

The Juno Letters

Book #1 - The Juno Letters

L.W. Hewitt

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Dedication

The Juno Letters is dedicated to my mother, Bonnie Hewitt. She was my inspiration, my muse. You gave a gift to your family that can only be repaid by passing it along to others. We miss you, Mom.

Disclaimer and Credits

This is a work of fiction. Although the context of the novel is based on known events, license has been taken to fit the story. The characters and situations are creations of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to persons or historical events is strictly circumstantial. Technical information where not attributed is either freely available from public sources or imaginary.

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Cover Photograph

Infantrymen in a Landing Craft Assault (LCA) going ashore from H.M.C.S. PRINCE HENRY off the Normandy beachhead, France, 6 June 1944.
Photographer: Dennis Sullivan
Canada. Dept. of National Defence, Library and Archives Canada; PA-132790

Back Cover Photograph

Infantrymen of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles in Landing Craft Assault (LCAs) en route to land at Courseulles-sur-Mer, France, 6 June 1944.
Photographer: Unknown
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The Letters

*Hostile armies may face each other for years, striving for
the victory which is decided in a single day.*

- Sun Tzu

Present Day

A small package was left by a delivery service on the front porch. I take my morning coffee at a downtown café so I was not at home when it was delivered. I call the café my “office” - a small table next to a giant wood stove in a former “Gentlemen’s Club” - a prohibition term for pub - that serves as the pool hall, bar, and restaurant for a small historic hotel called The Olympic Club. This is where I like to begin my day.

Today was quiet. My waitress brought me coffee in one of the “old cups,” reserved for regulars like myself. The manager had decided to spruce up the place by playing classical music (a good thing) and changing to

large teacups for coffee (not so good). They were clumsy to hold and the coffee cooled too quickly. When the regulars revolted by bringing their own coffee cups, he relented and kept a small supply of the old cups for us troublemakers.

I finished some routine work - checked my email, reviewed some client notes, and chatted briefly with one of the customers about the massive urinals in the men's room. These things resemble a porcelain coffin standing on end and are plumbed with ancient copper pipes with pressure valves attached, circa 1920 or so. There is a window in the door so people can take pictures without having to enter (another good thing if you have an aversion to infectious diseases). Centralia, Washington is likely the only town where a men's room is the main tourist attraction.

After coffee I took a short walk around the corner to the bank and paid the mortgage, then drove to the local grocery to select something for dinner, then home. The package was waiting for me on the front steps. It was nondescript, irregularly shaped - a bundle wrapped in plain brown paper. The return address caught my attention - the writing was in French.

Courseulles-sur-Mer

I had never heard of Courseulles-sur-Mer, and knew no one in France for that matter. I had travelled to Europe only once, to Germany to visit my daughter and two grandsons. I have an interest in World War II history and worked in a family visit with trips to Munich, Berchtesgaden, and Berlin. I've never been to France.

I sat the package on my desk and went to pour myself a cup of coffee. When I sat down, I first typed "Courseulles" into my browser's search field. The first

return link piqued my curiosity.

COURSEULLES-SUR-MER Calvados - 18 km north of Caen ... In Courseulles-sur-Mer the Germans had fortified the mouth of the river Seulles. On 6 June 1944, ...

June 6, 1944. D-Day. The Invasion of Europe. I clicked on the link and read the first paragraph ...

In Courseulles-sur-Mer the Germans had fortified the mouth of the river Seulles. On 6 June 1944, at 7:45 a.m. the amphibious tanks of the 1st Hussars were launched in the ocean three kilometers from the coast; many of them sank because of the hard swell. Those that succeeded in reaching the sand of the beach immediately opened fire on the German positions. They enabled the 7th Brigade to liberate Courseulles-sur-Mer in a few hours. By the evening of 6 June, 21,500 men and 3,200 vehicles had landed on Juno Beach.

