port about 90 miles north of Manila, and it has a rifle range that the Navy used on a regular basis. Cavite City is 22 miles southwest of the City of Manila, on the tip of a peninsula that protects the southern portion of Manila Bay.

In early January the Canopus spent a busy week out at sea, so the new sailors could participate in all kinds of drills. “We had a mock battle with our subs one night presuming they were attacking us” (January 14). Herb and some of his buddies were somewhat down on their ship, and in his letters, Herb referred to it as a “floating washtub.” He wrote about how old and inadequate the Canopus was – along with the submarines they support. He suspected that the ship would have to return to the states in a couple of years.

Herb continued working in the kitchen that winter. At one point he filled in for a mess cook who got sick, and he found himself peeling 300 pounds of potatoes (January 14). In one letter he confesses that he was having difficulty with how he would abruptly get reassigned to various jobs. “There are times when it really does seem hard, sweetheart. I get so angry I feel like doing anything, but then I think of you and all we are working for, and I always calm down then” (January 14).

“Still working long, hard days in the kitchen – as a mess cook,” he writes.

I started out this morning by dropping a table on my head. You see, we mess cooks fold our benches up, lay them on top of the tables; then hang the tables on the overhead (ceiling) after each meal. This morning me and a fellow started to take one down, and the legs I was holding collapsed. One hit me in the ribs and knocked my breath out and the table landed above my right eye and scratched me up. It was all very funny because I sure ended up in a funny position, even though I was slightly damaged. (January 16).

Herb ponders the amount of time until they are together again, and writes:

A tour of duty out here is 2 ½ years. It starts when you leave Frisco. I left there September 17. that means 4 months of it are up and I have two years, two months left to do before I get back to you. My tour of duty is officially up March 17, 1940 and if all goes well, I'll be with you around that time. Why sweetheart, that four months flew by, didn't it? Aw, it won't be long and surely, we can keep our patience and courage up that long. (January 16).

The U.S.S. Canopus arrived at the Navy Yard in Cavite for its six-month overhaul, which would take about a month. Herb writes from his new location, “They closed up the galley on the ship so that they can repair it, and they moved us mess cooks over to a mess hall in the yard. We are going to live over here until the ship is ready to leave the yard.” He was happy about this change, because after meals they (mess cooks) could go upstairs and rest, read, write, etc., while over on the ship “It's a mad house.” (January 21).

Shortly after Herb arrived in Shanghai last fall, he had written a story about the Japanese attack on Shanghai near the Whangpoo River, and the scenes of carnage that he saw. He sent it to his hometown newspaper in Lake Huntington, New York, which then published it in its entirety. Today he received copies of the edition which carried the story, just as he had described in one of his letters to Louise last fall.

He writes “The editor put my article in headlines and a whole front-page column. He didn't even change a word” (January 22). Herb was really proud of that, and in the letter to Louise he mused that he should have gone to night school or college to study journalism instead of joining the Navy.

Herb writes to Louise with an update about his family, back in New York. His step mother's illness had progressed to the point that she was "an invalid," and that she would be moved to New York City where she will live with an aunt of mine. She will be able to receive much better care there. My kid brothers are going to stay up in the country where they are going to high school" (January 23).

"I really feel like writing a lot tonight!" Herb writes, on a Friday evening after a busy week. "With another day's work behind, topped off by a cold shower, I feel like a new person, and I'll devote the rest of the evening to writing to a very sweet girl who deserves more letters than I have been sending lately. But my excuse: very few ships have been running to the states this month." Earlier in the day Herb reread Louise's first fifteen letters, and now he writes "You should see the exhilarating effect they had on me. I feel so darn happy tonight. As I reviewed every word you wrote in those letters, they seemed like a collection of wonderful gems; that I will always keep." (January 28).

The U.S.S. Augusta, the "lead ship" of the Asiatic Fleet, arrived in the Navy yard at Cavite earlier in the week, for a "short period of overhaul."

The Augusta tied up right in back of us, and it wasn't long before I saw fellows from it who I hadn't seen for a couple of years. Fellows who I knew from the Henderson; from the Tennessee; and fellows I went through training with over 2 ½ years ago in Norfolk. That's the way the Navy is. You have friends and acquaintances, and everything is so constantly changing, you part, and don't meet up again for years. Maybe in Panama, or Singapore, or Shanghai; I believe that reunions are responsible for most of the celebrations held in the local taverns or "Ye Olde Beer Shoppes."

