Veterans Day Salute 2018
Wartime Letters: A window into realities of war
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Attendees salute the U.S. flag during the Veterans Day ceremony at VFW Ship 4084 in 2017. This year’s event will begin at 11 a.m. on Sunday.
VETERANS DAY
HONORING ALL WHO SERVED
Wartime letters provide a window into the realities of such times, according to Chapman University's Andrew Carroll.

“I’ve traveled to all 50 states and 40 countries in search of letters,” Carroll said. Carroll spoke at the October Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert’s veterans luncheon on the topic, highlighting his personal mission of collecting such correspondence. Carroll serves as director of Chapman’s Center for American War Letters, which contains hundreds of thousands of correspondence dating all the way back to the American Revolutionary War.

“What is so breathtaking about the correspondence is the history they capture,” Carroll told a room full of veterans and active duty service members. 

He recounted a question asked of him by an Iraqi soldier during a visit to that country. “‘Why focus on war letters,’ he asked me,” Carroll said. “No one had asked that me that before and I mumbled that this is very personal project me and I thought it was worth saving history.”

However, he noted there was more to the story than that answer. Carroll noted he doesn’t come from a military background and hated history growing up, an irony not lost on him considering his profession.

“My sophomore year in college, our house in Washington, D.C. burned to the ground and we...
everything we had went up in smoke,” Carroll said. He said a distant cousin of his, a War World II veteran pilot named Jim, contacted him about WWII memorabilia he had stored which included a letter written to his wife in 1945.

Carroll held the letter up for the assembled group of veterans to see. An onion-piece of paper protected by a plastic sleeve, the letter contained Jim’s reflection on why he realized U.S. soldiers were in Europe fighting Nazi Germany. Carroll said the letter described his cousin’s walkthrough of a concentration camp the Allies had liberated.

“I will never forget the contrast of holding this very thin paper and comparing it to the weight and significance of its contents,” Carroll said. He said that letter was “the spark to start talking to other veterans about what they do with their correspondence.”

Through word of mouth, he started collecting dozens of letters. Dozens turned into hundreds and thousands. He gave it a name:—The Legacy Project — in 1998 to preserve the legacy of troops through their memories and letters.

Carroll said he wrote to the Dear Abby Column some 20 years ago about his project and soon after that his post office was inundated with letters.

From there, the project ballooned. Chapman University established the center after Carroll donated more than 100,000 wartime letters in 2013. It is housed at the Leatherby Libraries building in Orange, Calif.

In addition to the center and his project, Carroll has written several books around the subject.

He brought with him letters from different eras and conflicts, and highlighted how soldiers in WWI and WWII used censorship of letters to their advantage, including coming up with codes they relayed to their loved ones.

And then there were letters with a humorous story behind them. One letter written by a Bill Kaiser during WW II from the Pacific Theater, which was nothing more than a rectangle with a large hole, started off, “Dear Mom and Dad, so here I am in...” followed by the huge chunk cut out, and ending with “Well, I hope so too. Love Bill. P.S: They might censor this letter.”

“What I found out from his brother Ernie is that Bill would take a piece of paper, write the first line, jump down to the bottom, and then he would cut out the middle, blame the censors,” Carroll said. “It was only because Bill’s mother had been pestering him to write home and this was just easier.”

Some letters described moments and eye witness accounts of historical moments such as one sailor’s involvement during Imperial Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

Another was a letter collected by a Union soldier from a dead Confederate soldier:

The Historic USO Building hosts a Veterans Breakfast each month on the third Thursday.
Harley Baker, a Ridgecrest resident and Air Force veteran who served during the Korean War, said Carroll’s project resonated with him.

“My primary reaction was the fact of the memories he [Carroll] stirred during the Korean War, said Carroll’s presentation made it real,” Baker said. “Phone calls were expensive, email wasn’t around then and it was the only way I could hear news from home.”

Carroll told the Daily Independent following his presentation that he is working on a new project called “Million Letters Campaign.”

“I’m just barnstorming the country talking to museums, libraries, historical societies, veterans groups and high schools, encouraging people to seek out war letters,” Carroll said. “It’s amazing wherever I go, there are just so many of these letters out there and our urgency is to get them preserved before they’re lost.”

He said one of the center’s goals was to preserve letters from service members who “haven’t gotten their due,” adding that group includes African American, Latino, and Asian American soldiers and veterans, women who served in the military, as well as spouses.

“History buffs know about them, but the general population I think some times don’t know some of the extraordinary individuals who are out there,” Carroll said. He said letters aren’t just someone’s recollections.

“This is someone writing, telling people what it feels like, and I think for people who want to learn more about war, these letters make it human and makes it real,” Carroll said.

