

# *War Correspondents*

## *From the Front Lines to the Front Porch*

### **Introduction**

Over the course of our nation's history, there have been numerous occasions when, primarily men, have been called to duty to defend its borders from the threat of predator nations and on one occasion from each other.

Those who took up arms either volunteered or was conscripted into duty. Once engaged with the enemy, some gave their last breath in defence of the country and its citizens while others sustained injuries inflicted by the enemy.

When lulls from conflict permitted, most would take pen in hand and from the front lines communicate their thoughts to their loved ones back home. The correspondence was delivered typically to the recipients' front-porch mailbox.

Over the decades of our nation's history there have been numerous conflicts that resulted in soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to send letters home. These were individuals who reported, among many personal remarks, the situation currently being engaged in combat. These were each personal to specific loved ones who anxiously awaited news that their loved one was alive and well.

There were news organizations that deployed professional journalists to these hot spots, but independently those deployed to battle were independent journalists reporting their personal news back home to loved ones. The professional reporters sent their reports back to their employees from interviews with combatants or their senior officers.

The professional reporters sent their reports from the front lines to what often was published on the city paper's front page. The individual letter writers sent their observations from the front lines to their addressee's front porch.

Today we recognize the latter. We will observe examples of those who reported from the front lines extending from the War between the States to the Gulf War.

**The War between the States: Private John Ross Wallar**

**Introduction:** While many troops prayed to God to see them through the war unharmed, they were well aware that His will is sometimes unknowable. Private John R. Wallar was shot in the leg and languished in a military hospital for weeks in the early fall of 1864 before succumbing to his injuries. (Civil War hospitals were so unsanitary that a soldier could arrive with a minor flesh wound and die from infections soon after being admitted.) Wallar had volunteered for the army at the age of fifteen, and he began his service as a drummer boy. He was still a teenager when he dictated a short letter home from his hospital bed in Nashville, Tennessee.

Dear Sister father Mother and friends

I received your letter But I don't think I Ever shall see another that you write. this is Friday night But I don't think I will Live to See Morning. But My Kind friends I am a Soldier of Christ I will Meet you all in Heaven. My Leg Has Bin taking off above My nee. I am Dying at this time so don't Morn after Me fore I Have Bleed and died fore My Country. May God Help you all to pray fore Me. I want you all to Meet Me in Heaven above. Dear Sister you wanted to know if My Leg would be Stiff. God Bless Your Soul Sister I will be Stiff all over be fore twenty fore ours. My wound Dresser is writing this Letter fore Me. When you get this Letter write to Alexander Nelan fore I wont Live till Moring so good By My friends. May God be with you all. Good by. God bless My poor Soul.

**World War I: Nurse Maude B. Fisher for Richard Hogan to his mother**

**Introduction:** At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the war was over. Cities and towns throughout France, Germany, Russia, Great Britain, the United States, and many other nations exploded with joy on November 11, 1918, when the peace was announced. But for countless families around the globe, that happiness quickly turned to despair with they learned that their loved one had survived the war only to die from the horrific influenza pandemic that was claiming tens of millions of lives worldwide. One of these victims was a young American soldier named Richard Hogan, who became sick and then passed away just days after victory had been declared. Knowing that Hogan's mother would receive only a brief telegram from the government stating that her boy was dead, an American Red Cross nurse named Maude B. Fisher sent Mrs. Hogan a more personal message. Although not overly about faith, Fisher's letter is the very embodiment of compassion and kindness.

November 29th, 1918

My dear Mrs. Hogan:

If I could talk to you I could tell you so much better about your son's last sickness, and all the little things that mean so much to a mother far away from her boy.

Your son was brought to this hospital on the 13th of November very sick with what they called Influenza. This soon developed into Pneumonia. He was brave and cheerful though, and made a good fight with the disease. Several days he seemed much better, and seemed to enjoy some fruit that I brought him. He did not want you to worry about his being sick, but I told him I thought we ought to let you know, and he said all right.

He became very weak towards the last of his sickness and slept all the time. One day while I was visiting some of the other patients he woke up and seeing me with my hat on asked the orderly if I was his sister come to see him. He was always good and patient and the nurses loved him. Everything was done to make him comfortable and I think he suffered very little, of any pain.

