IF ALL THE SKY WERE PAPER
Copyright © 2024, Andrew Carroll

All Rights Reserved

IF ALL THE SKY WERE PAPER is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), or stored in any retrieval system in any way (electronic or mechanical) without written permission of the publisher.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights throughout the world for IF ALL THE SKY WERE PAPER are controlled exclusively by Broadway Licensing, www.BroadwayLicensing.com. **No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of Broadway Licensing and paying the requisite fee.**

All other rights, including without limitation motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to the author c/o Broadway Licensing.

NOTE ON BILLING

Anyone receiving permission to produce IF ALL THE SKY WERE PAPER is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears, including printed or digital materials for advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. Please see your production license for font size and typeface requirements.

Be advised that there may be additional credits required in all programs and promotional material. Such language will be listed under the "Additional Billing" section of production licenses. It is the licensee's responsibility to ensure any and all required billing is included in the requisite places, per the terms of the license.

SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS/RECORDINGS

Broadway Licensing neither holds the rights to nor grants permission to use any songs or recordings mentioned in the Play. Permission for performances of copyrighted songs, arrangements or recordings mentioned in this Play is not included in our license agreement. The permission of the copyright owner(s) must be obtained for any such use. For any songs and/or recordings mentioned in the Play, other songs, arrangements, or recordings may be substituted provided permission from the copyright owner(s) of such songs, arrangements or recordings is obtained; or songs, arrangements or recordings in the public domain may be substituted.

If All the Sky Were Paper was inspired by Andrew Carroll's *New York Times* bestsellers *War Letters* and *Behind the Lines*.

The world premiere of *If All the Sky Were Paper* was first presented as a staged reading at the Odyssey Theatre Ensemble in Los Angeles, on May 26, 2009. It was directed by John B. Benitz and produced by Ben Bradley and the Fountain Theatre. The cast was as follows:

ENSEMBLE ..... Mary Elizabeth Barrett, Danny Tobin, Scott MacDonald, Jeff McCracken, Hugh O'Gorman, Jenni Putney

The play premiered at Chapman University in the Waltmar Theatre on November 11, 2010. It was directed by John B. Benitz, the set design was by Don Guy, the costume design was by Megan Gurdine, the lighting design was by Leigh Allen, the projection design was by Jason Thompson, the audio design was by JD Park, and the stage manager was Jenny Ludwig. The cast was as follows:

ENSEMBLE ..... Jordan Bellow, Bethany Bonnaud, Conor Brown, Sean Burgos, Matt Gallenstein, Harrison Givens, Katie Gunderson, Nicole Javier, Martha Magruder, Amir Malaklou, Michael O'Brien, Natalie Rice, Elyse Russell, Garret Schweighauser, Andre Stojka, Lawrence Thunell, Sara Toufali, Sam Weiner

If All the Sky Were Paper received its first professional production at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Los Angeles on June 9, 2014. It was directed and produced by John B. Benitz and produced by Lexikat President Victoria Morris. The light design was by Richard Peterson, the sound design was by James Park Delgado, the projection design was by Jason Goussak, the program design was by Michael O'Hara, the graphic design was by Matt Howard, the original poster image was by Ariel Roth, the casting director was Michael Donovan Casting, the Press Representation was by DemandPR, and the stage manager was Megan Alvord. The cast was as follows:

ENSEMBLE ..... Annette Bening, Blake Berris, Chase Cargill, Conor Brown, Christopher Sweeney, Donathan Walters, Emma Turpen, Garret Schweighauser, Gary Cole, Jim Beaver, Josh Dominguez, Kate Mansi, Katie Gunderson, Kevin Bailey, Ken Howard, Laura Dern, Lauren Bowles, Lorna Duyn, Matthew Gallenstein, Michael Nehring, Sam Weiner, Sandra Seacat, Thurn Hoffman

NOTES

Background

This play was first staged, as a reading, at the Odyssey Theatre Ensemble in Los Angeles in 2009. It was then performed, as a full production, at Chapman University in 2010. Both of these performances were directed by John B. Benitz, professor of theatre at Chapman University. Since 2009, Benitz has directed almost all of the performances of this play throughout the country.

Casting

Seven actors, at a minimum, are needed for this production; four males, with one playing the Narrator/Carroll throughout, and three females. The script can, however, accommodate a much larger cast at the director's discretion.

The Narrator is based on a real individual whose travels around the world and the letters he found inspired this play, and the casting of the Narrator is the single most important component of the production. The Narrator should be extremely likeable and exude a sense of warmth. The war letters woven throughout the play represent to him a kind of living memorial to the individuals who wrote them, all of whom are real men, women, and children. (Although all of the letters are real, many have been edited for length and clarity.) Since he is essentially the anchor of the show, he should have a charismatic, appealing, "leading man" quality to him. He is not an academic type (so, no glasses or bow ties), but more of a scruffy adventurer, sleeves rolled up, and in dark khakis or travel pants. Since he is a civilian, he should not be wearing any sort of military clothing or footwear (e.g., combat boots).

If the full cast consists of only seven actors, with the Narrator/Carroll being one, the three males should include an older actor to play the more mature roles (generals, fathers, etc.); an actor to play young troops, civilian boys, sons, etc.; and someone who, age-wise, is in-between. At least one of them should be a Black actor, as there are letters written by Black troops, and one should be a young

Asian actor, to perform a variety of roles but especially the letter by the Japanese American soldier in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. For the three female actors, one plays the more mature roles (mothers, older female troops, etc.); one plays the younger roles (daughters, civilian girls, etc.); and the third actor should be in-between, age-wise. At least one of the female actors should be Asian and one should be Latina. But, again, the cast can be much larger (up to about twenty actors) if the director so chooses. It is not necessary for the actors to dress in period or military clothes.

Props

The main props needed are just the letters that the actors hold throughout the performance. The actors should have them memorized and not refer to them too frequently, but they can have the actual text there. Logistical suggestion: have the letters printed out in large font, making them more readable, and on thick paper, which is less likely to shake. Also, the actors should appear to hold just one letter at a time, not the entire script.

The only other prop that could be used is a old-fashioned typewriter, for the Ed and Goldie Marcellus scene where Goldie sends Ed, an American soldier serving in World War I in Europe, a handwritten letter, and Ed types his comments/replies directly onto Goldie's letter and then sends it back to her. If an actual typewriter that has a somewhat antique quality to it cannot be found, a more modern typewriter can be used but it should be angled so it's hard to tell it's a more contemporary one.

The one type of prop that should NOT be seen at any point in the play is any type of gun, rifle, or other weapon.

Run Time

Ideally, the play should be paced so that it runs approximately eighty minutes.

