

# Cunningham, Harold R. Papers

Harold R. Cunningham Papers

1943-1946



WILLIAM  
& MARY

CHARTERED 1693

## Title Statement

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## Descriptive Summary

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**Unit ID**

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**Unit Date**

1943-1946

**Language**

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**Creator**

Cunningham, H.R.

**Extent**

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**Repository**

Special Collections Research Center

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## Biographical Information:

Further information about this individual or organization may be available in the Special Collections Research Center Wiki: [http://scdb.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/H.R.\\_Cunningham](http://scdb.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php/H.R._Cunningham).

## Scope and Contents

Letters, 1943-1946, of Harold R. Cunningham, a Navy chaplain from California. Includes letters written while at the Chaplain's School at the College of William & Mary and while on subsequent duty assignments in Wales, at the Sampson Naval Training Center in New York and aboard the USS Arkansas. Most of the letters are addressed to his mother in California. All others are addressed to his wife.

## Related Materials:

World War II Resources in the Special Collections Research Center

Information about related materials is available at <http://guides.swem.wm.edu/WorldWarII>

## Keywords

Letters (correspondence)

Chaplains, Military--United States--20th century

College of William and Mary--History--20th century

United States. Navy--History--20th century

World War, 1939-1945

# Description of Subordinate Components

## Letters

**Unit ID** id177251

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/93573

**Unit Date** July 1943 - August 1943

**Mixed materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 1 (Folder)

### Scope and Contents

Scope and Contents Includes primarily letters from Temporary Duty Tour at Naval Receiving Station at nearby Newport News, VA. This two-week assignment was a component of the Chaplain's School program that allowed students the opportunity to observe and assist experienced chaplains. The Receiving Station to which Cunningham was assigned was used to form crews for new ships that were being built. Few permanent personnel were stationed there and there was no chaplain. Cunningham, a Methodist minister in civilian life, describes himself as a "pioneer" there. No Protestant services had been held at the Station for months. Worship services were conducted in the same auditorium used to show movies at night and where lectures for the men were held during the day (Cunningham mentions one lecture on venereal prophyllaxis). Cunningham draws up plans for some equipment to be used for worship - a reredos, altar, cross and lectern. A Chaplain's Aid was provided to serve as a musical accompanist during worship services. This Aid was also a student at the Naval Training School (NTS) at William and Mary. Cunningham notes that there were "quite a number" of these men being trained there. He explains that an Aid must have a college degree, be able to play the piano, know vocal music in order to direct choruses, and be able to type. Cunningham's routine at the Receiving Station includes daily visits to the "Sick Bay." He observes that "most of the patients are there because of their own moral laxity." He comments that "[t]he job of keeping men clean and decent in this mess is a big one! The navy is only interested in keeping them efficient - though it does try to provide entertainment and religious influences." On the same note, he quotes from a lecture given by a Catholic chaplain at the NTS: "The navy is neutral on the question of liquor - it's your business." Before he completes his assignment at the Receiving Station, Cunningham makes a trip to a large base nearby to get testaments and worship helps as well as tracts to distribute to the men. He commends the Navy for covering the expense of these items: "Thus the Navy shows its concern for the Spiritual welfare of its men. The Chaplain really gets cooperation."

## Letters (from UK)

**Unit ID** id177252

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/93574

**Unit Date** December 1943 - September 1944

**Mixed materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 2 (Folder)

### Scope and Contents

Cunningham is assigned to Great Britain as a chaplain. Censorship policy allows no direct information about his location or the military units he serves to appear in his letters. However, his general location in South Wales can be inferred (and is verified by letters written later when he had returned to the States). Provides miscellaneous details of his day to day life, though he also writes a good deal about personal family matters back home. Describes involvement with local churches and church groups. For example, he goes into some detail about a Methodist church social. He also writes of his participation in local church concerts (he sings tenor and has studied choral conducting at Boston University). He is warned by his "chief," the Area Chaplain, against working too much with civilian churches. Cunningham writes, "but if I prefer seeing homes, making friends of these fine people, speaking for Christ in youth groups, and singing to Service Men to going to the Officers' Club and listening to their profanity and obscenity and watching them guzzle their liquor, I think it is my business. Personally, I think I am doing a job that needs to be done, that other officers could well afford to do, making personal friends of these Allies of ours." Describes having a very busy schedule, running "from ships to Hospital to office to BOQ all day long." But by September 1944, he writes of having very little to do.

