

Copies of published letters from Americans who are held prisoners of war in Zentsuji War Prison Camp, Island of Shikoku, Japan.

Zentsuji War Prison Camp, Japan,
December 24, 1942

I am well and in good spirits as usual, so please keep your mind at rest. My hair is back to normal and I have developed a fine beard which Joe has aptly said makes me look like a fugitive Santa Claus. I'm still determined to take a psychology M.A. at Columbia. I have designs on an interesting future and I am confident of success*****Remember me to all my relations and friends. My love to you all.

Zentsuji War Prison Camp, Japan,
23 October, 1942

Received three of your letters, plus two from mother and one from Carl W---. It is impossible to say what letters mean to us here. It is such a grand pleasure that it hurts at first. Then you read, reread and reread them until you are again happily at home. When I received your letters I realized what a fool I had been to send that radio message for clothes--it seemed to worry you. My first radio message seems to have gone astray some place. After San Francisco radio inquired about me I was given an opportunity to send a second. My second message was sent just at the time we heard about the exchange ships, after someone here had started the rumor that we could get eleven lbs. each by these ships. Hence the word about the size 13 shoes. Anyway that should have convinced you that it was really your dumb husband writing. As you probably know, Tommy P--- is here rooming with me. He is feeling fine and looking well. Tell Jean that he has gained about twenty pounds since he had his picture taken and is his normal self again. Here are two of my latest pics for you and mother. We were all elated to hear about Joe and Bill, may they keep up the good work. This is my community letter so pass it on. It is good to know that you have found something useful to do that you seem to enjoy. Of course it seems impossible to us here that life goes on as usual, but it boosts the spirits a hundred per cent to hear about it. My thoughts are always with you. I am well and safe.

(Later from the same prisoner)

For the past eleven years I have longed to settle down. Now I have, sad and oh-so dumb. In spite of the Navy's notification, you probably have worried, but you have no cause to worry any longer. I am here with Herbie H---, our plane crews, the officers and men from Guam and Wake, and some Allied personnel, entirely safe; just waiting and hoping for an early and satisfactory end to the war--.

Here we are in barracks with a room about 30 x 20 for six of us, Herbie, two Dutch officers, two Australians, and myself; the entire group of prisoners have complete freedom in a large compound. We have daily classes in a wide variety of subjects of our own selection, then exercise, play cards, or "acey-ducey." We are living each day for the happiness in it--may you do the same until we can be reunited. Communication will necessarily be much more difficult in this war than in the last; it may be impossible to send a ship in either direction for a long, long time, but try to write, for my heart is with you. My only desire is that you should make a happy and complete life for yourself. We cannot predict when or how the war will end, we only know now that it will last long enough for there to be many changes at home before we return.

Zentsuji War Prison Camp
January 26, 1943

Dear Folks;

I will take advantage of the first opportunity to write to you that I have had for nearly a year. I wrote you a letter last February while in Bataan, but doubt that it ever got through. I hope that everyone is well and that everything is going smoothly at home. I am anxious to know what Vincent is doing, I hope he got a better deal than I got. I sure wish I could be home to see the activity and changes the war has caused, also to lap up some of the old home cooking. I hope the war has not caused you any hardship. I am glad to say that I am unscratched and well. My experiences during the war were not too horrible and I was not exposed to much danger, being in the rear areas most of the time doing various kinds of engineering work. I was one of a large group of war prisoners moved to Japan from the P. I. last November. We are quartered in large two-story barracks, sleep on mattresses with plenty of blankets and have plenty of room. There are English, Australian and New Zealand war prisoners interned here, also some American sailors and marines from Guam and Wake. These fellows have treated us swell since we arrived here. They are all in good spirits, healthy and optimistic, and our morale has risen considerably since our association with them. We have received toilet articles, sewing kits, tobacco and some food from the American and Canadian Red Cross. The Japanese army gave us overcoats and additional clothing to supplement our light tropical clothing. It gets quite cold here during the winter, the temperature going below freezing. I hope to hear from you soon.

