

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE

The WWII V-Mail Cartoons of Harry E. Chrisman:
“LOVE LETTERS TO THE WACS”

Volume Two

SHERYL JONES

HELLGATE PRESS



ASHLAND, OREGON

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE
©2014 Sheryl Jones

Published by Hellgate Press
(An imprint of L&R Publishing, LLC)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information and retrieval systems without written permission of the publisher.

Hellgate Press
PO Box 3531
Ashland, OR 97520
email: sales@hellgatepress.com

Editor: Harley B. Patrick
Cover design: L. Redding

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available on request.

Printed and bound in the United States of America
First edition 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Harry and Catherine

Contents

Acknowledgments.....vii

Harry's Original Dedication.....ix

Preface.....xi

Introduction.....xiii

THE V-MAILS

PART ONE: Love, Romance and the WAC.....1

PART TWO: Natural History.....159

Appendix.....187

About Harry E. Chrisman.....189

About Sheryl Jones.....193

V-Mail List.....195

Acknowledgments

AS ALWAYS, MANY PEOPLE HELP GET A PROJECT SUCH AS THIS ALONG the way until it reaches a reader whom I hope will enjoy Harry's cartoons as much as I do.

I could never get any of this done without the love and support of my husband, Don. He reads every word, passes judgment on content and feasibility and I know that he will not give strokes unless they are deserved. So when he says, "That's good, that's good," I know he means it.

And, of course, my sister, Judy Slothower, who sends encouragement over the cell phone every morning and when necessary, during the day also. She's eight hundred miles away, but that phone and e-mail attachments are my favorite tools! Well, next to my computer, of course.

To Major Thomas G. Grandin, retired, 82nd Airborne, who can answer all those Army questions, my loving gratitude and hugs. He's one heck of a good cook too!

And my new favorite Army guy, my grandson, Specialist Erik K. Jones, 82nd Airborne stationed at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. What a delight to learn the ins and outs of today's Army.

And many gracious thanks to three friends who continually support my efforts, with all my writing: Rita Friedman, Colleen Lautenbach, and Chuck Lautenbach. It makes life so much more enjoyable to have friends like them who encourage, congratulate, and, perhaps most importantly, laugh with you!

Special thanks to Ryan Henry, editor of the *Brownsville Herald* and the first newsman who saw the worth in Harry's cartoons and did a front page spread on "Harry's Legacy." Thank you so much, Ryan. How Harry would have loved meeting you.

And, as always, it's great to have an editor and publisher who is also a friend. Thank you Harley Patrick for your judgment and encouragement and patience as these volumes come together.

And lastly, but of course, not last, my two sons, Scott and Steven Jones. Scott is my walking WWII encyclopedia and can do things like stop mowing the lawn, mower on pause, and answer a question immediately and explain why this and that happen during that war. And Steve who thinks everything I write is terrific and is my best encourager! Don and I have raised good sons!

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE



Catherine and Harry Chrisman, circa 1945.

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*

YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE



“They never needed anyone else. You know, they were just so content with each other,” a niece of Catherine’s once told me. And it was true. They were two of the most content, compatible people I ever met. I never heard a harsh word, a complaint, a gripe—nothing but loving, caring words between them. And laughter. A lot of laughter. What wonderful role models they were!

In addition, they were both handsome people. The photo above, from 1935 when they had been dating for a few years, is proof of their good looks.

Catherine in summer uniform. Until the summer uniform was issued the WACs at Victorville were wearing their winter Olive Drabs or the men’s pants issued to them to wear when they climbed the radio towers. Before the end of the war, however, they were issued pants and shirts designed for women.



Preface

THIS VOLUME WAS DRAWN AND WRITTEN IN THE FALL OF 1982 when Harry and I began to search out possible publishers to print his collection of V-Mails. We were unsuccessful, not because the interest was not there, but because the expense of duplicating and photographing 403 cartoons/v-mails plus several pictures was too prohibitive.

