

Love endures across time and distance for a young college student and a cadet in 1942 at the onset of WWII. They fall in love and marry before he is shipped off to the South Pacific. For the next few years they corresponded mainly through letters.

Letters Across The Pacific: A Love Story In The Time Of War

By April Martin Beltz

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Letters Across The Pacific

A Love Story in the Time of War



April Martin Beltz

PRAISE FOR

Letters Across the Pacific

Author April Martin Beltz's new book deals with the letters exchanged between her parents from 1942 to 1953. The letters capture a period in US history when life happened without internet, social media or cellphones. The hopes, fears, sadness and longings expressed in them were just as valid then as now but shared in a more discreet and eloquent way. Meticulously researched and well written, this book throws light on life in the Pacific theatre of war, as well as the home front and the sacrifices that were made to keep us free."

Nora Curran, Author of Tapestry of a Life

April Martin Beltz brings this story to life as she weaves her parents' war-time correspondence with the challenging world of the times. A story of a young couple who each experienced sacrifice, longing and loyalty to serve. It is a true testament to the "Best Generation of Our Nation".

Susan Bodinet, Author of "Dangerous Secret"

April Martin Beltz pays tribute to her parents by publishing their love letters interspersed with actual world events in the Pacific Theater and on the home front between 1942 to 1953. Her father, Bob, would become a hero as an aviator, while her mother, Mariellen, was a hero at home alone, raising babies, and figuring how to make ends meet. This book is filled with photos showing the details of wartime.

Linda Payne Smith

Author "Tin Tubs and Hollyhocks"

Grossmont Adult School Creative Writing Teacher

This book took me back to memories of my father and what the Korean war was like for him. It brought me to tears and it brought me to a sense of awe for the ability of two people to maintain a connection of love and strength for one another during such a time of tragedy and deep uncertainty. I stand here saluting you for honoring the people who have contributed so much for their country. You have represented them in the light of love and deep respect.

Gail Beauregard

Author and daughter of a Veteran

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Introduction

Letters connect to form words. Words combine to produce sentences. Sentences strung together become paragraphs, and paragraphs written down tell us stories. Stories are told, re-told, shared, analyzed, and enjoyed. Some of the best and most truthful stories come from letters: letters between lovers or spouses-- love letters.

Love letters from home, wherever home may be, are a connection to the past, the present, and the future. The contents, often uncertain, are read with anticipation and apprehension. They are reread with love and affection, memorized, and pondered. Trust must abound on both ends. Trust that truths are being told with no hidden messages between the lines. How much does the writer tell? Do you talk of hurt, anger, frustration? Or must you be the portal of strength, love, and support? I guess the answer is both. And that is what a love letter becomes, a link to truth, dreams, and hope. And so it is with my parents' story. It takes place during World War II and the Korean War years, between 1942 to 1953 when letters were the universal and almost exclusive form of communication.

Growing up, we all knew these letters existed. My siblings and I thought they were too sentimental and intimate to read. We just weren't interested. It wasn't until my mom passed away, and I was going through her things, that I rediscovered them. Then, I was thrilled to find something of my parents from the past-- especially something so personal. Their letters to each other revealed conversations between two people in love-- during wartime. Soon, separated by oceans and time, their conversations changed, and their personalities developed.

My mother, Mariellen, and my father, James Robert (Bob), met in 1942 and fell completely and totally in love. They married before my dad was shipped overseas to the South Pacific during World War II.

For the next two decades and two wars, they navigated much of their lives through letters. They had a strong marriage, the kind born of resilience, tolerance, and acceptance. They went on to have seven children and survived multiple moves. Their letters survived as well. Here is the story of their life in the war years, through their eyes and through their words.

Chapter Two

1942



Bob and Mariellen - 1942

So began a romance, not uncommon during wartime. Once the United States entered World War II, the urge to get married among young couples rose exponentially. In 1942 alone, 1.8 million weddings took place, 83% higher than ten years before. And two-thirds of those brides were marrying men who were newly enlisted in the military.

