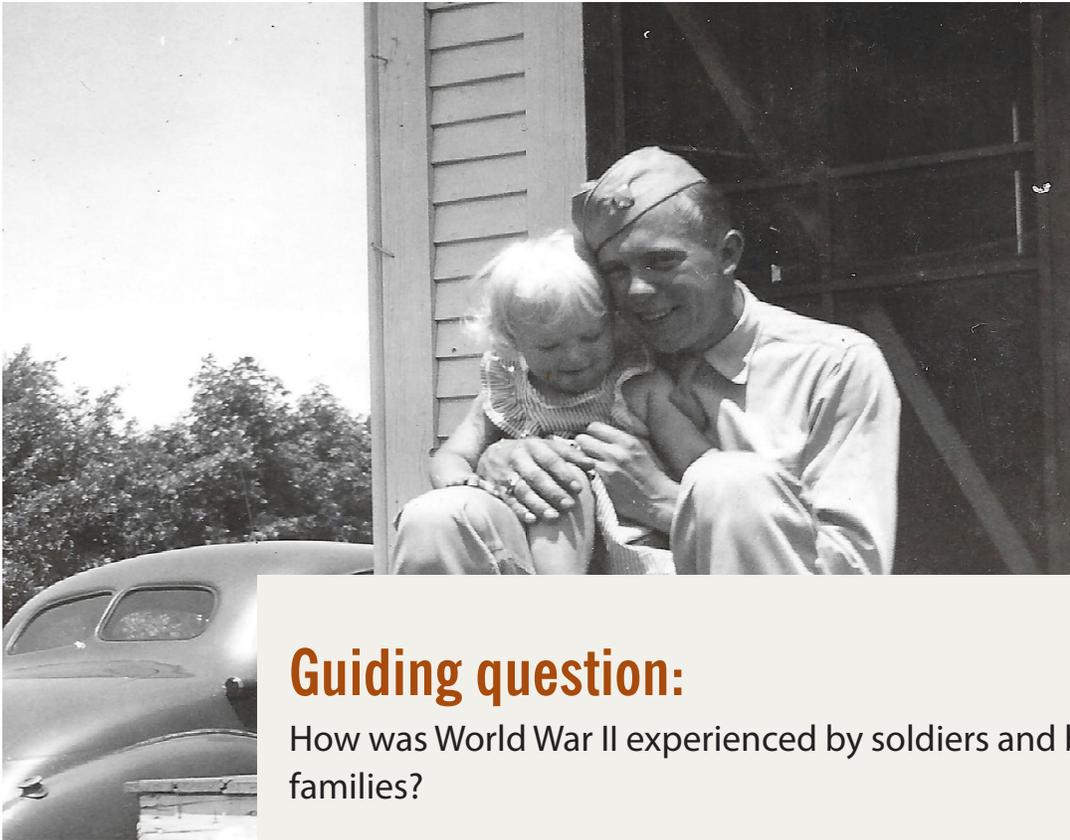




UNDERSTANDING
SACRIFICE

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



Guiding question:

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

DEVELOPED BY MANON BART

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

Subject(s): Social Studies

Cemetery Connection: Brittany American Cemetery

Fallen Hero Connection: Private Donald E. Brown



NHD
NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY

Overview

Using an interactive timeline from the American Battle Monuments Commission, letters, videos and primary and secondary source analysis, students will explore the experiences of both servicemembers and families during and after the war.

Historical Context

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

Objectives

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

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

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

—Manon Bart

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

Standards Connections

Connections to Common Core

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions;

Connections to C3 Framework

D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

D2.Civ.14.6-8. Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

Blank V-mail envelope

University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections

<https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc504978/m1/2>

★ *Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946*

United States Department of War

Film, *Decision* (1946)

National Archives and Records Administration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVuqaEinIM>

George Wilson, *If You Survive*, 1987 (excerpt)

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

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

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

State Historical Society of Missouri

<https://digital.shsmo.org/digital/collection/wwii/id/10641/rec/17>

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

Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

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

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

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

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

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

Letter, Water S. Gunnarson to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick W. Gunnarson, November 15, 1944
 State Historical Society of Missouri
<https://digital.shsmo.org/digital/collection/wwii/id/7336/rec/22>

Secondary Sources

★ Film, *Letters* [18:13]

American Battle Monuments Commission

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WETcOA4Wul4>

★ Matthew Elms, *When the Akimotos Went to War*

American Battle Monuments Commission

https://abmceducation.org/sites/default/files/AkimotosBook_508v2_0_0.pdf

★ Private Donald E. Brown Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy

ABMC Education

<https://abmceducation.org/understandingsacrifice/soldier/donald-e-brown>

★ Private First Class James Vrtatko Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy

ABMC Education

<https://abmceducation.org/understandingsacrifice/soldier/james-vrtatko>

★ *World War II: A Visual History*

American Battle Monuments Commission

https://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/interactive/interactive_files/WW2/index.html

Materials

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

Lesson Preparation

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

Procedure

Activity One (60 minutes)

- Project the [World War II Interactive Timeline](#) in the front of the room.
 - Ask students to identify the U.S. and France on the map.
 - Click through the years at the bottom of the timeline (1939-1945) to review the evolution of the Allied control zones through time and the evolution of number of campaigns.
- Divide the class into four groups (A through D).
- Ask students how service members and families stayed in touch during World War II.
- Remind students that the communication went both ways: to the service members and from the service members.
- Distribute the materials and writing assessment to each group of students. Monitor and assist as needed.
 - **Teacher Tip:** Preview each group. Some groups include more or less reading and can be adapted to students with various needs.
- Show the film, [Letters](#) [18:13], to the students to help them understand the value of these letters and the chain of communication between the homefront and the battlefield.

Assessment

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

Methods for Extension:

- Students and teachers interested in learning more about families in World War II can download and read Matthew Elms' book, [*When the Akimotos Went to War*](#).
- Teachers can enhance students' interest in the role of the connections between the battlefield and the homefront by exploring these related lesson plans on [ABMCEducation.org](#):
 - [A Japanese American Family's Experience During World War II: A Living DBQ](#)
 - [Sacrifice, Loss and Honor: A Simulation of the Homefront in World War II](#)
 - [Some Gave All](#)

Adaptations:

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

Group A: Battlefield Experience Materials

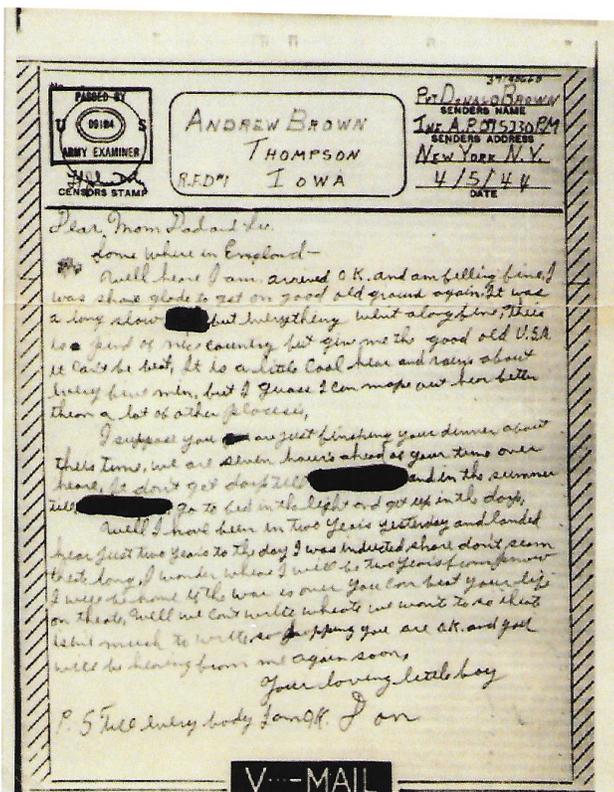
Directions: Using the primary and secondary sources below, learn about the experience of soldiers who fought in both the Normandy Invasion as well as the push into Northern France. After exploring these sources, you will write a letter describing training or deployment of U.S. soldiers in this campaign,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

