

# Preston, William Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Bennett, 1940-1960

William Preston Letters to Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Bennett  
1940-1960



WILLIAM  
& MARY

CHARTERED 1693

## Title Statement

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**Author:** Mariaelena DiBenigno, SCRC staff.

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## Profile Description

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## Descriptive Summary

**Unit ID**

MS 00227

**Unit ID**

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**Unit Date**

1940-1960

**Unit Date**

1941-1945

**Mixed Materials**

1 (Box)

**Language**

English

**source**

Gary Alonzo Barranger

**Creator**

Preston, William

**Extent**

0.5 Linear Feet

**Repository**

Special Collections Research Center

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## Biographical / Historical

William (Billy) Preston was an Army soldier with Col. B. 137th Infantry 35 Division during World War II. Later in the war, he was attached to the 2nd Army Headquarters in Shreveport, Louisiana; the Headquarters & Service Company, 713 Engineers at Camp Clovis, New Mexico; and the Railway Transportation Corps in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada. After the war, Preston returned to his hometown of Emporia, Kansas, where he worked as a financial analyst and taught accounting at Emporia State University (ESU) where his wife Aloha (Kraus) also taught physical education. The couple sponsored ESU's William J. and Aloha Preston Trust to support students in the accounting and women's athletics.

## Content Description

Correspondence from William (Billy) Preston to his sister and brother-in-law, Ruth and Ralph Bennett, primarily mailed during World War II (1940-1945) with a few letters sent from 1946-1960. The collection includes 120 handwritten and typed letters and postcards; black and white photographs; a Western Union telegram; and newspaper clippings. It is arranged chronologically. The correspondence is detailed and legible, with description of U.S. Army experience in North America (training, duties, socializing, medical

issues, traumatic injuries, supply needs, furloughs, and deployments). There is also much focus on Preston's romantic entanglements during the war.

Preston served with the United States Army for the war's duration, but he did not experience direct combat. From 1940-1945, he was stationed throughout North America, in order: Little Falls, Minnesota; Camp Robinson, Arkansas; Long Beach, California; Barksdale Field, Louisiana; Fort Ord, California; the Presidio, California; Camp Clovis, New Mexico; Fort Lawton, Washington; Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada; and Camp Claiborne, Louisiana.

From 1940 – 1941, Preston described his training, first in Little Falls, Minnesota and then at Camp Robinson, Arkansas. He opined about whether or not the United States would declare war and discussed his on-again, off-again romantic relationship with a woman named Vi. He included a sketch of his Arkansas tent quarters, and shared how several comrades suffered from scarlet fever and "the clap" (gonorrhea). Preston saw a Yankees baseball game; visited Washington Avenue, a primarily black neighborhood in Little Rock; endured "short arm" inspection for venereal disease; described how a soldier was jailed for harassing a nurse; and met the Little Rock Flyers, an exceptional women's basketball team. He also shared his brief stay at Barksdale Field in Shreveport, Louisiana to guard B-19 bombers. In November and December 1941, Preston noted the amped up military maneuvers and sought an Army discharge but was enraged when he did not receive notarized materials from his mother Florence in time. After Pearl Harbor (not explicitly mentioned) Preston's unit moved to the West Coast; the journey was described as uncomfortable. Preston also shared how troop transport operated during "the last war" (World War I), and mentioned three men killed during post-Pearl Harbor partying.

In 1942, Preston was stationed at the Presidio of San Francisco, where he dated an Italian woman and met her family ("the Wops") for large dinners. He visited the Chinatown in San Francisco; counselled his brother-in-law Ralph to enlist in the Army Air Corps as the infantry was "no place for white man"; saw the singer Tommy Dorsey; and witnessed military airplane maneuvers over the Pacific Ocean. In April 1942, Preston was transferred to Camp Clovis, New Mexico, as part of a railroad battalion. There, he began telegraph school; dated a woman who worked as a riveter; made sergeant; and was sent to Fort Lawton in Seattle, Washington. There, he was demoted back to corporal for reasons unknown. The November 14, 1942 letter has evidence of censorship and detailed his work with the Railway Transportation Corps in the isolated White Pass Depot in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada. Preston moved back and forth between the Canadian Yukon Territory and Alaska, where he provided medical assistance to a fellow soldier injured in a car accident and had difficulty finding alcohol.