The women who met these cadets or young recruits were quick to form a deep bond with them. All these men were moving on to either further training or overseas deployment.

There wasn't a lot of time to court or date, and if you happened to fall in love... well then, you either must commit to marriage or put a relationship on hold until after the war.

There was a feeling of urgency on both sides of the relationship. The soldiers wanted to feel connected to a loved one, receive letters, and have "something" to live for, a reason to come home. These airmen knew from their training that many would not return and wanted to experience all they could. They wanted to live life to the fullest before leaving for overseas.

The importance of a connection to home was often like a lifeline to a soldier. So many hasty decisions were made, and later, often when the men were at their most vulnerable, abruptly changed.

Mariellen, then a junior in college at UCLA, met Bob, a newly enlisted Army Air Cadet, who was stationed in Santa Ana, California. They fell truly and deeply in love. At the beginning of their courtship, they saw each other only on weekends, and then only if Bob was able to get a pass. Phone calls were unpredictable, so letters were written almost daily.

August 20th, 1942
Santa Ana, California

Dear Beautiful,

I fell asleep in class yesterday. The inspector of the area schools happened to stop by and as luck would have it, visited our classroom. I refuse to believe that my snoring led him to

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the door in hope that some exceptional experiment may be in progress, rather I think it was just happenstance that he wandered in. He seemed very put out about my sleeping. It wouldn't have been so bad for the class if I had fallen asleep in the seat, but when you crawl down beneath the seats on the floor, that's bad.

When he asked me what I attended classes for, I answered truthfully that I found it a good way to catch up on my sleep.

I suppose that when I dig this big hole, they will just want me to put all the dirt back in. They can think of the silliest things for a fellow to do. I also goofed off on retreat tonight. No shine on my shoes. I gotta stand retreat tomorrow. I don't get to take part in calisthenics. That breaks my heart.

Every Spring we used to go fishing in Missouri. Sorta killed two birds with two stones. Used to wash our feet at the same time (I used to find more pairs of socks that way). Anyway, we would get in the middle of the lake, hang our feet over, and when the fish come up for air (sunlight), we would grab an oar and hit them on the head. Used to clean out a lake in no time at all. They tasted funny sometimes however.

Well, I guess there is not much more that I can say, except to tell you how nice you are. How the very moonlight reflects the loveliness of your heart. And the brightness of your eyes is seen in every star. The tinkle of your voice, the sweetness of your smile (the beautiful eyelashes), all that and more I dream of - being with you - and so dreams are but the nightmares of being awake.

'Til trout come in yard lengths.

Love, Bob

Journal entry from Mariellen, reflecting back to 1942 -

"I'm going to marry you," Bob declared the first night we met. Twelve weekends we saw each other and each night together he announced: "I'm going to marry you!"

I don't suppose The Ambassador, or The Biltmore Hotels in Los Angeles had ever before or have since, had their respectability and calmness so invaded. In those early years of the war, every cadet of the 10,000 in Los Angeles, who could wrangle a weekend leave, spent it whooping it up at one of these two places. It was youth and health and laughs and tension from the top of the Biltmore to the bottom on a Saturday night. Host rooms, which were supposed to be doubles, accommodated two or three times that many, some not paid guests.

I remember the Biltmore with warmth because they did not press these matters as they might have. But how could they do otherwise? These future fliers represented the cream of young American manhood. They possessed sharp intelligence, fine physical condition, charm and a sense of humor that has not been equaled since. They were here today and gone tomorrow, and they knew it. They made the most of the time they had.

While visiting my father in Colorado, I received phone calls, flowers and letters from Bob.

August '42

Santa Ana

Beautiful,

I think you looked lovelier today than I've ever seen you look before. Your hair was like golden sunlight that just gleamed and - golly, it was beautiful. Your eyes were bigger

than I've ever dreamed of them being - and brightness in proportion. Your skin is fair and clear and smooth enough to be called "photogenic" in the best of Hollywood circles. Your toothpaste smile was tops and, Oh John, that figure - It was really the sweater type*.

Darling, I never knew you had such a wonderful figure.

