

Activity: You've Got V-Mail! The Role of Letters and Communication in World War II



Guiding question:

How was World War II experienced by soldiers and by soldiers' families?

DEVELOPED BY MANON BART

Grade Level(s): 6-8, 9-12

Subject(s): Social Studies

Cemetery Connection: Brittany American Cemetery

Fallen Hero Connection: Private Donald E. Brown





Overview

Using letters, videos and primary and secondary source analysis, students will explore the experiences of both servicemembers and families during and after the war.

Historical Context

Letter writing served as the main source of communication between soldiers on the front lines and their loved ones back home. World War II gave rise to Victory-Mail, or V-Mail, which allowed those across the world to express their feelings and share in their experiences. V-Mail employed a new technique. The postal service photographed the letters and placed them on microfilm, or a reel of film. This technique saved the military much needed space to ship military supplies overseas. Thousands of letters were reproduced on thumb-nail sized microfilm rolls, which made it easier to send the letters overseas. Once the microfilmed letters reached their intended destination, the military "blew up" the letter to a legible size and printed them.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Understand the role that letters played in connecting service members with their families; and
- Write a letter from the perspective of either a service member who fought in World War II or the next-of-kin of a service member who died during the war.

"The most precious mission we have at American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) is sharing the stories of service members buried in our cemeteries. I have learned over time that anonymous headstones and Missing in Action (MIA) service members commemorated on our Walls of the Missing have a story too, a story that is important to their families. I wanted to find a way to highlight the way that letters provided connections between soldiers and their families. These letters give us many insights to the different experiences people had on the battlefield and on the homefront." -Manon Bart

Bart is a French employee at the American Battle Monuments Commission in Paris, France.

Documents Used \star indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

Blank V-mail envelope University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc504978/m1/2

★ Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946 United States Department of War

Film, Decision (1946) National Archives and Records Administration youtube.com/watch?v= TVugaEinlM

George Wilson, If You Survive, 1987 (excerpt)

John F. Kennedy, Remarks at East Coast Memorial to the Missing at Sea Dedication, New York, May 23, 1963

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (JFKPOF-044-026-p001)

Letter, Curtis A. Kirkwood to Mrs. A. T. Kirkwood, 1944 State Historical Society of Missouri digital.shsmo.org/digital/collection/wwii/id/10641/rec/17

Letter, Donald Brown to Andrew Brown, April 5, 1944 Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

Letter, Donald Brown to Andrew Brown, April 9, 1944 Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

Letter, Donald Brown to Kleme [last name unknown], April 29, 1942 Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

Letter, Major General J.A. Ulio to Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Brown, August 28, 1944 Individual Deceased Personnel File, National Archives and Records Administration - St. Louis

Letter, Major General Thomas B. Larkin to Mrs. Barbara N. Vrtatko, January 15, 1948 United States Department of the Army

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944 State Historical Society of Missouri digital.shsmo.org/digital/collection/wwii/id/6922/rec/1

Letter, Water S. Gunnarson to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick W. Gunnarson, November 15, 1944 State Historical Society of Missouri

digital.shsmo.org/digital/collection/wwii/id/7336/rec/22

Secondary Sources

★ Film, *Letters* [18:13] American Battle Monuments Commission youtube.com/watch?v=WETcOA4Wul4

rivate Donald E. Brown Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy **National History Day** nhdsilentheroes.org/profiles/donald-eldon-brown/

★ Private First Class James Vrtatko Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy **National History Day** nhdsilentheroes.org/profiles/james-h-vrtatko/

Materials

- Group A: Battlefield Experience Materials and Writing Assessment
- Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials and Writing Assessment
- Group C: Homefront Experience Materials and Writing Assessment
- Group D: Homefront Experience Materials and Writing Assessment
- V-Mail Writing Assignment and Rubric
- Letter Writing Assignment and Rubric
- Computers with internet access and speakers

Lesson Preparation

- Divide students into four groups.
- Make copies of the Materials and Writing Assessment for each student in each of the four groups (A-D):
 - Group A: Battlefield Experience
 - Group B: Battlefield Experience
 - **Group C: Homefront Experience**
 - Group D: Homefront Experience
- Make copies of the V-Mail Writing Assignment and Rubric for students in groups A and B.
- Make copies of the Letter Writing Assignment and Rubric for students in groups C and D.
- Set up classroom technology and test all online resources before class.

Procedure

Activity One (60 minutes)

- Organize the class into four groups (A through D).
- Ask students how service members and families stayed in touch during World War II.
- Remind students that the communication went both ways: to the service members and from the service members.
- Distribute the materials and writing assessment to each group of students. Monitor and assist as needed.
 - **Teacher Tip:** Preview each group. Some groups include more or less reading and can be adapted to students with various needs.
- Show the film, <u>Letters</u> [18:13], to the students to help them understand the value of these letters and the chain of communication between the homefront and the battlefield.

Assessment

- Distribute copies of the V-Mail Writing Assignment and Rubric for students in groups A and B.
- Distribute copies of the Letter Writing Assignment and Rubric for students in groups C and D.
- Review the directions with the students.
 - Teacher Tip: Students can complete this assessment independently or in small groups at teacher discretion.
- The V-Mail Writing Assignment Rubric and the Letter Writing Assignment Rubric can be used to evaluate student work.

Methods for Extension:

- The American Battle Monuments Commission maintains U.S. military cemeteries overseas. These cemeteries are permanent memorials to the fallen, but it is important that students know the stories of those who rest here. To learn more about the stories of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice, visit <u>abmc.gov/education</u> and <u>NHDSilentHeroes.org</u>.
- Teachers can enhance students' interest in challenges faced by World War II servicemembers by exploring these related lesson plans:
 - Advancement of Medical Technology during World War II
 - The Challenges of Deployment: Interactions with Allies in the Pacific
 - The Red Cross on the Front Line

Adaptations:

Teachers can build student groups based on the accessibility of the documents within each group.

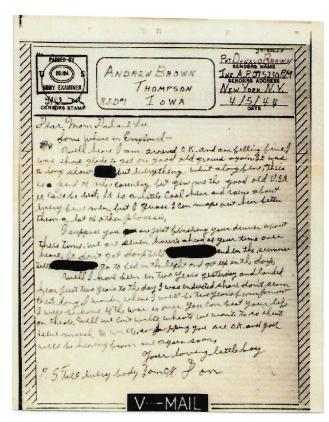
Directions: Using the primary and secondary sources below, learn about the experience of soldiers who fought in both the Normandy Invasion as well as the push into Northern France. After exploring these sources, you will write a letter describing training or deployment of U.S. soldiers in this campaign, so look for ideas and facts in these sources to help inspire your letter.