IF ALL THE SKY WERE PAPER

Six actors—three men (not including the Narrator/Carroll) and three women—enter. All actors should be holding their respective letters in hand throughout the play, even if they have them memorized. The more they can be "off book," the better, but for consistency's sake, they should each be holding a letter at all times. In the opening scene, the six actors have individual spotlights on them, and these will fade out after each actor has read their respective letter. (When the Narrator/Carroll does enter, he will be holding a leather-bound journal, which he briefly alludes to during his opening monologue and later in the play. If absolutely necessary, he can occasionally refer to it, but it should never be a distraction or slow down the pacing of the performance, and he should never appear to be reading from it for more than a line or two.)

MORT ELEVITCH. *(In a thick New York accent, and ideally he's wearing clothing that's slightly too big to accentuate that he's a young, scrawny kid.)* Fort Benning, Georgia, November 23rd, 1943. Dear Ma: For the *Nth* time, *please* don't send any more underwear, and the Milk of Magnesia was *absolutely* unnecessary. I'M HAVING NO MORE BOWEL TROUBLE AND DON'T ANTICIPATE ANY.

Now that I'm here, I'm satisfied. Already I have made friends and have a feeling of companionship I've never had before. They call me "Minnesota" because apparently most of us can remember a state better than just a man's name.

Anyway Mom, don't send any more food—JUST LETTERS. S'long. Mort.

SEBRON S. *(Southern accent.)* January 1st, 1863. My darling wife. I have recently read a large number of Union letters, all taken from a Federal boat. The letters, after being opened at our general's

headquarters and the money and valuables removed from them, were distributed among the men. Very few are from persons of education and are full of ridiculous composition and spelling.

His tone changes from snobbery to self-righteous revulsion.

There was also much vulgarity in the letters, some of them are obscene and show filthy, lewd dispositions.

Beat.

And I intend to send you a bundle of them as soon as the boys quit reading them.

GERMAN MOTHER. Stuttgart, August 1914. My Dear Bessie: In Hamburg, I found a letter from [my son] Franz, who had, of course, put himself once again at the disposal of his old regiment.

Last year, when he left the army, my feeling was that, in case of war, he need not take part in it. And now? I would bury myself in shame and despair if he remained at home. The French are bringing up their African troops against us, a white people, but we actually do not hate the French, for they are in their right when they seek to reconquer Alsace. Nor do we hate the Russians, a poor, misguided people, who are led like sheep to the slaughter without knowing why. But we [Germans] hate and *despise* the English, who fight us for mercenary reasons; a brother-people who have been intriguing against us for years, while, to our face, pretending friendship. Never again will I seek their society, as I have done all my life. I will shun them like poison.

So now, dear Bessie, goodbye. After this, you will not have anything to do with me, and I will have nothing to do with an English person. Thank you again for your lifelong friendship, for which I've been very, very grateful. If my son dies, you shall know of it. My existence is terror, fear, anxiety—and yet, if I could gain my country's victory by my boy's death, I would sacrifice him *ten times over*. And so would every woman in Germany. Yours sincerely.

FRENCH WOMAN. *(Her tone is almost restrained; she is still somewhat traumatized by the memory.)* To the Parents of Lieutenant Harry Wambolt: Eleven o'clock had just struck when my attention was attracted by repeated bursts of machine-gun fire. I saw three planes right above my head. The fight was going on for about half

an hour when suddenly I saw one plane turn over. A body came out and descended slowly. It was the airman—your son—falling.
I thought at first it was a bird, so slowly was he coming down. His coat had opened, acting somewhat like a parachute. He had his arms stretched out, and he hit the ground feet first in a small pond. The Germans arrived soon, and with some hooks dragged his body to the bank.
On his grave someone put a cross, made from a propeller. More than once I brought flowers, but the Germans took them away.

Beat.

I don't know why.

LATINO SPOUSE OF AN IRAQ AND/OR AFGHAN WAR VETERAN. *(Her tone, for the most part, exudes a wry sense of humor.)* Hello everyone. I'm emailing those of you in our support group who have loved ones returning home soon from Iraq or Afghanistan, and I wanted to offer you some suggestions in order to help provide your "returnee" with as smooth a transition as possible back to civilized life.
First, when he or she goes to bed, it is *imperative* that you make as much noise as possible. For example, run a lawn mower just outside the bedroom door. Hold loud conversations just two feet away. Your loved one is not used to complete silence and will toss and turn all night if extreme noises are not maintained.
Second, place bowls of sand or dirt in front of large, oscillating fans throughout your home and turn the fans to "high." Returnees can become disoriented if everything around them isn't covered in some kind of sand or dust.
Finally, and this is critical, when you do your returnee's laundry, make sure that you do not use *any* type of detergent or scented fabric sheets, as the fresh, clean smell and the softness of the clothing might confuse or even frighten them.
Please know it will take a lot of work and extra care on your part, but after about sixty to ninety days, your loved one should be as good as new.

Beat.

Just in time to be redeployed.
Good luck.

BUTCH LIVERGOOD. *(Exhausted and with little emotion, he takes a breath and begins speaking—slowly.)* Dear folks: I'm sorry I haven't wrote you in quite a while, but if you've been listening to the news you could pretty well figure out why. Saigon was hit heavy, and we were too.

I don't know if I should tell you this or not, but I have to tell somebody, and I can't tell Linda because she would worry too much.

Beat.

I think I might have killed a person.

We were fired at and I seen some men running with rifles, so I opened fire on them, and one of them fell to the ground. I don't know if I should tell you things that happen over here because not too many of the guys write home about it. But the pressure builds up in me, and I just have to tell somebody. Linda might not be able to live with me knowing that her husband has killed a person.

Well, I'll change the subject. How's all the kids?

Tell everyone I send my love and I'll be home in 327 days. Your Son in Vietnam. Butch.

P.S. Write as often as possible. Mail is all that I have to look forward to.

Lights fade then come up on Narrator/Carroll, alone onstage. At no point during the play should the other actors interact with, speak to, or acknowledge him in any way, and vice versa. Although he doesn't interact with the other actors, he is always watching them or at least clearly listening to them. Behind him, an enormous map of the world is projected. As the Narrator/Carroll is speaking, the countries he intends to visit are, one by one, highlighted (listed here alphabetically for reference sake, but the actual projections should be by region): Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Great Britain, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, and Vietnam. When the lights come up on the Narrator/Carroll for the first time, we see him—very briefly—write a few words in his journal, and then he closes it and begins speaking.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Before I left on my trip around the world, which I estimated would last about six months and would take me to more than thirty nations, including two active war zones, there was every indication it would be a fool's errand—or worse. Anti-American violence was flaring up across the globe, and the State Department had issued advisories against traveling to almost half of the cities on my itinerary.

I promised my family I wasn't going anywhere truly dangerous, but that was a flat-out lie; Iraq and Afghanistan were absolutely on my itinerary—and this was back when US troops were waging fierce battles in both countries, as part of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, respectively.

And, as it turned out, I had what was one of the most humiliating, surreal—and, yet, meaningful—encounters of my entire journey while in Baghdad, just seven months after the American-led, allied invasion into Iraq. I was waiting for a military escort to drive me to the airport, which was just a few miles from an old warehouse I'd been staying in with US troops, when I noticed four Iraqis standing and talking about fifteen feet from me.

