



2009 Take a Veteran to School Day Additional Primary Sources

Civil War Letter

Below is an excerpt of a letter written in 1862 by Union soldier Tilton C. Reynolds to his mother. Reynolds had enlisted as a seventeen-year-old six months earlier, and would serve until the end of the war, despite spending several months in a Confederate jail, a result of being captured a month after writing this letter. Though light and humorous in tone, there seems to be an underlying angst in the words of this young soldier as he prepares to confront a growing Civil War.

Camp near Yorktown, April 16, 1862

Dear Mother

I am going to write a few lines to tell you about a little fun we had about Col Corbet our Lieut Col. When the Regt went out on Picket he was going round to see where the Picket Posts was when he came to the Rebel Picket lines. It being after night he had missed our lines & got too far off. He rode up & asked what Regiment that was & One of them told him It was the 24th Virginia. This Scared Col Corbet Considerable & he turned his horse the other way & Started for the Picket lines of Co. C who was Posted first. The Rebels fired at him Several times but did not hit him. He jumped off his horse when he come to the Co & told them to hold his horse & he took down though the woods toward Camp Double Quick. This is the Story I heard I expect they made It a little worse than It was but he was Badly Scared that I know.

There was a little Scirmish to day that our Artillery had with the Rebels. They killed one of our men & Shot the legs of an other below the knees. I guess the[y] made the Rebels git though. They are trying to Drive them out of their little Batteries & I guess they are doing It. The Adjts & Uncle John is well. I was up to the Adjts office a little while ago he is going to write tomorrow. But I must close this for I have nothing to write about. The mail goes out in the morning. We have no drill any more Excep a little Bayonet Exercise & that is easy work. I am going to draw a new pair of Pants in a few days. Mine is pretty good yet but they are a little too Small & as we are Entitled to new ones I thought I might as well get them. But now I must close. Give my love to all & except my Sincere love for yourself and believe me to be your affectionate Son.

T Reynolds

[From: The Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, from the American Memory Collection entry titled "A Civil War Soldier in the Wild Cat Regiment: Selections from the Tilton C Reynolds Papers. (March, 2004)]



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Letter From World War I

The text below is excerpted from a letter written by U.S. soldier Albert Smith from his position in France during World War I. The letter is addressed to Albert's brother, Greg, who was at home in Tennessee. In these evocative passages, Albert describes the hardships of his daily life on the front, while expressing a fervent commitment to realizing an Allied victory.

France, Oct. 15, 1918.

Mr. McGregor Smith. Cookeville, Tenn

Dear "Greg":

I received a letter from you a few weeks ago but have not had time to answer for we have been exceedingly busy...This is the wettest muddiest country I ever saw, it has been raining steadily for seven weeks. I stepped in a mud hole the other night and went up to my waist in mud and didnt [sic] get to change clothes and in fact I haven't changed yet. I haven't changed for over two month and havent [sic] even had my clothes off for that length of time. I have not had a bath for six weeks and none in sight for I haven't the slightest idea of using what little drinking water I get in my canteen for batheing [sic] purposes...You cant imagine how torn up this country really is. Every where there are wire entanglements and trenches and dug outs. Even out of the war zone there are entanglements and dugouts to protect the civilians from air raids. I have been from border to border of France and I mean I made the trip on foot throughout the country like a Gypsy horse trader we would hike a while and then stop and fight a while...Our doughboy are the greatest men in the world...The southern boys are certainly hard fighters. The third Tenn. Infantry is the hardest fighting regement [sic] over here. I understand that they have been cited by the British for bravery. At Cambrai they were the americans [sic] that advanced thru the heart of the city and cleared the place of machine guns.

Don't worry about coming over here stay in school that is your service to your country. I am in good health and ready to come home after the war but not before, I will do my bit here...I want to stay on the front as long as the war lasts. Be good and study HARD have a good time and write often.

Love to all,

Albert

Corp. Albert P. Smith
Hq. Co. 115 F.A. American Expdnt. France.

Citation: Dear Home: Letters from World War I. The History Channel. www.historychannel.com/letters/wwletters.html.





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Recollections of a Japanese-American World War II Veteran

Before the United States entered the war, Joe Ichiuji, an American citizen of Japanese descent, was a corporal in the U.S. Army. Within two months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army discharged him and placed his family in an internment camp. When government recruiters came to this camp seeking recruits for an all Japanese-American combat unit in 1943, Ichiuji was one of the first to volunteer. Below are Ichiuji's recollections of this turbulent period, which proved to be the ultimate test of allegiance.

On loyalty:

"Japanese-Americans had to prove that they were loyal Americans because they had two battles to fight. One against the enemy in Europe and the Pacific, and the other against racial prejudice in the United States..."

On Pearl Harbor:

"I felt very badly because the country of my parents would attack the United States. Here I'm an American citizen. I'm in uniform and I just wondered why would they do a thing like that and how would I face my friends, my comrades in the Army, that was my concern..."