Yours,

Bob

***The term "sweater type girl" was made popular in the 1940s and 1950s to describe Hollywood actresses like Lana Turner, Jayne Mansfield, and Jane Russell, who adopted the popular fashion of wearing tight, form-fitting sweaters that emphasized the woman's bust line.**

In 1940 the War Department authorized the establishment of the Army Air Corps and enlisted centers for the initial training of recruits. The Air Corps established the first of these centers at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, where Bob did his basic training. Since the road ahead for most AAF enlistees led toward some specialized technical training, the centers were placed under the jurisdiction of the Air Corps Technical Training Command.

After completing basic training in Missouri in June 1942, Bob was shipped to Santa Ana, California and entered the Air Force Cadet Program. The Aviation Cadet Pilot Training Program was created by the U.S. Army to train its pilots. Candidates had to be between the ages of 19 and 25, athletic, and honest. A minimum of two years of college or three years of a scientific or technical education were required. Cadets were supposed to be unmarried and pledge not to marry during training. The grade of Aviation Cadet was created for pilot candidates and the program was renamed the Aviation Cadet Training Program (AvCad). Cadets were paid \$75 a

month. The program was expanded in May 1942 to also cover training navigators and bombardiers.

The training was difficult and time consuming. Over forty percent of cadets “washed out” because of physical problems, the inability to master the rigorous academic requirements or because they were killed during training. This left the graduating class only half of what it was at the beginning.

After Bob first completed the Curtiss-Wright Airplane Mechanics school, The next step was the classification class. Here, the cadets were given two to four weeks of extensive psychological tests to determine with greater accuracy their aptitude for aircrew training. They were given mechanical tests and tests which measured their physical reactions and coordination. At the end of these tests, each airman was classified for bombardier, navigator and/or pilot. If they passed that phase, then came nine weeks in Primary Pre-Flight school, consisting of intensive training in discipline and military customs, courtesies and drills. There were also courses in aircraft and naval identification, codes, navigation, meteorology and oxygen in a low-pressure chamber. Academic courses included mathematics, physics, military law, citizenship, national policy, equipment, and armament.

In the fall of 1942, Bob passed the first phase (pre-flight) as a second lieutenant and earned his cadet wings. The process for being selected to the cadet program was rigorous (just half of applications were selected). To graduate was considered an accomplishment in itself.

Of the cadets that entered the program, only one in five passed the physical exam. Following the physical tests were the qualification exams which included vocabulary, reading comprehension, practical judgment, math, contemporary affairs and mechanical ability.

Cadets also had to exhibit dependability, stamina, quick judgment, a “cool head”, and aggressiveness in the air (or simulators). Lastly, the cadets were asked a series of

questions about their family history. They were asked about their dating practices and morals.

“We must know that any applicant will develop into the type of man we would like to associate with for the remainder of our military service as brother officers,” an examiner would later account. Only thirty-five percent of cadets passed and received their wings.



On the back of this picture, Bob wrote - “See if you can find me. This was our class. Ten have washed out already. It was taken in front of the pool and administration building (it used to be a nightclub). More washed out this week-- class is getting smaller.”

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September 1942

Santa Ana

Darling,

The tests are all over now - all over my mind. However, the mental (under various high-sounding names) are finished.

I am not exactly the lowest type of life. But I was certainly disturbed when the examiner kept asking me if I was sure my mother and father were not first cousins. He was just foolin' I'm sure.

We had a private interview this afternoon. They ask you all sorts of stuff and try to straighten you out on a few things. Among other things he asked me if I was engaged. Then if we had been more than friends. I said no. He asked me if I had ever had relations with the opposite sex. Then laughed hard when I told him I was extremely shy. I expected to keep him there all day, but after I had related the obscure affair (a little redhead) he said, "That is sufficient, we just like to know the world is still going around."

You know I hope the day will come when I won't have that on my mind. When I won't think about lots of funny things every time I see a skirt, a pair of gams, or a lovely sweater. I never want to be so far gone that I don't feel the presence of beauty, but I want to just be normal. See 'em and treat 'em just like people. I guess part of it is that everyone I see puts me in mind of you. Your beauty, your loveliness, and your - just you - that makes it pretty hard. I'll never cheat on you. Both Father Closby and the Lt. that was my examiner, were surprised when I said I was going to be faithful.

