Members of the armed forces can feel isolated while deployed overseas in challenging and often dangerous conditions. Mail gives these men and women access to the world they have temporarily left behind. Receiving mail connects them to loved ones and enables them to learn about and participate in events occurring at home.

Mail Call explores how the military postal system works and why the mail is an important resource. Types of mail, transportation methods, and postal workers have all changed over time. Through innovations in technology and organization, mail has become more diverse and military mail services more reliable.
Postal Operations  Working Military Mail

- Moving the Mail
- The Field Post Office

Organization and techniques for processing, transporting, and delivering mail have changed over the centuries. One constant remains—military mail is high priority because it provides members of the armed forces with a vital link to their communities.

The military mail service has required the coordinated efforts of the post office and the armed forces. The current system has been, for the most part, in place since World War II. The Postal Service is responsible for moving the mail within the United States while the Department of Defense manages transportation abroad and the operation of overseas military post offices.

“Your function is to see that your shipmates receive all the benefits of the Postal Service. In performing this function you will contribute greatly to the morale of your ship.”
—U.S. Bureau of Naval Personnel, Postal Clerk 3 & 2 Manual, 1963

Your Civic Duty

Daily life does not stop just because a member of the armed forces is overseas. The mail system allows them to communicate, pay taxes, and vote. A member of the 547th Night Fighter Squadron used this form to request a ballot from his home state of Alabama for the 1944 election. The postal system enables military personnel to exercise their rights as American citizens, even while stationed abroad.

Text Messaging

Throughout its history, the post office has sought to provide the fastest service possible. Advances in technology have accelerated mail delivery, but rapid communication was possible even in 1862. Rachel Walters responded to this letter just one week after it was mailed by her husband David, then serving as a cavalryman in the Union Army.
“This is the fourth letter I have written you and I have received four from you and I would be glad to receive one every day or two if I could for I am always glad to hear from you.”
—Rachel J. Walters to her husband, October 7, 1862

### What Are Some of the Key Points in America’s Military Mail History?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Continental Congress implements the Constitutional Post.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>U.S. suspends mail to Confederate States of America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Military Postal Express Service operates mail for American Expeditionary Forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>V-Mail service is available for overseas military mail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Space Available Mail (SAM) is enacted for air transport of designated types of mail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Parcel Airlift (PAL) class of mail is created for overseas military mail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Military Postal Service Agency is established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Marines Corps launches the hybrid mail service MotoMail.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mail Call

Moving the Mail  Location is Key

Mail delivery must overcome the complexities posed by troop movements, supply lines, and transportation means. The most challenging and time consuming part of moving mail arises in a theatre of operation. Issues of security, difficult terrain, and transportation resources can slow dispatches. At times, limiting the size and weight of mailed items has helped to ensure that the mail goes through.

“I am truly glad to hear that you had rec’d some of my letters. I have the advantage of you. I know where to write to you. Your home is stationary, mine is upon the wide world, wherever I pitch my tent there is my home for the time being. A soldier’s life is uncertain & his abode more.”
—Lieutenant William McKean to his father, November 13, 1846

No Easy Task

Delivering mail in war zones is fraught with difficulty. During the American Revolution, postal couriers scoured the countryside to find George Washington’s elusive army. Two hundred years later during the Vietnam War, the military experimented with using bags like this one to drop mail from helicopters. Unfortunately, this type of bag blended in with the jungle too well, making it difficult to locate.

An “Outrageous” Bill

Creating and maintaining the system that made delivering military mail possible was expensive, requiring the government to devote vast resources to the task. Postal and military officials tried many ways to coordinate management and decide financial responsibility. In this 1862 letter, an officer from the Quartermaster General’s Office questioned the transportation costs charged by the Post Office Department.

How Does Mail Get to Ships and Submarines?

Different means can be used to deliver and receive mail from naval vessels. All require information about movements and location, including the old standby of
mail sacks from a helicopter on a flight deck, 2003. U.S. Navy photo by Photographer’s Mate 1st Class Arlo K. Abrahamson.
Aboard a ship or in the back of a truck, military post offices abroad strive to provide the same services found at home. Facilities are often cramped, but can handle a huge amount of mail.

Today, military personnel who handle mail must be authorized and trained to do so in accordance with Postal Service and Department of Defense regulations. Working in a war zone and screening for hazardous contents in parcels can be dangerous, but workers get to see the positive effect that mail has on their comrades.

An interview with Specialist Sergio Tobias as he describes his responsibilities with the U.S. Army, Detachment 3, 394th Postal Company in Kirkuk, Iraq on January 10, 2006.

Video by U.S. Army 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.
At Sea

Money orders available at field or shipboard post offices were a convenient means of sending funds, and sometimes the only financial service available to transfer money securely. This unused money order was aboard the USS Kanawha when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircrafts and sank on April 7, 1943. This artifact was recovered by divers and presented to surviving crew members on the fiftieth anniversary of the attack.

"With over seven million persons in the files, there were thousands of name duplications. At one point we knew we had more than 7,500 Robert Smiths."
—Major Charity Adams Earley, 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion

Who Can Tackle a Mountain of Mail?

The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was the only unit of African-American women, in the still segregated U.S. Army, to serve during World War II. The women found mail stacked to the ceiling of the postal facility when they arrived in England in early 1945. The battalion worked twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to provide mail to military personnel in Europe, making a valuable contribution to victory.
The Mail Piece  Changing Media, Consistent Content

- **The Early Years: 1775-1865**
- **Expanded Service: 1898-1920s**
- **Delivering More: 1941-1970s**
- **Modern Mail: 1980s-2010**

Technological innovations have transformed the way personal messages and official mail have been sent. Mail options expanded in the 1940s to include recorded messages and microfilmed letters. Today, computer technology allows electronic communication to be combined with traditional letters and packages in new ways.

The volume, size, and weight of mail has typically increased during wartime. Developing new procedures, trying different routes, and using diverse means of transportation are all ways that the postal system has continued to expand its capacity to meet the needs of military personnel and their communities.

### Military Personnel Phonograph Messages

- **Message recorded by Ralph Miller, Pharmacist’s Mate, U.S. Navy, at a USO event in Los Angeles, CA on July 21, 1944.**
  - Listen to side one (1.6 MB):  
  - Transcript:  
  - Listen to side two (1.5 MB):  
  - Transcript:  

- **Phonograph that Warren E. Gerstenkorn, Private, U.S. Army, recorded at training camp at Fort Belvoir, VA in 1943.**
  - Listen (1.4 MB):  
  - Transcript:  

### Almost Like You Never Left

A reasonably reliable mail service allows service personnel to stay connected with those at home. Even in 1835, Navy surgeon David Shelton Edwards was able to manage his New York household despite being stationed far from home at the Pensacola Navy
Yard in Florida. Through frequent correspondence with his wife, Edwards remained involved with his family and sent orders regarding the running of the house.

"My heart tells me I shall get a letter from you this evening unless the late heavy rains have so overflowed the country in Georgia as to stop the mail."
—Surgeon David Shelton Edwards to his wife, June 22, 1835
America’s revolutionaries recognized that the exchange of information was essential to their cause. The Continental Congress established the Constitutional Post on July 26, 1775. Patriots relied on the post for communication with army officials. Because they were already doing essential work, postmasters and post riders were exempt from serving in the military during the War for Independence.

As the young nation expanded and later conflicts like the Mexican-American War spread the armed forces across the continent, mail procedures evolved to keep up. The Civil War presented substantial challenges for postal operations. Mail volume boomed as literacy rates rose and postage rates became affordable. By June 1861, the United States had suspended mail exchanges between the North and South.

I Regret to Inform You

Thanks in part to relatively affordable postage rates, sending mail became much more common in the era of the Civil War. A year before receiving this letter in spring 1865, Rachel Walters received another, informing her that her husband David had been taken prisoner at Resaca, Georgia. This letter from his commanding officer confirmed David had died in a Confederate prison that winter.

“I feel that our country needs my help & I am willing to do all that I can & even give my life for your liberties & our beloved children”
—Private David Walters to his wife, Rachel, September 29, 1862

Whatever It Takes

Union blockades restricted goods including paper and envelopes from entering and leaving the Confederacy. Southerners used available materials, including old correspondence, the backs of printed circulars, and blank pages from books.
Envelope made from a document turned inside out.
Expanded Service 1898–1920s

The new territories occupied by American forces during the Spanish-American War required the establishment of military postal stations abroad. Post Office Department employees managed U.S military mail and postal services in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Many workers became sick with malaria or yellow fever during their service and quarantines often delayed transport ships.

During World War I, the postal system experienced unprecedented growth. Between July 1, 1917 and June 30, 1918 the Post Office Department dispatched 35 million letters to the American Expeditionary Forces.

“During the time yellow fever was at its height no mail was received or dispatched . . . Soldiers’ mail for the States kept accumulating.”
—Louis Kempner, U.S. Postal Agent in Cuba, 1898

Resourceful

Military men and women stationed abroad sometimes found it difficult to obtain the materials they needed for correspondence. A National Guardsman in the Philippines wove this grass envelope himself so that he could send a letter home to Oregon during the Spanish-American War.