He laughed and talked to the people around him as long as he was able. They wanted to move him to another bed after he became real sick and moved the new bed up close to his, but he shook his head, that he didn't want to move. The orderly, a fine fellow, urged him. "Come on, Hogan," he said, "Move to this new bed. It's a lot better than the one you're in." But Hogan shook his head still.

"No," he said, "No, I'll stay where I am. If that bed was better than mine, you'd 'a' had it long ago."

The last time I saw him I carried him a cup of hot soup, but he was too weak to do anything but taste it, and went back to sleep.

The Chaplain saw him several times and had just left him when he breathed his last on November 25th, at 2:30 in the afternoon.

He was laid to rest in the little cemetery of Commercy, and sleeps under a simple white wooden cross among his comrades who, like him, have died for their country. His grave is number 22, plot 1. His aluminum identification tag is on the cross, and a similar one around his neck, both bearing his serial number, 2793346.

The plot of the grave in the cemetery where your son is buried was given to the Army for boys and the people of Commerce will always tend it with loving hands and keep it fresh and clean. I enclose here a few leaves from the grass that grows near in a pretty meadow.

A big hill overshadows the place and the sun was setting behind it just as the Chaplain said the last prayer over your boy.

He prayed that the people at home might have great strength now for the battle that is before them, and we ask that for you now.

The country will always honor your boy, because he gave his life for it, and it will also love and honor you for the gift of your boy, but be assured, that the sacrifice is not in vain, and the world is better today for it.

From the whole hospital force, accept deepest sympathy and from myself, tenderest love in your hour of sorrow.

Sincerely, Maude B. Fisher

### World War II: Rabbi Alexander Goode, et al., U.S. Army

**Introduction:** Only months after the end of World War I, a young Austrian veteran of the conflict named Adolf Hitler became the chief propagandist for the National Socialist German Workers Party, which blamed most of Germany's problems on Jews. Hitler was named president of the organization, better known as the Nazi Party, in 1920, and he swiftly gained national prominence by preying on the German's postwar humiliation. Thirteen years later he was appointed chancellor of Germany. Although most Americans were understandably preoccupied with the Great Depression at the time, many Jews in the States were closely watching Hitler and his rabid anti-Semitism. They knew that German Jews were being harassed and persecuted and that Hitler's rhetoric was becoming increasingly fanatical. Twenty-three-year old rabbinical student Alexander Goode was well aware of Hitler's ominous rise to power, and in a letter to his sweetheart, Theresa Flax, he predicted how dangerous Hitler would be – not only to Jews, but to Germany itself. The letter, dated April 3, 1933, was written more than six and a half-years before the start of World War II. (The long ellipses are in the original.)

Darling Theresa, dear, why don't you write me sometime more intimately about yourself, what your opinion on things is, what you think about, what your interests are, anything at all so that I can feel I am closer to you when I read your letters, something that will reveal you yourself, in all your charm and sweetness, just say anything at all as long as it concerns you and I will love it.

Recently, I have cultivated a taste for poetry, a sure sign that I have become a mere shadow of my stern self and now am as sentimental and love-smitten as all the fellows I used to laugh at in former years. Keats and Shelly are my high-brow recreations now and fine fare they are too. If it were not for my infernal habit of reading so terrifically fast I could no doubt appreciate far more their charm and beauty. It is not at all mushy either. Perhaps when I become more familiar with them I'll try to impart some of the joy I get from reading their poetry to you. The Bible is not so bad for poetry either. Just read the Song of Songs sometime. It is not long, but its beauty is overpowering. They are lovesongs of the ancient Hebrew and as love poetry they have never been surpassed.

Speaking of the Bible I might mention that by this time in my preparation for the career of a Rabbi I have read most of the Bible, and when I say read I really mean studied carefully, at least three times, so that I am more familiar with this great library of our people than I am with any other volume I have ever studied or read. In it is stored such a mine of information and beauty that I am tempted to think with our ancestors who absolutely believed that everything in the Bible was true and that all things that man can experience under the sun are contained therein. So much is treasured up that I could not begin to describe its contents. It really is heartrending that more people do not seek out its treasures. Perhaps if Hitler read some of its valuable saying he would be a wiser ruler than he is destined to become.