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

Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

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

Andrew Brown
Thompson
R.F.D # 1



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

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

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

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

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

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

Your loving little boy

P.S. Tell everybody I am OK. Don

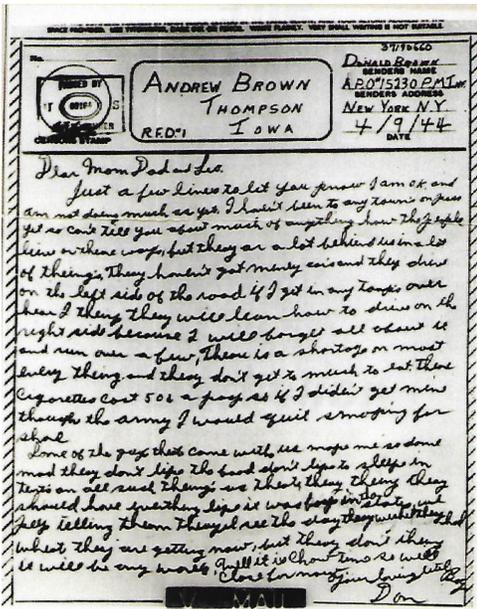
Group A: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

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

Andrew Brown
Thompson
R.F.D # 1



Dear Mom and Dad and Leo,

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

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

Well it is chow time so will close for now.

Your loving little boy

Don

Group A: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Donald Brown to Kleme [last name unknown], April 29, 1942

Courtesy of Joyce Sorensen

ENJOYING THE ARMY!

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

Dear Kleme:

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

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

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

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

Yours truly,

Private Don Brown

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

Group A: Battlefield Experience Materials

George Wilson, *If You Survive, 1987* (excerpt)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Group A: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

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

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

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

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

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

Secondary Sources

World War II: A Visual History

American Battle Monuments Commission

https://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/interactive/interactive_files/WW2/index.html

At the link above, click "enter," then click "1944" on the bottom of the page. Explore the materials available under the "Normandy Campaign" and "Northern France Campaign" buttons.

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

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

1st Bgt. Curtis A. Kirkwood
Co. C, 18th Inf. A. P. O. #1
40 P. M. New York
N. Y.

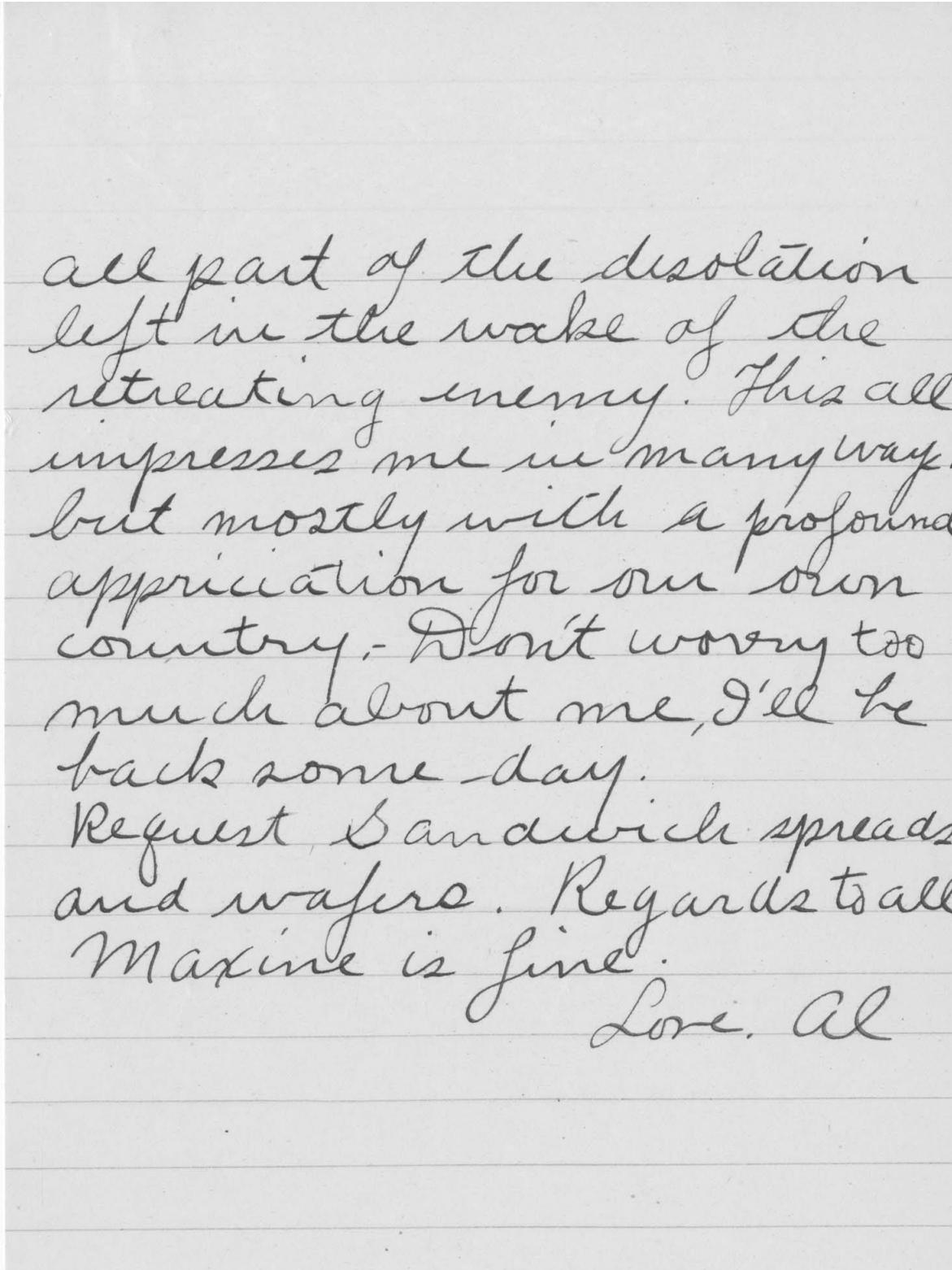
Dear Mother,

France is a beautiful country, even under these adverse conditions one cannot help but observe the scenic wonders and picturesque customs and habitations. There is evidence of the tragedy of war everywhere. - One can see it written on the faces of wandering refugees as they plod wearily along the road bravely trying to smile at the liberating Americans. The idle farm implements, unharvested fields, shell torn homes, -

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Curtis A. Kirkwood to Mrs. A. T. Kirkwood, 1944, Page Two

State Historical Society of Missouri

A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The handwriting is in cursive and appears to be from the 1940s. The text is written in dark ink on a light-colored background with horizontal lines. The letter is addressed to Mrs. A. T. Kirkwood and is dated 1944. The writer is Curtis A. Kirkwood. The letter discusses the writer's experience in the battlefield and expresses a desire to return home. The letter is signed "Love, Al".

all part of the desolation
left in the wake of the
retreating enemy. This all
impresses me in many ways.
but mostly with a profound
appreciation for our own
country. Don't worry too
much about me, I'll be
back some day.
Request sandwich spreads
and wafers. Regards to all
Maxine is fine.
Love, Al

