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PASSING FROM MEMORY – AN
ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN
SERVICEMEN’S LETTERS: KOREA 1950-
1953

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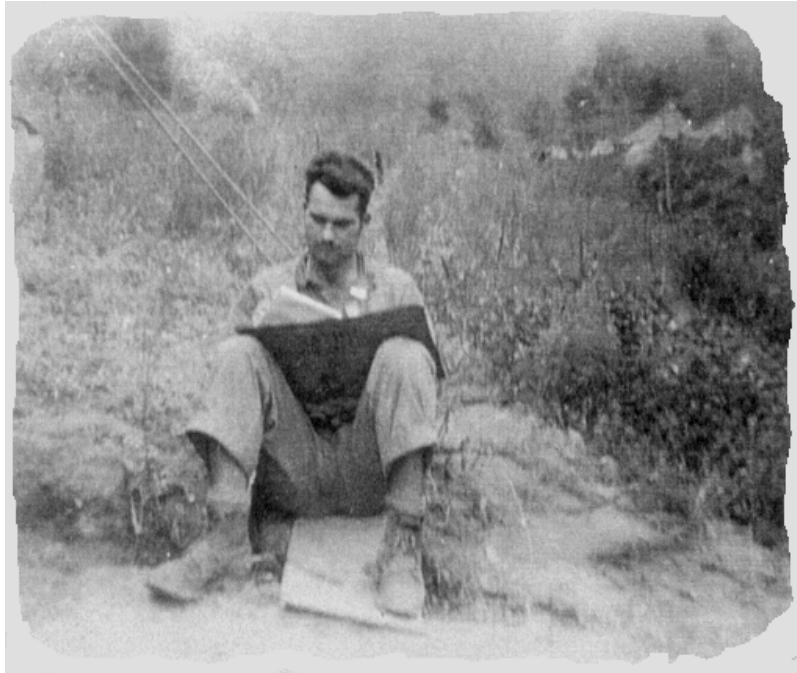


Figure 1 Harold Mulhausen - Somewhere in Korea, Summer, 1951

“My wife wrote almost every day...she wrote about the family, what she was doing, about our life when I return, what was happening around the city, and our love for each other...”¹

¹ Harold Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

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INTRODUCTION

“I know they have called this just a Korean Police Action, but I am over here and I say this is in no way just a Military Police Action, this is war and before it is over it may dam well prove to be one hell of a war.”²

“...a letter arrived at my parents home addressed to me...Someone told me it was from my Uncle Sam. Now I don't have an Uncle Sam. I do have uncles Pat, Mickey, Larry, George, Glen, and two Howard's, but no Uncle Sam...After my first joy had subsided I finished the letter – ‘You have been drafted.’ With that the smile left my face.”³

Thousands of drafted Americans were introduced to the Korean War by an innocuous letter from Uncle Sam. It was a letter that initiated their involvement in the Twentieth Century's third most costly war in terms of casualties, after World Wars One and Two. From 25 June 1950, when well-trained and equipped North Korean troops attacked South Korea across the 38th Parallel, until 27 July 1953, when the armistice was signed at Panmunjom, the Korean peninsula raged. Under United Nations auspices, the United States was to lose some 36,576⁴ men in those three years, a figure narrowly outstripped by the nation's losses in Vietnam over a period of more than a decade. The US troops were engaged against North Korean and Chinese forces in a “justified and necessary” war; defending a country that clearly wanted to be defended.⁵

James Webb has declared that during those three years, the Korean War consumed America's emotional and intellectual energies as well as the blood and sacrifice of its citizens.⁶ Only the latter part of his observation rings true. The American reliance upon ‘all or nothing’ Jacksonianism, and the ‘insistence that what really makes wars memorable is their lasting impact upon national *domestic* development’⁷ have marginalised the Korean War. Henry Pruitt summarises this – “You know, there

² Charles Morrow, ‘Somewhere in Korea’, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

³ Denney Kelley, in *Korea, Korea*, Hank Nicol (ed.), email 11 August 2005

⁴ Department of Defense statistic. <http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/casualties/index.htm>. Accessed 5 June 2005

⁵ William J. Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p.25

⁶ James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), p.300

⁷ Allan Millet, ‘Introduction to the Korean War’ in *The Journal of Military History Vol 65 No 4* (2001), p.923

wasn't any reaction one way or the other over my return. Nobody was particularly upset about the Korean War".⁸

The letters written by the American men that served in the Korean War are valuable historical documents. They offer insights into personal experiences that have been forgotten, marginalised or ignored by American society. Deeply moving, they are the truly felt history of the Korean War. This study of Korean War letters has been mainly based upon contact made with surviving veterans. Any general conclusions are applicable to this source and must not necessarily be applied to Korean War letters as a whole. The most frequently occurring themes in the letters studied for this dissertation will be analysed – combat, the Korean people, weather and 'home'. Alongside this will be an analysis of the letter-writing process in Korea and brief mention of themes less frequently addressed – pay and "Police Action." Certainly, other subjects were written of; love letters were common, though their value is obviously mainly personal. Spelling and grammar have been left in their irregular glory. Just as the soldiers' handwriting and the letter's folds and stains add lively authenticity, so too do the idiosyncrasies of the author bring him closer to us.

CHAPTER 1 – LETTER-WRITING PROCESS

"Letters make a big difference to the fellow or gal on the ground. I doubt that you can quantify the value but it is there."⁹

"Most of my spare time was spent writing letters."¹⁰

In an analysis of Korean War letters, of equal importance with the letters' contents is an illumination of the letter-writing process itself. It is wrong to ignore this aspect, which upon first reflection appears staid and dry. This includes identification of the letters' recipients, the time lapse between sending and receiving, the writing materials employed, and the frequency with which the letters were sent. These elements are rich and varied, woven from a skein of personal circumstance.

⁸ Henry Pruitt, in Frank Pruitt (ed.), *Delayed Letters from Korea* (1st Books, 2002), p.387

⁹ Stanley Jones, questionnaire answers

¹⁰ Franklin Lyon, questionnaire answers

1.1 – RECIPIENTS

Upon analysis, a hierarchy of recipients becomes evident, the template of which can be transposed onto almost all correspondence from soldiers who wrote home. For the married serviceman, letters to his wife are always paramount, then letters to his parents, and finally letters to family and friends – “I wrote to my wife usually every day or two; to parents every week to 10 days...to sisters, other relatives and a few friends occasionally.”¹¹ For the unmarried soldier, parents were in the ascendancy, usually above a girlfriend if there was one, then family and friends. For many other soldiers, parents or wives were the only recipients – “I usually wrote only to my father.”¹²

The above generalisation identifies a trend rather than a rule. Recipients could be as varied as the personal world the soldier had left behind. An example of this is the letters sent by Franklin Lyon. His address in Korea had been placed in his local newspaper in Missouri. The result was a deluge of mail both to and from Lyon – “Many people wrote to me...and I tried to answer all. Some people I knew and some I didn’t.”¹³ On occasion, even total strangers could receive letters from Korea.

This hierarchy of recipients possessed a dual purpose. Not only was the author’s wish of contacting his recipient fulfilled, but also in many cases a wider audience was reached. The author was often aware of his recipient’s ability to percolate important information down his chain of contacts. From just one letter, a whole network of correspondents could be informed and the soldier would be saved the task of repeating himself to more people in more letters –

“My wife stayed about a half mile from my folks so she could stop and tell them if anything was important.”¹⁴

“My wife was living with my mother so she read my letters to my wife too.”¹⁵

¹¹ Philip Tiemann, questionnaire answers

¹² Anon., questionnaire answers

¹³ Lyon, questionnaire answers

¹⁴ Lawrence Towne, questionnaire answers

¹⁵ Harold Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

1.2 – TIME LAPSE

Correspondence during the Korean War did not possess the immediacy that is possible with contemporary war correspondence. An email can be sent from Bosnia or Iraq one moment and be read by its recipient the next. Although such immediacy was not available during the Korean War, its participant's contact with America was efficient and effective – “mail thru the Army Postal Service was speedy and no snags [were] encountered in either direction.”¹⁶ (One should note however that letters from Korea enjoy a form of intimacy that emails struggle to reach. Beyond the content of the letters, personalities are intimated in the handwriting, and the cold and phlegmatic monitor or printout has none of the ‘life’ and authenticity of the irregular damage, rips, dirt or stains of real letters). Most servicemen could expect their letter to arrive at its destination approximately one week after they posted it – “The fastest a letter would travel in either direction was 7 days.”¹⁷ Indeed, the assiduous mother of Robert Graham noted a ‘received on’ date on every letter she received from her son, the average lag being seven days. Interestingly therefore, the cultural and spatial dislodgement experienced by American servicemen in Korea was not replicated in the time it took for them to contact home.

1.3 – MATERIALS

The soldier is silent without the materials necessary to write home. Where possible, the U.S. Armed Services employ a precise methodology, and letter writing is no exception. Generally, letters from Korea were written on “standard paper” and placed in “standard envelopes.”¹⁸ It was the soldier himself who produced the deviation from the anonymous and regulated. The vast majority of mail, coming and going, was written on air letters, sheets of blue paper with tabs that were glued shut by licking.¹⁹ In many cases, the writer had ready access to all the materials required for writing home. Marvin Myers was especially fortunate, for in his work of typing correspondence for the Division Adjutant, he “always had paper, pencil and most of

¹⁶ William Burns, questionnaire answers

¹⁷ Jones, questionnaire answers

¹⁸ Robert Graham, interview 14 August 2005

¹⁹ Nicol(ed.), *Korea, Korea*, email 11 August 2005

the time a typewriter at [his] disposal.”²⁰ However, there were other servicemen, usually on the front line, much less able to contact home so easily and frequently. Korea was a war of unpredictable fluctuations, and like the soldiers themselves, writing materials were at their mercy. One soldier could write “only if envelopes were available, which was not always the case.”²¹ A shortage of stationery was a problem on the front lines but could be solved through resourcefulness— “In a letter on 7 April [1952] I wrote that we had been able to beg 300 sheets of paper and envelopes from the Chaplain for a company of 310 men.”²² An even more ingenious solution was found when this supply was exhausted – “Several men used a panel from a C-ration box; they wrote their message on one side, put the address on the other side with “free” for postage and sent it off as a type of postcard.”²³ Such ingenuity suggests the importance contacting home held in the lives of these men.

1.4 - FREQUENCY

A lack of materials was just one of many factors affecting the frequency with which contact was made with home. Other external factors could render the letter writer unable to write as often as he may have liked. The most frequent of these was combat. The daily dangers of war meant contacting home was simply not possible. Harold Mulhausen was in Korea forty-five days before he wrote even his first letter because he was “at the ‘Chosin’ and there was no way to get letters out.”²⁴ Letter frequency often directly correlated with the ‘temperature’ of the war – “I wrote in spurts when able, depending on mission priorities.”²⁵ Periods of inactivity had to be rapaciously seized upon, for writing could soon be impossible – “I wrote more often when in reserve, and less often when on the line and in action.”²⁶ Nonetheless, even combat could not stop the most assiduous and determined of writers all the time. Dug in and awaiting the approaching Chinese, Bob Spiroff wrote – “I don’t know when I’ll be able to mail this letter. I won’t hardly have time to write it. I’ll have to hurry.”²⁷

²⁰ Marvin “Jimmy” Myers, email 8 July 2005

²¹ Anon., questionnaire answers

²² Jack Parchen, questionnaire answers

²³ Op. cit.

²⁴ Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

²⁵ Bud Farrell, questionnaire answers

²⁶ Parchen, questionnaire answers

²⁷ Bob Spiroff, Outpost-Dug-in around hill, to ‘My Dearest darling Wife’ (Cassie Spiroff), 3 January 1951, 9.30am. <http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/index.htm>.