Letter, Donald Brown to Andrew Brown, April 5, 1944

Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

Pvt. Donald Brown Int. A.P.O 15230 PM New York, N.Y. 4/5/44

Andrew Brown Thompson R.F.D # 1



Dear Mom and Dad and Leo Some where in England --

Well here I am arrived OK. And am feeling fine. I was shore [sure] glad to get on good old ground again. It was a long slow REDACTED but everything went along fine, this is kind of nice country, but give me the good old U.S.A. It can't be that. it is a little cool here and rains about every four months, but I guess I can make out here better than a lot of other places.

I suppose you are just finishing your dinner about this time. We are seven hours ahead of your time over here. It don't get dark til REDACTED and in the summer we REDACTED go to bed in the light and get up in the dark.

Well I have been in two years yesterday and landed here just two years to the day I was inducted shore [sure] don't seem that long. I wonder where I will be two years from now.

I will be home if the war is over. You can bet your life on that. Well we can't write where

Wishing you are okay and you will be hearing from me again soon.

Your loving little boy

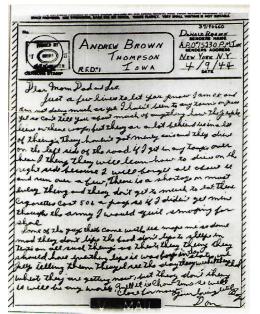
P.S. Tell everybody I am OK. Don

Letter, Donald Brown to Andrew Brown, April 9, 1944

Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

Pvt. Donald Brown A.P.O 15230 PM Int. New York, N.Y. 4/9/44

Andrew Brown Thompson R.F.D # 1



Dear Mom and Dad and Leo,

Just a few lines to let you know I am okay and am not doing much as yet. I haven't been to any towns on pass yet so can't tell you about much of anything how the people lives or there [their] ways, but they are a lot behind us in a lot of things, they haven't got many cars and they drive on the left side of the road. If I get in any tanks over here I think they will learn how to drive on the right side because I will [unknown] all about it and run over a few. There is a shortage on most every thing and they don't get to [too] much to eat. There cigarettes cost 50¢ a pack as if I didn't get mine through the army I would quit smoking for shore [sure].

Some of the guys that come with us make me so dam [damn] mad they don't like the food don't like to sleep in tents on all such as though they think they should have everything like as was back in the states, and I keep telling them though they'll see the day they wish they had what they are getting now, but they don't think it will be any worse.

Well it is chow time so will close for now.

Your loving little boy

Don

Letter, Donald Brown to Kleme [last name unknown], April 29, 1942 Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

ENJOYING THE ARMY!

C. C. 86th Inf Camp Roberts, Calif. April 29, 1942

Dear Kleme:

How is everything in Thompson? I am going on my fourth week in the army and am writing a little about it. We lie around in bed until 6 o'clock. This of course gives us plenty of time to get washed, shaved, dressed and to make our beds by 6:10 a. m. By 6:15 we stand outside and shiver while someone blows the dickens out of a bugle. After we are reasonably chilled we stumble our way thru the darkness to the mess hall. Here we all jump to the table like a bunch of hogs after an ear of corn and grab what we can. If you don't jump at the right time—no breakfast. After gorging ourselves with what we get we go back to the barracks.

Soon the sergeant comes in and says "Come on out, kids, and get some sunshine" so we get out in the wonderful California sunshine (nertz) to limber up. We do a few simple exercises like touching our toes with both feet off the ground and jumping up and down.

At 7:30 we put on a light pack and start for the hills. The light pack is not to be confused with the heavy pack. It consists of a gun, bayonet, canteen, mess kit, pup tent, poles, stakes, raincoat and a few other things. The heavy pack has a couple of blankets and some other things. An observation car follows us and picks up all that fall out or faint. Those that fall out or faint are treated very nice and get a free ride back to camp.

At 12 o'clock those that are left are divided into two classes—those that have sore feet and those with a cold. If you have a sore throat they swab out your throat with iodine and if you have sore feet they swab your feet with iodine. If you haven't anything wrong with you they say "what a man." That's the way it goes on 'til the day is over.

Yours truly, Private Don Brown

P. S. Laying all joking aside the army's O. K.

George Wilson, If You Survive, 1987 (excerpt)

"...One evening just before dark while standing in line for hot chow we got a real thrill. Four German fighter-bombers zoomed right over us at treetop level. We scattered instantly and dove for the nearest cover. But their targets seemed to be somewhere near the coast. In seconds just about every antiaircraft gun and machine gun within range opened fire and we could easily follow the path of the planes by the red glow of the tracers. Every fifth machine gun bullet was gowing white phosphorus to help the gunners see where they were shooting. The display looked just like the fireworks back home on the Fourth of July, but the planes were so fast and so low that they were gone before anyone could take good aim, and none of them appeared to be hit.

"About July sixteenth, our regiment moved northeast, close to Saint-Lô. Here we got the news that we were to become part of a special task force of thanks and infantry -- with no other purpose than making a major breakthrough of the German lines. This was the first large-scale tank-infantry team action ever undertaken by the Allies. The enemy in our immediate front was to be carpet-bombed before our jump-off, and then a large army of tanks and infantry would drive through any hole created.

"The crucial problem was the hedgerows. In Normandy, for generations the farmers had grown hedges to separate their fields, however small. They had started by digging small ditches around the edges of the fields. The earth was piled in rows between two fields, and over the years many of these dirt piles grew to become over two feet thick and three feet high. Hedges were planted on top, and their roots prevented erosion. Various bushes and trees also took root to form a barrier strong enough to fence in livestock.

"The Germans, of course, seized upon the hedgerows as the natural earthworks they were. They were excellent for defense. Easy to hide behind, the thick dirt embankment served as a very good shield against our small arms. Usually the Germans put machine guns near the corners of each field, giving them a crossfire that made a frontal attack by infantry nearly suicidal. Sometimes the poor infantry would fight a whole day to gain a few hundred yards -- and that only if they were lucky.

