WE WERE THERE

LETTERS FROM THE BATTLE FRONT
Dear Teacher,

Welcome to the National Postal Museum! Because you may not be able to visit our galleries, we have brought some of our galleries to you. This postal pack includes letters and postal history from three American wars. Letters and stamps provide personal perspectives that enable students to better comprehend the past. Please select the sections that best coincide with your current American history or language arts studies.

These materials are ready for photocopying. We suggest that students read the original letters. They should resort to the transcript only if necessary, because the original offers students a more personal sense of the writer's style. You might prefer to read these letters to your students or have them work in small groups. Answers to the questions can be found on the resource page.

The National Postal Museum is a part of the Smithsonian Institution. It is located in the former Washington City Post Office, a historic landmark, built in 1914. Now, six galleries, videos, films, and computer interactives tell the story of America's postal history.
From 1861 to 1865, the American Civil War tore apart the nation. Northern and Southern soldiers and seamen left home, many for the first time, to fight and die. Letters were the primary link between members of families severed by war. The rich history of the American Civil War is preserved in these letters. Nearly 500,000 American military men died in the Civil War, more than in World War II and the Vietnam War combined.
Near the end of the war, conditions became so bad in the South people were forced to use almost anything they could for paper and envelopes. People fashioned envelopes from wallpaper and the pages of accounting books. These unusual envelopes made from discarded materials are called "adversity covers."

WAITING IN LONG, LONG LINES...?

Before the Civil War, Americans had no free home mail delivery. They picked up their mail at the local post office. Free home delivery of mail began in 49 Northern cities in 1863, when postal officials decided that it was cruel to require the families of soldiers to receive death notices at post office windows. After the war, veterans were hired by the federal government to provide door-to-door delivery service. They were the first generation of city letter carriers.

WHO WAS THIS GUY?

Today, federal law dictates that stamps in the United States use only images of deceased people. After the Southern states seceded from the Union, however, the image of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, appeared prominently on Confederate stamps. Because few Southerners knew what their president looked like, this stamp was created to bolster Southern patriotism. The Confederate Post Office made a profit during the war, but letters cost over twice as much to mail in the South as in the North!
WHAT IS THE ANGEL OF THE BATTLEFIELD DOING AT THE POST OFFICE?

Clara Barton, known as the “Angel of the Battlefield,” nursed wounded soldiers, marked graves, and encouraged letter writing to the families of the injured and deceased. Her work during the war led her to found the American Red Cross.
WAS THERE AN OFFICE SUPPLY STORE ON THE BATTLEFIELD?

A 1,000-man Northern regiment might send and receive an average of 600 letters per day. At one point, 45,000 pieces of mail a day passed to and from the regiments through Washington, D.C. This volume of mail generated by soldiers was unprecedented in American history. In the North, supplies of ink, pens, and paper were available from sutlers, merchants who followed troops and sold supplies out of wagons. Writing kits were also widely advertised in newspapers as good gifts for families to purchase for soldiers.
This letter was written by Captain James A. Graham (1841-1908) of Hillsboro, North Carolina. His father, William Graham, served as a governor of North Carolina, secretary of the Navy under President Millard Fillmore, a U.S. senator, and a senator of the Confederate States of America. He enlisted in April 1861 in Company G, 27th Regiment of the North Carolina Infantry and remained with his unit until the end of the war. Afterwards he practiced law and served in the State Senate and the Federal Pensions Administration.

My dear Mother,

Contrary to my expectations we have had no fight on our lines yet, and I am beginning to think that we will not have one soon; for I believe that Grant will wait for Sherman to develop their plans fully before he tries us. The spirits of our troops are improving every day and I hope they will continue to improve. There have been a great many desertions lately, but my company had never had one since the war commenced until the war might last.
Sundays. Father was very well. I saw Johnny and Robert on Sunday. They were also well. I wish you would send me by the first opportunity two pairs of shoes as there are nearly worn out. Also please send the pants.

I wrote to you about some time ago when you would send me something by Walter Thompson. The box has not yet arrived but we are looking for him every day.

I saw yesterday a Yankee paper containing Lincoln’s inaugural address. It was very short—little over half a column. He called slavery an offense in the sight of God.
and said that this war was not
upon us as a punishment for that
offense and that perhaps it would
continue till very drops of blood
be the last word spoken by that dreamer.

The “Saviour” did justice a good
deal from the Bible and I think
probably one religion in some
parts of it. Day after tomorrow
in the day set apart by President
Davis as a “day of fasting, humilia-
tion, and prayer” when I hope it may
be strictly observed both by the
Army and the people at home, for
we need God’s help in this our time
of trouble, and I believe that he will
yet bring us out of all our trials
and enable us to triumph over
the Wheel.

There is no news in our
Camp. Love to all. Write soon.

Your affectionate son

 Jas. A. Graham
Camp 27th NO. CA. INFY

March 8th 1865

My Dear Mother

Contrary to my expectations we have had no fight on our lines yet, and I am beginning to think that we will not have one soon; for I believe that Grant will wait for Sherman & Co. to develop their plans fully before he tries us.

The spirits of our troops are improving every day and I hope they will soon be all right again. There have been a great many desertions lately, but my company had never had one since the war commenced until one night last week when four of my men deserted to the Yankees. Their names were W. T. Cape, W. A. Crabtree, W. H. Crabtree and D. C. Paul.

I prided myself a good deal on never having had a deserter and hoped that I would never have one. I can’t see how any man in his senses can desert if he will only think of it for a moment. Most of the desertions lately have been caused by letters from home. If the people at home would only write cheering letters to their friends in the army instead of counseling them to commit this base crime everything would go on so much better with us.

I went to Richmond last Friday and continue to camp Sunday. Father was well. I saw Johnny and Robert on Sunday. They were also well. I wish you would send me by the first opportunity two pairs socks as those I have are nearly worn out. Also please send the pants I wrote to you about some time ago. I received Sudie’s letter a day or two ago in which she stated that you would send me something by Walter Thompson. He has not yet arrived but we are looking for him every day.

