



COME AND  
**JOIN  
US**

**AS WE READ LETTERS HOME  
FROM AMERICAN MILITARY  
MEN & WOMEN OF  
VARIOUS WARS, PAST & PRESENT**

**THE READINGS WILL TAKE PLACE  
AT THE PEACE ARCH  
AT THE CORNER OF  
COVENTRY RD. & EUCLID HTS. BLVD  
IN CLEVELAND HEIGHTS**

**ON VETERANS DAY  
NOVEMBER 11, 2007**

**STARTING AT 1:30 PM**

[www.veteransforpeace.org](http://www.veteransforpeace.org)

## Introduction

Today we are gathered to pay homage to all of the military veterans of this country, current and past, living and dead. The letters we will read present the thoughts and feelings of some of the millions of men and women who have served in the United States armed forces during wartime. Some of the names you will recognize as famous patriots and soldiers you learned about in grade school; others you will not know. Some were high-ranking officers. Some were privates. Some were trained to kill. Others were trained to heal. Some survived. Some did not. But none write of the illusory glory of last charges, trench warfare, combat hospitals, or hills or towns taken and lost, and taken again. As combat veterans, we know that war is not glorious, heroic, or redeeming. It is brutal, terrifying, and the systematic eradication of life.

No veteran walks away from a war unwounded; only the size and location of the wounds differ. We share with you here the wounded hearts, the honor unblemished, the anger unleashed, the grief beyond reckoning, and finally, the redemption that one of our friends and fellow Veterans for Peace sought—and we pray found—when he returned to Vietnam last week to walk in peace the ground he once walked in war.

As veterans, we know there is truth and hope to be found in the letters we will share with you today. As Veterans for *Peace*, we work for the day that such letters will never again have reason to be written.

## **Major General Smedley Darlington Butler**

*Smedley Darlington Butler was born in 1881. At the time of his death in 1940, he was the most decorated Marine in U.S. history, twice awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He served as Commanding General of the Marine Barracks in Quantico, Virginia, from the end of WWI until 1924. The following is excerpted from his writings after he retired from the military in 1931.*

War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope, and the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.

I spent 33 years and 4 months in active military service as a member of this country's most agile military force, the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from 2nd Lieutenant to Major General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers.

I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927, I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested....

I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket....I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was operate his racket in 3 city districts. I operated on 3 continents....

I say, "To Hell with war."

A professional soldier understands that war means killing people, war means maiming people, war means families left without fathers and mothers. All you have to do is hold your first dying soldier in your arms, and have that terribly futile feeling that his life is flowing out and you can't do anything about it. Then you understand the horror of war. Any soldier worth his salt should be anti-war....

*~ General H. Norman Schwarzkopf*

## **General George Washington to His Wife Martha**

*George Washington wrote this letter to his wife, whom he called Patsy, 3 days after he was unanimously chosen to lead the Continental Army.*

Philadelphia, June 18, 1775

My Dearest:

You may believe me, my dear Patsy, when I assure you that so far from seeking this appointment, I have used every endeavor in my power to avoid it, and not from my unwillingness to part with you and the family, but from consciousness of its being a trust too great for my capacity, and that I should enjoy more real happiness in one month with you at home, than I have the most distant prospect of finding abroad, if my stay were to be seven times seven years. But it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown me upon this service, I shall hope that my undertaking is designed to answer some good purpose.

I recoil with horror at the ferociousness of man. Will nations never devise a more rational umpire of differences than force? Are there no means of coercing injustice more gratifying to our nature than a waste of the blood of thousands and the labor of millions of our fellow creatures?

*~ Thomas Jefferson*

**Army Captain Joshua T. Byers**  
**2nd Battalion, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment**  
**Iraq**

*Captain Byers wrote this letter to his parents in June 2003.*

June 5, 2003

Hey Mom and Dad,

...Not only will I soon be a Cavalry Troop Commander...but I will have the opportunity and the incredible responsibility of commanding in combat. I have to admit that I am really nervous and just pray that I am up to the task out here to lead 120 men in combat operations. I will give them everything I have to give. I love them already, just because they're mine. I pray, with all my heart, that I will be able to take every single one of them home safe when we finish our mission here.

Love, JT

*Captain Byers, of Anderson, South Carolina, was sent to Iraq in April 2003. He was killed instantly 3 months later when an explosive device was detonated under the Humvee in which he was riding. He was 29 years old. He died on his mother's birthday.*

Beside the ship leaving port  
For the hot, dry gulf  
The white-haired woman says

I'm proud of my grandson  
He has to go  
To protect our interest.

