

Precious Letters:

A world at war and the letters that helped win it

by Wayne G. Sayles

Thrust into a world of chaos with very little preparation, mixed emotions and a “boatload” of expectations, America’s finest were challenged in the waning days of 1941 to save the world from tyranny. Never asking “why”, these young men and women met that challenge. As the U.S. Army Air Corps was ramping up for conflict and the American industrial complex tooled up for the inevitable materiel demands—aircraft became a priority. Thousands and thousands of warplanes started rolling off the assembly lines of America in a wave that boggles the imagination to this day. Airplanes need crews and training bases sprang up at obscure places throughout the country—turning sleepy hollows into bee hives of activity.

Harold David Andrews Jr. was eighteen years old when America entered World War II. As a young boy growing up in Auburn, Maine, he was fascinated with machines and how they work. That enthrallment grew when he saw his first airplane and fascination turned to infatuation. After graduation from high school, he worked for Vought-Sikorsky Aviation in their Experimental Machine Shop. By the time he was nineteen, Dave was an Air Cadet in Class 43-C at Greenville Army Flying School, doing what he had always dreamed about. It was the Fall of 1942 and for him a time of tremendous change. From Maine and New England culture, to that of Mississippi and the deep South, he was transplanted overnight and awakened to the sometimes harsh realities of military life. Amidst the jarring intensity and discipline of Army training, Dave travelled on a short pass to Ocala, Florida with a friend. There, he was introduced to Jackie Marshall.

Jackie was beautiful, gregarious and smart. He was simply overwhelmed by her charm and elusiveness.

When Dave returned to Greenville, it was hard to stay focused on flying and he anxiously awaited the letter she had promised to send. It came, along with a snapshot of her, as America mourned those lost a year earlier at Pearl Harbor. His reply was quick and unambiguous:

“I have the snapshot right in front of me now, on the letter, and I can hardly keep my eyes on where I am writing. To me you are very cute and pretty, definitely Beautiful from the top of your lovely hair down to those little toes peeping out of your “mousehole” shoes....How does it feel to be a Georgia Peach transplanted in a Florida Grove?”

The young man was clearly smitten by this Southern belle. Recalling those days, Dave now readily admits that by their second meeting he was determined that Jackie would be his wife. Of course the world was at war and a proper courtship might be a bit difficult, not to mention the fact that Jackie hadn’t weighed in on that course of events—yet. Dave had a mountain to climb, but determination was something he never lacked.



AVIATION CADET HAROLD DAVID ANDREWS, formerly of 69 Gamage Avenue, Auburn, recently reported to the Greenville Army Flying School, Greenville, Miss., for further flight training. After completing his training at Greenville, Cadet Andrews will be sent to another field in the Southeast Army Air Forces Training Center for the final phase of training. Upon successful completion of this course, he will receive his “wings” and a commission as a second lieutenant in

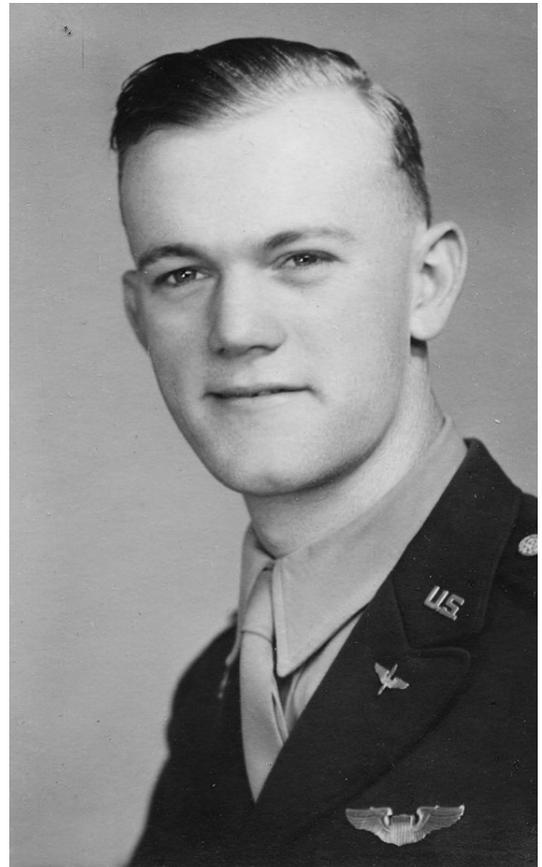


In a letter to Jackie on December 27, 1942, he wrote:

“Wednesday I will start to ‘dry behind the ears’, that is, I’ll be 20, just imagine that, it won’t be long before I am an old man.”