I have chosen most of the V-Mails he drew especially with the Women's Army Corp (WACs) in mind and considered appropriate for his wife, Catherine, and her WAC friends. Some were meant just for her and those she did not share with her fellow soldiers; but many were placed on the bulletin board in "Hysteria Haven," the name she and her mates chose for their barracks. She told me remembering those V-Mails helped bring a smile or, often, laughter as she spent night after lonely night without Harry, wondering where he was and what he was doing, and was he safe.

Several years after Harry's death, Catherine and I were cleaning out the trunk of his 1966 Buick, the first new car he ever bought, and there was his Army first aid kit. She told my husband, Don, to open it. He began that process and looked up at her and said, "Why, Catherine, this has never been opened." She smiled and said, "Thank goodness!"

For the first year after he died, she cried a lot and spent a good deal of time reading the autobiography he wrote while recuperating from four heart attacks. We saw her often because Don helped her with financial and personal matters from the time Harry died. After the first year she began to take an interest in life again and began to talk about Harry and their life together. But most of what I knew about her years as a WAC I learned as she wrote her book, *My War, WWII—As Experienced by One Woman Soldier*. It was written while Harry was still alive and published in 1989 by Maverick Publica-



Catherine with actor Randolph Scott. According to Catherine, "I met Scott at a golf tournament at San Bernardino in November 1943. I had met his WAC sister earlier in Florida, at Daytona Beach."

tions, Harry's own publishing house, just as the 50th anniversary of that war approached. As she wrote the book she shared her experiences with me. We often dropped by the house on our way home from school and she would talk about what she wrote that day while Don and Harry visited in another room. I asked her once how she could remember so much and she said once she started writing, one incident lead to another and so on and so on.

Harry was so proud of her book, he had been after her for years to take her thumbs out of her fists and write it, that we had several celebrations for her. First, a signing party at my house and then a big celebration for her 80th birthday with a picnic in their backyard. My son, Scott, filmed it so we have it all on a DVD. What fun it is now after all these years to see them both once again, happy and smiling.

Introduction



CATHERINE WAS GOOD FOR HARRY. Harry sowed many a wild oat BEFORE he met her. He was a good looking traveling salesman and liked women, wine, and song. But Catherine changed all that. He gave his total love and respect to her. He told me once that without Catherine he would have undoubtedly taken a different road in life. They remained faithful to each other for the rest of their lives, although many an airman looked longingly at Catherine while she served in the WACs at the air base in Victorville, California. This photo, taken when she finished basic training, explains why she received many a second look during her time in the service.

This is Catherine's story as much as Harry's because he enjoyed drawing all the cartoons. He knew the WACs in Hysteria Haven waited every day to see if Catherine got a V-Mail cartoon she would share with them. Usually the cartoon was posted on the bulletin board in the barracks and officers often "inspected" the barracks to check out the latest cartoon.

The Women's Army Corps (WAC) was the women's branch of the Army until it disbanded in 1978 and women joined whatever branch of the Armed Forces they chose. In May of 1942 the WAAC, Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps, was created by several branches of the U. S. government. It was soon apparent that the expected 11,000 enlistees was a very inaccurate number because 150,000 women eventually served during WWII. So many woman applied for the Corps that in 1943 WAAC was changed to WAC, Woman's Army Corp, and granted full status as a branch of the Armed Forces. The first Director was Oveta Culp Hobby from Texas. She served in that position from 1942 to 1945.

The first women to enlist began training at Fort Des Moines in late 1942. Catherine began her training there as one of the first WAACs in November of 1942. There were

800 women in that first contingent. The first day of basic training they were fitted for uniforms, interviewed, assigned to companies and barracks and inoculated against disease. Catherine was just beginning to learn “The Army Way” that day when she finally was assigned a cot in the barracks and got only two hours of sleep before a “Roll Out!” call found her on the snowy parade ground of the fort in ten minutes.

