

THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

The WWII V-Mail Cartoons of Harry E. Chrisman

SHERYL JONES

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THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

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For Harry

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Acknowledgments

THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE INVOLVED IN PRODUCING A WORK OF THIS TYPE; it's difficult to know where to begin and where to end. The beginning, of course, was Harry and his determination to fight for the country he loved, to keep his wife, mother, and family assured of his safety through his cartooning talent and his poetry and letter writing expertise. So, the first thank you goes to Harry and Catherine Chrisman for allowing me to be a part of their lives.

Next, my cousin-in-law, Major Thomas G. Grandin, retired, 82nd Airborne, who provided information on Army life, inspiration and encouragement, receives my continuing and life-long thanks.

And to my husband of fifty-four years, Don, who also reads everything I write but is kind enough to edit, correct, and suggest so that the prose or poetry is the best it can be. It sure helps to be married to an English major!

To my sister, Judy Slothower, who reads every word I write and thinks it's all great even when I know a re-write is in order.

To my son Steven Jones who also reads everything and just comments, "It's wonderful, Mother!" I raised a good son!

A warm thank you to Morse Clary, Harry's nephew and co-executer with my husband of the Chrisman estate, for giving me permission to fulfill my promise to Harry.

A very quality thank you to Harley Patrick, my editor and publisher, who was willing to take a chance on a totally different type of military memoir, one which shows the softer side of WWII created by a soldier who wanted to ease the anxiety of those at home and others also serving in that war. Thank you Harley for sharing my sense of humor, always answering e-mails and telephone calls, and a reassurance that you would not "hang me out to dry" in my OD (Olive Drab) pantaloons!

And a thank you to three special friends: Rita Friedman who reads all my work, children's books included, and is kind enough to make lots of notes; Colleen Lautenbach who also reads everything and is the world's best hostess; and Chuck Lautenbach, my go-to guy for anything historical.

THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

To end this part of the book, special thanks to all the men and women who did what had to be done during those war years, both overseas and at home, both military and non-military, and made it possible for me to write a book about the softer side of World War II.

Harry's Original Introduction

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO THE PRESIDENT AND OUR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and to our First Lady of that time, Eleanor Roosevelt, both of whom played predominant roles in the leadership of the American people in our struggle against Japanese Imperialism and Nazi-Fascism in World War II.

Although our great leader died before the victory came, his inspiring life and the guidance he gave us lives on in a time when the nation sorely needs it.

To all who followed this democratic path through the pains of World War II, and survived, and to all born since, we learn that the beaten path is the safe one. Let us continue to appreciate and follow the philosophy laid down by this masterful architect of the Good Neighbor Policy in all of our relations, foreign and domestic.

—*Harry Chrisman, 1982*

THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

Preface

ON THE MORNING OF DECEMBER 7, 1941, A CLEAR AND LOVELY SUNDAY, an enemy force struck the island of Oahu, in the Hawaiian Islands. Suddenly the entire Pacific Ocean Area was in the headlines of all newspapers over the world, and the radio waves sparkled with news events of the tragedy that had befallen the United States' defense forces of that western area. Suddenly, islands whose names were heretofore unknown by the American People, and many of them almost unpronounceable, became occupied by American soldiers, Marines, Navy personnel and Seabees as well as having airstrips developed on them that would carry our war to the Japanese who had attacked us. Within a few months Saipan, Tarawa, Attu, Yap, Guadalcanal, Midway—yes, and Christmas Island—became as familiar to our tongues as Cleveland, Bismark, San Francisco and Chicago.

What occurred on these islands has become a part of our American history. The occupation of islands to be used as air and naval bases, to be made into supply depots to help us gain control of the Pacific Ocean Area has been told in many history books. However, one thing that occurred, and was a blessing to the folks at home as well as to the American forces overseas, has never been properly described, its historical value told. That was the birth of the V-Mail, those small, one-quarter size letters that saved thousands of square feet of valuable shipping space, and tons of weight to be used for better purposes than carrying messages from the Home Front to the battle zones. A C-54 cargo plane could now carry 36,260,000 microfilmed V-Mails, whereas it had formerly carried but 260,000 letters.