In December 2016 Dave turned 94 years old. For him, that prophesy came true. He would be the first to acknowledge that those years went by too quickly. Sadly, Jackie is no longer with us to reminisce. The early letters from Dave to Jackie often talk about home and family, but gradually they turn to his growing admiration for her and his boundless excitement about flying. Over the two-year period, from December 1942 to December 1944, Dave and Jackie exchanged more than 300 letters, most of which have been saved for more than 70 years and have now been donated to the 416th Bomb Group Archive in Gainesville, Missouri. These letters provide fascinating insight into the lives of two young people caught up in the war and its times. The dynamics of their long-distance courtship are gripping and the evolution of this love affair—born, nurtured and tested almost exclusively through their letters—is testament to a world we might hardly recognize or understand today. Their world leaves some of us in admiration and others in bewilderment. In any case, it was a different world than we know and one that we could well learn from in several respects.

After completing Basic Flight Training at Greenville in January of 1943, Aviation Cadet Andrews was transferred to Columbus Army Flying School at Columbus, Mississippi for Advanced Pilot Training. He graduated, earned his wings and was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant at Columbus on 25 March 1943. No “brown bar” recipient ever felt more proud, I’m sure. From Columbus, Dave was transferred to Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma and the 46th Bomb Group, 50th Bombardment Squadron. The 46th at Will Rogers was an operational training unit for Douglas A-20 Havoc crews. There, over a six-month period, he logged more than 300 hours in the Beechcraft AT-10; Douglas RD7-B, A-20B, A-20C, A-20G and North American B-25 twin engine aircraft. The A-20G was, at that time, the hottest twin engine bomber in the Army Air Corps inventory and its pilots were the envy of many. During the Oklahoma City days, the letters between Dave and Jackie became more frequent and a “relationship” was clearly Dave’s goal. Jackie was less certain, and tauntingly reserved at times. A mid-summer’s night dream, turned into something less when he proposed and Jackie waffled. She later wrote about that night:



2Lt Andrews

“...maybe I failed you most the night of July 26th. Then, I should have given you either a positive or negative reply without stopping to consider everything so thoroughly. Time only makes us act by our heads more than by our hearts. We soon start saying - ‘Oh - be sensible, millions of young girls are getting married. Why not wait until the war is over, when things are on the way to recovery?’ These are just a few of the things that have been running through my mind. They are my gremlins I guess.... I didn’t see why there was any reason for getting married as soon as you return from combat, for even then there will still be a long war ahead. To me it meant getting married, being with you as long as your furlough lasted, and seeing you go off to some base far away.”

Jackie went on in that letter to tell Dave about the wedding plans that she and her girl friends had made years earlier as youngsters. It was obvious that the war had disrupted any idyllic script that either of them might have harbored and she was gradually learning to cope with that. Despite the psychological setback of her nuptial caution, which seemed to baffle Dave, the letters continued to flow through the summer of '43. Lt. Andrews was transferred to the 671st Squadron of the 416th Bomb Group on 29 October 43. He arrived at Lake Charles Army Air Field, Louisiana literally as the Group was leaving—destined for combat training maneuvers and pre-deployment inspections at Laurel, Mississippi. The 416th was a fully operational unit



S.S. Colombie

and everyone in the Group expected that overseas assignment was on the doorstep. At Laurel, Dave logged another 40 hours in various versions of the A-20 Havoc.

the next morning. Ten days later, rattled by motion sickness and German submarines, they landed in Scotland and were transported overland by train to Wethersfield in Essex—northeast of London.

The much anticipated combat assignment came as a Christmas present with mixed blessings for men of the 416th. On 28 December 1943 they were restricted to base and on New Year's Day boarded a train at Laurel for their port of embarkation at New York City. Although the assignment was a closely guarded secret, everyone surmised that their destination was England. On 17 January 1944, the entire 416th cadre boarded the 488-foot-long S.S. Colombie and steamed out of New York Harbor with a 150 ship convoy