Over There

The State Department issued this special passport asking foreign governments to treat postal agent Charles Leary as a representative of the U.S. government on official business. Initially, Leary and other Post Office Department employees staffed the Army Post Offices in France during World War I. The postal system was faced with rapid expansion at the same time it was struggling to find and train enough workers to replace those who left for military service.
In May 1918, the War Department assumed responsibility for overseas post offices. Military personnel replaced Post Office Department employees who had been sent to operate the field stations. The Military Postal Express Service (MPES) was the first all-military mail service in American history. This handstamp was used by the MPES at APO 753 in Limoges, Haute-Vienne, France.

Why Did Doughboys Send Postcards?

Postcards were one of the popular ways military personnel communicated with family and friends during World War I. Cards were widely distributed for free by nonprofit organizations. Other postcards were readily available with scenes of life at training camps in the U.S. or printed in Europe with patriotic themes, exotic sights, or scenes of the war’s destruction.

Today, these postcards provide a glimpse of the attitudes and experiences of members of the armed forces. This doughboy writing on November 18, 1918 used this card to gripe about the weather, even though the war had just ended.
Delivering More 1941–1970s

An unprecedented amount of mail was transported during World War II. To bring mail to service personnel stationed worldwide, the military postal system required a global network. The Navy alone increased the number of post offices from 891 in 1941 to 4,632 in 1945.

By 1951, over 11 tons of mail a day poured into the Korean Theater for the multinational forces. This volume exceeded available aircraft space and led to restrictions on size and weight of airmail parcels sent overseas.

During the Vietnam War, available space on commercial airlines, military airlift, and chartered aircraft and ships meant postal cargo didn’t compete for space with people or supplies. Most mail reached Vietnam in as little as three days, thanks to innovations in cargo containers, automated location tracking, and prioritization of deliveries.

Radio Segment on Iwo Jima, 1945


Listen (9.6 MB):  
Transcript:

V For Victory

V-Mail allowed people to send letters without competing for the space needed to ship military supplies during World War II. Technicians copied images of letters onto 16 mm microfilm reels that were transported by air. About 1,500 letters could be reproduced on a single reel weighing only five ounces, saving about 98% of cargo space compared to traditional mail.

The recipient received a photographic print of the letter about one-quarter of its original size. This global V-Mail network required intensive labor and
By the Vietnam War the availability of affordable recording equipment made it possible for deployed personnel and their families to send voice messages regularly. Hearing the voice of a family member or friend on the other side of the world was the next best thing to having them at home.

How Was Mail Censored?

The first widespread effort to censor personal military mail occurred during World War I. The practice was resumed in World War II with the censors usually looking for sensitive information such as military unit location and troop strength. Censors read each letter and cut or blotted out sections which were considered unacceptable. Modern forms of secure postal communication are not censored.
Modern Mail  1980s–2010

Despite the availability of electronic communication, mail remains relevant to service men and women. Packages can be sent simply with domestic U.S. postage rates, and mail reaches military personnel serving in places where phone and internet communication is unavailable.

Modern mail transportation has been made efficient through computer tracking and containerized mail shipping. The postal system remains a global operation, bringing mail to service personnel in bases and outposts around the world.

"Few things impact a unit’s morale more than mail... Letters are not left behind on a nightstand or on a cot when Soldiers go into battle. They are taken along and read over and over. A small piece of correspondence from home means the world to these brave young men and women who fight for freedom."
—Brigadier General Sean J. Byrne, 2003

Desert Storm

Captain Ann H. Patrie wrote letters to her husband Chris while serving as a medical evacuation pilot during the Persian Gulf War.

In Patrie’s letter of January 20-21, 1991, she described some her work and the dangers she faced: "I am much, much closer to the Iraq border. Just to give you an idea – I flew there at 50' to 100' feet at 102 [knots] (117.5 MPH). The radar altimeter – had to be turned off because the Iraqis could acquire its signal and lock on." (Letter courtesy of National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution)

Care Package

For military personnel, the ability to send parcels to family and friends can be just as important as receiving care packages from home. While serving in Iraq, Chief Warrant Officer Peter Paone used this Priority Mail box to send souvenirs to his son Tom.

Hybrid Mail

Tested by the Marine Corps in 2003, MotoMail represents a new way to send mail. With MotoMail,
people can e-mail a message to a service man or woman at a Marine camp overseas. The message is then printed and delivered to the recipient through postal delivery like a normal letter. MotoMail is free to use, fast, and private. The Army experimented briefly with a similar system in 2009, called Hooahmail.

### What Do I Need to Know About Sending Military Mail?

- Mail addressed to military personnel must have the recipient’s name, unit, and APO or FPO number. For tips on military addressing, click [here](#).
- Mail to certain locations might have prohibitions on certain materials and content. For the most current list of restrictions by APO/FPO address, check the latest [Postal Bulletin](#). Look for the section titled “Overseas Mail.”
- Parcels shipped overseas must be accompanied by a customs form, which can be found [here](#). Mail sent to APO/FPO addresses overseas are considered international mail, even though military post offices are U.S. addresses.
Mail gives service men and women a link to the outside world and something to look forward to. For those at home, a letter can bring news that a loved one is well and hopes to come home soon.

The armed forces know that mail gives deployed personnel a morale boost. Receiving a letter or care package helps give service personnel the determination to get the job done.

"The proper handling of mail is important to morale in any unit—the mail clerk must draw and distribute as fast as possible. The traditional mail call is a big mob scene of boisterous expectant men outside the orderly room or the company headquarters in the field."

~U.S. Army, Company Duties, 1951
All Together Now

Bringing mail to armed forces personnel around the world is a group effort. The federal government, non-profit organizations, and the business community all play a role in making mail call a reality. The Jewish Welfare Board provided free postcards such as this one to military men and women serving overseas during World War I.

No Stamp Required

Getting postage stamps can be a challenge in a combat zone. The government has implemented several measures to waive pre-paid postage or grant free mail privileges for military personnel in wartime.
Mail Call

The Group Effort  Promote Letter Writing

Bringing mail to military personnel overseas requires a collaborative effort by both the public and private sectors. The Department of Defense subsidizes transportation of military mail to final destinations overseas. Members of the armed forces have often been granted free mail privileges in wartime, sparing them the challenge of finding stamps.

Assistance from the private sector has been just as important. Non-profit organizations have supplied free materials and volunteers to help military personnel write home. The business community has provided advertising campaigns to inspire people to send mail to service personnel.

So Much to Give

Non-profit organizations like the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army have provided stationery and facilities to help service men and women communicate with their families. Volunteers assisted wounded personnel by writing or typing letters. This World War I postcard was supplied by the YMCA to help military personnel alert loved ones that they were returning home.

For Immediate Release

Large and small businesses alike contribute to the military mail system by mobilizing the public to write letters to service personnel. These public awareness campaigns became popular during World War II and businesses continue to support the men and women of the military with similar promotions today.

The New Haven Railroad published this advertisement in 1943, urging Americans to send letters to members of the armed forces deployed overseas during World War II.

To learn more about public awareness campaigns during World War II, click here.

"Only you can put the magic in mail call. You mean to write often, but you're busy-busy?—and sometimes you forget to, or put it off. Don't. And if you have no one in Service to write to, remember the men who have no one to hear from — and find out what you can do about it."
How Is POW Mail Handled?

Prisoner of War (POW) mail is delivered by humanitarian organizations like the International Red Cross. Mail is often censored by the enemy before being distributed to the POWs. While it takes longer to reach POWs, mail delivery is generally reliable.

During the Vietnam War, this was not the case. The North Vietnamese hoped to use mail to break the spirit of the POWs. Naval aviator Bob Shumaker, pictured here, remembered that it was very rare for North Vietnamese officials to distribute mail. In eight years of captivity in the ‘Hanoi Hilton,’ he received only eight letters.
Mail is important for deployed personnel and their families. The postal system enables service personnel to receive news from loved ones and stay current with and participate in events in their hometown. Care packages provide military men and women with some of the comforts of home. Messages from a service man or woman let those waiting at home share in their experiences and their hopes for the future.

"Missing You - Letters from Wartime," about wartime letters, 1861-2010, expresses the essential connection of mail between military personnel and the families and friends left behind.

Dear Frances

In 1919, Private John Zimmer wrote to his sister to tell her that he hoped to come home soon. He wrote the letter from a hospital in France using stationery provided by the American Red Cross. Zimmer used the opportunity to thank her for the letters he had received, ask for more correspondence from friends,
and express concern about his love life.

Semper Fidelis

Marine Corps Major Reina DuVal sent this letter to a friend while serving in Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf War. DuVal expressed her feelings on the war, her desire to come home, and some of the strange experiences of living in the desert. Telling her friend that “we live for mail call,” she used the occasion to express gratitude to her friend for writing.

“I sincerely appreciate that you’ve taken the time to remember us over here. At times we feel so disconnected from reality, but I must tell you we are all endeared to people like yourself who pray, write &/or remember.”
~Major Reina DuVal to her friend, February 27, 1991

What Happens to Mail Addressed to a Service Man or Woman Who Is Deceased, Missing, Captured, or Hospitalized?