Harry’s first V-Mails to her were addressed to WAAC and he, as well as others, used the term interchangeably for the first year of Catherine’s service.

So here they are—Harry’s “love letters” to the WACs—and, when I know it, the back story of the cartoon as told to me by Harry, and often by Catherine. In addition, Harry wrote a line or two about some of them, and those are designated with an “H”. When I clarify or add background information, it will be indicated with an “S”.

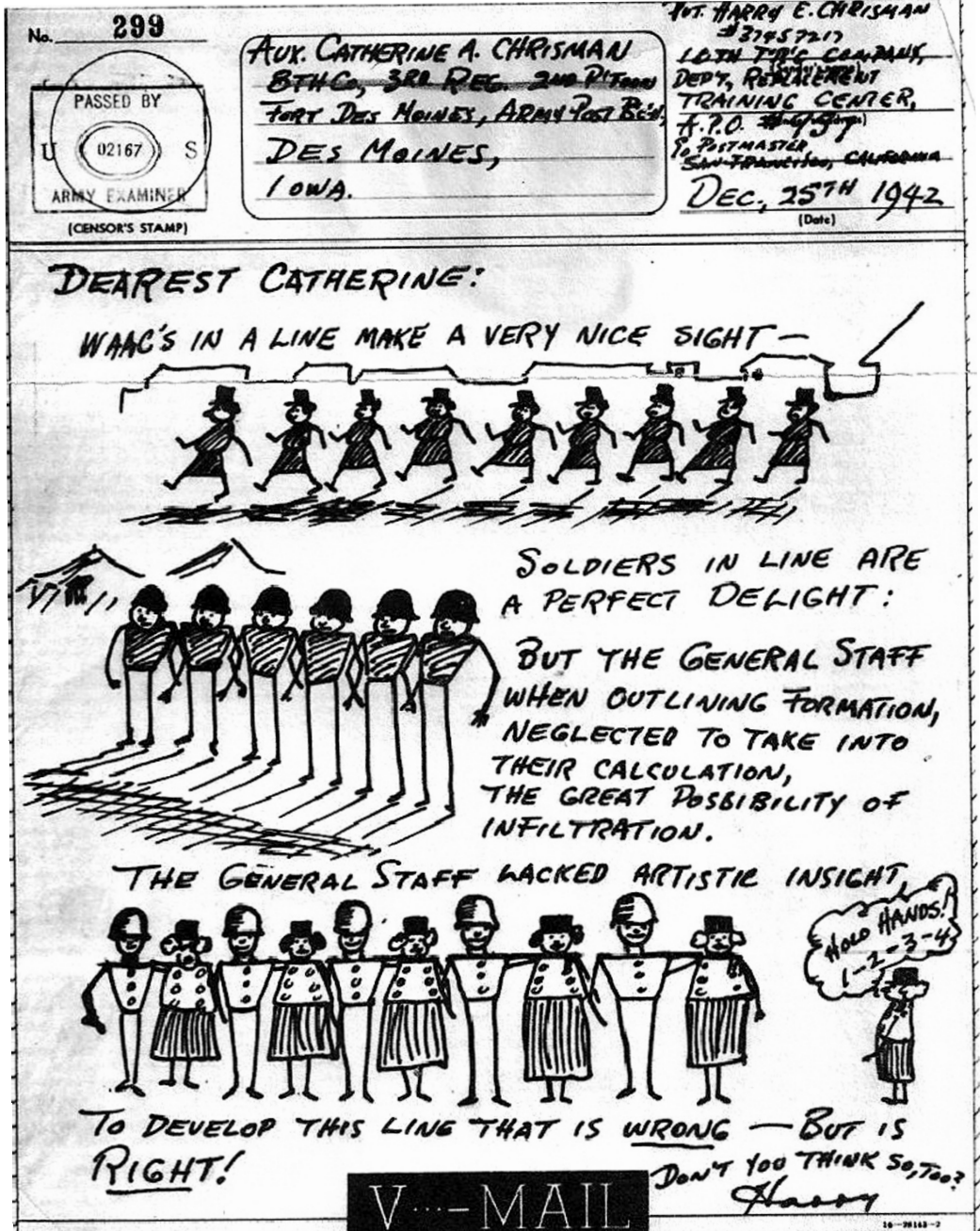


Catherine Chrisman in uniform during WWII (*above*) and at home in 1992 (*right*).

