

A Telegram, A Letter

The telegram, when it finally arrived, was brief, but welcome:

Daughter born, both well, best wishes from all of us.

The sender was William Cathcart of Kershaw, South Carolina, the recipient his brother First Lieutenant John Wallace Cathcart II, MD, then serving as surgeon of 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment. Lieutenant Cathcart's regiment was part of the 24th Infantry Division then battling the Japanese to liberate the Philippines and make good General Douglas MacArthur's return.



John Cathcart was born in Winnsboro and entered Clemson College at the age of 17 in 1935 as a general science major. He played freshman football and was a member of the Fairfield County and Pre-Med Clubs. He served as a first lieutenant in the Cadet Corps and participated in summer ROTC training at Fort McClellan, Alabama the summer before beginning his senior year. During his summer training, he earned the Army's Sharpshooter badge at the rifle range.

Following his graduation with the Class of 1939, Cathcart continued his pursuit of a medical degree by enrolling at the South Carolina Medical College in Charleston. He graduated with his medical degree in 1943 and began an internship at Columbia Hospital. While at the hospital, Cathcart met nursing supervisor Margaret Caughman who had earned her nursing degree from Johns Hopkins University. The two were married on February 21, 1944.

On March 10, 1944, Cathcart reported for active duty at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, then to Breckinridge, Kentucky for six weeks of intensive training before shipping overseas in August. In September, Cathcart landed in New Guinea where he was assigned to a hospital dispensary. In November, he reached Leyte Island the Philippines and was sent into action on Mindanao.

The telegram from his brother William reached him in December 1944.

In a letter to his new daughter dated January 19, 1945, Cathcart, by now promoted to captain and serving as the battalion aide surgeon, expressed his delight in her arrival.

My Darling Daughter,

A telegram from your Uncle William came today telling of your blessed arrival. I am so sorry that I could not be there to greet you personally, but "Uncle Sam" thought it best for me to be on a small island in the Philippines to help defeat the Japs and establish a lasting peace in which you and countless other children can grow...

It is a pity that you were born into such a war torn world as this, but by the time you grow up to understand, all this will be in the past, and I shall be home to help your mother and you. By

then you will be a little lady walking around and prattling away in your baby talk. When I show up, you will probably not know me, but we shall get to be wonderful pals...

As I write this, I do not know very much about you... But I can imagine you are a plump, rosy cheek little girl with a twinkle in your brown eyes, and fine brown hair on your darling head -- also that you have five fingers on each hand and five toes on each foot. I know with a mother like you have, that you are a beautiful, precious child, and I love you very much...

... you have made me the proudest father anywhere and as you grow, that pride in you will grow along side. There are so many things that I would like to write you that all of them seem to run together in a jumble, but once we are together, we can have wonderful times talking together and telling stories to each other.

It is almost dark now, and as yet we have no lights, so I shall have to close for this time. I love you dearly and can hardly wait until I can see and hold you in my arms.

Sadly, Cathcart would never have the chance to hold his daughter Virginia. On May 3, with the battalion in action near Mintal, Captain Cathcart was killed by a Japanese sniper. His remains were returned to Winnsboro where he was buried at the Bethel ARP Cemetery.

Captain John Wallace Cathcart II was survived by his widow Margaret and his daughter Virginia, three brothers and two sisters. The John Wallace Cathcart II Annual Memorial Scholarship is sponsored by the Clemson Alumni Association.