I must not look the type! But they don't know how worthy I have to be of you. I miss you so very much. I repeat your name

several times to myself before I go to bed. Then I blow you a kiss and then to sleep and lovely dreams about horses -

Darling, I'm sorta bad at being a very good liar, but I love you more than to see you get a lemon or - bats in your belfry, baby. I'm throwing a kiss to the stars tonight - let's see you catch it.

Love,

Bob

xoxxxxxox

Bob graduated from Cadet school in the top ten percent of his class. Completing his airplane mechanic classification and preflight training, Bob was sent to Lowry Field in Denver for bombardier school.

Specialized bombardier training in the military did not begin in earnest until after Pearl Harbor. The amount of time allotted to training gradually increased over the course of the war from 12 to 24 weeks. The course was divided into two phases: the ground phase and the air phase. Ground training emphasized the physics and theory behind dropping bombs from an airplane. Air training put the theory into practice and took up almost three quarters of the time. The 18-week course included 425 hours of ground instruction, including time on the A2 trainer, a bombing simulator. After three weeks on the ground, students began training in the air. Over the course of his training, the bombardier dropped between 155 and 200 bombs from various altitudes and conditions. For qualification, he would fly seven bomb runs, four in daytime and three at night, and had to place his bombs within 230 feet of the aim point to be considered qualified.

Talk of their love and the future was at the forefront of all my parent's conversations. With Bob's continued training looming down upon them, they began to speak of marriage.

Bob, a devout Catholic, believed strongly in his faith. After their engagement, Mariellen, who was raised Presbyterian, began to take catechism classes to convert to Catholicism. Religion and politics were topics near and dear to both my parents. My mother spoke often about her willingness to become a Catholic. Her faith would become even more important to her later during the war years she spent at home alone raising children, while my father was overseas. Meanwhile, letters were still being sent almost daily during Bob's time in Cadet School and Mariellen's junior year in college.

*Sunday, October 1942
Whittier, Ca.*

Dearest –

Hi Bob - believe it or not the sun is shining. At least it's trying to shine. We might go to Chamberlains for dinner tonight. It's a good thing if we do. We haven't any red stamps left until next Monday. We'll have to eat beans, chicken, rabbit and fish until then. Which of the four would you prefer for Saturday? Take your choice, honey.

Andre is on the radio again. He is playing "Tales from Vienna Woods." Did you see that picture, "The Great Waltz?" It was really a beautiful picture - didn't you love hearing all those waltzes? I can hardly contain myself - I just want to waltz and waltz and dance all over. Let's learn to do the old fast waltz - then sometimes we'll go to a masquerade as old-fashioned Viennese and we'll waltz. Okay?

Bob Darling, I love you. Ever since you called, I've had a feeling - sort of an aching inside me - of how terribly much I love you. Time and eternity aren't very

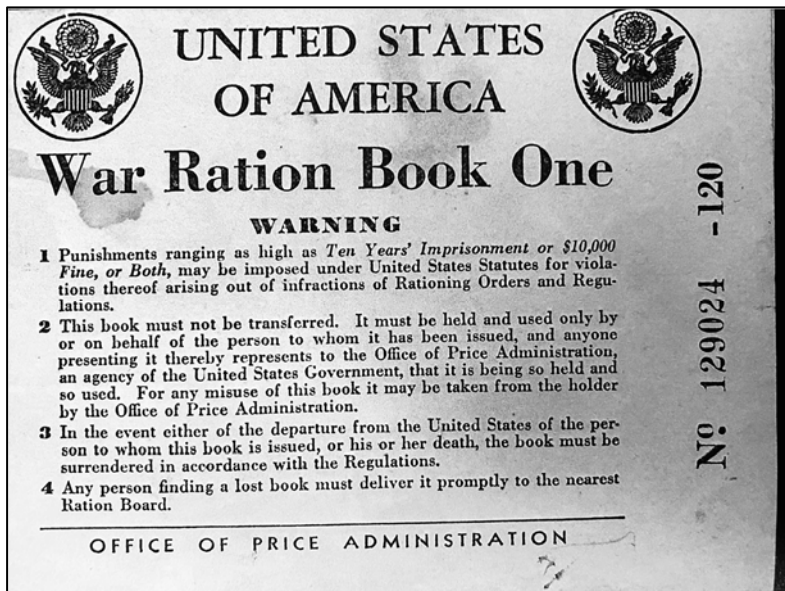
important, they are fleeting - it's our love that is important and timeless. Like all love is, I guess.