Mail addressed to wounded personnel is forwarded for delivery to the hospital treating the recipient. Letters or parcels mailed to a member of the armed forces who is deceased or missing are held until the next of kin is notified by the Department of Defense. Mail that had not been delivered is returned to the sender. Items that were received are forwarded to the next of kin.
Get Involved  How You Can Make A Difference

"Every time I receive a letter, home doesn’t seem so far away"
~Seaman Dang Cho aboard USS Kitty Hawk, 1999

Whether or not you are a veteran, educator, student, or have a loved one in the armed forces, there is a way for you to get involved.

If you are interested in writing letters to military personnel serving overseas, there are a number of organizations which can help. Click here for a list.

If you are a veteran and you would like to donate your letters, the Veteran’s History Project at the Library of Congress is collecting letters and other personal accounts. For a list of more organizations which take donations, click here.

If you are an educator who would like to teach your class about the role of mail during wartime and using letters as primary sources, see topical resources from the National Postal Museum:

We Were There: Letters From the Battle Front Teacher’s Guide (National Postal Museum)

V-Mail Classroom Guide about World War II Victory Mail

Maybe you have a family member who is a veteran and you would like to learn about their service. The best place to start is by talking to your family about your loved one’s service. To learn more about researching your family member’s military service, click here for information from the National Archives.

For helpful tips on preserving letters and historic documents, click here for tips from the National Postal Museum.
Acknowledgments

This exhibition is made possible, in part, through the generous support of:

Lockheed Martin Corporation
Estate of Winton M. Blount
Rumsfeld Foundation

The Mail Call exhibition team included:

*National Postal Museum Staff:*
Erin Blasco, Education Specialist
Eric Chapman, Exhibits Specialist
Marty Emery, Public Affairs Manager
Lynn Heidelbaugh, Curator
Manda Kowalczyk, Preservation Technician
Bill Lommel, Web Designer
Tom Paone, Curatorial Assistant
Patricia Raynor, Collections Specialist
Roxanne Symko Smith, Project Manager

*Interns:*
Amy Cohen
Anna Cosner
Steve Henne
Saige Jedele
Heather Maclean
Louise Pearson

*Consultants:*
CB Services, LLC
Haley Sharpe Design, Ltd
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postal Operations</td>
<td>Postal Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mail Piece</td>
<td>Moving the Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Field Post Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale</td>
<td>The Mail Piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Early Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expanded Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delivering More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modern Mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Involved</td>
<td>Morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Group Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A World Away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>Get Involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Smithsonian Institution | Privacy | Terms of Use | Site Map | Top
Sergio Tobias: Specialist Tobias, first name is Sergio, S-E-R-G-I-O, Tobias, T-O-B-I-A-S. And I’m with the 3rd Detachment behind the port AG Postal Company and I am from Orange County, California or Westminster, California. Right now I’m the alternate registered clerk. I handle the registered mail given out to all the mailpersons who come to pick it up, and that is the most secure mail that we have here at the post office. Besides that, I’m operations. I deal with everything, redirecting. So we’re in the fore here as you see and that’s about it.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about what's going on behind you.

Sergio Tobias: Behind me right now we're breaking down mail. What we're doing is all the mail that comes in from the flight, we have to break them down by unit. We've got to make sure if there are insured, registered, certified or whatnot. If it does, then we just go ahead and put them on this car right here and me or my NCOIC, Sgt. Mejia, will take it back to the cardboard [sounds like] room and lock it up, so we are ready to work on it, and in the meantime just bring down every box we have here.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell me about how you feel about this job.

Sergio Tobias: About this job, postal. Well, I’ll never look at my postman the same way again. It’s a tough job. You’ve got to learn lots of different aspects of the job, and you see how it all comes together.

Interviewer: What’s the greatest part about this job?
Sergio Tobias: The greatest part about this job is, I guess, when you see a package for people, you know who it's for and you know that you can get a great satisfaction bringing that to them because you're out here for a very long time, and it's a great feeling when you have a package mailed to you. So I get to see some people when they see their packages, their eyes just light up or whatnot.

Interviewer: What do you think about all these people that come here to give help?

Sergio Tobias: I thank them because it is a lot of work and we feel sometimes, like for us personally, it's overwhelming, but when everyone just chips in and gets the job done everything just goes smoothly, and it's great teamwork. I love working with the Air Force because the Air Force often helps us out and all the units of the Army come out and help so it's a great -- and everyone comes along for the mail because it's our little piece from home.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you'd like to say or add anything?

Sergio Tobias: Yeah. Hi to the rest of the 304th AG Company and the rest of the 806 AG company back home, and see you when you get here.

[End of file & transcript]
Female voice: Greetings, Mr. and Mrs. Sides. This is July 21st, 1944. We are speaking from the USO in the Pacific Mutual Building in Downtown Los Angeles. Through the courtesy of Gem blades and razors, I have the privilege of bringing you the voice of Gem. Here he is.

PhM 2/C Ralph Miller: Hello, Mother. My gosh, almighty. Here I am making one of these here records up here in Los Angeles. Just got up here a little while ago, and it's just some real town up here, having a lot of fun up here. Going up to Hollywood tomorrow. Right now I'm at USO where I'm making this record. We've got a very beautiful girl here. Say hello, honey. Say hello to them, go ahead. There's my mother.

Female Voice: Hello.

Ralph Miller: Isn't that nice, huh? We're going to have a lot of fun tonight. Yes, indeed. Well, I'll tell you why I called the other night. You know, I told you on the phone it was just because I was a little stewed or something, but it wasn't true. The reason I called you the other night was to tell you I was trying for a 30-day leave; however, it didn't go through. The doctor wouldn't pass it -- you know, my doctor passed it, but the captain wouldn't pass it as yet. However, I'm going to still try and get a leave before I ship out this time. They tell me it's pretty hard to get out of California though because of train transportation and everything else, but I'm still going to try and maybe I'll be home before even this war is over and back after the war is over, I hope.
Well, now I can go and tell you about all this here good music if you can’t hear it out there. Can you -- how is the record coming along? Can you hear the record music out there? Boy, beautiful music out there, beautiful music, beautiful music, beautiful girls and plenty of eats. You know my hobby, women and eats. Very pretty girls, nice little smile, just love it. So I’m going to turn the record over now, Mother.

[End of file: Miller-USO-1944_HSC_0113_side1.wma]

[Start of file: Miller-USO-1944_HSC_0113_side2.wma]

Ralph Miller: Okay, we’re back on the air again she says, so I have to start talking again. They stopped the music on me now. Everybody can hear me. Even the girl over here, she’s reading something and smiling. I don’t know what to think about that, though. Where are you planning this out, out of Pearls [phonetic], I guess? Well, how’s everything at the cottage, down there at the boat and everything? My gosh. I’ll be glad to get back home again and take life easy. I don’t know. This L.A. weather has got me under the skin here; I’m beginning to get a small cold in throughout the nostrils, going to need the pharmacist made for myself here pretty soon.

And so it’s a very nice state though, a very good state. I like the way it’s laid out. I don’t know how long it’s been dead, but I like the way it’s laid out. No kidding though, they got cockroaches so big they wear hash marks. You have to salute them when they go by. One turned my dog tag over last night to see what type of blood I had. It’s a wonderful town, a wonderful town. They got two laughs out of that, that’s more than I got in Philadelphia.
But really, I don't know what to say now that I'm on this doggone thing. Besides, it'll probably be picking up another ship before long, probably another LSD too and be shoving out. Oh yeah, don't go hold your breath waiting for that because I might be back and be taking life easy for the rest of the duration. No, there's nothing the matter with me. I'm in perfect condition. Nothing's the matter with me at all besides a little lovesick. You know how things get you down here once you come up here to a USO and see a couple of little girls smile at you like this here, you wouldn't know, there smiling at me [indiscernible] I don't know what I can do. Well, somebody is waving a pencil so I have to shove off here any minute now. Be good, mother, and God bless you all.

[End of file & transcript]
Male Voice: Hello, Mrs. Rice. The Pepsi Cola Company is very happy to bring you the voice of your son from Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Private Warren Gerstenkorn: Hello, mom. It's swell to get this chance to talk to you again; cheaper than a long distance phone call, too, and it'll last much longer, but I sure would like to hear your voices once more.

There isn't much to report that I haven't said in my letters but I thought of you very much anyway. Same old routines from revelry to test, movie, letters and a show once in a while. The funny thing though, I sort of like it all, but I hope you both feel as well as I do. They keep me too busy to get homesick here, but I sure would like to see you all right now. Your letters bring my happiest moments. I guess you have to be a soldier to realize what I mean. Mail call is the happiest or the satisfying part of the day for everyone. So you keep me happy and everything will be swell.

How about that camera one of these days? I'm still waiting for it. Remember me to everybody and tell them all to write. I'll answer as soon as I can, though time is very precious here on the island. Be sure to write and let me know how I sound. You can play this record over and over while I'm away. Other boys like to talk to their folks, too. So, so long for now and goodnight and God bless you all.

[End of file & transcript]
Interviewer: Perhaps you have often wondered what happens to all those hundreds of thousands of letters you write to the men overseas, the men of the various branches of the Armed Forces, how soon they’re delivered, how they’re handled, and how quickly they reach the men when the men are actually in combat.

We’re speaking to you right now from Iwo Jima, and we have members of the Postal Department of the Veteran 4th Marine Division gathered around the microphone to tell you something about how that mail is handled. And I think you’ll be astonished to learn how efficiently and how quickly mail is brought to these men in actual combat and how quickly the mail from these men is taken back to the States.