On the internment camp:

"The morale of the relocation camp was low after being uprooted from their home and friends and placed in the middle of the desert. On top of that the camp was surrounded by barbed wire and it was guarded by armed soldiers. The camp life was regimented like the Army – you were assigned a number, you had to line up for mess, shower and toilet. And my family lost the control and as time went by they adjusted to camp life and they made the best of it."

On the possibility of rejoining the Army:

"I just didn't want to give up this chance to show my loyalties as an American citizen and serve my country. Even though I was discharged and evacuated and placed in a camp and treated as an enemy alien. I thought that by proving that I was a loyal American, the people outside, you know, they would have confidence in us and remove us from the camp – that was my aim."

[From Save Our History®: The National World War II Memorial, an original documentary by The History Channel, ©1999.]



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Recollections of a Paratrooper

Richard Scudder was a paratrooper who participated in the invasion of France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Below is his account of this historic day, revealing the overwhelming fears of a soldier who parachuted well behind enemy lines as an integral part of a crucial invasion force.

"For the ride across the Channel, nothing seemed real. It seemed to me like the world was coming to an end. When our plane taxied around on the runway, a real sick feeling came over us. We flew over the biggest invasion force that was ever put together. Ships, battleships, everything that you could think of was there in the Channel, ready to participate in the invasion of Normandy."

"When we got over the coast of France, all hell broke loose. The bullets hitting our planes sounded like someone was throwing gravel on a tin roof. Our company commander kicked the door off of our plane and said, 'That real estate belongs to those sons of bitches tonight, but it will be ours in the morning.'"

"As I got to the door, a burst of flak exploded right above my head. I don't know how this could ever happen but it did: A piece of that flak got under my helmet and hit me in the eyebrow, and the blood streamed down across my face, and I remember frantically feeling for a hole, thinking that I had been shot with one of those tracer bullets that I had witnessed coming up towards us. Thank God it was only a scratch in my eyebrow. That was a relief to find that I hadn't picked up a bullet."

"I landed by a causeway. We had been briefed on these things, that we could wade them; they were only supposed to be knee-deep. Boy, that wasn't true at all. I went into that water and I went down over my head, and that scared the devil out of me. I thought I was going to drown."

[From Ronald J. Drez, (Editor). *Voices of D-Day: The Story of the Allied Invasion Told by Those Who Were There*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1994), p.80.]



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Desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948)

The following is an excerpt of an executive order signed by President Harry Truman ending segregation in the armed services and calling for the complete integration of the military. This order was the culmination of efforts among members of the military and their supporters, and it is remembered as one of the initial victories for integration which ushered in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s.

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense:

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.
2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.
3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the Armed Services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.
4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.

Harry Truman
The White House
July 26, 1948



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Letter From The Korean War

The following letter is written by Pvt. Edward L. Pierce to his parents back home in Calumet, Illinois. Pierce, who wrote frequently during his deployment in Korea, describes some of his recent experiences and tells of the challenges he faced as a radio operator in Korea.

*Pvt. E. L. Pierzchalski US55263754
Hqtrs.Btry. 48 F.A.Bn., A.P.O. #7
March 25, 1953*

Dear Mom and Dad,

...The[y] (enemy forces)...made a "push" last night and got "Old Baldy." We lost one O.P. and one lieutenant.

I think the rain is holding up the fighting. Our guns aren't firing now. The skies are dark. When something's up, the skies are all lit up with flares and air bursts. Right now it's 2:40 a.m. I'm on duty from 12:30 a.m. - 6:30. It's really hard to keep awake. The light is bad and after writing or reading a while my eyes burn so I have to quit. We took one of the headlights off the truck and hung it up with wire to the battery so we do have better lighting than anyone else. We burned the "dims" out, now we've got the "brights" burning.

Tomorrow, I'll try to wash in one of the streams. I haven't any other clothes with me so it will be a couple more days till I change. I'll write again as soon as possible or when I get a letter to answer. Otherwise the news is always the same. There are times when things do happen and moves we make but I'm not allowed to write about them. (Some of our wiremen just came in now)

I'll sign off now. I have to start the truck in order to charge the battery.

*Love
Eddie*

Citation: Edward Pierce Collection (AFC/2001/001/8025), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.



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Letter From Vietnam

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Sgt. Robert Gauthier, a platoon leader in the Vietnam War, to Patricia Lala (referred to as Patricia Pugliese) in 1968. As part of the local Junior Women's Club, Pugliese began writing Marines, and the following text is one of those correspondences. The letter describes the general hardships of war and the moral-boosting impact of these generous letters.