A further external factor is revealed in the letters of Dudley J. Hughes. His almost daily ritual of writing to his wife could not be interrupted by combat or lack of material, but only by an officious and zealous superior – “I missed writing you yesterday because the colonel doesn’t like to catch anyone writing letters!”²⁸

Despite the pressure exerted by these factors, it was the letter writer himself who was the prime determinant of the pace of contact with home. Many made a “conscious decision to write as often as possible.”²⁹ Officially, keeping a diary was frowned upon because of concern that its secrets might fall into enemy hands. However, regular correspondence could act as a substitute for the memorialising diary. Furthermore, the letter home is a proof-of-life statement and the more frequently it arrives, the less worry will accumulate at home. The severing of this link, if only for a week, could trigger frantic letters from concerned loved ones. The mother of Marvin “Jimmy” Myers employed a cunning emotional blackmail to ensure her son would write frequently. Before he left for Korea, Myers had to promise “Even if it’s just a postcard, Jimmy, write me at least once a week to let me know you are all right.”³⁰ Myers was to write more than 200 pages of letters to his parents during his time in Korea! “I continued writing, almost every day, even when there was nothing to report, in keeping with the promise to my mother.”³¹ A promise is a promise.³²

Such frequent writing – “I wrote to my wife usually every day or two”³³ - was certainly not invariable. A more steady and regular pace was also adopted. This was not always a premeditated decision, but rather can be explained by the personal experiences of the letter writer - “My time was boring, [there was] not too much to write.”³⁴ The attitudes toward writing home were also vital – “I was lazy. I was a terrible letter writer.”³⁵

Finally there are those servicemen who never wrote home, or only on extremely rare occasions. Crucially, this concerns the recipient as much as the sender. A letter needs a reader. The soldier who received a lot of mail was usually the soldier who wrote an

²⁸ Dudley Hughes, to Robbie Hughes, 14 March 1953, in Dudley Hughes, *Wall of Fire – A Diary of the Third Korean Winter Campaign* (Oregon: Hellgate Press, 2003), p.143

²⁹ Tiemann, questionnaire answers

³⁰ Myers, email 8 July 2005

³¹ Myers, email 12 August 2005

³² Myers, email 8 July 2005

³³ Tiemann, questionnaire answers

³⁴ Robert Graham, questionnaire answers

³⁵ Hank Nicol, questionnaire answers

equal amount. The reverse of this is also true – “I wrote home only when I received a letter.”³⁶ It would be folly indeed to write home if there was nobody willing or able to write back. “I received only 2 letters and 1 package from home and responded only to one letter writer and the package sender (same person) during my year in combat in Korea.”³⁷

CHAPTER 2 - COMBAT

“You asked for color – if most of it happened to be hemoglobin red, it wasn’t because I wanted it that way.”³⁸

Korea marked a watershed in the writing of war letters in that letters home were free from the censor’s critical eye that had been present during World War Two. On the whole letters were more graphic than those of World War Two as the GI was given *carte blanche* on his content – a decision that could blanch the face of his readers. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of letters still simply ignored the dangers of war – “My letters sounded like I was on a Boy Scout camping trip, having fun.”³⁹ There is a correlation between the detail and embellishment of descriptions of combat and death, and their intended recipients. Almost always, the recipient was someone who could empathise with these harrowing and stressful accounts. When writing to friends, Bill Burns’ letters adopted a “more macho”⁴⁰ posture, and Bud Farrell would mention “some detail regarding losses to friends but not family.”⁴¹ Only family members who could understand what the author was going through were privy to this information – usually a father or brother who had experience in the services. Jack Parchen gave “relatively detailed descriptions of where I was, what my command was like (including company and platoon positions)” to his father, himself a soldier in World War One and “somewhat of an armchair adventurer.”⁴² John Harper also detailed small unit actions and casualty information, including his own, to his father – a World War Two Lieutenant Colonel.

³⁶ Anon, questionnaire answers

³⁷ David McDonald, email 13 May 2005

³⁸ Lt. John W. Harper, to Father, 24 September 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_harper.htm.

³⁹ Hughes, *Wall of Fire*, p.114

⁴⁰ Burns, questionnaire answers

⁴¹ Farrell, questionnaire answers

⁴² Parchen, questionnaire answers

The style of the Korean War is reflected in a phrase that has become a mainstay in letters describing combat. The bugle charges, ebbs and flows, profligate loss of life and sporadic zeniths and nadirs of combat action – “the attack seemed to end as quickly as it started”⁴³ – combined to cause its prolific use: “All hell broke loose.” When the serviceman chose to elaborate upon this assessment, compelling and graphic accounts could rise to the surface of this bloodied pool. In a letter written to his mother in August 1950, a woman one must assume of great composure, Donald Luedtke composed a relentless and graphic report of the battle of Taejon. His scope in recounting this dramatic event is impressive and harrowing as Luedtke bounds from trauma to trauma; drivers are shot through the head and graphic detail is given of a wounded GI – “blood coming out of both sides of his head, nose and mouth.”⁴⁴ Luedtke even stresses to his mother just how close he came to perishing himself. Bob Hammond adopts a similar literary style in a letter to his father recounting the brutal fighting at the Chosin Reservoir. Here, Hammond informs his father tersely “we were masecured”, before providing a graphic illustration of it – “Machine gun slugs tore thru the ambulance killing a G.I. and a Captain sitting across from me...My pants leg was ripped wide open and I saw my leg was a mass of dried blood.”⁴⁵

A stylistic detail, present in both letters, is the placatory note at the end of each. After divulging information that could cause nothing but consternation, both letters end similarly. Luedtke’s “Never worry about me, they can’t get the best of a man from Nebraska”⁴⁶ is replicated by Hammond’s almost jaunty finale – “But, I’m okay now and I feel great. Don’t worry about me.”⁴⁷ The reasoning for this could be that in the process of writing these letters, both men have been absorbed in a cathartic outpouring of emotion – “GIs that lost their friends probably wrote about it to share and help overcome their sorrow.”⁴⁸ Following Freudian doctrine, they have relived the trauma in an attempt to exorcise it.⁴⁹ Once this necessary process has finished, the

⁴³ Jim Hein reminisces in Hank Nicol (ed.) *Christmas in July*.

<http://www.northcoast.com/~dogface/xmas/chpt3.html>. Accessed 9 August 2005

⁴⁴ Pfc. Donald Luedtke, to Mother, Arcadia, Nebraska, 20 August 1950, in Andrew Carroll (ed.), *War Letters* (New York; Scribner, 2001), p.325

⁴⁵ Pvt. Bob Hammond, Osaka Army Hospital, to Father, Henderson, Nevada, 7 December 1950, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.335

⁴⁶ Luedtke, to Mother, 20 August 1950, in Carroll (ed.) *War Letters*, p.327

⁴⁷ Hammond, to father, 7 December 1950, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.336

⁴⁸ Franklin Lyon, email 17 August 2005

⁴⁹ Professor Donald Miller, LaFayette College, Pennsylvania. Guest Lecture at Glasgow University, 8 March 2005

authors are snapped back to reality with an apologetic shrug of the shoulders and continue in a style more expected in letters to parents.

Thomas O'Connell's letter to a friend reporting an intense battle along the 17th Parallel in July 1953 gives these graphic accounts added purpose. Its cathartic function is evident, yet O'Connell includes such gory information primarily to warn. The carnage of the scene and O'Connell's genuine revulsion at it is encapsulated succinctly, yet perfectly – "Boy that was really slaughter here, I never saw anything like it...I stepped on something soft, & I felt, & it was a man's stomach...That whole hill stinks something terrible all over with dead bodies. I never hope to see anything like this again."⁵⁰ First hand experience of the carnage, and his response to it, means that one is forced to heed, and respect, the authority of O'Connell's heartfelt commination – "Write, & what ever you do, don't come up here, you might get to see some action, but it's not worth it...Boy, I can't get out of this hell hole over here fast enough."⁵¹ Jack Train Jr., advising a friend's younger brother against enlisting, picks up O'Connell's baton with similar urgency – "...it's no fun dodging bullets and artillery shells, never knowing from day to day whether you'll ever see your home, family or parents again – no, it's a Hell on earth, and you'd be a lot wiser to spare yourself from it."⁵² Paradoxically therefore, just as those who omitted accounts of combat and death did so primarily to protect loved ones, often those who included such traumas did so for the same reason.

To be sure, however, most of the letters that dwell on combat or death do so sparingly and with much less fervour than the examples cited above. When reported at all, traumatic incidents are usually compressed into concise aloof statements, for "it was hard to tell them what I was experiencing – they would not understand – nor should they."⁵³ This conscious refusal to divulge upsetting information did not always equate to its complete absence in letters home. Rather, universal techniques were employed to convey the horrors of war in a manner palatable to the reader. The most frequent of these were white lies, understatement, and a mere recognition of disturbing situations without any further embroidery. In a letter to his father on 30 May 1951, Marvin Myers informed his father of "A couple of the boys who were

⁵⁰ Thomas O'Connell, to 'Dick' 12 July 1953.
<http://www.uwm.edu/Library/arch/Warletters/korea/Oconl.jpg>.

⁵¹ Op. cit.

⁵² Pfc. Jack Train Jr., to Kathie Thompson, 29 May 1953, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.365

⁵³ Towne, questionnaire answers

hit...One boy had gotten it through the back but was doing all right.”⁵⁴ In subsequent reminiscence, Myers admits, “Even though I told my dad the marine was doing all right my gut feeling at the time was that the wound was inoperable.”⁵⁵ Myers consciously straddles the boundary of veracity, truthfully reporting the incidence of the casualty, yet withholding its true impact to protect his father. Bob Spiroff, writing to his wife on 11 December 1950 adopts a different technique to achieve the same end – “The past two weeks have been nightmares – simply hell. I could never begin to explain just what happened.”⁵⁶ Although Spiroff does not, or can not, embellish beyond simply accepting that he has been through hell, this is still a deviation from the usual line adopted in the overwhelming majority of letters home – “I never talked about the bad things, blood and guts...I never talked about the war.”⁵⁷ Spiroff may not be illuminating upon the “bad things, blood and guts”, but he is certainly ‘talking about the war’ in a manner that forces the reader to accept their existence. Joe Sammarco achieves a similar outcome, using the same technique, when reporting the battle of Chipyeong-ni to his wife. When the Chinese broke into the house and killed his Buddy he “got over being scared.” After that “I don’t know what happened...except that as the sun started to come up there were several hundred dead & wounded Chinese all over the place.”⁵⁸ Sammarco’s memory of the incident may well have been incomplete, or he may have been intentionally sparing his wife. Either way, the outcome is the same – Bobbie Sammarco has been informed of the battle, yet in a sanitised monochromic manner, precisely the way her husband intended.

2.1 – MORTALITY

Passages concerning combat are often accompanied by an assessment of the soldier’s own mortality. Allan Galfund considers his mortality, and its precarious nature, after being “banzaied” on just his first night on the line – “...it sure makes you sweat when you feel that it may be over any day and you have to risk your life

⁵⁴ Marvin Myers, Chun-ni, Korea, to Father, 30 May 1951

⁵⁵ Myers, email 8 July 2005

⁵⁶ Spiroff, Sunchon, Korea, to Cassie (wife), 11 December 1950. <http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/index.htm>.

⁵⁷ Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

⁵⁸ SSgt Joe Sammarco, to Bobbie (wife), 22 February 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.344

needlessly.”⁵⁹ Others regarded their existence with an austere reliance upon an uncomplicated logic. Charles Morrow simply and coolly declares, “...it is kill or be killed.”⁶⁰ This rational and calculated assessment of mortality is reiterated in the following close escape for John Wheeler - “Good thing it didn’t go all of the way in or I would have come home sooner than anticipated, in a pine box.”⁶¹ These soldiers have not been blasé in blindly welcoming the inevitability of their death, but rather have accepted the possibility of it. Clarence Schuster, in a letter to his parents, illuminates this theme further – “...it was his first patrol, he got killed last night, he was just 1 day up here on lines as they say, when a guy’s time is up it’s up.”⁶²(underline added). They have become soldiers of fortune at the whim of a greater, intangible force. Certainly however, they do not embrace their impotence, as Schuster continues – “Guess that’s no way to look at it tho.”⁶³ Crucially, Schuster does not dwell or expand upon the death of the soldier. No deeper emotional response is offered and just one line later he is frivolously (in comparison) lamenting not owning a car. One can assume that Schuster almost felt guilty for divulging the information of the soldier’s death and quickly attempted to rectify the situation with more light-hearted, generic content. This reluctance to divulge emotional insights is a prominent theme in many letters home concerning death and combat. When an emotional response is volunteered, the soldier is revealed as a human and a personality, contrary to widely perceived qualities of an efficient soldier. Bob Hammond felt impotent and useless - “I watched a good buddy of mine die of wounds and lack of medicine. I cried, I felt so utterly helpless.”⁶⁴ Hammond’s tears were not only for the death of his friend but also one suspects because of his frustration at being wholly unable to prevent it. The acceptance of fate that pervades the previous letters is replaced with anger. Just as Hammond was rudely reminded of his powerlessness, so too was the anonymous author of the following passage. Again tears flow for the death of a GI, yet this soldier cries for the loss of innocence - “Gosh

⁵⁹ Allan Galfund, ‘at the Iron Triangle’, to Col. Rosengren, 2? July 1951.

