

William Martin

[Archive]: World War II Era Submarine Chaser Navy Letters

New York, Florida: 1944-1945

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An archive of 46 letters from Ensign, later Lieutenant (junior grade), William Martin to his wife between 1944 and 1946 while serving on the submarine chaser, USS PC-1146. All letters are very good with original envelopes with tears from opening.

A collection of letters written by William Martin, who often goes by “Bill” or “Skipper” in the letters, to his wife, who he refers to as “Butch,” while serving on board the submarine chaser USS PC-1146 beginning in the summer of 1944. Martin spent time in the Atlantic near Florida including a stint off the coast of Miami and later in the Pacific. Martin acquired many titles and duties during his time aboard the ship including ship’s censor and gunnery officer. In one letter he writes, “the past few days have been hectic ones for me. This life as a gunnery officer is no bed of roses. I’ve been out at the range training the crew.” By the end of July 1944 the ship was about to ship out and Martin writes, “I’m looking forward with great anticipation on going to sea so I can find out exactly how my gang will function. They’re all a good bunch of fellows, but you can’t tell their true value to the ship until we get out.”

He had a few troubles on board with some of the men saying he found it “difficult to understand some of them. They think too much of their personal problems and not the good of the ship as a whole. You have just have to think of the unit. I explain it to them but it does not seem to be of any effect.” It seems he took his job very seriously and eventually expanded his duties to also include Stores Officer and Communications Officer. He writes, “I’ve found that I really enjoy my responsibilities in spite of the constant strain I’m under.” His seriousness may have resulted in some of the issues he encountered with fellow seaman, though he does mention a few men throughout the letters that he thinks are “wonderful” and good people to work with. Although they did have fun at his expense. In one letter he writes, “did I ever get left last night...Got back (to the ship) about 10:30, and the ship was gone. You can imagine how I felt. After a couple of hours I found out that they would be back this morning... Steve, Lous and the captain had gone out alone.”

As time goes by the service wears on him with the tedium and uncertainty of the war. He writes, “all I seem to do is work, sleep and eat. Really don’t have too much ambition these days.” Although some days are harder than others the news that the war is slowing down is uplifting and he writes of it back home. “Things sure seem to be picking up for us in Europe now. Every day the news reports sound better and better. If we keep going as we are, I shouldn’t be surprised if the war will be over in that section within a few months. Then we can really turn on the yellow rascals in the West.” Later her writes, “the whole world will have to be educated. Whatever it was that threw us into this era of madness must be stamped out and never allowed to present itself again.” In September they moved down the Florida coast where Martin writes, “the climate down here is much better than in Miami. The nights are cool for a change. Nearly every day there is a shower to cool thing off a little. There is not much of a town, but we can go the show at night or swimming on the base.” He talks of other leisure activities the men are involved in on off time including baseball games. “We had a ball game tonight. Our crew played a team from another ship....we lost a close game 4-3. Hope we can beat them tomorrow evening.”

When discussing the assignments the ship goes on Martin is careful not to divulge too much information and takes the idea of self censorship very seriously. Most of the letters mention the journey, the weather, and the news of the war. “The trip up here was very pleasant to say the least, smooth seas all the way...We are carrying the unit commander now, so we have another officer on board.” His winter 1945 letters often remark on how warm it is for February. He also inquires about her pregnancy, which has been going on for much of the letters. In March 1945 he writes, “I was awfully excited when mother told me you were ok and that we had a boy....Sure wish I could get to a phone. I want to know how you are getting along and what the kid is like.” In one of his last letters from August 1945 he writes, “you know, honey, deep down inside of me I have a hunch that I’ll be home by Christmas.”

An interesting collection of Navy letters from the end of World War II detailing a young seaman’s time serving his country and his relationship with his young wife. [BTC#407497]