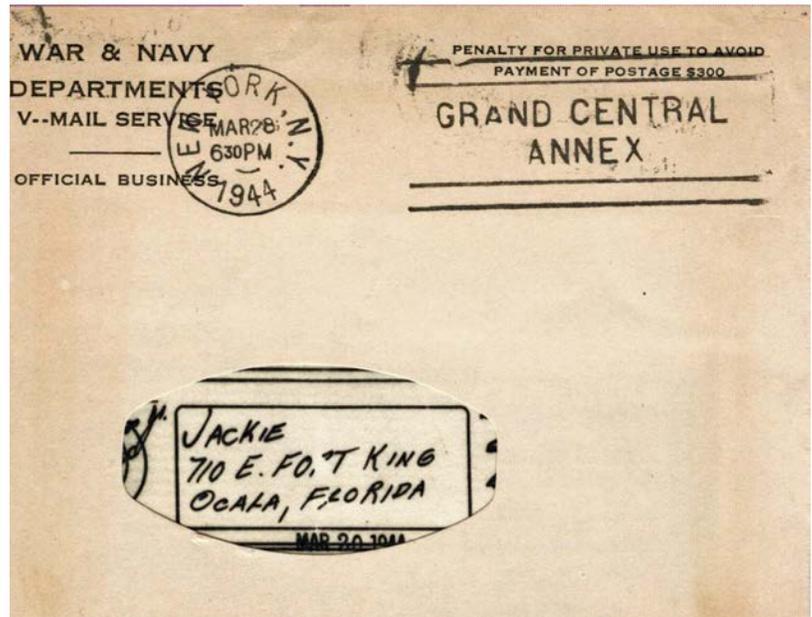
Life in a combat zone can test the strongest of men. While fear and physical hardship may be overcome with resolve, the pain of feeling alone and confused can become an even greater enemy. In that environment, strong personal bonds, often lifelong, are formed with comrades and a soldier at war quickly comes to understand the importance of “home” wherever or whatever that is to each of them. More than two thousand years ago, as Roman legions fought the so-called barbarism of their time, the philosopher Gaius Plinius Secundus (better known as Pliny the Elder) wrote: “Home is where the heart is.” Nobody knows better than a soldier in combat what a letter from home means. It's sometimes a port of rescue in a bad storm or cause for a joyful tear—maybe the remembrance of a loving smile or a stern guiding hand—always a thread or umbilical cord connecting one back to that place where things made sense. During World War II, the letter was nothing short of precious in that respect and the U.S. War Department public relations team made sure that those back home knew and remembered it.

The Group had hardly settled into their Nissen Hut quarters and were still awaiting the shipment of aircraft from the U.S. when Valentine's Day came along. Dave had few resources to find a present for Jackie, but he did have creative talent and a machine shop on the Air Base. Using the wing and propeller insignia from his collar brass and a piece of thick plexiglass from cockpit windshield fragments, Dave created a heart pendant that would make any young lady proud to wear. On 11 February 1944 he sent a V-mail with a drawing of the pendant and a poem that he had written for her on that occasion. The pendant, V-mail and a contemporary photo of Jackie wearing the pendant are preserved and on permanent display at the 416th Archive.



War Department Poster

V-Mail, short for Victory Mail, was an innovative solution to a huge logistical problem during WWII. With millions of individuals separated from their families and longing for close and constant contact, the amount of mail, in letter form alone, was staggering. Planes and ships that ferried seemingly endless supplies to Europe often carried mail back to the States with them, but that was not enough. The British had created a system called “Airgraph” that the American War Department based their V-Mail system on. At either end of the correspondence the sender would write their message on a 7”x9” form that was then photographed on microfilm for transportation. At the receiving end, the image was printed on photographic paper at 60% of the original size, about 4x5 inches, and sent to the addressee as a small but welcome correspondence. It was similar to a post card, but enclosed within an envelope for privacy and security. Of course, any mail sent from a combat zone, whether standard letter or



Typical V-Mail Envelope

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“Your Pilot’s Valentine”

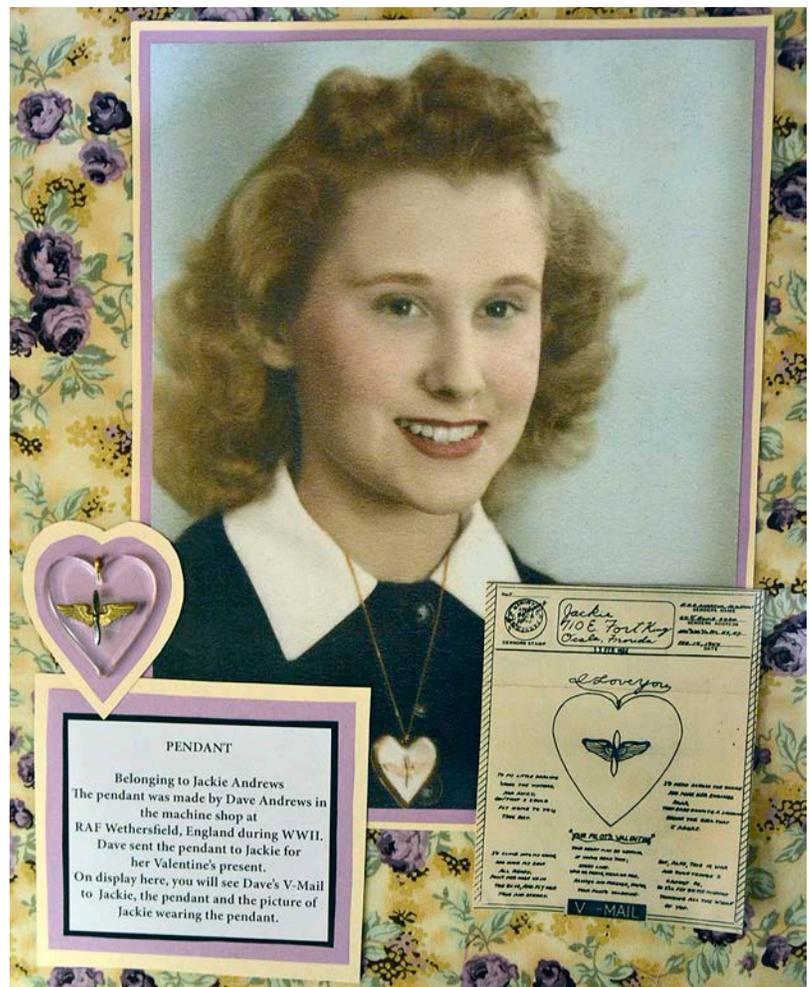
*To my little darling
‘cross the waters, far away,
Oh! That I could
fly home to you day.*