I saw yesterday a Yankee newspaper of the 5th inst. containing Lincoln’s inaugural address. It was very short little over half a column. He called slavery an offense in the sight of God and said that this war was sent upon us as a punishment for that offense and that perhaps “it would continue till every drop of blood drawn by the lash was repaid by that drawn by the sword.” He quoted a good deal from the Bible and I think was really sacrileges in some parts of it. Day after tomorrow is the day set apart by President Davis as a “day of fasting, humiliation & prayer” and I hope may be strictly observed both by the army and the people at home, for we need God’s help in this our time of trouble, and I believe that he will yet bring us out of all our trials and enable us to triumph over the Yankees.

There is no news in our camp. Love to all. Write soon.

Your affectionate Son

Jos. A. Graham
This letter was written by an African American soldier from Company B, 54th Massachusetts Infantry on March 13, 1864. It was printed in an African American newspaper, The Christian Recorder, in Philadelphia on April 2, 1864.

The Christian Recorder was a major African American publication from 1852 to 1902. It was the newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.). The paper offered its readers articles on religion, science, literature, and important issues affecting black Americans. The Recorder encouraged readers to send articles and letters to the editor for publication. In its fifty years of existence, it rigorously challenged attempts to deprive African Americans of their civil rights and protested acts of discrimination. The letter is signed E. D. W., probably Edward D. Washington of Philadelphia. He writes about the Battle of Olustee in Florida.

For the Christian Recorder.

Mr. Editor—Sir:—It is with pleasure that I now write to inform you concerning our last battle; thus we were in Co. B, on the 20th of Feb. Mr. Editor, I am not writing to inform you about this battle without knowing something about it.

The battle took place in a grove called Olustee, with the different regiments as follows: First was the 8th U. S.; they were cut up badly, and they were the first colored regiment in the battle. The next were the 54th Mass., which I belong to; the next were the 1st N. C. In they went and fired a few rounds, but they soon danced out, things were too warm for them. The firing was very warm, and it continued for about three hours and a half. The 54th was the last off the field. When the 1st N. C., found out it was too warm, they soon left, and then there was none left to cover the retreat. But captain J. Walton, of the
54th, of our company; with shouts and cheers, cried, "Give it to them my brave boys, give it to them!" As I turned around, I observed Col. E. N. Holowell standing with a smile upon his countenance, as though the boys were playing a small game of ball.

There was none left but the above named, and Lieut. Col. Hooper, and also Col. Montgomery, those were the only field officers that were left with us. If we had been like those regiments that were ahead, I think not only in my own mind, but in the minds of the field officers, such as Col. Hooper and Col. Montgomery, that we would have suffered much loss, it plain to be seen, for the enemy had taken some three or four of their pieces.

When we got there we rushed in double-quick, with a command from the General, "Right into line." We commenced with a severe firing, and the enemy soon gave way for some two hundred yards. Our forces were light, and we were compelled to fall back with much dissatisfaction.

Now it seems strange to me that we do not receive the same pay and rations as the white soldiers. Do we not fill the same ranks? Do we not cover the same space of ground? Do we not take up the same length of ground in the grave-yard that others do? The ball does not miss the black man and strike the white, nor the white and strike the black. But, sir, at that time there is no distinction made, they strike one as much as another. The black men have to go through the same hurling of musketry, and the same belching of cannonading as white soldiers do.

It has been nearly a year since we have re-ceived any pay; but the white soldiers get their pay every two months; ($13.00 per month,) but when it comes to the poor negro he gets none.
Unidentified soldier from the 54th Massachusetts Infantry.
For The Christian Recorder

Mr. Editor - Sir: -

It is with pleasure that I now seat myself to inform you concerning our last battle: thus we were in Co. B, on the 20th of Feb. Mr. Editor, I am not sitting down to inform you about this battle without knowing something about it.

The battle took place in a grove called Oustee, with the different regiments as follows: First was the 8th U.S.; they were cut up badly, and they were the first colored regiment in the battle. The next was the 54th Mass., which I belong to; the next were the 1st N.C. In they went and fired a few rounds, but they soon cleared out; things were too warm for them. The firing was very warm, and it continued for about three hours and a half. The 54th was the last off the field. When the 1st N.C. found out it was so warm they soon left, and then there were none left to cover the retreat. But Captain J. Walton, of the 54th, of our company, with shouts and cheers, cried, “Give it to them, my brave boys! Give it to them!” As I turned around, I observed Col. E. N. Hallowell standing with a smile upon his countenance, as though the boys were playing a small game of ball.

There were none left but the above named, and Lieut. Col. Hooper, and Col. Montgomery; those were the only officers left with us. If we had been like those regiments that were ahead, I think not only in my own mind, but in the minds of the field officers..., that we would have suffered much less, is plain to be seen, for the enemy had taken three or four of their (artillery) pieces....

Now it seems strange to me that we do not receive the same pay and rations as the white soldiers. Do we not fill the same ranks? Do we not cover the same space of ground? Do we not take up the same length of ground in a grave-yard that others do? The ball does not miss the black man and strike the white, not the white and strike the black. But, sir, at that time there is no distinction made; they strike one as much as another. The black men have to go through the same hurling of musketry, and the same belching of cannonading as white soldiers do.
ENVELOPE JOURNEY: LETTERS THAT DARED TO CROSS A DIVIDED NATION

From the spring of 1861 until the end of the Civil War, the border between the Union and the Confederacy was closed to mail. Letters had to take unusual routes to reach their destinations. Sometimes letters traveled to Nassau in the Bahamas or Havana, Cuba, and then were carried into Southern ports by a blockade runner (a sea-going vessel that illegally ran through the Union blockade of the South). Private express companies carried some letters across the closed border.

The postmarks and stamps on envelopes (called “covers” by stamp collectors) can tell us the location of a letter’s origin, the date it was mailed, and sometimes the method of transportation that brought it to its destination.

Here is a letter sent by a Virginian in the summer of 1861 to William C. Rives, a friend in the North. The letter takes a lengthy journey to get to Mr. Rives.

1. Letter is ready to be mailed to William C. Rives in Boston.

2. Letter is mailed from Richmond, Virginia, on August 8, 1861 and the sender pays ten cents and a fee to have it taken across the line by a private express company.

3. The Adams Express Company, a private courier, takes the letter across the Union line to Louisville, Kentucky, on August 13.

