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## MS-094: Letters of John Duttera, World War II

### Description

This collection consists primarily of correspondence received by Ruth Feiser during World War II from John Duttera, Joseph E. Atland, and others.

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### Keywords

World War II, WWII, 93rd Air Service Squadron, West Pacific, Duttera Sound Service

### Disciplines

European History | History | Military History | United States History

**Guide to the  
Letters of John Duttera, World War II.**



**Gettysburg College, Musselman Library  
Special Collections & College Archives**

**Processed by Kayla Lenkner  
April 2008**

## **MS – 094: Letters of John Duttera, World War II**

*Processed by: Kayla Lenkner  
April 2008*

### **Provenance:**

Purchased from Charles Apfelbaum in 1996.

### **Biography:**

John Walter Duttera was born in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania on March 11, 1912 to George H. and Laura E. Duttera. He graduated from Gettysburg High School in 1931 and later joined the army.

Duttera served with the 93<sup>rd</sup> Air Service Squadron, eventually becoming a Staff Sergeant. He moved frequently during his early army career and was stationed at Keesler Field, Mississippi, Lowry Field, Colorado, Duncan Field, Waco Field, and Dalhart, Texas, before being sent overseas to Australia in the summer of 1943.

Duttera spent the remainder of World War II in West Pacific, where he worked with aircraft engines, radio and sound systems. He was briefly stationed in Japan during the fall of 1945.

He was discharged in October, 1945 and returned to Pennsylvania, where he established Duttera Sound Service, a radio and electric shop. In addition to running his own business, Duttera also worked as a rural mail carrier in the Gettysburg area.

Throughout the war, Duttera kept correspondence with Ruth Feiser of New Oxford, Pennsylvania. Feiser was born in New Oxford on March 17, 1916 to J. Frank and Florence R. Feiser. In 1934 she graduated from New Oxford High School. She later graduated from Thompson's Business School in York, and was employed as a bookkeeper at the York Machinery and Supply Company.

Duttera and Feiser were married on October 19, 1946 at the First Lutheran church in New Oxford. The couple lived in Gettysburg and had two children, a son, John W. Jr. and a daughter, Shirley.

John died on March 3, 1991 and Ruth died on September 22, 1995.

### **Scope and Content Notes:**

This collection consists primarily of correspondence received by Ruth Feiser during World War II and is broken up into four series: I. John Duttera Correspondence, II. Joseph E. Atland Correspondence, III. Miscellaneous Correspondence, Clippings and Photographs, and IV. Collection Information.

Series I. consists of 106 letters written by John Duttera to Ruth Feiser during his military service from 1942 until 1945. These letters detail Duttera's experiences at basic training and while stationed overseas as a staff sergeant in the army air force. He worked on engines and radios, and saw very little actual combat. Duttera moved frequently, and his letters document his travels. The early letters describe the various cities in which he stayed and American landmarks he visited. Eventually he is stationed in Australia, at

which point his letters become much less descriptive because of the censor, though he does occasionally comment briefly on the native foods, wildlife, currency, and people and their customs (August 31, 1944; November 8, 1944; November 17, 1944; January 27, 1945; March 8, 1945; March 22, 1945; October 10, 1945). He is stationed on several South Pacific islands, and the letter dated September 6, 1945, written after the censor is lifted, describes his travels in detail (included as Addendum I). The majority of Duttera's correspondence is about daily life in the army, the food, the other men in his unit, the mail service and entertainment. He was very fond of films and frequently writes about what he has seen, though he does not describe the films in any depth. He does occasionally discuss the way the depiction of the war in films differs from his own experiences (March 1, 1944; June 23, 1944; August 10, 1944; September 13, 1945). He writes about seeing visiting orchestras, stage shows, comedians and celebrities, about the *Reader's Digest* and local papers, and about the Hit Parade on the radio. He discusses his opinions about the Woman's Army Corps (May 17, 1943; December 29, 1943; June 30, 1944; November 27, 1944; March 31, 1945; May 3, 1945) censorship, war marriages (January 22, 1944; March 10, 1944; June 30, 1944; March 8, 1945), Ruth's employment and working women in general (December 4, 1943; December 16, 1943; February 17, 1944; April 25, 1944; December 23, 1944; March 8, 1945), politics (March 20, 1944; May 24, 1944; June 30, 1944), Victory Gardens (May 24, 1944; June 30, 1944; September 14, 1944), and rationing. Duttera's mother dies while he is stationed overseas, and several of his letters focus on her death as well as his concern for his sister, Mary (April 16, 1945; May 3, 1945). After the war, most of his letters are about the point system (discussed in the majority of the letters written May 12, 1945 through October 10, 1945). In response to Ruth's letters, Duttera often remarks about Ruth's experiences in Pennsylvania, about her job, family, friends, car, classes, attempts to raise ducks and turkeys, the draft in the Gettysburg area (May 18, 1944), and an outbreak of infantile paralysis (polio) around New Oxford (September 14, 1944). He frequently writes about sending and receiving photographs and gifts. His letters often include newspaper clippings, cartoons, song lyrics and jokes.

