

Philinda's Voyage to Lagos

December 1942 – February, 1943

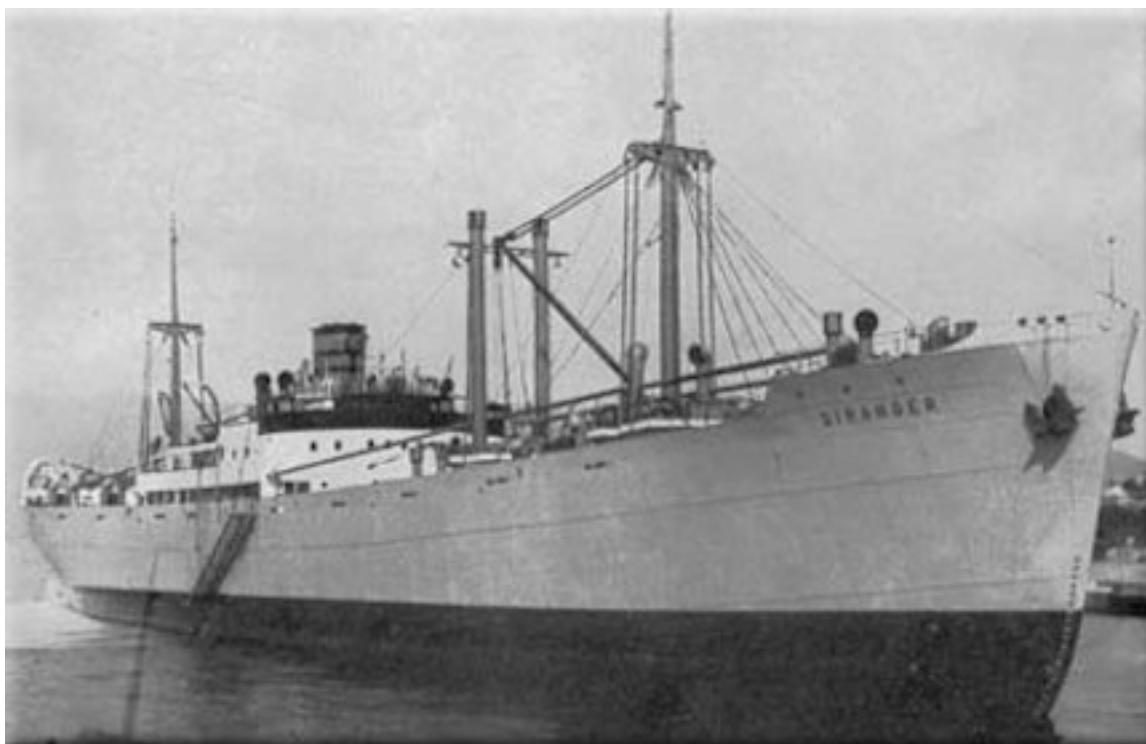


Photo 1: M/S Siranger
(Source: <https://www.warsailors.com/singleships/siranger.html>)

Laurence J. Krieg

May 10, 2020

(Mothers' Day)

Contents

Philinda’s Voyage to Lagos	1
Introduction	3
Shipping in World War II	4
Norwegian Freighters.....	5
What We Know About the Journey.....	6
The Vessel: M/S Siranger	6
The Voyage	7
Letters	8
Letter from William to Philinda, October 2, 1942.....	8
Telegram from Philinda to William, December 26, 1942.....	10
Telegram from William to Philinda, December 29, 1942.....	11
Letter from Philinda to her family, January 11, 1943.....	12
Note from Philinda to her family. Undated, probably January 11, 1943.....	15
Letter from Philinda to her mother’s sister Josephine. February 3, 1943	16
Letter from Philinda to her family, February 1, 1943.....	17
Epilogue	22

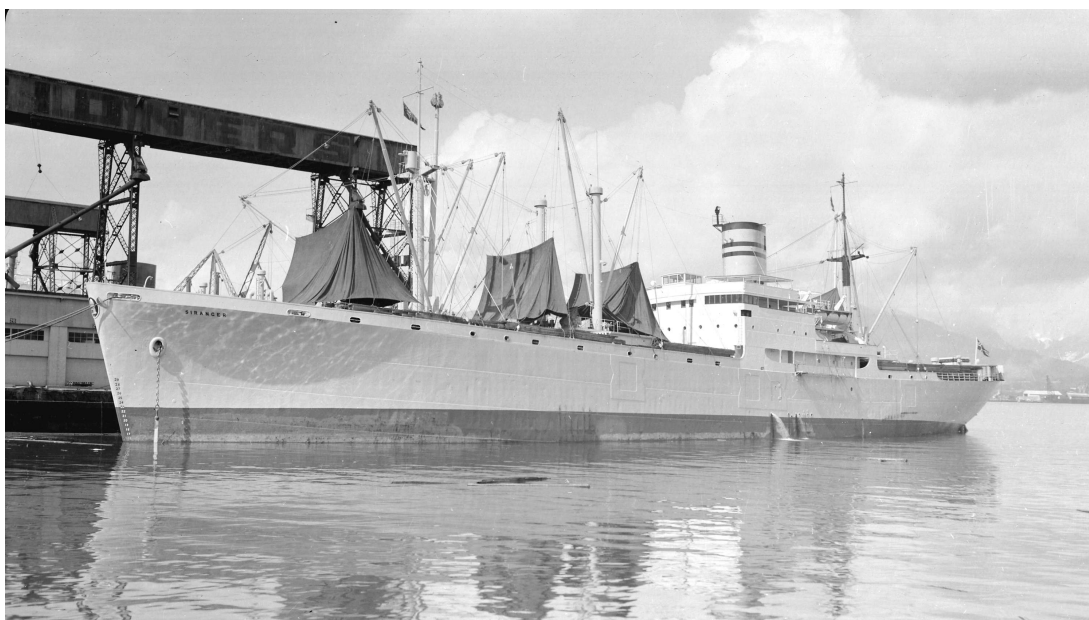


Photo 2: M/S *Siranger* successor (built 1944) in Vancouver
 (Source: Walter E. Frost, <https://searcharchives.vancouver.ca/m-s-siranger>)

Introduction

Laura Philinda Jones met Foreign Service Officer William Laurence Krieg in Lisbon, Portugal, during the summer of 1941. She had been in Paris since 1939, while he had been in Milan, Italy, since 1940. Both were being evacuated from Axis territories, waiting in neutral Portugal for their next destination. After pledging each other their undying love, Philinda returned to the United States while William was sent to serve in the American Consulate at Lagos, Nigeria. There followed fourteen months of dogged efforts to re-unite and marry. William was not allowed to return to the U.S., and it took them over a year to get Philinda permission to go to Lagos – followed by some months trying to find a way for her to travel there. Air travel could not be arranged, so they reluctantly agreed to a perilous voyage over seas patrolled by German U-Boats. This is the story of that voyage, as told in Philinda's records and the chronicles of World War II shipping.