Tex Hoppus, president of the Historical Society, said he’s in the process of setting up a drop off point in case local Ridgecrest and Trona residents wish to donate their own letters to the Center for American War Letters. The drop off point would be at the Historic USO Building, 230 W. Ridgecrest Blvd.

For more information on the Center for American War Letters and the Legacy Project, visit www.warletters.us.
Celebrate Veterans Day at VFW Ship 4084

VFW Ship 4084, 117 N. Alvord Street, will host a Veterans Day Ceremony, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. Shannon Grove, candidate for the 16th State Senate seat, will be the guest speaker. There will be a potluck lunch to follow the ceremony.

For more information, call 760-375-4084.

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In this patriotic community when I name my favorite holidays, I often think of waving flags. However just a flag is nice and very appreciated but so is an individual word – a special thank you to those serving now and especially to those who have served.

Many of them didn’t ask to leave their homes to fight on distant battlefields as in the past, when service was mandated, now all volunteer. They do not do so because they love fighting. They serve to be part of something greater than they ever thought: a group serving for all of us in the Armed Forces. Someone each of us owe a debt we will never be able to repay in full but must never cease to try!

Millions of Americans have fought and died on battlefields here and abroad to defend our freedoms and way of life. Today our troops continue to make the ultimate sacrifices, and even as we lose men and women, more Americans step forward to say, “Count me in!”

Today, people throughout this community will gather together to remember, to honor, and to offer homage to those who have served our country. This is just one Community’s spark that I hope will grab our Nation and fill us with honest thanks, not for just a day off, but in recognition that there goes a hero - someone who has or continues to serve so that we may always be - Americans!

So please speak out - say thank you to all of our Veterans!
This Veterans Day weekend, Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division will pause to remember and to honor the service of all U.S. military veterans - past and present. When stopping to reflect upon the incalculable impact of our veterans’ sacrifices, I think it important to recall some of the history of this national holiday.

In the U.S., Veterans Day evolved from Armistice Day observances marking the end of World War I on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. On the first Armistice Day in 1919, President Woodrow Wilson issued a message honoring a nation which, "with splendid forgetfulness of mere personal concerns" had brought "vast resources, material and moral," to the assistance of allies who had "suffered and sacrificed without limit in the cause for which we fought." This message resonates with me. It reminds me that our veterans’ finest accomplishments have historically stemmed from the conviction that the pursuit of freedom, equality and justice should take precedence over the pursuit on one’s own well-being. I am most heartened whenever I see this principle at work at NAWCWD and in our local community.

And I do see this principle at work in countless different ways in the Indian Wells Valley. I see it among the NAWCWD veterans who serve on base in a wide range of civilian career fields. I see it among the veterans, family members, friends and supporters who continue to serve our local community on a daily basis as teachers, police officers, fire fighters, local officials, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. I see it in the sincere and dedicated support that the entire IWV community offers to the U.S. Armed Forces’ ceaseless efforts to protect and defend the nation.

This Veterans Day, I encourage you to thank the veterans in your own lives for their service. As you do so, I invite you to join me in reflecting on the principle of selfless service to the most vulnerable among us that has historically motivated the most accomplished of our veterans.
Veterans Day is not just a day of thanks for those who have served this great Country, but a solemn annual reminder of their profound sacrifice, and our indebtedness to them. As a former Navy Captain and Commander of Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, I have served alongside many remarkable Sailors, Soldiers and Marines. I have seen firsthand their tireless commitment, dedication and sacrifice.

The men and women of our military are deserving of our deepest gratitude and respect, and that is why I invite you to join me in honoring them, not only this Veterans Day, but every day. We should honor them not only in words, but also in actions.

As this heated election season draws to a close, and political tensions wind down, it is important to remember the fact that regardless of the outcome, we enjoy the freedom of speech, the freedom to elect our leaders, and the freedom to shape our own destiny like nowhere else on earth. It is equally important to remember that these freedoms were fought for and won by countless brave men and women, many who paid the ultimate price.

Ronald Reagan once said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the blood stream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same…”

Thank you to all who have served, for your bravery, your sacrifice and your example.

For all those who served, Our deepest gratitude.

God Bless Them and God Bless America

Honoring All Who Have Served

Thanking all the brave men and women who sacrifice their time and lives to protect our great country

Veterans Day remarks from Kern County First District Supervisor Mick Gleason
Leaving a Legacy: Ways to celebrate veterans before they pass on and after they’ve died

For any American, visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., can be one of the most powerful and emotional ways to honor the more than 58,000 Americans who gave their lives in service to our country. For Vietnam-era veterans, a visit can provide closure and reinforce the importance of their sacrifice.