First of all, we want you to meet Tech Sergeant E. T. Downing [phonetic] of 8 Carter Terrace in Somerville, Massachusetts and Sergeant B. D. Brian [phonetic] of Spartansburg, Pennsylvania, both postal clerks in the 4th Division post office. Ed, when did you bring your post office ashore?


Interviewer: And when did you first start dealing mail out here on the island?


Interviewer: So does that mean it was the first mail that you had in?

E. T. Downing: The first mail that came in.

Interviewer: How long did it take to sort that mail and get it out?
E. T. Downing: Same day. The mail is delivered the same day it comes in.

Interviewer: About how many sacks did you get that first day?

E. T. Downing: Approximately 23 sacks, I believe.

Interviewer: And that’s about how many pieces of mail? Could you estimate that off hand? At 23 sacks that would be probably about 12 or --

E. T. Downing: About 65,000.

Interviewer: About 65,000 pieces of mails that came in on the first day. It was all sorted and delivered that first day. What is your particular job with the division post office?

E. T. Downing: I’m the NCO in-charge of the post office right now.

Interviewer: And you came ashore with the division post office. How about when you landed in Saipan, were you able to set up as quickly there as you have here?

E. T. Downing: No, we set up quickly here than we did in Saipan.

Interviewer: I’m going to ask B.D. over here a question. This is Sergeant B. D. Brian of Spartansburg, Pennsylvania. You were on Saipan, too, weren’t you?

B.D. Brian: That’s right.

Interviewer: Well, how do you account for the much greater efficiency that you had on setting up your post office here?

B.D. Brian: Experience, I suppose, is the greatest factor.

Interviewer: Where else has this crew been through besides Saipan?

B.D. Brian: They’ve been on the Marshall Islands and then Tinian.

Interviewer: That’s [indiscernible] and Saipan and Tinian before they hit Iwo Jima.
B.D. Brian: That’s right.

Interviewer: How many pieces of mail would you say is handled on an average day on one of these operations?

B.D. Brian: The average day is about 25,000.

Interviewer: Has it been running true to form here in Iwo Jima?

B.D. Brian: No. We’ve got more than that. We’ve got 163,000 pieces today.

Interviewer: That’s your peak day, isn’t it?

B.D. Brian: That’s right. So far.

Interviewer: That’s an awful lot of mails to handle. That’s just for the 4th Division.

B.D. Brian: That’s right, just for the 4th Division.

Interviewer: I understand that you fellows, the 4th Division post office, are also handling the mail for the 3rd and 5th Divisions also in this operation.

B.D. Brian: That’s right. It has come to us I suppose because of our greater experience. I don’t know.

Interviewer: Ed, how do you work that? Do you process the mail for the other divisions too?

E. T. Downing: No. We separate it into different divisions. We get it pouchsed to each separate division. We break it down that way.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Then all you actually sort out is the mail for your own 4th Division.

E. T. Downing: As far as actual mail sorting goes, that’s right.

Interviewer: How many men do you have working in your post office?
E. T. Downing: We have 10 men with us.

Interviewer: And how many of those are V-Mail technicians?

E. T. Downing: Three.

Interviewer: Just three. That leaves you seven to handle all this tremendous volume of mail.

E. T. Downing: That's right.

Interviewer: That would be 163,000 pieces handled by seven men today. Well, you certainly have done a marvelous job. And speaking of V-Mail, we have the chief V-Mail technician, Tech Sergeant Bill Stagner [phonetic] of Lowell, North Carolina. Bill, is V-Mail used [audio glitch] during couple of days of V-Mail. How so? Why is that?

Bill Stagner: Well, the call is most with us, the only thing that we can get out. Our V-Mail now is going up presently, and that’s the only mail going up.

Interviewer: Yeah. You process that here in your post office?

Bill Stagner: We have a V-Mail station set up here. We do process that here.

Interviewer: In other words, all you send out here is the film.

Bill Stagner: That’s right, the film.

Interviewer: How about incoming mails? Does V-Mail get priority coming in during an operation?

Bill Stagner: Well, we don’t handle incoming mail here. That’s handled in the rear echelon.

Interviewer: Oh, when you get it, it’s all produced and on the printed form.

Bill Stagner: That’s right.
Interviewer: Do you have any idea what percentage or approximate percentage of mail, this V-Mail, is going in and out one of these operations? Going out is what I’m saying.

Bill Stagner: Going out, I’d say V-Mail is about 99 percent.

Interviewer: That much?

Bill Stagner: That much.

Interviewer: I understand that even on the ordinary air mail going out in this operation, the delivery isn't certain or sure of being rapid. How is that? Is there difficulty in transportation?

Bill Stagner: Well, yes. I’d say that.

Interviewer: I imagine you have to wait until there's a boat going off the island for you to get to the nearest --

Bill Stagner: That’s right, unless an airport has opened up so we can get it off.

Interviewer: I see. And now, we’d like to introduce the postal officer of the 4th Marine Division who’s responsible for setting up this system which he’ll tell you more about. He is Captain Harding, Captain Emmett E. Harding [phonetic] of 53 Patterson Avenue in Hampstead, New York. Captain, suppose you tell us something about this set-up that you have. I think you’ve done a marvelous job in getting mail out to these men of Iwo Jima so many thousands of miles from home so quickly. How long did it take to get your system set up?

Emmett Harding: We had our post office set up within 12 hours after we got ashore. It was functioning at that time. We also had a complete V-Mail station set up and functioning.
Interviewer: How many months of preparation went into that though?

Emmett Harding: I would say that the entire length of time we've been in the Pacific since January ’44 has gone into the preparation of that. We've built it up as we gone along. One operation teaches us a little bit more and we gain from experience.

Interviewer: How long does it take now under your setup as an average for one of these V-Mail letters getting off Iwo Jima before it gets back to the States?

Emmett Harding: Well, I should say it should be back at the processing station in the States within four or five days.

Interviewer: How about coming out, do you know about that?

Emmett Harding: Coming out would be approximately the same time.

Interviewer: Suppose you tell us a little bit, Captain, if you can about how this mail setup is worked along the way. I know on a trip out here we had mail on the various stopping points.

Emmett Harding: Well, that is a system which we put into practice on this operation. It entails weeks of preparation and works in this way. We leave part of our postal crew at an intermediate point. They receive all the mails for the division at that point and separate it into rear echelon and forward echelon mail. They have a list of every man and the ship in which he comes out hereon. They break down the mail to ships and send it forward to us pouched to ships.

All we have to do at any intermediate point is deliver the pouch to the ship and each man gets his mail within a matter of minutes once that mail is put aboard the ship. That process continues until we jump off from our last stopping place, and we notify
those people back at the intermediate point, then they just continue breaking it to ships
to send it out to military units. That’s how we get it here on Iwo.

Interviewer: Well, on the trip out, Captain, is the mail flown to the convoy?

Emmett Harding: Mail is flown so that it reaches our stopping point several days
before we reach there by ship.

Interviewer: I see. I’ve already asked these men about the number of letters that
have been handled in a day. How about a second, third and fourth class mail, do you
do any of that in these advanced combat posts?

Emmett Harding: Oh, no, we don’t take care of anything but first class mail on an
operation. We find that it is too bulky, and transportation is at a premium. There’s no
way of getting it out here. We save it at our rear echelon and deliver it to the boys when
we go back.

Interviewer: Well, thanks a lot, Captain, for talking to us. There’s one more thing
I do want to ask you, and that is how this postal employees in the Marine Corps are
selected. Are they former civil postal employees, or how do you work that?

Emmett Harding: Well, many of them are former postal employees. I would say
the majority of them, although that is not always so. Sometimes we find a man who is
not a former postal clerk who makes very good military postal clerk. I have several in
my organization. I’d like to say at this point that I believe I have a postal organization
that’s second to none in the Pacific area. The boys are a fine bunch of boys. They’ve
done a splendid job.

Interviewer: Well, I agree with you wholeheartedly, Captain. I think that you, as
head of the organization, could be well proud not only of your organization but of the
fine job they’ve done at this point so many thousands of miles from the States in getting mail out so quickly and so efficiently. Thanks a lot for talking to us from the folks back home to give them an idea of how their mail actually is handled.

You've been listening to an interview with Captain Emmett E. Harding of Hampstead, New York, a postal officer on the Veteran 4th Marine Division on Iwo Jima. He and the following members of his postal staff, Tech Sergeant Bill Stagner of Lowell, North Carolina, Tech Sergeant E.J. Downing of Somerville, Massachusetts, and Sergeant B.D. Brian of Spartansburg, Pennsylvania. This program was recorded in Iwo Jima by the Radio Section, Division of Public Relations of the Veteran 4th Marine Division.

[End of file & transcript]
Private First Class Frank A. Kowalczyk: -- it’s kind of like a lightweight, but I know you’ll like it. That’s in there, too. So Paulie has probably torn off fatigues all apart, taking all the stripes off from that. Well, he didn’t get very much.