Photo 3: William in the apartment at American Consulate, Lagos
(Source: family archives)



Photo 4: Philinda's Passport Photo (Source: family archives)

Shipping in World War II

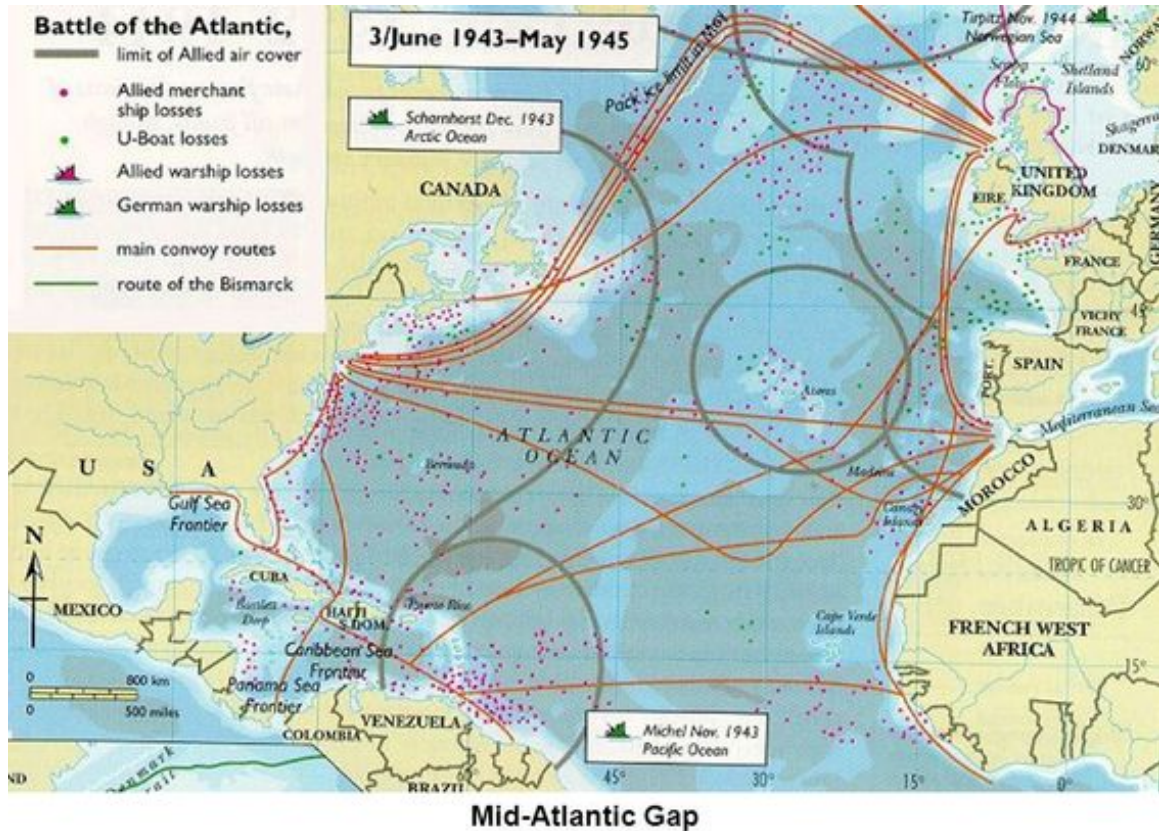
It's well known that submarine warfare reached a high level during World War II. Map 1 shows the locations of ships sunk during 1942, the year immediately preceding Philinda's voyage:



Map 1. Source: <https://www.dvsw2.ca/navy/1942/images/1942atlantic.jpg>

In order to minimize the risk, Allied Forces organized convoys of merchant vessels protected by naval vessels. Convoys were organized by route, as illustrated on Map 2.

Together with Map 2, the Wikipedia article "[List of Allied convoys during World War II by region](#)" gives us a good indication of the route followed by the ship on which Philinda traveled.



Map 2: Principal convoy routes, 1943-1945

Norwegian Freighters

We know, both from family oral history and from indirect information in letters, that Philinda traveled on a Norwegian freighter under contract to the Barber Line, also known as the American West Africa Line. Neither the name of the ship nor the date and port of departure appear to be recorded in the family archives.

The reason for this lack of information is the submarine threat. The oft-repeated slogan, “Loose lips sink ships” was taken very seriously in 1942 – especially where journeys of loved ones were involved. So Philinda never sent the name of her ship to William, instead only hinting that he should ask the Barber Line representative in Lagos.

Norway has been a nation of sea-farers since the Middle Ages. When Norway was occupied by German forces in 1939, hundreds of Norwegian vessels were trading all around the world. News that their country had been conquered inspired most of their owners and captains to seek service with the Allies in their fight against the Axis. This resulted in a heroic – often sacrificial – effort by Norwegian sailors to keep the Allies supplied by sea.

There is a Web site commemorating this effort: “[1939-1945 Norwegian Merchant Fleet](#)”. It contains and links to extensive archives of the many ships in this service, including photos of many vessels and a database of their sailings, port by port, including dates of call, during the war. All photos of Norwegian vessels in this document are on (or linked to) this site, and called at Lagos in 1942-3.

What We Know About the Journey

We know that immediately prior to leaving the United States, Philinda stayed with her mother, Dorothy Middleton, at 761 Scotland Road, Orange, New Jersey. There don't appear to be any photos of this house in the family archives, so I include here a Google Street View photo from 2019.

Philinda refers in her letters to her father, John W. Campbell, Sr., accompanying her to the ship. It was docked somewhere in the Port of New York and New Jersey.



Photo 5: 761 Scotland Road, Orange, New Jersey
(Source: Google Street View, 2019)

The Vessel: M/S Siranger

Information on the Norwegian Merchant Fleet site (<https://www.warsailors.com/singleships/siranger.html>) allows us to identify the vessel on which Philinda sailed, Motor Ship *Siranger*. (Probably pronounced [si'raŋər]) Here are the details:

Launched: 1937, Bergen, Norway; Entered service: July, 1939.