The Iraqis can be represented by four spotlights on the stage or by four actors in silhouette.

They appeared to be in their midtwenties, and I knew they spoke English because I could overhear parts of their conversation. I really wanted to ask them about their country's history, its culture, and most important: Did they have any wartime letters or emails they'd be willing to share with me?

The whole purpose of my trip was to find *even just one war letter* so powerfully written and filled with raw emotion that it would help those of us who've never experienced these conflicts to better understand those who have.

Ideally, the letter would also bring to life an extraordinary story or aspect of war that had somehow gone overlooked.

After hesitating a bit, I finally walked over, introduced myself, and explained that I was an author and historian traveling the world collecting war letters. I even held up my journal as if it were some sort of proof that I was an actual writer.

Would it be OK, I asked, if I could talk with them?

The four young Iraqis all looked at me, and then each other.

Beat.

Total silence. One of the men, whose name I later found out was Ammar, seemed like he was about to speak up—but decided against it.

One of the four spotlights grows brighter, then dims.

"Please," I said, "feel free to ask me whatever you want."

Spotlight brightens.

He thought for a second, smiled, and said (with genuine enthusiasm) "So who are your favorite British authors?"

Beat.

Completely thunderstruck by the question, I just stood there, unable to say anything. The four of them looked at me eagerly, and I began thinking, "Okay, British authors, favorite British authors…"

A few moments passed and—nothing. Not one name came to mind. Beads of sweat were literally dripping down my forehead, as I felt like I was representing the entire US educational system.

This is ridiculous, I thought. You were an *English major* in college for God's sake. This is one of the few topics you should be able to discuss with some intelligence. Forget *favorites* at this point. Just name *any* British author.

Beat.

And, again, a total blank. The Iraqis, trying to be helpful, very gently, and rather easily, started throwing out suggestions right and left—*(quickly.)* Austen, Brontë, Dickens, Shelley, Wordsworth…

Eventually, I came up with a name all by myself: Shakespeare.

Beat.

Although embarrassing, the question did help break the ice, and we went on to have a very open and honest conversation about our two countries, the war, what they had endured living under Saddam Hussein's regime, and the reason for my visit.

We'd spoken for about twenty minutes when my military escort arrived, and, as I was leaving, Ammar said, "One last thing. I'm just curious. Why are you so interested in *letters*?" I didn't have time to go into much detail, but I explained that my search had begun years ago for very personal reasons, after a fire had swept through

our family's house and destroyed everything, including all of our personal letters.

Ammar, I learned, had a different experience.

"My older brother," he said, "was killed during the war with Kuwait, and he despised Saddam Hussein and hated being in the military, but he couldn't write any of this in his letters home."

When I asked Ammar if he had saved the letters, he said, "No. We burned them all."

His tone was respectful and almost sympathetic, but Ammar didn't think I would ever find the letter I was looking for. And he reminded me that, as an American, I was likely to confront indifference and perhaps outright hostility in certain countries.

Friends and family members had warned me of this as well. They were also worried about how the journey might affect me emotionally. The subject matter was inherently grim, and they knew I'd be visiting concentration and extermination camps, cemeteries, and battlefields where thousands of soldiers had been slaughtered in days, if not hours.

But Ammar, who I thanked for his candor and simply taking the time to talk, had touched on my biggest fear: that I'd come home empty-handed.

As to the psychological toll the journey might take, well—I already had some idea of what to expect.

> *Lights dim as Narrator/Carroll steps to the side to put his journal down. Lights come up with two spotlights on Narrator/Carroll and Carroll Jordan.*

CARROLL JORDAN. Dear Betty Anne, I saw something today that makes me realize why we're over here fighting this war.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Dated April 21st, 1945, and written by a distant cousin of mine named Carroll Jordan, this was the letter that began it all.

CARROLL JORDAN. We visited a German political internment camp that had been liberated only two days earlier. The inmates consisted mostly of Jews, some Russians, and Poles, and there were six American pilots they had shot almost immediately.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Nobody was hurt when our family's house in Washington, D.C., burned down, but almost everything

we had went up in flames. After the fire, Carroll checked in to see how we were doing, and I mentioned that we'd lost all of our photographs, letters, and other irreplaceable memorabilia. He told me that, while recently going through his old army footlocker from World War II, he had come across a letter he'd sent to his wife about the Nazi concentration camp in Buchenwald,* Germany.

CARROLL JORDAN. When we first walked in, there were all these creatures that were supposed to be men. We met one who could speak English so he acted as a guide for us. First we saw a German monument that stated 51,600 had died in this camp in three years. They were proud of it.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Only twenty-three years old at the time, Carroll was a P-51 pilot attached to the Ninth Army. Buchenwald was the first concentration camp liberated by American forces, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the commander of all Allied troops in Europe, made it a point to see the camp for himself. He was accompanied by General George "Old Blood and Guts" Patton, who had earned his nickname because he seemed to relish warfare, no matter how gruesome it could be.

CARROLL JORDAN. Then we went down through rows of barbed wire to a building where they purposefully infected these people with diseases. Human guinea pigs for German "medics." In this building were exhibits of human heads in jars and tattooed human flesh and skin [hung] on the walls.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. As Eisenhower and Patton continued through the camp, Patton became so overwhelmed that he stopped for a moment, vomited, and refused to go into any more buildings. Eisenhower was also revolted by the German atrocities, and this is why he ordered American troops—like my cousin—deployed throughout Europe to walk through the camps and serve as witnesses to what the Nazis had done. Nevertheless, some of the men *withheld* certain details in their letters that they considered too graphic to repeat. The basic facts were horrifying enough.

CARROLL JORDAN. After that we went up to the torture department. Here were beating devices that I won't explain. In one room

* Pronounced: BOO-kuhn-waald

there were eight cremator furnaces. There is another place I won't tell you about because I don't think you'd believe me.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Carroll sent me the original letter, and I'll never forget holding that thin, onionskin paper in my hands and thinking how delicate and fragile it was—and what a stark contrast this was to the weight and significance of his words. When I told him I'd return the letter, he said, "Keep it. I probably would have ended up throwing it out anyway."

CARROLL JORDAN. Enclosed you will find some pictures I took while going through the camp. Our time was up so we boarded a truck and rode home—just thinking.

Beat.

All my love darling, Carroll.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. The idea that he would even think of discarding something so valuable was shocking to me, but then—after talking with other veterans—I learned that many of them had already tossed away their correspondences or lost them to neglect. After mentioning my cousin's story to a friend, Anne Tramer, she told me about a World War II letter from her family that was memorable in its own way.

ERWIN BLONDER. September 30th, 1944. Dear Dad and Jerry. I am writing this letter to you to get certain things off my mind. I am telling this to you because I want to spare Shirlee the horrible details of war and I don't want this letter shown to either her or Mother.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Writing to his brother and father from France, twenty-three-year-old Erwin Blonder confided that he had misled his mother and wife, Shirlee, by having told them that he was safely in the back of his battalion and far from combat. The opposite was true.