His policy now means utter ruin, not only to the Jews, but to the whole of Germany itself. He can no more injure the Jews of Germany without seriously depriving the nation itself of all its wealth and position than he can cut off his nose without detriment to his Charlie Chaplinesque physiognomy.

I see no hope for our kinsmen abroad. Germany's loss, however, is our gain for expulsion of the Jews from Germany means that many of the greatest Jews alive today will emigrate to America and greatly promote the development of Jewish culture in this country. As long as their lives are not injured it will be a gain to American Jewry to have these Jews here. There should be no difficulty in the way of their entering America. This country will be glad to have them.

There I go veering off at a tangent. I am grateful to this letter indeed because it has caught my interest and made me lose sight of my own mood, blue as blue can be, of an hour ago. I think I feel much better now. May my slumber be as peaceful as I hope yours will be tonight...so with a tender caress...goodnight. Alex

In 1934, Alexander Goode and Theresa Flax married. Four years later they had a baby daughter, Rosalie Bea. An extremely patriotic young man, Goode had volunteered for the National Guard in high school, and, when war was declared in December 1941, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. After completing his orientation at Harvard University's Chaplain School, Rabbi Goode, age thirty-two, was ready to deploy overseas. Right before he embarked for Europe in early January 1943 on a troopship named the *USAT Dorchester*, he quickly wrote a letter to Theresa.

Darling: Just a hurried line as I rush my packing. I'll be on my way in an hour or two. I got back yesterday afternoon just before the warning. Hard as it was for us to say goodbye in New York, at least we could see each other before I left.

Don't worry—I'll be coming back much sooner than you think. Take care of yourself and the baby—a kiss for each of you. I'll keep thinking of you. Remember I love you very much. Alex

Those were the last words Theresa Goode ever received from her husband. At 1:00 a.m. on February 3, 1943, the *Dorchester* was torpedoed one hundred miles off the coast of Greenland by a German submarine. As soldiers aboard the sinking ship began to panic, Goode, along with three other chaplains—Rev. George Fox (Methodist), Fr. John Washington (Catholic), and Rev. Clark Poling (Dutch Reformed)—did everything they could to calm the frightened men and help the wounded put on their life jackets. But only minutes later they made a horrendous discovery. There weren't enough life preservers for everyone on board. According to eyewitnesses, once the chaplains made this realization, they quickly removed their own preservers—which meant they would almost certainly drown—and gave them to the first soldiers they could find.





The last anyone saw of the chaplains was the four men, locked arm in arm, praying together as the ship went down, taking them and 672 other men to their graves in the icy waters of the Atlantic. The bodies of the chaplains were never found.

### World War II: PFC James F. Norton, U.S. Army

**Introduction:** Only days after being liberated from a German POW camp, Private First Class James F. Norton writes a jubilant letter to his parents proclaiming, “By the grace of my Lord and Savior I am here today.”

“Dearest Mom and Dad,” Private First Class James F. Norton began a letter to his parents back in St. Paul, Minnesota, on April 15, 1945. “This is the second happiest moment of my life,” the nineteen-year-old soldier continued, ... “at last a chance to write home. The happiest moment came a few days ago when the greatest army in the world liberated me. Things have been happening so fast to me since I’ve been liberated, my head is still spinning. As much as I’ve cursed the Army, I love it now, and I’ve never seen a more smooth working, efficient organization.”

Norton especially wanted his parents to know that the experience of being wounded and captured, as terrible as it had been, had one positive effect—it had made him a more religious man. He went on to write:

Gosh, there’s so much to say, I don’t know how to start, and to tell the truth I don’t know what I’m allowed to write or not.

I’m back in a huge, beautiful hospital in France, so I guess it won’t be very hard for you to guess where I am. I’ve received nothing but the greatest of kindness from every one, and I never could put it in words what it feels like to be treated as a human being again. I’m so happy I don’t know whether to laugh or cry. Today we had the meal I’ve been dreaming about for 4 months—steak and French fries, and how—how I’ve been eating.