*I’d climb into my chute
and have my ship all ready,
Point her nose up in the blue
and fly her true and steady.*

*I’d head across the ocean
and make her engines roar,
Then ease down to a landing
beside the girl that I adore.*

*But alas this is war
and even things I cannot do,
So I’ll fly on my missions
thinking all the while of you.*

*Your heart may be certain
if you read this every line,
War or peace, near or far
always and forever you’re
your Pilot’s Valentine.*



V-Mail, required the inspection and approval of a unit Censor. Not all correspondence was converted to V-Mail and the majority of the Andrews letters are in fact on standard writing paper in stamped envelopes. The cost of an airmail letter via Army Post Office (APO) mail from or to someone overseas was 6¢ in 1944. V-Mail was delivered with Postage Paid indicia.

Print the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No. _____	To Lt. H.D. Andrews, Jr. O-799707 671st Bomb Sq., 416th Bomb Gr. APO # 9396 New York, N.Y.	From Jackie Marshall <small>(Sender's name)</small> 710 E. Fort King <small>(Sender's address)</small> Ocala, Florida Jan 5, 1944 <small>(Date)</small>
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(CENSOR'S STAMP)

Dearest Dave,
This is my first V-mail letter, and my first letter to go overseas. Mind being my guiney pig? Seriously, I am rather glad that my first ones go to Lt. Dave.

I am going to write your mother this afternoon for I know she will be glad to learn I have heard from you. I will write her once a week as you want me to do. Also Florence.

This afternoon I feel very much as I did when in grammar school and the principal declared a holiday for all the stores close Wednesday afternoons, which gives me a half-holiday. It can be used to some advantage - see, I begin first by writing you.

Be good, Lovingly,
"Jackie"
and
Jacquelyn

V-MAIL

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT PERMIT NO. 6

Due to the strict censorship of mail, Dave was unable to tell Jackie much about what he did in the air. Not even that his first combat mission was flown on 7 March 1944 to an enemy airfield in Conches, France. It was the group's fourth mission and the unit was not yet up to its full complement of aircraft. Consequently, several pilots would share the same plane and the interval between missions for a crew was somewhat longer than it would be later in the war. March was a relatively quiet month and Dave mentions in a V-Mail of March 14,

"I wish something exciting would happen here, the inactivity is getting me down. I do so little I have a hard time writing you a letter unless I have a letter from you to answer."

The month of April started with a lengthy period of bad weather and several missions were cancelled or recalled due to heavy cloud cover. At that point in the war, the only option for the light bombers was visual targeting by the formation leaders who flew glass-nosed versions of the A-20 with a bombardier/navigator position. With time on his hands, Dave penned a letter to Jackie on April 8th in which he bemoaned the fact that he hadn't received a letter from her:

"I received no mail from you for five days now and tomorrow the mail isn't delivered. I know it's not your fault, but it certainly doesn't make me the least bit happy. I miss you so terribly over here and I hope you miss me at least just a little."

It was a very difficult period for Dave. After his first mission, he had been criticized by one of his superiors for not flying a tight enough pattern. On a bomb run, aircraft needed to be almost wingtip-to-wingtip in order for the bomb cluster of the flight to hit the target effectively. To many, that admonition might have been water off a duck's back. For Dave, who in the past year had flown the equivalent of three times around the world, it was a devastating critique and because of the mail censoring he suffered with it alone. Jackie's letters were his port in a storm and he told her how much they meant to him.

The following day, April 9th, was Easter Sunday and a "stand down" day at Wethersfield. Dave started his letter to Jackie that day with "Hi Precious", a term he began to use more and more frequently in their correspondence as time passed. He talked about the two of them going to church together and about one future occasion in particular:

"One of these days I'm going to take you into church Miss Jacquelyn Marshall and bring you out Mrs. Harold D. Andrews, Jr. How does that sound to you? How long is it before you're going to let yourself believe that and let me know it? I've been worried about taking off to fly and not hearing those badly needed words, 'Yes Dave I'll marry you', for fear I might not get back and I'd need them to help me in a pinch when I have nothing else to go on."