Zentsuji War Prison Camp, Japan,
April, 1943

Dear Folks;

I sincerely hope that everyone is well and that everything is all right at home. I am in good health and have put on a little weight during the last two months. I spend a good deal of time reading. We have a good library consisting of several hundred books and magazines of all kinds, and we also subscribe to several Japanese magazines and daily newspapers printed in English. We have lectures and classes in many different subjects, taught by some of our qualified brother prisoners. Once a week we have a show, put on by some of the prisoners, and on Sundays we have services conducted by our chaplain. Some of our other activities are cultivating a two-acre garden, raising rabbits (we now have 400), collecting grass for rabbits, cleaning up the camp, washing our clothes, making beds, cleaning up our quarters, and exercising. And so our time marches on. Am still hoping to hear from you.

Zentsuji War Prison Camp, Japan,
June 1943

Dear Mother;

Letter number four. Have been holding this letter, pending receipt of something to answer, but since today is your birthday I am writing anyway to wish you many happy returns. Thanks for the Christmas greeting, which I received February 24. I was very glad to get that message because it showed that you were cognizant of my whereabouts. I got through the winter in fine style and am still in excellent health. Although the existence here is rather monotonous, we do have a good library and I have read about 90 books. With the arrival of 150 officers from the Philippines, there are now quite a few prisoners in camp. The morale here is remarkably good. I hope our family is still intact. Give my love to all. Maybe we can have a family reunion on your next birthday. With all my heart.

Zentsuji War Prison Camp, Japan,
December 1943

Dear Mother;

Message No. 8. During the past few weeks have received 12 letters, late latest being no. 33 of Sept. 12. You can't imagine how much pleasure they gave me. Thank Dotea for her two. Mail and packages which arrived on exchange ship are still being distributed and I should receive your package in the next few days. It will certainly be the grandest Christmas present I ever had. Two more letters will make your series from 20 to 33 complete. To answer a few of your questions: Bassett, Wilson, and I are the only Pope personnel in this camp. Regret that I can give you no additional information on others. There are 29 English, Dutch, Australian, and American officers in my room, and, as you suspect, I have made a number of friends among the nearly 700 residents here. Jake Vandergrift, Mead Willis, Hugh Mellon, Ed Wood and Joe Martin are some of the naval officers. Yes, I have gained weight since that picture was taken--all the way to 140 pounds. Since someone would mention bridge, I'll admit that I have become rather proficient. Have read 135 assorted books in my spare time in addition to daily paper and weekly magazine. From your letters I judge that getting married has become a national pastime. Hope there will be a few eligible girls left. Give my love to the family.--Flash--Your box arrived Dec.13. It exceeds my fondest expectations.

A postcard from the above prisoner dated January 25, 1944 read "Since signing my letter I have received 15 of your earlier communications, 7 on my birthday. Am still enjoying your parcel".

Zentsuji, December 1943

Dear Len;

Your birthday is past and Christmas is nearly here, while all I can do is write with hopes that you will receive it in about six months. I have read several letters and seen some of the parcels which arrived on the exchange ship. The wool socks, underwear, sweaters, candy and dried fruit are particularly appreciated. I have drawn a blank so far, but have strong belief that I should receive a letter soon. I am certain from the information in these letters that you are receiving word of where I am. It must have been hard until you did know. I have written three letters and two cards from here previous to this one. I wonder if you heard about my broadcast recording. I last saw Gene Nirdlinger and Ray Minogue in the Philippines over a year ago. They were in good health and supposed to have gone to Mindanao. We are able to write only once every two months. There are five Australians, two English, one Scottish, and six American officers in my room. I am looking forward to the time when I can be with you all again.

Undated, published in October, 1944.

Since November 25, 1943, I have received 18 beautiful letters from you, 24 from Katherine and 2 from Virginia, mostly written from January to June. As you well know words cannot express the value of them to me. Every scrap of news from the family and friends is eagerly read, and I wish for more and for photographs. Some invaluable textbooks, along with others came recently. I attend classes an hour or two each week in Spanish, German, Commercial Law, photography and statistics. A dozen of us have church weekly. Valuable to me are the friendships I have made here. There is an interesting international group here. This is letter No. 7, your parcel not yet arrived. I am well and cheerful.