“Many monuments and memorials exist around the country honoring those Vietnam vets who were killed, along with the Vietnam Wall in D.C. that is the main anchor for honoring those Vietnam veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice,” said Bob Babcock, who served with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division as a rifle platoon leader and executive officer, 1966-67 in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

BY MELISSA ERICKSON
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THANKING AND HONORING ALL THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN FOR THEIR SACRIFICES TO PROTECT OUR GREAT NATION

We Appreciate All You Do

JESSICA WESTON/DAILY INDEPENDENT

Meris and Doug Lueck glance at names on The Moving Wall, a half-scale replica of the Vietnam Wall Memorial, at Freedom Park in July.

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Since the Wall officially opened in November 1982, people have left tributes there in honor of veterans such as dog tags, medals and other special remembrances. Some people leave more — the cremated remains of veterans. As the age of the remaining population of Vietnam veterans increases, so has the leaving of cremains.

This January the National Park Service erected signs advising people not to leave cremains. One sign reads: “The scattering of human remains is prohibited anywhere on the National Mall, including at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Human remains and associated objects should not be left at the memorial and will not become...

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Residents walk along The Moving Wall at Freedom Park in July.

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The National Park Service has collected more than 400,000 objects left at the Wall, from sonograms and international flags to military regalia and wedding rings, to teddy bears and even a motorcycle. Those mementos are curated to form the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection, which “provides context for a better understanding of the many aspects of the Vietnam War and its veterans,” said Mike Litterst, National Park Service spokesman.

The war was complicated, but the legacy of Vietnam veterans shouldn’t be.

“Most Vietnam veterans participated in the Vietnam War because we felt it was our duty and our responsibility,” Babcock said. “Just as others before us, we who did what our country asked us to do in Vietnam simply did our part to pay the price for living in this great country that many before us fought to create and preserve.”

Too many people today take our freedom for granted and don’t personally know anyone in the military, Babcock said.

“We who answered our country’s call during the Vietnam War can hold our heads high that we did what all Americans should be willing to do when called on. Those who were draft dodgers probably have regrets, in their private moments, that they shirked their responsibility back when they were young men. “I did my duty, made lifelong friends, learned lessons that have served me well all my life, have a strong patriotic sense of responsibility to our country and its defense ‘against all enemies — foreign and domestic,’ and am a better man because I served in Vietnam. I made more important decisions as a 23-year old rifle platoon leader than I ever made in my 34-year career as an IBM executive,” Babcock said.

Casualties keep mounting

Those who served in Vietnam have long been the nation’s largest group of veterans, numbering 6.7 million in 2016, according to the U.S. census. Now in their late 60s to 80s, these veterans are experiencing the normal maladies associated with aging, and many are dying at a faster rate because of Agent Orange.

“It’s tragic. Just like World War II and Korean vets, it’s now Vietnam vets’ time,” said Paul Palazzolo, president of Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 9, in Detroit.

Veterans who returned home from Vietnam and later died as a result of their service are often not eligible for inclusion on the Wall.

“When the Wall was built in 1982, no one knew that veterans were going to continue dying from Vietnam-related
for their service and sacrifice after they founded and built the Wall. The group's In Memory program is "a way for us to honor Vietnam veterans for their service and sacrifice after they came home. The In Memory plaque was dedicated in 2004 just off to the side of the Three Servicemen Statue in D.C. and it reads: "In Memory of the men and women who served in the Vietnam War and later died as a result of their service. We honor and remember their sacrifice," Zimmerman said.

"The majority of our honorees (more than 3,200 total to date) died from Agent Orange-related illnesses and/or PTSD-related events — suicide," she said.

Visit the In Memory homepage, vmf.org/InMemoryProgram, where each veteran has his or her own page that offers more information about them.

Veterans added to In Memory are honored each year on Father's Day with a ceremony. Last year, more than 400 veterans were honored by almost 2,000 family members and friends in attendance. Each honoree's name is said aloud either by a family member or a volunteer. Previous honorees' families are invited to attend.

"They describe it as very healing to be around other families who have been through very similar experiences. In Memory costs nothing to the family member/applicant, and it really does help a family with healing and closure," Zimmerman said.

Oral history

When it comes to the legacy of Vietnam veterans, who better to speak of it than themselves?

"There's a growing interest across the country" to get veterans' stories "on the record," especially after last fall's 18-hour PBS series "The Vietnam War" by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, said Edward Miller, associate professor of history and director of the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, Dartmouth College.

The Dartmouth project is an oral history endeavor that brings together students and older members of the Dartmouth community to record testimony. Rather than focusing exclusively on veterans, it is a community-building measure, Miller said.