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

State Historical Society of Missouri

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

Dear Mother,

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

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

Love, Al

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page One

State Historical Society of Missouri

September 17, 1944
Somewhere in France

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

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Two

State Historical Society of Missouri

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

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Three

State Historical Society of Missouri

street, doors & windows would pop open & the strangest assortment of heads & shoulders & people would appear. An upstairs shutter would fly open and an old man in a stocking cap would wave - across the street & down further a woman would wave, (her hair tied up in a cloth), a little boy would run to a garden gate with jacket on, but no pants, & start jumping up & down, girls in flannel night gowns, old people rubbing the sleep out of their eyes, mothers obviously interrupted while preparing breakfast, little girls with hastily grabbed flowers, trim young ladies, ready to go to work, would appear to wave, & cheer, & laugh. One woman ran up with a basket of ripe tomatoes & in

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Four

State Historical Society of Missouri

her enthusiasm, spattered us with some, as we drove along. I caught one tho & it tasted good - tasted good because of the feeling in the air - in the people - in the country that is France. The payoff came when we passed an old gentleman shaking hands with the guards outside the big iron gates of the bank. He had on a derby hat, an old-fashioned flannel night gown, & looked as tho he should have been wearing spats!

So you see life in France isn't all tribulation & discomfort. It isn't too soft but one becomes accustomed to the rough parts & in many ways has the advantage over those at home, who do not know when to worry, & so must be inclined to worry all the time.

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

Letter, Ralph Gilliland to Mrs. J. B. Gilliland, September 17, 1944, Page Five

State Historical Society of Missouri

Don't do so if you can help it.
I don't - except for you + the
family. It is apparrent now
that Germany can't stand a
great deal more. & in the not
too distant future we will
all be together again.
Do take care of yourself -
the family needs you more
than they realize now.
Give my love to all & I
will write more often after
this letter
Love -
Ralph

{ P.S. Heavenly Father we are grateful
that we are expecting him home
soon - my prayer of thanks
His mother }

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

France
15 Nov 44

Dear Ma. and Pa.

Winter seems to have arrived in this part of the Old World. Last night it snowed an inch or so, and the white covering has lasted through all the gray cold day. However, it has not been quite cold enough to freeze the everlasting mud. The English weather has been widely criticized but the French autumn and winter will not receive any praise from me. When the sun shines at all it is only through a momentary rift in the endless clouds.

Service Battery is now the sole occupant of this town except for a detachment of six men (engineers who work the water point. There is not a single building here undamaged and most are completely wrecked. Our CP (command post)

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

is in the vaulted wine cellar of an old inn and the various sections of the battery are dispersed through the town, wherever quarters for men and parking space under cover for vehicles could be improvised. A room here, a cellar there, with salvaged stoves and a few armfuls of straw and we are grateful for the shelter, particularly when the unenviable lot of the doughboy is contrasted therewith. We can count on three meals a day, generally hot meals, too, while the infantryman, during an attack, may have to go for a day or two with no meals served hot, and some meals missed entirely; at a time when he is running, crawling and lying in wet fields and muddy fox holes. Some of the men caught a horse and at first amused themselves by riding it bareback, then, after finding a buggy, they engaged in a little buggy driving through the town.

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

One section of the battery, the motor maintenance, "accidentally" shot a young pig. As usual it was because they thought a German was hiding behind him, or else the pig didn't know the password. One man butchered the porker, to make the best of the matter.

Thanks Mom for the second package (assorted candy bars) which reached me last week and served a most pleasant purpose.

Our votes seem to be gone with the wind again. Maybe next time will do it.

As far as I can tell from here and according to the "Stars and Stripes" the war news is very favorable.

Saw three truckloads of German prisoners going to the rear, as we neared the main highway yesterday morning and two prisoners were being guarded at our battalion CP when I stopped in later.

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

Christmas will soon be with us again and I write these Christmas greetings as a stream of roaring tanks race past and I earnestly pray that this war shall have ended before this message will have reached you. There is no question of relating our efforts, however, until the Allied armies are completely victorious on the battlefields. May God be with us all, here, and at home.

S Kal

(Signed) Walter

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

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

France
15 Nov 44

Dear Ma and Pa

Winter seems to have arrived in this part of the Old World. Last night it snowed an inch or so, and the white covering has lasted through all the day cold day. However, it has not been quite cold enough to freeze the ever-lasting mud. The English weather has been widely criticized but the French autumn and winter will not receive any praise from me. When the sun shines at all it is only through a momentary rift in the endless clouds.

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

One section of the battery, the motor maintenance, "accidentally" shot a young pig. As usual it was because they thought a German was hiding behind him, or else the pig didn't know the password. One man butchered the porker, to make the best of the matter.

Thanks mom for the second packaged (assorted candy bars) which reached me last week and served a most pleasant purpose.

Our votes seems to be gone with the wind again. Maybe next time will do it.

As far as I can tell from here and according to the "Stars and Stripes" the war news is very favorable. Saw three truckloads of German prisoners going to the rear as we neared the main highway yesterday morning and two prisoners were being guarded at our battalion CP when I stopped in later.

Christmas will soon be with us again and I write these Christmas Greetings as a stream of roaring tanks race past and I earnestly pray that this war shall have ended before this message will have reached you. There is no question of relaxing our efforts, however, until the Allied Armies are completely victorious on the battlefields. May God be with us all, here, and at home.

Skål [Cheers]--
(signed) Walter

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

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

George Wilson, *If You Survive, 1987* (excerpt)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Group B: Battlefield Experience Materials

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

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

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

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

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

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

Secondary Sources

World War II: A Visual History

American Battle Monuments Commission

https://www.abmc.gov/sites/default/files/interactive/interactive_files/WW2/index.html

At the link above, click "enter," then click "1944" on the bottom of the page. Explore the materials available under the "Normandy Campaign" and "Northern France Campaign" buttons.

Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

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

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

g
Pfc James N. Vrtatko, 36 396 086
Plot G, Row 10, Grave 248,
United States Military Cemetery
Neuville-en-Condroz, Belgium

15 January 1948

Mrs. Barbara N. Vrtatko
2702 South Homan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mrs. Vrtatko:

The people of the United States, through the Congress have authorized the disinterment and final burial of the heroic dead of World War II. The Quartermaster General of the Army has been entrusted with this sacred responsibility to the honored dead. The records of the War Department indicate that you may be the nearest relative of the above-named deceased, who gave his life in the service of his country.

The enclosed pamphlets, "Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead," and "American Cemeteries," explain the disposition, options and services made available to you by your Government. If you are the next of kin according to the line of kinship as set forth in the enclosed pamphlet, "Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead," you are invited to express your wishes as to the disposition of the remains of the deceased by completing Part I of the enclosed form "Request for Disposition of Remains." Should you desire to relinquish your rights to the next in line of kinship, please complete Part II of the enclosed form. If you are not the next of kin, please complete Part III of the enclosed form.