ERWIN BLONDER. I am a forward observer. My job is to go along with the Infantry and conduct the firing of field artillery as the situation demands. I have experienced things that I will never forget. [Recently] I saw an artillery shell chew up one of my men. At least he never knew what hit him. My only thought is to get home safely to my wife. I hope that when peace descends upon the

world again, we will prove capable of having peace. I don't want my children to endure the things I have.
Erwin

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Three weeks later, Blonder and his unit found themselves surrounded by German troops. Attempts to drop them supplies from the air failed repeatedly, and by the fourth day, they had nothing to eat and had to drink from a nearby swamp. After more than a week of insufferable conditions, the "Lost Battalion" as they became known, was saved by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Blonder recuperated fully and returned to the United States. At his fiftieth wedding anniversary, Anne told me, he read the letter aloud to his entire family, most of whom knew nothing—until that moment—about what he had truly experienced decades earlier.

As Erwin Blonder exits, Ernest Uno and Willson Price take the stage behind Narrator/Carroll.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Erwin Blonder generously gave me his letter—the first war letter I had collected outside of my family. But what was even more crucial is that Erwin became a kind of mentor, helping me to reach out to troops and veterans from all walks of life. He encouraged me, emphatically, to find letters by those from communities who hadn't received the attention they deserved, including the 442nd Regimental Combat Team—the unit that had saved Erwin's life—as well as another group of World War II service members who were integral to the Allied victory in the Pacific.

ERNEST UNO. July 29, 1944. Dearest Mae, I promised you I'd write every chance I had so here I am again. In the lull, between firing, I've found that scribbling off a few lines of a letter was the best way to ease the tension of fighting.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. What was so notable about the 442nd Regimental Combat Team is that it was composed almost entirely of young Japanese American men, like Ernest Uno, who volunteered to serve in the army, despite the fact that many of their family members were imprisoned in internment camps throughout the United States. Ernest Uno's sister, Mae, was detained inside Camp Amache,* in

* Pronounced: Ah-MAH-chee

Colorado—simply, although born in America, for being of Japanese descent.

WILLSON PRICE. Dearest Rose, Your letter was received here yesterday afternoon. Glad to hear from you. I really don't have anything to tell you because things are so different nowadays. That's why. I don't care to write to anybody, not even my own folks.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. While Ernest Uno was fighting in Europe, Willson Price was in the Pacific—and with an elite unit that was engaged in a very unique and dangerous task; their operation was so secret that it wouldn't be declassified until decades after the war. Rose was Willson's fiancée back in California.

ERNEST UNO. Any little thing we do to divert our mind and keep us busy when the fighting comes to a temporary halt relaxes the nerves and rests our bodies. That's why receiving mail from home is so important. I've got a bunch of letters in my pocket that are dirty and falling apart. I almost know each one, word for word, 'cause I've read and reread them so often.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. In late October of 1944, 275 American soldiers with 1st Battalion's 141st Infantry Regiment were encircled by German troops in the Vosges* Mountains in eastern France. Running out of food and water, their plight was so severe that newspapers back in the States ran articles about the fate of "The Lost Battalion," as they were called.

WILLSON PRICE. I know it is pretty hard to say this. Why don't you just forget me and find someone else. That way you'll be happy and have nothing to worry about.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Willson Price had begun to realize the gravity of his mission and the real possibility that he wouldn't come back to Rose alive.

ERNEST UNO. One thing I do like to talk about is the people here [in Italy]. There was one time while we were fighting that one [German] sniper killed one of our men. A woman saw him die, and she sat by his body and wept. She refused to leave the body, and between tears, she tried to tell us how horrible it was to see an American soldier die for their sake.

* Pronounced: Vohzh

NARRATOR/CARROLL. After numerous rescue efforts had failed, the 442nd was directed to make one final attempt to break through the German lines and save the besieged battalion.

WILLSON PRICE. I am not saying all this because I dislike you. Even though you promised me you will wait until I returned, it's pretty hard to say, the way this war has been going.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Willson Price was a Navajo Code Talker, making him part of, what I learned to be, one of the most brilliant clandestine operations ever executed by American forces. The US Marine Corps, working with Navajo service members, created a code based on their language. Their word for potatoes, for example, meant "grenades," a submarine was an "iron fish," and commanding generals were "war chiefs." The Code Talkers were so valuable they were assigned their own bodyguards, who had two main responsibilities: The first was, of course, to keep their Code Talker alive. But if the Code Talker might be captured by the enemy—and then, they would almost certainly be tortured and executed—the bodyguard had orders to shoot and kill the Code Talker on the spot.

ERNEST UNO. I know now, for certain, what we are fighting for! Our mission is to free all the nations of oppression. Give the children of this and the coming generations a chance to grow decently, and learn the true meaning of the "Four Freedoms."

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Beginning on October 24, the 442nd commenced their assault against the Germans to save the Lost Battalion. After five punishing days, they were ultimately successful—but at an appalling cost.

WILLSON PRICE. I think that will be all for this time. Goodbye and so long. God will care for you. Love, [Willson].

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Willson Price survived the war, and when he returned to the States, Rose was there, waiting for him. They married and had four children. Price volunteered to fight in Korea and then in Vietnam, and when he retired in 1972, he had served thirty years active duty in the US Marine Corps.

Willson Price exits.

ERNEST UNO. Please give my regards to the Morimotos. Good luck, and lots of love. Ernest

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Out of the approximately 3,000 soldiers in the 442nd who fought to save the remaining 275 members of the Lost Battalion, they suffered *800* casualties. Ernest Uno also made it home alive, spent thirty years working for the YMCA, and eventually became a deacon. The 442nd would go on to become one of the most highly decorated units in US history.

Ernest Uno exits.

Just as my one casual conversation with Anne Tramer led me to her grandfather, Erwin Blonder, who led me to Ernest Uno and Willson Price, simply through word of mouth I started finding and collecting dozens and then hundreds of war letters, some dating back to the American Revolution.

Reading through this ever-growing mound of correspondences, I realized that, along with being private messages between loved ones separated by thousands of miles, they represented the first drafts of our nation's history.

Right after Narrator/Carroll stops speaking, a flash of light fills the theater at the same time as a massive explosion is heard. After a beat, William Czako reads his letter quickly and with a sense of urgency—but he is not hysterical.*

WILLIAM CZAKO. Dear Sis: It's 9:05 Sunday morning and we've been bombed now for over an hour. Our antiaircraft guns are yammering and every so often a bomb strikes so close as to rock this ship. We're helpless down here in the forward engine room because our main engines are all tore down.

I'm on the interior communications and I can hear the various stations screaming at one another. A man just brought us our gas masks. I don't know why I'm writing this because if we're hit with a bomb they won't find enough of me—let alone this letter. I imagine it's to show myself that I can be calm under fire.