PART ONE

LOVE, ROMANCE AND THE WAC

Catherine was sworn in to the WAAC (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) on November 12, 1942, just four weeks after Harry's swearing in to the Army. He knew she had joined but did not know the date she would be sworn in. He told me he was so proud of her, but worried, of course, how she would be treated by the men she would be working with. Many men resented the WAAC as they felt the women were replacing men who would eventually end up on the front lines. They warned their wives and sisters that people would think they were prostitutes or lesbians and many a father forbade his daughter enlisting. Not every enlistee was like Harry and Catherine, doing what they could to win the war. This V-Mail was Harry's way of looking at the situation with humor. (S)



WACs in a Line-12-25-42

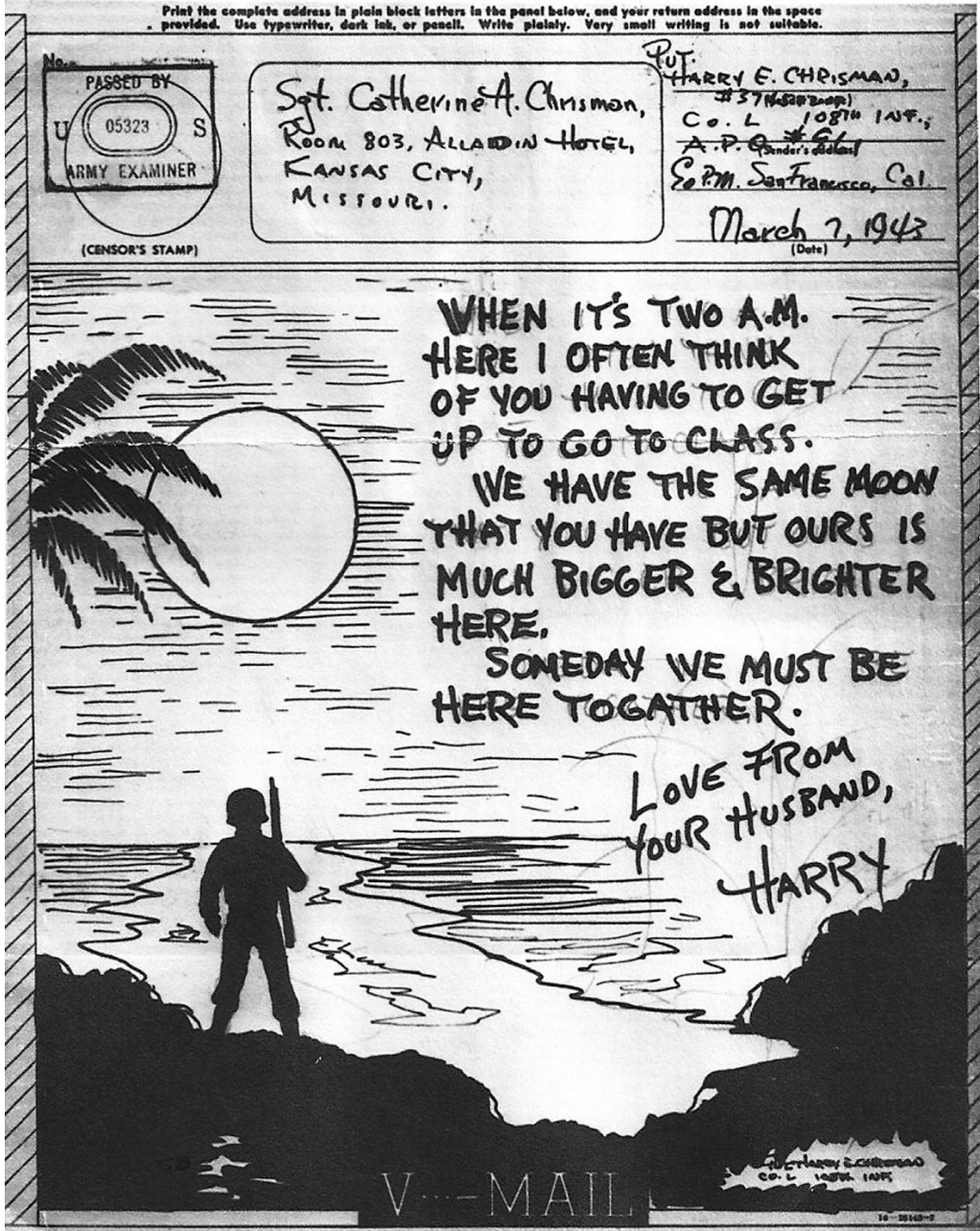
YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE