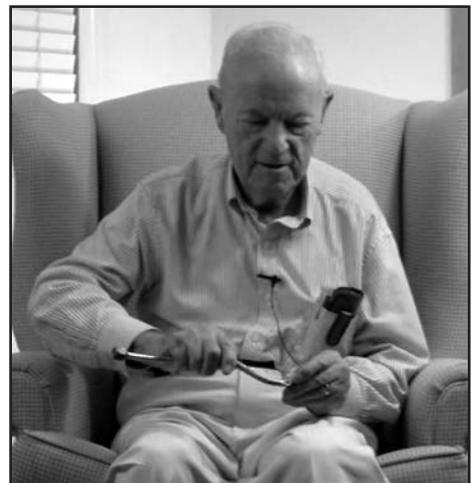
Recalling that feeling some 70 years later, he describes a conversation with the Almighty on one such occasion where he prayed, "If you want me to marry Jackie, you'll have to get me back home." Dave's letters of April 8 and April 9 were both postmarked by the U.S. Army Postal Service on 10 April 1944. On that day, the weather broke and while his letters were airborne for America, he was airborne for France. The 416th had been tasked with a mission to destroy the German "Buzz Bomb" site at Bois des Huit Rues in the French Pas de Calais and his name appeared on the loading list. It was mission number two for Lt. Andrews and number 10 for the Group. The criticism that Dave had labored over following his first mission had apparently been resolved as a case of conflicting instructions. In any case, he was assigned here to the lead flight with A-20G #43-9219. In position #6 of the standard "V" formation, he was directly behind the plane flown by West Point graduate William Edward Cramsie. The mission did not go well. By the time the formation reached the target area the site was completely obscured by cloud cover. That did not stop the German anti-aircraft batteries from seeing the approaching formation with their gun's radar controls. As

the flight leader, Major Dave Willetts circled the target area looking for a break in the clouds, the German 88mm cannons filled the sky with flak. Every one of the 36 ships in this mission received flak damage and three planes did not return to base—two of them lost with their entire crews and a third crash landing at an RAF base on the coast of England. One of those lost and never recovered was #43-9699, piloted by Bill Cramsie. When Cramsie left the formation with an engine streaming smoke, Dave moved forward into the position left vacant. At that point he was flying on the left wing of the Squadron Commander—certainly not a spot that would be assigned to someone untrusted.

The flak burst that ultimately claimed the lives of Bill Cramsie and his crew also punctured one of the hydraulic lines in Dave's brake system. When he touched down back at Wethersfield he encountered the sinking feeling in one's stomach as a brake pedal slides right to the floor with no resistance. The A-20 had an emergency air brake for just such occasions and Dave's hand hit the air bottle instinctively. The plane came to a controlled stop and all seemed well. Well almost. There were more than 30 hot planes with problems of their own lined up behind Dave single file, waiting to land on the same spot of runway. They weren't far behind, only a few seconds, and were totally unaware of Dave's little problem. They would pile up like cord wood if he dallied to think about the choices. Being painfully aware of that, and not especially fond of togetherness in that sense, he pushed the throttles ahead and taxied off the runway under his own power. That left him on a taxiway, rolling along with no primary nor emergency brake. Only one thing left to do, he drove off the taxiway into soft mud. That did the trick and his plane was none-the-worse for wear. It was a day to remember for sure. When the crew chief inspected the brake system he found the punctured piece of tubing and a handful of shrapnel which he presented to Dave as a souvenir of life in the "fast lane". More importantly at the time, Dave inherited 43-9219 that day as "his" plane and became the primary pilot in future missions. There were times in later missions where that plane was flown by other pilots and times when Dave flew different planes, but most of his combat missions were flown in this plane with SSgts Cook and Werley as gunners. The plane had been given the name "Desperate Ambrose" by persons unknown, and Dave on his next outing in that plane wrote the name "Jackie" in chalk on the port landing gear access port. Eventually "Desperate Ambrose" was erased and the plane was known thereafter as "Jackie".