A few of the boys here are white-faced and their voices hushed and choked. They know this is no joke or mock battle, but the real stuff…

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Written by a young sailor named William Czako, a copy of his letter was sent to me by a woman who had

* Pronounced: SAY-ko

found it purely by accident after moving into the Czako family's old home in Seattle.

What immediately caught my attention were the words in the upper right-hand corner of the first page: "December 7th, 1941. USS New Orleans." Czako was *inside* that ship at Pearl Harbor. Miraculously he survived, and he went on page after page to describe the attack in vivid detail.

These were the life-and-death perspectives not of generals, presidents, or commanders far removed from the front lines, but of young individuals right there in the eye of the storm. And their letters emphasized that regardless of education or background, anyone could take a pencil in hand and craft a message that would resonate for centuries.

Spotswood Rice takes the stage.

During the Civil War, a slave named Spotswood Rice escaped to freedom and enlisted in the Union Army. As his regiment neared the plantation where, coincidentally, Rice had been enslaved and where his daughter Mary was *still* in bondage, he wrote the following letter to his former master.

SPOTSWOOD RICE. *(His tone is confident, but not angry; he has become empowered, but he remains in control of his emotions.)* September 3rd, 1864. I received a letter from Caroline telling me that you say I tried to steal my child away from you. Now I want you to understand that Mary is *my* child and she is a God-given right of my own. We are now making up about 1,000 black troops, and when we come, woe be to the slaveholding rebels for we don't expect to leave them root nor branch. I offered once to pay you forty dollars for my own child, but I am glad that you did not accept it. So you just hold on now as long as you can. When I come after Mary, I will have a power and authority to bring her away.

Beat.

You will *then*—know how to talk to *me*. Spotswood Rice.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Over time, the letters that people were sharing with me covered a broader spectrum of the wartime experience, from more philosophical musings to passionate expressions of love.

GEORGE RAREY. *(Waving a small yellow envelope.)* JUNIE!! Got back from a mission at four o'clock this afternoon and what did I see the deacon waving at me as I walked up the road to the shack? A small yellow envelope! I thought it was a little early but I quit breathing completely until the wonderful news unfolded—A son! Junie, I'm so proud of you, I'm beside myself! I was just getting down to the really serious part of the floor pacing—when WHAM!, I find that Junie has done the whole thing without the moaning and hollering from the Old Man—And they say woman is the weaker sex—Phooie!

Beat.

Junie, if this letter makes no sense, forget it—I'm sort of delirious. This iron hut looks like a castle—the overcast sky is the most beautiful kind of blue I've ever seen. I'm a father! I have *a son*!! My mind is a little jumbled, and I want to take a walk and just sort of order my thoughts a little—Sweet Dreams, my Sweet Mother. Love, George. March 22, 1944.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Later that same year, a twenty-two-year-old soldier in Europe named Dick Cowan wrote to his mother on his birthday while literally in the crosshairs of an enemy sniper.

DICK COWAN. *(Despite his reference to being under sniper fire while writing his letter, Cowan maintains a light, happy tone throughout; according to his family, he was a very funny, upbeat young man.)* Dear Mom: I guess twenty-two years ago was a pretty important day for both of us. But it was only the start—the days that have come since, all 8,030 of them—have been a whole lifetime in one sense. It's an awfully solemn mood in which to write a letter, Mom, but I haven't lost the willingness to look at the humorous side of it. Like today—*of all days*—there's the rather determined effort of a German sniper to erase me from the company roster. Artillery and machine guns are never so personal as a persistent sniper. But it makes every fellow here play his real part and not just the part that he'd like to play. It's like you wrote, Mom, you talk your ethics and you live them, and then the day comes when you feel they ask too much. The beauty of it is that, when the going gets rough, the old creeds come shining through.

Everybody shares the same universals—hope, love, humor, faith.

Beat.

Pretty convinced I'm grown-up, ain't I, Mom? Well, I still count on your tucking me into bed when I get home. Love, Dick.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Twenty-five-year-old John Pohlman was working as a Peace Corps volunteer when he was drafted to fight in Vietnam. Three weeks after arriving in-country, he wrote to a close friend about his views on the war.

JOHN POHLMAN. *(He is more bemused than fearful or angry.)* Dear Carolyn: It would be interesting to know what you're expecting me to say. Either to confirm your suspicions that the army has made a conservative establishment tool out of me, or else to bolster your own anti-war feelings. I'm afraid you're going to get neither. My outlook has narrowed considerably in the last month since I arrived in Vietnam.

It doesn't make a bit of difference whether I feel the war is just or unjust, politically or morally. The fact is that I'm here, and will be for the next eleven months. *That* is my own very selfish, compulsive interest right now. Survival.

I developed this mental tunnel vision during a mortar attack the first night I was here. Something happens to your mind when you realize there are people out there trying to kill you. It doesn't matter that it isn't me but what I represent. When somebody shoots at me, I take it personally. It's a *weird* experience.

To be continued… Love and kisses, John.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Service members frequently downplayed the dangers they faced, but, all too often, the true hardships and perils couldn't be hidden.

Beat.

Three months after writing to his wife, George Rarey was shot down over France while providing air cover to Allied troops at Normandy. He did not survive, and the twenty-six-year-old pilot would never see or hold his newborn son.

Rarey exits.

Less than two weeks after writing to his mom, Dick Cowan and his unit were nearly surrounded by enemy soldiers in the Ardennes Forest.

They were ordered to pull back—but Cowan himself wouldn't budge. He single-handedly held his machine gun post against *eighty* attacking Germans and a tank so that his men could withdraw to safety. Because of this, Cowan, himself, wouldn't make it out alive. For his bravery, he posthumously received the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest military award.

Cowan exits.

And John Pohlman, who wrote to his friend Carolyn on the morning of April 15th, 1970, about just wanting to survive the next eleven months in Vietnam, was killed later that day.

Pohlman exits and Narrator/Carroll doesn't speak again until Pohlman is offstage.

Military restrictions, especially during World War I and II, prevented troops from confiding specific information about where they were or what they were doing, and their loved ones were careful about not asking too many questions. Instead, they often discussed everyday matters or exchanged idle gossip about friends and relatives.

Goldie and Ed Marcellus have entered by now. He is sitting with his feet propped up on a desk with a typewriter, and he is eating while reading a book. She is wearing an apron and stands facing the audience, but, in her case, she is not *holding a letter. One of the other male actors walks toward Ed with a stack of mail and drops a letter in Ed's lap, which he begins to read. After a moment, he places the letter in the typewriter. Goldie is cheerful and chatty, while Ed is terse. Although the letter does sound like a conversation, at no point should they seem to actually address one another. Goldie speaks the letter as Ed reads it on his typewriter and adds his remarks.*

GOLDIE MARCELLUS. Dear Husband: This is Saturday afternoon and I have the work all done and washing on the line.