<http://www.uwm.edu/Library/arch/Warletters/korea/Ag3.jpg>,

⁶⁰ Morrow, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

⁶¹ John Wheeler, Japan, to Father, 8 May 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.330

⁶² Clarence Schuster, in Korea, to ‘Dear Folks and Family’, 12 October 1952. http://e27marines-1stmardiv.org/letters_to_home/clarence_schuster.htm.

⁶³ Op. cit.

⁶⁴ Hammond, to father, 7 December 1950, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.335

he could have been anyone of the gang from home. Anyway, he was some mother's son."⁶⁵

In war letters, the most explicit manifestation of a soldier's recognition of his own mortality comes in the form of the letter he has written "In Case of Accident". Bob Spiroff wrote such a letter to his wife in October 1950, whilst resting during a dangerous mission. Spiroff's letter is not self-indulgent, nor does he display resentment for his service in Korea. Rather, it is an emotionally rousing letter that thanks his wife for her love and implores her not to pine her life away, but to find love with another man. Spiroff's faith offers him solace and explanation for his imagined demise, again revealing subordination to a higher power outwith the soldiers control; simple honest acceptance – "Just think of me as someone that you knew long ago – and remember that it's God's will that we had to part."⁶⁶

2.2 - KILLING

"There is no greater love than a man who is willing to lay down his life for others, I am willing to do this but in doing so I will be fighting back."⁶⁷

The emotional response expressed in the previous letters following the deaths of American servicemen is not replicated when Communist deaths are described. Enemy deaths are alluded to in a more succinct and cold manner, and there is an almost uniform denial of an emotional response to them. John Wheeler deviates from this impersonal style in his quasi-fanatical zeal for killing Communists – "I could see nothing more fitting for a young man to do than to devote his entire life to killing everyone of them."⁶⁸ However, when Wheeler actually describes the death of "the gook that got him", he simply states that he is now with his honourable ancestors. This laconic description of killing the enemy is prevalent throughout the majority of letters home. David Hughes' description of his killing an enemy soldier at close quarters – a traumatic and dramatic event – is equally economical – "I shot him with

⁶⁵ Soldier, to 'Dear Paw en Maw en All', 1951.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/filmmore/pt.html>.

⁶⁶ Spiroff, Somewhere in Korea, to wife, Maryland, 3 October 1950. <http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/index.htm>.

⁶⁷ Morrow, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

⁶⁸ John Wheeler, to Father, Borger, Texas, 5 November 1950, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.329

my submachine gun after he jumped into the hole with me.”⁶⁹ This is the only illumination Hughes provides of the event. Bob Hammond, who “cried and felt utterly helpless” after the death of a GI, displays no such emotional capacity after his shooting of an enemy soldier. Rather, he writes only of the dry physical facts of the incident – “I jumped to my feet, fired once and killed one and then ran back to ‘B’ Battery.”⁷⁰

The soldiers did not write this way because of a boyish misinterpretation of duty, nor out of bravado, but because they were aware that killing the enemy was the fundamental obligation of their job – “we got a job to do, and we will get the job done.”⁷¹ Jack Parchen highlights this rule of employment – “I was impressed by the thoroughly professional – almost stoic – attitude of the enlisted Marines. They were fighting not for ‘mom and apple pie’ but because they were in Korea to do a job.”⁷² An emotional reaction, and the embellishment of it in letters home, would compromise their ability to perform their job and therefore their existence – “He was my enemy and he would kill me if he had a chance so that is how I could go on being a soldier even though I had no hatred for him.”⁷³

2.3 - HUMOUR

When recounting episodes of combat or casualties in letters home, the author often felt himself able to adopt ground that fell between the attitudes already illustrated. Indeed, humour is evident in certain passages concerning front-line combat – often stemming from the near farcical situations the soldiers could find themselves in. One cannot fail to concede a smile at the following passages, despite, or perhaps because of, their combat context.

On 21 July 1952, Lawrence Towne wrote to his wife of an incident involving US tanks and a group of Chinese defenders. Towne “didn’t see anyone hurt in the whole battle”, which resulted in soldiers from an immobilised tank diving into the hatch of another – “These men would have scored a 10 in their dives if they had been on the

⁶⁹ Lt. David Hughes, on board Oturu Maru, to Captain John Flynn, 7 February 1952.

<http://www.koreanwar.org/html/units/frontline/hughes.htm>.

⁷⁰ Hammond, to father, 7 December 1950, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.335

⁷¹ Morrow, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

⁷² Parchen, questionnaire answers

⁷³ Towne, questionnaire answers

Olympic Diving Team... If any act of war could be called funny, this act was.”⁷⁴
Even John Harper, whose letter to his father described not only air strikes, mortars, and close combat, but also his being shot, finds time to intersperse such details with comedy. The first instance that reveals a lighter nature of his personality concerns an amusing telephone call between a Platoon Sergeant and a soldier on the line. The comic denouement is reached only after frantic panic caused by “sounds like somebody chokin’ a pheasant!!” –

“Phone: They’re blowin’ a bugle!!

Plt. Sgt.: Oh? – Well – What are they playing?

Phone: I dunno – I can’t make it out. I tell you they’re blowin’ bugles!!

Plt. Sgt.: Who’s blowing bugles?

Phone: The GOOKS!!

Plt. Sgt.: Well – can’t you tell what tune they’re playing? Listen close and see if it’s on the hit parade.”⁷⁵

This passage is followed by another amusing anecdote. Startled by a gang of noisy squirrels, a rifleman in attempting to throw a grenade at these attackers contrived to knock out his buddy’s teeth and render him unconscious. “This threw his aim off and the grenade flew out, hit a tree, and bounced back and exploded just a few feet from the bunker.”⁷⁶ Fearing the grenade had been tossed back, the grenadier “threw another half dozen grenades in all directions to defend himself. When his panic subsided...he helped his buddy look for his teeth in the dark.”⁷⁷

Humour was employed as a tool to convey instances of combat for a variety of reasons. “There was always something unusual or funny stuff going on”⁷⁸ and it is natural that the soldier saw fit to include these instances in his letters. In adopting humour specifically regarding combat, the GI could include details of dangerous engagement while at the same time easing any worry. Despite the obvious dangers one can laugh at the above passages and imagine combat as a playful game rather than what it is. A crucial explanation for humour is provided by the demographic of the American presence in Korea – “...we were just kids thrown into a mans situation and

⁷⁴ Lawrence Towne, Beside Old Baldy, to JoAnn Towne (wife), 21 July 1952

⁷⁵ Lt. John W. Harper, to Father, 14 October 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_harper.htm.

⁷⁶ Op. cit.

⁷⁷ Op. cit.

⁷⁸ Towne, questionnaire answers

the ‘kid’ traits would keep coming out even in the most trying times.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, when surrounded by death and destruction on a daily and de-humanising basis, humour allowed the GI to retain his grip on reality – “I believe that if a man could not find a humorous incident nearly every day that he wasn’t long on the front line; he would probably crack up.”⁸⁰

CHAPTER 3 - KOREAN PEOPLE

Before the war broke out, American eyes in Asia had been firmly fixed on Japan. The overwhelming majority of American servicemen that went to Korea had never even left the United States, let alone heard of the country before the North Korean invasion of June 1950 - “I had never been further from home than Kentucky or Tennessee, so California was quite an experience for me”⁸¹ recalls Paul Steffen of his training before Korea. To interact in the army with the disparate peoples that only melting-pot America could provide – Irish-Americans, Hispanics, Blacks, or Texans etc – could be a disconcerting experience. However, this pales in comparison with the immersion into Korea of these internationally naïve young men. They were understandably disorientated by their rapid conversion into the racial minority. The Korean people were a mystery, and analysis of their depiction in letters home reveals a distinct dichotomy; a compassionate depiction of the civilian population exists alongside a more common and damning appraisal of both the civilians and the ROKs. These raw young men were assured of their own (and America’s) position at the pinnacle of the new world order, for “behind us were only the victories of World War Two and the heady feeling of virtual omnipotence.”⁸² Certainly, an ‘imperial’ condescension is a continual theme in passages concerning Koreans, indelibly flavoured by Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden*. The cultural baggage of these young American soldiers ensured the Koreans as “half-devil and half child”. However, concomitant with this is a humility and compassion in letters home concerning the Korean people that ensures analysis of this theme is more complex

⁷⁹ Op. cit.

⁸⁰ Op. cit.

⁸¹ Paul Steffen, in Pruitt (ed.), *Delayed Letters*, p.195

⁸² Gregory Henderson, ‘Korea 1950’, in James Cotton and Ian Neary (eds.), *The Korean War in History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.181

than perhaps initially expected. To be sure, some soldiers wrote “NOTHING on Korean People”⁸³ yet many were compelled to write “about the people [Koreans] that I came to know and how they lived”⁸⁴ and it is these soldiers whose letters form the nucleus of this section.

3.1 - COMPASSION

The American serviceman in Korea must not be myopically defined as simply a cold, aloof automaton, whose only emotional response to the Korean people, if indeed he is capable of one, is disdain, racism and contempt. Reginald Thompson’s accounts of rape, murder, and pillage appear incompatible with the following passages, which can be used to provide a more balanced viewpoint⁸⁵. In letters home, a stream of compassion flows, however shallow, and expresses a humility and concern for the Korean people that has been forgotten in the popular American memory. Simple observations, without any critical analysis, show at the least an interest that can be interpreted as concern.

In a letter to his wife, Chaplain Frank Grieppe evocatively displays a concern for the Korean people and an appreciation of their troubles – “My heart bleeds for these people. I guess they have been turned out of their homes so often they know what to take in a hurry...Where they go for shelter at nite I don’t know.”⁸⁶ Grieppe goes on to accept the faults of the American attitudes toward “these people”, but that perhaps such attitudes should be not be condemned too harshly, given the alternative – “We have to treat them shabbily enuf, the Commies use them even a bit worse.”⁸⁷

When the cultural differences were overcome, an empathy and affinity can be observed in letters home that is often ignored. Molton Shuler’s description of a scene at the improvised church he has helped create shows a communion that has defied cultural differences. It is now their similarities that are celebrated. After noting the American presence of a “blond and baby faced young man” and “a tough looking hombre”, Shuler recounts the Korean presence – “And down in the front row are three

⁸³ Farrell, questionnaire answers

⁸⁴ Jones, questionnaire answers

⁸⁵ Reginald Thompson, *Cry Korea* (London, 1951), pp.163-164

⁸⁶ Chaplain Frank Grieppe, to ‘My Dear Muriel’ (wife), 2 December 1950.

<http://www.uwm.edu/Library/arch/Warletters/korea/grieppe1.jpg>.

⁸⁷ Op. cit.

Korean boys...self-conscious to be sure, but, even so, attesting to God's presence in the hearts of a people torn by war."⁸⁸

It was undoubtedly the Korean children who elicited the most magnanimity in letters home, especially those written by older servicemen. The war had robbed these "poor tikes"⁸⁹ of their innocence, and servicemen could readily equate the Korean children with their own sons or daughters back home. The range of emotions exhibited concerning the Korean children is considerable. Sympathy, amazement and a trace of guilt are all detectable in the following passage – "Soon small children wandered out from the town...Many were barefoot. How could their feet withstand this below-freezing weather, I wondered". The Americans in contrast "...wore a couple of pairs of socks, lace up boots and leggings for protection from the elements."⁹⁰

The compassion that the Americans could feel for these Korean children is projected in the reactions to local orphans of Joe Sammarco and Norman Duquette. Their touching accounts are not merely observations, but develop into a proactive desire to ameliorate the situation. The men are amazed by the orphans' stoicism and moved by the terrible plight that has befallen them – "They all seem so very brave and unconcerned with their pathetic selves"⁹¹ compares favourably with "...there is absolutely no future for all these sick and weary people...no place for anybody to go. No homes, no food and for thousands of kids there are no parents."⁹² These accounts are made so much more vital by their authors' next revelation. Both Duquette and Sammarco feel they could adopt these children, and bring them back to America where they could care for them in a way that was not possible at that time in Korea – "There were a couple that I thought I'd like to adopt...I was thinking all the while they were singing, about how much I could do for them if I had them in America."⁹³ "I wish I could bring one of them home with me. If there was a way would you want me to bring one with me?"⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Capt. Molton A. Shuler, Choron, to Mrs Helen Shuler (wife), South Carolina, 1952, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.357

⁸⁹ Norman Duquette, to wife Lou, 21 January 1952. <http://www.cottonpickers.org/a-1formy.htm>.

⁹⁰ Myers, email 8 July 2005

⁹¹ Duquette, to wife, 21 January 1952. <http://www.cottonpickers.org/a-1formy.htm>.