Manager: Westfal-Larsen & Co. A/S, Bergen

Captain: Amund Utne; First Mate: Halvor Moy

Tonnage: 5393 gt, 8600 tdwt.

Dimensions: 400' x 55.6' x 28.6'.

Machinery: 5 cyl. 2T single acting, 3400 ihp, 13.5 knots.

Signal Letters: LKFX

Sunk: October 22, 1943, by German submarine U-155 (no casualties). A detailed account of the attack, sinking, and subsequent events – together with much other information – is given on the Web page linked above.

Successor: *Siranger* bulk cargo ship, also managed by Westfal-Larsen & Co. Built 1990s. (Photo 6)



Photo 6: Siranger II departing Vestfold og Telemark, Norway
(Source: Westfal-Larsen & Co.)

The Voyage

- December 22, 1942:
Siranger sails from New York City to Guantanamo Bay Naval base, Cuba, as part of Convoy NG 331 (New York to Guantanamo)
- December 29, 1942:
Siranger arrives Guantanamo and departs the same day for Trinidad in company with Convoy GAT 33 (Guantanamo to Trinidad via Aruba)
- January 4, 1943:
Siranger arrives Port of Spain, Trinidad; awaits convoy
- January 15, 1943:
Siranger departs Trinidad with Convoy TB 2 (Trinidad to Bahia, Brazil)
- January 17, 1943:
Siranger detaches from convoy TB 2 to sail independently to Lagos
- February 4, 1943:
Siranger arrives Lagos (probably late night)
- February 5, 1943:
Philinda disembarks, is met by William. Stays overnight at home of Consul General Shantz.

William and Philinda were married the next day, February 6, 1943.



Photo 7: Broad Street, Lagos, near American Consulate.
(Source: postcard in family archives)

Letters

Many letters were written by William and Philinda during this period. Here are a few of the most relevant to the journey.

Letter from William to Philinda, October 2, 1942

[1942-10-02 L-110 WLK to LPK]

FILE NO. 36

AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL

Lagos, Nigeria; October 2, 1942

Darling;

I was good and surprised to learn from your letter of September 18th that you were leaving PAA and going to New York, but I am very glad you did, as it will have put you in a good position to take advantage of the situation which I hope has been opened up as a result of my cable to you of today and the cable which the Barber Line is sending to Mr. Finch.

As you probably know by now, I learned that a fast ship would be leaving New York soon for this coast, and Captain Roberts, General Agent for the Barber Line here, whom you will soon meet, said that he considers it as safe a way to travel as any in these days. He said furthermore that he didn't think it would be a good idea for you to have to stop over in Bolama or Bessau because they were terrible dumps of places and he wasn't sure you would be safe there. I thought you could stay with Pan American, but I am not actually sure that this would be possible. So I asked him to cable Mr. Finch and have him try to put you on this vessel, which I am told is very comfortable. For all I know, you may have left before receiving this letter. I have told Cap that I would pay your fare here, so that should leave you plenty of money to buy clothes and the other things that we will need. I have already send a cable to the British Passport Control Officer in New York authorizing the issuance of your visa, and you should also have visas for Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, in transit.

So now perhaps you have enough positive action to satisfy you, my impatient darling. I will be terribly worried about you, and I will either come up to meet you at your disembarkation point or arrange with the Barber Line agent to see that you have a place to stay. Right now I see no reason why I shouldn't be able to come up to meet you, unless Mr. Shantz goes away and leaves me in charge of the office. However, before you leave, I hope you will get your father's permission, as I don't want to get off on the wrong foot with your family.

By the way, they must think it very funny that I haven't written to them. You remember that I asked you to send me his first name and address so I could write. If you haven't done so already, please do so right away, as I don't want to risk making him any angrier than he probably is already. Your mother has been hearing from me through my letters to you while she was staying in Miami, so although I haven't actually addressed a separate letter to her, I don't feel quite so bad about that. If she would like a letter, I will be glad to write you, but right now it takes all my time just writing to you. Please give her my best love in the meantime.

One of the advantages of traveling by sea is that you will be able to take most of your baggage with you. You can consult with your father and/or step-father as to whether they think it should

be insured against war risk. I have heard that the rates have recently been reduced, and if so it might worth while. Before, it was so expensive that it hardly paid.

I was a little surprised at your saying that I had only mentioned that you should bring towels and asking whether there was anything else. On page two of my letter of August 27th I mentioned two light blankets, and a dozen sheets and pillow cases. In addition, I think we ought to have a set of inexpensive china to serve 12 persons, glassware, including water, highball and cocktail glasses, and some cheap silverware. I could get the latter wholesale at a greatly reduced price, but I have been afraid to order anything for fear you wouldn't like it. You should tell the seller to have it packed very carefully for export. If you have any particular kind of soap you like, bring some along. We have some soap which is much like Ivory, and there is some soap locally made, but it is not up to American standards. It would be nice to have an extra pair of cheap men's swimming trunks to [lend?] when we have guests at the beach. A cocktail recipe book would be handy, although we lack most of the ingredients. I see I mentioned in the other letter that you should bring all the sanitary equipment you will need, and, since we won't want to have any babies until after the war, or at least until after we leave Lagos, better bring along whatever articles you need so that that we don't. This is one of the things it would be nice to talk over in person instead of writing it in a letter, but we have no choice.

When Jesse Boynton heard that you had left Miami, he suggested that you go to see the man to whom he wrote a memorandum about you – Mr. John C. Schroeter, PAA-Atlantic Division at La Guardia Field. He thinks that might do some good, if you have time. I'm afraid I misled you into thinking there was some chance of your being employed by PAA-Africa. I have never for a moment considered such a thing. If you work for PAA here, it will be the Atlantic Division. PAA-Africa will soon be taken over by the Army, so no wonder their representative in Miami wasn't very helpful.

Well, darling, they are holding up a pouch for this letter, so I must finish it. I wish mail left oftener than once a week, so I could write you more frequently. One last word, dearest. Be sure to wire me before you leave. Just say, "On the way", or something like that, so I will know and can make arrangements to meet you or have you met at your destination. I am terribly excited at the prospect that you may be able to come soon; I do love you so much, darling, I can hardly wait until you step off the gangplank into my arms. Please be careful, dearest love.

Your William



Photo 8: American Consulate, Lagos, Nigeria
(Source: family archives)

Telegram from Philinda to William, December 26, 1942

[1942-12-26 L-111 LPK to WLK]

Printed in England. Aug. 1941. (9,000 pads) L-111 . 5/-168

CABLE AND WIRELESS LIMITED.