Those of us who were serving overseas, both in the Pacific Ocean Area and at other camps, posts and stations in other parts of the world, used the little V-Mails extensively in our correspondence to those back home. But we encountered a few problems with them. If we wrote too small, the letters were difficult to read. We soon learned that to get all our thoughts expressed, we needed to write more than one letter. But when we did this, there was no assurance that they would arrive in the sequence in which we mailed them. We even tried numbering each letter, but that proved difficult, too. The V-Mails were postage-free to service people, so that was no problem. We learned it was best to stick to a single subject. However, there was one benefit—at least for those men who disliked writing. They needn't write long letters to wives and sweethearts at home!

Only the true black ink photographed well. Blue ink was like writing with one's fingernails. Once I tried red ink. It worked well, but for some reason operators of the photographic equipment just sent the red-ink V-Mail on in its original form, not photographed and reduced. And that required more time for delivery. Eventually—actually it didn't take me long—I found a wonderful use for V-Mail. Black and white cartoons! In a V-Mail cartoon I could depict the First Sergeant as a creep, even point out a captain, a major or a full colonel as a nerd. I learned to put buckteeth on the officers I drew, as did my friend, George Baker, creator of *The Sad Sack*.

I constructed an entirely new world in which to live, the world of Imagination, one in which I could dwell alone and answer to no one. I could cry out or whimper, or sob, or brag, or dissent with Army policies, or show their value to the soldier. With the V-Mail available to me and my pen, I followed a path of relief from the hard march we were all taking to win the war. It became a subtle way to reassure my mother and father, my wife and friends that I was doing well, was healthy and—sometimes even happy with the Army Way and that I loved life. No matter that it often became a Liars Platform, for often it became that way. But it did give the lowly GI, the infantry soldier that I had become, a way to express himself with art, something that I could not feel at ease with in writing regular letters, letters that were censored by our own immediate officers, often working right across a desk from us, or in the same platoon.

Herein, in cartoon form, is told a few bits of the larger story—how the GI's and Sailors and Airmen kept in touch with wives and families at home over a period of four years as that war raged on.

The graphic story is told in humorous drawings of the men who fought the war, of those who occupied those atolls and islands for many dreary months as the combat zone moved further and further north and west. They are done with a faulty pen, with PX ink, drawn under all sorts of conditions. I served the Infantry and the Transportation Corps for more than three years, a soldier who made his small contribution to the whole as did tens of thousands of others. It is my hope that you will find them interesting and entertaining as well as educational, not as “war stories,” but as an example of how duty soldiers conveyed their love, their anger and their hope to the Folks Back Home.

As you look at these pictures, often drawn under almost impossible circumstances in pup tents, in pyramidal tents and hutments, on the beaches and in jungle swamps, I hope you will gain a better understanding of what war consists and what it does to men and women who serve you in the military forces.

May our world soon find a true and lasting Peace.

—Harry Chrisman, 1987

Introduction

HARRY E. CHRISMAN WAS MY ADOPTIVE FATHER. It was an understood agreement since I was 48 years old at the time and Harry was 80. My husband, Don, and I had been good friends of Harry and his wife, Catherine, for fifteen years. They had no children of their own and we became their family, my sons their grandsons. When told that my father had not long to live, Harry said to me, “I know your father isn’t gone yet, but when he is, can I be your father?” I was delighted to be adopted and for over seven years, until Harry died on December 17, 1993, I had a second father. For over 20 years I enjoyed and reveled in the company of Harry Chrisman.

My biological father, Riley Chambers, taught me a love of nature, a love of education and knowledge, pride in my Cherokee heritage, and tolerance for all living things. Harry reinforced my father’s legacy and added a love of writing, art, photography, and humor to the mix.

My father, Riley, would take my sister, Judy, and me on long walks through the Kansas woods to hunt squirrels. But he never shot one. They were always too young, that one was a mother, this one was too old, too far away, too little, too something. There was always a reason not to kill.