In 1943, Preston shared his dental problems and how he injured his elbow hurdling fences. While hospitalized at Fort Lawton, he got in trouble for leaving the hospital without permission. After his elbow healed, Preston was sent back to the Yukon and had a hard time re-adjusting after hospitalization. He mentioned camp dogs barking and the possibility of a bear in the nearby woods; there were also hunting expeditions. The camp coal lamps hurt Preston's eyes, and he outlined the shifts in military mail censorship to answer his sister's queries. He also detailed various romantic entanglements with three women: Vi, Billie, and Lee. There were rumors that his unit would be sent to Burma or Sicily; and Preston described how he deliberately viewed the corpses of two airplane crash victims.

From 1944 – 1945, Preston was concerned about the financial and mental state of his mother Florence. He also mentioned how a furlough visit was too expensive. He shared his new duties in the orderly room, his desire to go to France, and a new girlfriend named Sally who worked for the military. By late 1944, his brother-in-law Ralph was also in the Army. In January and February 1945, Preston was at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana where he completed an intense infiltration course, took a syphilis test and contemplated Officers Candidate School. His unit was "stuck" at Camp Claiborne after it closed. Preston anticipated the war's end; discussed the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt; and had his shipped orders cancelled and returned his overseas equipment. In June 1945, he eloped with former high school classmate Aloha Kraus in a double ring ceremony. Preston outlined his courtship and bemoaned his mother's angry reaction. By the end of 1945, Preston awaited an Army discharge.

From 1946-1960, Preston's letters described how he fixed up his family home in Emporia, Kansas while his wife Aloha worked for the Sears order office. A 1950 letterhead named Preston as manager of CIC Finance Company. In 1960, he described an extensive trip all over the Southwest and through California; this letter also outlined how he lost his job and had a car accident.

Folder 26 contains an undated letter from Preston; 1942 note from Doris, a woman Preston met in Little Rock, Arkansas; and 1942 letter to Ruth Bennett from her aunt Lillian.

Folder 27 contains 11 photographs of Preston in Alaska; and with his mother Florence (Hull) Preston, sister Ruth (Preston) Bennett, wife Aloha (Kraus) Preston, and dog Lady.

## Keywords

World War, 1939-1945

World War, 1939-1945 -- Campaigns -- Alaska  
World War, 1939-1945--United States  
World War, 1939-1945 -- Canada  
Gary Alonzo Barranger  
United States. Army.

## Description of Subordinate Components

### Correspondence

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/268193

**Unit Date** 1940 August 10 - October 31

**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)

**Container** 1 (folder)

**Language** English

### Correspondence

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282465

**Unit Date** 1941 January 8 - January 26

**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)

**Container** 2 (Folder)

**Language** English

### Correspondence

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282466

**Unit Date** 1941 February 5 - February 25

**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)

**Container** 3 (Folder)

**Language** English

### Correspondence

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282467

**Unit Date** 1941 March 9 - April 26

**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)

**Container** 4 (folder)

**Language** English

### Correspondence

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282468

**Unit Date** 1941 May 26 - November 28

**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)

**Container** 5 (folder)

**Language** English

### Correspondence

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282469

**Unit Date** 1941 December 5 - December 21

**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)

**Container** 6 (folder)

**Language** English

**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282470**Unit Date** 1942 January 10 - February 19**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 7 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282471**Unit Date** 1942 March 5 - March 24**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 8 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282472**Unit Date** 1942 April 4 - July 30**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 9 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282473**Unit Date** 1942 August 11 - October 10**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 10 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282474**Unit Date** 1942 October 19 - December 9**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 11 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282531**Unit Date** 1943 January 13 - February 20**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 12 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282533**Unit Date** 1943 March 5 - May 14**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 13 (folder)**Language** English

**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282534**Unit Date** 1943 June 1 - June 25**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 14 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282545**Unit Date** 1943 July 5 - July 30**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 15 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282546**Unit Date** 1943 August 15 - September 27**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 16 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282552**Unit Date** 1943 October 7 - October 22**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 17 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282553**Unit Date** 1943 October 26 - December 27**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 18 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282554**Unit Date** 1944 January 28 - April 28**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 19 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282561**Unit Date** 1944 May 12 - August 8**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 20 (folder)**Language** English

**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282562**Unit Date** 1944 September 19 - October 19**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 21 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282569**Unit Date** 1945 January 9 - February 22**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 22 (Folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282572**Unit Date** 1945 March 17 - June 27**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 23 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282574**Unit Date** 1945 July 11 - October 5**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 24 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282575**Unit Date** 1946 - 1960**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 25 (folder)**Language** English**Correspondence, Miscellaneous and Undated****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282576**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 26 (folder)**Language** English**Photographs****Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/282580**Unit Date** 1940 - 1945**Mixed Materials** 1 (Box)**Container** 27 (folder)**Language** English