Series II consists of nineteen letters written to Ruth by Joseph E. Atland. These letters written in 1942 and early 1943, are primarily about his experiences during basic training at Langley Field Virginia and his pre-flight school training at Maxwell Field, Alabama. He frequently his fear of being "washed out" of flight school—which does eventually happen, due to his poor eyesight. Atland describes his various living quarters and daily life in the army, as well as his impressions of Montgomery and his dislike of the South. He frequently discusses gas rationing. Atland often writes about sending and receiving pictures and gifts, and occasionally he requests that Ruth send him specific necessities, such as a suitcase.

Series III consists of two additional letters received by Ruth, one from William J. Heller and another from Charles H. Blackburn, three drafts of letters she wrote, clippings and photographs, probably of John and Ruth.

Series IV consists of collection information, including the purchase record and container list.



November 7, 1943 Australia: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
November 14, 1943 Australia: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
December 9, 1943 Australia: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
December 16, 1943 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
December 29, 1943 New Guinea: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)

**1 – 9 Correspondence: January 10, 1944 – February 17, 1944**

January 10, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)  
January 22, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)  
February 17, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)

**1 – 10 Correspondence: March 1, 1944 – March 29, 1944**

March 1, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
March 10, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope; cartoon clippings;  
March 11 Northern American edition of *Guinea Gold*; March 12  
*Guinea Gold* weekend supplement)  
March 20, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp.  
March 29, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope)

**1 – 11 Correspondence: April 4, 1944 – April 25, 1944**

April 4, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope and small note—  
definition of “hysterises”, possibly written by Ruth)  
April 12, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope and Easter Sunday  
service bulletin)  
April 17, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope and clippings of  
cartoons and jokes)  
April 25, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)

**1 – 12 Correspondence: May 1, 1944 – May 31, 1944**

May 1, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp.  
May 9, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope, cartoon clippings and  
3 pages of shorthand notes, probably Ruth’s)  
May 9, 1944 1 page request fro film; ALS (includes envelope)  
May 18, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
May 24, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)  
May 31, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope)

**1 – 13 Correspondence: June 7, 1944 – June 30, 1944**

June 7, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope and clipping: “The  
Athletic Round Table’s Serviceman’s Ballot”)  
June 14, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope and cartoon clipping)

June 23, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)  
June 30, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope and July 2 church bulletin)

**1 – 14 Correspondence: July 7, 1944 – August 31, 1944**

July 7, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp.  
July 30, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope)  
August 10, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-10pp. (includes envelope)  
August 19, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-7pp.  
August 31, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope)

**1 – 15 Correspondence: September 10, 1944 – September 24, 1944**

September 10, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
September 14, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope and clippings of jokes)  
September 24, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)

**1 – 16 Correspondence: October 2, 1944 – October 28, 1944**

October 2, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
October 11, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp.  
October 20, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
October 28, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 1 Correspondence: November 8, 1944 – November 27, 1944**

November 8, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-7pp. (includes envelope)  
November 9, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-1p. (includes envelope)  
November 17, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-9pp. (includes envelope)  
November 27, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope and cartoon clippings)