I guess I already told you about me putting in a transfer for B Company. They’re stationed in Saigon. They got a hell of a lot of better than we do and that ain’t no lie, believe me. They tried to talk us out of not going but I just couldn’t do it. I prefer being out there than here any day of the week. This place here is -- just doesn’t get it. There’s too much harassment, duty, everything like that, but I guess that’s how the whole Army is based on everything, duty.

So how’s dad doing? Is he still working pretty much? I guess he’s back on that seven-to-seven shift. That tape that you sent me, I could use it, but I got to cover it with some other tape because Jeremy over here states you have to have everything with their brown tape and that ain’t worth the shit; I ain’t kidding.

I washed our floor today in here like a regular G.I. party soaked with soap and water and then scrubbed it with a broom. It turned out pretty good, distributed mothballs around, sprayed it. It seems like everything di di mau’ed out of here, which means it left. Di di mau in Vietnamese means go away.

So we’ve been on -- we had our alerts all week so far since Saturday. We didn't have nothing last night. When we got to bed, if they did, we didn’t hear it. We’re pretty
tired when we got in. It’s now about 1:30 in the afternoon, so I figured I’d just sit down
and instead of writing you a letter just make use of tape. It would be a hell lot of easier.
You know how much I hate writing.

Yeah, tell Aunt Helen I received her letter yesterday. I also wrote two or three
letters, too. I don’t know why she said she hasn’t received any, but I can’t understand
why. I done wrote her two or three letters.

I told you about me receiving the state flag; I have it here. I still haven’t put it up;
I will in a bit.

Has Joe still got my Dodge or did he trade that car off on me? Probably he’s got
ideas trading it off to get himself a Pontiac. I know he always had his eye on that
Firebird. Does he still got the crazy idea of going in, going in the Marine Corps or did he
finally give that idea up? I told him before what would happen to him if he joined the
Marine Corps and I happen come back again.

Well, nothing new here. We’re still getting up 5:00 in the morning for reveille and
formation and police call now twice a day. That’s another thing, you just can’t realize
you’re in a combat zone with all these duties, polished boots, starched fatigues, the
whole bit. You wouldn’t believe you’re in a combat zone.

Saturday night, they really gave Charlie some hell out here. I wish I had a
camera to take pictures that night and send them back to you and see how pretty that
stuff looks. The Minigun definitely does bring some smoke out here. It’s one of the best
things the Army has over here in Vietnam besides us fighting men over here.

One of our buddies from over here volunteered last night to go relieve another
guy that was married out there in 62nd. All this did not happen on our perimeter; it
happened about a mile to a mile-and-a-half from us or maybe a little more than that. It's hard to determine. Anyway, it was far enough away. So we might go out there this afternoon and take them some cokes and that.

All I could say is nothing much has ever happened around here till that or something. It didn’t kill the monotonous around here. Of course, your knees sure shake quite a bit especially when all those artillery rounds go off and all that.

Today, me and my buddy over here, Bud Hill, are scrubbing the floor. We're standing up and spilling some water and they turned loose with a big ass artillery round. If you want to see two guys jump, you should have seen us, it was pretty damn funny. And on top of it, we threw some full cans in the trash can and they started popping, and it did scare the hell out of us there, too. Once you come back from out there and you’ve been mixed up with a little action over there, you're pretty jumpy, and believe me, we're jumpy.

Well, they asked me if my machine gun worked, and I told them it was shooting and it was working, but I never had to use too much. I only shot off about 200 rounds. This other kid here, they had shot a whole bunch of stuff up. You name it, they were shooting it, but they were lucky nothing happened to them too seriously. They had some snipers out there but they managed to get them all. This one guy's rear end is pretty damn sore. The colonel knocked him down on it when the snipers were shooting at him. He’s still complaining his rear end hurts. He’s pretty lucky, though. He’s one of the guys I was telling you about. He’s the one whose sister I write to. He’s a pretty damn nice guy. Thinking about it, when I get back out of here is going to Wyoming and seeing him. He said it’s pretty nice if we all can get back together out there. I told him

[Page 3]
I'm planning on coming out there as soon as possible. I wish you can meet him, ma. I think you'd really like him. He's a really nice guy.

I never did receive your other two packages you sent me; the ones with my dress greens, my clothes, and other stuff. They never got here. This other one beat it. Maybe they probably got lost or something like that, no big problem. I didn't pay for the Army uniform, no way, just the taxes. That's another thing I wanted to ask you, did you file my income tax? They state since you're in the Army, you have six months prior of ETSing out of the Army to pay -- to file your income tax, so I guess I really have no sweat.

Have you received the one from Inland Construction yet? I want to know how much I made last year so if you get a chance, jot it down on a piece of paper and send it to me. I know it wasn't much because I didn't work very much but about a month, not very much money in one month.

So you're not working no more; I bet you like that. Now you can stick around the house, fool around with your garden since spring is coming around the corner. You told me in your letter yesterday that your tulips were coming up. That's pretty strange. It's the middle of February, tulips coming up? I can't believe it.

Three more days and it's payday here for us. We're planning on buying us a TV set with our money. We might be billed for the rest of the month. At least we'll have something to watch instead of listen to the tape recorder all the time, trying to wind around with a movie.

Right now, they're keeping us pretty busy with these alerts and all this stuff like that there. Other than that, we have no complaints.
You asked about the chow once before. Well, that's another question. It is pretty bad. Sometimes you just waste your time going up there to eat. We did have hot water for a while in the shower, but now we don't have that no more either unless you go up during day when it's pretty hot. Otherwise, at night, it's all cold water, which you don't mind, as long as you get cleaned. This place here is really dusty and filthy. I don't care what -- how soon you take a shower, you come back, and you could wipe dirt right off you. It's just the way it is. Nothing you could do about it.

And another thing, Vietnam isn't like the way they use to stimulate it in the news. It's not half as bad as that; it's just bad. The Army makes a big story out of everything over here.

On this tape, it might be a little short because there ain't much you can say around here to cover 1,800 feet of tape. But the thing I wanted to ask you, like this buddy of mine just came up with ideas; when you do make me a tape and send it back with all this talking on it, catch the weather or the news or something on television on it. It definitely would be strange to hear something like that way over here because you just don't hear nothing that good back here.

So, how's the weather been back there? Probably the snow and all that starting to melt. I wish we had a little snow over here. It sure will kill a lot of these bugs and make a lot of us feel a lot better. Of course, a lot of people here it doesn't bother them, but at nights since you pull guard around here and it gets cold, you wish you had your field jacket out there because it gets cold. I know it's going to be hard for me to get used to it when I get back in the world, but I ain't going to complain once I get back, I'm going to take it. I'm going to ask Kim [phonetic] when I get back to work to put me on an
inside job for the winter because I don’t think I’ll be able to hack that first winter out there. I’ll give it a try if he can't do nothing for me. The most I could do is just freeze to death out there.

I also have that cross that I was telling you about papa-san [sounds like] made for me. It’s really beautiful. I wish I could get it home to you in a way but I’m sort of leery sending it home. I’m afraid it may get damaged or something. I just -- you just couldn’t buy it. I think back in the world, it costs anywhere from $50 to maybe $60, if not more. It’s all carved out of wood. Even Jesus Christ is carved out of a hunk of 4x4. He has all the actual bruises, cuts, blood stains, the whole works on it. It’s really nice; you won’t be able to believe it until you see it.

My buddy Bud over here, he’s got one, too. The first one he got, I told papa-san to make it to me earlier and never did got around to it. He kept pestering papa-san and finally he give it to him. This one here, papa-san wanted boocoo money for, which means a whole lot of money. All I gave him was a carton of cigarettes so far. He don’t need much more. He’ll probably take those cigarettes out there and sell them for maybe 80 or 90 cents of pack. He’ll make a hell of a lot more money than what I paid for on what he can get.

All these people talk about around here -- they keep saying a lot of VC in Bien Hoa, Bien Hoa. Well, as far as we know, we haven’t had no trouble from Bien Hoa; it’s always been in the back of us or towards the barricade area in that. Of course Bien Hoa is only a few miles away from us like I told you this before. I don’t know about Saigon, what kind of trouble Saigon has had. We haven’t heard nothing about it. Maybe back in the world, they give a little news report on it in that.
Saigon isn’t very pretty as a lot of people say it is. I have been all over a lot of parts of Saigon and it’s not very nice. It reminds you of the slums back in Chicago; it’s all that reminds you of. The docks are kind of pretty in a way but that’s about it. The water isn’t too clear; it’s dirty. People run all over. That’s another thing that’s going to be hard to get used to, is driving back home. Over here, you don’t drive still, you just go like a bat out of hell through all them places. And those people, regardless any age they’re on a motorcycle out here. And when you’re in one of these Army vehicles, you just don’t have time trying to stop for them. Luckily, we never hit anybody, but they tell you once you get in those towns like that, go -- just don’t drive too slow, drive fast enough to get the hell out of there if anything happens.

But I’ve never seen so many people and the crazy things they do. They’ll just start out in front of you, walk right in front of you, do anything they please like they own everything here. Of course, it is their country, but still it doesn’t give them the right to walk in front of your vehicle like this, but they do it. I have pictures, of some of Saigon but not too many. I have pictures of the U.S. embassy. That is a pretty looking building from the outside. I never was inside up to see what it was like.