• HOW DOES IT GET FROM THE SOUTH TO THE NORTH?
• CAN YOU UNRAVEL THE MANY STEPS IN THIS LETTER’S TRIP THROUGH A DIVIDED AMERICA?

DIRECTIONS: Read each section of the letter’s journey. Then on the map to the right, draw a line that follows the path of the letter and number each of these steps.
Directions: Draw a line that follows the path of the letter and number each of the steps.
The Second World War was fought across six of the planet’s seven continents and in all of the oceans. The war effort included the involvement of over 16 million American men and women. The United States supplied its own armed forces and manufactured huge quantities of war material for its British and Russian allies. American factories produced 100,000 tanks, 274,000 military aircraft, 41 million rounds of ammunition, and 55 million tons of merchant shipping.

Communicating with families and friends was a great morale booster for the men and women stationed around the world. But transporting mail across a world at war was fraught with obstacles. The Post Office Department used a new technology, V-Mail, to deliver enormous amounts of mail vast distances.
WHAT'S DIFFERENT BETWEEN THIS STAMP AND THE PHOTO BELOW?

This stamp was released on September 28, 1945, to honor the U.S. Army. The photograph depicts the 28th Infantry Division marching through Paris on August 29, 1944. General George C. Marshall is credited with selecting this photograph to be made into a stamp. How is the stamp the same yet different from the photograph? Marshall came up with the idea of adding six bombers to the picture even though there were no bombers present at that particular moment. Because this stamp was meant to honor the entire U.S. Army and the Army Air Corps which had made a crucial contribution to the war effort, special alterations were made.
Designer Bill Bond designed this stamp for a series commemorating the 50th anniversary of America's participation in the war. More than 50 years earlier, on February 23, 1945, Joe Rosenthal, a newspaper photographer, caught a moment that became a symbol of American valor—U.S. Marines raising an American flag on the small Japanese island of Iwo Jima, which later became a critical landing strip for badly damaged bombers returning from missions over Japan. More than 21,000 Japanese and 6,800 Americans died in the four-day battle for the island. The photograph was used for a commemorative stamp in July 1945 (violating the policy established by the Post Office Department prohibiting the portrayal of living people on stamps). Today, the nation sees this image in the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial on a hill near Arlington Cemetery, overlooking Washington, D.C.

Patriotic envelopes

Bye, Bye Hitler

Citizens helped to fund the war effort by buying war bonds from the government. This type of envelope with a patriotic message that encouraged people to buy bonds was very popular during WWII.
YOU'VE HEARD OF E-MAIL. HAVE YOU HEARD OF V-MAIL?

For troops fighting overseas, letters from home were precious. The government wanted to get as many letters to the troops as possible, despite the limited space on boats and planes. To do this, a new technology was needed. The Post Office Department, in cooperation with the armed forces, borrowed a photomail idea from the British and called it V-Mail, the “V” standing for “Victory.” Photomail is the process of microphotographing personal messages and official documents on rolls of 16mm or 35mm film. The film was shipped overseas, where it was developed at a receiving station near the addressee. Legible half-size prints were reproduced from the miniature negatives and delivered. With thousands of letters on film, instead of on paper, the weight of the mail was drastically reduced. Some 150,000 V-Mail letters were shipped per sack, replacing what would have been 22 sacks of regular mail. In the 41 months that it was used, V-Mail accounted for more than 1.5 billion microfilm letters.

POTS AND PANS

People at home supported the war effort in many ways. Why did the scouts collect all these pots and pans? They were made from aluminum and iron. What was the metal going to be used for?
This letter was written by Robert Easton to his wife, Jane, near the end of the war in Europe. First Lieutenant Easton was in Company K, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division. His observations and insights reveal a war that people on the home front might not have heard about. He was the leader of a tank-destroyer platoon.

Dear Jane,

I write by candlelight from a brick cellard, sumptuously furnished with one rocking wood table and two rocking wood chairs. I asked Sgt. Brantamer to bring them. I'm finishing a 'Sugar Report' to the girl. We hope to go home and marry next month -- her next in the rotation plan, after 28 months overseas -- and some of our boys are relaxing on their new G.I. sleeping bags on the dirt floor, while singing "Home on the Range," "Birmingham Jail," and other good old American ballads. The center of this domestic scene is our cherished possession, our stove, simply fueled by coal which we plentifully store outside, so that we stay cozy and warm despite snow we see outside -- which are beginning to melt at last. I'm happy to report.
Now the old-timers, veterans of D-Day, are discussing things you never hear at home: the superior of Jerry's weapons--his tank, the smoking pistol, or "bump gun," the Flamm which I've seen at night might light up a landscape night so dark while ours flickered dimly as some old gas lamp; the smokeless powder which doesn't reveal his whereabouts while ours goes on away time and again.

In fact you realize it's the overwhelming quantity of our material which makes the difference; and if Jerry were here with his whole army instead of facing us with most of it men might be fighting the red line in gray. They also think of Jerry's combat mentality, none of them very pretty.

"Ever have a women come at you?" I ask.

"Bored in France we did. Old Jerry let us all day. Hidden up a tree. Of course we didn't know she was a woman. Finally old Whiskey he says: 'I'm gonna get that one if I hit her.' Patient, Whiskey was. He'd wait all afternoon just to get one shot. While she keeps packing away, not hitting anything. But coming closer, he slips off down a hedgerow. He was near St. Lô then. After a couple of hours saw her an M-1 crack. Just one shot. She's laying there with her head shot clean as a whistle between the eyes. She'd had on one of the night gray caps. Must be mean and it'd fallen off and showed her long yellow hair."

"French or German?"

"Naw, Japs out. We was moving on."