ED MARCELLUS. *(Typing his reply then speaking it.)* Smart girl.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. It can't be determined exactly why Goldie Marcellus and her husband, Ed, a US Army clerk in Europe during World War I, settled on their unusual epistolary system. Possibly it was to save paper. Or Ed might simply have been a man

of few words. But whatever the reason, after receiving Goldie's lovingly handwritten correspondences, Ed would type his comments directly on her letters and then mail the pages back to her.

GOLDIE. I received a letter from Pearl. She is not well at all, poor girl. Your mother goes over to help her, and does the washing and ironing and baking—

To accelerate the pacing, Ed should start typing and speaking at the same time.

ED. and talking.

GOLDIE. I took your picture to church with me. You see, I just must have you with me that is all. Everyone thought you sure was a fine—

ED. Fat.

GOLDIE. —looking young man. And the preacher said, "Not only he, but he is the possessor of a nice-looking young wife."

Ed says/writes nothing.

I will look more pretty when you get home. Your picture stands in front of me this very moment. I just have to kiss that sweet face every time I look at you.
Well, I must stop a bragging on you for you might run away with some pretty girl over there. *(Beat, then nervously.)* Ha-Ha.

ED. There isn't any.

GOLDIE. Oh! It is mail time and I do want to get this in the box by 4:30. So I will have to close. I could write to you by the hours.
Take good care of yourself, and I will do the same. So bye-bye, my dear hubby, I enclose all my love for you.
From your ever, *ever*-loving wife, Goldie.

Beat.

ED. Ed.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. *Intentional* humor, not surprisingly, isn't very common, I discovered, in war letters. But for some service members, a little levity can help them cope with the stress of combat, and it was also an effective weapon against a persistent and age-old enemy: boredom.

ROBERT GUTTMAN. October 11th, 1990. Desert Shield. Dear Brudda: Can't say where I am exactly, loose lips and all that, but it's the place to be this season. Clear skies, bags of sun, temperatures in the low 110s. What more could anyone want?

Everybody who's anybody is here as well—all you have to do is listen to the VHF radiotelephone.

(British accent.) "This is the British warship calling the vessel four miles off my starboard beam. Be so good as to respond on Channel 16 or I shall reluctantly be compelled to blow you out of the water. Over."

(He takes a deep drag on a cigarette, tosses it on the floor, and squashes it out, and then says in a petulant French accent.) "Zees ees zee French warsheep calleeng zee sheep on mah port quar-tair. Eedenteefy yoursalf, ovair."

(British again.) "French warship be damned! I fly my sovereign's colours, and I'll not heave to for any snail-chewing, garlic-breathed swab of a frog. And Ye may lay to that! Over."

(Smiling and super friendly.) "Heyyyyyyyyy, this is the Canadian warship calling the vessel aboot— *(Looks off into the distance and gestures like he's completely guessing.)* three miles away from me. How's it going, eh?"

And then, of course, there are the Americans. The Americans don't actually speak English at all. They speak Navy.

(Without pausing and in a straightforward, monotone, almost bored voice.) "Merchant vessel on course three five two speed one seven this is Charlie Oscar US Navy warship three five zero zero yards bearing two five five relative what are your intentions regarding my unit over?"

This—*this*—to an Albanian Tanker, where there may be only one person onboard who even speaks English at all, and badly at that.

Well, in any case, you see that we don't lack for free entertainment. We have a couple of World War II veterans onboard, both merchant marines. They volunteered for this trip. After dodging U-Boats and kamikazes, they find this a bit of a yawner.

Give my best to everybody. Hope to see you soon.

Robert.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Thirteen years later, when US forces were once again in the Gulf region, an army sergeant named Sharon Allen emailed family members about her interactions with Kurdish troops serving with the Americans. On one particular occasion, the Kurds—during an impromptu campfire sing-along—had slightly, and understandably, misinterpreted a famous Beatles song.

SHARON ALLEN. July 2004. We work with a lot of Turks and Iraqis, especially the Kurds. One of our guys brought his guitar around to the guard shacks and played some music for them. Sometimes they'd try to join in. You haven't lived until you've seen a bunch of Kurdish soldiers, complete with AK-47s, sitting around and singing with gusto as they mangle the Beatles' "Let It Be."
"When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom…Little Pea."

Beat.

They *really* got into it.
"Little Pea, Little PEA! Little Pea, yeah, Little Pea…Whisper words of wisdom, Little Pea."
(Beat and then, almost wistfully.) That was a good day.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. The idea to travel the globe and collect war correspondences *from*—and not just *about*—other countries came, first, from another friend of mine. Connie Phelps. Connie asked me if I'd be interested in letters written to her parents, Lois and George, a World War II Navy captain, from an Austrian man named Gunter Leopold, with whom George had befriended during the war. I told Connie I would certainly be willing to read them, but I wasn't sure if I'd expand the scope of my mission to include foreign letters.
The real impetus to do just that came from an unexpected community: US veterans. They believed that to better understand our own wars, I needed to seek out letters from nations that had been our allies, and even our enemies. Many of these veterans were also simply curious to know what foreign troops had written during conflicts that involved the United States. And the more I considered it, the more I realized that it would be beneficial to visit the places around the world that I'd been reading about and see them for myself.
Except for the fact that I would focus only on countries in which

US troops had actively set foot and fought in, I had no strict criteria in mind when I set out on my search, but I wanted the letters I found to be as intimate, heartfelt, and candid as possible.

ANONYMOUS CANADIAN MALE SOLDIER #1. They're censoring our letters so I'll send this by civilian post, as I don't want some *fat son of a bitch* reading my mail.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Canada was my first stop. At their national archives in Ottawa, a staff member pulled out a file containing World War II letters between Canadian troops stationed in Great Britain and folks back on the home front.

ANONYMOUS CANADIAN MALE SOLDIER #2. I've always imagined the English army to be all military and neat, but they're really the sloppiest bunch I've ever seen. Just a bunch of bums. The slouchiest Canadian is tops compared to some of them.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Government censors read through the letters to make sure that nobody was divulging sensitive information. Or, negatively impacting morale.

ANONYMOUS CANADIAN WOMAN. *(Spoken, especially near the end, with a smile and in a slightly sarcastic, malicious tone; she is, obviously, the woman having the affair.)* Dear Mrs. Johnston: As you know, your husband is in love with another woman. I'm afraid it's kind of heavy, and I think that if you both want to be the happier, you will go your own way. I am writing this, just from what I myself have seen, and I know how your husband is with this woman. As a matter of fact, he can hardly get away enough to see her.

Beat.

Just a tip—from a friend.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Censors recognized the need for soldiers to vent, and they often grappled with the question of what was an acceptable, mild outburst and what was truly objectionable.

CANADIAN SOLDIER "FRED." By the Great God above, I hate the army worse than I hate anything. Mark my words, there will be a revolt or something of the kind before winter is over. Our rations have been cut twenty percent and heaven knows the boys don't get much to eat now. We are living in quarters that were condemned *years* ago.

If God and his almighty justice have anything to do with winning a war, I don't see how this army can do it—it's rotten and corrupt.

Having worked himself into a lather, the soldier takes a beat, and says the next line with almost exaggerated politeness.