"Vietnam touched a big part of the population, just about everybody. When you start to record you begin to see the diversity of stories and experiences of veterans, protesters, families. No single veteran's perspective is the same, but most express pride in their service," Miller said.

Oral histories by veterans give others who weren't present — or even alive — a powerful sense of what it means to serve.

"It's rare to understand the higher sacrifice made by veterans," said documentary Ron Osgood, professor emeritus at Indiana University and a veteran who was deployed three times to Vietnam between 1970 and 1972.

There's no comparison to learning about war from an individual's perspective to understand it, said Osgood, whose most recent film is "Just Like Me: The Vietnam War — Stories from All Sides," produced by Indiana Public Television as a companion piece to "The Vietnam War."

Collectively, movies made about Vietnam or the way it's viewed in popular culture rarely focus on the individual but rather the horror or carnage of war, Osgood said.

"Vets have stories to share, and many times wives or families haven't heard them. Like the World War II and Korea veterans, these stories are disappearing," Osgood said.

For the "boots on the ground," now is the time to share their stories, Babcock said.

"It is the 50th anniversary of the year in the war — 1968 — where we suffered the most casualties, had the most victories and had the press and the nation turn against the Vietnam veteran and the Vietnam War. ... It is more important now than ever for we Vietnam veterans to tell our stories — those of us who lived and fought the Vietnam War — rather than let someone else tell the story for us."

Honor veterans in life

Paying tribute to fallen heroes keeps them in mind, but a better way is to honor them while they're still alive, Palazzolo said. Visiting the National Mall, the monuments in your own town or a Veterans Day parade are all simple ways to start.

"Detroit holds a massive Veterans Day parade," and last year about 4,000 veterans made the 2-mile march, Palazzolo said. Other top Veterans Day parades are in New York City; Auburn, Washington; Albany, New York; Birmingham, Alabama; Las Vegas and Houston.

Visit a V.A. hospital

Veterans of all wars seek health care in Veterans Administration hospitals, and there may be one near your community.

"Go visit the guys laid up in bed. Everyone goes at Christmas or other holidays. Do it another time," Palazzolo said.

Bring small gifts like toiletries (razors, combs), magazines or candy bars.

"A visit can make a big difference in someone's life and is a great way to teach young people," Palazzolo said.

"There are a lot of little things you can do like bring vets to the hospital," Osgood said. Help is needed in all departments, and your assistance frees up staff for more important work, he said.
Ralph Stepney's home on a quiet street in north Baltimore has a welcoming front porch and large rooms, with plenty of space for his comfortable recliner and vast collection of action movies. The house is owned by Joann West, a licensed caregiver who shares it with Stepney and his fellow Vietnam War veteran Frank Hundt.

“There is no place that I’d rather be. ... I love the quiet of living here, the help we get. I thank the Lord every year that I am here,” Stepney, 73, said.

It’s a far cry from a decade ago, when Stepney was homeless and “didn’t care about anything.” His diabetes went unchecked and he had suffered a stroke—a medical event that landed him at the Baltimore Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

After having part of his foot amputated, Stepney moved into long-term nursing home care at a VA medical facility, where he thought he’d remain—until he became a candidate for a small VA effort that puts aging veterans in private homes: the Medical Foster Home program.

The $20.7 million-per-year program provides housing and care for more than 1,000 veterans in 42 states and Puerto Rico, serving as an alternative to nursing home care for those who cannot live safely on their own. Veterans pay their caregivers $1,500 to $3,000 a month, depending on location, saving the government about $10,000 a month in nursing home care. It has been difficult to scale up, though, because the VA accepts only foster homes that meet strict qualifications.

For the veterans, it’s a chance to live in a home setting with caregivers who treat them like family. For the Department of Veterans Affairs, the program provides an option for meeting its legal obligation to care for ailing, aging patients at significantly reduced costs, since the veterans pay room and board directly to their caregivers.

Cost-effectiveness is but one of the program’s benefits. Stepney and Hundt, 67, are in good hands with West, who previously ran a home health care services company. And they’re in good company, watching television together in the main living room, going to elder care twice a week and sitting on West’s porch chatting with neighbors.

‘They deserve it’

West, who considers caring for older adults “her calling,” also savors the companionship and finds satisfaction in giving back to those who spent their young lives in military service to the U.S.

“I took care of my mother when she got cancer and I found that I really had a passion for it. I took classes and ran an in-home nursing care business for years. But my dream was always to get my own place and do what I am doing now,” West said. “God worked it out.”