⁹² Sammarco, to wife, May-June 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.349

⁹³ Duquette, to wife, 21 January 1952. <http://www.cottonpickers.org/a-1formy.htm>.

⁹⁴ Sammarco, to wife, May-June 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.349

Today this would seem irresponsible, but Sammarco's compassionate integrity is sealed with his declaration that "...any little thing that I might do to alleviate the situation is completely worth the time, trouble, and money it might take to do so."⁹⁵ The letters in this section are a portal to the hearts of these men and qualify the cold image of an American army that was simply there to perform the job of containing communism.

3.2 – RACIST OR ALOOF

However, enlightened and emotionally rich narrations concerning the Korean people in letters home are dwarfed by more sinister observations. Investigation of letters reveals a majority leaning toward condescension, racism or lassitude. Racial differences are at times stressed in an uncomfortably superior manner. Analysis of this must be tempered with a concluding explanation rather than justification.

The most obvious difference between American and Korean is physical appearance, and it is understandable that this is a theme that appears with regularity in letters home. This is not to say that the physical appearance of the indigenous Korean was always portrayed with sneering superiority. Indeed, mostly it was simply observed in didactic, matter-of-fact fashion – "I did write about the people and their customs. I told about the white clothing and stove pipe hats and the long shining pipes the old men smoked."⁹⁶ A physical description of the Korean people was a frequent epistolary feature – "Most of the people wear pants except for some of the old *Mamasans*,"⁹⁷ – and was a common connection and reference point for both author and recipient. Furthermore, physical appearance could provoke a child-like wonderment; naïve and innocent, and devoid of any racist connotations. Regarding Koreans Marvin Myers notes their "...funny hats and goatees."⁹⁸ The cultural chasm between Japanese and American is commented upon by Myers also, and one can assume that the following reaction is in all probability based upon both appearance and behaviour – "I just watched a Japanese working party go off ship. They really tickle me. No

⁹⁵ Op. cit.

⁹⁶ Anon., questionnaire answers

⁹⁷ Jerry Chappell, to parents, 29 December 1952, in Richard Chappell and Gerald Chappell, *Letters from Korea – Corpsmen* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2000), p.84

⁹⁸ Marvin Myers, Pohang, to 'Dear Mom', 17 February 1951

kidding, they're really funny. They all bow to the officer in charge; we have to salute"⁹⁹.

A fascinating nuance of the role played by physical appearance in the Korean War was the inability of the American to distinguish his ally from his enemy – the South Koreans from the North Koreans and Chinese. 'Friendly Fire', that most ridiculous of euphemisms, was a very real threat to American and Korean alike. Many American soldiers did not simply "...come close to shooting one of the Korean guards for a Chink."¹⁰⁰ In his recollections of the conflict, Philip Grass highlights this – "the North Koreans were just disappearing into the hills...magically turning into South Korean farmers. Some of them would join the masses so you couldn't tell who they were."¹⁰¹ Such difficulties in enemy identification were to haunt the American sojourn in Vietnam, yet perhaps Grass' comments resonate loudest in the context of the contemporary 'war on terror'.

Comment upon physical appearance could however descend into vituperative diatribes about Korean intelligence and civilisation – "The [South Koreans] don't seem to be as smart as the Japs and they smell like hell. They are a lot more odd looking than the Japs, I don't trust them too much."¹⁰² A possible explanation for this racial stratification with America at the top, then Japan, then Korea is what the average GI would associate with these nations. America was home, successful and safe. Korea was essentially a cruel third world nation where young American men were still being killed so soon after World War Two. Japan meanwhile was an R&R destination, a peaceful, humble and modern industrial nation successfully rehabilitating itself after its shame in World War Two – "downtown Kobe...could pass for the downtown of any American city of that era."¹⁰³ "The Japanese are immaculately clean...If it weren't for the world situation I would like to go to school over here for a year."¹⁰⁴ The theme of Korea as a barren, retrograde land is reiterated in the following reminiscence – "My first impression of Korea was the smell. They used raw animal waste for fertilizer and it STUNK."¹⁰⁵ The unthinking condescension and superiority to Orientals that underpin certain comments has been

⁹⁹ Marvin Myers, Yokasuka, Japan, to 'Mom and Bobby (brother)', 10 February 1951

¹⁰⁰ Sammarco, to wife, 11 June 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.349

¹⁰¹ Philip Grass, in Pruitt (ed.), *Delayed Letters*, p.8

¹⁰² Anon.

¹⁰³ Myers, email 8 July 2005

¹⁰⁴ Marvin Myers, Kobe, Japan, to 'Dear Mom', 13 February 1951

¹⁰⁵ Fred Culbreth, in Pruitt (ed.), *Delayed Letters*, p.248

labelled the ‘gook syndrome’¹⁰⁶ (an arrogant misjudgement of Asians), and appears to be most stridently manifested in the following extract from a letter written by Gordon L. Madson – “Life to the oriental is so very cheap they care not if you live or die...I have a deep hatred for the chinese and koreans for they are outright murderers...”¹⁰⁷ However, investigation of the provenance of these comments uncovers an explanation for them. Madson wrote this letter to the father of a friend he had made while a P.O.W. This friend, John Wheeler, had died due to Chinese negligence, yet before this, both had endured horrendous treatment from their captives – disease, filth and heavy labour. Madson’s comments certainly seem more understandable in this context.

The above passage provides us with a very specific reason why letters home may have been tainted with racist and disparaging comments. There are certainly other reasons. To be sure, some soldiers serving in Korea were racist but this alone cannot be regarded as the sole determinant for such comments. Almost all these soldiers were young men in their late teens or early twenties – “I was a nieve country boy, who was very religious...I did not smoke, drink or cuss.”¹⁰⁸ In conjunction with youthful innocence was a common inability to comprehend the nature of the war, or indeed their role in it – “I don’t think I totally understood what the war was all about”¹⁰⁹ ... “it was an adventure and I simply went along with it.”¹¹⁰ With such naiveté, racist remarks can be expected. Fear of the unknown is a natural reaction, and one cannot be surprised that this fear could foster racist attitudes. Furthermore, the American Armed Forces had entered the Korean War basically segregated by race¹¹¹. Many units had simply chosen to ignore Truman’s desegregation order of 1948, and blacks were still castigated as cowardly and undisciplined. Enemy propaganda attempted to exploit these racial tensions through radio and leaflets - “It was an embarrassment for us to have someone in a foreign country know how we were being treated”, recalls Samuel King¹¹². This ideal opportunity for communist propaganda triggered the abolition of official military segregation in 1954, more than

¹⁰⁶ Callum MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986), p.211

¹⁰⁷ Sfc Gordon L. Madson, to ‘My dear Mr Wheeler’, September 1953, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.334

¹⁰⁸ Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

¹⁰⁹ Towne, questionnaire answers

¹¹⁰ Thomas McCluskey interview, 6 June 2005

¹¹¹ Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War – No Victors, No Vanquished* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p.251

¹¹² <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/korea/b5.html>. Accessed 10 July 2005

a full decade before it occurred in American society as a whole. Sanctioned racism could not fail to transpose itself to letters home from Korea.

Another explanation for racial condescension toward Koreans in letters home is granted by the nature of the war itself. The American soldier felt abandoned and unappreciated for the job he was performing – “people were more interested in finishing their education with the G.I. Bill, building homes, having children and buying automobiles than they were in a dirty little war in Korea.”¹¹³ Seminally, this lack of appreciation appeared to emit from the Koreans also. Lucid evidence of this can be found in the frequent remarks regarding the ROKs in letters home.

3.3 – ROKs (Army of the Republic of Korea)

The average GI was bitter about the lack of ROK support and felt that the South Koreans should be doing more in their own defence. The attempts by the South Koreans to save themselves and aid the UN coalition were not completely ignored in letters home. However, instances of praise for their efforts are rare. David Hughes, writing on 7 February 1952, congratulated the “...5th Platoon (South Koreans) which did good work that night...”¹¹⁴ and the best Dick Chappell can write of the KSC (Korea Service Corps) is that “...some of them are really characters.”¹¹⁵ Philip Grass remembers the respected Capital Division of the ROK that were “rolling real good along the coast highway.”¹¹⁶ Aside from this somewhat tepid praise, the deafening verdict of letters concerning South Korean military activity was angry condemnation. They provide a personal vilification that is substantiated by an official attitude illuminated most succinctly by General Lowe, President Truman’s military aide – “as a dependable military force” the ROKs were almost non-existent – “cowardly and in no wise to be depended upon.”¹¹⁷ The Americans on the ground cared not why the South Koreans were poor military allies i.e. press ganged, poor training, bewildered etc. Rather, they assessed the Koreans solely by their actions in the field. Here, they were revealed to be inept soldiers – “We made a drop today to an outfit that got

¹¹³ Parchen, questionnaire answers

¹¹⁴ Lt. David Hughes, to Capt. John R. Flynn, 7 February 1952.
<http://www.koreanwar.org/html/units/frontline/hughes.htm>.

¹¹⁵ Dick Chappell, to Parents, 18 November 1952, in Chappell, *Letters from Korea*, p.67

¹¹⁶ Philip Grass, in Pruitt (ed.), *Delayed Letters*, p.8

¹¹⁷ MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam*, p.216

themselves surrounded. The ROK's have a habit of doing it."¹¹⁸ Worse still, on many occasions letters home reveal an American disgust for perceived Korean cowardice – “Several of the Koreans got so tired they wanted to quit. I kept them moving.”¹¹⁹ “The Korean stretcher bearers supposed to follow up and evacuate such cases jumped into holes shivering and refused to function. They were routed out into action at bayonet point.”¹²⁰

“...a South Korean stretcher team was coaxed out to pick him up and carry him back.”¹²¹ (underline added)

The choleric reaction to perceived Korean levels of performance was exacerbated when it appeared that the Koreans were deliberately rubbing salt in American wounds. Rather than offer gratitude for American sacrifices, or help gamely in their shared struggle, the Americans construed certain Korean actions as heinous betrayals. Synghman Rhee's sabotage of the peace negotiations by threatening a new offensive needlessly risked further American lives – “I know the South Koreans don't want it over and we're letting them make suckers out of us.”¹²² The author of this passage, Jack Train, was killed on 8 July 1953 as a direct consequence of Rhee's vainglorious blustering. Another GI remembers South Korean actions during the 1953 peace negotiations with similar distaste. When the South Koreans freed North Korean prisoners because they too were opposed to negotiations – “We were really upset, because our guys were up there fighting on the main line, getting killed, taking prisoners, and here this guy lets a bunch of them go.”¹²³

Upon initial reading one is instantly shocked by the xenophobic language and attitudes on display in Korean War letters. The South Koreans, North Koreans and Chinese are embroiled in a confusing racial stramash. Their nomenclature is interchangeable; all are invariably castigated as ‘gooks’, ‘chinks’, ‘orientals’, ‘Luke the Gook’, ‘chinamen’ etc. However, scratch the veneer of this extrinsic display and

¹¹⁸ SSgt Carl J. Dorsey, Tachikawa [probably] Air Base, Japan, to Sgt. Thomas E. Warner (brother-in-law), Pennsylvania, 3 January 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_dorsey.htm.

¹¹⁹ Paul, to ‘Dear Tom’, December 1952. ‘Letters from Servicemen’, in *The Forgotten Voices Vol V, Issue 2*, p.11

¹²⁰ Lt. John W. Harper, to Father, 20 September 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_harper.htm.

¹²¹ Lt. John W. Harper, to Father, 14 October 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_harper.htm.

¹²² Pfc. Jack Train, to Parents, 22 June 1953, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.365

¹²³ Richard Fastenau, in Pruitt (ed.), *Delayed Letters*, p.91

one encounters nuances of compassion, empathy and a reasoning behind this prevailing attitude. The young, naïve GI could not fail to write home in a xenophobic manner when his superiors were often moulding such attitudes. A divisional commander's nefarious declaration that one American life was worth any number of Koreans was a heinous abuse of authority.¹²⁴ These beliefs were transplanted easily from the Koreans to the Chinese who were, in the foolhardy words of Lt. Gen. Edward Almond nothing more than a "bunch of laundrymen."¹²⁵ Indeed, China itself was contemptuously labelled as a mere 'Manchukuo' of the Soviet Union by Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk¹²⁶, an insulting and dangerous under-estimation made just a few days before the outbreak of the war.