Dave Andrews holding a section of the hydraulic brake line punctured by flak on Group Mission #10



43-9219 --Mission 10 to Bois des Huit Rues (left) and Mission 19 to Monceau Sur Sambre (right)

The letters kept flowing in April and their tone seems to change. Although early in the month Jackie had given him a definite “No” to the proposition of engagement, she almost immediately started to recant a little. Perhaps a letter to her from Dave’s mother on April 11th had some bearing on that:

“Dad just arrived to lunch and you never could guess what he had with him so I’ll let you in on a secret. It was a little box with one of the most beautiful set of rings I have ever seen. They came from a jeweler’s in Oklahoma City, so perhaps you can guess for whom they are intended. All you have to do is say the word and we’ll send the first one down post haste. I can think of nothing that would make Dave any happier and the rest of the family would rejoice with him. Of course you would have to wait until he got back from England for the second one.” She signed, “Lovingly, Mother Andrews”

About the same time, Dave received a letter from Jackie’s mother that offered him some encouragement. In a subsequent letter to Jackie on 28 April 1944, he wrote:

“I enjoyed your mother’s letter so very much and I learned something I didn’t know. She said she hoped I’d be one of the family someday soon. I thought your Mother didn’t even want you to think about getting married.”

So, the “M” word was definitely floating around by then and the two were talking to each other more like people in a long distance “Relationship”. Letters between their two families started appearing with some regularity. By the end of May, Jackie’s letters were opening with “Dearest Dave”. In one letter to Dave, she wrote:

“I had a very nice surprise yesterday for my birthday. Your Mother sent me the most beautiful luncheon set which she crocheted, and I just love it. It surely was sweet of her and I know she must have spent a good many hours on it. Under it she placed a small picture of you, and I can hardly take my eyes off of it.”

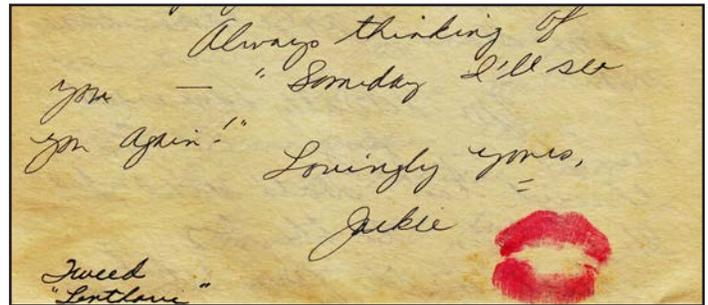
In that same letter, she talks about a possible trip to Maine and how badly she wanted to meet Dave’s family. The letter is signed with “Lots of Love” and included a Yankee Clover perfume scent. Two changes seem apparent in their correspondence. Jackie seems less guarded, even to the point of reflecting a little humor in her warmer tone. At the same time, Dave seems less pressing for an absolute commitment. To the reader of these exchanges from a window 70 years later, they seem to evolve at this point to actual love letters with heartfelt expressions and emotions in both directions. Part of this change can surely be attributed to the world around them where maturity came at an accelerated pace. On 31 May 1944, Jackie’s nineteenth birthday, she received by mail a diamond engagement ring and formal proposal of marriage from Lt. Harold D. Andrews. She accepted.

As the invasion of Europe became imminent, England had become a hotbed of activity. The 416th was born for this moment. Now at its full complement of crews and aircraft, the unit was being tasked with missions that it had superb capability to carry out. All of the German defensive positions in Normandy needed to be marginalized or eliminated before June 6th—that well kept secret date. With two missions per day, 36 planes per mission, two thousand pounds of bombs per plane, the 416th hammered bridges, supply routes, airfields, communications centers, and defensive command centers. This was warfare that the men of the 416th had not previously experienced and facing it successfully required a herculean effort from both the aircrews and their support teams on the ground. Many fine young men were lost in those days and Dave Andrews saw several of his comrades perish before his eyes. It was trauma of the first order and without question a life-changing experience.

Of course, all this activity was being followed by the American press and Jackie must have realized, like every other sweetheart, mother, sister and virtually everyone in the country, that someone very close was in harm’s way—not just theoretically, but every moment of their life. During these days, Dave had little spare time, but what he did have was filled productively. He did not drink any alcoholic beverage or socialize with

local girls, so most of his time was spent in the Group maintenance shops where he felt very much at home and probably more secure. With his background in machining parts, he contributed greatly to the success of local repair efforts. This was especially significant because some work that normally would be farmed out to depot maintenance shops, with inevitable delays, could be handled in-house and greatly reduce turn-around time. That they continued to correspond almost every day was little short of miraculous. This off-duty work in the machine shop was something that Dave could share with Jackie without any concern to the unit censors. It was also something that Jackie admired in Dave beyond the persona of an Army Air Corps bomber pilot. That summer, Jackie's letters became more frequent, much longer (26 pages in one case) and very positive in their tone. On some occasions she signed "Always" or "Lovingly", a subtle but telling sign of the change in their relationship—along with the lipstick impression from a kiss at the bottom of the page and a note that the paper's scent is her favorite "Tweed":

"There's not a bit of news around here, and like you, it is hard to know just what to write when you don't hear. That won't ever keep me from writing though for I know the importance of mail on the home front and that is nothing compared with its importance overseas"