All of the sayings Harry wrote on this V-Mail were true. And he had yet to see a WAC. Catherine was the first woman from Scottsbluff, Nebraska, to join the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the second from that state. It wasn't long before Catherine became a member of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) rather than the WAAC. (S)



What Does a WAC Look Like? 1-27-43

Catherine knew Harry was at an island location somewhere in the Pacific because of the palm tree and the water movement onto the shore. She knew he was no longer in training camp because of the change in the APO (Army Post Office) address. She always wanted to go to Hawaii and see where Harry had served but somehow they never got there. Harry had me take pictures of Sand Island and the bunkers and beaches of Maui when Don and I went there to celebrate our 25th anniversary. It was as though he could not experience "Island Fever" again just like he would never go camping again! We offered to take Catherine after Harry's death but she could not bear to go without him. (S)



When It's Two AM 3-7-43

This was not only an item of interest, but an indication to Catherine that Harry was going to another station. The sailor in the center of all the G.I.s was a signal that he would probably be going somewhere on a ship. His next cartoon V-Mail listed him in the 108th instead of 102nd so she knew he was probably in a different location. Although she did not know this at the time, he had volunteered for the Birch Task Force and was headed to Christmas Island, one of the Line Islands off the coast of Australia. It was feared that the Japanese might try to use these islands as refueling points for both aircraft and ships. Christmas Island had an airfield and a harbor, perfect for both functions.