Taking a dare I just did 25 push-ups from my fingertips and therefore about half the free area of my middle finger. His eyes squinted in the glare of the light of letters the way if you turn the pages of letters the eye can't contribute to my talk anymore and my eyes, "Now we'll see the Lake (and the Stars) after the first 30 years and then!"
GERMANY (Schlevin), 19 Feb., 1945

Dear Janie,

I write by candlelight from a brick cellar, sumptuously furnished with one rickety wood table and two rickety wood chairs. Sgt. Branham sits beyond the candle finishing a "sugar report" to the girl he hopes to go home and marry next month - he's next on the rotation plan, after 28 months overseas - and some of our boys are relaxing on their new G.I. sleeping bags on the dirt floor, while singing "Home on the Range," "Birmingham Jail" and other good old American ballads. The center of this domestic scene is our cherished possession, our stove, amply fueled by coal which is plentiful hereabouts, so that we stay cozy and warm despite snow and ice outside - which are beginning to melt at last, I'm happy to report....
Now the oldtimers, veterans of D-Day, are discussing things you never hear at home: the superiority of Jerry's weapons - his tanks, his machine pistol or "burp gun," his flares which I've seen at night light up a landscape bright as day while ours flicker dimly as some old gas lamp, his smokeless powder which doesn't reveal his whereabouts while ours gives away time and again. In fact you realize it's the overwhelming quantity of our material which makes the difference; and if Jerry were here with his whole army instead of facing Russia with most of it, we might be fighting till our hair is gray. They also talk of Jerry's combat methods, none of them very pretty.

"Ever have a woman snipe at you?" I ask.

"Back in France we did. She bothered us all day from up a tree. Of course we didn't know she was a woman. Finally old Whitey he says: 'I'm gonna get that son-of-a-bitch.' Patient, Whitey was. He'd wait all afternoon just to get one shot. While she keeps picking away, not hitting anybody but coming close, he slips off down a hedgerow. He was near St. Lô then. She's laying there under her tree shot clean as a whistle between the eyes. She'd had on one of them soft gray caps snipers wear and it'd fallen off and showed her long yellow hair."

"French or German?"

"Never found out. We was moving on."

Taking a dare I just did 25 push-ups from my fingertips and therefore don't have to lick any envelopes for a week. You would appreciate the full value of this if you saw the pile of letters the boys contribute to my table nightly and knew how flat the task (and the taste) after the first 30 I read and seal!

Reading and censoring [his soldiers' letters] I find no cynicism. These are unsophisticated people, Janie. No other college graduates beside myself in the entire company, including officers. To these fellows, college graduates are rich men's sons in rear area jobs or the Air Force. Some of their fathers are pampered to be in Berlin having champagne and cigars with the German generals, while deciding which day to bring the war to an end. The rich are mistrusted. The unsophisticated may be naive, yes. But they're seldom cynical. Profoundly and naturally they affirm the goodness of daily life.

Speaking of which, Denasse had prepared our evening's snack of pancakes and canned butter and coffee and I must show my appreciation. We are not in any particular danger at the moment so don't worry.

Enclosed is a first spring bud, perhaps a willow, I do not know. It's a month or so early. Every year we've been apart I've sent a bit of spring and here is the one from Germany. Next spring I hope to deliver it in person.

With all my love, Bob

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**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

1. Who was Lt. Easton referring to when he talked about "Jerry?" What do you think "sugar report" means?

2. What aspect of the German military was superior? How did Easton compare German equipment to American equipment?

3. What was the military advantage the Americans had over the Germans?

4. **Class Discussion:** On page two of the original letter, what did the writer say about the role of the Russians in fighting the Germans. Compare Russian casualties with American casualties. On a map, locate the final positions of the Soviet Red Army. Compare those positions to the countries that later became a part of the "Soviet Bloc." The Soviet Union felt that their contribution to the war effort entitled them to the postwar "prizes" of a number of Eastern European countries. Was this a valid reward? Would the war have been won by 1945 without Russian help?

5. **Class Discussion:** Part of the responsibilities of Lt. Easton, like many officers, was to censor the letters of the men in his company. Discuss the pros and cons of censorship and suspending the civil rights of citizens during times of war.
There were nearly 300,000 women serving with the United States armed forces during World War II. These courageous women served as nurses, doctors, clerks, and Red Cross workers, as well as piloting aircraft for non-military purposes. They played a very important role in defending our country by providing medical, clerical, and other tasks both in the United States and near the front lines. This letter was written by June Wandery of the Army Nurse Corps. As a combat surgical nurse, she was close to the front lines in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, and Germany. She earned seven battle stars. When the war in Europe ended in the spring of 1945, she was stationed in southern Germany, caring for the survivors of Dachau.
Sicily, July 1943. Lt. Wndrey is third from the left reading a letter from home.
Somewhere in North Africa, May 31, 1943

Dear Ruth,

V-Mail is safer as it is flown over and doesn’t run the risk of being sunk. I celebrated Memorial Day by going swimming at Ferryville. The beach isn’t bad, but not as nice as the one at Bizerte, which is really sandy. I cut my foot on some stones. The sun is very, very hot....

I planned to buy you a silver bracelet but we had jeep trouble on the way up so we didn’t get to Tunis until closing time for the shops. Our male officers are the only ones who can use our hospital transportation. The nurses never go anywhere unless they walk, hitch-hike, or have a friend who has a jeep....

Once we were stationed next to an airfield. They had the niftiest little bombers. They promised to give me a ride in one someday. You would have to lie up behind the pilot’s head. It’s a very small place. They let us clean our clothes in aviation gas. The dirt just fell out of our uniforms. Neat.

Surprising how one becomes used to an air raid. It’s about the most spectacular thing one could possibly see. You are so fascinated watching the anti-aircraft fire and the light from bursting bombs that you forget all about your own personal danger. No one panics. They are so well trained. There isn’t any confusion, no one makes an outcry. On a pitch-dark night, an air raid looks like a big Fourth of July celebration. You can hear the enemy planes overhead, and when they get in the beam of the large searchlights, you can see the planes, if they are low enough, even the pilots. But then it is too bad for them. The enemy planes usually drop flares so that they can see where they want to bomb. It’s eerie watching the flares float to the earth. It’s then that I wish our huge Red Cross were as big as the Empire State Building.

By the time you get this, you will be out of school for a nice, long vacation. In a way I envy you, but just for a minute. While this war is on, I just couldn’t be back in the States, despite the inconveniences we experience. They are so desperately in need of surgical nurses. The newspapers and magazines that we get to read are months old. We’re sung and resung all the old songs that we can remember the words to and the other songs we just hum the melody. Could you please send me the words to “Star Dust,” “Make Believe,” “You’d Be So Nice To Come Home To,” and a package of phonograph needles.