Oh, it's getting late, darling. I love you - oh Bob I do. Bye darling.

Loads of Love,

Mariellen

Civilians first received ration books— War Ration Book Number One, or the "Sugar Book"— on May 4, 1942. The books were distributed through more than 100,000 schoolteachers, PTA groups, and other volunteers.



Ration Book One

To get classification and rationing stamps, one had to appear before a local War Price and Rationing Board, which reported to the OPA (Office of Price Administration). Each person in a household received a ration book, including babies and small children who qualified for canned milk not available to others.

By the end of 1942, ration coupons were used for coffee, typewriters, gasoline, bicycles, footwear, silk, nylon, fuel oil, stoves, meat, lard, shortening and food oils, cheese, butter, margarine, processed foods (canned, bottled, and frozen), dried fruits, canned milk, firewood and coal, jams, and jellies.

The work of issuing ration books and exchanging used stamps for certificates was handled by some 5,500 local ration boards of mostly volunteer workers selected by local officials. Each ration stamp had a generic drawing of an airplane, gun, tank, aircraft carrier, a stalk of wheat, fruit, etc. and a serial number. Some stamps also had alphabetic lettering. The kind and amount of rationed goods were not specified on most stamps and were not designated until later when local papers published, for example, that beginning on a specific date, one airplane stamp was required, in addition to cash, to buy one pair of shoes. One stamp number 30 was required to buy one pound of sugar. The product amounts changed from time to time, depending on availability. Red stamps were used to ration meat and butter, and blue stamps were used to ration processed foods.

A national speed limit of 35 miles per hour was imposed to save on fuel and rubber for tires. To receive a gasoline ration card, a person had to certify a need for gasoline and ownership of no more than five tires. All tires in excess of five per driver were confiscated by the government, because of rubber shortages. An "A" sticker on a car was the lowest priority of gasoline rationing and entitled the car owner to 3 to 4 US gallons of gasoline per week. Sugar was the first consumer product rationed, with all sales ending on April 27th, 1942, and resumed on May 5th with a ration of a half-pound per person per week, half of normal consumption.

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October 1942

Santa Ana

Darling,

Supposing I didn't start my letters off in a conventional way. Just supposing I said that you were the best-looking girl in the world, not the most beautiful one.

What a liar I would be. But - Oh, well there is no use of me trying to make or keep you guessing. I do think you are the best of the best and I do love you.

Do you think all of our children would look as beautiful and sweet as you (three boys - two girls)? I'll make those dreams come true dearest. With a home and everything. Someday, I'll put you in a palace and make you the queen you really are.

I felt swell after reading your letters. I just sat down to write you a very inspiring repartee when we had to go for chow. Then on the return, I drew up a chair and started again. I got to the first

"I love you" when I got called out on a special detail.

Then at 4 p.m. on my return, I was informed that because of my previous experience, I was chosen for guard duty - 24 hours - That gave me 15 minutes to shave and write you. Then I found out I could get on a later guard. So, I delayed the action and then I decided a call to you would be just the ticket! So I called you - I had this letter half-finished and 2 dollars in change in my pocket. What a mess! I tell you it can't be done. You can't make love to a gal over the phone. First off, it's a pay phone - there are 17,000 fellows waiting outside, eager to get in and get you out. Secondly, the

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operator - They should all be boiled in oil - and thirdly, I love you. Most every time I get out of the phone booth, I could kick the devil out of myself.