Sooooooooooo…How's the weather where you are? It's cold and frosty here one night and raining the next. I sure don't like England, and what the hell Hitler wants this country for beats me. Jerry is making a mess over here, just wiping places out. But he hasn't dropped many bombs near us yet. I guess he knows he doesn't need to bother about us with the horse doctors we have. Several chaps have died of pneumonia already because the doc said they were not sick.

Guess I'll ring off for now. Write soon. Your loving brother, Fred.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. After visiting Canada and several other countries, I headed to Iraq and Afghanistan. A week before I arrived in Kabul, and again, this was early in the war, when the Taliban had been defeated and before their return to power, members of an al-Qaeda cell exploded a bomb behind the hotel I'd be staying in, the InterContinental. Fortunately nobody was hurt in the blast. I considered canceling my reservation but figured that the odds of the hotel being attacked again, in the very near future, were probably now lower, so I decided to stick to my itinerary.

I wrote an email to my family not to worry about the bombing in Kabul, and I also shared with them an incident in Baghdad that I thought was slightly amusing. After meeting with Ammar and his friends, I went to the airport to catch my return flight to Kuwait. We were scheduled to leave at 1500, but after four hours had passed, my fellow passengers and I were still waiting. To kill time, we were watching television when a reporter announced "breaking news" from Baghdad International Airport. We were *right there* in the terminal and all looked at one another, wondering what was going on.

A cargo plane, we found out, had been hit by a ground-to-air missile, and this was the first time the insurgents had brought down a plane. Incredibly, nobody was hurt—even with one wing on fire—the pilots were able to circle back to the airport and land safely.

But we were next in line and didn't know if the insurgents were still there, hiding and waiting for the next plane—*our* plane—to take off

and, this time, knowing exactly where to aim. I walked up to one of the soldiers at the operations desk and asked him if we were still flying out.

Sensing I was nervous, he looked at me and, in a calm voice, said, "Relax. You'll be in a C-130* completely filled with fuel and going relatively slowly at takeoff. So if you do get hit by a missile, it'll be over just like that."

I repeated this story in the email to my family, and I received a two-word response: "Not funny."

And to some degree, they were right. I knew there were risks from the start, but now they were becoming all too real. And one of the reasons I was writing in my journal was in case the worst did happen to me, someone might find it and there would, at least, be a record of all that I had seen and done.

When I told the hotel clerk in Afghanistan that I planned to walk around Kabul by myself, "No, no," he said. "Too dangerous."

But I had come this far, so I decided to venture out anyway. The weather was gorgeous, the sky an endless sheet of blue cellophane. I went to one coffeehouse after another and struck up conversations with anyone willing to talk. Eventually, I was introduced to an Afghan woman whose father had been sent, unjustly, by the Taliban to one of the country's most notorious prisons that was later closed down. She had gone to the site and wrote to relatives about her visit.

MASO MOHAMADI. On Friday I went for a drive to Pul-e-charki, the place where my father had been imprisoned for eight months. Close to 60,000 men were here, many of them killed. The prison is in the middle of a dusty field, and if you look out you see huge dents in the ground from the mass graves. They are slowly rebuilding the prison but I wish they'd make a memorial instead. I think it would be healing for those people whose family members disappeared in the surrounding fields. Much love, Maso.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Later, I met an American officer named Kathy McConkey, who shared with me an email that she'd written to her family soon after arriving in Afghanistan, and, again, this was early in the war, when there were approximately 80,000 US service members there.

* Pronounced: See one thirty

KATHY McCONKEY. April 1, 2003. Hello everyone. My time here is like nothing I can describe. On Saturday a Special Forces team went into a village to meet with the leader to discuss humanitarian aid. They were ambushed. One soldier died in flight and the other shortly after arriving. The third went through extensive surgery and woke up during the night. He tearfully asked for his friends. His commander told him, "They did their duty," and he understood. The Special Forces teams sat with their dead comrades for *hours* in our triage area.

I hope everyone is doing well at home. I appreciate your emails. You'd be surprised at how the little things mean so much.

Love, Kathy.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Although my selection process was, admittedly, a subjective one, I did have specific topics I wanted to cover. At a World War I museum in Belgium, for instance, I had hoped to locate letters that mentioned gas attacks, machine guns, tanks, submarines, and airplanes, all of which were relatively new to warfare in 1914.

One of the curators asked her colleague, "Should we show him the letter by the sexually frustrated World War I German housewife?" He thought for a moment and replied, "I don't think that's quite what he's looking for." Immediately, I turned to him and said, "No, no, no. I'd, I'd actually be *very* interested, *(Tempers his enthusiasm a bit.)* or, you know, I wouldn't be opposed to seeing the letter by the sexually frustrated World War I German housewife." They handed me a translated version, and, while it wasn't exactly "the letter" or "incredible forgotten story" I was scouring the globe to find, it was definitely a keeper.

> *To accentuate her entrance and create an element of suspense, "Mrs. S." can be heard walking in loud, hard-soled boots even before she is seen. She is dressed in dowdy farmers' clothes, enters upstage, goes all the way downstage, stands proudly straight up, and speaks very businesslike.*

MRS. S. January 2nd, 1917. Dear Leader of the Company: I, the signer below, have a request to make of you. Although my husband has only been in the field for four months, I would like to ask you to grant him a leave of absence, namely—because of our physical

relationship. I would like to have my husband at least once for the satisfaction of my natural desires.

She speaks slowly and through clenched teeth.

I just—can't live—like this—anymore.

She regains her composure.

I would like to ask you very kindly to grant my request.
I will then be able to carry on until we are victorious. With all reverence. Mrs. S.

She gives a quick, respectful nod, clicks her boot heels, and marches back offstage.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. For the record, the leave was not granted. And to be fair, references to sexual matters weren't unheard of in letters from our own wars, even those dating back to the eighteen hundreds.

UNION SOLDIER JOHN N. *(His tone is more matter-of-fact than outraged, but he's clearly peeved.)* March 27th, 1863. Dear Mr. Lincoln: When this war broke out I went right in, I did, and fought and bled for the Cause and left my wife, and when I came home on furlough last month, I found out that she had been diddling other men. And I would like to have a discharge for she diddles all the time. And she has got the clap, which I now have got too. And I want a discharge for when I get well. If for me you will do as I say, I for you will pray. Yours truly and affectionately.
John N.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. In this case the leave *was* approved.
As my travels around the world continued, I had assumed that the correspondences I uncovered would accentuate deep cultural differences. The opposite was turning out to be true. Whether it was a letter by a child pleading to an aunt during the *nine-hundred-day* siege of Leningrad—

SOVIET CHILD. Oh Aunt Natasha, Galia and I have lived through so much in this war. Bombings, hunger, epidemics. In January we buried Mommy. Galia and I are alone together. Oh Aunt Natasha, please come soon.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. —or an eleven-year-old Iraqi in Baghdad, sixty years later, who also wrote to an aunt—

IRAQI CHILD. I need you to help us move from here because we are dying. The other day there was a bomb blast in front of my school, and I almost got killed. For the sake of our family, please save us.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. —or the wife of a Confederate soldier in the American Civil War assuring her husband that their young children had not forgotten him—

CIVIL WAR WIFE. Harvey calls your name, Pap Pap Pap, a hundred times in a day. Willie says he won't kiss me but will kiss you when you come home.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. —or the wife of a South Vietnamese officer writing to her husband from Saigon a hundred years later—

VIETNAMESE WIFE. Tram speaks of you all day. She misses you so much that she refuses to let anybody sit in your dinner chair, and at night she tosses and turns. The children and I send you many kisses.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. —the emotions were timeless. If the letters were stripped of their names, dates, and addresses, it would be almost impossible to distinguish between wars and nationalities. What also surprised me was the number of stories that involved innocent civilians.