(INCORPORATED IN ENGLAND.)

The first line of this Telegram contains the following particulars in the order mentioned: Office of Origin, Number of Profs., Letters and Number of Messages, Office of Destination, Words, Date, Time handed in and Official Instructions—if any.

Circuit.	Clerk's Name.	Time Received.	
T1 ZBI	AOB	0159	
		26 12 42	

CABLE ROUTES ———
WIRELESS ROUTES - - - - -

OFFICE OF ISSUE
0020

TAWL82BG NEWYORK 24 20

NLT WILLIAM KRIEG AMERICAN CONSULATE LAGOS =
CONSULT BARBER LINE CONCERNING LAST PARAGRAPH
OF YOUR LETTER NUMBER 36 MERRY CHRISTMAS I LOVE YOU
PHILINDA JONES.

MARK YOUR REPLY *"Via Imperial"*

NO ENQUIRY RESPECTING THIS TELEGRAM CAN BE ATTENDED TO WITHOUT PRODUCTION OF THIS COPY.

(Note that this was sent four days after her departure from New York, probably by her father, for security reasons.)

Telegram from William to Philinda, December 29, 1942

[1942-12-29 L-112 WLK to LPK]

Printed in England. Aug. 1941. (70,000 pads.) **Form for Reduced Rate Plain Language Telegram.** 5/-85B

CABLE AND WIRELESS LIMITED. L-112 p1
(INCORPORATED IN ENGLAND.)

CABLE ROUTES
WIRELESS ROUTES

No.	Charge.	OFFICE STAMP AND DATE.	Clerk's Name, No. and Circuit and Time forwarded.
Official Instructions <i>"Via Imperial"</i>			
No. Words	Time	Instructions to be Signalled.	

NOTICE—This Telegram cannot be accepted unless the Declaration at the foot of the Telegram is previously filled in and signed by the Sender. The indication LC, DLT, NLT, ELT or GLT must be inserted between the double hyphens before the address of this Telegram, which indication is charged for as one word.

**TO = NLT = PHILINDA JONES 761 SCOTLANDROAD
ORANGE (New Jersey)**

**GOOD LUCK DARLING A HAPPIER YEAR IS COMING MY LOVE
GOES WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU ARE**

WILLIAM KRIEG

I hereby declare that the text of the above Telegram is entirely in plain language (the language used being.....), that it is written in accordance with the general usage of the language, and that it does not bear any meaning other than that which appears on the face of it. I request that the Telegram may be forwarded on the faith of the foregoing declaration and subject to the conditions printed on the back hereof by which I agree to be bound.

Signature of Sender **William L. Krieg** Telephone No. **305**
Address **American Consulate General, Lagos.** **Dec. 29, 1942**
(Not to be telegraphed) * State here the language used. (P.T.O.)

TO PREVENT MISTAKES ATTENTION IS CALLED TO THE IMPORTANCE OF LEGIBLE WRITING.

(This is the form for people to submit at the telegraph office giving information to be sent. We don't have the telegram printed on arrival in the United States. Probably Philinda never received it, having left several days earlier.)

Letter from Philinda to her family, January 11, 1943

[1943-01-11 L-113 LPK to JWCf]

January 11, 1943

Dear People,

When we got here the first thing we all wanted to do was get off after so many days in rather cramped quarters, and so little exercise. Not that everything hadn't been just as comfortable and happy as possible, but just that the best of things can become stale after a long period. And to think that a longer period still is in store for us! But I think that we all will have enjoyed the first part best, first because it was all new and different, and everything was interesting, second because there were more people around than there will be later. My friends Ensign Donovan and Commander Weems have left us and gone back home, much to everyone's sorrow. The Commander is from Tennessee, and is quite famous in Navigation circles for his invention of the Weems system of Navigation, and of the Weems Bubble sextant. If he had come all the way with us I am sure I could have applied for my Master's license and become a Captain myself, because I heard so much navigation talk. All we heard morning and night was the "buebble sextant" as the captain pronounces it in his Norwegian accent. But the Commander is really a card, and made the whole thing infinitely more pleasant, especially with his droll tales of the old rootin' tootin' days in the Tennessee mountains when men were men and you could cut a man's jugular vein without angering him, just so you didn't get real mean and call him a bad name. P. V. H. Weems himself is a big, strong man of fifty five or so, Annapolis, Olympic wrestler not so very long ago, bald pate with reddish side whiskers that come way down on his appropriately weather-beaten cheeks like the old admirals you see in 19th century portraits. The life of every party, and co-designer with Edward Link of one of the famous Link trainers for students of aviation.

The Captain was far famed in peace time all the way from San Pedro to Buenos Aires as "El Capitán Loco". Full of vigor and crazy ideas for amusing himself. Now we are here he has taken up the monstrous custom of waking all the non-missionary crowd up at all hours of the night and early morning for a nocturnal bull session, or motor boat ride, or heaven knows what. We have all taken up one of his ideas, which at first seemed gruesome to us: he woke us all up at dawn one morning for a shower under the hose outside, in our bathing suits. Now we are doing it later, just before breakfast, but it turned out to be quite a good idea after all, although that first morning we were ready to use a blunt instrument on him. Naturally, he is nervous and fidgety constantly, so while we are here he is bound to amuse himself as much as possible and forget the past and future. Three years without seeing his wife and family is wearing on him. He is a great one for teasing the ladies, and half-shocking the missionaries, whom we have found to be very nice people and not hard to get along with at all, in spite of our first fears.

The champion entertainer of the list is Mr. Sokall, the gentleman whom father saw in New York one day, and about whom he remarked that he looked as though he could tell a good story. Quite correct! He has an amazing dry wit, and when he is in form no one can equal him. Mr. Sokall came home on the *Drottningholm* from Italy last June. He had lived there for fourteen years, and previously to that in China for fifteen, so you can imagine that along with his natural gift for stories, he also has a fund of interesting and different ones to tell.

I hope Mr. Donovan carries out his promise to bring you some coffee. I liked him a lot, because he was very kind to me all along, and here he took me around to officer's clubs and beaches until he

left; also because he has a most amazing talent for living pleasantly and enjoying everything. If you know him long enough, you'll discover that he is very intelligent, and if you know one of his friends (such as Commander Weems) you'll discover that he went to Harvard, otherwise you won't. We spent several very gay days at a beach not far from the town, where the bachelor officers have taken over things entirely. There is a lovely club house on a hill overlooking the sea, with clumps of bamboo, palm trees, banyans, and umbrella trees all around; a flagged terrace in front of the club, with a little pool complete with fountain in the middle. It's lovely to sit there at sunset, and watch the red sky outline the rocky crags that form the little beach about a hundred feet below you. You can have supper out there under umbrellas, too, or sit in the sun with a drink after you've climbed up the path from the beach. The water is clear and green, and if you are strong minded it's possible to dive down from one of the rocks into ten or twelve feet of water and untold numbers of small tropical fish.