Darling, if I ever see you twice in the same day, I am going to talk your arm off the first time and not say a single word except I love you - the second time. We have so many plans - so many necessary things that have to be discussed - Gee, when are we going to do it? I've got a lot to tell you darling.

I keep thinking about the telephone call - I hate telephones - But I love you. There's lots of things much too sacred for me to say over a telephone and lots of stuff I can't say in a letter. We have to have some long talks, kid. Sensible and grown up talks. Not emotional and kiddish ones.

Do you still look as beautiful as the last time I saw you standing in the moonlight? How can I say I love you, how can I?

Well - dammit I can't put it on paper - I just want to grab you - just hold you close. I love you and well, I want to kiss you just twice as hard as I ever had before and twice as badly.

With all the love in the world,

Bob

P.S. Be it hereby resolved that I shall not rest until every pay phone in this country is turned in for scrap metal and every operator be burned at the stake. And no rest at all until you are in my arms.

(From Mariellen's Journal)

At Christmas (1942), our engagement became official. My ring arrived at our home by special cadet courier, who had been waiting at the Santa Ana Army Air Base Post Office for its arrival. This called for a great celebration! Bob and I, five Cadets plus some of my sorority sisters, went to the Coconut Grove at the Ambassador Hotel that evening.

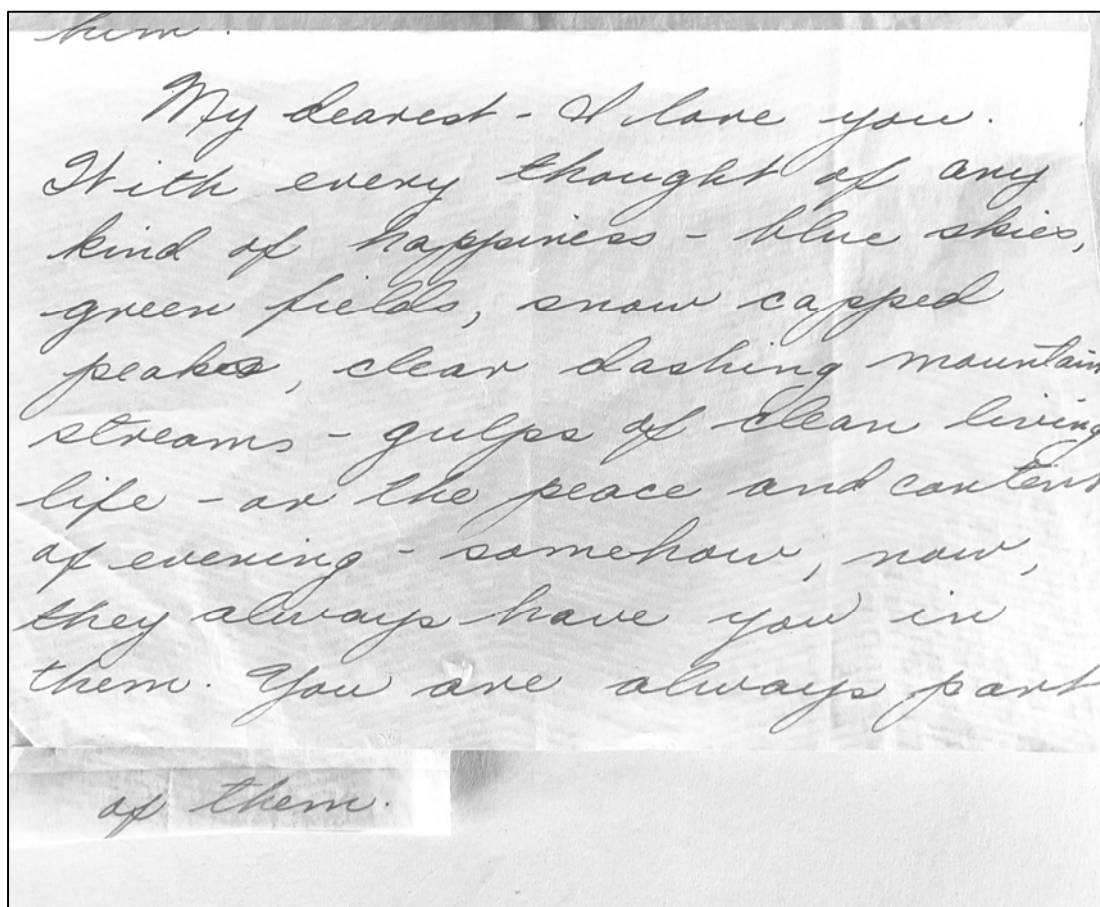


Engagement Photo - December 1942

Bob was being sent to further training, so we decided to marry right away. We had just one month to prepare. Bob's parents lived back east so they really couldn't put

much pressure on us to act with more wisdom. My family tried. Finally though, they gave in and said, 'Mariellen must finish college and have no children for at least a year.'

The next two weeks were a flurry of hunting for a wedding gown, finding a dress for my sister who was to be maid of honor, and getting all the things done you do to have a church wedding. I was taking the instructions required to be married in the Catholic Church because Bob was a Catholic and I wasn't yet. All this while studying for finals.



Things didn't go as smoothly as planned for Bob either. Ten days before the wedding, a fellow in Bob's barracks came down with the measles. All the cadets in the building had their leaves canceled for that weekend, with the additional threat that if any more cases were reported, leaves would be canceled the next weekend too. The idea that we would not be married that weekend was unacceptable. Bob was being transferred to a different base for continued training. Somehow, we dared not look beyond that next weekend. It might never happen. Bob assured me on his nightly telephone call (which he had to stand in line for up to an hour to make), that no-one would be reported with the measles that week. Someone did get the measles but with the whole barracks determined to see the wedding take place, the poor cadet was kept in bed, fed orange juice, and answered roll for.