During WWII my father worked in communications close to the airplane plants in Wichita, Kansas. He told me once that he helped make those places safe. He didn’t talk much about that time, but I did gather that he placed telephone communication between the plants and the underground bunkers that were built there. I never remember feeling afraid during that war. I was born in 1938 so I do remember that time. I thought the black shades in our house very beautiful, I loved watching my mother make the white “butter” turn yellow, I got to belong to the Clean Plate Club, and I wondered why my father was so upset when Judy and I rode our tricycles to the end of the block just as night set in. We were not afraid in the dark, we were used to blackouts by then, but my father made us promise never to ride our tricycles after dark. After I grew up my father remained my mentor in natural history, thus my biology major in college. To this day I will observe something unusual or rare in nature and think to myself, “The next time I talk to Daddy...”



Harry on Maui, March 1943. At this point he was with L. Company, 108th Infantry, 40th Division

Harry became my mentor, also. He taught me to ask myself just what I was writing about, what was it I was taking a picture of, why is this funny, why did I prefer Monet to Renoir? He spent hours going through his V-Mails telling me why he drew a particular one, how he used them as a catharsis against boredom, unfairness, and loneliness. He drew hundreds of cartoons for other soldiers and even an airman or two. I wonder if any of them still exist? They would be signed “HEC” for Harry Eugene Chrisman. And as I listened to him talk about why he drew this V-Mail or that one, I learned about the history of that war in his little part of the Pacific.

Harry would take his V-Mails out periodically and put them into one order or another, always commenting about his love of Catherine, his mother, his family, his country, as he moved them about, stopping often to tell me why he drew this one or that one. He

was proud to have served his country and proud that Catherine, the second woman from Nebraska to enlist in the WAAC, also served.

In the late 1970s we were just beginning to see the emergence of the age of technology and I found a place that could reproduce the V-Mails. But it proved expensive and the clarity of the V-Mails was often sacrificed. So the planned book of V-Mails Harry envisioned was put aside for the time being and he continued work on his western history books. He published fourteen books about the West, and until his death, corresponded with many members of The Western Writers of America. Louis L'Amore wrote in one of his letters to Harry, "Don't ever stop writing your books! I use them for research." Today, many of Harry's books are available through Amazon.com, most published by Ohio University Press.

Harry was the most learned man I ever met and as a secondary teacher I had many opportunities to meet well-educated people. But Harry stood above them all although he finished high school by getting his GED and graduated from Rochester School of Technology after WWII. He spent his working years after RST as a newspaperman. What a privilege to have him as my adoptive father. I am sure my biological father approved.

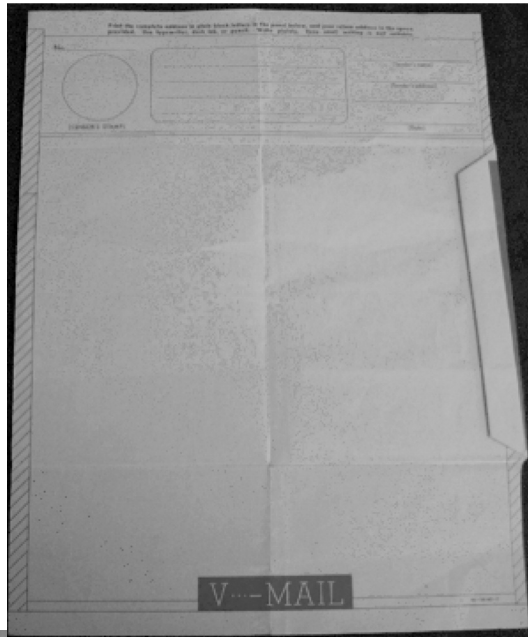
So—here they are, the first part of 403 V-Mails Harry drew, wrote and received. This first book contains the V-Mails about the Army Way of Life during those war years on those islands in the Pacific. He wrote a line or two about many of them, and they are designated with an "H". When I can clarify or add background information, I will do so and indicate that with an "S".

Please enjoy them. I did then and I still do.