The first day here I went around to PAA, and saw my old friend and exacting boss Mr. Art Nugent, whom mother met in Miami. He is as nervous as ever, but seems to be doing very well by the old company. He tells me they have more passenger service girls here than they do in Miami, which is difficult to understand considering how very few women there are here. A girl is a particular *rara avis*, so that every time I go into one of the clubs I am showered with flattering attention, which would perhaps be a trifle more flattering if I didn't know how very few young white women there are here.

The other night the Commander gave a big party at the Army officers club in town, after a good dinner. I wore one of my fancy dresses (mother will realize immediately that it was the one with rhumba ruffles) and the mantilla handkerchief that Rufus gave the Christmas before last. The Commander is a fine dancer, and the boys had a juke box, so around and around went the Commander and I, dancing like mad long after everyone else had tired out and sat down. Afterwards we had a lovely long ride in a motor boat, all around the harbor, and then the Commander treated me to a night at the hotel, as a pleasant change from the old homestead. However, I soon discovered that the old homestead is infinitely more comfortable, with much better service and wonderful food. When we arrived and the Commander left I was moved out of my old room and given a much better one that he had occupied. Plenty of cool breezes, nice sofas and chairs, a comfortable bed, separate bathroom with tub and shower, big closets. It's a pleasure to be in such a nice cabin.

I must admit I haven't done as much reading as I had expected to do, which only proves what a good time I've been having. So far I haven't even finished *Storm*, in all this time. The long days to follow ought to give me plenty of opportunity to do so, however, I'm afraid I've gotten terribly, awfully fat, too, so I have vowed to eat less and exercise more. In order to carry this monumental scheme, I had one of the men make me a skipping rope, which the missionary girls and I use to bounce around with of an afternoon.

Now I am wishing I had known what a long time I was to be here and abouts, for I discover that I really need more clothes, and can't get at them. I am dreadfully afraid that the only answer is a family washing and ironing. Thank goodness everything is very informal, and I wear my patented smarty pants most of the day, with the desired result that I am getting brown legs. Sometimes Mr. Donovan and Mr. Pendleton and I took sun baths of an afternoon, topping them off with a salt water hosing just before dinner. Mr. Pendleton, by the way, is our other non-missionary friend, and a good lad very lonesome for his home, family, and fiancée. He is the tall one with glasses that father saw. The son of a big shipping line, he has many connections here. So much so, that the other day one of his connections, a Mr. Kennedy, invited us both out to his shack in the hills.

Nothing loathe, we all piled in the family car and drove out with a picnic basket, some wine bottles, and our bathing suits. Their cottage is on a hillside by a rocky brook, all surrounded with grapefruit trees and immortelles. Mr. Kennedy is American himself, but has lived here for thirty years, and his wife is a native of the place, of French descent, with the loveliest and most incredible accent I've ever heard. Four of their six sons are grown up and in the army now, but the two little ones wander around with the same fantastic local accent, which must be heard to be believed. It's not English, it's not Spanish, it's not French, it's just Trinidad. Well, anyway, we had a nice quiet afternoon, and went in swimming as soon as the noon rains stopped. The lady had dug up a can of peas, some brisket of beef, and fruit salad, which we all enjoyed along with some real French Madoc off a vessel that came here a year or so ago fortunately carrying the fruits of French vines. After that we came down from the hills, visited the Kennedy's enormous rambling open-to-the-four-winds town house, as Trinidad-Victorian as it can be. Then Mr. Pendleton and I had a dinner engagement along with the Captain and the other non-missionary (Mr. Sokall) at the home of the Captain's agent, a most amusing and wise young man, who belongs to the genus typical Englishman, sub species reddish hair, horn rimmed spectacles, cherubic face, slightly mussed light gray flannel suit. The only drink left on the island is native rum, so rum punches are the order of the day when it comes to entertaining, much to most people's disgust. I can't say I am very fond of them myself, but there is nothing else, so one struggles along at parties. There were four or five other ladies at the party, as well as the men, so it made quite an unusual evening.

As you can imagine, I am anxious to get there. But the time will be long, and the best attitude is a fatalistic one, with a hand ready for the old life preserver. They have everything ready at all times, and the boats are well provisioned. The other day we took a fine sail in one of them all around the harbor, enjoying ourselves enormously until we ran into an old sunken hulk, where we were hilariously stuck for an hour or so, and all the vikings had to get out and wet themselves trying to pry us loose from the ancient ship!

Much, much love, until the next opportunity to write.

LPJ

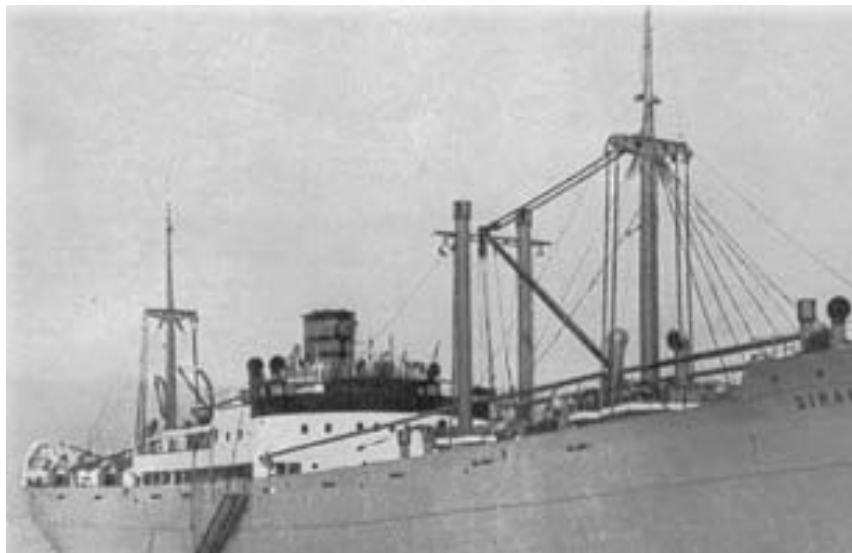


Photo 9: M/S Siranger
(Source: Roger W. Jordan)

Note from Philinda to her family. Undated, probably January 11, 1943

[1943-01-11 L-114 LPK for JWCf]

Dear People,

You certainly do find yourself in odd places these days! I certainly never thought I'd be in Trinidad when I started out. I have seen my old boss in Miami – Mother met him – Mr. Art Nugent. He's the one she thought looked like an actor. He was transferred down here last July. This place is quite lovely, with Haiti-like mountains and lovely craggy beaches. After such a long sea trip & before some even longer days at sea, just to be on land again is a great pleasure.