I’ll never forget as long as I live when I saw that first Yank. I always said I’d kiss the first one I saw who liberated us, even if it were a 2nd Looie, and you guessed it, he was. He was more surprised than I, and I imagine it’s the first time in history an officer has ever been kissed by an enlisted man. Then they gave us chocolate bars and cigarettes and I went wild. From there to here it has been a smooth job of evacuation.

I was shot and taken prisoner on the memorable day – December 16, the first day of the terrific German breakthrough in the Ardennes, when all hell broke loose

The next four months I will tell about when I get home, and will describe them now in two words, Living Hell.

My leg is just about well now, and I'm here more or less to be built up. It will only be a short stay and I should be back in the States soon, Mom, and when I do get home, I'll probably never get farther than the back porch, as I've had all the excitement and adventure to last me a lifetime.

This is a small world, I never saw Bob Muyre from the day I got captured until now, and I often wondered what happened to him, and here we run into each other in the same ward of the huge hospital, and we both came in the same day. He was also shot in the leg but went to a different place and was also liberated a few days ago. Gosh, were we happy to see each other. Now my biggest concern is what happened to Red Deal, the best friend I ever had, and a lot of my other buddies. There's a million things I want to learn now that I'm back in contact again.

My biggest concern and something that has always been on my mind is how you two are and how the Missing in Action affected you. But you are both brave, strong parents so I'm sure everything is all right.

We were all saddened very much yesterday by the death of our great leader and a real buddy to every G.I. Joe, President Roosevelt. But it was God's will, and I hope that President Truman can fill his shoes.

Death has faced me many times in the past months and by the grace of my Lord and Savior I am here today to write this letter. I always considered myself a good Christian until I was captured, and then I learned what a fool I had been and what it really means to have faith and the power of prayer. I prayed day and nite, and these prayers were heard with the result that today I can relay call myself a good Catholic and firm believer in the will of God.

I could fill up pages, but there's so much I'd rather tell than write, and so much more I want to know about you, Johnny and Bill. This is a poor attempt for my first letter, but I find it much more difficult than I expected. I hope to be in the States before I get an answer. To see your faces again will be the happiest moment of my life. I love you both and thank God every day I have such wonderful parents.

Your loving son, Jim



**Korean War: Capt. Molton A. Shuler Jr.**

Introduction: A veteran of World War II, twenty-nine-year-old Captain Molt Shuler was attending the University of South Carolina Law School in Columbia when his reserve unit was called back to active duty after the communist North Korean army invaded South Korea in June 1950. As a student, married man, and father, Shuler could easily have obtained a deferment, but felt an obligation to serve his country once again. While en route to Asia (via Alaska), he wrote the following letter to his wife, Helen:

8 May 1952

My dearest—words won't describe the hurt in my heart to be moving further away from the one and only perfect wife on earth with each tick of the clock. I feel all choked up and my heart seems as if it is being torn out of my body. In fact I don't really have a heart anymore—I left it with you. For where you are is my whole life. Only the times when I receive mail from you will it be again in my body—for your words and thoughts will be you for the minutes I have to read and think of you. At times it may be hard for you to love me—but try hard, won't you? No effort on my part to love you is necessary—for you are easy—so easy to love. I'll mail this in Anchorage—but I shan't write again until I am in Japan—for I want to do some reading in a Field Manual.

All my love—for always, Molt

Just over two weeks later, Shuler was in Korea. But despite the harsh conditions and stress of combat, he nevertheless found himself in an upbeat mood. Hunkered down in Chorwon, just north of the 38th Parallel, he sent the following letter.

Sunday night, 25 May 1952

Helen my Darling: You are perfection—the paragon of womankind—and you're my wife—and I adore you! And what's more, your first 6 letters came today! With them came my very life—for my heart was slowly breaking for words of love and tenderness from you, my beloved wife. It's impossible to describe what your letters meant to me. More than you can possibly imagine I appreciate your love. I know full well you love me—but I can't see quite why. But I'm not going to quibble. I'm only going to love you more for loving me as you do.

There is another reason for my good spirits tonite—as if your letters were not enough. I went to church tonite. Let me paint you a word picture of the “church.” Picture a grassy hillside surrounded by mountains. And a rugged looking—crew hair cut and all—chaplain dressed in fatigues standing by a Government Issue folding podium with a red velvet cover and brass candelabra minus candles, all placed on a couple of ammo boxes.