Mrs. Myatt enters with Mr. Myatt, who does not and will not say anything, and the two of them walk onstage lovingly holding hands. Both are smiling and happy.

Over the past one hundred years, more *non*-combatants have died in wartime than soldiers. Fifty million individuals—the vast majority of them civilians—perished in World War II alone. That's 25,000 men, women, and children killed, on average, *every day* for six years.

MRS. MYATT. Dearest Beryl: This is our second letter to you since you set out on your big adventure, and we suppose you were very surprised when you arrived at Auntie Emmie's to find a letter waiting for you! We will send them each week.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. On top of this were the hundreds of millions of people wounded or sent fleeing from their homes as refugees.

MRS. MYATT. We expect you enjoyed your voyage across the wide Atlantic. How would you like to be a nurse on a big ocean liner when you grow up, dear?

NARRATOR/CARROLL. When the Luftwaffe began its relentless bombing raids on London and other British cities in July 1940, parents frantically sought to have their children sheltered in the countryside or, even better, taken to safer nations. The parents of nine-year-old Beryl Myatt were thrilled to learn that their daughter had received a visa to leave England on the passenger ship *SS City of Benares*[*] and stay with relatives in Winnipeg. But traveling alone to a new home thousands of miles away was a frightening experience for a young girl, so the Myatts airmailed a happy, loving letter to greet Beryl when she arrived in North America.

MRS. MYATT. Now, sweetheart, don't forget what we told you. Show Auntie and Uncle that you really appreciate the opportunity they have given you to have a holiday in one of the most interesting countries in the world. You remember the photograph you had taken at Christchurch school? Well, Mummy wants to know if you'd like us to send it on to you.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. What the Myatts didn't know was that just four days after it had set sail, the *SS City of Benares* was spotted by a German U-boat.

MRS. MYATT. The weather here is still fairly nice. What kind of weather are you having? Please give our love to Auntie and Uncle, and when you write, you must tell us all about what you are doing.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. The sub fired its torpedoes on the unarmed ship, and 260 passengers, approximately eighty of them children, burned to death in the fire or drowned in the sea.

MRS. MYATT. With tons of love and heaps of kisses. God bless you. Mummy and Daddy.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Nine-year-old Beryl Myatt was among the dead.

The Myatts, still cheerful and completely unaware of their daughter's fate, leave the stage.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill denied that the firebombing of Dresden was revenge for these types of German attacks on civilians, especially at Coventry, which was nearly wiped off the face of the

* Pronounced: ben-AIR-is

earth by the Luftwaffe and suffered thousands of casualties. But Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris was defiantly unsympathetic:

SIR ARTHUR HARRIS. *(He is stern but reserved and not over-emotional.)* The Nazis entered this war under the rather childish delusion that they were going to bomb everyone else, and nobody was going to bomb them. At Rotterdam, London, Warsaw, and half a dozen other places, they put their rather naïve theory into operation. They sowed the wind, and now they are going to reap the whirlwind.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. The whirlwind descended on Dresden, Germany, the night of February 13th, 1945—less than three months before the war in Europe was over—and lasted for fifteen hours. Allied warplanes carpeted the city with incendiary bombs, and Dresden was soon engulfed in an ocean of flames.

HANS SCHRÖTER. *(Shröter is so emotionally cauterized by what he has seen and experienced that there is almost a lifeless quality to his letter, though small bursts of emotion reveal themselves.)* Dear Mrs. Ganze: I only just received your letter with its sad contents—my belated, heartfelt sympathy to you. But so many are experiencing the same. Fate's turn was the worst for me, and I don't have an interest in living any longer.

Saturday and Sunday evening I was at Marienstrasse 38 through 42. During the attack, the door of number 38 was destroyed, so only the emergency exit was left.

When I ran out, I saw my wife and son standing in Marienstrasse so helplessly, but I had an older aunt from Liegnitz, and I wanted to save her, so I said to my wife, "I'll be back in *two minutes*."

But when we returned in just that amount of time, my loved ones had disappeared. I searched for them in the cellar and on the street, but they were nowhere to be found. Everything was in flames. Everywhere were burned bodies.

I went with great haste to my home only to find my loves laying on the street so peaceful, as if they were sleeping.

Beat.

I believe you can imagine what I have been through since then. Yours, Hans Schröter.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Ironically, a group of American prisoners of war being held in Dresden lived through the firestorm virtually unscathed.
One of these POWs, a twenty-two-year-old private first class named Kurt Vonnegut, wrote to his family back in Indiana on May 29th, 1945.

KURT VONNEGUT. Dear people, I've been a prisoner of war since December 19th, 1944, when our division was cut to ribbons by Hitler's last desperate thrust through Luxembourg. The other American divisions on our flanks managed to pull out. We were obliged to stay and fight. Well, the supermen marched us, without food, water, or sleep to Limberg, a distance of about sixty miles. From there we were shipped to a Dresden work camp.
I was their leader by virtue of the little German I spoke. It was our misfortune to have sadistic and fanatical guards. After trying to improve our situation for two months and having been met with bland smiles, I told the guards just what I was going to do to them when the Russians came.

Beat, then a wry smile.

They beat me up a little, and I was fired as group leader. On about February 14th the Americans came over, followed by the RAF. Their combined labors killed 250,000 people in twenty-four hours and destroyed all of Dresden—possibly the world's most beautiful city.

Beat.

But not me. After that we were put to work carrying corpses from air-raid shelters. Civilians cursed us and threw rocks as we carried bodies to huge funeral pyres in the city. When General Patton took Leipzig*, we were evacuated on foot to Hellendorf. On that happy day the Russians were intent on mopping up isolated resistance in our sector. Their planes strafed and bombed us, killing fourteen.

Beat.

But not me. I'm writing from a Red Cross Club, and I can't receive mail here so don't write.
Love, Kurt Jr.

* Pronounced: Lipe-zuhg

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



In order to protect our associated authors against copyright infringement, this free sample is not complete.

TO PURCHASE THE FULL TEXT, AND TO OBTAIN PERFORMANCE RIGHTS, GO TO

www.playscripts.com