Saturday I went through the most beautiful cathedral in Carthage. The ceilings were all done in mosaic: the stained glass windows and statues were gorgeous. It was mammoth, sitting high up on a hilltop overlooking the brilliant blue waters of the Mediterranean. You have never seen anything quite so beautiful as the blue of the sea with the purple mountains in the distance....

Wide-eyed as always, June

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**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

1. Why does Nurse Wandery feel that mail carried by planes in 1943 is safer than by ship?
2. Why would Nurse Wandery want the red cross painted on the roof of the hospital to be as big as “the Empire State Building?” What does the red cross symbol mean?
4. **Class Discussion:** Should women hold combat or noncombat positions in the military?
5. **Geography Question:** Where and why would American forces be in North Africa at this time?
Examining a historical document, even an envelope, can reveal facts about the world at the time the envelope was mailed. This envelope originated in The Netherlands. Look closely at the stamps and postmarks and answer the questions below.

1. This envelope was postmarked The Hague, Netherlands, in 1942. The stamps are German with a portrait of Von-Hindenburg, a World War I German war hero and former president of the German Republic. Why would German stamps be used in The Netherlands?

2. The mark in the lower left-hand corner of the envelope (called a cover by stamp collector) indicates that the letter originated from the office of the German Commissioner in The Netherlands. Note the eagle was a symbol used by the German military during the occupation. What political party’s symbol is held by the eagle?

3. What famous, young, female diarist lived in The Netherlands?

4. Before World War II, inflation in Germany was so great that one stamp cost billions of marks, the German currency. Extreme frustration with the inflated economy led in part to the popularity of the Nazi Party and its rise to power. This 1923 stamp cost 50,000,000,000 marks. The stamps on the envelope above are not in marks, but pfennigs (100 pfennigs = 1 mark). How much did it cost to mail the above letter in 1942?
Vietnam was a part of the French Colony of Indochina. A nationalist revolution led by the Vietnamese Communist Party drove out the French in 1954. The United States intervened in Vietnam to maintain governments in southeastern Asia that would be sympathetic to the West. By 1969, more than 543,000 American soldiers were fighting in Vietnam. They used state-of-the-art helicopters, pilotless aircraft, chemical defoliants, and other advanced technologies. Despite the superior military technology, the war was long and difficult. American soldiers faced a strongly motivated enemy.

This was the first war in American history to be televised daily. The American home front was already in the throes of social upheaval as the Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum. Vocal antiwar groups formed, dividing opinion on the war effort. Mail played a vital role in communicating the struggles both on the battlefield and the home front.
THE VIETNAM WAR: EX POST FACTO

GREEN EVERYWHERE

The war in Vietnam, a country dense with vegetation, was predominately a jungle war. In a brief experiment, mail for the troops was dropped from helicopters in green bags to hide it from the enemy. But the bags proved too difficult to locate in the green jungle. Some of the bags were lost, and the experiment was ended.

NEW FORMS OF MAIL

During the Vietnam War audiotapes were an alternative method for soldiers to communicate with people at home. During Operation Desert Storm in Iraq, the idea evolved into using videotapes to communicate. Today, soldiers can communicate through e-mail and other forms of satellite communication. With these electronic methods of communication, how will historians of the future document wartime?

A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE, A PLACE TO MOURN, A PLACE TO HEAL

In 1982 the nation formally recognized the sacrifice of the men and women who fought in Vietnam with the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The memorial has become a place of reverence and contemplation, where people mourn their losses, try to understand their feelings, and pay tribute to those who lost their lives serving our country. The 140 black granite panels enshrine the names of the over 58,000 Americans who died in the war. This stamp, issued in 1984, commemorates the dedication of this memorial.
Dear Mom,

I know you must be worried to death from not hearing from me but at least it was unavoidable this time. We moved out about a week ago from our base camp at Nui Van. I replaced a unit of 10k marines. I was right in the middle of a letter when we got the word to move and I had to pack it away. These 10k's replaced were dug in defensively in the middle of rice paddies. They had been hit by two battalions of VC a few nights before. Surprisingly 49 casualties and killing over 100 VC. They hadn't been sending out any patrols or recon when they dropped on us and we had no idea what the situation was.

Since we've been here we've suffered pretty heavy casualties. Yesterday the count stood at two dead and fifteen wounded, but last night Ben's C company got into it with a battalion of VC and last count there were a dead and many wounded. By the time you get this I imagine you will have heard about the 101 on news. We killed a lot of VC and captured a lot of weapons and that's what counts.

I got into it pretty heavy a few days ago and it was a sight that you can imagine. I can give you the date and time and see if there was any indication of extreme danger at that time on my chart. It happened on the 4th of Feb. There was another 32 of us with the lieutenant on a routine patrol about 3 miles from the hill the rest of the company was on. We were searching through an abandoned village looking mainly for chickens eggs and salt to sleep on. We were crossing a bridge between two houses when we were opened up on by about 60 VC with automatic weapons. I was carrying the radio which made me a prime target that night. My usual job but on this particular day...
Tu y Hoa
7 Feb 66
Dear Mom,

I know you must be worried from not hearing from me, but at least it was unavoidable this time. We moved out about a week ago from our base camp at Tu y Hoa and replaced a unit of ROK [Republic of Korea] marines. I was right in the middle of a letter when we got the word to move, and had to pack it away. These ROKs we replaced were dug in defensively in the middle of a rice paddy. They had been hit by two Battalions of VC [Viet Cong, the enemy] a few nights before, suffering 48 casualties and killing over 100 VC. They hadn’t been sending out patrols or recon, so when they dropped us out here we had no idea what the situation was.

Since we’ve been here we’ve suffered pretty heavy casualties. Yesterday the count stood at 2 dead and 15 wounded. But last night B and C Company got into it with a battalion of VC, and at last count there were 6 dead and many wounded. By the time you get this I imagine you will have heard about the 101st on [the] news. We’ve killed a lot of VC and captured a lot of weapons, and that’s what counts.