"The special tactics that were developed called for the tanks to break out into a field and spray the next hedgerow with their machine guns while the infantry walked or ran behind the tanks, using them as shields. When the tanks got close enough to the hedgerow they'd raise their fire a little, and the infantry would run ahead, keeping as low as possible, throwing grenades over the hedge. The tanks would plow through the hedges and the infantry would follow closely, then fn out to either side to capture any remaining enemy.

"Originally a tank could not handle a hedgerow very well, because the dirt mounds would tilt them up and expose their relatively vulnerable underbellies to the German panzerfaust — a lethal, armor-piercing rocket grenade similar to our bazooka, capable of knocking out a tank. After a while a sharp steel scythelike bumper, fashioned from old train rails and the scrap iron from German beach obstacles, was welded to the front of tank about a foot above the ground. It sliced a chunk out of the hedge, which allowed the tank to keep low as it burst through and took the Germans by surprise.

"If all went as planned, we would mop up the enemy and continue the attack across to the next hedgerow, and the one after. The tactic seemed practical enough, but even in dry runs it was utterly exhausting to carry all our gear while running behind tranks, bathed in their hot fumes and the churned-up dust.

George Wilson, If You Survive, 1987 (excerpt) con't

"After several days of grueling drill in the new tactics, we were ready to go. Every day we got our gear together and waited for orders to jump off. That went on for about a week, because the bombers that were to do the carpet bombing were grounded by the rotten weather. All the waiting didn't do our nerves any good.

"Meanwhile, there were a few sidelights. One day I came upon one of my young soldiers who had his pistol in hand, apparently getting up the nerve to use it on himself. He was terribly depressed because he had received any mail from home since his landing France. I sat down and quietly talked with him alone for quite a spell until he was assured his family really did care, but that our mail was all messed up because of the fighting. The very next day he received a couple of letters, and that snapped him out of his depression.

"One day our ever-resourceful cooks decided to treat us. They said that a nice young cow had wandered into enemy mortar fire, and that fortunately they had been nearby and so knew it was fresh meat. The steaks were a marvelous change from regular Army rations. A little later, however, Captain Holcomb was comewhat [sic] embarrassed when a French farmer came calling and excitedly demanded payment for his slaughtered cow. He was turned over to a major form Military Government, and I suppose something was worked out.

"Another day Major General Barton, our Division Commander, held a regimental review to award medals for heroic actions since the invasion. As we marched by companies to the parade field some German fighter planes roared over at treetop level -- and men and heroes scattered in every direction, with some diving right through dense hedgerows. The planes never fired on us, and may never have seen us, so we resumed our march to review. We kept looking over our shoulders, but the planes never circled back.

"One of the men had some barber tools, so we took turns sitting on a stump for a quick haircut. I don't remember getting my hair cut again for the next eight months

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Letter, Curtis A. Kirkwood to Mrs. A. T. Kirkwood, 1944, Page One State Historical Society of Missouri

ear mother,

Letter, Curtis A. Kirkwood to Mrs. A. T. Kirkwood, 1944, Page Two State Historical Society of Missouri

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Request Sandwich spreads
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maxine is fine.
Par al
Dore, acc

Letter, Curtis A. Kirkwood to Mrs. A. T. Kirkwood, 1944, Transcript

State Historical Society of Missouri

1st Sgt. Curtis A Kirkwood Co. 'C'.18th Inf. A.P. O. #1 c/o P.M. New York NY

Dear Mother,

France is a beautiful country, even under these adverse conditions one cannot help but observe the scenic wonders and picturesque customs and habitations. There is evidence of the tragedy of war everywhere. One can see it written on the faces of wandering refugees as they plod wearily along the road bravely trying to smile at the liberating Americans. The idle farm implements, unharvested fields, shell torn homes - all part of the desolation left in the wake of the retreating enemy. This all impresses in many ways, but mostly with a profound appreciation for our own country. Don't worry too much about me, I'll be back some day.

Request sandwich spreads and wafers. Regards to all. Maxine is fine.

Love, Al

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page One State Historical Society of Missouri

September 17, 1944 Somewhere in France mother - I have started several letters but some where in the process of finally getting them mailed I have failed. I will absolutely do better - promise - I have Written several times about the wild enthusiasm, of the french people on being freed from the Boches (as they call them), and there must have been innumerable articles and pictures sent to the States concerning the same subject, but it is still one of the upper most things in my mind, It has been one of the most unusual experiences, permitted to mankind, to drive across France and see, and be a part of the liberation of a people. Very often some of us would be the first Allied soldier

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Two State Historical Society of Missouri

In some small community - You could drive thru an apparently deserted village, and by the time you could turn a jeep around and drive back, the streets would be lined with French, American and British flags, and The people would be swarming the streets, with enough flowers to deluge a jeep, or two-and fruit for the soldiers. Everybody wants to shake hands (an old deeply-rooted French custom. A have their little ones give you two-cheek Kisses, + all thru the villages and along the roads the people (mostly women, and old men y children), line the roads, waving, giving the V' sign + throwing kisses. One morning I drove thru a village just ahead of a column of Tanks, which were going to the Front. The people were just getting up and all along the

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Three State Historical Society of Missouri

street, doors + windows would pop open & the Strangest assortment of heads & shoulders of people would appear. An up stairs shutter would thy open and an old man in a stocking cap would wave - across the street + down further a woman would mave, (her hair tied up in a cloth), a little boy would run to a garden gate with jacket on, but no pants, & start jumping up y down, girls in flannel
might gowns, old people rubbing the sleep out of their eyes, mothers obviously interrupted while preparing break. +ast, little girls with hastily ladies, ready to go to work, would appear to wave, + cheer, + laug h. One woman yan up with a basket of ripe tomatoes vin

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Four State Historical Society of Missouri

her enthusiasm, spattered us with some, as we drove along. I caught one tho yit tasted good - tasted good because of the feeling in the air - in the people - in the country that is France. The pay-off came when we passed an old gentleman shaking hands with the guards outside the big iron gates of the bank. He had on a der by hat, an old-fashioned flannel night gown, & looked as the he should have been Wearing spats.
So you see life in France
isn't all tribulations discomfort It isn't too soft but one becomes accustomed to the yough parts 4 in many ways has the advantage over those at home, who do not know when to worry, 9 so must be inclined to worry all the time.