The trip down here was so completely enjoyable that I'm planning to rest up a bit the rest of the way.

The Captain is completely dependable, & don't worry about me. I just wish I could tell you how interesting the trip has been so far & promises to continue being.

Much love

Me

P.S. Our courier is Ensign Donovan, who formed part of our naval escort. A fine boy.



Photo 10: North Atlantic Convoy, July 28, 1942
(Source: U. S. Navy)

Letter from Philinda to her mother's sister Josephine. February 3, 1943

[1943-02-03 L-115 LPK to Aunt Jondie]

At sea
February 3, 1943

Dear Aunt Jondie et al,

It is beginning to look as if we have made it – the ship and I. Everything has been most pleasant, calm and uneventful; the accommodations are marvelously comfortable, the food is good, the officers and passengers interesting to be with. Be that as it may, I certainly cannot recommend sea voyages at this time on this or any ship. They are hardly rest cures. The constant apprehension is incredibly nerve-wracking to everyone. One comes aboard perfectly reconciled to the fact that one is undertaking a dangerous trip, and perfectly willing to forget it, since there is absolutely nothing to be done about the situation beyond taking normal precautions and trusting in God. But little by little, perhaps from being in such close contact with the crew, one becomes nervous and fidgety. We passengers are on the ship for one trip; they have to continue till the end of the war, or the end of them. I think it would be less of a strain to be on a battleship, where you would know at least that you could fight back, where you aren't just a moving target. These men are brave, and I wonder how they manage to keep out of the insane asylum.

We had a nice long stop-over in [*censored*]¹ much to the surprise of all the passengers, who didn't know we were going to make any ports other than our destination. It was pleasant to interrupt such a very long sea trip with a little land. [*Censored*]² is extremely interesting just now, with all the activity centering there. I saw my old boss from Miami days down there, met some of the local people (with their amazing accents that don't seem to come from any place in particular) and visited some of the army and Navy officers clubs, some of which are simply lovely. Young ladies are at such a premium there that anything in skirts is bound to be rushed off her feet by eager legions, with the result that I was able to see a great proportion of the sights from the comfort of government vehicles. After X weeks, we set out to sea again, not particularly looking forward to the long, long trip. Seeing the same ten faces for X months in a small ship becomes rather monotonous, but thank goodness everyone is very nice, and we have come to be fond of each other. The Captain is at the bottom of all the entertainment on board, probably because he is so fearfully nervous that he must always have someone around him day and night. Never again will I look on the phrase "heroes of the merchant marine" as an empty cliché.

Soon I'll be seeing my love again after fifteen months. Whoops! Peace, it's wonderful!

Thank you dear people for all your kindnesses to me. Thank you for the two visits in Vermont, which were just wonderful in all ways, and thank little Susan for the fine lunch and bull-session the afternoon in New York. The next time you pass by the West Coast of Africa....

Much love to you all,

Laura Philinda

P.S. Am now honest woman, and working hard.

¹ Trinidad

² Trinidad

Letter from Philinda to her family, February 1, 1943

[1943-02-01 L-88 LPK for LPKf]

At Sea

February 1, 1942

[should be 1943]

Dear People,

What a long trip this has been! And what a monotonous one! It will be a fine long time again before I have the urge to travel by sea – at least three months, I should guess. Also, it will be quite a while before I will forget this one. I have come to the conclusion after sufficient study of the matter that the time to go voyaging on distant oceans is definitely not right now. The sea is still deep blue one day, jade green the next, beautifully stormy the third, glassy grey the fourth, lovely always; lovely as one of those man-eating [*cut out*]³ ocean seems capable of absorbing the most hideous tragedies and remaining agonizingly aloof. Once we saw an empty life-boat drifting half-filled with water; obviously going to sink in a day or two. Another time we saw a life-raft with two or three stanchions still up in spite of the buffeting of waves. From a distance we thought the upright stanchions were men. We were all thinking that this was a wonderful thing to see – a few men rescued from the complete emptiness, and yet none of us said it, because we were so afraid it wasn't so, and that the things we saw were just what they later proved to be – sticks of wood. That life raft had been occupied. Which reminds one of what the army chaplain said, that no one is an atheist in a foxhole. And there we were with our feet firmly planted on the decks while our minds were tossing around on the empty little life raft.

The sun has been terrifically hot lately, which of course makes me supremely happy. My nice cabin is always breezy, however, and cool even at night, when of course we have to keep our blacked-out portholes closed tightly. Most of the day is spent reading borrowed books – our own have long since been finished. I got a hold of Cecil Brown's *Suez to Singapore*, and found it very difficult to put down even for an hour. The description of the sinking of the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* is the highlight, but all of it is fascinating. I also enjoyed *Leonardo da Vinci*, and *Storm* was read luckily just as we were passing through a rather violent one, so that the ship's creaking and rolling and the sound of rain beating against the ports made fine incidental music for the book. Another good portion of the day is spent in, of all things, washing and ironing! Naturally in this warm climate we all wear washable things, and there being no laundryman [*cut out*]⁴ are all forced to do our own things. The two missionary girls and I have somehow been wheedled into ironing the men passengers' shirts and shorts, with the result that endless hours are passed over the ironing board. At night after black-out hour we sit around the Captain's cabin talking or listening to

³ The original of this letter was written on both sides of two legal-length sheets. On the first sheet, Philinda mentioned a number of things that were censored by cutting out the controlled information with a razor or similar sharp blade. The result was that writing on the reverse side of the page was also lost. It seems likely in this case that the controlled information was on the opposite side.