**2 – 2 Correspondence: December 8, 1944 – December 23, 1944**

Christmas card CS. (not dated, postmarked December 7, 1944) (includes envelope)  
December 8, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope)  
December 17, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)  
December 23, 1944 New Guinea: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope and clippings of jokes)

**2 – 3 Correspondence: January 17, 1945 – January 27, 1945**

January 17, 1945 Somewhere in Philippines: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)  
January 27, 1945 Philippines: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 4 Correspondence: February 7, 1945 – February 25, 1945**



February 7, 1945 Philippines: ALS-10pp. (includes clippings of jokes)  
February 12, 1945 Philippines: ALS-1p. request for film (includes envelope)  
February 18, 1945 Philippines: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope and cartoon clippings)  
February 25, 1945 Philippines: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope and cartoons clippings)

**2 – 5 Correspondence: March 8, 1945 – March 31, 1945**

March 8, 1945 Philippines: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
March 9, 1945 Philippines: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
March 15, 1945 Philippines: ALS-7pp. (includes envelope)  
March 22, 1945 Philippines: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
March 25, 1945 Philippines: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
March 31, 1945 Philippines: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope and clipping of jokes)

**2 – 6 Correspondence: April 16, 1945 – May 25, 1945**

April 16, 1945 Philippines: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)  
April 18, 1945 Luzon: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope and clipping)  
May 3, 1945 Luzon: ALS-9pp. (includes envelope)  
May 12, 1945 Luzon: ALS-3pp.  
May 18, 1945 Luzon: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
May 25, 1945 Luzon: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 7 Correspondence: June 3, 1945 – June 30, 1945**

June 3, 1945 Luzon: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope and cartoon clipping)  
June 11, 1945 Luzon: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
June 17, 1945 Luzon: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope and newspaper clipping)  
June 25, 1945 Luzon: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope and cartoon clipping)  
June 30, 1945 West Pacific: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 8 Correspondence: July 4, 1945 – July 27, 1945**

July 4, 1945 West Pacific: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope and clipping jokes)  
July 11, 1945 West Pacific: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
July 20, 1945 West Pacific: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope and joke and cartoon clippings)  
July 27, 1945 West Pacific: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope and cartoon and joke clippings)

**2 – 9 Correspondence: August 2, 1945 – August 31, 1945**

August 2, 1945 West Pacific: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
August 11, 1945 Ryukyus: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope)  
August 17, 1945 Okinawa: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope and song lyrics)  
August 24, 1945 Okinawa: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)

August 31, 1945 Okinawa: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 10 Correspondence: September 6, 1945 – September 26, 1945**

September 6, 1945 Machinato Air Strip: ALS-7pp. (includes envelope) Letter includes a detailed description of Duttera's travels in the service.  
September 13, 1945 Machinato, Okinawa: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope)  
September 20, 1945 Machinato, Okinawa: ALS-8pp. (includes envelope and clipping)  
September 26, 1945 Machinato, Okinawa: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 11 Correspondence: October 10, 1945 – October 23, 1945**

October 10, 1945 Japan: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)  
October 15, 1945 Japan: ALS-1p. (includes envelope)  
October 22, 1945 Japan: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)  
October 23, 1945 Japan: ALS-1p. (includes envelope)

**Series II – Joseph E. Atland Correspondence**

**2 – 12 Correspondence: April 22, 1942 – May 24, 1942**

April 22, 1942 Langley Field, VA: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
May 6, 1942 Langley Field, VA: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
May 10, 1942 Langley Field, VA: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
May 24, 1942 Langley Field, VA: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 13 Correspondence: June 5, 1942 – August 28, 1942**

June 5, 1942 Langley Field, VA: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
June 22, 1942 Langley Field, VA: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
July 5, 1942 Langley Field, VA: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope)  
July 13, 1942 Maxwell Field, AL: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope)  
July 29, 1942 Maxwell Field, AL: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)  
August 28, 1942 Maxwell Field, AL: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)

**2 – 14 Correspondence: September 9, 1942 – December 21, 1942**

September 9, 1942 Maxwell Field, AL: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)  
September 17, 1942 Decatur, AL: ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)  
November 15, 1942 Columbus Army Flying School, MS: ALS-6pp. (includes envelope)  
December 12, 1942 Kaye Field, MS: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope) (year dated incorrectly)  
December 21, 1942 Kaye Field, MS: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope, and notes written in pencil, possibly Ruth's.)

