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# commentary

from other pens...

## Saving letters from all of America's wars

By Lawrence L. Knutson

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — They are letters from America's wars, pages of a national autobiography revealing the broadest range of human emotions amid the shock and horror of combat.

When author Andrew Carroll began Project Legacy, a one-person campaign to preserve as many American war letters as possible, he was deluged with urgent messages from the past.

The result is a treasure of a new book: "War Letters, Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars," to be published this week by Scribner. It contains 200 unpublished letters from the Civil War, the two world wars, the wars in Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, the Cold War, and from recent U.S. military operations in Somalia and Bosnia.

Many are neglected, stuffed into attics and closets in every city and town in the country. Letters that once were lifelines between soldiers at the front and families at home are often thrown in the trash.

Carroll, the editor of previous collections of historic American letters and 20th century speeches, chose from the estimated 50,000 war letters that flowed in after syndicated columnist Abigail Van Buren described his project in a 1998 "Dear Abby" column.

There are letters from generals and privates, the famous and the obscure. To read them is a little like leaning over a soldier's shoulder on a Civil War roadside or in a World War I trench.

Some are intensely personal. Some describe horrific combat scenes. Some profess undying love. Some were written to be read only if the writer was killed. In one Civil War missive a soldier assures his wife he has absolutely, positively not been shot for desertion, despite a local newspaper's report to the contrary.

There are letters stained with mud and blood. A series of Civil War letters are written in blackberry juice. One letter, written after bloody fighting at Anzio in Italy, has been pierced by a bullet.

One startling letter, was composed by an army sergeant on the conference table in Adolf Hitler's apartment in Munich, as World War II in Europe ended. Written on Hitler's gold-embossed personal stationary, the sergeant drew a neat line through the dictator's name, then described the horrors he had just witnessed at the death camp at nearby Dachau.

In another, an Army corporal describes a night-long vigil in September 1945 at the bedside of Japanese Premier Hideki Tojo, suffering from a self-inflicted gunshot. American officials were anxious Tojo recover, so he could be tried and executed for war crimes. (He did, and he was.)

The letter did not remain in the writer's family. It was purchased for a dollar at a Davenport, Iowa, yard sale 20 years ago.

These are moments frozen in time, as in a December 1862 letter timed at 2 a.m. — in which nurse Clara Barton describes her foreboding in the still, moonlit hours before the disastrous assault on entrenched Confederate lines at Fredericksburg, Va.

And in a far different mood, Union soldier Charles George, describing the events of April 1865, tells his wife: "In one week we have eaten up Lee's whole army — taking large mouthfuls every day."

George H.W. Bush, a future commander in chief but then a young Navy lieutenant, tells his parents he grew a goatee, but has just cut it off; Army 1st Lt. George McGovern, not yet the anti-war liberal of his 1972 presidential campaign, writes he "will be more than disgusted" if Republican Tom Dewey fails to win the presidency.

There's a former president, Theodore Roosevelt, mourning his youngest son, Quentin, "the huge, laughing, gentle-hearted boy," shot down behind enemy lines in France near the end of World War I.

Speaking for many of the young men represented in this collection of letters is Union Pvt. Elijah Beeman.

"Truly we know not the horrors of war until peace has fled," he wrote in April 1862. Five months later he was killed in action.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington's history for more than 30 years.



## Disdain for Bush echoes Reagan

It's much too soon to say that President Bush will be another Ronald Reagan, with half of Washington's landmarks renamed after him. But this much is in parallel and in Bush's favor: Europe can't stand him.

Bush is being portrayed in the European press, as was Reagan early in his first term, as a cowboy, a buffoon, a cold warrior, a bully, a reactionary and a menace to the peace.

In Reagan's case the cause was his unfamiliarity with details, his defense buildup, his declaration that the Soviet Union was the "evil empire" and, ultimately, his "Star Wars" missile-defense proposal.

For Bush it's his tendency toward malapropisms, his dumping of the Kyoto global-warming treaty (which no major European nation has ratified, either), his less encompassing missile-defense proposal, plus his Texas record on the death penalty, which Europe finds barbaric.