⁴ Controlled information was probably on the reverse. Most likely the missing words here were, “**aboard, we**”.

the radio, and usually around eleven we make a quick raid on the icebox in the galley, bringing back ham and sausage and cheese and beer and whiskey and a general feeling of temporary well-being. The passengers and officers all have stories to tell. Father's candidate for a good story-teller (when we saw him at the docks that famous Sunday) has proven to be that and more. The chief mate is consciously or unconsciously, no one can decide which, terribly funny also. The other night he was talking about navigation (that [*censored*]⁵ subject), and about how he first tried to use the Bubble sextant. Unfortunately, said he, he read from the bottom instead of from the top, but he got an excellent appearing answer, and morsed over to the other ships in the convoy the course they would take according to his result. Hastily the next ship in line morsed back: You are steering a dangerous course. We are headed six miles inland on Cape M---. !! Another time, said the first mate, he was down in Para, in Brazil, headed down an inlet he was not familiar with. The current was so strong that for a day and a half the ship was aground on a sand bank with no one wiser, because whenever they looked out they saw the current flowing past and thought the ship was moving! Well, maybe. The chief mate has a dog named Cari of which he is very fond. He had her on the last ship he was on, which was torpedoed. For three days he and Cari were on a life raft. The mate says that Cari behaved very well all the time, but apparently her nerves suffered, for when she got on land she went wild, with the happy result that four puppies of dubious race were born on the next trip out, much to everyone's delight. The mate says Cari was as surprised as could be.

I am always hoping I will remember feelings and impressions and states of mind. When I was in France I kept saying to myself, you must remember how it is to be absorbedly interested in food, and you must remember how it feels to be hungry very often, and to become satiated with one plate of soup and two pieces of bread. Now I am hoping that I will remember how it feels to have the heavy weight of sudden death over you day and night, all the time. You go to bed at night in order to sleep so soundly that you forget the weight, and in the morning you wake up glad and somewhat astonished that you are still in your comfortable bunk, with the solid bulkheads around you. One more night's safety, but another day to fear. At first I didn't have that feeling, for some reasons which I can't mention, and also because when you don't know about a thing, you can't appreciate the dangers it carries with it. At [*censored*]⁶ Here on the ship, I am beginning to hear the stories of some of the officers and men who survived torpedoings before. One or two trips ago, seventeen men were picked up from a lifeboat, and we are beginning to hear about their experiences. Slowly the passengers began to realize why the Captain is so nervous that he must always be doing something, and always wants someone with him day and night, to talk to and laugh with. Little by little you begin to get the idea that you are walking in a dark night in the direction of a precipice which you know is ahead of you somewhere, but just when you will arrive at it you don't know. At first, you are ashamed, but by and by you see that the oldest hands at the game are the ones who wear their life belts day and night. Sudden sounds make them jump to attention, lights on the horizon at night make them silent, whales rising above water frankly scare them. There will be nothing of the cliché to me in the phrase "heroes of the merchant marine" when and if we get to port. The passengers are on this ship for one trip only, but the men have to go on till the end of the war or the end of them. It must take great

⁵ Possibly "that's his subject"

⁶ Best guess from remaining clues: "[at Port of Spain we saw ships] **with gaping holes in their sides.**"

courage and strong wills, and I don't wonder that they have to be bailed out of jail so often when they reach land. It's just a wonder they don't have to be bailed out of sanitoriums.

I hear the siren call of lunch.

And a very good lunch it was, as ever. My goodness how we do eat! The two new passengers who came on at [censored]⁷ ate very delicately at first, too, but after a week or so they too were eating like steam shovels. The food is very good; I don't think I've ever been on a ship with a better chef and better provisions. The busboy used to be a pastry cook, with the result that all our cream cheese comes to us with delicate designs on its milk-white surface, done with one of those bags. He made a cake the other day, and had all the lady passengers down to the galley to see how it's done. I was allowed to try my skill at writing "Happy Birthday" in frosting. It was quite an experience.

We have been missing the Commander⁸ and Mr. Donovan since we left [censored]⁹ and not a night passes but we drag out another one of the stories the dear old commander used to tell. We especially liked the one about the old Scottish first mate, appropriately named Duncan Campbell, who moped and wailed in his bunk for days after he was rescued at sea from a life boat. His rescuers thought he had been affected mentally by the horrors of the experience, and used to come in and try to cheer him up. Finally one of them asked him why he kept repeating "what'll I say, what'll I say?" Campbell replied: "My auld mother, my auld mother! I know she'll ask me wherrre is my father's gold watch and my grrrandfather's gold cuff links. I left them aboard when we werrre torpedoed, and what'll I say to herrr?" Then there's the story he used to tell about the Britisher in China, on the upper Yangtze. To get his exercise he used to bat tennis balls against a concrete wall. An old Chinese wise man would watch him for hours at a time. The Britisher one day asked him what he was thinking about as he watched. "I'm wondering why you, who are a wealthy foreigner, don't get a coolie to play while you take your ease." And the Captain has a tale about a Dane living in Buenos Aires. The Captain met him one night at a bar, when this Dane kept looking daggers at him across the room. Not to be outdone, the Captain looked daggers back at him. Finally he left the bar, and the Dane followed him out like a bloodhound. On the sidewalk the gloomy Dane put his fist under the Captain's nose and said "You're a dirty German, aren't you?" The Captain laughed and replied that he wasn't a German even if he did look it, whereupon the Dane apologized profusely and invited him to come along on a midnight adventure. The rest of the night was spent in a taxi hired for the occasion, with three B. A.. Policemen also hired for the occasion in the back seat and the Captain and the Dane on the front seat with the driver. Every time the Dane saw a party of Germans he would leap from the taxi and start beating them up, while the three policemen busied themselves reassuring and keeping off the other policemen when they came up to stop the fights! A fine time was had by all. Well, we do have some good times aboard this ship, and if it weren't for the fact that we are constantly oppressed by the precariousness of our situation, it would be a grand trip, just as comfortable and gay as any peacetime cruise.

⁷ Cut-out is 10 characters long, likely "Trinidad"

⁸ U. S. Navy Commander Philip Van Horn Weems

⁹ Cut-out is about 12 characters long, likely "Port of Spain"