As an American I have often heard the stories and watched movies of the D-Day assaults on Omaha Beach and Point du Hoc by the American army. Admittedly, even though I was an amateur historian of World War II, I had spent little time studying the action on the other landing beaches. Just what connection was there between this package and the Canadian assault on Juno Beach?

I cut the tape holding the paper package together. It consisted of two bundles of old letters tied by coarse twine. Several of the envelopes had been opened and the letters appeared to have been recently read and

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refolded. There was a cover letter enclosed, and a name in the first paragraph immediately caught my attention. Henry Anderson. And further down, a date - 1918.

Henry W. Anderson, the Reverend H.W. Anderson, was my grandfather. He had served in France in WWI, and later served as an army chaplain in the Pacific during WWII. He retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Grandpa “Andy” had been the chaplain of the Veterans Administration hospital in Vancouver, Washington when I was a small boy. My family used to take the train from Tacoma to Vancouver to visit. He and “Nana” Lucile lived in the old Fort Vancouver Officer’s Row - vintage Victorian homes that housed the post’s officers.

The cover letter was in English.

To: Monsieur Lawrence Hewitt

Centralia, Washington USA

Dear M. Hewitt,

Recently our city demolished a small cottage on the outskirts of Courseulles-sur-Mer. The construction company found a metal container with these letters inside.

One set of letters is addressed to Henry W. Anderson in Tacoma, Washington. The other set contains letters written by the same Henry Anderson from several addresses in both the United States and

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overseas. The time frame is 1922 - 1944. I must apologize for opening and reading several letters, but we were trying to identify their owner.

We discovered through U.S. Army records there was a Henry Anderson stationed in Tours, France, in 1918. A further search of public records indicated he had a daughter named Bonnie who married John Hewitt of Tacoma, Washington. They had a son named Lawrence. Records indicate both John and Bonnie are deceased, but we traced a Lawrence Hewitt who had lived in Tacoma to Centralia, Washington, and surmised this may be the correct family.

If these are the letters meant for your grandfather, please accept them with our compliments. If not, please return them to me. It is our desire to see they are forwarded to the correct party.

Yours sincerely,

M. Frédéric Pouille

Mayor, Courseulles-sur-Mer, France

I placed the letter aside and cut the twine binding the groups of letters. The first group was written in French by “Andy” Anderson to “Antoine.” The dates covered a span of some twenty years, the last one dated 1942.

The second group, also in French, was addressed from “Antoine” to Henry W. Anderson. They were

sealed, except for a few opened by the city, but never posted. There was no indication as to Antoine's last name and no return address.

All the envelopes were old and yellowed, obviously from the same period. I carefully slit them open with a pocketknife and removed the letters, organizing them by date. I examined the latest one first. It was from Antoine, but the writing was shaky and uncertain.

I opened the French - English translator on my computer and typed in small pieces of the text. Although the translation was a little clumsy, eventually the meaning of the letter came through. It read,

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6 Jun 1944

My Dear Andy,

This will be my last letter, for I will die this day, I am certain of it. I wish only to be remembered as a patriot, but that cannot be.

Pray for me. You are my only friend.

Antoine

R

Chapter 1

The Great War

*It was called The Great War.
It would last four agonizing and murderous years,
and change the lives of its children
- and their children's children - forever.*

The bow crashed into the trough of the giant wave with a shudder. Confined below decks, the company of soldiers suffered through the cold and damp air, fouled by the rancid smell of vomit. Private Henry W. Anderson wrote in his journal,

Jan 16, 1918 Wed
Conditions rotten beyond words.
Air damp and cold.
Feeding fishes.

The RMS Carpathia, famous for rescuing the survivors of the Titanic disaster in 1912, served as a transport between America and England, ferrying troops for the Great War raging in Europe.

The year is 1918. The first leg of the trip to Halifax was cold and rough. Despite the ship's size, 541 feet overall and 64 feet in beam, it was tossed violently in the rough seas.

Arriving finally after three days, the great liner anchored at the head of Halifax harbor awaiting the other vessels that would form a convoy to Glasgow, Scotland. The weather cleared somewhat, and on January 19, the day after making port, the soldiers were allowed on deck.