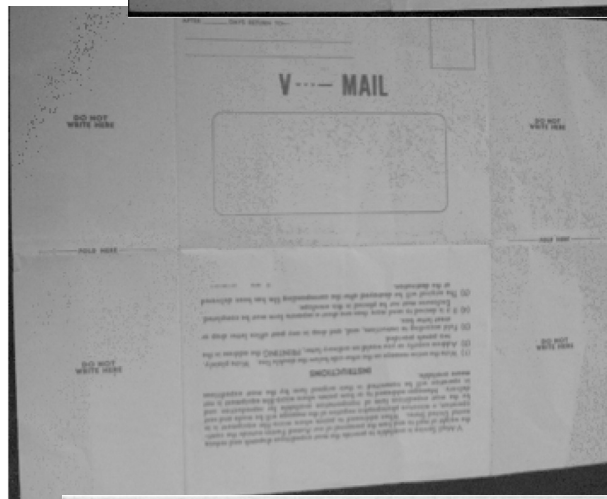
—Sheryl Jones, October 2013

THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

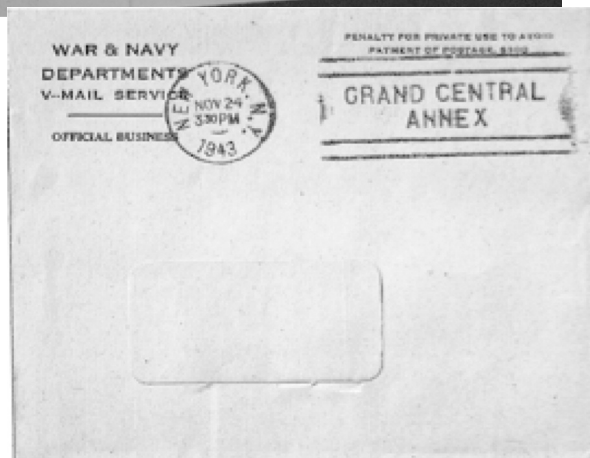
Blank V-Mails. This is where the sender would write his letter. It was standard size, 8½ x 11. The writer had to be most careful to write large enough due to the shrinkage occurring during photography. Blue or black ink worked best. And cartoons worked best of all! The final V-Mail was 5 inches tall by 4 inches wide and went into a 3x4 envelope.



This is where the sender would place his/her address and the address and the address of the recipient.



Once the photographer had taken a picture of the letter and printed it to size it went into the envelope and was ready to be sent home.





Catherine A. Chrisman, nee Catherine A. Bell, Serial #A-703130 Woman's Army Corps, 1942—1945. My wife, in the Women's Army Corps, and I had much the same feelings about being caught up in the boots of the Military Machine. (H)

The object of Harry's affection and recipient of most of the V-Mails he sent, Catherine was one of the most beautiful and gentle women I have ever known. It's easy to see why Harry was jealous of the men she served with at Victorville Air Base, but yet he was so proud of her service to her country. (S)