Dear lady,  
Your interest just left on that ship.

*~ Lynda Van Devanter  
Army Nurse Corp  
Vietnam, 1969-70*

## **George (last name unknown), an African-American Soldier, to His Sister from Somewhere in France during WWII**

*Over 1 million African-American men served their country in World War II, but  
they were required to eat, live, train, and fight in segregated units.*

March 19, 1945

...As you know, Sis, I'm not in a combat unit so I can only write of general conditions behind the "Lines." I am in the Service Force. It is a very important branch of service. Yes, the hours are sometimes very long. However, I can work with that certain satisfaction that my work behind the "Lines" is the only direct support that the men "Up Front" have. If that convoy with supplies is late because it was not started promptly as ordered, the men "Up Front" may meet with capture, unnecessary hardship or even death, because the ammunition or rations were not at

the proper place at the proper time. If that Liberty ship isn't unloaded as soon as possible, it may miss the convoy and sometimes cost our government the ship and the lives of the men aboard. So you can see why the cry behind the "Lines" is, "Work so that your Combat Buddy may live."

All of us have many reasons for wanting to stay in the States. Yet we know the war can't be won by our attending dances and enjoying weekend passes. Yes, we too are "Red Blooded Americans" and have as much at stake as anybody. Yes, we have a share in the American Way of Life. We hope that the American People won't forget that if we can work and fight for the Democratic Way, that we are entitled to enjoy every privilege it affords when this mess is over.

Best wishes,  
Your brother George

The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows.

*-- Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**Marine Captain Rodney R. Chastant**  
**Marine Air Group 13, 1st Marine Air Wing**  
**Da Nang, South Vietnam**

June 29, 1968

Mom,

Today I received your letter in reply to my extension letter. You replied as I knew you would—always the mother who tries to put her son's wishes before her own, even when she is not sure it is best for his welfare. It made me sad. I want so much to make you proud.

I want so much to make you happy. At the same time I have my life to lead with my own dreams, goals, and outlook. And I know all these things cannot be compatible—particularly over the short run.

Know that I dream of the day when I return home to you and Dad and hold you in my arms again. Sometimes I get lonely. Sometimes I want nothing more than to sit down at the dinner table, see before me roast beef, corn on the cob, mashed potatoes, bow my head for the blessing, and look up and see my mother—pretty and smiling—searching for any way she can to make her son more comfortable. Know that it is hard to turn your back on these things.

It is not easy to say I opt for 6 more months of heat, sand, and shooting. I know there will be nights that I suffer the loss of another friend. And nothing can make a man feel so alien or alone as a walk by the seashore as he tries to adjust to the loss of another friend in this godforsaken country....But here there is a job to be done. There are moral decisions made almost every day. My experience is invaluable. This job requires a man of conscience. The group of men that do this job MUST have a leader with conscience....I am needed here, Mom. Not that I am essential or indispensable. But my degree of proficiency is now undisputed as the best in 1st Marine Division. The young men coming in need the leadership of an older hand. I am that hand; I am that man.

*Captain Chastant, from Mobile, Alabama, was killed on October 22, 1968, 4 months after writing this letter. He was 25 years old.*

What a cruel thing is war: to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world.

*~ General Robert E. Lee, in a letter to his wife*

## **Sergeant Douglas McCormac**

*Sergeant McCormac served with Company C, 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group, in Pleiku and Kontum provinces, Vietnam, from May 1968 to his return home in May 1969.*

*This letter was written to his friend Stephen.*

August 13, 1968

Dear Steve,

I think perhaps this experience is changing me. Of course, it would—but it is happening not as I expected. I have not found much opportunity to “help” people, as I once almost romantically rationalized. But I’ve learned a little here—I’ve learned to dislike this war more.

What I’ve seen is the superabundant American economy overflow with its war effort into the Vietnamese peasants’ and citydwellers’ environment....The high-ranking grab for the rake-off and black-market profits, and the rest of the crowd reap the scraps and burdens of the casualties.

Of course, Americans are dying, and I would not belittle anyone who served “with proud devotion” and faith in this enterprise. It may not have been a terribly wrong theoretical idea at one time. But the foreign, introduced offensive, the consequent corruption and then the contempt that developed between people and groups—it makes a mockery of the “noble” words used to justify this war. It belies the phony enthusiasm with which those words may be delivered. It’s now a war of survival....

Yours,  
Doug

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children....This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from an iron cross.