“Nice to get a bit of fresh air, eh, Andy?”

Lee Gray was from Chicago, just eighty miles as the crow flies from Andy’s family hometown of Rockford, Illinois, and had befriended the 21 year old Henry “Andy” Anderson of Santa Cruz while struggling to keep the passage rations down in the rough seas. The two young American recruits strolled the deck together, their first time at sea.

“I cannot imagine what the trip across to England will be like after that,” Andy replied, happy to breath the clean harbor air and stretch his legs on deck. “Will you look at that!”

While the European war seemed remote, there was ample evidence of the conflict even here on the coast of Canada. A massive explosion had rocked this port in Nova Scotia just over a month before when the munitions ship Mont-Blanc filled with 3000 tons of explosives bound for the war and the Belgian relief ship Imo collided. A fire started and after the crew abandoned ship, the Mont-Blanc exploded, laying waste to two and a half square miles of the city in a mostly working-class section. Two thousand were killed, and more than six thousand wounded.

The men stared in silence at the giant debris field that once had been a part of the town.

For a young man from Rockford, this had already been the trip of a lifetime. Rockford was located northwest of Chicago, and had been populated by industrious Swedish and Irish immigrants. Among them was Lars Johan Anderson of Harnesta village, Munktorp Parish, Wästmanland, Sweden. The son of Lars Anders made his living repairing shoes in his own repair business and running the village’s commercial scales.

Andy Anderson had left home and moved to the San Francisco Bay area in April 1917 just three days before President Wilson declared war on Imperial Germany. His parents visited him in California, and so liked the area that by July his father had sold his business and moved west to San Jose. Andy's mother Karolina, sister Ruby, and brother Sam followed by mid-September.

R

The letters were all written in Andy's schooled style, but in French. Certain phrases that I could understand caught my eye. It would take a while to piece all this together, especially using my computer translator. My first thought - who was Antoine?

I remember my mother telling me Grandpa Andy had served in France during World War I, but no one in the family really knew what he had done or where he had been. My mother had compiled a comprehensive family history that included extensive genealogy and family scrapbooks, organized by family name on both my maternal and paternal sides. I would start there.

The histories were stored in boxes in the attic. After rummaging around in the dust I managed to pull out several boxes filled with binders, some with photos and letters and another marked "Anderson, Hewitt, Kelso, and Greene; Genealogy, History." The Hewitt line was the least known, the genealogy records stopping with an adoption. The Greene line was the longest, stretching as I remembered multiple generations before the Revolutionary War. My father's mother was a Greene, and Nathaniel Greene, a friend of George Washington's and a famous general in our Revolutionary War, was a direct ancestor. The Kelso line was Irish.

On my Mother's side I was Swedish and English, an Anderson on one side and a Bond on the other. My Grandpa Andy's parents had immigrated to America in the Northern European migrations of the late 19th century, and had settled in the Midwest. There was nothing even remotely close to an Antoine, on either my grandfather's or grandmother's side. I found nothing in the genealogy or the photo and letter binders either that gave me a clue who Antoine could be.

"Did you check the old box on the closet shelf?" my wife asked. I wasn't exactly sure what she meant, but on looking further I found an old wooden box with a keyed lock on the front. Inside was a lift out shelf, and a separate compartment in the lid. It contained some old buttons, an old Boy Scout badge, and other little mementoes. Nothing of relevance to my current search, but I found my attention wandering as I carefully touched these precious little objects my mother had so carefully saved.

Lifting the shelf out, I found some old books and what appeared to be journals. There were old maps of Paris and Tours, France. Beneath these, I hit pay dirt. There was an old journal stamped with the title, "A Soldier's Diary." It was my Grandpa Andy's personal diary from World War I.

I carefully opened the first page, and read,

Nov 28, 1917
Quit job at Fageol Motors.
Enlisted 660 Market St.

R

Young Andy had taken his first job at the American Can Company in San Francisco, but soon moved to a

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