It was as if Jackie were sensing a bad moon rising, and indeed it was. At that very moment the weight of combat was taking its toll on Dave. He had become so dependent on her letters that a week long drought of mail prompted a flood of emotions. On July 8th, he wrote:

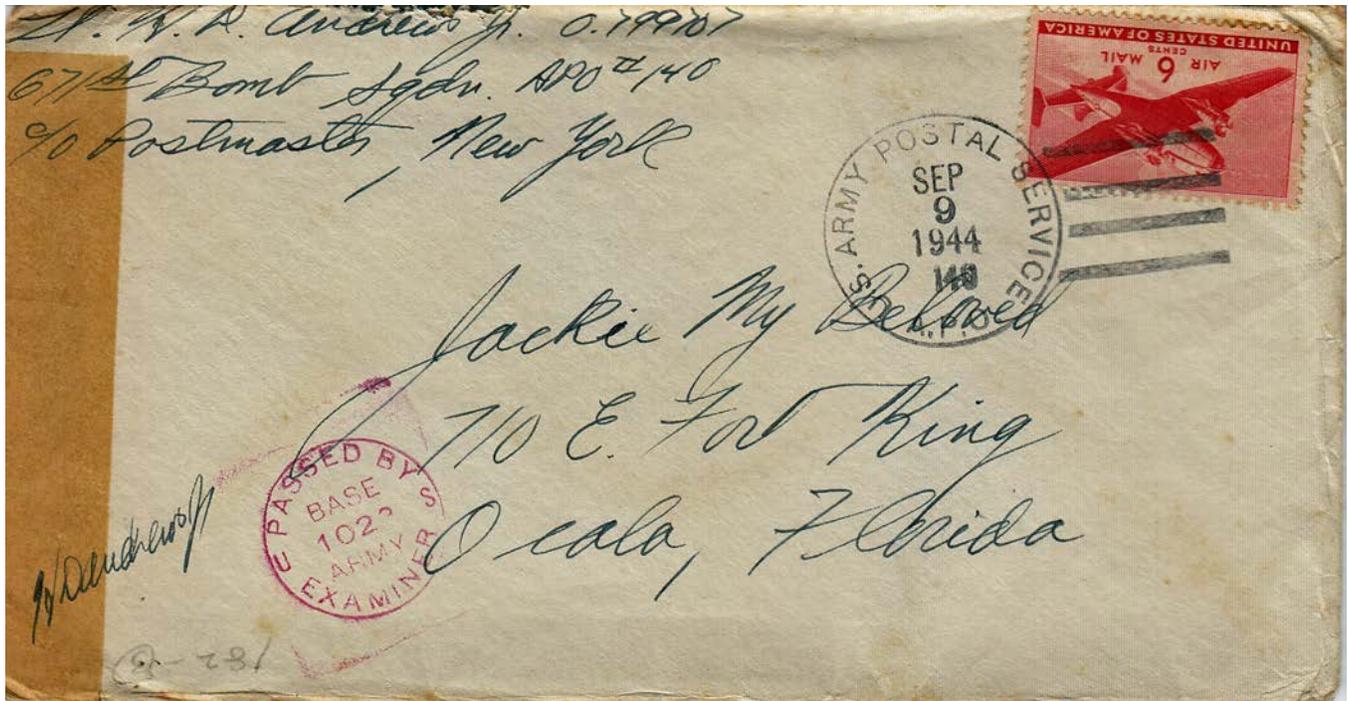
"Now what have I done wrong, it's been over a week since I heard from you last and since I'm going on a 7-day leave starting tomorrow I won't get a chance to hear from you for another week. All I can say is I'm sorry but I guess this living in the E.T.O. is changing me in spite of all I try to do to prevent it. 40 missions will sort of affect a guy no matter what he does. It's getting so I tire easily and can't think of anything interesting to write to you, I haven't written you a decent letter in over a month. Right now I'm at a loss to know what to say or think. I wish you would take me out of this sea of confusion, I know you could."

What Dave could not and probably would not say in that letter is that his week of leave was a badly needed break. Those who experienced the stress of combat day after day needed a chance to recuperate. Dave was not scheduled for a mission between July 6th and July 18th. On the 8th of July, his first actual day of leave, he wrote in a 26-page letter to Jackie:

"Hi Jackie Precious", How is My Little Darling tonight? Did I ever tell you that God brought us together and is keeping us together through the rough road of love? You see Jackie Darling I had intended to leave early on my leave this morning and therefore not be around for Mail Call but he kept putting things in my way so I couldn't leave and when Mail Call finally came I was there to receive three of the sweetest letters, and most needed letters, I could want. It changes the whole future of my leave to a happy restful one from just a heartsick stay away from camp. And your letters came none too soon, as you have already found out from last night's letter. You see, I was wrong and too often am. I hope I am forgiven, but it will reveal what a state I can get in when I have to worry about you as well as keeping myself alive. Precious, those letters were the best tonic to my troubled mind you have ever sent me and you never can send me too long or too much of your heart in any letter. Those @!?!* V-Mails are the worst thing the Army ever invented for two people in love separated by an ocean. Your letters are not censored at all and you can write always on both sides, it doesn't make good sense not to, and your lip prints are full size and the perfume is real too."*