CHAPTER 4 – WEATHER

“When we landed in Korea it was raining every day, nothing but mud and rain...I never saw such a dam place.”¹²⁷

“I was going to write last nite, but my ink was frozen in the pen.”¹²⁸

The American forces in Korea struggled against not only North Korean and Chinese Communist troops, but also against an arguably even more formidable foe – the brutal Korean climate. This was to bulk large in the experiences of letter writers home. Contrary to mythic acceptance, the climate was an enemy shared by the Communist and American forces - “Fortunately the Gooks don't like the rain and mud any more than we do.”¹²⁹ Indeed, Chinese equipment afforded much less protection from the elements than American equipment.

Norman Duquette's letter of 21 January 1952 encapsulates the climate of Korea and the American attitude to it – “The weather has been stinkin again. Cold as heck one day then warm & wet the next. Two hours ago it was like spring outside. Since then

¹²⁴ MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam*, p.210

¹²⁵ Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.182

¹²⁶ Sandler, Stanley, *The Korean War – No Victors, No Vanquished* (London: UCL Press, 1999), p.267

¹²⁷ Morrow, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

¹²⁸ SSgt Joe Sammarco, 100 miles southeast of Inchon, to Bobbie Sammarco, Alabama, 23 December 1950, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.343

¹²⁹ Jerry Chappell, to parents, 31 October 1952, in Chappell, *Letters from Korea*, p.60

it has rained, hailed and is now snowing flakes as big as half a dollar.”¹³⁰ Korea has four distinct seasons, and a wide temperature range. Its winters, roughly November to March, are bitterly cold, at the whim of icy Siberian winds. Indeed, South Korea has the dubious distinction of having the coldest temperatures at its latitude, similar to those found in New York some 300 miles north.¹³¹ Summer however, is hot, close and extremely humid.

It was the problems caused by the cold that entered lastingly into the shared American memory of Korea. The frequency with which it is alluded to in letters home is testament to the significance it held in the lives of these servicemen. The analysis of weather in letters home can be divided into two distinct themes. The first reveals letters whose tone and cadence regarding the weather is distinctly optimistic, or brief. The antitheses of these letters are more numerous and instead portray more bleakly and realistically the Korean climate and the hardships it posed. Before analysing these polarised interpretations it is helpful to provide a brief account of the difficulties it presented.

4.1 - FROSTBITE AND COLD WEATHER PROBLEMS

As stated, it was Korea’s unrelenting winters that blighted the American soldier’s service life and caused the most difficulties. These difficulties manifested themselves not only in the incapacitation of equipment and machinery, but also of the most vital weapon in the American army – the soldier himself. Guns failed to function in the plummeting temperatures, C-rations froze solid, and simple tasks adopted a Sisyphean nature - starting an engine became an onerous task of thawing moving parts and coaxing frozen oil back to life. Blood plasma froze and even morphia syrettes had to be carried in the mouth to prevent a similar outcome. However, it was a much less agonising ordeal to revive frozen equipment than it was to resurrect the frozen soldiers – “They were frostbitten, and you couldn’t put a needle in their arms or legs because they were frozen. We were panicking, and we were trying to get some blood or plasma into them to warm them up and thaw them out.”¹³²

¹³⁰ 1Lt. Norman E. Duquette, to ‘sweethearts’, 21 January 1952. <http://www.cottonpickers.org/a-1formy.htm>.

¹³¹ http://travelmax.statravel.co.uk/sisp/?fx=destination&loc_id=131115§ion=weather. Accessed 10 June 2005

¹³² Herbert Wittenberg, in Pruitt (ed.), *Delayed Letters*, p.159

Innocuous though it may sound, frostbite was a terrible affliction that accounted for more American casualties in the first year of combat than the enemy. The formation of ice crystals inside body tissue led to swelling and blistering before the flesh finally died and scarred. Feet and hands were the most vulnerable and frequently attacked extremities. James Heersma, a Naval surgeon writing home in that hellish first winter of the war witnessed first hand, and on a daily basis, the agony the cold could cause – “Every day I have at least ten men come in with their feet frozen. Some of them are so bad, that they’ll lose their toes or a foot.”¹³³

4.2 - UPBEAT LETTERS

Although mention of climate is almost *de rigueur* in the letter home to America, the interpretation of it is various. Despite the obvious hardships caused by the cold (the heat must not be ignored also) many soldiers adopted an optimistic tone regarding such hardships in their letters home. In denying the reality of the situation such letters are pugnacious and upbeat, and frequently grounded in humour. Written to his family in mid-November 1951, the following soldier’s description of the weather has a somewhat feisty, understated tone - “Weather has been turning out okay lately, except for some snow and sleet a few nights ago. Didn’t have any shelter over my hole, so was quite damp.”¹³⁴ This sentiment is echoed in the letters of Gerald Chappell, written in December 1952 and January 1953. Crucially, a swaggering bravado and grim acceptance are tools used to defuse the reality of the cold – “When I got up this morning there were two inches of snow on the ground. It’s about time, December and all.”¹³⁵ The following month, Chappell’s outlook is more humorous, yet loses none of its pugnacious bluster – “That’s one good thing about the Marines, the colder it gets the more ice cream they give us.”¹³⁶ The struggle against the elements was not the sole preserve of the soldier on the ground. American airmen were also at their whim. Carl Dorsey, writing just three days into 1951 epitomises the bravado and humour that his comrades on the ground also possess – “We have good heaters on the crate which is one good thing. Flying with the back doors off is mighty cold... We flew one day

¹³³ James R. Heersma, to ‘Dear Folks’, 15 January 1951.

<http://www.uwm.edu/Library/arch/Warletters/korea/Jh2f.jpg>.

¹³⁴ John, to ‘Dear Family’, 10 November 1951. ‘Letters from Servicemen’, in *The Forgotten Voices Vol V, Issue 2*, p.12

¹³⁵ Jerry Chappell, to parents, 7 December 1952, in Chappell, *Letters from Korea*, p.70

¹³⁶ Op. cit., 29 January 1953, p.89

zipped up in sleeping bags...I was afraid to move in fear of my jewels, they'd have dropped off.”¹³⁷

The hot and humid Korean summer was also an endurance for many American servicemen, and it could often elicit a similar bullish reaction in letters home – “The weather here is still just as hot as it always been. I'm sitting out side my bunker again & it sure is hot. I'm about to cook. Ha ha. I should have a cool case of beer huh.”¹³⁸

Such optimism regarding the weather came to the fore in letters written when the weather was agreeable. John Harper's letter to his father illuminates a contentedness with the climate and its crucial similarity to home, while a residual bullishness remains – “The weather was good, clear and bright and cool – football weather at its best – also fine for our air strike which began about noon.”¹³⁹ This escape that the weather could provide for the soldier is evident in a letter written by Joe Sammarco to his wife in April 1951. Whereas Harper can relate the weather to a football game at home, Sammarco is amazed to have found in the climate an escape to what could have been anywhere else in the world. In Korea (Chosun), the Land of The Morning Calm¹⁴⁰, Sammarco has found a release from the travails he had endured during the previous winter – “It was so peaceful & quiet down there and its just like spring anywhere in the world.”¹⁴¹

The reasoning behind the embracing of this viewpoint is a simple and altruistic one. The overwhelming majority of letters that display such equanimity concerning the weather were intended to be read by wives, girlfriends or parents, and not brothers or friends. Their authors made a conscious decision to sanitise what they were writing. Indeed, “In all the letters dealing with the war, we had to keep our letters to the folks on the light side so that our reports wouldn't scare the daylights out of them.”¹⁴² One soldier did write about the “cold in winter and all the cases of frostbite”¹⁴³, but crucially purged the graphic details from letters to his recipients (his father and girlfriend) – “I didn't talk about the guys who lost fingers and toes and feet to the

¹³⁷ SSgt Carl J. Dorsey, Tachikawa [probably] Air Base, Japan, to Sgt. Thomas E. Warner (brother-in-law), Pennsylvania, 3 January 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_dorsey.htm.

¹³⁸ Clarence Schuster, to 'Folks', 17 July 1952. http://www.e27marines-1stmardiv.org/letters_to_home/clarence_schuster.htm.

¹³⁹ Lt. John W. Harper, to his Father, Chicago, 21 September 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_harper.htm.

¹⁴⁰ David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (Maryland: Penguin, 1970), p.7

¹⁴¹ Sammarco, to wife, Alabama, 21 April 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.347

¹⁴² Chappell, *Letters from Korea*, p.74

¹⁴³ Anon., questionnaire answers

cold.”¹⁴⁴ The letters of Stanley Jones exemplify this style of expurgating any harrowing details concerning the weather – “While I wrote of some floods etc, and the cold that first winter, I never wrote about anything that could create worry”. The suppression becomes remarkable when one learns of their provenance: Jones was a ballistic meteorologist.

4.3 - REALISTIC LETTERS

The preceding letters must not be taken as the only interpretations of the weather in Korea. To accept that stoicism and phlegmatic acceptance were the only reactions concerning the weather is to deny a much darker, though no less common alternative. For every sanitised letter home to an anxious girlfriend or parent, there exists a more realistic, sombre, and often more detailed depiction of the Korean climate. Patrick Sheahan’s poignant letter (he was to be KIA on 8 June 1951) is an ominous and baleful introduction to the darker emotions that the climate could evoke in letter writers home – “The weather is pretty good now but the nights are cold already; they will surely be bad a couple of months from now.”¹⁴⁵ The more prevalent of these grim emotional responses, namely reactions to the monotony of the climate, and the despair and near delirium it could cause will be analysed.

Within this bleak set of letters concerning the weather, it is the sheer monotony of it that is most notable. There was barely respite in the changing of the seasons, as the monotony shifted with ease from the soporific cold of the winter, to the relentless rain of the summer. To be sure, on frequent occasions, the summer rains were to elicit a more irritable response in letters home than the icy winters - “As usual it is still raining. I sometimes wonder if it is ever going to quit.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Charles Morrow required only a week before his diurnal boredom and frustration at the weather was to manifest itself – “..already I am sick of these dam C-rations and the weather...When we landed in Korea it was raining every day, nothing but mud and rain every day...I never saw such a dam place.”¹⁴⁷ A possible explanation for the obvious irritation and truth in the accounts of the summer rains, in comparison to the winter cold, could be

¹⁴⁴ Op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ Pvt. Patrick Sheahan, to Frank O’Connor, 1951. <http://www.illyria.com/irish/sheahan.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Bud, to Dear Mom and Dad, 26 August 1952. Kris Gaertner email, 27 May 2005

¹⁴⁷ Morrow, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

that the letter home was a channel for the author to vent his frustrations and energies. In the cold, such mental energies were not only diminished, but were also completely fixed upon the prime purpose of survival.

For certain soldiers, the combination of the weather's monotony and harshness drew forth letters dripping with latent despair. The following is a passage from Don Byres' letter to his parents, written from Japan during recuperation from a leg wound. It epitomises the desperate drudgery and misery that the climate, in collusion with other factors, inflicted upon daily life – “We were cold and hungry and so tired we just flopped on the ground when we stopped to rest.”¹⁴⁸ Such desperation and desolation reaches its zenith in Bob Spiroff's letter to his wife Cassie, dated 11 December 1950 – “The past two weeks have been nightmares – simply hell...It's so cold now I can't hardly write”¹⁴⁹. The simple act of contacting a loved one at home, usually a joyous emotional experience surpassed only by receiving such letters, has become a physically, and one must speculate, emotionally arduous experience. In one case, desperation stemming from the climate very nearly passes into delirium. This soldier's misery has led to his dreams acting as an escape 'home' from Korea. This is not unusual, but the fact that 'home' is essentially now 'warmth' bears witness to the impact that the cold has had upon him – “Had a dream last night [regarding hot rolls from the oven at home]...When I woke up, I had a hunk of snow and I was chewing on it.”¹⁵⁰ Another soldier, upon hearing news of his imminent return to America reflects jovially upon just how despondent he had become, principally because of the cold – “Don't get me wrong. I still want a hot car, a hot girl and a cold beer, but there were times I would have traded them all for a warm blanket...There were times when I would have traded my soul for a hot cup of coffee.”¹⁵¹

The determining factors behind the inclusion of these more graphic and realistic details are more complex than those behind their exclusion. In all likelihood, Don Byres or Al Puntasecca for example, knew that their parents regarded the lethal currency of war – bullets, artillery and mortar rounds – with more perturbation than

¹⁴⁸ Donald Byers, Japan, to 'Dear Mom and Dad', 8 March 1951

¹⁴⁹ Spiroff, Sunchon, Korea, to wife, 11 December 1950. <http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/index.htm>.

¹⁵⁰ Johnny ?, Korea, to 'Dear Paw en Maw en All', 1951. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/filmmore/pt.html>.