Bien Hoa, that’s another beat-up place; nothing new about it neither. We’ve been to many places in these different places like Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, Cholon, Tam Hai, Cholon, and all this different odd-and-end places like this here. These people here just live like animals, nothing for ‘em to live for, it looks like way they act. Kids running around with no clothes, dirty. But I have -- in many of these papa-sans' homes we’ve been to, none of them have yet had a mattress in them; they all sleep on wooden beds or floors. Buildings are all open. Anybody could walk in and do as they please.
In a way, it's hard. I don't know why these people just don't try and do something. They have one of the best carpenters, I think, in the world. They are really good and I can't understand why they can't build up their place better than what it is. I guess they're just -- their hopes and everything has just disgusted kind of this war in Vietnam. It's like that paper clipping you sent us from that senator, whatever he was, that gave that report in Chicago American, the true facts he did state about the ARVN's. They will turn on you; 90 percent of the time, they will turn. I haven't seen much of it, but I have heard of guys who have experienced it themselves, and I feel this is the truth. Something should be done about it.

The same thing like when we go on guard here, they know this is a combat zone and all this, but just asking you these questions and this -- you sit down, thinking and wondering if this is a beauty contest and a question-and-answer game you're going to. It really doesn't make much sense, but either does the Army make any sense.

You asked me if I was going to go on R&R so I can get you some souvenirs. Well, as far as I know, right now, I wasn't planning on going on R&R. It really is a waste of money; $200, maybe $300 just to go for a matter of five to seven days. To me, I just want to stay here for the seven days and take all the harassment and that and save that little money I have coming in from the Army back home.

They told me I'll finally get promoted next month when I get to B Company. I sure hope it is soon; I really could use the money. I guess you're really wondering what happened to me why I was taking that money out. Well, it was like this here. It was New Year's Eve, we had a little bit of drink and everybody else was shooting their weapons, so I just decided I was going out there and shoot mine, too. Well, I was one
of the ones that got caught doing it right outside the perimeter. Nothing would have happened to me from the CO but this officer, he says he was a real bastard, turned me in. He says he wouldn’t have done a thing because he was doing the same thing but you know how the Army is. There is always someone trying to kiss another one’s ass so he can get another stripe or another bar to put on his shoulders. It’s all this place is made out of.

Well, for amusement we've been having doing a little lately, the last three or four days before we went on alert was playing volleyball. It sure felt good to play it. I like it in a way; I ain’t too good at it but still it kills the monotonous. We have a pool table now, too. They're fixing up the day room. I had a few of my papa-sans in there working. They wanted me to go in there and work, and I told them no stripe, no work. So they never set on to me, and I had my papa-san go.

Our buddy over here, Bud, he’s U.S. too, he’ll have his full time in the Army when he gets out of here. He came to Vietnam after I did, and yet he’s beat be home by 23 days. Man, that is something else. He came and make Spec-5, and he’s got already about 10 months of Spec-4. That’s how bad this company is. And just about the whole company is Spec-5, but since we’re the lowest ranking guys, section that is, that we just can’t get promoted because we have no officers to back us. Nobody wants to back the utility section. It's just something that no one wants to handle with then you got to fight with these S3 and stuff and S4. It’s just one big fight with one another here, that’s all that goes on.

I guess you’re wondering what our little building looks like. Well, it don’t look too much nothing; it just got four sides on it, our weapons hanging on one wall. We have a
little refrigerator, three beds on the back wall, three wooden cabinets where we keep all our clothes at, two fans hanging up from the ceiling and two little -- three little windows in the thing and a door and a screen door, just a little shack is all it is, made out of plywood and masonite. We got a little table in there.

Bud got kind of mad today, and he cleaned the hell out of it today. It looks real damn good. We cleaned the floor up. The other guy, he just didn’t feel like getting about doing it. He went on guard for the first time in five months, but he made one mistake to volunteer and to go out to 62nd last night where we were at the night before because now, they’re probably going to put him on guard rest, and I know he’s going to hate guard mount as much we do. I’ll have guard again the 27th. Every four days we’re supposed to get it, but I don’t mind. I’m going to keep asking to go back out there; there’s no harassment out there. Over here, on our perimeter, you got to worry about all these officers coming around all night long asking you silly questions and all that stuff like that. Out there, they don’t bother you at all. They treat you like a man out there, not like they do over here.

A buddy of mine was telling me that he was pinned down for three hours out there that night when he was out with the colonel. He said the colonel was just like another man; he’s just there with them. He said he like the man quite a bit.

Two men got killed, one from our company. I think I knew the one that got killed. The only reason he died is because no one came to get him. He laid in a bunker for two hours and the way it seems that I was told he bled to death there. It’s a shame that they won’t do things to help somebody over here until it’s too late. But that’s the way the Army is. They’re never ready for nothing.
Another thing, have Aunt Helen write Ronnie and have him get me four packages of blousing rubbers thing, you know that we used to put around our leg to hold our pants bloused up. He'll know what they are before he comes home from basic. We can't get them over here, and they sure to hell beat it, sticking your pants in your boots. I think it will probably cost me maybe $4 or $5 for them, so would you please send them the money and then you can take it out -- the money that comes in the check from the Army here?

Next month should be last time they take any money out on me, I hope. I should have that 90-some dollars paid for by next month that they took out, and I'll be able to get maybe $150, $160 a month put in there. If I get my Spec-4 pay, I'll even get even more, so I should have a pretty good sum of money there when I get home from here. That's why I don't want to go on R&R so I'll have money saved up when I get back to get that new car I was thinking of. I've seen the 1969 Chargers over here. I like the hell out of that. I might -- think I can get me one of them.

Also, you asked me, you said you want to learn how to drive. Well, that's no big problem. I'll teach you how to drive. Just the only thing I won't teach you for a while after I get home until I get used to driving back in the city. I don't want you to go around hot riding like we were doing over here. You're liable to get a million tickets. I know you could drive stick shift and that's one of the cars I want to get again, a stick shift. I'm so used to driving them over here. And the one I had before, just like I never did care for automatic and that's my last automatic I'll ever get.

So dad still got this idea of getting a new car again, huh? Well, I hope he gets the one he likes this time. He'll probably get another Rambler because he sure likes the
Rambler products quite a bit, unless he wants to get a Plymouth or a Dodge. I really don't know.

So how's the kids doing? I hope all good. How's Philip doing in school? Do you still give him a lot of hell or he's finally simmering down, getting himself some good grades for a change? He was doing pretty good there for a while when I was in California. I hope he's doing just as good now. Unless he made the honor roll, you never did say if he did or didn't. I hope he does do it and shows someone he's not a dummy, at least he ain't. How are Paul and Billy doing in high school? Billy still the big Casanova or has Paulie taken over his place now? I know one of them sure has got a lot of girlfriends when I was over there.

I get mail every so often. Mail comes pretty slow over here now. The only one I've been getting mail from lately is you, Aunt Helen, and a letter now and then from Sonny. I got one from Mary Ann Novakovich [phonetic], well, Green, she's married now, and Auntie Annie's daughter. I got one from her, too. I haven't heard nothing from Aunt Katie yet.

My buddy over here is looking for his axles for his car; he only found one. He's looking all over the instructions to see if there are supposed to be two or more some different type of deal. It looks like it's going to be a pretty nice looking car when he's done with it. He said he'll probably all -- he'll finish just the engine because that's all he ever built, it's just the engines.

He's been married now three years and he spent all three years in the service just about. This will be a second wedding anniversary in the service for him. It's a shame, though. He's U.S. and he's proud of it just like me. He's got the same attitude
about the Army, no different. He's got a cute little wife, too. She is always sending him
tapes, that's all he -- always talks to, is through a tape. That's what I'm going to start
doing too, is talking to you through a tape. I know I don't have that much to say but still
it beats right.

Well, you'll probably hear a bulldozer or something coming down the road here in
the background. I guess that's what it is. We got the door closed in here so to stay
cool. I couldn't think of anything else to be coming down here. Either a 10-ton tractor
and trailer or something will be down here that makes a lot of noise, but other than that
nothing much ever comes around here.

I have been learning my Vietnamese pretty good. It's going to be something to
get back home and try not to speak it. Like I already slipped up a few times in this tape,
really saying boocoo and all the stuff like that there. It's just like when you were trying
to teach me how to speak Croatian in that. Well, I can't count in Croatian, but I can
count in Vietnamese pretty damn good. I can count up to 999 but I still can't count to a
thousand. I really don't want to learn to count that far because I really don't need to
know more than what I do know. But it pays to know a little bit so you can talk to these
people and get the work out of them and get yourself out of a lot of work. That's what
we do with them.

They like me and this other guy real good, so now and then, we give them a can
of beer. They really appreciate it quite a bit. So, me and him, we're planning before we
leave here, if we do, is to throw a little party for these papa-sans we have working here,
get them some -- get some steaks, trade some stuff off for some steaks and get some
beer and some pop and that stuff and throw them a little party. Something they've
never really seen before is to have good chow and stuff like that there. But they have a lot of respect for you in a way. They’ll do things for you which other people won’t.

We have this one who used to be a girl from this guy that went home. She’s 32 years old. She’ll do anything for us. She tailors my fatigues for me. The tailor shop, in order to tailor them costs you about a dollar a pair. She took eight pairs home for me and did them all for nothing. They treat you pretty good once you treat them pretty good. They just like anybody else remember when you do something to bother them.