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Five State Historical Society of Missouri

Dont do so if you can help it. I dont - except for you + the tamily. It is appayrent now that Germany can't stand a great deal more or in the not too distant future we will all be together again. Do take care of yourself the family needs you more than they realize now.

Give my love to all & I

will write more often after this letter Calph P.S. Heavenly father we are grateful that we are expecting him home as a soon - my prager of thanks

His mother

Letter, Water S. Gunnarson to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick W. Gunnarson, November 15, 1944, Page One State Historical Society of Missouri

France. 15 now 44 Dear ma and Pa Winter seems to have arrived in this part of the Old World. Last night it snowed an ench or so and the white covering has lasted through all the gray cold day. However, it has not been gette cold enough to freeze the ever fasting mud. The English weather has been widely criticized but the French autumn and wenter from me. When the sun shines at all it is only through a momentary reft in the endless clouds. Service Bottery is now the so accupant of this town except for who work the water point. There is not a single brilding here un

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is in the varitted wine cellar of an old inn and the various sections of the battery are dispersed through the Town, wherever quarters for men room here, a rellar there, solvaged stoves and a few armfuls of strow and we are grateful for the shelter, particularly when unenviable lat of the doughboy contrasted thereouth. We can count on three meals a day, generally hat meals too while the infantaymon during an attack, may have to go for day or two with no meals served hat and some meals messed entirely; at atterne when he is running, crawling and lying in wet fields and for holes. Some of the men caught a horse and at first amused themselver by riding it bareback, then, after little buggy driving through the lown

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Service Battery is now the sole occupant of this town except for a detachment of six men (engineers) who work the water paint. There is not a single building here un-damaged and most are completely wrecked. Our CP (command post) is in the vaulted wine cellar of an old inn and the various sections of the battery are dispersed through the town, wherever quarters for men and parking space under cover for vehicles could be improvised. A room here, a cellar there, with salvaged stoves and a few armful of straw and we are grateful for the shelter, particularly when the unenviable lot of the doughboys contrasted therewith. We can count on three meals a day, generally hot meals too, while the infantry men, during an attack, may have to go for a day or two with no meals served hot, and some meals missed entirely, at a time when he is running, crawling and lying in wet fields and muddy fox holes. Some of the men caught a horse and at first amuse themselves by riding it bareback, after finding a buggy they engaged in a little buggy driving through the town.

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Skål [Cheers]-- (signed) Walter

Written by Captain Walter S. Gunnarson 0278309
Service Battery 216th Field Artillery Battalion, 35th Division - A.P.O No. 35
c/o Postmaster, N.Y., N.Y. and sent to
Mr., Mrs. Frederick W. Gunnarson, 459 63rd St. Brooklyn, N.Y.

George Wilson, If You Survive, 1987 (excerpt)

"...One evening just before dark while standing in line for hot chow we got a real thrill. Four German fighter-bombers zoomed right over us at treetop level. We scattered instantly and dove for the nearest cover. But their targets seemed to be somewhere near the coast. In seconds just about every antiaircraft gun and machine gun within range opened fire and we could easily follow the path of the planes by the red glow of the tracers. Every fifth machine gun bullet was gowing white phosphorus to help the gunners see where they were shooting. The display looked just like the fireworks back home on the Fourth of July, but the planes were so fast and so low that they were gone before anyone could take good aim, and none of them appeared to be hit.

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"If all went as planned, we would mop up the enemy and continue the attack across to the next hedgerow, and the one after. The tactic seemed practical enough, but even in dry runs it was utterly exhausting to carry all our gear while running behind tranks, bathed in their hot fumes and the churned-up dust.

George Wilson, If You Survive, 1987 (excerpt) con't

"After several days of grueling drill in the new tactics, we were ready to go. Every day we got our gear together and waited for orders to jump off. That went on for about a week, because the bombers that were to do the carpet bombing were grounded by the rotten weather. All the waiting didn't do our nerves any good.

"Meanwhile, there were a few sidelights. One day I came upon one of my young soldiers who had his pistol in hand, apparently getting up the nerve to use it on himself. He was terribly depressed because he had received any mail from home since his landing France. I sat down and quietly talked with him alone for quite a spell until he was assured his family really did care, but that our mail was all messed up because of the fighting. The very next day he received a couple of letters, and that snapped him out of his depression.

"One day our ever-resourceful cooks decided to treat us. They said that a nice young cow had wandered into enemy mortar fire, and that fortunately they had been nearby and so knew it was fresh meat. The steaks were a marvelous change from regular Army rations. A little later, however, Captain Holcomb was comewhat [sic] embarrassed when a French farmer came calling and excitedly demanded payment for his slaughtered cow. He was turned over to a major form Military Government, and I suppose something was worked out.

"Another day Major General Barton, our Division Commander, held a regimental review to award medals for heroic actions since the invasion. As we marched by companies to the parade field some German fighter planes roared over at treetop level -- and men and heroes scattered in every direction, with some diving right through dense hedgerows. The planes never fired on us, and may never have seen us, so we resumed our march to review. We kept looking over our shoulders, but the planes never circled back.

"One of the men had some barber tools, so we took turns sitting on a stump for a quick haircut. I don't remember getting my hair cut again for the next eight months."

Directions: Using the primary sources below, learn about the experiences of families who received letters home from the military regarding their loved ones. After exploring these sources, you will write a letter from a soldier's family member to the U.S. government explaining how you want your loved one to be remembered.

Letter, Major General Thomas B. Larkin to Mrs. Barbara N. Vrtatko, January 15, 1948 United States Department of the Army

Pro Vames M. Vrtako, 36 396 086. Plot C, Row 10, Grave 208, United States Military Cometery Neuville-en-Condroz, Belgium

15 January 1948

Mrs. Berbara M. Vrteko 2702 South Homan Avenus Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mrs. Vrtako:

The people of the United States, through the Congress have authorized the disinterment and final buriel of the heroic dead of World War II. The Quartorte the honored dead. The records of the War Department indicate that you may be the nearest relative of the above-named deceased, who gave his life in the service of his country.