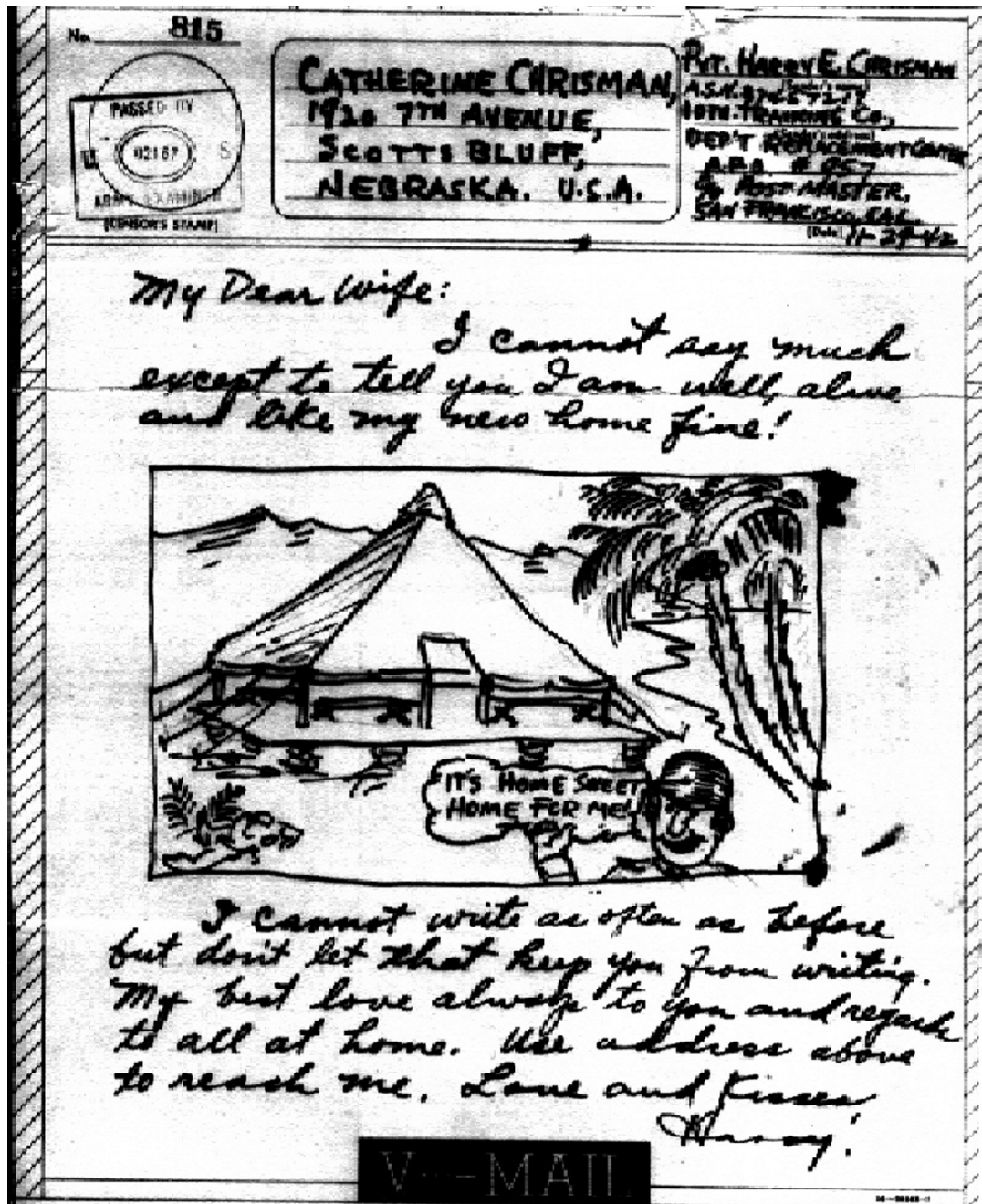
THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

**THE V-MAILS OF
HARRY E. CHRISMAN**

THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

I was in Camp at "Tent City," near Schofield Barracks on Oahu, when this was sent. (H)

This is the first V-Mail Harry sent home. The ones he sent to Catherine she would send on to his mother, Berna Hunter Chrisman, who kept everything she received in large albums. (S)



Schofield Barracks 11-29-42

THIS IS THE ARMY, MR. JONES!

Harry wrote this letter to his parents when he was still at Schofield Barracks. He loved and respected his parents very much and did his best to always see that they were cared for. Harry had a very close relationship with his mother as she was also a writer and recognized and appreciated his talents. (S)

provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No. **724**


PASSED BY
U **02167** S
ARMY EXAMINER
(CENSOR'S STAMP)

MR. & MRS. H. E. CHRISMAN
300 EAST OVERLAND DR.
SCOTTS BLUFF, NEBR.

VT. HARRY E. CHRISMAN,
37457217
10TH TRAINING CO.,
DEPT. REPL. [REDACTED]
TRNG. CENTER,
A.P.O. # 957
90 POSTMASTER,
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.
12 July - 42

2nd CAMP IN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS. 12-7-42

DEAR FOLKS - LES & STELL:
ONE YEAR AGO TODAY.
THE JAPANESE BOMBED PEARL HARBOR. I PROPHECY
THAT ONE YEAR FROM THIS DATE THEY WILL
REGRET THAT ACTION. HOW DO YOU LIKE THE
V-MAIL SERVICE? WE MEN IN THE SERVICE
APPRECIATE IT VERY MUCH.
I AM WELL AND HAPPY
AS THE FOLLOWING LATEST PHOTO WILL
SHOW. THIS WAS TAKEN ON THE BEACH
AT [REDACTED]