Friday evening before the wedding, Bob called. He said he could get off base the following day only if he was picked up by private transportation, and then not until 10:00 a.m.

*I'd gone down to City Hall to get our marriage license. I found I could apply for it, but they needed Bob's signature too. That gave us two hours to drive the fifty miles of country road. * Okay, I was game... the next morning at 5:00 a.m. my girlfriend and I were up prepared for the drive.*

The day never really dawned. It was gray and pouring rain. The road was like a rollercoaster and every dip was a creek. We made it to the base around 9:30. Bob got in the car about forty-five minutes later and we were back on our way to L.A. We arrived at the license bureau at 11:55. It closed at noon. We waited in the car to make sure he made it. He did!

We left him there as he still had to buy the wedding ring. We got back to the sorority house to find my wedding dress pressed and hung in a special room with the train draped over tissue paper. My hair had to be done, the flowers had to be picked up and things had caught up with me. I don't know who took care of the flowers for me, my sister or those for the church. I only know that at 4:45 I had my wedding dress

and veil on and my sister had brought a full length white velveteen cloak to keep the rain off. We were ready to go to the church.

The wedding, like everything else in wartime, was made up of bits and pieces. In the vestibule, five minutes before time for the wedding to start, I had a wild, mad desire to run out the door, down the street and far away. What did I know about this cadet I was going to spend the rest of my life with? I had never met any of his family - never known anyone he had known. Does everyone have this last doubt just before the ceremony?

At that moment someone opened the door to the church itself and I could see Bob, in his dress greens waiting at the altar. I have never seen anyone look so handsome! The next minute I was walking down the aisle to music I had forgotten to arrange for - but someone had. The six ushers knew what to do. Bob knew what to do. My sister knew what to do and we had never had a wedding rehearsal.

Father Bowling relaxed some rules to make it a more beautiful wedding and a more meaningful one. We were married at the altar, something not often done at a mixed marriage at that time. The organist played Ave Maria, not usually played at a wedding, but I had requested it. The whole ceremony was said in English instead of Latin, so that my family would be able to follow what was being said. At the end of the wedding the sun shone briefly as we left the church.

It was the happiest day of my life.