I got into it pretty heavy a few days ago, and it was a miracle that I’m alive. I can give you the date and time and see if there was any indication of extreme danger at that time on my chart. It happened on the 4th of February. There was about 12 of us with the Lieutenant out on a routine patrol and a half mile from the hill the rest of the company was on. We were searching through an abandoned village looking mainly for chickens and eggs and mats to sleep on. We were crossing a dike between two houses when we were opened upon by about 10 VC with automatic weapons. I was carrying the radio, which made me a prime target. That’s not my usual job. On this particular day I ended up with it.

We started returning fire, and my weapon jammed on me on three different occasions. This whole fight was being observed by our men on the hill. We received instructions to try and maneuver and push the VC which we were able to do fairly successful, and were told that help was on the way. The guys on the hill said they could observe about a platoon of VC moving away from us. Anyway, they entered a tree line as we were coming out of a another tree line with about a 300-yard open rice paddy between us. We were about halfway across when they opened up from the tree line again. We were laying in about six inches of water and a foot of mud. We held back for an air strike and artillery. These helped some, but they didn’t follow through.
We were told to begin pushing again. When we stood up, they wounded two men, and when the Lieut. ran over to one of them, they killed him. This put us without a leader because the platoon sergeant was way around to the left trying to flank them. About this time the company was coming up behind us and they didn’t know where we were exactly. The fire from the VC was going over us and into them and the company was firing back at us. So we were receiving murderous fire from both sides. They were so close that when one of us would try and stand up and tell our guys they were firing at us we could hear them yelling, “There’s one! Get him! Get him!” We ended up with one seriously wounded by our own fire, and the other one not sure who got him. It was about 2:30 p.m. when they first fired on us and about 4:30 p.m. when we finally met up with the company and pushed the VC to the river. When you check your chart, be sure to allow for the time difference.

You probably can’t tell too much from what I’m writing, but I’m mainly interested in getting this letter off to ease your worry. As you can see I’m writing this on the back of one of Shawn’s letters. I carry all your letters in the top of my helmet, and I was able to scrounge up an envelope. I’ll close this now and [fit] will go out on the resupply chopper.

Don’t worry, and I’ll write first chance I’ll get.

Love, Johnny
Red,

I am living in a place with a gun over my head all day, working on a gun, and sitting on a gun. It's a jungle, and life is brutal, but you are behind the lines. All around me, I am at war with the radio station apart. I have just heard that a tropical storm has blown in down by the Mekong and is moving up north towards us. Things are almost end of the world. It's raining fiercely, fog has cut visibility to where I can't see a tenth of a mile. We are trying to get our little radio station up and running, but all is lost. Playing hill down long tent. Street down our radio antennas, and slowly but surely up to stop the cyclone fence around our little knoll. It is supposed to protect us from incoming NVA's (North Vietnamese Army). Yesterday some were thrown a white phosphorous grenade down the windward side of the hill and the screaming fire almost burned down our little post. Barry Working made a screen out of our tent so now I'm sitting in here cold, but well. I'm able to do a little bit of drinking after eight, and we are close. It's hard to feel anything. My life here is supposed to be full of joy, but the weather has ruined it. The cockroaches have taken over, and the rain has ruined everything. We are all cold, hungry, and living at the edge of our lives in the jungle. Yesterday our little group was set up for a fireball attack and we all had our supplies. We were prepared to fight, but a huge explosion occurred, and everything was destroyed. It was a tragedy for all of us. We were all set to fight, but it was all for naught. We were all left standing at the edge of the jungle, without supplies, and with no hope.
coming in. We are consolidated into two positions about a hundred meters apart, with me on the higher hill overlooking us and the guys keeping us from closing the ground. This makes for a very nervous situation, especially since our support Helic 

utts are right at feet and non-existent at worst in the weather if Vickers copies up the hill. The very life of a Ranger in the Orient.

I don't really know the reason I'm writing this. You write me once, which was nice, and you were the first, so I was very grateful. But I think I'll tell this to the one of you who you want to again. So let's all play it out and see if you write again. I really want to write, but you know a guy you're to speak. Things happen over here that you just can't hope to yourself - if you do you think on them, they go away. I'm happy, get careless, and eventually get die. When your mind has strayed from the job at hand, sometimes, especially after setback, one's very easily of the whole, you get to talk things out and it helps a lot of the other person is just a buddy out there who has been through it. And I'm not sure if a member of the opposite sex who can and you hope is never all to. Ever. I don't want this at last. I'll have to write it out when you get back to me.

Last Monday I went on my first Santa's Belle operation and our force close up in the first time. We had two forces; twelve men each, at dawn about two miles inland and slightly north of the Lai. About an hour off the drop. We set up around a trail and a lone NVA officer walked into the middle of me. We tried for a fire but he panicked and took off in a blizzard of shells. I had him in my sights three times when he just disappeared. Me. The NVA took thirty minutes to one minute.

It's a living, running human scare to the next round. We don't think a real change of city. In fact, I thought it was O that got him. But it was a shot that brought him down and I carry an M16. My new Vietnamese was not there. After that everyone in the area started to know we were in the area. Put on Hunter Killer operations to stay to fight necessity, then extract upon attacking contact. We found ourselves the NVA had been working on the mine and across a dead path center when all the NVA were visible. The fire was shooting on the area men and on open ground with the first man here than 10 feet for the NVA when we were ambushed with grenade and automatic weapons. If there's a living in a situation that all do dead but as it was war, were remarkably lucky and not a man was killed. Two men took sheltered in the face, and I took some in the shoulder and then our NVA and front gathered the ambushing force, the wounded man rushed the NVA after them and Victor broke contact and ran. He ran into the smoke and the NVA took three without taking any men casualties. Then after being pinned down for about two hours were extracted under air support. Only one of us was really wounded, my wound and one of the maps was insignificant but we really lucked out that time.

The frightening thing about it all is that it is so very easy to kill one man. There's no remorse, no ethical thinking of the hand to get rid of non-existent dead, just own any regrets. Who it happens you
As you know, my hands shook so much. I had trouble releasing and it took a whole effort to perform each motion and control what would normally be called panic but which, somehow, isn't. You're scared, really scared, and there's no thinking about it. You just have that little 500-kilogram bomb that kills you and you desperately want to live, to go home, to get drunk or walk down the street and drive again; and suddenly the grenade isn't going off. Now the weary enemy is stopped, and suddenly it all is over and you're alive because someone else is either dead or so anyone to stay alive that his run away and you get the victory. If there is such a thing for war. You don't think about it...