Most of my buddies on the Augusta had lots to say about all that the "Augie" went through up in Shanghai. One fellow told me that the night after the Panay was sunk, no one on the Augusta knew what it might lead to, and that their ammunition was all set for their guns; just in case war had resulted. But its lucky for the Augusta that nothing came of it, because there were 43 Jap warships between the Augusta and the open sea!

Well now, since 600 off the "Augie" are eating in the mess hall here, it means that we have to feed about 1400 each meal, and we do it in about 40 minutes. You can bet that it's a busy 40 minutes too. The "Augie" is only supposed to be here about a week, and we hope no longer. Our temporary life of ease has been interrupted since she arrived. (January 28).

Herb shares some of his sentiments about Japan's war with China.

Well, the latest the Japs did was to slap a U.S. Envoy around. Those little rats! It's hard to take all that they hand out. We should either do something about it, or not be out here at all! If Japan wins this war, ten years from now some country will wish that they had done something about it now. It's a lucky thing for them that the American people, as a whole, want peace! A pacifist made a speech in a newsreel the other night, at the movie show in the mess hall, and you ought to have heard the boos and hisses he got from the audience. We sailors, on the whole, aren't sentimentalists or militants but we resent having our flag trod on and we wouldn't mind doing something about it. We know that we could lick those Japs. (January 29).

Herb had been assembling a photo album since he joined the Navy in 1935. He plans to send it to Louise, and cautions her about some of what she will see.

Since I've finished up my album and will send it to you next week, there are a few things I really ought to say about it. None of your pictures are in it because I want to keep them where I can see them; do you blame me? Now the pictures of girls that are in it are naturally people who don't mean anything anymore. You see, I didn't censor anything before I'm sending it.

I'm sorry that so many pictures of me are in it. It looks like I'm very conceited. It's a bad habit I got into when I first bought my camera; of taking too darn many pictures of myself. Whatever pictures need further explaining, just write and ask. I took nearly all of the pictures myself and have most of the negatives here, so if you would like to give anyone some of those pictures, just let me know and I'll get some printed, and send them on. Don't let the war pictures shock you! I've seen really horrible ones that I didn't dare put in it. Many of the pictures won't be interesting without a detailed explanation. And I don't care how many people you show it to since it's yours as much as mine, now. (January 29).

After laying on his bunk for a while, pondering what he had written in his long letter to Louise, and thinking of her, he shares with her his thoughts on a delicate subject.

I wonder if it's wrong to think about how we will possess each other, physically too? No, it can't be; because it's all the result of our genuine love for each other. And since our flesh is such a dominant part of our nature; it probably naturally controls a large portion of our thoughts. Especially since we are going to be physically true to each other for such a long time.

I don't know how it is with girls, but after boys reach a certain age its almost physically impossible for them to abstain from sexual intercourse, for any length of time. However, people with lots of will power, or an inspiring motive can do it. That never bothers me darling, because I love you so much; and you are an inspiration who brings out all my will power; so, I don't have any trouble what soever in being true to you in that way.

I brought up these facts because they are the motive behind the argument that we both run into, and will keep running into for two years. Especially the fellows who I argue with. From experience, they can't realize how we can do it. People will also tell you that they can't see how we can stay true to each other that long.

That's why Milton said what he did; and that's why others will tell you that. We might as well be frank with each other from the beginning. We can't get too intimate for our good, since we are going to be man and wife someday. (January 30).

One night aboard the ship herb watched the movie "The Toast of New York." The next morning, he writes

What enhanced it in my opinion was the theme song of the picture "The First Time I Saw You." Yep, when Frances Farmer started to sing it, I closed my eyes for I didn't want to see the setting in the picture. I saw a silent shadowy road, a wonderful girl named Louise

in my arms, singing that song in a far more pleasing fashion to me than Miss Farmer could ever sing it. It brought that night back so vividly, my heart almost felt leaden when I thought of how far you were from me. But then I happily realized how much you love me and I couldn't feel unhappy. (February 4).