Then just left of the “pulpit” as you face it you find a battered, 30-odd key, olive drab organ, a GI pianist seated on a 5 gallon gasoline can. And in the background you find blasted Chinese bunkers and old gun emplacements. Then if you look way to your left you’ll see a battery of 6 105 howitzers, their ugly muzzles pointed menacingly toward the North. To the right and on up the valley are bunkers of our company, a couple of tents from which winds a road (one way) behind our “church.”

But what about the pews and who occupys them? Well, they are roughly terraced rows with a handful of soldiers, mostly a little dirty and bedraggled, trying to keep from becoming more soiled by sitting on their helmets. You find a rifle loaded with a full clip, or a carbine with a jam-packed magazine beside each man. Over there is a blond and baby faced young man, and beside him is a tough looking hombre with a dark beard and dirty fingernails. And down in the front row are three Korean boys who just sang a couple of hymns in their native tongue, self-conscious to be sure, but, even so, attesting to God’s presence in the hearts of a people torn by war.

And God is in this “chapel”—so near you can almost reach out and touch him. And the chaplain says, “And men, in the days to come, you must remember the words of Christ when asked where He lived; ‘come and see’,”

Only a couple of times in my life before this evening , have I felt God’s presence in such a way. Perhaps it was the place and the time—I don’t know. Be that as it may, I liked the way it felt.

’Scuse me for trying to be literary. I didn’t mean to—As my efforts no doubt reveal.

Good night and love our children for me—and miss me, please.

Your man always—Molt

“By now you have no doubt been notified that I was scratched up a bit on the morning of the 16th,” Shuler wrote his wife on June 18. He had been struck in the neck, back, and leg by shrapnel and was quickly rushed to a MASH unit. He was then sent to a Tokyo Army Hospital to be treated for his wounds. From Japan he wrote:

I expect to have everything recleaned and stitched sometime this afternoon or tonight. It will be several weeks—perhaps four—before I leave here. Don’t tell people I’m hurt bad—I’m not—and it’s no use to make a mountain out of a mole hill.

His injuries, in fact, were not life-threatening. But in a tragic turn of events, Shuler is believed to have received infected blood plasma during his treatment, and, while still in Japan, he died of hepatitis on August 24, 1952.

### **Vietnam War: Chaplain Lt. Ray W. Stubbe**

**Introduction:** In a letter to his parents dated January 20, 1968, Stubbe listed a variety of minor, everyday matters with which he needed their help (making photographs out of slides he was sending home, paying his membership dues for a chaplains’ association, keeping a record of the boxes he was sending home, etc.). He then remarked:

Last night, and at about 2 in the afternoon, just as I am writing this letter, there were B52 strikes against two suspected North Vietnamese regiments (about 3,000 or so men) to our south, about 5 miles or so. These strikes are called “arc lights” and consist of 5,000 and 10,000 pound bombs. They drop so many of them that it sounds like a real bad thunder even at this distance. So things are getting a little warmer here.

His last comment could not have been more of an understatement; the next day marked the beginning of a massive siege of the Marine base at Khe Sanh by communist forces, and Stubbe and approximately 6,000 troops were pinned down for eleven weeks. On January 21, Stubbe tried to assure his parents, who he knew would have heard about the attack on the news, that he personally was fine.

First, I’m okay, not even a scratch. The casualties have been comparatively small. So don’t worry.

I wrote my last entry in my log beginning Dec. 1st. Since our post office was hit this morning, I gave it to one of the pilots of one of the planes to mail via registered mail. I do not know if it will ever get home, but there’s a lot in it; it’s very important to me. Please write me if it does. It’s a green record book diary, covering the period of 1 Dec. to today, plus a lot of personal papers.



We are, as you probably hear on the news, under attack. It's the scariest thing I've ever had to face. I awoke at 5 o'clock to the sound of incoming rockets and mortar exploding just outside my hooch! They hit our ammunition dump, and rounds of ammunition were flying all day long. Practically half the base is in ruins, but the casualties were very few because everyone got in bunkers. The only casualties were from the lines on the perimeter of the base from Hill 861. I am writing this as the sun is setting today. I don't know if you will ever receive this, but I must write it anyway.