~ *General Dwight David Eisenhower*

### **Confederate General George E. Pickett**

*In 3 days of fighting at Gettysburg, 51,000 American men were killed, captured, or wounded. General Pickett led the final rebel assault on the Union Army.*

*The following is from a letter he wrote to his fiancée Sallie, 3 days after the combat was over.*

July 6, 1863

On the Fourth—far from a glorious Fourth to us or to any with love for his fellow-men—I wrote you just a line of heart-break. Even now I can hear them cheering as I gave the order, “Forward”! I can feel their faith and trust in me and their love for our cause. I can feel the thrill of their joyous voices as they called out all along the line, “We’ll follow you, Marse George. We’ll follow you—we’ll follow you.” Oh, how faithfully they kept their word—following me on—on—to their death, and I, believing in the promised support, led them on—on—on—Oh, God!

I can’t write you a love letter today, my Sallie, for with my great love for you and my gratitude to God for sparing my life to devote to you, comes the overpowering thought of those whose lives were sacrificed—of the broken-hearted widows and

mothers and orphans. The moans of my wounded boys, the sight of the dead, upturned faces, flood my soul with grief—and here am I whom they trusted, whom they followed, leaving them on that field of carnage....

This is too gloomy and too poor a letter for so beautiful a sweetheart, but it seems sacrilegious, almost, to say I love you, with the hearts that are stilled to love on the field of battle.

Your Soldier

The suffering that must exist in the South the next year, even with the war ending now, will be beyond conception. People who talk of further retaliation and punishment, except of the political leaders, either do not conceive of the suffering endured already or they are heartless and unfeeling and wish to stay at home, out of danger, whilst the punishment is being inflicted.

*~ General Ulysses S. Grant, in a letter to his wife*

**2nd Lieutenant Lynda Van Devanter  
Army Nurse Corps  
71<sup>st</sup> Evacuation Hospital, Pleiku  
67<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital, Qui Nhon  
South Vietnam**

*Lynda Van Devanter served in Vietnam from June 1969 to  
June 1970. This letter was written to her family on December 29, 1969.*

Hi all,

...I don't know where to start except to say I'm tired. It seems that's all I ever say anymore. Thank you both for your tapes and all the little goodies in the Christmas packages. Christmas came and went, marked only by tragedy. I've been working

nights for a couple of weeks and have been spending a great deal of time in post-op. They've been unbelievably busy. I got wrapped up in several patients, one of whom I scrubbed on when we repaired an artery in his leg. It eventually clotted, and we did another procedure on him to clear out the artery—all this to save his leg. Well, in my free time I had been working in post-op and took care of him. I came in for duty Christmas Eve and was handed an OR slip—above-the-knee amputation. He had developed gas gangrene. The sad thing was that the artery was pumping away beautifully. Merry Christmas, kid, we have to cut your leg off to save your life. We also had 3 other GIs die that night.

Kids, every one. The war disgusts me. I hate it! ...I'm sick of facing, every day, a new bunch of children ripped to pieces. They're just kids—18, 19 years old! It stinks! Whole lives ahead of them—cut off. I'm sick to death of it. I've got to get out of here....

Peace, Lynda

It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood....War is hell.

~ General William Tecumseh Sherman

## **Arthur Empey, an American Who Joined the British Army**

### **From Somewhere in France, 1917**

*The First World War accelerated the development of new technologies designed to improve the ability to kill: the machine gun, the tank, the airplane, the zeppelin, and gas. Chlorine and phosgene gases attack the lungs, ripping the breath out of their victims. Mustard gas attacks the skin, burning its way into its victim, leaving searing blisters and unimaginable pain. By the end of the war, one in four artillery shells fired on the Western Front contained gas. Arthur Empey survived and published his recollections in 1917.*

Gas travels quietly, so you must not lose any time; you generally have about 18 or 20 seconds in which to adjust your helmet. For a minute, pandemonium reigned in our trench...We had to work quickly, as the Germans generally follow the gas with an infantry attack. A company man on our right was too slow in getting on his helmet; he sank to the ground, clutching at his throat, and after a few spasmodic twistings, died. It was horrible to see him die, but we were powerless to help him. In the corner of a traverse, a little, muddy dog, one of the company's pets, was lying dead, with his two paws over his nose.

It's the animals that suffer the most, the horses, mules, cattle, dogs, and cats, they having no helmets to save them. At times, gas has been known to travel, with dire results, 15 miles behind the lines.

Out of our crew of 6, we lost 2 killed and 2 wounded. That night we buried all of the dead. In death there is not much distinction; friend and foe are treated alike.

Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we do about peace. We know more about killing than we do about living.

*~ General Omar Bradley*