The Medical Foster Home program has slightly more than 700 licensed caregivers who live full time with no more than three veterans and provide round-the-clock supervision and care, according to the VA. Akin to a community residential care facility, each foster home must be state-licensed as an assisted living facility and submit to frequent inspections by the VA.
But one prerequisite cannot be taught – the ability to make a veteran feel at home. West has grown children serving in the military and takes pride in contributing to the well-being of veterans. “It’s a lot of joy taking care of them,” she said of Stepney and Hundt. “They deserve it.”

To be considered for the program, veterans must be enrolled in VA health care; have a serious, chronic disabling medical condition that requires a nursing home level of care; and need care coordination and access to VA services. It can take up to a month to place a veteran in a home once they are found eligible, according to the VA.

The veterans also must be able to cover their costs. Because medical foster homes are not considered institutional care, the VA is not allowed to pay for it directly. The average monthly fee, according to the VA, is $2,300, which most veterans cover with their VA compensation, Social Security and savings, said Nicole Trimble, Medical Foster Home coordinator at the Perry Point VA Medical Center in Maryland.

**Pilot Program Takes Off**

Since 1999, the Department of Veterans Affairs has been required to provide nursing home services to veterans who qualify for VA health care and have a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher, or are considered unemployable and have a disability rating of 60 percent or higher.

The VA provides this care through short- or long-term nursing home facilities, respite care, community living centers on VA hospital grounds, private assisted living facilities and state veterans homes.

Shortly after, the VA Medical Center in Little Rock, Ark., launched an alternative: a pilot program that placed veterans in individual homes, at an average cost to the VA of roughly $60 a day, including administration and health care expenses, compared with upward of $500 a day for nursing home care.

And because veterans who are enrolled in the Medical Foster Care program must use the VA’s Home-Based Primary Care program, which provides an interdisciplinary team of health professionals for in-home medical treatment, the program saves the VA even more. One study showed that the home-based care has yielded a 59 percent drop in VA hospital inpatient days and a 31 percent reduction in admissions among those who participate.

More than 120 VA medical centers now oversee a Medical Foster Home program in their regions, and the VA has actively promoted the program within its health system.
We Thank You

On this day, we would like to take a moment to honor our military veterans who have sacrificed so much to ensure our safety and freedom. Our deepest gratitude and thoughts remain with you and your families on Veteran’s Day and every day. Thank you for serving America with honor, courage, and commitment.

It also has attracted bipartisan congressional support. In 2013, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) introduced a bill to allow the VA to pay for medical foster homes directly.

In 2015, former House Veterans Affairs Committee chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) introduced similar legislation that would have allowed the VA to pay for up to 900 veterans under the program.

And in May, Rep. Clay Higgins (R-La.) raised the issue again, sponsoring a bill similar to Miller’s. “Allowing veterans to exercise greater flexibility over their benefits ensures that their individual needs are best met,” Higgins said in support of the program.

A Guardian ‘Angel’

Foster care has been a blessing for the family of Hundt, who suffered a stroke shortly after his wife died and was unable to care for himself. Hundt’s daughter, Kimberly Maleczewski, lives nearby and often stops in to visit her dad, sometimes with her 2-year-old son.

“T’m not sure where my father would be if he didn’t have this,” she said. “With my life situation – my husband and I both work full time, we have no extra room in our house, and we have a small child – I can’t take care of him the way Miss Joann Trimble, whose program started in 2012 and has five homes, said she hopes to expand by two to three homes a year. The VA will remain meticulous about selecting homes.

“There is a strict inspection and vetting process to be a medical foster home,” Trimble said. “We only will accept the best.”

It also takes a special person to be an “angel,” as the caregivers are referred to in the program’s motto, “Where Heroes Meet Angels.”

Stepney and Hundt agree West has earned her wings. On a recent cruise to Bermuda, she brought Stepney and Hundt along.

For Hundt, it was the first time he’d been on a boat. And Stepney said it was nothing like the transport ships he and his fellow troops used in the late 1960s: “Well, I’ve gotten to travel, but it was mainly two years in Vietnam, and there weren’t any women around.”

When asked why she brought the pair along, West said caregiving is “a ministry, something you really have to like to do.”

“And you know how the saying goes,” she said. “When you like what you do, you never work a day in your life.”

❖
We are grateful to those who have served our country so courageously and continue to serve. Thank You!
“Today, we honor the brave veterans who answered our nation’s call to service. There is no way to repay the incredible debt we owe them, but we must continue to fight to ensure our veterans have access to first-rate care. It is the least we can do for their courageous service and sacrifice.”

Kevin McCarthy

www.McCarthyforCongress.com

Paid for by Kevin McCarthy for Congress