¹⁵¹ Al Puntasecca, to ?, November/December 1952. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/filmmore/pt.html>.

the weather, however harsh. The letters' intended recipients (their parents) could relate to such harrowing information with less worry than to military perils – “they would feel that the son could stand the weather and still come home alive.”¹⁵² Inclusion of this information can therefore be counter-intuitively construed as the soldier's attempt to ease any worry. Furthermore, although a minority of men were engaged in front line hostilities, all could write about the impact the weather exerted on their lives. That such information was worrying matters less than the reality that its inclusion could act not only as a conduit “to communicate some facts of ...[his] world in a letter”¹⁵³, but also as a method for the serviceman to find empathy and share the agonies that he may be in.

As has been stressed, the frequency with which weather appears in correspondence is testimony to the significance with which it was regarded. Weather was to play a role, however minor, in every serviceman's life, and could be easily related to those back home. Admittedly, many soldiers mentioned it only briefly, if at all, and it could even determine if they were to write home – “I wrote so seldom [because] I didn't think they wanted to hear about...miserable weather.”¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the climatic extremes of a “devilish frozen hell on earth”¹⁵⁵, or the stifling summer heat were not realities for all. Indeed, in a style somewhat alien from the usual correspondence of regular GIs, Colonel Roswell Rosengren, safe from the weather, is reminded of Shakespeare, so moved is he by the “...beauty of weather with unlimited visibility that made one think of Shakespeare

“And what is so rare as a day in June
Then, if ever, come perfect days.”¹⁵⁶

Nonetheless, there were many whose lives were exacerbated by the weather and who felt compelled to mention it in their correspondence. In such letters, the physical and emotional relationship the author has with the elements certainly comes to the

¹⁵² Lawrence Towne email, 13 July 2005

¹⁵³ Op cit.

¹⁵⁴ Anon., questionnaire answers

¹⁵⁵ Chris Sarno memoir. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/memoirs/sarno/p_sarno_33_winter_mount.htm. Accessed 28 August 2005

¹⁵⁶ Roswell Rosengren, to “Mother Dearest”, 2 June 1952. <http://www.uwm.edu/Library/arch/Warletters/korea/Rr1a.jpg>. nb – Rosengren is misquoting Shakespeare. His actual reference is James Russell Lowell.

fore. The role weather could play in the Korean War is indicated by letters from another battle at the cruel mercy of the elements – Stalingrad 1942-1943. These letters are almost indistinguishable from those written during Korea’s winters of discontent, and could easily be mistaken for such –

“My hands are gone, since the beginning of December...on the right hand the three middle fingers have been frozen...I am rather helpless...”¹⁵⁷

“In place of the bright carpet is an endless white field. It is no longer summer, but winter; and there is no longer a future, at least not for me, and of necessity not for you.”¹⁵⁸

CHAPTER 5 – ‘HOME’

5.1 - IMPACT AT HOME

The significance of letters written from Korea can be gauged by the esteem with which many were regarded by their recipients. A study of this nature would be impossible if it were not for the careful preservation of these letters over half a century. That these letters survive today is testimony to the value put on them – “I have the letters he wrote me from Korea as we were married 3 months before he left for there.”¹⁵⁹ Admittedly, most letters have not survived, time and circumstance leaving only a meagre remnant. “I do not have any letters - neither those received or those that I sent”¹⁶⁰ was a depressingly common response during research for this study. However, there were diligent mothers and wives who kept much, if not all the correspondence they received, and to whom this investigation of war letters is greatly indebted –

“We were both prolific letter writers, and Mom saved every letter.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ John E. Vetter (translated from German), *Last Letters from Stalingrad* (New York: Coronet Press, 1955), p.16

¹⁵⁸ Op. cit. p.15

¹⁵⁹ Marjorie Shaw, email 18 May 2005

¹⁶⁰ Anon., email 19 May 2005

¹⁶¹ Chappell, *Letters from Korea*, p.vii

“I think Mom musta kept every letter I wrote from Korea...she was just like that.”¹⁶²

Understandably, though regrettably, an equivalent body of letters sent to Korea has not survived. Inevitably, given the personal circumstances of letter writing there are exceptions – “I still have every letter she sent me.”¹⁶³ Indeed, a letter written by Lou Duquette to her husband Norman reveals the similarities of letters to and from Korea. Just as her husband stressed his desire to come home soon in his letters, Mrs Duquette advances this theme and even offers an idealised vision of how this event will progress – “Gee it will be wonderful to have you home again. We will get a nice car & have a nice home fixed just like we want it. And you can come home at night to a nice comfy chair & Jay will bring you your slippers & pipe...”¹⁶⁴ In this case at least, it is evident that home weighed as heavily on the soldiers mind as it did on the civilians he left behind, themselves hostages of the war. The realities of war are a more accurate, yet less enchanting, reason for the contemporary lack of letters from America than the one offered by Dudley Hughes to his wife. Upon her presentation of the 150 letters he had sent her from Korea, she queried the fate of the letters she had sent him. “Would you believe the Communists captured them?”¹⁶⁵ was Hughes’ imaginative response!

5.2 - LETTERS FROM HOME

“The letters were very essential...The letters were the one solid and sane thing in my life and she made me believe our lives would be normal again soon...”¹⁶⁶

War correspondence is founded in the dual process of sending and receiving. Given the paltry, in comparison, sum of letters to Korea that endure today, an analysis cannot be based on reading their content. Rather, content will be investigated primarily through soldier’s recollections, placed alongside an equally important consideration of the frequency with which mail arrived in Korea. Also, as will be shown, mail call must not be overlooked.

¹⁶² Graham interview

¹⁶³ Jones, questionnaire answers

¹⁶⁴ Lou Duquette, Iowa, to 1Lt. Norman Duquette, 20 January 1952.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/filmmore/pt.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Hughes, *Wall of Fire*, p.21

¹⁶⁶ Towne, questionnaire answers

FREQUENCY

As has been noted, the frequency of mail to and from Korea was linked. Wives would usually write more habitually than parents or friends – “My wife wrote to me daily”¹⁶⁷, “...my wife wrote almost daily, and my parents about weekly.”¹⁶⁸ A captivating reason for this slower pace employed by parents, outwith any reliance on mail arriving from Korea, is a domestic adaptation of the social network system used by the soldiers and elucidated previously. Just as letters from Korea were shared around a network of the concerned in America, reducing the amount of mail the soldier had to send, so too could the anxious mother or father reduce their outgoing mail for the same reason – “I had a brother on the same hill in Korea for about 2 and a half months so we would share the letters from our Mother and she knew this so she probably felt she didn’t need to write so often to each of us.”¹⁶⁹ Brothers or friends from the same locality were forwarded relevant information in the same letter, thus lessening the flow of mail from America. The ultimate example of this is the mail written to twin brothers Richard and Gerald Chappell. This was regularly shared and intended for the consumption of both – “Just received two big boxes from Grandma Richardson filled with swell canned fruits. One is Jerry’s, so I’m saving it for him.”¹⁷⁰

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“Grandma Richardson” played her own part in the torrent of “Goodie Packages”¹⁷¹ that descended upon Korea during the war. Nonetheless, conventional letters remained the more common form of correspondence. The letters’ contents varied as much as their authors, yet once again patterns can be identified. Mail from wives or girlfriends inevitably followed the “love letter type.”¹⁷² They would be centred on themes of affection, longing and loneliness – “[they] would always say how much she missed me and wanted me home soon.”¹⁷³ This could evolve into descriptions of a shared future as seen in the Duquette letter above – “[she] wrote ...about our life when I return...and our love for each other.”¹⁷⁴ These are themes common in letters

¹⁶⁷ Jones, questionnaire answers

¹⁶⁸ Tiemann, questionnaire answers

¹⁶⁹ Towne, questionnaire answers

¹⁷⁰ Dick Chappell, to parents, 24 December 1952, in Chappell, *Letters from Korea*, p. 81

¹⁷¹ Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

¹⁷² Towne, questionnaire answers

¹⁷³ Op. cit.

¹⁷⁴ Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

written by wives to their husbands at war, and the parallels between Mrs Duquette's letter and the following letter, written by a wife in Glasgow, to her husband serving in World War One are palpable "...when you come home – if God spares you...it will be a right laugh in the morning when we start narking at each other."¹⁷⁵ Just as Mrs Duquette mentions the impact of her husbands absence on their children – “Jan is beginning to call every man she sees in a magazine ‘Daddy’”¹⁷⁶, so too does the Glaswegian wife – “Wee Maggie was asking for you...She misses you.”¹⁷⁷ The features of handwriting and writing materials in letters from Korea have their equivalent in letters from America. Evidently, graphology is one factor in this, but there are other personal touches. An interesting example of this is borne in the faint scent of perfume on letters to Jack Parchen from his girlfriend. This was to evoke “good memories as well as pleasant thoughts of the future.”¹⁷⁸

Mail from parents and family was usually equally caring, yet less latently emotional. These letters tended to concentrate on “local small talk”, and, crucially, “the brighter side of family news, events etc.”¹⁷⁹ Such letters were often deliberately light and frivolous, as the sender offered the recipient a release from his daily routine that he could not achieve from the ‘heavier’ letters from his spouse or beloved.

Packages and parcels also rained down upon Americans serving in Korea. In many cases the senders seemed oblivious as to whether what they sent was needed or wanted (!) yet letters home suggest that the parcels were always gratefully received. Besides letters, photographs were the next most numerous items sent – both to and from Korea. Photographs not only provided physical confirmation of the words that eased worry, but also acted as stimuli to memories that had lapsed – made the memory more real – “I have your pictures out right here next to me now, and honey I miss you all so much.”¹⁸⁰ The arrival of photographs of loved ones would be shared, and no doubt inwardly compared, and could be a momentous event – “I opened my Christmas present from you and found you smiling at me...It's hard to realize that such a beautiful creature as you exists.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Jeannie, to Jamie. Leaflet from Peoples Palace, Glasgow - Home Front Exhibition, 3 July 2005

¹⁷⁶ Lou Duquette, to Norman Duquette, 20 January 1952.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/filmmore/pt.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Jeannie, to Jamie. Leaflet, Glasgow, 3 July 2005

¹⁷⁸ Parchen, questionnaire answers

¹⁷⁹ Farrell, questionnaire answers

¹⁸⁰ Sammarco, to wife, 11 June 1951, in Carroll (ed.) *War Letters*, p.350

¹⁸¹ Hughes, *Wall of Fire*, p.100

Clarence Schuster was to inform his parents “you can send anything you want and I’ll get it OK.”¹⁸² It would appear that Americans the length of the country enthusiastically seized upon this as all manner of items were posted across – “cigars, pens, Tabasco”¹⁸³, “cupcakes and stationery.”¹⁸⁴ Essentially, if it was possible for an item to be sent to Korea then it inevitably made its way there! Mothers concerned for their sons’ physical well-being would inundate their brood with all kinds of delicacies from home – “I’ve been sent candy, cookies and nuts and they’re all very good.”¹⁸⁵ Marvin Myers identified eating as the first of the three things uppermost in his mind during Korea (the other two being sleeping and letters from home!)¹⁸⁶ Clearly, Bill Burns would empathise with this, for his letters to his mother were “full of thoughts of food”¹⁸⁷ and he often asked for food packages. The smorgasbord which arrived would be shared with as many as possible and food parcels would be rated by fellow soldiers – “they complied sending canned hams, rye bread (always arrived moldy but still happily received), cookies and once, a bottle of White Horse Scotch, well padded to prevent breakage.”¹⁸⁸ Requests would be made - “[can you] mail me a pocket knife”¹⁸⁹ - and the parcel would be duly sent off to Korea to be gratefully received.

5.3 - MAIL CALL

The arrival of mail in Korea was an eagerly anticipated event, one that often fulfilled and even exceeded expectations. In the military the process of actually receiving mail deserves further consideration, given its dissimilarity to the delivery of mail on ‘Civvy Street’. Indeed, “Mail call has always been one of the greatest joys of the soldier.”¹⁹⁰

To achieve this “great joy”, initial contact was invariably made by the serviceman himself. In this first letter home, a prerequisite for receiving mail is fulfilled in his communication of an address where he can be reached – “Now, that I am assigned, I

¹⁸² Clarence Schuster, to parents, 24 July 1952. http://e27marines-1stmardiv.org/letters_to_home/clarence_schuster.htm.

¹⁸³ Parchen, questionnaire answers

¹⁸⁴ Robert Graham, to Parents, Fremont, Ohio, 29 February 1952

¹⁸⁵ Paul, to ‘Dear Tom’, December 1952. ‘Letters from Servicemen’, in *The Forgotten Voices Vol V, Issue 2*, p.11

¹⁸⁶ Myers, email 21 July 2005

¹⁸⁷ Burns, questionnaire answers

¹⁸⁸ Op. cit.