***The route from Eagle Rock to the base in Santa Ana was, at the time, mostly a dirt road.**



Wedding Photo January 30, 1943

We had no reception. There wasn't time for anything like that. Bob had to be back at the base by Sunday afternoon. That night, after the wedding, we went to a house at the beach. Bob tried to fry an egg the next morning and I almost fell off the chair laughing when he cracked the egg and the yolk fell out on the floor. It was even funnier when he tried to clean it up. He had a quizzical grin and a sense of humor that was new to me.

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By two o'clock Sunday, Bob had to report back to the base. At least twice that afternoon, he introduced me as his wife but used my maiden name. Late in the day, Bob had to go to his barracks and I had to leave. I drove fifty-plus miles by myself in the dark. It was a long drive, especially since I got lost. I wandered around in the toughest part of Los Angeles until after midnight. It must have been about this time that I stopped to get a cup of coffee. I was exhausted and afraid I might go to sleep while driving. The coffee shop was a typical truck stop. There were only men there, but they were kind to me, gave me coffee and good directions to get home.

After the wedding weekend, Bob returned to base in Santa Ana, and Mariellen was back at college. They continued to communicate through letters.

February 1943

My Darling,

Hi Bobbie dear. Are you tired? Not you! You're too big and strong. But anyway-- I bet you're tired. Bob, it was a good weekend wasn't it? It was such a happy one. You know, darling, we want to have breakfast like we had today every Sunday. I love you!

*Forever,
Mariellen*

Letters Across the Pacific

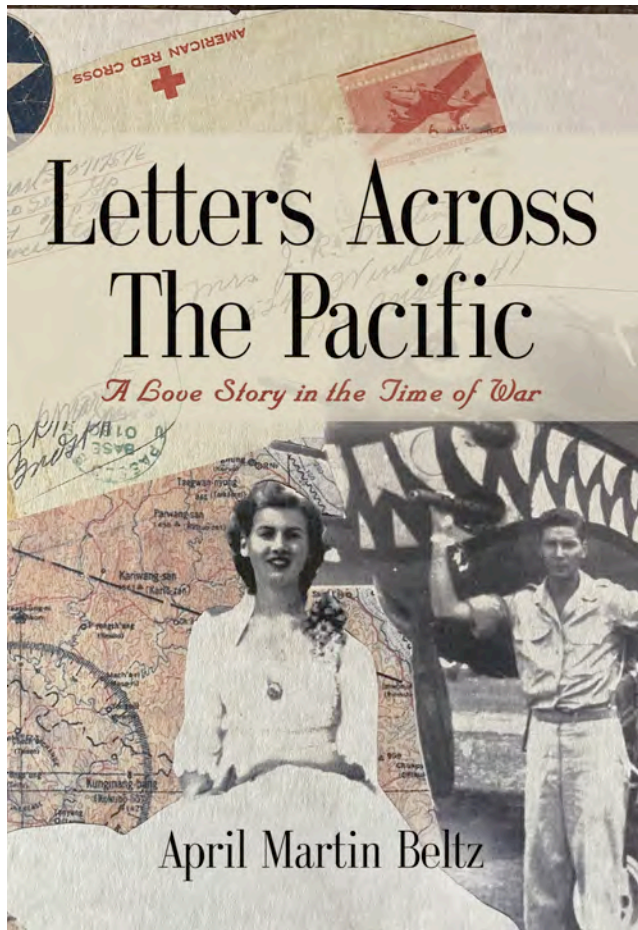
Feb '43
Santa Ana

Dear Beautiful,

Dearest you are perfect. I got my mind off you long enough to type out 43 pages of our 60-page study guide (3 hours) and after checking it over, I found I had written "Mariellen" in 37 times. It was placed in the oddest spots - I always figured my hands were tied to my brain, not my heart. Every time I dream of you - you grow more beautiful - right now I'm dreaming of you 300 years in the future.

Yours with love,

Bob



Love endures across time and distance for a young college student and a cadet in 1942 at the onset of WWII. They fall in love and marry before he is shipped off to the South Pacific. For the next few years they corresponded mainly through letters.

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By April Martin Beltz

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