*From: Sgt. Robert Gauthier platoon leader
To: Pat Pugliese*

Dear Pat and girls,

Let me say girls that the packages of cookies, cheese, crackers and spread couldn't have come at a better time. The platoon had been out in the field and just came in for a 3 day rest and we were going to go out again for 5-7 days. The packages arrived and we had quite a party, and I must truthfully say that morale was extremely low until your packages came and we had just what you girls wanted, a good old picnic. Everyone joking, talking; the mood changed, we dug up a radio, danced (by ourselves) clowned around and different guys competed for different type dance honors. I won the jitterbug of course, no competition from the younger set. That sure did do a lot more than to mold us back as a good fighting machine...

Now to a sadder note. I regret I must inform you of the deaths and serious wounded of YOUR Marine Pltn., as we have all vowed ourselves YOUR platoon. I and everyman has voted to inform you girls through me and my sucessor [sic] if I am killed of their fate whether good or bad. As I sit here writing this, alive and recovering from my own wound, the memories of our brave men bring tears to my eyes I am not ashamed of one bit. Gach and everyman beleived [sic] and died for that belief and that is, America the free and beautiful...

As you can see we lost 25 men and within a week or so now girls you will have about 70-75% of a new platoon....I can promise you more mail than you've been getting. I hope that you're as understanding as you all seem because the terrible mental and physical strain here is terrific... We have been in the field almost continually for the past 2 months...

*With all our love and respect,
Your Temple City Jr. Platoon of U.S. Marines
Your old mean Sgt. Friend,
Bob*

Citation: Patricia Lala Collection (AFC/2001/001/2236), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.



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Letter From a Persian Gulf War Veteran

The following is a letter written to Congressman John Shimkus from Patricia Seawalt on November 29, 2001 in response to a request for information on her military service in the Persian Gulf War. In the letter, Seawalt recalls the hardships she faced after reenlisting to offer her unique skill of oil analysis to the effort in Saudi Arabia.

To: Congressman Shimpkus [sic]

RE: Military tour to Saudi Arabi (Gulf War)

Dear Sir...

Our hardships were many. The older military [and] those of us with experience in the field and those with war time experience adapted as well as we could. Those with little or no experience were lost. They were under the impression that they would work 0800 hrs to 1700 hrs then go into town shopping. We dealt with millions of flies and our mess tables were so covered with them the tables looked black. Showers were allowed only at the end of the day and for 10 min. in length. On several occasions the water delivered for our showers were in the same trucks that had hauled petrolem [sic] products earlier. The toilets Were impossible to keep clean due to the large number of units using them...

...Weather conditions: by 0430 it was usually around 105°F. Rainy season usually flooding and constantly Wet. Winter extreamly [sic] cold at night. We had scorpions, snakes, bugs and flea's to deal with as well as more flies. A lot of the bugs, flea's and Flies were feeding on dead bodies and carcusses [sic] of herds of goats & camels found dead in the desert for no apparent reason. Little or no food. Only MRE's (meals ready to eat) for weeks or months at a time...The whole Battalion coming down with dysentery. constant alarms sounding...

I hope this is what you wanted, and I hope it will help.

Sincerely [sic]

Sgt Patricia M. Seawalt (Ret)

Citation: Patricia Seawalt Collection (AFC/2001/001/949), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.



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Poems from World War II and the Vietnam War

"A Combat Soldier of WWII"

August 3, 1944-July 2, 1946

By James W. Hale

A soldier in battle, I remember the fray.
It's clear in my memory to this very day.

I slept in the snow and on hard, stoney soil
My bed was a foxhole dug with backbreaking toil.

I had no warm bath, and no fresh, clean clothes
During those months that I lived in the cold.

A foxhole of water with mud knee-deep
Was my substitute for a bed and clean sheets.

I traveled over ridges and through valleys low.
I crossed over rivers and crawled
through grassy plateaus.

Through enemy lines of fortification
I fought my way onward with no vacation.

There were guns; there were tanks; there
were automobiles
That lay alongside the men who were killed.

Rifles and cartridge belts, helmets and shell
Also were scattered down blood spattered trails.

My memory still pictures one frightening scene
As if it were a movie on the television screen.

The edge of the woods near the French/German border
Was ground covered with horses that died from
the mortar.

A thud on my shoulder – it dropped to the ground,
I had a hole in my collar from an eight millimeter round.

I wished for a shelter or a very thick shield
To safely protect me from the fast flying steel.

I think of the soldiers with whom I did room
That died in the battles and never came home.

I often feel sad and sometimes alone
To think of those buddies that I have known.

The wounds of my buddies, the death of my pals
Greatly affected the company's morale.

General Earnest, General Patton, and
General Eisenhower
Rushed us forward and forward until victory was ours.

The war was then over and I bid adieu
To friends who returned to the home that they knew.

I still can remember the places I stayed,
The battles I fought, and the friends that I made.

Citation: James Hale Collection (AFC/2001/001/19898), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.



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Poems from World War II and the Vietnam War

"What? Why?"

By Rhona Marie Knox Prescott

What is happening?

Why?

What are we doing in Vietnam?

Why?

Will there be an honorable peace?

When?

Citation: Rhona Prescott Collection (AFC/2001/001/1146), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.