The base is quite safe. The airstrip wasn't harmed, and planes keep coming and going. We still have our artillery for counter-mortar attacks. My hooch's well-built, sturdy. We have a lot supporting us. So don't worry.

I feel I'm needed here. I give my every waking moment for these men. They are basically good men, but not particularly religious as such, although I'm quite sure many prayed today! Yet I love them all, and give my daily life for them, and I do it not for personal satisfaction or companionship or a sense of personal accomplishment, but because I feel this is God's will.

You of course know my love for you both and grandad and all—Peg and Jeane, Jackie, Henry—everyone, but especially you and grandma. I have not always been a good son and I know I've caused you grief at times, unsureness and anxiety at other times. But I've always loved all of you very deeply.

Well, there's really not too much more to say in this situation—I've recorded all the details of everything in my log. Love, Ray

President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered that the base be saved at all costs, and tens of thousands of American and South Vietnamese troops were rushed to Khe Sanh. The North Vietnamese were repelled in early April, but thousands of Americans were killed and an estimated 1,500 to 2,500 were wounded. (Ironically, the base was closed down only months later.) Stubbe survived the battle for Khe Sanh, and in a letter to his parents after he was out of harm's way, he mentioned how close he had come to dying.

So many things happened at Khe Sanh—It's good I didn't write earlier—practically anything I might write would either sicken or scare you. But that's all past now. I must say the good Lord was very merciful and gracious. I didn't even receive a cut or bruise. But there for a while I was having very close calls every day.



One noon, while eating brunch in my hooch, an incoming round went into my wall—through four feet of dirt, 3 feet of sandbags, and bent my steel walls held up by u-shaped engineering stakes—it was a dud!

Stubbe returned to Wisconsin in January 1969 and stayed in the military for another sixteen years. He still preaches occasionally at his old church and ministers to the homebound and others in need.

### **The Gulf War: Capt. Steve Belgium, U.S. Marine Corps**

**Introduction:** Serving in Operation Desert Storm, Capt. Belgium receives a letter from a woman named Lynda Severson and their ensuing “Pen Pal” exchange leads to a surprising conclusion.

To a soldier, Marine, airman, or sailor serving abroad, few things can boost morale like a handwritten letter. These messages of support offer a tangible connection to friends and loved ones, and even mail from a total stranger can be a lift to the spirits. Lynda Severson, a twenty-six-year-old human resources manager working in Minneapolis, did not have any family in the armed forces. But after the United States launched Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait in January 1991, she sent the following letter to a Marine named Steve Belgium on January 27 to let him know that, although they had never met, she was grateful for his service to our nation.

Dear Steve— I’m a friend of Linnea Hanson’s, who is a flight attendant for Northwest and flew troops to Germany over the holidays; she asked that I write to let you know you’re in our thought and prayers. Hopefully, you’re not an English major as the previous sentence was definitely a run-on.

I was given a list of twelve names to write to. I’ve distributed the other eleven names to my co-workers & Bible study friends. You see, your name came with a reference. Someone under your command said some very nice things about you! Isn’t that great to know your peers think very highly of you!

The same two groups of people mentioned above: My coworkers @ Daytons (a leading retail firm in Minneapolis and the Midwest) and my Bible study friends (Professional Christian Women’s Network) sent Christmas cards, wrapped tins of Christmas cookies, books, etc. to some troops in Saudi Arabia. We are all behind you and your efforts!!

Presently, I'm on a plane en route to Minneapolis. I just spent 4 days visiting my brother, Mark, in Butte, Montana! We both love to downhill ski!! Tomorrow, it's back to work ...

Being I've been told you age (29, right?), I'll bet you know I'm 26 (27 in May). I graduated from the University of Texas at Dallas in Public and Political Communications.

If you have an opportunity to write back, I'd appreciate hearing from you ... Again, I want to tell you how much we all appreciate what you're doing in the Persian Gulf. Hopefully, you'll all be back to America soon! May God bless You and keep you in His care ! In friendship, Lynda (Severson)

Belgium replied soon after he received Severson's letter.