I have only come to envy the honest pacifist who honestly believes that no killing is permissible and can, with a clear conscience, stay home and not take part in these conflicts. I wish I could be as calm, but I can't see sitting on the side and my heart and my blood. The Irench idea of not taking any injury to it from my mind. The fact that the only known pacifists such as the honest can live out in an orderly society is because someone lets them police it. This is taking risks to keep the twelve away. To be a ship in a world of sheep is one thing, to be a sheep in a world of predators something else, and I somehow believe that the lack of sheep due toacoacide is another key to this place. Holding the predator at bay... somehow I just can't see it. 1 do it, not. I don't believe in it. I guess that's why I'm not here. Why I fought at all. To come here and why, even though I'm scared.
31 Aug 69

Red,

I am living in a green world with a green canvas roof over me...dressed in green camouflage fatigues and sitting on a green cot that once was white but now is midewed while all around me an act of God is blowing this little radio station apart. We’re getting the tail end of a tropical storm that has moved in down by Da Nang and is moving up north toward us. The monsoons are almost upon us. It’s raining fairly hard, fog has cut visibility to seventy feet at high noon and zero at night and a thirty mile an hour wind is gusting over our little relay station playing hell with my tent, blowing down our radio antennas and slowly but surely uprooting the cyclone fence around our little knoll that is supposed to protect us from incoming RPG’s [rocket propelled grenades]. Yesterday some douche threw a white phosphorous grenade down the windward side of the hill and the resulting fire almost burned down our little post. Burning embers made a screen out of my tent, so now I’m sitting in here cold, wet, unbelievably dirty after eight days up here, fairly miserable – yet strangely content. My team was supposed to be relieved today but the weather has grounded the choppers and cut off all resupply so not only are we stuck up here till this blows over but we’re low on food and almost out of water. Ammo is plentiful however, and that’s the important thing; a cold hungry and thirsty man can fight but a warm, well fed and satiated man can’t without ammunition.... We are consolidated into two positions about one hundred meters apart with no one manning the hill between us and the fog keeping us from observing the ground. This makes for a very nervous situation, especially since air support will be erratic at best and non-existent at worst in this weather if Victor comes up the hill. The merry life of a Ranger in the Orient.

I don’t really know the reason I’m writing this.... Actually I’m writing because I have to write or go out of my mind....

Last Monday I went on my first hunter killer operation.... We tried for a POW but he panicked and took off in a blizzard of shells. I had him in my sights three times at him and he just disappeared. No Hollywood theatrics, one minute he’s a living, running human being, the next second he’s down, just a red lump of clay.... After that everyone in hearing distance knew we were in the area.... We were strung out on open ground with the point man less than 10 feet from the NVA, [North Vietnam Army] when we were ambushed with grenades and automatic weapons.... We ran into the woodline...then after being pinned down for about two hours we were extracted under air support.... We really lucked out that time.

The frightening thing about it all is that it is so very easy to kill in war.... You kill because that little SOB is doing his best to kill you and you desperately want to live, to go home...or walk down a street on a date again and suddenly the grenades aren’t going off any more, the weapons stop and unbelievably fast it seems, it’s all over and you’re alive because someone else is either dead or so anxious to stay alive that he’s ran away and you are the victor – if there is such a thing in war.

I have truly come to envy the honest pacifist who honestly believes that no killing is permissible...the fact that the only reason pacifists such as the Amish can even live in an orderly society is because someone - be they police or soldiers - is taking risks to keep the wolves away..... I guess that’s why I’m over here, why I fought, so hard.... At least I’m doing my part according to what I believe.... I hope somebody, somewhere is having fun tonight.

George
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

For George, what was the most frightening thing about war?

What is a pacifist and what were George’s feelings about pacifists?

Class Discussion: There were many different opinions about whether or not the United States should be fighting in Vietnam. What were George’s feelings and beliefs about fighting in this war?

ENVELOPE JOURNEY: ENVELOPES WITH A MESSAGE

PROTEST COVER

This envelope is focused on the feelings of the sender and his or her reaction to the Vietnam War. What do you think the sender of this letter feels about the war?

I'm mourning for one dying now in Vietnam

MAP COVER

This envelope was sent by a soldier. Soldiers at the battle front did not have to pay postage. Has this changed today?
Dear Teachers

It is becoming increasingly recognized that one of the most effective methods of teaching is the "hands-on" approach. Students perform experiments in science class, using a variety of manipulatives in math. Why not use the same technique in the history classroom?

One activity that history teachers have found to be effective is to have students examine stamps and mail-related material from the time period being studied. This includes used envelopes (called covers by stamp collectors), and the letters contained in the envelopes.

What are the advantages of using this material? First of all, the students are dealing with primary source material, the stuff of which history is made. When examining such materials, making inferences, and drawing conclusions, they are engaging in critical thinking. As one teacher put it, "They're doing history, rather than just studying it."

A second important advantage from the point of view of the classroom teacher is that the kids enjoy it. They like using the old letters! Don't be surprised if some of your less motivated students get involved in trying to figure out illegible words. Kids enjoy the challenge.

Another benefit of using local philatelic artifacts is that it helps students understand that American history is not just a story in a book about unknown people in faraway places, but involves people all over the country, including right where they live. For instance, a letter from a nineteenth-century Yale student that mentions cotton prices, helps make clear to Connecticut middle-school students the relationship between Northern mills and Southern cotton plantations. Correspondence from the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company discussing "a method...for consuming smoke" will help Chicago students understand that air pollution was a concern even in 1901!

There are several good techniques for using old covers and letters in the classroom. One is to simply put them in a protective plastic covering and pass them around. Be prepared for some students' disbelief that they are really as old as they look. They're so used to prepackaged curriculum kits that they find it difficult to believe they're actually handling the real thing!

A very effective method of incorporating this material is to design a set of questions based on the letter being studied. Questions should range from what seems obvious, i.e.: What was the cost to mail the letter? or, Who received the letter? to the more sophisticated, Which party controlled the White House when the letter was written? or What can we tell about the author from the contents of the letter? Dividing the class into groups, each of which has been supplied a photocopy of the letter, can create a cooperative learning opportunity.