The enclosed pumphlets, "Disposition of World War II Armed Worces Dead," and "American Cometories," explain the disposition, uptions and survices made available to you by your Government. If you are the next of kin according to the line of kinship as set forth in the enclosed pemphlet, "Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead," you are invited to express your wishes as to the disposition of the remains of the decessed by completing Part I of the enclosed form "Request for Disposition of Membles." Thould you desire to relinquish your rights to the next in Line of kinship, please complete Part II of the enclosed form. If you are not the next of kin, please complete Part III of the enclosed form.

If you should elect Option 2, it is advised that no funeral arrangements or other personal arrangements be made until you are further notified by this office.

Will you please complete the enclosed form, "Request for Disposition of Remains" and mail in the enclosed self-addressed envelope, which requires no poetage, within 30 days after its receipt by you? Its prompt return will awnecessary delays.

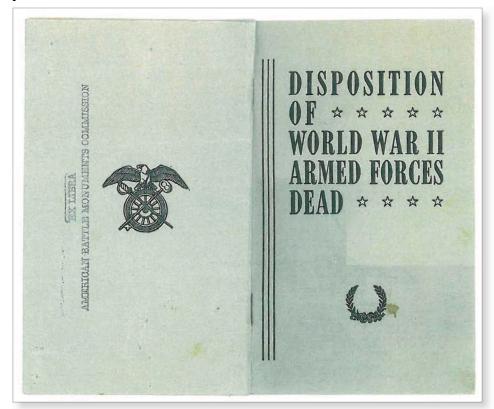
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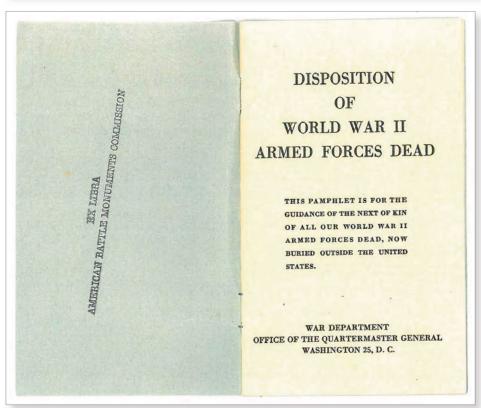
Bincerely,

THOMAS B. LANGE Major General The Quartermester General

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

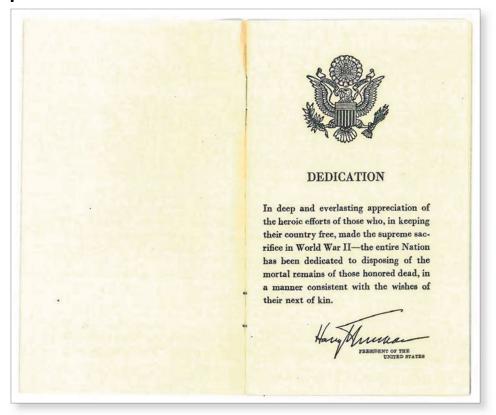
United States Department of War





Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

United States Department of War



FOREWORD THE Congress of the United States has authorized the Secretary of War to carry out all feasible wishes of the next of kin for disposition of the remains of those Americans who made the supreme sacrifice during World War II. The next of kin of those members of the armed forces as well as of the civilians who served with the armed forces will be requested to indicate their wishes. This program is not alone a War Department program, but rather a coordinated program jointly planned and participated in by all the armed forces of the United States and those governmental agencies whose personnel served overseas in World War II with the armed forces. The Quartermaster General of the Army, acting for the Secretary of War, will administer this program. The information contained in the succeeding pages is published so that, as next of kin, you may become acquainted with your rights under the law, and learn of the pro-

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

United States Department of War

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visions that have been made for carrying out your desires. If you have a question or several questions, not included in the following pages, please send it—or them—to the Office of The Quartermaster General, Memorial Division, War Department, Washington 25, D. C. Every endeavor will be made to carry out your expressed desire.

All efforts will be devoted to ensuring such final resting places for our honored dead as they themselves would choose. The selection of the procedure to be followed, however, is now yours, as next of kin.

Question: Who is the next of kin?

Answer: In order best to insure a proper disposition of the remains, the War Department will, in the absence of special circumstances, recognize designations for disposition of decedent's remains from persons specified below in the order indicated:

a. If the deceased was unmarried.

- 1. Father.
- 2. Mother.
- Brothers over 21 years of age, in the order of their seniority.

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- 4. Sisters over 21 years of age, in the order of their seniority.
- Next of kin of legal age in order of their relation to decedent.

b. If the deceased was married.

- Widow or widower (if not divorced, separated, or remarried).
- Sons of the deceased, who are over 21 years of age, in the order of their seniority.
- Daughters of the deceased, who are over 21 years of age, in the order of their seniority.
- Next of kin of legal age in the order specified for unmarried deceased personnel, as set forth in par. a 5 above.

Question: What should I do if I conclude that I am not the next of kin?

Answer: If, after reading the answers to the preceding question, you have decided that you are not the next of kin, not the one authorized to direct the disposition of the remains, please fill in part III of the "Request for Disposition of Remains" form and return it in the postage-free, addressed envelope that has been provided.

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Question: If I have concluded that I am the next of kin, may I relinquish my rights to someone else?

Answer: If you are the next of kin as outlined in answer to the first question, you may relinquish your rights to dispose of the decedent's remains. The rights which you had then pass to the next existing person in the order of eligibility outlined in answer to the first question. To accomplish this, please complete part II of the form entitled "Request for Disposition of Remains" and return it to the Office of the Quartermaster General, Memorial Division, War Department, Washington 25, D. C.

Question: What should I do if I conclude that I am the next of kin and wish to exercise my rights?

Answer: If you have now decided that you are the next of kin, please read the following pages and make your decision on the various options that are presented for your selection. Then please complete part I of the "Request for Disposition of Remains" form, have the form notarized in the space provided for this purpose, place the form

.

in the addressed, postage-free envelope that has been furnished and promptly mail it.

The reinterment of these honored dead is a tremendous undertaking. It will be carried out, area by area, from all over the world. It is an undertaking that will require many months, probably years, to complete. It will be accomplished in reverent and orderly manner. Your action in promptly returning the completed "Request for Disposition of Remains" form will greatly assist in the performance of this sacred duty. Prompt action is stressed. You are urged, therefore, to return the inclosed request form within 30 days after its receipt by you.

Although emphasis has been laid upon the necessity for your prompt action, even answer by return mail will not effect immediate action in event that you decide upon option 2. If you should elect option 2, it is advised that no funeral or other personal arrangements be made until you are further notified by this office.