It's enormously pleasant to sit up on the top deck acquiring a suntan while you dry your hair without benefit of one of those ghoulish hot-air contraptions. It's wonderful to think that if all goes well we will be in the goal of my desiring in X number of days. It's smugly nice to know that while we are basking in the hot sunshine of a certain part of the ocean which bears a romantically adventurous name, the snow is falling and the cold winds are howling at home. It's almost as nice as ever to go up to the bow and watch the clean cut made by the ship in the water, and see the flying fish zooming along beside us. At night the phosphorescence (well, I haven't got a dictionary with me) lights up the water as the electric lights used to in pre-blackout days, and we see constellations which are unfamiliar to most of us... But what we all want silently but ardently is land on the horizon, and an end to this seemingly endless journey. This ship has become our home in a new world, out of time and out of space, unrelated to the past and the future. Literally and metaphorically, we want to be back on solid ground again, with a real world around us and somewhat more of a real future in front of us. What an incalculable difference it makes in one's entire psychology to be sure of what one is going to do tomorrow, and where one will be! I keep wondering if it is possible eventually to become accustomed to complete insecurity, and if so what changes must be made in one's fundamental thinking processes. As I said before, all this makes one proud to know the people who make up our crew, who stoically face their fate and know that they must continue to face it. It would be easier for them if they could go back to their homes and families from time to time. They haven't for three or four years, and they all have slightly heart-rending snapshots which they will drag out and show you at the drop of a hat. You can read about that sort of thing for days at a time and think that's-too-bad-isn't-it, but it comes up and hits you for a knockout when you're living with it for a month or two. They don't know whether their families are doing as well as can be expected or whether they are out of the running completely; and to top it all off they know that a fair proportion of their friends that were on this side of the fence by some good luck, have been killed, and that they are themselves unnaturally lucky to be around still at this late date. Briefly, complete insecurity. My admiration for their good spirits is colossal, and I'd like to shout it out all around the world. May Allah and Thor and Buddha guide them all back home safely and from the bottom of my heart I say they deserve the very best of everything.

I must have been sleep-walking when I packed, because everything I really need on the trip is down in the hold, whereas I had one large suitcase filled with evening dresses put in my cabin. We never wear anything save slacks and shorts, day and night. Also, not knowing what a long trip it was going to be, I didn't take along enough toothpaste and so forth for the ocean phase of the journey. But everyone seems to be in the same fix, for the phrase "I have some but it's down in the hold" has become the motto of the ship. I completely forgot to pack one of the twelve toothbrushes I bought into my overnight bag, so I had to buy one from a missionary girl before we got to Shangri-La. And having only two blouses put in the bags which were put in the cabin, I have to wear one while I wash the other, with the result that I have to wash and iron every single day. Thank goodness stockings are a thing of the distant past.

Hopefully we have been planning magnificent parties for after we arrive, on board and ashore. The captain has promised to dash ashore and get Bill on as soon as possible, and our police officer has agreed to give my hero a pass to board the ship. The police officer (as perhaps I told you) is none other than Mr. Collins, with whom Bill spent a pleasant week-end last winter at Tarqua Bay. If you look at the snapshots Bill sent me of the party, you will see

both Mr. Collins and his wife, who is also on board. Mr. Collins is very funny indeed. He has a standing argument with one of the missionary girls, who is also quite amusing. She says there is such a thing as flying fish, and they have wings. Mr. Collins says there is no such thing, and anyway they don't have wings. To prove his point, he had the radio operator put an annex on the news sheet which comes out daily, announcing that in New York during the course of the conference held by the Entomological Society of America, the well-known authority on marine flora and fauna, Dr. W. Aquaticus Dolphin revealed that after much scientific experimentation and research it has been discovered that there is no such thing as a flying fish, and that in reality the fish which is popularly known as such has a pair of intricate ducts on each side of his body which emit a thin stream of water that is often confused with wings, since the sunlight gleaming on these streams of water gives the appearance of solidity! Mr. Collins was greatly pleased and astounded upon reading this news in the bulletin, but was even more astonished the next day when he read that on the final day of the entomological Conference being held in New York, the President of that august body was forced to announce with regret that their former respected colleague, Dr. Dolphin, had just been found to be none other than the infamous Looie the Lobster, of Fulton Street Fish Market. Representatives of the Press were unable to contact Looie after the conference, since his whereabouts were unknown. But it was added, according to the bulletin, that unofficial sources usually well informed had been quoted as saying that Looie was last seen making a desperate attempt to board an outgoing ship, destination unknown. It's a great fight, but it hasn't been settled yet, and we all feel that it won't be settled before we reach port.

I have written to Mr. Johnston, the Blisses, and Mrs. Murphy (the nice lady in the Coconut Grove Library). I want to work up the energy to write to Aunt Jondie and Rufus, too, but sad to say a kind of tropical languor usually envelopes me after the laundry is done. In order to compensate for the enormous meals we eat, I have been doing daily dozens like mad before breakfast each day, something which also cuts into my small supply of energy. I only wish I hadn't used up all my yeast, because I feel sure that would give me the required verve. As the saying goes, I have some more but it's down in the hold. I gravely fear that when I get to port I will be too busy to write for some time, and between then and now stands a perfectly monstrous pile of laundry which simply must be done, and nails which simply must be gotten ready for inspection, and hair which simply must be washed, and re-packing which simply must be done. It's appalling.

This morning when I went out on deck to borrow this typewriter they were all out taking pictures of each other in those Men-from-Mars rubber life suits which we discarded from among our handy equipment as soon as we left cold waters. In the tropics they are valueless. The suits are becoming to one and all, as you will see when I send you the picture. The boots are big enough to fit the most generously-proportioned feet, and the waistline has been so designed as to fit over a gargantuan tummy plus a kapok life preserver. I was told by kindly critics than mine was perhaps a half size too large on me. I didn't have to be informed that I took a smaller shoe size than the one I was wearing, because in those boots I shuffled around like a dancing bear, only not so gracefully. In the picture I am leaning in careless ease against the side of a convenient life boat, grinning like an ape to complete the anthropoidal leitmotif which runs through the photograph. I am anxious to see it developed. One of the missionaries says he is sure that Bill will want a copy to carry next to his heart always, but I maintain that one's family should come first.

Well, it's almost over now. When I get to port I will be enormously glad I did it, happy to have had the experience, proud to think that I have shared the dangers that These Men have to face for such a much longer period, and terribly, extremely glad to be safe. Whereupon I intend to forget everything (except the courage of These Men) and set to work being happy with Bill.

Much love to one and all, chickadees!

P.S. If ever you reach the fabled state where you have an extra penny lying around idle, make me happy by contributing it for the relief of survivors of the Allied Merchant Marine, and you know which ally I mean.

P.P.S. No time to write about the wedding – next time!



Photo 11: William and Philinda at ease in the beach shack, Tarqua Bay near Lagos
(Source: family archives)

Epilogue

William and Philinda remained married until death. After Lagos, they served in Caracas, Venezuela; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Santiago, Chile; and several tours in Washington, D.C. Their children are Laurence John Krieg (*your author*), Laura Krieg Morris, and Helen Krieg Came; and eight grandchildren. William and Philinda retired to Sarasota, Florida, where Philinda died on April 9, 2008 (age 90); and William died on November 15, 2010 (age 97).