Herb plans to purchase a variety of goods while in the Philippines and China, things he wants to bring home as well as things that Louise might like to have. He writes:

You see we have a trunk room in one of the holds of the Canopus, and anyone having a suitcase is allowed to stow it down there. Fellows buy these big leather ones, with dragons engraved on them, and then during the course of their time out here; they buy linens, or silks, or souvenirs; that they can stow in their suitcases. When they bring the stuff into the U.S. themselves, they don't have to pay duty on them.

Well, that's what I'm going to do. You can get leather suitcases out her for about \$15 that would cost you \$50 in the U.S. not to mention how cheap silk and other materials are. What do we want, and what would you like me to bring back Louise? (February 4)

Herb is hoping to become rated as a storekeeper within a few months (February 6). He is eager to advance because it will change the type of work that he is doing. In his current rate as "Seaman" his work involves much manual work, and as a "Storekeeper" he will do office work (February 11).

Herb tells an interesting story in his letter of February 11, 1938 about what he describes as "primitive justice." At the time, the Canopus was in drydock in Cavite, where sailors enjoyed dining in a large mess hall on land, near basketball courts and a swimming pool.

Yesterday some primitive justice was executed amongst we mess cooks. You see the bosun in charge of us appointed a mess cook who is no better than we are, to be his "stooge" (we call him); and anything that he wants done, he sends his "assistant" to tell us, instead of telling us himself as he should. It's a useless job that he shouldn't take to heart since he is one of us, but he is the unfortunate type of person known as a "squealer." And he assumes false authority and tries to act like a bigshot.

Well yesterday right after dinner, me and a buddy of mine dashed off to the swimming pool, as we have been in the habit of doing lately. As usual, we weren't sure whether there was work to do or not. It turned out that some did turn up and the bosun casually told the stooge to round up the mess cooks and tell them about it. It wasn't necessary that all the mess cooks should be there.

There were enough to get in each other's way cleaning up what little work there was to do as it was. But no; the guy had to come running all the way down to the pool with a tin badge on too; and he says "Get back to the mess hall on the double." And that water was so good! Well, we leisurely took our shower and sauntered back!

When we got there, we walked into the mess hall to help the others. The bosun wasn't looking at us but his stooge was, and like a little school kid he tapped him on the shoulder and said "There they come!" The bosun didn't even yell at us either.

Well when the work was done, we told Mr. Stooge what we thought of him. He said "Well, do you want to see me personally, or see the boss?" My buddy who's more his size than I am said "I'll see you personally, outside, tonight." The stooge is a big guy, 6 ft. 2 in., and my buddy's about 6 ft, and I'm about 5 ft 10 in., so my buddy, who was the maddest of us two anyhow, had the first call.

Well in the evening after the show started and we knew there wouldn't be any crowd around, we sojourned to a dimly lit alley between a couple of warehouses. The big guy got yellow and didn't want to fight at first, but he had to; and in about two minutes Bob gave him a black eye and a broken nose. And then he said "I give up you are a better man than I am." Why the big stiff really wasn't hurt much. But he sure wanted to quit! When he offered to shake hands, Bob said "I don't want anything to do with you," and we walked off and left him there, "in all his glory."

Had he beaten my buddy, and said "who's next?" why it would have been me. But knowing what I do know, I know that I could "take him" too. What a shiner that guy woke up with this morning. And all day long hundreds of guys razzed him, and told him that he got what he was asking for.

That, my dear, is primitive justice. But don't let it worry you Louise, this wouldn't be a man's outfit without things like that. And a person only gets what is coming to him! I don't think that I've ever been in a fight yet when I wasn't looking for trouble. Things like that teach a person lessons. Now promise not to let that incident bother you, honey, or I won't be able to tell you about all that happens in the future. "Just a bunch of kids, those sailors!" Sez you.

Herb writes about a humorous incident that occurred with respect to having to stand for a formal inspection.

Before it, a couple of us were in the washroom shaving, when one fellow who needed a haircut and was afraid he wouldn't get by inspection, asked me if I wouldn't shave around his ears so it would look as though he didn't need a haircut. Well I told him I wasn't much of a barber but that fact he disregarded, to his eventual dismay. I took his razor and went "swoop," and it looked like someone had lowered his one ear two inches. He took a look in the mirror and just about collapsed. I was fired as his barber then and he got another fellow to fix his other ear. The other fellow did an entirely different job.