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Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

United States Department of War

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OPTIONS TO BE GIVEN NEXT

Option 1-

The remains be interred in a permanent American military cemetery overseas.

> The establishment of permanent American military cemeteries overseas in the various areas in which American forces served is contemplated.

Option 2-

The remains be returned to the United States, or any possession or territory thereof, for interment by next of kin in a private cemetery.

> Shipment will be made to the city or town designated by the next of kin.

Option 3-

The remains be shipped within, or returned to a foreign country, the homeland of the deceased or next of kin, for interment by next of kin in a private cemetery.

> Shipment to a foreign country is dependent upon the ability of the

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United States Government to obtain entry and reinterment authority therein. If authority can be obtained, shipment will be made to the city or town designated by the next of kin.

Option 4-

The remains be returned to the United States for final interment in a national cemetery.

When this option is desired, the remains will be transported to the continental United States and interred in a national cemetery selected by the next of kin. Burial in the national cemetery desired is subject to availability of space therein.

Alternate Choice

If the options described above do not provide for your wish, it is suggested you submit your specific desire to the Office of The Quartermaster General for final decision by the War Department as to its legality and practicability.

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Cremation

If cremation of the remains is desired, specific request that the remains be cremated should be made on page 2 of the Form "Request for Disposition of Remains," in the block titled, "Remarks and Additional Instructions." The request should include a statement as to whether the next of kin desires to arrange for private cremation services or wishes the Government to make necessary cremation arrangements. Upon receipt of this request a letter pertaining to the Government procedure to carry out the wishes of the next of kin in this respect will be forwarded to the next of kin from the Office of The Quartermaster General.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON OPTIONS GIVEN ABOVE

All Options

On all options, all costs of exhumation, preparation of remains, casketing, and shipment to the city or town designated by next of kin, or his duly authorized representative, will be borne by the Government 9

of the United States. In all cases the Government will provide a flag of the United States to be used for proper draping of the casket during interment services. If next of kin of the deceased, or authorized representative, is present at the time of final interment, this burial flag will be presented. Otherwise, this burial flag will be forwarded to next of kin.

Option 1—Permanent American Military Cemetery Overseas

The establishment of permanent American military cemeteries overseas, in the various areas in which American Forces served, is contemplated. These cemeteries will be beautified, maintained, and permanently cared for by the United States Government. To assist the next of kin in determining the place of final interment, a pamphlet describing permanent American military cemeteries abroad, and national cemeteries in the United States, is inclosed. All expenses incident to burial in permanent American military cemeteries will be paid by the Government. When the next of kin

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

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requests that remains be interred in such cemeteries, they will be removed from their temporary burial location, prepared for reburial, casketed, transferred to the site of final interment and reburied there, all at Government expense. An Army chaplain will conduct appropriate religious services at the time of this reburial. The location of the permanent burial site will then be communicated to you. A temporary inscribed grave marker, (Cross, or Star of David.) will identify the grave until it can be replaced by the Government with an approved type inscribed headstone.

Option 2—Private Cemetery in United States

If option 2 is selected, in addition to the expenses outlined above, the Government will contribute a sum not to exceed \$50 toward the defrayment of actual burial expenses. Costs or expenses in excess of \$50 must be borne by the person who contracted for the services. Funeral services at the private cemetery will be as arranged by the next of kin. Local veterans' organi-

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zations and the State Guard may be contacted for assistance in arranging for such military rites as may be desired. These organizations will cooperate insofar as their facilities permit. Arrangements for the burial plot are the responsibility of the next of kin.

An escort, provided at the expense of the Government, will accompany the remains to the city or town designated by the next of kin and will be instructed to obtain the signature of the next of kin, funeral director, or other designated representative of next of kin, in receipt for the remains. If the next of kin requests the escort to remain for the funeral services, the escort will be permitted to remain for a period not to exceed 72 hours from the time he arrives with the remains. The escort will deliver appropriate printed instructions regarding the manner of submitting claim for the Government contribution of \$50 toward defrayment of actual burial expenses.

Option 3-Private Cemetery Overseas

If option 3 is selected, in addition to those services provided under all options, the

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Government will contribute a sum not to exceed \$50 toward the defrayment of actual burial expenses. Costs or expenses in excess of \$50 must be borne by the person who contracted for the services. Funeral services at the private cemetery will be as arranged by the next of kin.

An escort, provided at the expense of the Government, will accompany the remains to the city or town designated by the next of kin and will be instructed to obtain the signature of the next of kin, funeral director, or other designated representative of next of kin, in receipt for the remains.

The Government will provide assistance in obtaining medical clearance and reinterment authority. Next of kin must arrange for burial plot and such funeral services as may be desired.

Upon application to the Office of The Quartermaster General, Memorial Division, War Department, Washington 25, D. C., after interment, the next of kin will be furnished appropriate instructions regarding the manner of submitting claim for reimbursement of a sum not to exceed \$50 to

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cover expenses incurred during final interment.

Option 4-U. S. National Cemetery

National cemeteries were established in the United States in honor of and to provide final resting places for deceased members of the armed forces. To assist the next of kin in determining the place of final interment, a pamphlet describing permanent American military cemeteries abroad, and national cemeteries in the United States, is inclosed. If the deceased was a member of the Armed Forces of the United States, the option, "Return to the United States for final interment in a national cemetery," authorizes selection as the site for final interment, a national cemetery which is open for burials. A listing of these cemeteries which are open for additional burials is inclosed. If the cemetery chosen by the next of kin is no longer open for additional burials when the reply form "Request for Disposition of Remains" is received, the next of kin will be advised and requested to make another choice from a list of national cemeteries open at the time.

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Remains may be shipped directly to the selected national cemetery for interment and funeral services; or, remains may be shipped to the place designated by you and thence to a national cemetery for interment. In the latter case, the Government will be responsible for transportation cost in an amount not to exceed the travel expense otherwise necessary to move the remains to the national cemetery by a direct route from the Distribution Center.

An escort, provided at the expense of the Government, will accompany the remains to the national cemetery selected, or the city or town designated by the next of kin if it is desired that the remains be shipped to a designated city or town for religious services prior to interment in the selected national cemetery. In the latter case, the escort, if so requested by the next of kin, will be permitted to remain for the services for a period not to exceed 72 hours from the time he arrives with the remains. The escort will be instructed to obtain signature of next of kin, funeral director or other designated representative of the next of kin, in receipt for the remains. Provision for 15

services of an attendant to accompany the remains from the place where services were held to the selected national cemetery is an obligation of the next of kin.