They like to call me mẫp which in Vietnamese means fat or heavy. Ever since one day mama-san, the one we have working for, she is a pretty old woman, small, she’s really tiny. These papa-sans were building a frame for a sign and had a hard time getting it with a hammer, and I just got at it and hit it a few times with the heel on my boot. The first thing mama-san said was boocoo mẫp, which means a lot of weight or fat. I got me a little bit of a gut here but now, since we haven’t been doing much drinking [indiscernible] and all that, I’m starting to lose it. Well, I’m going to try and lose it before I come home anyway. I don’t want anybody to be laughing at me with a big gut. They say you get skinny in Vietnam, that’s a big lie because I sure ain’t getting skinny by no long shot.

-- never did it before and get sent to it when they're too old or getting ready to settle down to get involved in it. Oh well, that’s life in the long run.

No, Stasha [phonetic] -- I haven’t received Stasha’s letter yet. I guess I might, maybe tonight or tomorrow sometime. I sure hope to hear from him. It has been possibly maybe two weeks, two-and-a-half weeks since I last -- well, that was the last time I wrote to him and I haven’t heard from him since.
This week, so far, we haven’t had much time to do anything other than trying to catch some sleep if possible. With all these practice alerts and the real things now coming up, just impossible trying to sit down and write. And during Têt, there was no papa-sans here and mama-sans, so we had to do all the work ourselves, full KP, the whole bit. I didn’t care for it at all. I really hated it, especially when I had KP one day and guard the next day then a few days later had CQ running and again guard. This place here just picks on the same four guys.

My buddy over here, he had staff duty/runner one night; he had guard the next time. I’m telling you he was tired, he had no sleep that night and went out on guard and then we had alert the next day. He didn’t even get -- he got his half-day sleep just like I did. Usually, when he has guard, I have CQ/runner.

Finally, we had guard together because he volunteered to take another guy’s place because this guy was going home in three days and they sent him out doing guard which is very foolish. His lieutenant found out about it and he said, what’s that man doing out there in the first place? So he volunteered to take his place. I was a little bit mad at him for him going out there since he’s married and not single, but you can tell him nothing. He’s just like the rest of us, wants to get — see a little bit of the action like anybody else does. You really can’t blame him.

Everybody wants to try it once to see what kind of a man they are and believe me, the first time you’re out there and something happens, you shake and you keep shaking after it because there’s always -- the first time for everything there. This isn’t my first time as you already know. I have been in trouble with it, but still I shook enough when the stuff was happening out there, but I still didn’t do anything to let anyone else
get hurt if it was possible to do it.

Right now in the background, you'll probably hear a chopper flying over. They fly over here quite a bit. All day long, we have them coming over. That’s one of the best things we have over here in Vietnam, is the helicopter. Without it, I think Charlie would really put us in a bind, very bad bind.

I hope Joe never has to come over and put up with all this stuff over here. I hope he never has to go in the service period. But if he does, maybe he’ll be fortunate enough to stay in the States instead of doing all this stuff we’ve been doing over here.

Tell the kids as soon I get more stuff, I'll send it to them. And as far as your souvenirs, I'll give some guys a little money when they go in these different places for R&R to have me pick them up and I'll send them home to you. I have a few friends now, I think they’re going to Tokyo, so maybe I'll get a hold of them and have them pick something up. Other than that, I have no intentions of really leaving here to going out there, so I probably couldn’t get you nothing. I'll try and get some different stuffs from Vietnam for you, though, but I know of one thing you will really like is this cross. I'll have papa-san put his name on the back of it now but I’m going to have him put in there Vietnam, February 1969 when he made it. It will be something that no one would really believe was handmade. He carved it all by himself. It took him 20 days to do it and believe me, you wouldn’t believe it unless you see it. No one -- anybody else. That’s why I’m kind of leery sending it home through the mail. Maybe if I could find the right packing stuff for it, I might do it.

As far as the ring, like I was telling you before, I can’t send that through the mail. They won’t insure nothing over here to go home, so I might just hold on to it until I'm
ready to come home. It’s sitting in my drawer right now and still in the same box I got it in, nothing different has happened to it, and it could stay there as far as I’m concerned about it.

Oh well, there’s not much more I can say for now. I guess I’ll just stop for a bit. Maybe later on tonight if I get a letter from you, I could finish the tape to say something on the letter. So I guess I’ll stop for now. Until later, bye.

Well, here it is, 5:30 at night. I fell a sleep for a bit. I ain’t receive no mail from none of you back home except from Sandy, Sonya, and Auntie Helen. I told you I wrote her a letter. She stated in her letter that she finally received one of mine. She says Ronnie is doing pretty good and should be coming home very shortly which is very nice. I remember her saying something Uncle Mike hurt his back before. So far, she had said nothing in this letter. He must be feeling pretty good. She also said Ronnie doesn’t mind basic too much or maybe they have changed it a bit since I’ve been there. I sure hope so. Well, no word if he’s ever going to come over here or not. She hasn’t stated anything in her letters about it. Maybe he won’t have to come. I sure hope he won’t have to come to this hole because this is exactly what it is.

Sandy told me that she might have a friend of hers or a cousin, whatever it was, built them a home in Cal City right off of Yates, must not be too far from us. That will be pretty nice to have them living in the same neighborhood as you do.

Nothing too much has ever happened around here other than just what I have said. We’re waiting for our buddy to come in; he should be coming in about 6:00 or 6:30 at the latest. Chow wasn’t too good tonight. We had beef, mashed potatoes, and some other stuff, and juice, and some cherry pie. The beef was kind of tough as usual, so I
didn’t eat too much of that. The mashed potatoes weren’t too bad. I thought I had to eat something.

Back over the hooch right now - another name for the house - Bud has finally got his car all put together. It looks pretty mean. It’s got a big engine in it. It’s all white. He don’t want to paint it; he is going to keep it as a white car. He’s going to keep a spare tire in the engines he said just for the hell of it. He said his trunk won’t open at the moment. I want him to say a few words back to you but he won’t talk. He’s trying to keep his voice real quiet as it is now. Maybe I’ll bring him back with me someday if he wants to come out over and visit me. I might get him around to doing it. I don’t know. He hasn’t cared too much for the city. He’s more or less a country boy than anything. I don’t blame him. In a way, the city is pretty crowded unlike the way he’s set up. It’s pretty nice that way.

His wife is a teacher which is pretty good, too. She doesn’t mind teaching but he said it’s quite a ways to travel to go back and forth to school. I don’t know exactly where she teaches at but I know it’s in Wyoming. That’s where he’s from, Wyoming. His sister is from Nebraska, Platte Center Nebraska. Maybe Martha might know where it’s at. It is spelled P-L-A-T-E C-E-N-T-E-R, Nebraska. I believe she’d know where because she is originally from Nebraska herself or her brothers. I don’t know how far it is from Omaha right offhand. I’d have to ask Bud where it’s farthest from. He says it’s 100 miles from Omaha-Nebraska so maybe Martha might have heard of the place. I really don’t know. Let me know if she did or didn’t.

Well, how’s everything tonight? I hope pretty good. I got just about all the tape used up now but it sure takes a lot of talking to get it all used up here. Well, I guess
we’re just going to stick around the place tonight and don’t do much. I plan on going to bed a bit earlier tonight because 5:00 comes around off early. Bud over here, he’s got KP tomorrow morning and said I should have it probably the next day or the day after since I’ll probably have guard at 27th so I won’t have it that day. I’ll probably have it next day. Oh well, that’s the way the Army is around here, always duty, duty, duty.

Well, our place smells a lot cleaner now, and it looks a hell a lot nicer since we washed the floors down and put some mothballs in the corners there. His wife sent us some mothballs too, so we’re pretty well set up now. All we’re doing is waiting to leave this place, which I hope is very shortly.

I guess tomorrow I’ll try to get down to post office so I can mail that package and get it out of here as fast as possible before I leave and won’t have a chance to get to it. I plan on taking my tape recorder in tomorrow too and have it all cleaned up. It gets pretty dirty around here. This country is so damn dusty; I don’t know what the hell. You can go out of your mind if you lived here and tried to clean around here as bad as you do. Don’t pay because all you do is you can dust for five minutes, and five minutes later it's right back the same damn way, dirty.

I’ll be glad when I leave here in 214 more days and believe me it feels good to get it short. You see all these new recruits coming in, it’s the first thing you say to them, short, which is a term everybody over here in Vietnam uses one time or another. A lot of guys say to you they’re short but they go back, they got months serving the States, so in the long run usually ours are shorter than them. One guy used to say to us he’s short but he’s got 17 months of doing the States, so he changed his mind. He’s from Illinois; he’s going to Fort Campbell, Kentucky after he leaves here. He’s a pretty nice kid,
though. Of course, he made a mistake like a lot of these other guys do, go RA all the way. It doesn’t make much difference; you’re still headed in Vietnam. So just face it, it used to be a two-year [indiscernible] you stand a better chance of staying out of here.