## Letters

**Unit ID** id177283

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/93575

**Unit Date** September 1944 - July 1945

**Mixed materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 3 (Folder)

### **Scope and Contents**

Scope and Contents Arrives back in the United States in September of 1944. Mentions sailing with U.S., Canadian and British military personnel as well as a couple thousand German P.O.W's taken by the Canadians. Expects the P.O.W.'s to be used to harvest crops for the "Canucks" for the duration. Is assigned to Sampson Naval Training Center on the eastern shore of Seneca Lake in the Finger Lakes region of New York. Most of what he writes concerning his job there pertains to worship services he conducted, baptisms he performed and his involvement with the church choir. Also mentions a program of Evangelism he is conducting with his unit. Writes of "Welcome Lecture" given to all recruits coming to Sampson: "At the 'Welcome Lecture', which is given to every company of recruits that enters Sampson, we pass out an information sheet, which includes a blank place for those who may be interested in baptism and church membership, to check. All men who check that interest are interviewed and in many cases decide that they wish to unite with the Church. Such men are given literature (when we can get it) pertaining to the Church of their choice. Then they are invited to attend our Service Men's Christian League and a Bible Class is conducted on Thursday evening. We write a letter to the pastor of the Church which the man wishes to join, informing him of the man's intention, and of the date that the man will be at home on Recruit Leave ... The last Sunday of each month is set aside for a service of Baptism and reception into Church membership ... I conduct a service of Baptism by immersion, in the swimming pool, the afternoon of the day of our recognition service, for those men going into the Baptist, Christian, and other churches requiring that mode of baptism. Our monthly membership services are certainly a great inspiration; and the men (many just 17 & 18 year-old boys) seem so serious in their confession of loyalty to Christ and His church. Certificates are issued to the men and to their churches." As in many of his letters, much of what he writes concerns family back home in California and his wife and daughters who have come east to Washington, PA where they are staying with his wife's parents. He visits his family in Pennsylvania when he gets a "48." In letter of May 7, 1945, writes that he is waiting for official announcement of V-E Day "so that we can have our pre-arranged observances." The chaplains will read a prepared prayer. Hears "that England has gone wild with rejoicing, even though official announcements by the heads of our Governments have not yet been made." Wonders how his friends back in Penarth and Milford Haven (both in Wales) are feeling. Also reports that he has heard rumors that the US Navy does not expect to "even start the demobilization of this branch of service for at least 2 years." Writes that too many chaplains have been sent to Sampson. Expects that those who have been there the longest, he among them, will be reassigned to sea duty. Receives orders in July of 1945 for reassignment to the battleship USS Arkansas. Says it is quite an honor for a chaplain to be assigned to a carrier or battleship. Ends letter with words: "TOKYO, HERE I COME !!."

### **Letters**

**Unit ID** id177292

**Unit ID** /repositories/2/archival\_objects/93576

**Unit Date** August 1945 - February 1946

**Mixed materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 4 (Folder)

### **Scope and Contents**

Scope and Contents Cunningham is sent to San Francisco in August of 1945 pending assignment to the USS Arkansas. Writes on October 16, 1945 that he hopes "to be aboard my ship by the end of the week." Describes "Navy Week" in letter of October 28, with the "many people visiting the ships now at the piers here." Mentions that among those ships are the carrier Bunker Hill, the "huge" battleship Iowa, the battleship Colorado, the submarine tender Fulton, the submarine Capitaine and the Arkansas ("Arky"). Just two letters were written from aboard the Arkansas. He mentions sailing to Pearl Harbor toward the end of November. By December 3, he is back at San Francisco. By Christmas he has joined his family in Washington, PA and is on terminal leave. Writes of taking classes at the Presbyterian Western Theological Seminary (now Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) "on the GI Bill of Rights arrangements for 'refresher courses' for chaplains and other professional men whose careers were interrupted while they were in the Service." Says that "the special courses that the Seminaries thought would prove so attractive to ex-chaplains are almost a complete 'flop,'" adding that "there is practically no demand for them." Speculates that this is due to the fact that "a good many chaplains had churches waiting for them, others will not go back to the ministry, and some are remaining in the Service; besides which, a good many must feel as I am inclined to feel, that the churches should be sending their ministers to sit at the feet of the Chaplains and learn a few of 'the facts of life', instead of assuming that the chaplains have 'lost touch' with religious truth and procedures." Is discharged from the Navy as of midnight, January 27, 1946.