By using questions that vary in difficulty, all students in a heterogeneous class will find some measure of success. Also, by working in groups, students are more likely to figure out the hard to decipher words in the letters. Once the groups have had sufficient time to answer the questions, the teacher should review them with the whole class. Be sure to listen to all answers. Someone may read something into a letter that everyone else, including the teacher, has missed!

The questions many readers are asking at this point is, How does one obtain old covers and letters from their community? Isn't something that old an expensive collector's item? It isn't necessarily expensive. Most large towns and more than a few smaller ones have stamp dealers often listed in the Yellow Pages. Such dealers will frequently have stocks of old covers, often with enclosures, generally at very reasonable prices of a dollar or two -- sometimes even less. In general, an expenditure of ten dollars will provide enough material for several days' worth of lessons. Also, from time to time it is possible to buy an entire lot of covers all from the same family.

An alternative method of obtaining these materials is to attend a stamp show. These are held throughout the year in various parts of the country. Listings of them appear every week in the newspapers Linn's Stamp News and Stamp Collector. Stamp dealers are also great about searching for material for their customers. Tell them what you want, and you'll be contacted when it's found. Stamp dealers seem to be universally interested in education and are particularly enthusiastic about using philately in teaching.

Bring history home to your students by using locally produced covers, letters, and stamps and watch this hands-on approach make for some of your most successful lessons.

Robert F. Welt is a social studies teacher at Robert E. Fitch Middle School, in Groton, Connecticut. He is also a stamp collector and columnist for Global Stamp News.
CIVIL WAR: LETTER 1

2. People writing depressing letters to the soldiers. Soldiers depended on letters for news and encouragement. People writing a cheering letter.
3. “an offense in the sight of God.”

CIVIL WAR: LETTER 2

1. The editor of the Christian Recorder newspaper. He wanted a large African American audience to read his opinion.
2. There was a lot of gunfire.
3. Equal pay for Black soldiers. All soldiers face the same danger.

WORLD WAR II: LETTER 1

2. The Germans had advanced weaponry technology. It was much better.
3. The Americans had an “overwhelming quantity of materials.”
4. Soviet casualties: 27,000,000
   American casualties: 407,000
   These locations became the Soviet Bloc.

WORLD WAR II: LETTER 2

1. In the early part of 1943, German U-boats were sinking the Allies’ boats at a rate of 4 out of 5.
2. A medical facility, marked with a red cross, was not supposed to be fired upon.
3. For security reasons. She feels critical of the war effort.

WORLD WAR II: ENVELOPE

1. The Germans occupied The Netherlands after they invaded.
2. Nazi Party
3. Anne Frank
4. 12 pfennigs (.12 marks)

VIETNAM WAR: LETTER 1

1. They were extremely dangerous.
2. Letters were very important. He carried letters in his helmet.
3. No, technology has made it possible for radios to be very small.
4. It was found in his helmet. He had not yet mailed it. It was delivered to his family along with his personal belongings after his death.

VIETNAM WAR: LETTER 2

1. It is so easy to kill.
2. Someone who opposes war. He envies them, but believes that they can exist only because others protect them and keep order.

VIETNAM WAR: ENVELOPES

Map Cover: Soldiers do not pay postage for sending letters when they are on an active battlefront.
RESOURCES

BOOKS AND LETTER COLLECTIONS


PHOTO CREDITS

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Civil War soldiers: Courtesy of Library of Congress

Receiving mail in World War II: Courtesy of National Archives

Vietnam soldier: Courtesy of United States Military History Institute

CIVIL WAR

Soldiers reading in battlefield: Courtesy of Library of Congress

Battlefield post office: Courtesy of Library of Congress

Clara Barton at post office: Courtesy of Library of Congress

1995 Clara Barton stamp: Courtesy of United States Postal Service

Graham letter: Courtesy of Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Confederate Soldier: Courtesy of Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, The Museum of the Confederacy

African American Union soldier: Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society

Christian Recorder letter: Courtesy of Library of Congress

WORLD WAR II

Soldiers reading mail: Courtesy of National Archives, photograph #111-SC-18577

28th Division marching in Paris: Courtesy of Associated Press

Patriotic envelope, pots and pans: Courtesy of Robert F. Welt

Iwo Jima stamp, 1995: Courtesy of United States Postal Service

Women sorting V-Mail: Courtesy of National Archives, photograph #111-SC-396916

Photograph: Courtesy of Robert Easton

Letter: Courtesy of Robert Easton

Photograph: Courtesy of June Wandery

Letter: Courtesy of June Wandery

VIETNAM WAR


Helicopter carrying mail bags: Courtesy of U.S. Army Aviation Museum, Fort Rucker, Ala.

Vietnam Memorial Stamp, 1984: Courtesy of United States Postal Service

Photograph: Courtesy of Mrs. Dorothy Dobrinsky

Letter: Courtesy of Mrs. Dorothy Dobrinsky

Vietnam Ranger: Courtesy of National Infantry Museum, Fort Benning, Georgia

Letter: Courtesy of Rosemary Dresch

Mourning protest envelope: Courtesy of John M. Hotchner

* These letters were rewritten by the authors after they were first published, the originals were lost. The authors kindly rewrote them in their own hand for the Postal Pack.

COLLECTING OUR HISTORY

Stamps: Courtesy of the ©United States Postal Service

This Postal Pack was created by the Education Department of the National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

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COLLECTING OUR HISTORY

Not only do stamps make it possible for us to send mail, they are also beautiful documents that preserve history. Many stamps commemorate events and people that have played important roles in creating our history. Collecting stamps is a great way to remember these influential moments and unique people. Historical stamps are available at your Post Office.

Who decides what historical moments and people should be celebrated on a stamp?

The process begins democratically, with Americans throughout the country sending in suggestions to the Postal Service. A Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee, made up of artists, historians, stamp collectors, and business people, reviews the suggestions and selects the subject that it feels the American public will most enjoy. A special restriction exists for stamps commemorating people. Individuals can not be honored on a stamp until 10 years after their death. The Postmaster General makes the final decision.