

Still in New Orleans: A marriage proposal.

I have said that in this condensed version of our letters I would forego the details of the developing love story, and the following exchange is the next-to-last. These remaining entries do bring the story to a kind of resolution. Professions of love have been made, but up to now no mention of what would now be called the "M - word", marriage. Recall that in an earlier exchange of letters with M&D, they wanted to know if there was an "understanding" and I said that at that time we had only acknowledged our love. For myself, it was a clear goal, but was it fair to JM to go this final step, bringing us even closer together, when I could not foresee the degree of danger to which I might be subjected and what my chances of returning were? On the other hand, from a selfish point of view, given the heightened emotions of wartime and the fact that JM in her club and other social activities at school would be in contact with many attractive men both in and out of uniform, I wanted the security of a formal commitment. Whether from selfishness or simply the power of our love, I was driven to seek that ultimate bond and so in the following letter (Oct.10) I ask the BIG question. The letter which follows it is JM's reply (Oct.14).

"My Darling Jean-Marie,

"It is wonderful to have a letter to look forward to every day - I really do appreciate your efforts. I know how hard it is to sit down to write when you have been working hard and are tired. You must have an awful lot to do, with the club and the magazine and all the other things, but I know the magazine will be better than ever before.

"Yesterday we started out on a hike, but after walking for an hour, we stopped and had a football and a baseball game on the levee, then marched back again - some hike. On Saturday and today I was given a restriction to the company area for being a bad boy. I skipped a couple of classes on Wednesday morning and it had to be on that particular morning that they started checking back on the roll calls taken in class! The lieutenant, however, seemed sympathetic and says he will try to get Frank and me some sort of special duty to get us out of classes.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get a phone call through on Thursday night, especially since you were there, darling, but I put the call in at 7:30 in New Orleans and at 10:00 had to leave to get some supper and go back to camp. Telephoning is a worse problem here than it was at Pickett, I guess it is just useless to try.

"I didn't mean to be so alarming to Mother and Dad about my going, because for all I know I may be here for Christmas. On the other hand I might leave tomorrow and I thought it a good idea to let them know how to tell I was alerted.

"I may have said this before, but I'll say it again - that to be picked up from all that one knows and loves, to be planted far away from those things without ever comprehending the myriad and multiform forces that caused it gives one at times a complete sense of loneliness and a tremendous desire to have a definite grasp on those things one loves most.

"In all the letters I've written you, sweetheart, I've seldom mentioned the future and yet it has always been on my mind. But, now that I may be leaving soon I have an uncontrollable desire to tell you my deepest feelings and what I hope for, even though it may be the selfish thing to do.

"I love you with all my mind and emotion, my darling, and I know I'll love you always. I know too that I want nothing more than to have you waiting for me when I come home. In other words, Jean-Marie, I'm asking you if you'll marry me sometime in the future which I hope isn't too distant, when we can lead normal lives once again - when we can form a little universe of our own and know the happiness we want together.

"It is a lot to ask of you to say yes, darling, but I so much want to hear it. Tell me it can be so. I love you."

JM's reply (Oct. 14), only four days later.

"When I came home tonight there was a letter from you on my dressing table. Quite often there is a letter there waiting for me, and as always I tore it open and began reading it eagerly. Then suddenly I thought I must be dreaming.....
"I'm asking you to marry me." Denny, you must know my answer is "Yes." What I want more than anything in the world is to spend my whole life proving to you how much I love you. I hope and pray that that future we are waiting for is just around the corner, but no matter how long a wait it is, darling, it will only make the happiness of being together more precious.

"Mother and Daddy are pleased, I think, and I do hope that your family will be.

"I love you, Denny."

Here is my response to JM's acceptance, out of order according to date, but it gives closure to this part of our story. The date is Oct.22.

"It was wonderful to have you give me the answer I wanted. After a few days in a state of semi-shock, I am now back to what might be called normal except for a rosy glow which seems to accompany me about. I have never been more sure of anything than that we can and will be happy together, dearest. I love you more than ever.

"More and more, it looks as though I may be able to get home. When do you get days off from school - do you get any time around Thanksgiving? I don't want to come home when you have lots of studying if I can work it for some other time. You wouldn't want to fail a course just because I pestered you, you know, and besides I must keep peace with the family. This is 50% day dreaming, you understand, but it's a good idea to have this settled - just in case.

"This week I am platoon sergeant and am in charge of the cleaning of the barracks, seeing that the men get to class on time, taking reveille and retreat formation and a few other duties, less time consuming, but equally irksome. I have attempted to make the place a little neater and more organized and am already termed a tyrant by some. However, my efforts have been rewarded by some success and most of the men are with me.

"I started this letter Wednesday night, after returning from the service club at about 10:30 PM, where I was having some Red Cross women sew on some of my stripes. There were so many fellows in the room talking that I finally gave up. Last night I went to New Orleans with Frank & Bob Gossington to do some shopping, but I managed to write a little yesterday morning. Now it is 10:45AM

on Friday and I hope to finish before lunch. This morning, the officer who is our platoon leader for the week, came thru inspecting and I had to trot along behind him taking down the names of offenders in my little notebook (very few had anything wrong however - I've seen to that). After he finished, the major's adjutant came thru and I had to go around with him. One of the men I selected for barrack orderly this morning is named Pvt. Wellington F. Mugridge - sounds like there should be a III after it.

"Whenever we go into town, Frank and I always stop at one of the several places where fresh fruit drinks are sold. Last night we headed for one right off the bat and I had seven glasses of orangeade - it was really good. ...

"With interruptions by nosey officers, I haven't written as much as I wanted to, but I'd better get this in the mail now before you think I've forgotten you. I love you my darling and so I will always."

Now back to a regular sequencing of letters, this one to JM, Oct. 16.

"...Gossington, now a sergeant technician, has just returned from a 10 day furlough (the lucky guy - I am jealous). Not all the units are "hot" and the men in these units are all getting them. There is still hope for me though, darling, and maybe I can see you once more before I go. I only hope so. It is a wonderful thought and it helps to keep me going.

"Tonight I went to see Claudia, the movie with Gossington. We both enjoyed it very much although most of the men seemed quite restless through it. They want a picture with lots of action. The weather for the past couple of days has been clear and cold - about 56 deg. F this morning. In comparison to what we have been having it seems frigid, but I like it, it is much more like home. There is a beautiful full moon in a clear sky tonight - I wish we were alone somewhere watching it together.

"This afternoon, we walked to the levee again and stopped there for a couple of hours to play baseball and football. Unlike last week, I left the games with Cassel, Roecker & Gossington and we hiked around in the woods. We all are trying to study as much of the natural history as we can while we're here. We didn't see very much of interest, but it was a beautiful day for hiking and it did us good to get away from camp for a while. The spanish moss is really lovely stuff. It seems to grow mostly on hackberry, oak & cypress trees. It is used quite a bit to stuff mattresses and pillows and I think life preservers also. We saw some banana trees with green bananas growing on them, near a group of negro shacks...."

To M&D, ca Oct.17.

"It is a shame that the telephone call wasn't possible, but the evening I tried calling was no exception from all I hear. Many other men have tried calling home without success. Evidently the lines here are used a great deal. However, the possibility of my receiving a furlough tomorrow is just as great as the possibility we'll ship out. In other words we just don't know a thing about our moving, but I'm prepared for either.

"Last week I wrote to Jean-Marie and asked her the all-important question.