¹⁸⁹ Morrow, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

¹⁹⁰ Lou Gasparino, email 21 May 2005

hope to receive some letters from you soon. I'll be very happy to receive that first letter...The address is '24th Sig. Co., APO24.'"¹⁹¹ Once this was achieved, mail could be expected, yet still with doubt and uncertainty. Often, though only when a "long, long way behind the MLR (Main Line of Resistance)"¹⁹², a buglers report would herald the mail call, a grandiose introduction given its arrival elsewhere - "the arrival of a sack, followed by names bellowed at random"¹⁹³. It was a tense occasion, crystallised in the following recollection - "A bugler sounds mail call. Multitudes assemble...Then it happens. Pfc Myers gets a letter. Yippee! Yahoo! Yaba-daba-do!...This is what's great about the Marine Corps. Mail is delivered when they have enough to distribute. The day of the week or time of day does not matter. When they have enough mail they call for the bugler..."¹⁹⁴

This obvious excitement, giddiness and youthful exuberance for mail call must be qualified by the experiences of those, albeit fewer in number, for whom mail call was a lonely and embarrassing event. The reasons for this could be a paucity of mail for the serviceman, or perhaps the dreaded 'Dear John' letter.

A lack of mail could be hurtful and humiliating. A young officer who had remained regularly anonymous at mail call informed his wife he was starting to "really feel blue & disappointed. Everybody kids me now because I never get any mail from the states...it's getting to hurt a little now. It's bad enough not eating & sleeping and freezing night and day, but to feel cut off completely is too much."¹⁹⁵ It was easy for the soldier to regard his sacrifices as in vain, and as his letters were seemingly continually ignored, hurt could effortlessly develop into abject anger and resentment. This is clearly shown in a later letter by the officer, dripping with vitriolic indignation - "You said in your 1 page letter you couldn't think of anything to say, well, you better start thinking, or quit writing. I'm the only dam fool around here who never seems to get any mail."¹⁹⁶

The 'Dear John' letter could cruelly resolve uncertainty concerning home. This was an expression coined by the Americans during World War Two when thousands of US servicemen were stationed overseas for long durations. Almost as feared as the

¹⁹¹ Franklin Lyon, Republic of Korea, to Parents, 18 August 1950

¹⁹² Nicol, email 26 August 2005

¹⁹³ Graham interview

¹⁹⁴ Myers, email 27 July 2005

¹⁹⁵ Officer, to wife, 20 January 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.339

¹⁹⁶ Officer, to 'My Darling' (wife), in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.340. As a point of interest, it is warming to note that the officer survived the war and he and his wife remained happily married

enemy bullet¹⁹⁷, these harbingers of grief indicated the end of the relationship between the serviceman and his wife or girlfriend at home. Their impact could be emotionally catastrophic. On 15 June 1952 'Leon' responded to his fiancée's 'Dear John', received the previous day, – "Oh yeah, I knew it was coming. I could tell from the tone of your last few letters."¹⁹⁸ After informing her of his understanding of her decision, and wishing her the best, 'Leon' poignantly concludes – "There are 500,000 N. Koreans and Chinese on the other side of that hill bound and determined to make sure I don't have a future. Over here where your past is your last breath, your present is this breath and your future is your next breath, you don't make too many promises. Which leaves me what? Goodbye, Leon."¹⁹⁹

The power of this eloquent conclusion and the finality of its farewell are tragically magnified by the knowledge that 'Leon' was to die just two days later, having charged a Chinese machine-gun nest alone, and on his own initiative.²⁰⁰ One can but speculate upon the bearing his 'Dear John' had exerted upon this decision.

5.4 – THE SOLDIER'S MENTION OF HOME

Home was mentioned in an abundance of letters from Korea, and in a variety of ways. Inevitably there are personal exceptions; Philip Tiemann "[didn't] seem to mention home much, if at all"²⁰¹ and another serviceman only mentioned home once during his time in Korea²⁰². Nonetheless, for the majority of servicemen whose letters have contributed to this study, home was a familiar fulcrum of their letters from Korea. Home was to be mentioned in various interesting and personal ways; Bud Farrell dealt with home lightly – "small talk, about cars [and] going back to school."²⁰³ Bob Graham invariably concluded his letters to his parents with his latest appraisal of his return date, a date that was to be lengthened apparently with every letter sent. It was with a certain satisfaction that he was to declare, "I'll be home on 1st January. That's a proven fact now!"²⁰⁴ Graham's preoccupation with home in his

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.stevencurtis.com/vietnam/story9.htm>. Accessed 17 August 2005

¹⁹⁸ 'Leon', to 'Dear Babe', 15 June 1952, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.341

¹⁹⁹ Op. cit.

²⁰⁰ Op. cit.

²⁰¹ Tiemann, questionnaire answers

²⁰² Anon., questionnaire answers

²⁰³ Farrell, questionnaire answers

²⁰⁴ Robert Graham, to Parents, Fremont, Ohio, 10 December 1952. Graham was in fact not to return until after this date, being wounded with just 10 days remaining of his tour

letters even marked the envelopes, the rear of which would be adorned by the daily estimate of the duration left of his tour in Korea.²⁰⁵ The letters of Lavar Hollingshead and Clarence Schuster are saturated with references to home yet adopt alternate attitudes towards it. Hollingshead concentrates on his desire to return home whereas Schuster's references replicate those of Farrell – more idle musings of a personal nature – “So Vernie Schneider is getting married huh. Well I don't know, but he isn't but about 17 years old is he... So Dad & Donald are still plowing.”²⁰⁶ These musings must not however be simply dismissed as a bland jumble of inconsequential family news, but rather should be recognised as having a calmative function.

Homecoming and homesickness are two of the most regular ways in which home is mentioned in letters from Korea. The date a serviceman could expect to return from Korea was invariably uppermost in his mind. However, due to its provisional nature (e.g. determined by points accrued or Rhee's posturing) attitudes toward it could swing between the optimistic and pessimistic. Optimistic letters concerning coming home are usually motivated by a temporal certainty – “I'm coming home! It's official as of this morning...See you soon. See you soon. See you soon.”²⁰⁷ Such optimism was rarely so exuberant and sanguine. Returning home sooner than expected could be effected with a “million dollar wound”²⁰⁸ – a non-fatal wound that was severe enough for the soldier to be sent home. A soldier who had received such a wound in the hand wrote the following – “I shouldn't be here much longer and when I get back to the outfit, ill probably be sent home right away. So don't you worry. I'll surely be home for Christmas.”²⁰⁹ The letter concludes with a confident assertion that he will be seeing all the neighbours soon. The tone of this letter is upbeat and jaunty, briefly describing the wound before declaring, “Boy, Oh Boy, I have really been getting my fill of ice cream...Ha! Ha!”, and extolling the virtues of his “wonderful Brooklyn Dodgers.”²¹⁰ These topics and their treatment are surely compelled by the knowledge of his imminent return.

²⁰⁵ Robert Graham, to Parents, 3 September 1952. On rear of envelope, Graham has written 2m 25d (2 months 25 days)

²⁰⁶ Clarence Schuster, in Korea, to Parents, 27 July 1952. http://e27marines-1stmardiv.org/letters_to_home/clarence_schuster.htm.

²⁰⁷ Pfc Al Puntasecca, to family, November/December 1952. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/warletters/filmmore/pt.html>.

²⁰⁸ Hank Nicol (ed.), *Christmas in July* (Florida: Avon Park Press, 2003), p.81

²⁰⁹ Matt, to 'Dearest Mom & Dad', Mattoon, Illinois, 25 September 1951, 'Letters from Servicemen', in *The Forgotten Voices Vol. V, Issue 2*, p.11

²¹⁰ Op. cit.

Uncertainty over the date of return was the prime determinant of pessimistic letters concerning homecoming. Written in November 1951, the following letter cynically yet pragmatically assesses the war and the possibility of its imminent end – “Heard some scuttlebutt about the war being over in a month or so...I’ll be home for Christmas 1952 – maybe.”²¹¹ This ‘maybe’ was the final word in this letter and seals the tone of all that has been written previously as ambiguity and doubt. Anger could flare from this ambiguous situation before a final despairing resignation to it. Carl Dorsey has “almost given up the idea of getting home in the near future”²¹², and the following extract adds Lavar Hollingshead’s forceful resentment to this despondency – “For hell sake, don’t be sick when I get home – that is if I ever get home from this dam place.”²¹³ Having momentarily entertained the notion of returning home, Hollingshead quickly excludes this possibility. Many others chose simply to revert to their training and keep both hope and despair at bay. Rather, a logical assessment was made whereby the soldier resigned himself calmly to fate – “In two months anything can happen so I’m not worried too much about going back.”²¹⁴ However, the following sentence did show that this soldier was hopeful of his return – “The war might even be over.”²¹⁵ This letter was written on 8 March 1951.

Alongside these estimations and attitudes to the time of repatriation, a pining for home was also a regular occurrence in letters. This melancholy homesickness based itself on an appreciation of the life the serviceman had enjoyed in America before he had come to Korea – Bud Farrell wrote of his “appreciating home more every day.”²¹⁶ Clarence Schuster writes (admittedly after drinking some beers) that he “got pretty homesick...sure will be good when we can all go home again.”²¹⁷ This lugubrious remark is followed by an observation that suggests increased awareness of his life in America, stimulated by his hardships in Korea – “A guy just don’t realize how good he had it back home till he comes over here.”²¹⁸ This pining for home seems caused

²¹¹ John, to ‘Dear Family’, 10 November 1951. ‘Letters from Servicemen’, in *The Forgotten Voices Vol. V, Issue 2*, p.11

²¹² SSgt Carl J. Dorsey, Tachikawa Air Base, Japan, to Sgt Thomas E. Warner, Easton Pennsylvania, 14 February 1951.

²¹³ Lavar Hollingshead, to Patsy (wife), 18 June 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_hollingshead.htm.

²¹⁴ Donald Byres, Japan, to Parents, 8 March 1951

²¹⁵ Op. cit.

²¹⁶ Farrell, questionnaire answers

²¹⁷ Clarence Schuster, in Korea, to Parents, 26 October 1952. http://e27marines-1stmardiv.org/letters_to_home/clarence_schuster.htm.

²¹⁸ Op. cit.

as much, if not more, by the situation in Korea, rather than the remembered reality in America. Lavar Hollingshead writes – “Anyone who has been over in this dam place would want to get as far away from here as he could.”²¹⁹ When Hollingshead does mention home, he reveals that his longing is for his wife rather than any conceptions of America – “If I didn’t know that I had you waiting for me at home I wouldn’t give a hell if I never got home.”²²⁰

5.5 - WHAT IS ‘HOME’?

“Home to me was a combination of things – family, friends, house, hometown. I longed for them all and eventually got them back.”²²¹ Bill Burns

In a study of this nature it is necessary to illuminate not only the instances of ‘home’ in letters, but also to analyse what exactly ‘home’ meant to these letter writers. This evocative word was to occupy a broad range of mythic space and had various metaphorical formulations e.g. ‘mom and apple pie’. Although slippery in interpretation, such formulations share a common factor – the serviceman’s distance from ‘home’. The hardships in Korea meant home could become psychologically distant, unrecognisable and unfamiliar – “letters [from home] reported about things that were so remote to my situation that I was not deeply interested.”²²² The previous observation identifies an inability to connect with home from descriptions in letters that is identical to the following extract. Writing to his parents from Vietnam in September 1970, Sgt Michael Kelley states – “Letters from home are like Bibles: they tell of tales so distant from this reality that they demand a faith before one can actually read them. Is there really such a beautiful place...or is my memory based only on some childhood myth that I was awed into believing?”²²³ Certainly the faith of which Kelley writes waned in many as the diurnal struggle for survival in Korea endured.

²¹⁹ Hollingshead, to Patsy (wife), 18 June 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_hollingshead.htm.

²²⁰ Hollingshead, to Patsy (wife), 9 July 1951. http://www.koreanwar-educator.org/topics/letters_warzone/p_letters_warzone_hollingshead.htm.