## **2 – 15 Correspondence: January 19, 1943 – March 18, 1943**

January 19, 1942 Kaye Field, MS: ALS-5pp. (includes envelope) (year dated incorrectly)  
February 9, 1942 Kaye Field, MS: ALS-4pp. (includes envelope) (year dated incorrectly)  
February 28, 1943 Columbus, MS: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
March 18, 1943 Columbus, MS: ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)

## **Series III – Miscellaneous Correspondence, Clippings and Photographs**

### **2 – 16 Additional Correspondence**

December 23, 1943 Panama City, FL: “Hello Ruth” from “Bill” [William J. Heller]; ALS-2pp. (includes envelope)  
May 25, 1943 Camp Blanding, FL: “Hello Ruth” from “Hugh B” [Charles H. Blackburn]; ALS-3pp. (includes envelope)  
February 26, 1945 “Dear Donald”. TL-1p. (probably written by Ruth)  
March 14, 1945 New Oxford, PA: Request to *Reader’s Digest* for a renewal of John Duttera’s subscription; TL-1p. (probably written by Ruth)  
April 4, 1945 New Oxford, PA: “Dear John”; TL-1p. (probably written by Ruth)

### **2 – 17 Song Lyrics and Jokes**

n.d. Song lyrics: “Mairzy Doats”; AD-2pp.  
n.d. Song lyrics: “It’s Love, Love, Love”; AD-2pp.  
n.d. Song lyrics: “I’ll Be Around” and “Don’t Sweetheart Me”; AD-2pp.  
n.d. Song lyrics: “Let’s Take the Long Way Home” and “I Promise You”; TD-1p.  
n.d. Song lyrics: “A Little on the Lonely Side” and “My Dreams are Getting Better All the Time”; TD-1p.  
n.d. “Love Life of an Indian”; TD-1p.  
n.d. “A tramp was leaning against a post...”; TD-2pp. (two copies)  
n.d. Moron Jokes; TD-2pp.  
n.d. Christmas greeting; TD-1p.  
n.d. Valentine Greeting; TD-1p.  
n.d. Thanksgiving greeting; TD-1p.

**2 – 18** Photocopies of newspaper and magazine clippings concerning the death of Duttera’s mother, cartoons, and pages about the occupation of Japan and the war on the Pacific Front.

**2 – 19** Seven photographs, possibly of John Duttera and Ruth Feiser.

**Series IV – Collection Information**

**2 – 20** Purchase record and container list.

## Addendum I

### Date Range:

June 30 – July 15, 1942:  
September – October 13, 1942:  
December, 1942:  
February 9 – April 1, 1943:  
April 29, 1943:  
May 8 – June 14, 1943:  
July 20 – December 9, 1943:  
December 16, 1943 – June 30(?), 1944:  
July 7 – December 23, 1944:  
January 17 – April 18, 1945:  
May 3 – August 2, 1945:  
August 11 – September 26, 1945:  
  
October 10, 1945

### Location:

Keesler Field, Mississippi  
Lowry Field, Denver, Colorado  
Duncan Field, Texas  
Waco, Texas  
Pampa, Texas  
Army Air Base, Dalhart, Texas  
Townsville, Australia  
Oro Bay, New Guinea  
Finchhafen, New Guinea  
Noemfoor  
Luzon (location varies in Luzon)  
Machinato Air Strip, Okinawa [occasionally referred to as Ryukyus]  
  
Japan

### September 6, 1945 Letter Locations:

1. Townsville, Australia
2. Oro Bay, New Guinea
3. Finchhafen [Finschhafen?], New Guinea
4. Noemfoor (island)
5. Luzon
6. Lingayen (Luzon)
7. Mangaldan (Luzon)
8. Clark Field (Luzon)
9. Laoag (Luzon; only for one night)
10. Machinato, Okinawa
11. Working at the Yonton Strip and Naha.