V-MAIL

Love Fairy

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT PERMIT NO. 61

First Letter 1-3-42

Also sent while Harry was in training at Schofield Barracks. For the most part he liked and respected the G. I.'s and officers. This is where he began his first newsletter. He would find a typewriter, or if one was unavailable he would write by hand, and post the doings of the day, sometimes on a tent post. He always drew cartoons and many of the men he worked with told him how much that bit of humor and information helped during those first days in the Army. (S)

Print the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or penball. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No. **274**

PASSSED BY
U **02167** **S**
ARMY EXAMINER
 (CENSOR'S STAMP)

Aux. Catherine A. Chrisman
874 Co. 3rd Reg. 2nd Platoon
ARMY Post Branch, Ft Des Moines,
Des Moines,
Iowa.

Wt. Harry E. Chrisman
2344 72. 12
10th Thompson Co.
34th. 2nd Platoon out of, Center,
A.R.O. # 987,
6. Postman (Army)
San Francisco, California

January 2nd 1943
 (Date)

Sweet Gal:
 For lack of any news to write, I'll sketch some characters from life.
 I see these figures every day, and dream of them 'most every nite.



This is the man who
Gripes & Grates,
On all our nerves -
he's full of hates.



This is one of a thousand
hounds
That hang around our
camping grounds.



This is our top-rich - rough
and tough
He's not so bad - he's
mostly bluff!



This is our Censor who
cuts out
The secrets that we
blab about.
(THIS WILL GET EVEN WITH HIM!)



This is our "C.O." who has
gained
Respect from all the men
he's trained.



This is a b—— we all
damn.
He makes us proud of
Uncle Sam.
y'is damn

V—MAIL

We were making up the “Birch” Task Force at Schofield Barracks at this time. I was company clerk only during the assembly period and aboard ship. We sailed to Christmas Island aboard the ship “Arrow.” (H)

Harry was on Maui at this time. For three months he and the other members of his battalion were setting up beach defenses. They placed barbed wire on all the beaches and built bunkers, etc. There was still great fear that the Japanese might land on the Hawaiian Islands. Harry and Catherine never did get to Hawaii after the War. But when my husband and I went there to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary, Harry had me take pictures of Sand Island and the beaches on Maui. “They sure didn’t look like that when I left there!” he said. And then the stories began. (S)

The Birch Task Force was created to protect the Line Islands, a group of eleven atoll and coral islands, located south and east of Hawaii in the South Pacific. There was fear that the Japanese might use these islands as refueling stops. Harry volunteered for this first contingent of Americans, a company from the 102nd Infantry Regiment, a National Guard unit from New Haven, Connecticut. A group of Army Engineers had already built an airfield on Christmas Island in October of 1941, before Pearl Harbor. A contingent of that unit remained on the island throughout the War. (S)

Print the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No. **PASSED BY**
U **05323** S
ARMY EXAMINER

(CENSOR'S STAMP)

Sgt. Catherine A. Chrisman,
Room 803, ALAMODIN HOTEL,
KANSAS CITY,
MISSOURI.

PUT: **HARRY E. CHRISMAN,**
#374882401
Co. L 108TH INF.,
A.P.O. #51
Sender's address
P.O.M. San Francisco, Cal.

March 7, 1943
(Date)

WHEN IT'S TWO A.M.
HERE I OFTEN THINK
OF YOU HAVING TO GET
UP TO GO TO CLASS.
WE HAVE THE SAME MOON
THAT YOU HAVE BUT OURS IS
MUCH BIGGER & BRIGHTER
HERE.
SOMEDAY WE MUST BE
HERE TOGETHER.
LOVE FROM
YOUR HUSBAND,
HARRY

V-MAIL

10-38143-2

First V-Mail from Maui 3-7-43

Harry began using codes, as many men did, to indicate where he was and what was going on. Maui V-Mails, for example, used a palm tree. On Christmas Island he always used a crab, a gooney bird, or phrases like "Down where the tradewinds blow," or "Gooney Bird Island." He never used a code that could be helpful to the enemy, only ones to tell his family he was safe and okay. The Sailor amid all the Army men in this cartoon indicated to Catherine that he would be sailing somewhere. He knew then that he would be going to Christmas Island and really felt he would see battle there, something he was glad his family did not know. (S)