

“...And by the Way, Send Food.”



No matter how fast the bullets flew, American soldiers in World War II still found time to write home.

Life in the Trenches

William Shinji Tsuchida was a medic during the invasion of Germany. His parents, born in Japan, were interned by the U.S. during the war. Tsuchida wrote often to his brother and sister in the internment camp.

France, 23 Oct. 1944

Dear H and E,

Hello again while I have a chance to write. The other day we were supposed to have our first rest period but we were called back. From that you can surmise to what degree we are having casualties since I can't tell you that directly. Anyway we got as far as the showers and I had my first shower in about two months. You should see us now. We are caked with mud from head to toe and my clothes are ready to be peeled off me. My underclothes are oily black and I sure would like to change. The shower point is about 20 minutes away. No ducking, no shrapnel. I guess that was about the most enjoyable five minutes in my life.

What a mess the whole business is. My mind is one confused conglomeration of incidents, the basic fears of night, and the waiting for daylight. I hope everybody with the soft war

jobs realizes the horrible days and nights the line company men have to spend out here.

Got your letters regularly, with the pictures. Thanks, and keep it up. Please send me jars of jellies, preserves. Our diet lacks vegetables, so send small cans of tomato juice, soups, fruit, and be sure to make the packages in a variety, not just one item in one box.

So long for now,
Shinji

At 20,000 Feet

Lieutenant Colonel John Woolnough served as a bomber captain, flying 50 missions over France and Germany. He wrote to his sister from a base in England.

25 October, 1944

Dear Nancy:

Yours are the most loving and newsy letters I get from anyone. I really mean that, Nance. We've certainly grown close since our separation. It is the same with Charlie [twin brother]. I guess that is what our family needed.

Our war (in the air) is a different war. It isn't a bloody, ruthless war. It is almost impersonal. Except in a few cases, we see nothing. Our gunners tell us they saw a ship blow up. If you

don't know anyone in that ship, it has little effect upon you. You just shrug your shoulders and say, "This is war." If your friends go down, you miss them for a while, and cold as it may seem, you grieve little.

You can't imagine how it feels to be flying at 20,000 feet with the temperature down to 30 degrees below zero. Ahead of you lies the target and flak—hundreds and thousands of black puffs, just like a cloud—all you can do is sit there and sweat. When it is passed, you wonder how many holes are in the ship as you heard the "woof" and the tiny pellets rattle against the fuselage. After a few seconds you get enough moisture back in your mouth so you can talk again.

I hope to be home for Christmas, maybe not.

Lovingly,
John

Wounded

Harry Towne was a Marine corporal in the Pacific.

March 19, 1945

Central Pacific
Dear Mom:

I don't know if you have heard that I was wounded, Mom. I asked a Chaplain to write to you, so you probably have. I am coming along fine now and expect to be in the States before long. I was wounded quite badly, Mother, but the Medical Corps will fix me up like new again.

Don't let this be a shock to you, Mother, I will be in almost as good shape as before, now that they have these new artificial limbs. Yes, Mother, I have lost my right leg, but it isn't worrying me a bit. I shall receive a pension for the rest of my life and with the new artificial limb, you can hardly tell anything is wrong.

I would like to write to Alma, but

somehow I can't force myself to do it. You write and tell her, Mother. I'll try to write to her later on.

Love,
Bill

"It's All Over!"

Barrie Greenbie was a private in the field artillery. He was in the Philippines when Japan surrendered, ending the war. He wrote to his wife just after he heard.

Tuesday, August 14th

Dear Meg:

"IT'S TRUE! IT'S ALL OVER!": says the enclosed *Free Filipino Extra*. Isn't that the most beautiful headline you ever saw? It should be framed!

No official confirmation yet, but there isn't much doubt. The news came this afternoon out at camp, came with a shouting and hailing but without surprise. There's not the celebrating in the streets tonight. No honking, shooting. The harbor whistles blew a while, but there's not crazy joy, just happy relief, and that's even better.

I'd like to be on Times Square, but maybe it's more appropriate this way. New York must be wild, celebration without reservation this time. With V-J Day proclaimed, perhaps tomorrow while I'm rolling north, I'll be thinking of my two girls up in the Empire State Building high over the city, on top of a world at peace at last, and my heart will float up to meet them.

I'm going out to spend my last four pesos for a couple of drinks and will drink with the first guy standing by to peace and home and family! Don't know where the other boys are, but everybody's a friend on a night like this.

Love,
Barrie

Between the Lines

1. Judging from the tone of each letter, list three adjectives describing the writer's mood.

a. Tsuchida. _____

b. Woolnough. _____

c. Towne. _____

d. Greenbie. _____

2. Every primary source is biased, because it contains the particular perspective of the person who created it. What might have influenced each writer's perspective? List three factors for each letter writer.

a. Tsuchida. _____

b. Woolnough. _____

c. Towne. _____

d. Greenbie. _____

Taking it Further

Pick one of the letter writers and research the context in which the letter was written. Then write up a report. Your report might begin something like this: "When William Shinji Tsuchida wrote to his family in October 1944, he was stationed on the front lines in France. Fighting there at the time was . . . The Allied strategy was to . . . Tsuchida may have been involved in . . . , etc."