Well, we were all lined up for inspection and in walked this fellow and everyone started laughing. We couldn't hardly keep a straight face when the captain of the ship inspected us. When he looked at this fellow he said "Hmph! Lad, you had better change barbers!" I wonder if he wondered why I looked as if I was about to laugh in his face when he inspected me. Someday I'm going to laugh at an inspecting officer and catch it, unless I learn to restrain my emotions more. (February 13).

Herb closes this letter by telling Louise how he feels about his life in the Navy, and what they are attempting to do.

All day long and some nights too, I think of you, and your letters, and your pictures, and they are the only things that make sense in this crazy melodramatic world. I just let the rest of the world roll by because I'm all wrapped up in love. I'm willing to risk two years minus pleasure and excitement (the kind my buddies go in for) for all the happiness that I'm bound to find in the future with you darling.

It's so much worth it! I love you; I love you and I could keep on plastering it all over this page but I have to end sometime. Good night darling. I'll dream of you tonight I know. Perhaps in my dreams I'll be in your arms once again. All my love forever and ever, sweet. (February 13).

While the Canopus was docked at Cavite for maintenance, one of the jobs Herb is assigned to involves hard physical labor, which he enjoys.

This afternoon we had to take all our tables and benches off the ship and carry them over here where we scrubbed them thoroughly. They were a little dusty after a month of idleness and we had to get them in shape for when we start feeding on the ship again in a week or so. Gosh, it sure was a job carrying the tables and benches over because they are fairly heavy, and we had to carry them up two ladders, around several narrow corners and passageways, and down a steep gangway. After we got them over, we took off our shoes, rigged up the salt water hose and started scrubbing them. I felt so dusty and hot, when I got ahold of the hose, I just ran it down my back, and boy did that feel good! It's fun to work real hard once in a while, I mean actual physical labor. (February 14)

In one of his letters Herb addresses Louise's concern about when he will be returning.

I guess I've told you how I figure that I probably won't be there in time for Christmas of 1939. I'm quite sure that it will be early in 1940 though darling. Less than two years now, sweetheart, let's say it that way! Yes, I wouldn't mind either if something happened in Congress and they withdrew the Asiatic Fleet. (February 19).

Herb attempts to address another concern that Louise expressed, based on something that he had written in a previous letter. His stepmother had been having financial difficulty after his father died, and so he made sure to send her money each month. He gave her a third of his monthly paycheck from the Navy to supplement the "charity" (as he put it) she was receiving. Apparently, there was a stigma to be receiving "relief" aid from the government.

As a result, when Herb's brother Bernard got a WPA job in San Luis Obispo, Louise was concerned that Herb might write to Bernard in a negative tone about it. Attempting to reassure Louise, Herb writes:

Bernard told me all about his new job in today's letter, and how much he liked it; and I'm happy to hear how nice everything turned out for him. It's a swell break and will make a big change in him, I think.

Now! I've got to get to the bottom of something right away darling, because I do not understand why you thought I wouldn't like Bernard's job, or why you thought I'd write

to him and not say I was glad he got it. And when did I say anything about relief work or that I didn't like the idea of it; and when did I ever say anything against W.P.A. jobs?

I'll start from the beginning and tell you my conception of relief. Relief is a form of government employment made necessary by a depression and unsettled labor and financial conditions. There is nothing charitable about it. People work for what they get just as they do in any other position. It's something very vital in times like this and it's a good idea.

I've always looked at it in that light and that is why I wonder that I could have said anything contrary to it. And I'd really feel awful if I thought for a moment that your mother, or Fred, or Bernard, ever got that idea of my impressions too. (February 19)

Toward the end of the week Herb writes "Tomorrow we get underway for a trial run of a few hours out in the bay and then anchor in Manila. Monday, we go back up to Olongapo where there is a dry-dock." (February 24).

The ship would be there for about a month, preparing for its "southern cruise." Herb was looking forward to this cruise, scheduled to start at the end of April. It would take them to Celebes, one of the Dutch East Indies; then south to Bali, to Java, Borneo, then northward to the Philippines, and back to Manila.