²²¹ Burns, questionnaire answers

²²² Parchen, questionnaire answers

²²³ Sgt. Michael Kelley, to Family, 14 September 1970 in Bernard Edelman (ed.) *Dear America* (New York: Norton & Co., 2002), p.242

The troops that fought the UN ‘police action’ in Korea (to adopt Truman’s misguided neologism) were of diverse origins e.g. Ethiopia, Thailand and Great Britain.²²⁴ Just as home varied greatly on an international level, so too on the national level were there differing perceptions of the meaning of home. Certainly there were those for whom ‘home’ was a straightforward national entity – ‘Home I guess was simply America’²²⁵, ‘‘Home for me was America in general.’’²²⁶ This leads to an inevitable appraisal of the virtues of America. The most lucid evaluation of this is provided by Harold Mulhausen, who regards America in clear simple terms – ‘‘Home is being back in the US! A place to go to work, buy a house and raise a family.’’²²⁷

For others, home is a more abstract and relative idea, with people rather than place providing its essence – ‘‘home to me was my family.’’²²⁸ The socio-political framework of America, whereby loyalties to state often come before or alongside loyalties to nation, may have influenced notions of home. In these instances home was more specific and local – ‘‘where I was raised, my hometown’’²²⁹, ‘‘the family farm east of Cairo, Missouri.’’²³⁰

A final example of the diverse interpretations of home is explained by the fluid population dynamic of America. Thomas Paine, in his tract *Common Sense*, had declared America a sanctuary for the oppressed of the world – ‘‘O! receive the fugitive and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.’’²³¹ By the beginning of the 1950s this ‘‘asylum for mankind’’ was developed and one who had availed of it was Patrick Sheahan. Sheahan was born in 1928 in Newtownsandess, County Kerry. In 1948 he came to America, and was killed fighting for the US Army in June 1951. In a letter from Korea, Sheahan reminisces of his home in Ireland – ‘‘I am due for discharge June 17th '52 so I hope to see Newtown Sandess very soon after that’’²³² and a focus of his letter is the Gaelic Football scores that he has missed – ‘‘Wouldn't it be nice if Kerry was in for the All-Ireland and won it again this year.’’²³³ It is interesting to note

²²⁴ In total 15 nations (outwith the US) contributed to the UNC, with 5 others contributing medical units. For a full breakdown of this, see Rees, *Korea: The Limited War*, p.457

²²⁵ Tiemann, questionnaire answers

²²⁶ Parchen, questionnaire answers

²²⁷ Mulhausen, questionnaire answers

²²⁸ Anon., questionnaire answers

²²⁹ Graham, questionnaire answers

²³⁰ Lyon, questionnaire answers

²³¹ Rudolph J. Vecoli, ‘The Significance of Immigration in the Formation of an American Identity’, in *The History Teacher Vol. 30, No. 1* (1996), p.12

²³² Patrick Sheahan, to Frank O’Connor. <http://www.illyria.com/irish/sheahan.html>.

²³³ Op. cit.

that nine Irish soldiers of the US Army (including Sheahan) were KIA in Korea yet never attained US citizenship. The remains of these men were shipped back to Ireland. A surviving veteran, Sgt. John Leahy of Lixnaw, County Kerry conveys this discontinuity of home and service. Although not officially American, and although their ‘home’ may well have been Ireland, “We served the U.S., not the UN.”²³⁴

CHAPTER 6 - MISCELLANEOUS

Aside from the major themes already identified as prevalent in letters home, two other topics are addressed with sufficient regularity to merit their analysis. Although less frequent in occurrence than mention of the weather or home in letters, the themes of “Police Action” and pay were often encountered in the letters studied.

6.1 - “POLICE ACTION”

At dawn on 25 June 1950, the ferocious and rapid North Korean attack across the 38th Parallel triggered a war in Korea. Only on 27 July 1953 was the armistice signed at Panmunjom. This agreement technically brought the war to an end, but a state of suspended hostilities continued to exist between North and South Korea for many years, and even today the situation remains unresolved. The whole of Korea was one gigantic area of conflict for three years, and the devastation, loss of life, injuries and family separations were enormous²³⁵ – “When we got to Seoul, all that was left standing was one solitary pontoon bridge.”²³⁶ Upon hearing of the initial North Korean invasion, Truman bullishly declared, “By God, I’m going to let them have it!”²³⁷ yet his actions were to be in clear disagreement with this sentiment. In the US, the war was termed a “Police Action” under the aegis of the UN, largely to negate the necessity of a Congressional declaration of war. Veteran Vince Krepps offers an interesting explanation of the provenance of this debated phrase – “I heard it started from a reporter and he [Truman] just picked up on it. Somebody says, ‘You mean this

²³⁴ <http://www.irishecho.com/search/searchstory.cfm?id=8810&issueid=185>. Accessed 2 September 2005

²³⁵ Peter Lowe, *The Korean War* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), p.101

²³⁶ Graham interview

²³⁷ Clayton James, *Refighting the Last War* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p.11

is a police action?’ and Truman replied ‘Yes, that’s what it is, it’s a police action’.”²³⁸

Truman’s incompetent neologism was a misnomer that understandably infuriates veterans today – “My resentment is toward those, who, when discussing wars, skip from WWII to Vietnam, disregarding the Korean War, or who persist in calling it a ‘conflict’ or a ‘police action’.”²³⁹ Crucially, sentiments toward the phrase were also scathing in letters home written by soldiers in Korea. Joe Sammarco, who had seen brutal fighting at Chipyong-ni and Chaun-ni, writes with obvious scorn –

“After the next big ATTACK, (which is predicted to be the biggest of the “Police Action”, (ha! ha!) I think the Chinese will be about washed up.”²⁴⁰

“I don’t know when I will be able to come home, but it should be in the next 3-4 months at the latest. Unless, of course, the “Police Action” (HA! HA!) takes a turn for the worst, which it might easily do.”²⁴¹

Certainly one cannot question the logic, nor fail to notice the quotation marks, in the following extract, written by Lawrence Towne to his wife in May 1952 – “Yes, our leaders may call it a “Police Action” but these men are just as dead as in the biggest of wars.”²⁴²

In letters home, the soldier’s observations revealed the illegitimacy of the war as a horrendous error. Seventeen-year-old Charles Morrow eloquently displays more perspicacity and forethought than the decision makers in Washington in a July 1950 letter – “I know they have called this just a Korean Police Action, but I am over here and I say this is in no way just a Military Police Action, this is war and before it is over it may dam well prove to be one hell of a war.”²⁴³ In a transaction that was to be life-shaping or fatal for these servicemen, they had been sold a police action, yet they had received a brutal and cruel war. The American public had also been deluded. Marvin Myers suggests the spirit of the times – “Only a handful of friends and family came to see us off. Why would they? There was no declaration of war. Congress had not approved, nor had the president signed, a declaration of war...*The Klinger Letter* even boasted that the minor conflict would be over in six weeks.”²⁴⁴ For many, arrival in Korea was disconcerting and alarming – “We soon got an idea of something

²³⁸ <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/korea/a1.html>. Accessed 15 August 2005

²³⁹ Tiemann, questionnaire answers

²⁴⁰ Sammarco, to wife, 1 March 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.345

²⁴¹ Sammarco, to wife, 21 April 1951, in Carroll (ed.), *War Letters*, p.347

²⁴² Lawrence Towne, Hill 347, to JoAnn Towne, 26 May 1952

²⁴³ Morrow, to Uncle Arthur, 6 July 1950

²⁴⁴ Myers, email 1 June 2005

more than a “Police Action” when we saw the devastated towns and cities...Of particular note were ambulances with bullet riddled red crosses.”²⁴⁵

6.2 – PAY

The financial remuneration received by the serviceman in Korea was a frequently occurring topic in letters home. In almost all the letters in this study concerning pay the generosity of the serviceman stands out. Large amounts of money by contemporary reckoning were sent back to loved ones in America – “I got \$112.00 pay today so if I can get a money order I’ll send about \$70 home.”²⁴⁶ The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, in Korea “There was not that much I wanted to spend it [money] on anyway.”²⁴⁷ Secondly, and more significantly, when displaced to Korea the serviceman was incapable of physically supporting his family in person. Concern about this meant that the next best solution was to selflessly sacrifice his pay to those who needed it at home – “if you ever need any money this winter just let me no, maybe I can help you out. I sent home a check I hope you got it ok.”²⁴⁸ Concern for the financial well-being of those at home can be found in the letters of Dudley Hughes. Despite his separation from his wife, Hughes considers his pay for his service in Korea to be a shared income – “if I can stay close enough to the front to get combat pay for a few months, we could really stack it up...Who knows we may retire.”²⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that at this time Hughes’ wife Robbie was herself receiving an income (in the constable’s office in Dallas), yet Hughes’ crucial use of the word ‘we’ is an example of the self-effacing and generous spirit that permeates so many letters from Korea. The combat pay to which Hughes alludes was the most common way to supplement the basic pay offered to the serviceman. Often attitudes toward this danger money were strictly mercenary with the serviceman happy to accept the risks and the money. After all, they were in Korea to do a job, and combat, though not welcomed, was an inevitable hazard of this job. Remarkably, “some worried we wouldn’t be shelled the requisite four days a month so we could collect

²⁴⁵ Wayne Pelkey, in Nicol (ed.), *Christmas in July*, p.19

²⁴⁶ Robert Graham, to Parents, Fremont, Ohio, 29 February 1952

²⁴⁷ Graham interview

²⁴⁸ Clarence Schuster, in Korea, to ‘Dear Folks’, 25 August 1952. http://e27marines-1stmardiv.org/letters_to_home/clarence_schuster.htm.

²⁴⁹ Dudley Hughes, to Robbie Hughes (wife), 13 January 1953, in Hughes, *Wall of Fire*, p.91

our \$50 combat pay.”²⁵⁰ Various other schemes were hatched to bolster the soldier’s income, including the selling of cigarettes or alcohol. Dudley Hughes revealed one such ingenious plan in a letter to his wife, again employing the ubiquitous ‘we’ – “I finally made first lieutenant. Already, I’ve given away \$11 worth of cigars...This will mean an additional \$45.76 per month – we’re getting rich.”²⁵¹

CONCLUSION

Eric Severeid claims in *Not So Wild a Dream* - “War happens inside a man. It happens to one man alone. It can never be communicated.”²⁵² This study undermines the veracity of this statement, and has shown that war can be communicated. These Korean War letters are powerful, emotional and evocative tools of communication. Indeed the response to my appeal for letters reveals not only a story untold, but also one that its participants are keen to tell. The Korean War may indeed have happened to “one man alone” but in many instances that one man is eager to communicate his experiences. From homesickness, to combat, to weather, letters from Korea form a rich tapestry of personal experience and are perhaps amongst the most critical tools in understanding the American involvement in this neglected War. Their power is not in their analysis, but truly in the honest emotions that emerge from them. One is reminded of Wordsworth’s warning in *The Tables Turned* -

“Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things-
We murder to dissect.”²⁵³

The role of letters during the war was absolutely critical. They tracked the soldiers whole Korean experience, beginning with the draft letter, progressing to letters to and from Korea, and finally reaching their climax with a ‘coming home’ letter, or a stilted and official ‘form’ letter telling family and friends of their loved one’s death or injury - “The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your brother Pfc Morrow, Charles A., was slightly injured in action in Korea.”²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Nicol (ed.), *Korea, Korea*. Email 11 August 2005

²⁵¹ Hughes, to wife, 2 April 1953, in Hughes, *Wall of Fire*, p.150

²⁵² Professor Miller, LaFayette College. Guest Lecture at Glasgow University, 8 March 2005

²⁵³ <http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/2000/w/words56.html>.

²⁵⁴ Secretary of the Army, to Eugene Morrow, 29 July 1951, Western Union Telegram

These letters do something to flesh the bones of what has been a comparatively maligned and insufficiently remembered war. They are personal testimonies of the most enlightening and crucial form, creating vivid and unique historical images. Inevitably, there is further territory to be explored within this subject. A number of the letters investigated evince an awareness of political realities and query the purpose of the war. The following observations indicate this -

“This is one country I don’t think is worth the powder to blow it up...”²⁵⁵

“We were not fighting for Korea, but to stop an invading Communist nation”²⁵⁶

A comparative analysis with letters from World War Two would also be extremely interesting. World War Two was “our last just and victorious war, the last war a man could come home from with the expectation of glory.”²⁵⁷ This certainty and confidence could provide a stark contrast to Korean War letters.

Veterans of the Korean War will “remember their buddies, and the good times and the bad ones, and wish, perhaps that their sad war had been worthy of them.”²⁵⁸

Hopefully, this study of Korean War letters has shown that their experiences must never be forgotten.

²⁵⁵ Heersma, to “Dear Folks”, 13 December 1950.

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²⁵⁶ Parchen, questionnaire answers

²⁵⁷ Samuel Hynes, *New York Times*, 6 June 2004

²⁵⁸ Op. cit.

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