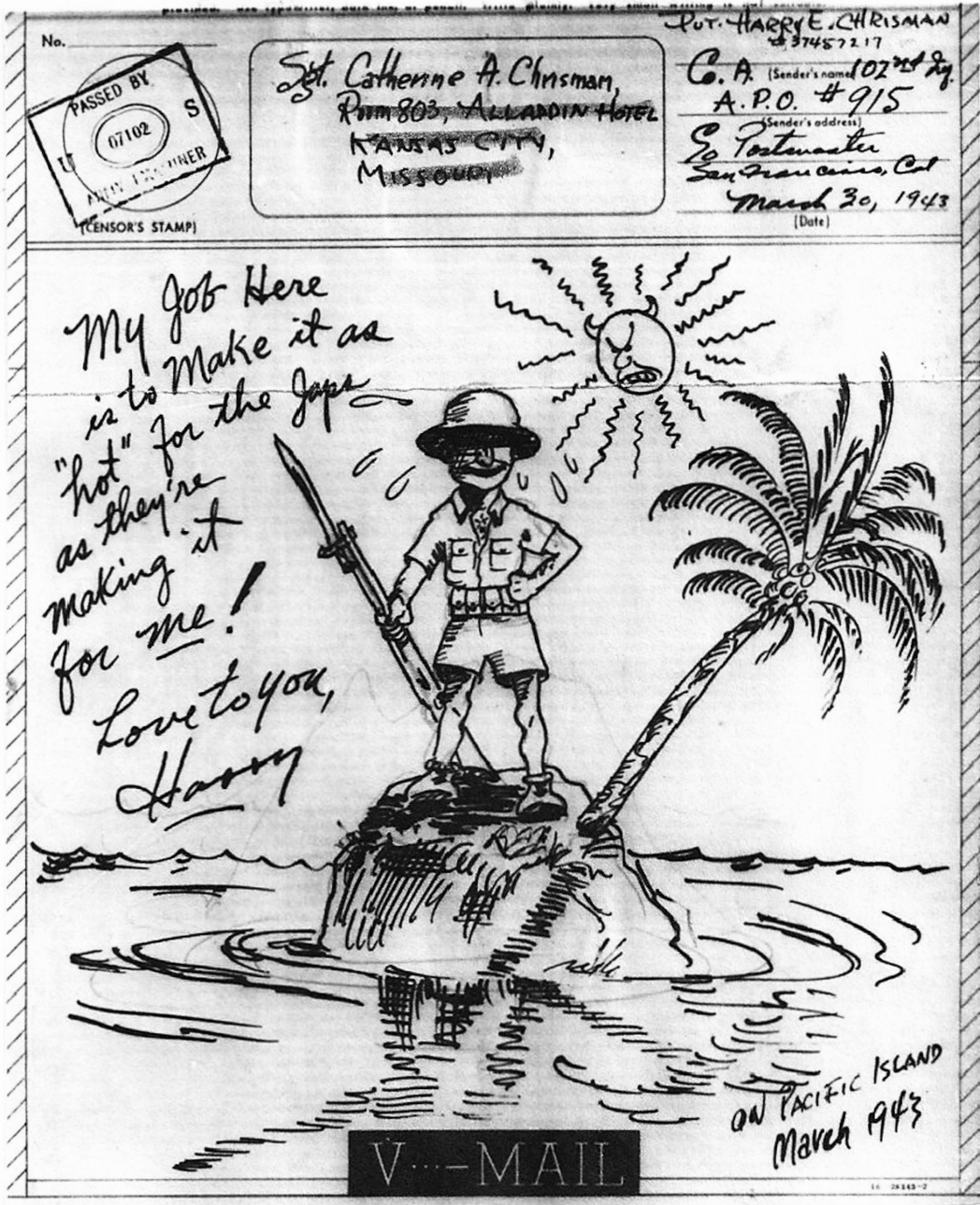
In October 1942, the United States Army placed a contingent of twenty-five engineers on Christmas Island in order that they might build an airfield. They had several graders plus other equipment they might need to build the field. Christmas Island was occupied at that time, but after the bombing of Pearl Harbor the civilians were evacuated. The Corps of Engineers remained and served duty after the Birch Task Force arrived in the summer of 1943. (S)



Item of 1898 3-7-43

The first impression of Christmas Island as we approached it that morning of March 26, 1943 was of a flat line of coral on the horizon, bedecked with a fringe of the greenest of green coconut fronds, and with a background of gigantic cumulus clouds forming in the east. The sea was a deep blue, that contrasted greatly with the pale green of the large inner lagoon as we approached closer. A trade wind of about twenty-five miles per hour wafted to us the scent of land as we sailed in from the northwest and took a position some mile or so westward from the single harbor, a place they called London town. South from the port city, across the neck of the lagoon, was the place known to the local population as "Paris." (H)

This is the first V-Mail Harry sent from Christmas Island. The APO (Army/Air Post Office) number for there was 915. Harry's family knew by the number change that he was in a different location, but did not know where. Catherine's address is marked out and the V-Mail forwarded. She had joined the WAC and was inducted in Kansas City, MO, and then trained at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, and at Daytona Beach, FL, before being sent to Victorville, CA. She loved the WAC and felt she was doing her part for the war effort while still able to support her mother. (S)



On Pacific Island 3-30-43