When interment in a national cemetery is your choice, there will be no cost to you for the grave site, the opening of the grave or the actual interment and closing of the grave. Also as stated previously, the Government approved type of inscribed headstone will be provided automatically at no cost to you.

Identity of Deceased

Prior to the registering of a grave overseas as containing the remains of a designated (by name) member of the armed forces of the United States, every means possible was employed and every known method was pursued to established definitely and positively the identity of the deceased. In this respect, no effort was considered to be too great and meticulous attention was given to smallest details. Identity having been thus established, evidence of identity was buried with the re-

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mains and indicated on the grave marker. If removal and reburial elsewhere become necessary, all records will again be checked and all evidence of identity again examined. Military personnel especially trained in the procedure supervise and directly control these operations. Also, from the time of exhumation of the remains until their reception by next of kin, they will be under constant protection of military escorts. Thus, when the next of kin is requested to indicate his desires in the manner of final disposition of the remains of a certain member of the Armed Forces of the United States, he and all others may rest assured that the identity of the remains has been definitely

INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE DECEASED

When information on any of the following listed subjects, with respect to the personnel indicated is desired, the inquiry should be addressed to the office that is listed below: 17

Army, State Department, Merchant Marine, U. S. Employment Service, Red Cross, and War Correspondent Personnel:

Death (circumstances surrounding death) and missing personnel— The Adjutant General,

The Adjutant Genera Casualty Branch, Munitions Building, Washington 25, D. C.

Cemeterial and Burial Information—
Office of The Quartermaster General,
Memorial Division, War Department,
Washington 25, D. C.

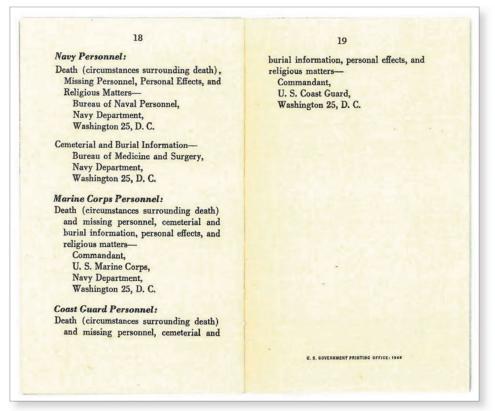
Personal Effects—
Army Effects Bureau,
Kansas City Quartermaster Depot,

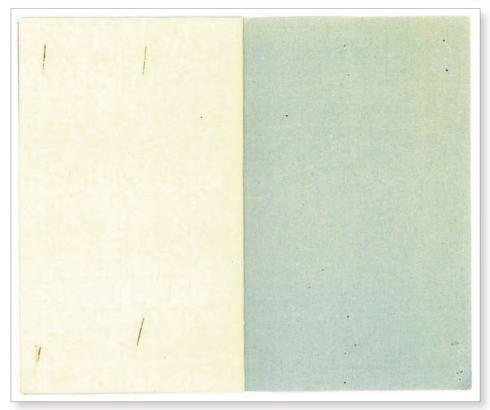
601 Hardesty Avenue, Kansas City 1, Mo.

Religious Matters—
War Department,
Office, Chief of Chaplains,
Washington 25, D. C.

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

United States Department of War





Film, *Decision* (1946)
National Archives and Records Administration
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TVuqaEinlM

Secondary Sources

Private First Class James Vrtatko Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy National History Day nhdsilentheroes.org/profiles/james-h-vrtatko/

Directions: Using the primary sources below, learn about the experiences of families who received letters home from the military regarding their loved ones. After exploring these sources, you will write a letter from a soldier's family member to the U.S. government explaining how you want your loved one to be remembered.

Letter, Major General J.A. Ulio to Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Brown, August 28, 1944 Individual Deceased Personnel File, National Archives and Records Administration - St. Louis

AG 201 Brown, Donald E. PC-N TT0166

28 August 1944

Mr. and Mrs. Andrew J. Brown R. F. D. #1
Thompson, Iowa

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Brown:

It is with regret that I am writing to confirm the recent telegram informing you of the death of your son, Private Donald E. Brown, 37,190,660, Infantry, who was killed in action on 28 July 1944 in France.

I fully understand your desire to learn as much as possible regarding the circumstances leading to his death and I wish that there were more information available to give you. Unfortunately, reports of this nature contain only the briefest details as they are prepared under battle conditions and the means of transmission are limited.

I know the sorrow this message has brought you and it is my hope that in time the knowledge of his heroic service to his country, even unto death, may be of sustaining comfort to you.

I extend to you my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours.

J. A. ULIO

Major General,
The Adjutant General.

John F. Kennedy, Remarks at East Coast Memorial to the Missing at Sea Dedication, New York, May 23, 1963 John F. Kennedy President Library and Museum (JFKPDF-044-026-p001)

NEW YORK WAR MEMORIAL in both

We meet at a moment of dedication. Inscribed upon these slabs of stone are the names of those who two decades or so ago gave their lives, and now sleep beneath these waters, in order that freedom might live and that free men and women might sleep more securely at home. They came from every state of this grateful Union whose life they saluted in death. They belonged to every branch of the American Armed Forces whose honor they nobly served.

The strays of me of your his see

4

The cost of freedom, we have had cause to remember lately, has always been high -- but Americans have always been willing to pay it. And our generation of Americans knows that we can never repay the staggering debt which we the living owe to those who died in arms save by holding undiminished the ideals for which they lived and died.

If all men and nations can read that message here, if friend and foe alike can see that these massive monuments are made of untarnished, enduring greatness as well as granite, then the mournful loss of these brave men will not have been a waste --

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No stone or cross can mark the place where these men fell for freedom. No wreaths can be laid by kin or friend on the graves of those lost or buried at sea or simply missing in action. But their sacrifice was no less than that of those who rest in the grandest military cemetery or at the site of vast battle monuments -- and these simple memorial stones, therefore, insure that their names and their valor will never be forgotten by all who cherish freedom. Their fellow-countrymen, their friends and their bereaved families will find here engraved in granite --

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the last World War will truly be
the last world war -- and neither
war nor the threat of war,
neither injustice nor the denial
of justice, will ever blight the
planet Earth again. For Franklin
Roosevelt described the goal of those
who fought and died and are honored
today in these simple words: "More
than end to war, we want an end to
the beginnings of all wars."