The week of leave may have been helpful, but it couldn't possibly have done more for the health and welfare of Dave Andrews than those precious letters from Jackie. Those letters continued almost daily, sometimes two in the same day. They were the therapy that Army Air Corps could not provide. Finding writing paper and envelopes, even pens, was a problem for both of them as the demand was so great that stores could not keep writing materials in stock.

The subject matter of letters to and from Dave in the late summer of '44 was far different than in the first half of the year. After Dave and Jackie became engaged, the mixed feelings and insecurity faded. In its place came a positive dialogue about the future and feelings about family, children and life in general. The postman in Ocala was so accustomed to delivering mail to Jackie from England that Dave's addressing the envelopes to "Jackie Precious" or "Jackie My Beloved" led to some teasing.



One of Dave's extra duties was Unit Censor for the 671st Bomb Squadron. The envelope above bears the Base Examiner's seal (who had opened and resealed it) and Dave's signature as Censor in the lower left corner. Of course the letter inside, dated Sept. 8, 1944, had no violations. What it did say however was worth remembering. The first words were "My Perfect Day." In that day's mail Jackie had agreed to marry Dave as soon as he returned to the U.S. It was the statement that Dave had sought and agonized over for almost two years. This letter promised the fulfillment of his recurrent dreams. As Dave's personal life was coming together for him, the war effort was also showing positive signs. Allied forces had established a foothold in France and were pushing east toward Germany. As they moved closer to the maximum range of the light bombers, the 416th was transferred to Melun-Villaroche, a former German airfield southeast of Paris.

The A-20 had served the men and mission of the 416th well during the invasion of Europe and the early missions out of Melun. In October of 1944 the Group transitioned to the new Douglas A-26 and the A-20s were phased out. Dave flew "219" to a Salvage Depot England on 4 November 1944 for its last flight. where it was salvaged along with scores of other Havocs. One of the last things he did was remove the steering wheel hub in which he had embedded a photo of Jackie, that visual reminder during the most intense and dangerous missions kept his mind focussed on the reason he was over there and the prize he hoped to win for coming back safely. With the A-26 and the new A-20-K model, the Group could reach targets in the Rhineland and a softening of defenses in that region became their prime object.

The light bomber pilots were individually transferred back to the U.S. after they had flown 65 combat missions. Dave was nearing his point of rotation as Fall turned to Winter. Losses continued to mount



Lieutenant and Mrs. Harold D. Andrews, Jr.

*Mrs. M. E. Abney
announces the marriage of her daughter
Jacquelyn Marshall
to*

*Harold David Andrews, Jr.
Lieutenant, United States Army Air Corps
Sunday, January the twenty-first
nineteen hundred and forty-five
Fitzgerald, Georgia*

for the Group and some of them were very close and personal to Dave. Still, the angel that was his copilot for all those sorties remained on guard. Though his plane often was riddled with holes from German flak, he survived untouched. His final mission, #164 for the Group, came on 2 December 1944 to Saarlautern, Germany. Dave flew one of the new A-26 Invaders on the left wing of LtC Willetts, the 671st Commander. They were in the lead of the two-box formation, right at the point of attack. He remembered well their first meeting at Lake Charles, when Willetts was still a Captain. Here, barely a year later, his "boss" was a Lieutenant Colonel. It was a long hard road between those two events. Across from Dave on the right wing of Willetts was newly promoted Captain Joe Meagher, of the 668th. Like Dave, Joe was an excellent pilot. That day, he was flying one of the A-20K glass-nosed aircraft as "deputy" to Willetts. It was expected to be a "milk run", but they had no sooner crossed the front lines and entered Germany when an intense flak barrage struck. Joe's plane was hit and he lost an engine as well as all feeling in his leg. He dropped out of the formation and headed back to friendly territory where he made a miraculous crash landing. All of the crew survived, but Joe was badly

injured and was returned to the States for treatment. Visions of the past year must have crossed Dave's mind as he once again watched a plane right next to him meet with disaster—it was happening far too often. But, as they say in combat, his number was not up and Dave returned safely once again.

Following a short trip home on the SS Santa Maria, he arrived in Boston on 11 January 1945 where wedding bells were waiting to chime. That long-awaited event took place on January 21st as he and Jackie tied the knot in Fitzgerald Georgia, opening a new chapter in their long lives together.