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

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

Sincerely,

THOMAS B. LARKIN
Major General
The Quartermaster General

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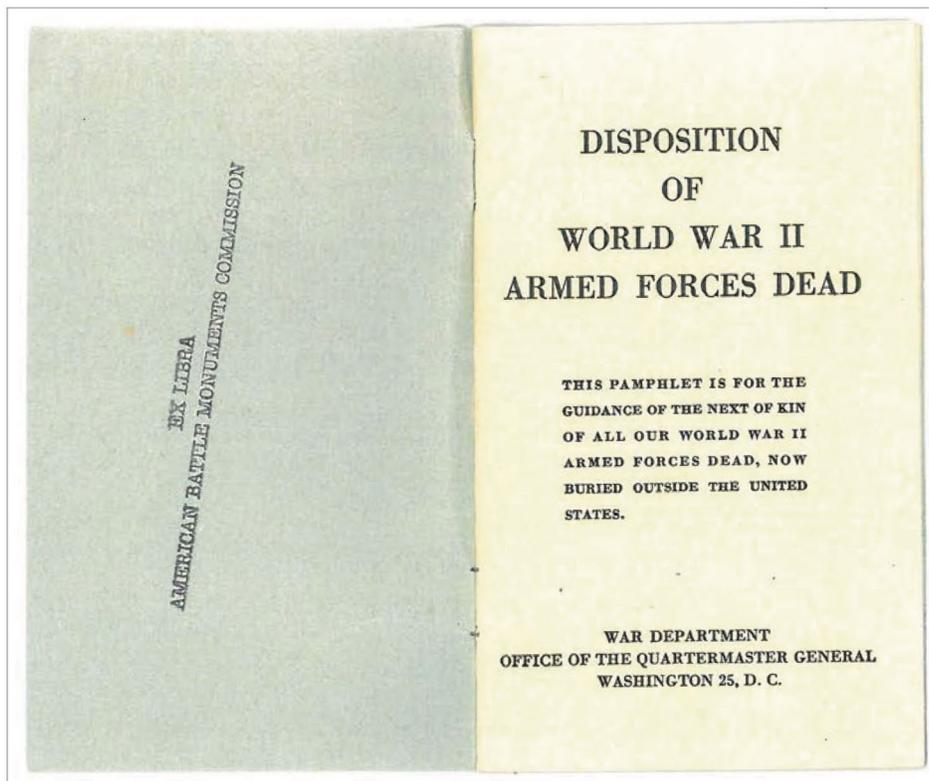
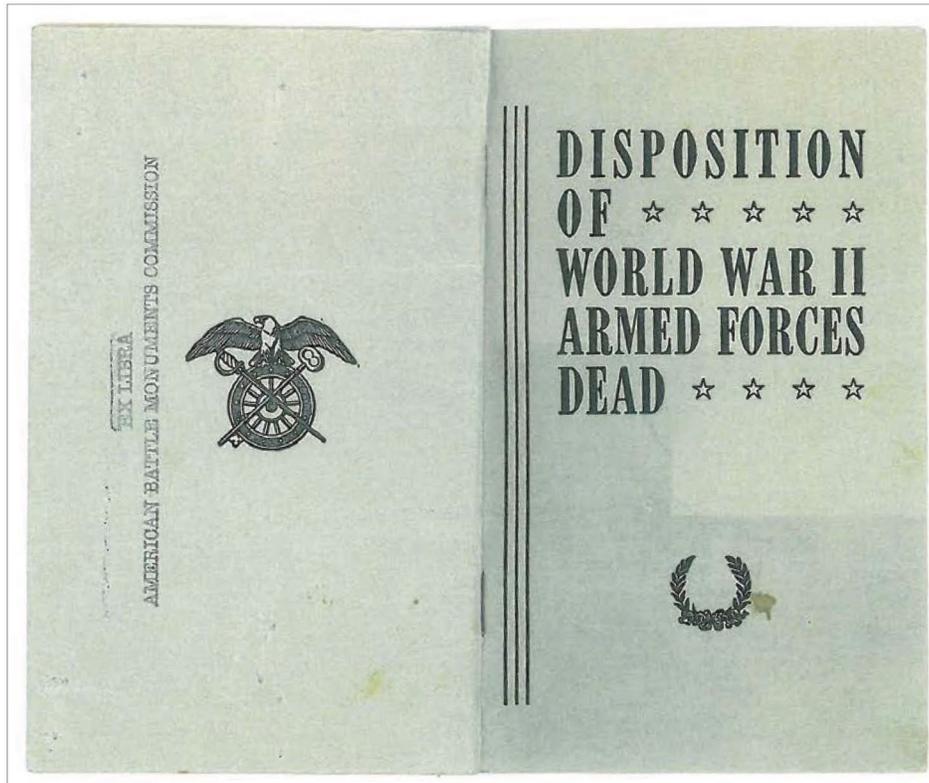
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Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

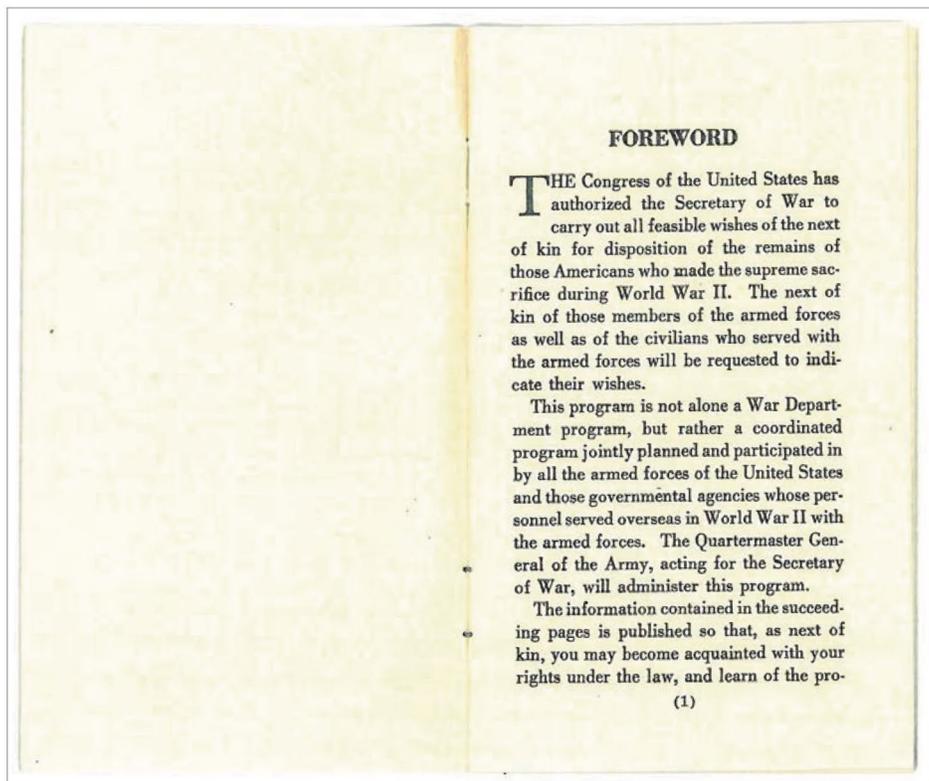
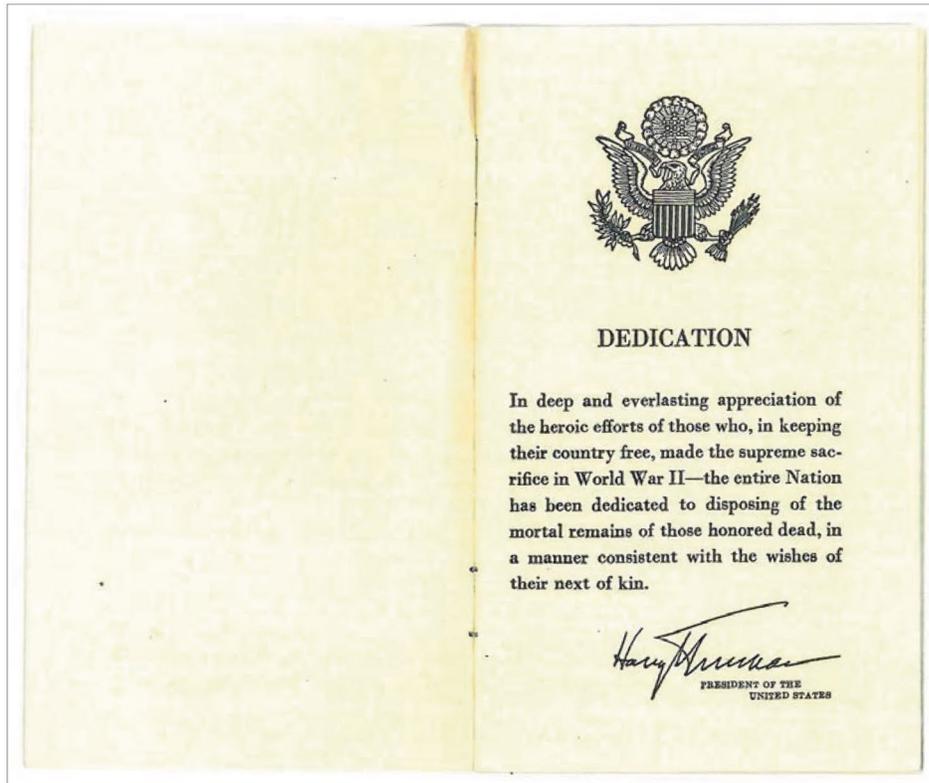
United States Department of War



Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

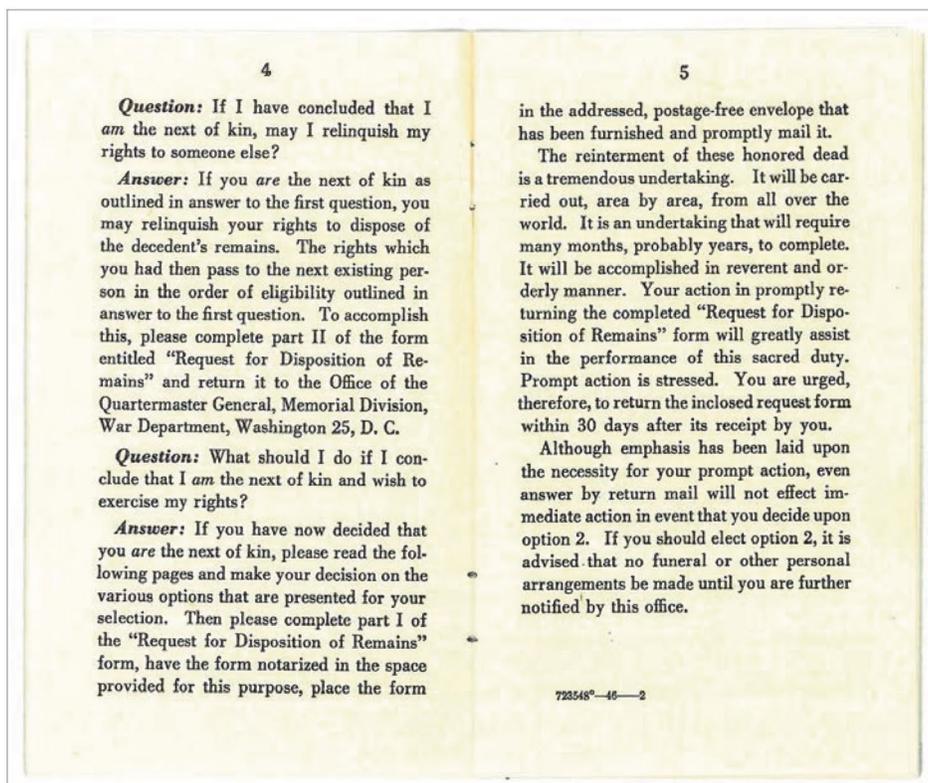
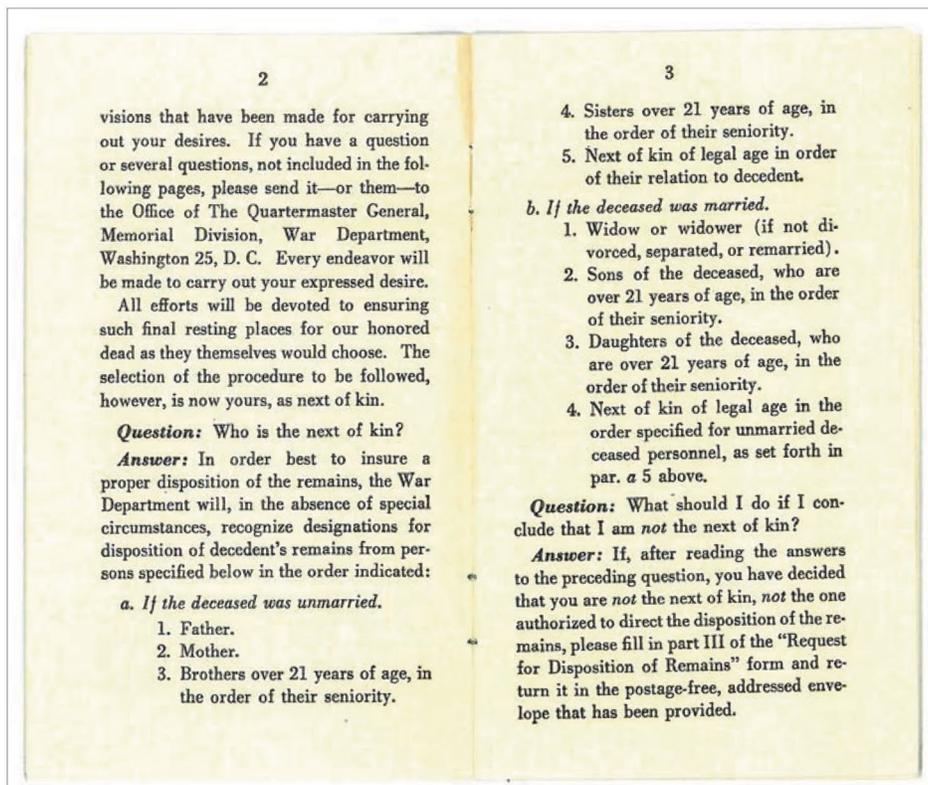
United States Department of War



Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

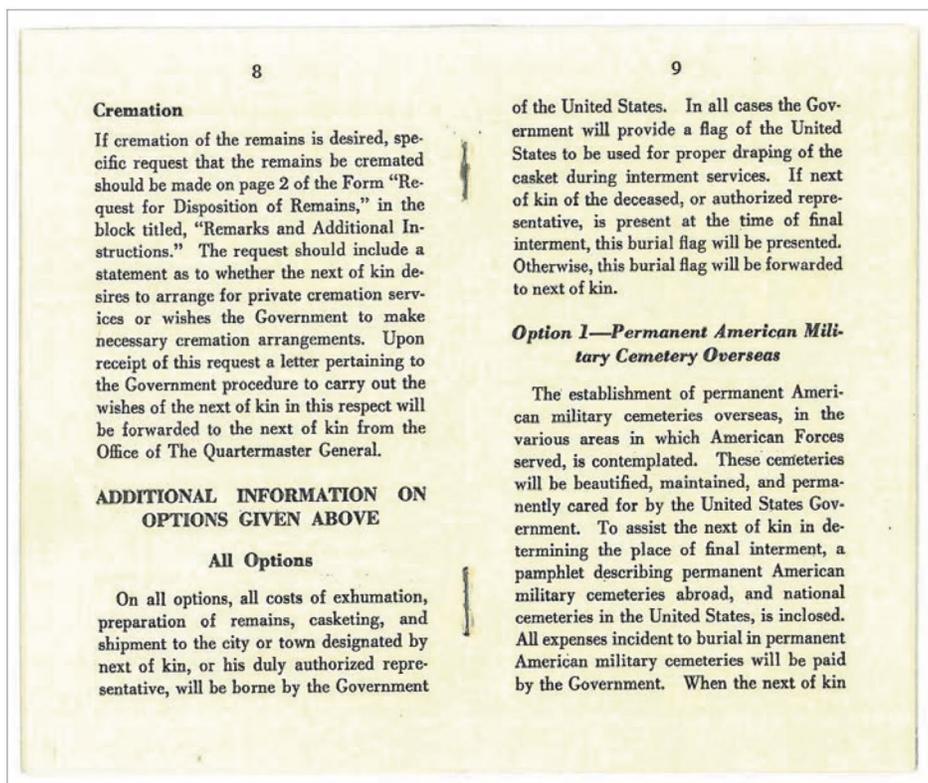
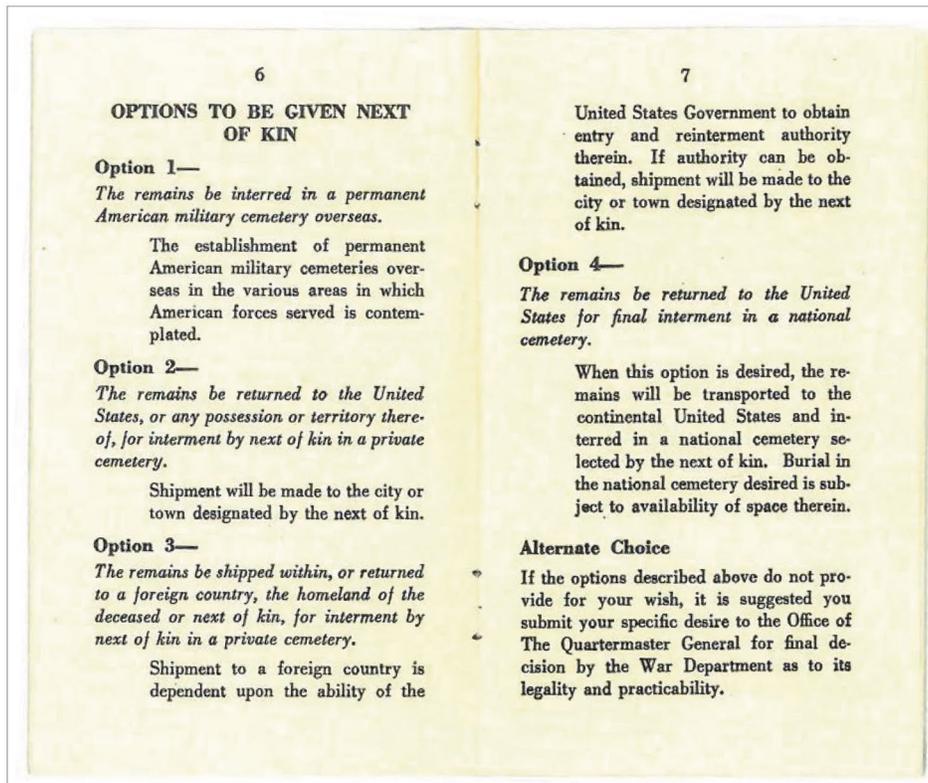
United States Department of War



Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

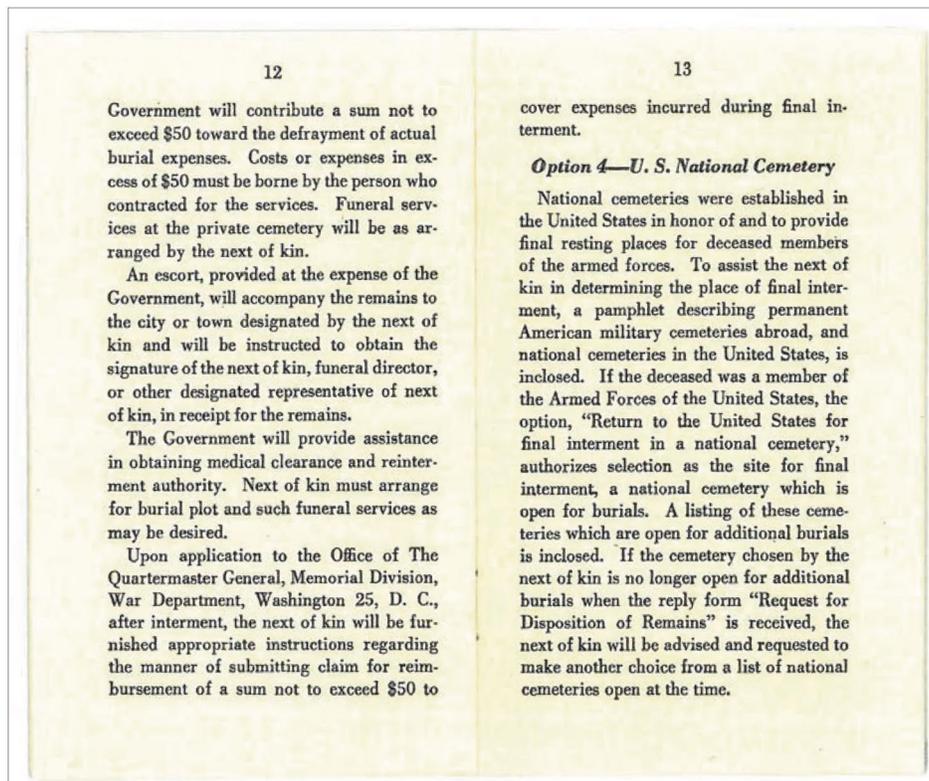
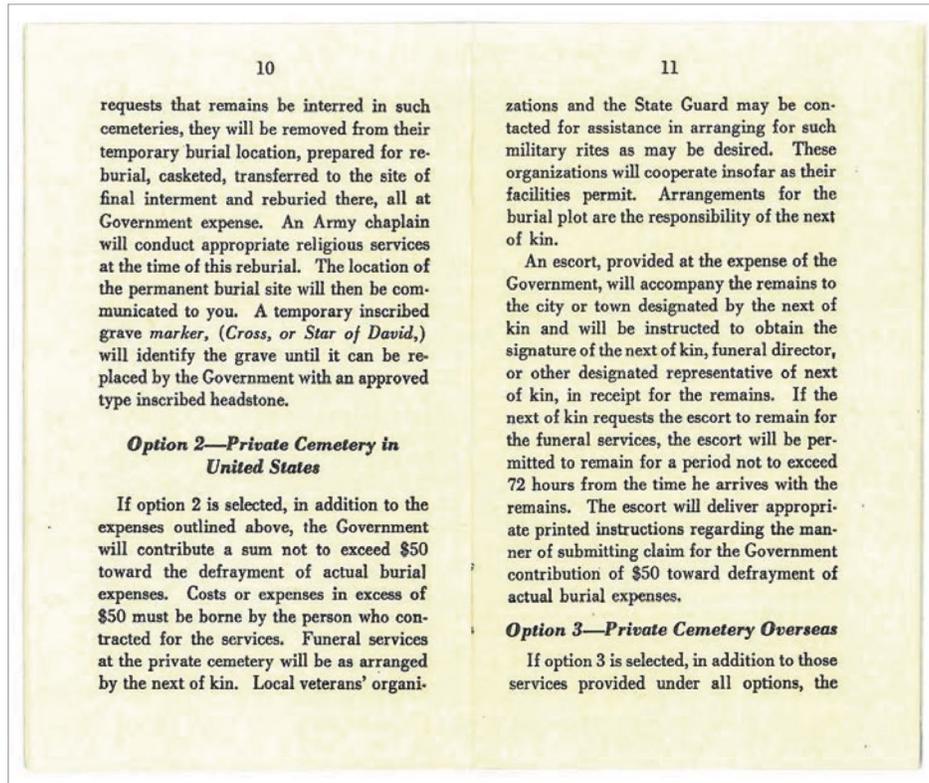
United States Department of War



Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

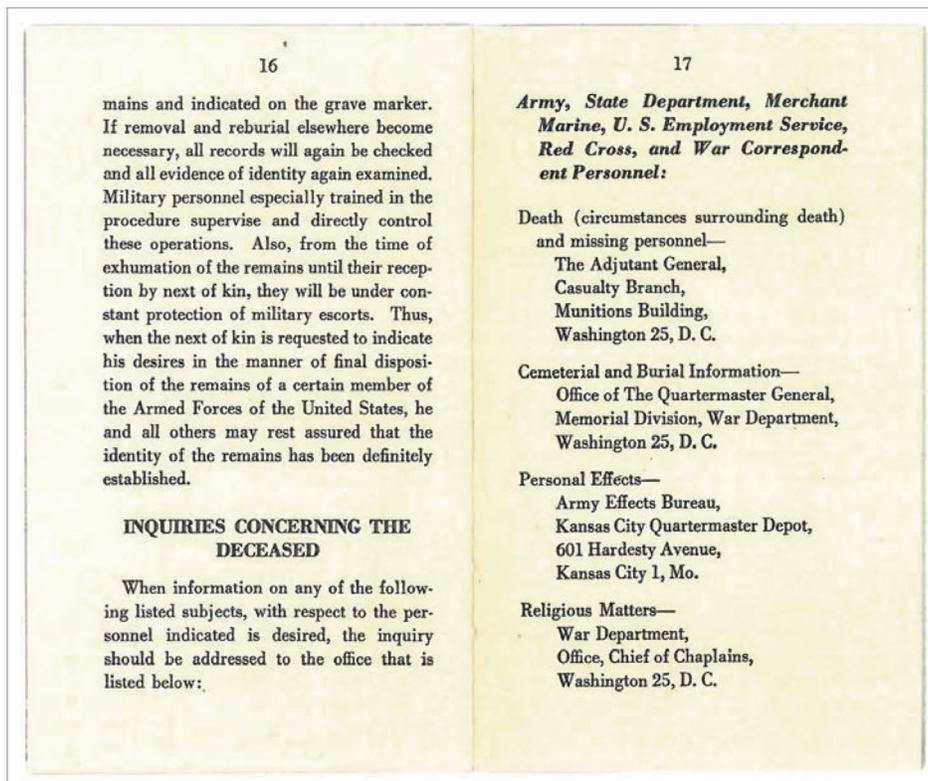
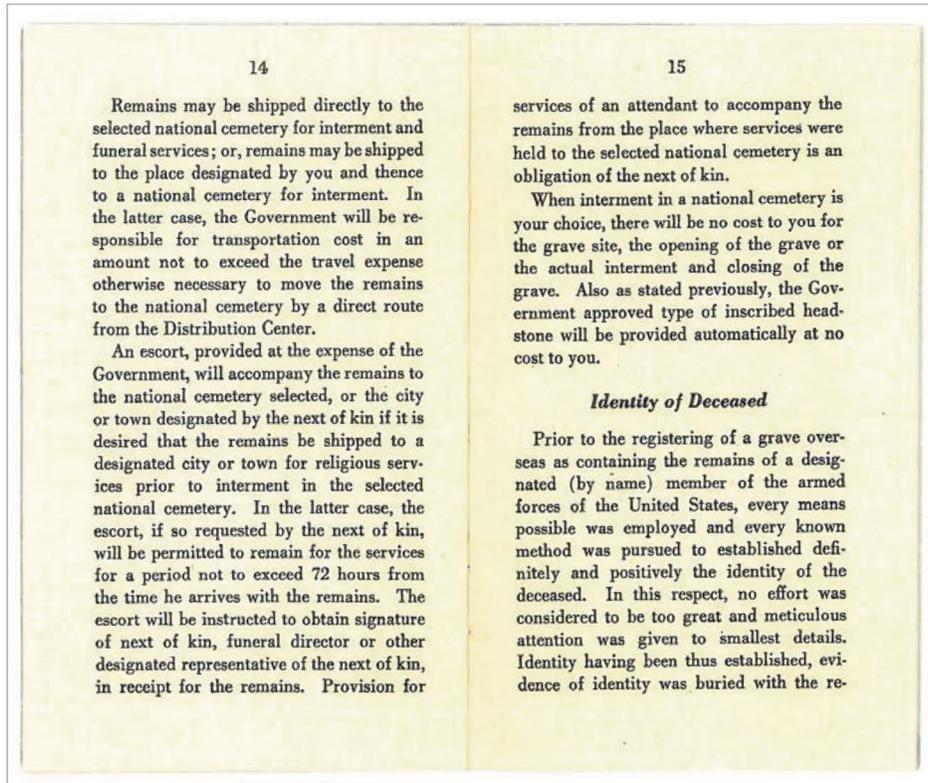
United States Department of War



Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

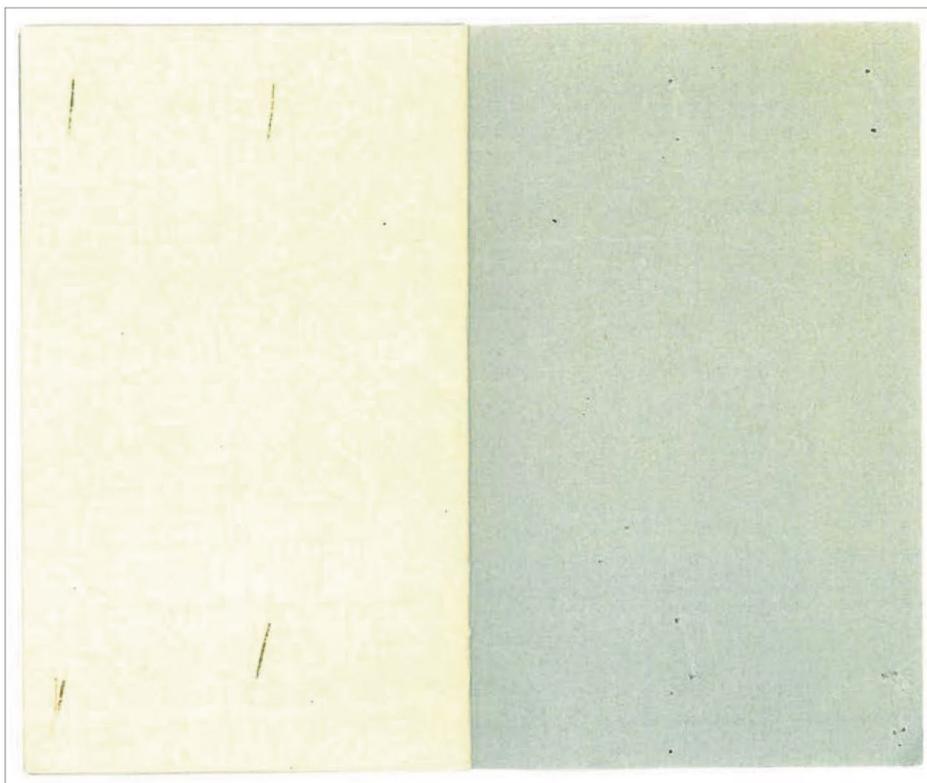
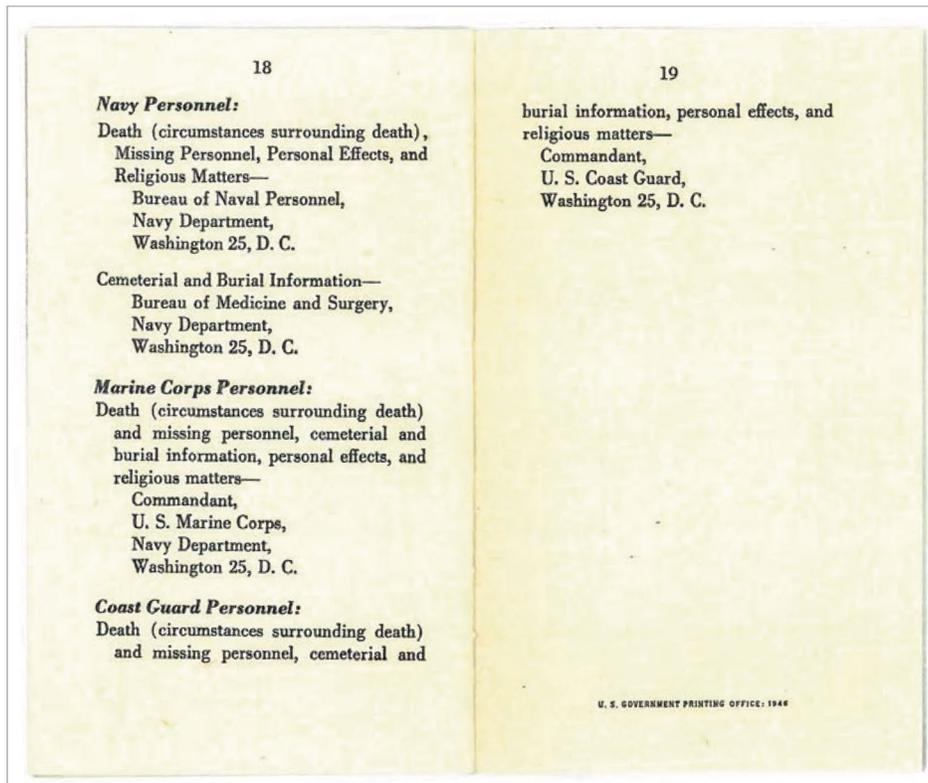
United States Department of War



Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Disposition of World War II Armed Forces Dead, 1946

United States Department of War



Group C: Homefront Experience Materials

Film, *Decision* (1946)

National Archives and Records Administration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVuqaEinIM>

Secondary Sources

Private First Class James Vrtatko Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy

ABMC Education

<https://abmceducation.org/understandingsacrifice/soldier/james-vrtatko>

Group D: Homefront Experience Materials

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

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

AG 201 Brown, Donald E.
PC-N TT0166

28 August 1944

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

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Brown:

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

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

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

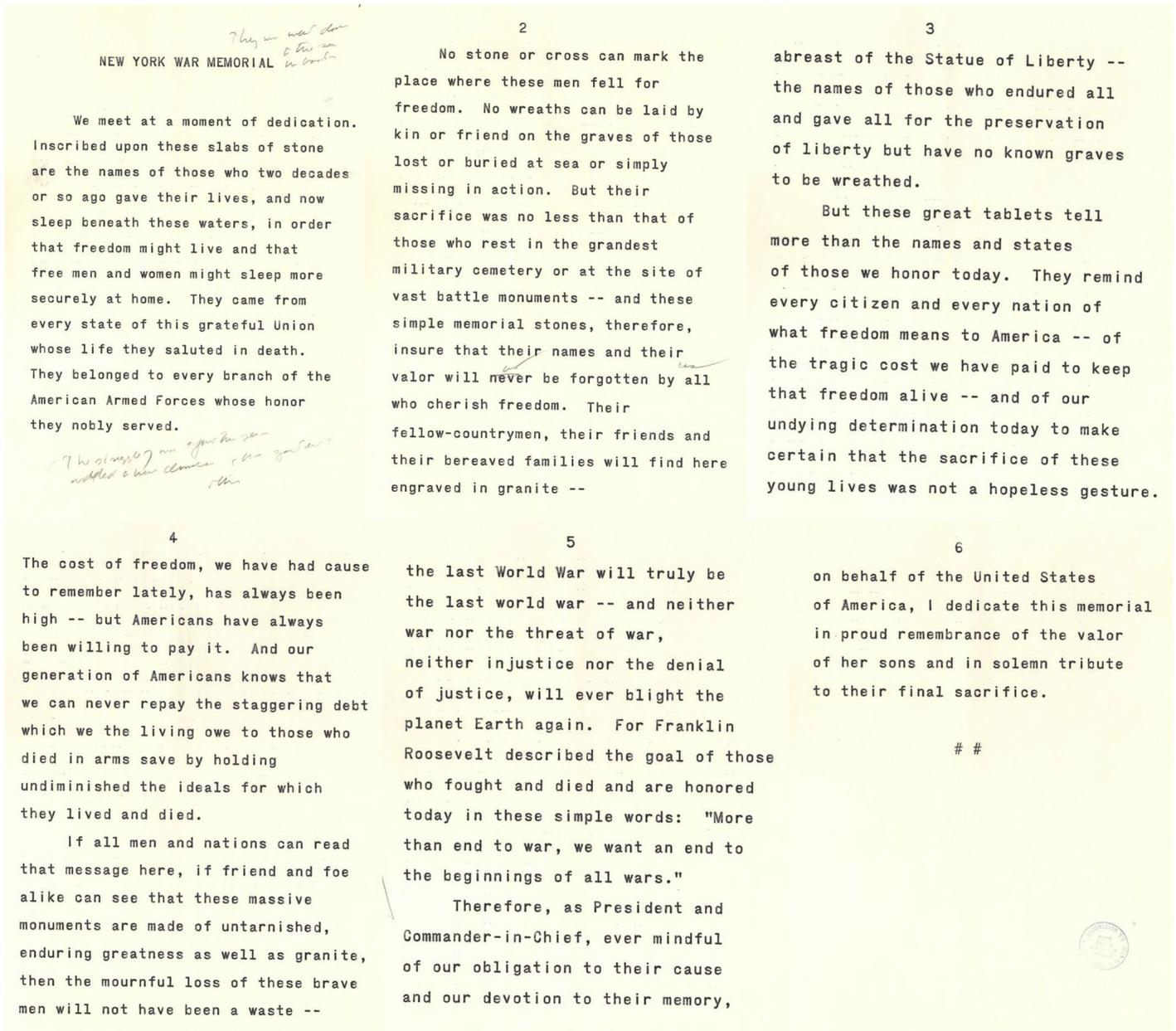
I extend to you my deepest sympathy.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULLO
Major General,
The Adjutant General.

Group D: Homefront Experience Materials

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



Secondary Sources

Private Donald E. Brown Fallen Hero Profile and Eulogy
ABMC Education

<https://abmceducation.org/understandingsacrifice/soldier/donald-e-brown>

V-Mail Writing Assessment: Groups A and B

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

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

TO: _____

FROM _____

(CENSOR'S STAMP) SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2 (Sender's complete address above)

FOLD TOP AND BOTTOM IN, THEN FOLD IN CENTER AND SEAL
NO OTHER ENVELOPE SHOULD BE USED

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP? **REPLY BY V...-MAIL** HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?
POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT PERMIT NO. 1

V-Mail Writing Rubric: Groups A and B

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

Letter Writing Rubric: Groups C and D

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