Dear Lynda: Hi! Happy Valentine's Day! Linnea told me you would be writing. Thank you for keeping all of us servicemen and women in your thoughts and prayers. We really appreciate the support; it does make a difference over here.

No, I'm not an English major. In fact, I studied Business and minored in Entrepreneurship at Seattle Pacific University and graduated in 1983. Seattle Pacific is a small private school in Seattle, Washington. Regardless of your writing, I would not criticize it because then you would tell me how sloppy my handwriting is. So, I cheated this time and used the computer.

I would like to be specific in telling you what I do but I can't talk much about it right now because the operations I am assigned to are ongoing. I am an assistant Operations Officer and work for a Lt. Col. who is the Ops Officer. Basically I help plan future operations, train Marines who work in the same section that I do, and stand watch daily.

Yes, you got it right. I am 29 but soon to be 30 years old (March 31). Ouch, that sounds old, doesn't it? Just kidding. I plan on being in shape to run triathlons in my 60's. Unfortunately, we have little time or facilities to stay in any decent shape.

Well, that's about enough rambling to bore you to death by now. If you care to write me back, I would like to hear from you. Also, I really like pictures. I'll see if I can get one to send you. Could you send me a picture? Thanks.

Take care, Steve



From this simple exchange, a friendship blossomed. On Belgum's birthday, Severson sent him a card with some photographs of herself. "Steve—Wherever this finds you, I hope your day is wonderful!! Happy 30th Birthday!! Happy Easter!! With a birthday hug, Lynda." And on the opposite side, Severson wrote: "Thanks for your nice letter! All the events in the Persian Gulf have certainly changed since you wrote! Praise the Lord!! I'm curious to know where you live—California? Washington? What is your next assignment? Here are a few photos to keep or throw away."

Belgum replied on April 27.

Dear Lynda: Thanks for the birthday card and the pictures! It got turned around in the mail system and so I did not receive it until I had been back at work for a few days.

Lunda, I have to say this: You are gorgeous! I would love to meet you. Throw your pictures away—are you kidding?

I live in Escondido which is in San Diego County. I drive 35 minutes to work at Camp Pendleton, the large Marine base on the coast just north of San Diego.

You are an active person. Beside work you have a second job, are involved at church and a Professional Women's club, and stay in shape. That's a lot. I am also very active. Besides work I workout daily, sometimes twice a day, stay current on the news, and continue learning a second language (Spanish). During a previous tour in South Carolina I was in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program. My little brother, there, is Robbie who is now 14 years old. We had a great time together every week. I miss spending time with him.

Thanks for the card. I did have a good birthday but I am now over the hill (Just kidding!) Please call me if you would like to.

Warmly, Steve.

If you have been keeping up, the romance continued between Steve and Lynda. Ultimately, Lynda moved to California in January 1992 and afterward the two dated for another eleven months. Belgum proposed on November 11—Veteran's Day. They married Memorial Day weekend in May 1993 and now have two sons, Mark and Zachary. Steve remained in the Marine Corps Reserve, and on February 14, 2003, he received orders to go back on active duty. Just weeks before their ten-year anniversary and fearing that her husband would be sent to Iraq, Lynda wrote the following letter on March 3, 2003:



Dearest Steve: I have always wondered if I'd ever be one of those military wives who'd embrace her husband and say "good-bye" as tears streamed down her face ... while he left to serve our country.

Well, here we are, ten years into our marriage and it's time for me to send you off to a bigger cause beyond our family. I'm very proud of you for your twenty year dedication to the United States Marine Corps!

I realize that becoming a single mom for an uncertain amount of time is the sacrifice I'm willing to pay for gaining our American freedom back. I will pray continuously for your safety! May the Lord give you wisdom, strength, and power to carry out His will. Lynda.

Ultimately, Steve did not go overseas. Instead, he served at Camp Pendleton helping young Marines with their deployment to and from Iraq.

**NOTE:** Excerpts cited above in this document are taken from: *Grace Under Fire: Letters of Faith in Times of War*, ed. Andrew Carroll (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2007).

(End: 2020 Memorial Day Special: *War Correspondents: From the Front Lines to the Front Porch*.)