Therefore, as President and Commander-in-Chief, ever mindful of our obligation to their cause and our devotion to their memory.

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abreast of the Statue of Liberty -the names of those who endured all
and gave all for the preservation
of liberty but have no known graves
to be wreathed.

But these great tablets tell
more than the names and states
of those we honor today. They remind
every citizen and every nation of
what freedom means to America -- of
the tragic cost we have paid to keep
that freedom alive -- and of our
undying determination today to make
certain that the sacrifice of these
young lives was not a hopeless gesture.

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on behalf of the United States
of America, I dedicate this memorial
in proud remembrance of the valor
of her sons and in solemn tribute
to their final sacrifice.

#

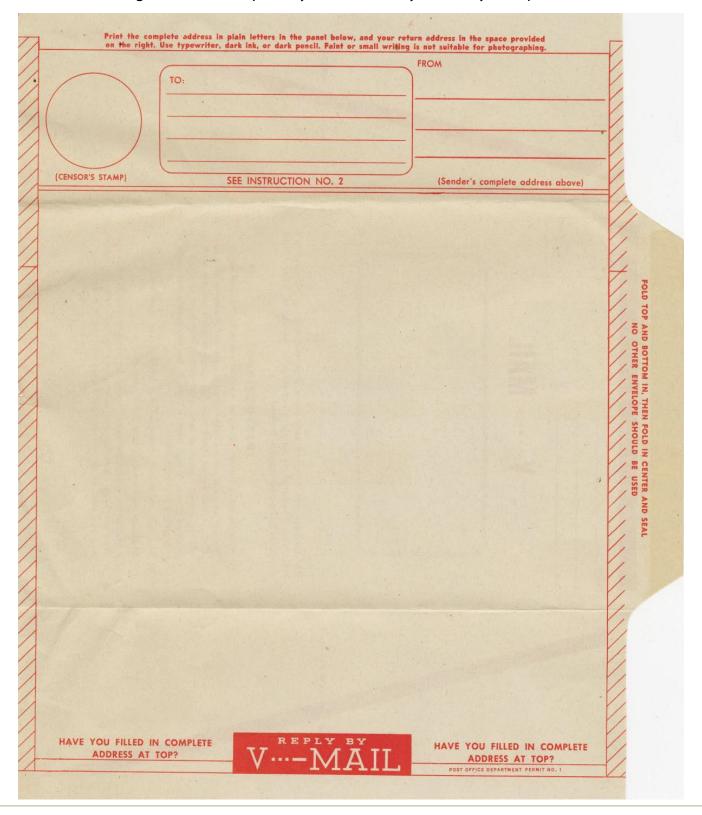


Secondary Sources

Private Donald E. Brown Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy National History Day nhdsilentheroes.org/profiles/donald-eldon-brown/

V-Mail Writing Assessment: Groups A and B

Directions: Write a letter home on V-Mail from the perspective of a World War II soldier. You may choose to focus on training or deployment of U.S. soldiers in this campaign. Be sure to include at least three facts integrated from the primary and secondary sources you explored.



V-Mail Writing Rubric: Groups A and B

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Content	Writing clearly addresses the prompt.	Writing addresses the prompt.	Writing addresses the prompt.	Writing does not adequately address the
	Provides at least three pieces of evidence from the documents to support ideas.	Provides at least two pieces of evidence from the documents to support ideas.	Provides at least one piece of evidence from the documents to support ideas.	prompt. Provides no clear evidence to support ideas.
	Evidence is drawn from three or more figures in the document packet.	Evidence is drawn from two figures in the document packet.	Evidence is drawn from one figure in the document packet.	Evidence is not drawn from figures in the document packet.
	V-Mail begins with an appropriate salutation.	V-Mail begins with a salutation.	V-Mail begins with a salutation.	V-Mail lacks a salutation.
Organization	Paragraph-length V-Mail includes a clear introduction sentence, well-organized body sentences, and a concluding sentence. V-Mail ends with a complimentary close.	Paragraph-length V-Mail includes an introduction sentence, body sentences, and a concluding sentence. V-Mail ends with a complimentary close.	Paragraph length V-Mail is missing one of the following: an introduction sentence, adequate body sentences, or a concluding sentence. V-Mail ends with a complimentary close.	V-Mail is not paragraph length. No clear introduction sentence, body sentences, and/or concluding sentence. V-Mail lacks a complimentary close.
Conventions	Clear control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and proper sentence formation.	Adequate control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Limited control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.

Letter Writing Assessment : Groups C and D

Directions : Write a letter to the U.S. War department from the perspective of the family members of the soldiers you studied. What decision would you make for the remains of your loved one? How do you want your loved one remembered? Be sure to include at least three facts from the sources you explored in your response.						
explored in your response.						

Letter Writing Rubric: Groups C and D

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Content	Writing clearly addresses the prompt. Provides at least three pieces of evidence from the documents to	Writing addresses the prompt. Provides at least two pieces of evidence from the documents to	Writing addresses the prompt. Provides at least one piece of evidence from the documents to	Writing does not adequately address the prompt. Provides no clear evidence to support
	support ideas. Evidence is drawn from three or more figures in the document packet.	support ideas. Evidence is drawn from two figures in the document packet.	support ideas. Evidence is drawn from one figure in the document packet.	ideas. Evidence is not drawn from figures in the document packet.
Organization	Letter begins with an appropriate salutation. Paragraph-length letter includes a clear introduction sentence, well-organized body sentences, and a concluding sentence. Letter ends with a complimentary close.	Letter begins with a salutation. Paragraph-length letter includes an introduction sentence, body sentences, and a concluding sentence. Letter ends with a complimentary close.	Letter begins with a salutation. Paragraph length letter is missing one of the following: an introduction sentence, adequate body sentences, or a concluding sentence. Letter ends with a complimentary close.	Letter lacks a salutation. Letter is not paragraph length. No clear introduction sentence, body sentences, and/or concluding sentence. Letter lacks a complimentary close.
Conventions	Clear control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and proper sentence formation.	Adequate control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Limited control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.