Our new CO, he’s Hawaiian. He’s name is Gustav Tashima [phonetic]. We call him Tashimoto; he ain’t worth much nothing; he’s really a gung-ho animal if you all ask us. We caught him one night wandering around back here. He didn’t know what the hell to do, but he had an M-14 on him with a flashlight on the other, and I had a carbine on the back of him. We didn’t know who it was at first, but that’s the safest way to be since we’ve been having a lot of trouble back here with fires. So they told us to just stop and you don’t belong down there and that’s just about we’ve been doing.

So far, there hasn’t been any more trouble down here other than trouble we had in the beginning. Lately, nothing much has been going on. It’s been pretty quiet all around us, except for Saturday night and Sunday night. I don’t know what happened out there last night. We haven’t heard anything from this guy yet. He should be coming in very shortly. He’s from Missouri, Steele City, Missouri. He’s a pretty nice little guy at times. Usually, when he gets drunk, he gets a little bit out of hand but other than that, he’s all right. He is just like the rest of us, got to have our days.

Does Joe ever go to work in construction or is he still working for Paul? He probably is still working for Paul knowing him. I don’t know about him. I wish he’d get in there and be a machinist like he planned on doing. It would be a hell a lot better for him to make his money, have himself more security. I guess you can’t tell everybody what the hell to do, what to do after they get out of school. Of course, he would be a good machinist if he just take it up instead of playing around in these body shops and

[Page 20]
construction because he knows his work. I hate to see him put it to waste since the way they're asking for many machinists around here. So tell him I said for him to get out there and get a job. Because Tommy, Annie’s husband, remember, he says he’d get him a job anytime he’s ready for it, so he better get his ass in high gear and get over and see Tommy so he can get himself a job where it's inside instead of working outside for the winter and all that bad weather.

I'm really running out of things to say over here because 900 feet is sure is a lot of talking, that's 45 minutes worth and not a little bit more. I guess you're wondering how big these cockroaches get over here. Well, some of them we’ve seen been about two inches long, anywhere from a half inch or a little wider. They sure are ugly looking things. They got some weird looking bugs over here, some of the things you’d never believe we had back in the world but they sure got them over here. You name it, they got it over here.

Auntie Helen was teasing us about putting matchboxes on them and let them pull us around. It's pretty funny, though, if you ask me. She always comes up with something funny like she says, don’t trust Charlie and stuff like that there. Well, anybody knows not to trust Charlie. Of course, we know, like anybody else know, there you are working on a post but first you got to prove that it is them. That’s one of the hardest thing to do, is trying to prove it around here because if you can’t catch them doing something suspicious, there ain't no way you can prove he is a VC. You have the feeling but yet, that’s not enough to prove it.

The papa-sans we got working for us is hard to determine what they are. It seemed like they're all pretty straight. We had one papa-san, we gave him some old
clothes and that when he left the gate, he came back the next day and said the VC got it and took it all away from him when he went outside the gate, so it's hard to say what they're saying. I can understand some Vietnamese but not too much of it. Old Bud says if I don't watch myself get back in the world, they'd be using it quite a bit. I sure hope not. Of course, it won't hurt to know a little bit about it. At least, no one can say you don't know a foreign language.

They claim it's a very easy language to learn, but I doubt it very much. It's not too easy because one word could be -- with different accents can mean three different things. It's the same thing like yay; yay means what in Vietnamese. You know what it means back home. It's all different. They got things back home; in English it means one thing, and over here it means another thing. So it's hard to determine anything around here with their language, especially when you hear them talking. I could even tell time in their language except for the half hours. I don't know how to say like 4:30 or 3:30 or something like that. I just know how to say like 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 and so on -- forth.

Oh well, the tape is getting a little bit shorter now so maybe I'll be able to say goodbye in a little bit. I hope you enjoy this tape. I know it probably doesn't sound like me which is nothing unusual around here, not to sound like yourself especially the tape recording never sound like. I hope you just make one back and send it to me. This one here I should be able to send home for nothing. I'm pretty sure this is anything five inches and under goes back free because I was trying to send these big ones home, this 1,800-foot reels I have. They said no, I have to pay to send them, so I figured a whole [indiscernible] and buy some and just bring them back in the world with me, and
me and Paul could make all kind of tapes.

Well, say hello to everybody back there. Julie and her little girl, say hello to, too. How about Carol down the block, did she ever get married yet? I haven’t heard anything from her. I wrote her a letter once, never heard a reply from her. I got a Christmas card from her, from her folks but other than that, I haven’t heard anything from her. I was just wondering how she was doing. She probably did get married to George unless they broke up again, could be more likely did happen but I hope not.

So Billy driving yet or is he still wandering around out there? I know Philip, he’s encouraging trying to do something around there, trying to get in a car. More or less likely for someone to take him someplace or he’s wondering around with somebody. I suppose he wants something from back here, too. Well, tell him there ain’t much you can get out of here, maybe some stripes but none of them are colored. Very seldom you get a hold of any of them that are colored around here because they don’t wear them. It’s usually just like the ones I sent home, black and green. That’s the natural colors over here in Vietnam, black and green.

Some of the countryside here looks pretty nice from a distance. When you get right up to it, it’s nothing but rice paddies. We went out to one place, it’s all there was, was rice paddies on one side, rubber plantations on the other, just open field and trees. Even the river ain’t clean at all. People bathe in it. I don’t know why they want to go and bathe in it for. It’s not worth it. It’s just as dirty, but they think it’s worth it.

Well, I guess I’m going to say goodbye for now; this tape is about to the end. So I hope all of you have enjoyed this tape very much, and I hope it made you make you feel 100 percent better hearing my voice since it’s been almost, well, it has been five
months now since you last seen me or heard from me other than just writing. So I guess this will make you feel 100 percent better in a way.

Tell dad to take it easy and not to work too hard, and I’ll be seeing you all very shortly. Tell him we’re going to go out when I get back. We can go out and get drunk, one time me and him. And you ain’t going to have a word to say about it when I come back, unless you want to go along because me and him could do that and have a good talk about this funny war over here.

If you have any questions about what’s happening over here, I’ll try and tell you the best as possible. A lot of stuff, you know, you just don’t like to talk about or say things about because people just take it in the wrong sense of manner. There’s nothing really you could say about it other than just trying to say it in your own words. Like what happened that night, it was easier just to say it out on a tape than trying to write it because it will take a lot of writing paper in order to get it straight. But nothing really was too serious out here because they did handle it pretty well for what happened out there.

But me, nothing really happened to me out there. I was one of the fortunate ones to be safe. A lot of them weren’t too safe. Like they said, it was better the way they killed a lot of VC and we only lost a few guys which was very good for once that the statistics were pretty good. They weren’t lying saying United States lost this many and the enemy lost that many. We didn’t lose too many so far, but the VC have lost quite a bit, especially when the Minigun comes in; he definitely puts a lot of hurt on there.

So I guess I’ll close this tape for now. God bless you and take care all. Love Frank. [End of file & transcript]
Corporal Ben Magiera: What I've been told ever since I came into the Marine Corps and had postal chores as MOI is that mail is morale, and when it comes to mail it’s just something that’s going to motivate you. It keeps the troops around the frontlines fighting, that will to fight, and it makes it so that when you get that Christmas present or that letter from your wife saying that she just had your first baby, it keeps you being able to go through those seven months without having to worry about what's going on back home. We’re kind of that in-between person that bridges that gap between back home in the States and being deployed here.

Personally, my favorite thing about this job is when you get that package for that master sergeant who’s been waiting to find out whether his baby has been born, to actually get to know them on a personal basis. We get to know many of the Marines on this camp. We're known by face as the postal Marines. So to be able to say, hey, master sergeant, I have that box you’ve been waiting for. And just to see his eyes light up, he just gets really excited just to know that his box finally got in. It’s really rewarding to know that we’re actually doing something that makes people happy.

My family is entirely from San Diego. I was born in Grossmont. We pretty much lived in Alpine, and then we moved to Pine Valley. So we've grown up in the San Diego area. I've been there my whole life. Two brothers, two sisters, we all grew up there. It’s probably one of the finest places to grow up.
Every New Year we get together as a family. We have a thankful box. It was something that we used to do during Thanksgiving but moved it to New Year just because it was a time where more of us could be around. Each of us takes on a little piece of note paper and put it inside the tissue box and something that we’re thankful for. Throughout the entire month of December, we put a little thing here, there, and on New Year’s Eve we actually grab all the little notes out and sit in the family corner and just read everything that’s there. We get some really funny things like sometimes we have being thankful for pickle juice, as to being thankful that we’re all here and safe.

If you wait until Christmas or New Year as a point to get through the deployment, you’re going to think of all those traditions and happy things that you do back home. One of the things my corps did when I was at book back in Iraq was we didn’t have ice cream until Christmas, and in the entire time, that’s where we’re focusing on. We’re counting down the days until Christmas so we could have ice cream. It took my focus off of the actual Christmas holiday season which could make me homesick but to be focused more on something like ice cream, which is a lot of fun. It gets the unit together, something that everyone can look forward to, see if you can get anybody to join and jump in on the bandwagon.

This holiday season, I’m actually going to go and do a fun run that all the units are putting together. It’s going on at the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve. We’re going to get together, do a 5k fun run. It’s going to be really, really cold but it’s going to be something that we can do together as a group to get our blood pumping. It’s going to be a lot of fun.

[End of file & transcript]