The European press and intelligentsia also take their cues from the liberal media in our country and the Democratic Party, which caricatured Reagan as a blockhead until it had to accept that he was making some magical connection with the American people and achieving policy success to boot.

Democrats and various pundits in the U.S. media are playing back Europe's disdain for Bush as proof that he's inept or irresponsible — or both.

In the 1980s, Democrats had to respect the fact that Reagan won two landslide elections. Bush, of course, lost the popular vote, and Democrats are attacking him relentlessly.

Europe came to respect Reagan — to some degree because fellow conservatives held power and vouched for him in Britain and Germany, but mainly because he ultimately forced the Soviet Union into negotiations on his terms.



**morton kondracke**

• commentary

Those on the left in the United States and Europe wanted to accept a nuclear freeze that would have given the Soviets a lopsided missile advantage in Europe. But Reagan proposed deploying a U.S. missile force, and when Germany took the United States' side in the 1984 elections, the Soviets immediately wanted to talk.

Just because Reagan was successful, of course, doesn't mean that Bush will be. Democrats are on solid ground in questioning whether his budget adds up or whether they will stifle needed domestic initiatives.

However, when foreigners start railing at Bush, Democrats are foolish to adopt the foreign point of view as gospel. Both House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., and Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., did just that in blaming Bush when the United States was kicked off the U.N. human rights commission.

France, Austria and Sweden agreed to take places on the commission alongside despotic regimes such as the Sudan, Vietnam, China, Libya, Algeria and Cuba.

The vote discredited the U.N. commission, but Gephardt attributed it to the Kyoto decision and Bush's "willingness to shatter the international arms-control framework in pursuit of unproven missile defenses" and his "failure to follow basic diplomatic precepts on critical global matters."

Kerry accused the administration of

"unilateralism." Counterattacking effectively, the Bush administration said the Democrats were adopting a pattern of "blame America first."

Obviously, the United States should not disregard the views of other nations, especially other democracies. So it's wise for the administration to be sending high-level emissaries abroad to answer questions about the President's missile-defense ideas.

Of course Democrats have a responsibility to ask critical questions about the system, including its feasibility, cost and foreign policy implications.

Democrats betray more than skepticism, though. They sound hostile — largely based on excessive loyalty to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

The treaty may well be obsolete — particularly when it prevents the development of a system that may be needed to defend against impending threats from North Korea and Iraq, which are developing nuclear weapons and missile arsenals.

Had Iraq possessed a deliverable nuclear bomb in 1991, the administration argues, Saudi Arabia might have been deeply reluctant to allow allied troops to use its territory as a base for launching the Desert Storm liberation of Kuwait.

If North Korea can deliver a nuclear weapon, it might be emboldened to launch a ground attack against South Korea, believing that the United States could not use the threat of nuclear weapons to deter the assault.

Furthermore, indications are that opposition to U.S. missile defense is softening even in Europe and Russia — though not in China. If he can make his case, Bush may end up being the leader, not the laughing stock, of the post-Cold War world, much like Reagan's image was transformed during the Cold War.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

## Finding a wedding photographer

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I am planning my wedding and am in need of a good photographer. Having good wedding photographs is very important to me. Do you have any tips that may be helpful?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

Congratulations on your upcoming wedding. Selecting a good photographer is a very important process as you and your family will want to view these pictures for generations to come. Here are a few tips that, hopefully, will make the job easier:

- Ask around for recommendations. Friends and family can be a great resource when trying to find the right photographer. They are usually happy to refer you to someone who has done a good job for them in the past and will often be quick to direct you away from those who did not. It has been said that for every good experience consumers have with a supplier, they will tell three people. For every bad experience, they will tell 10 people. Word of mouth is very powerful.
- When you have a list of photographers that you are interested in, call your local Better Business Bureau and my Consumer Protection division for any complaint history on file.
- When you meet with a prospective photographer, ask for references. Also ask to see samples of previous work. A photographer should be happy to show you his or her portfolio.



**carla j. stovall**

• consumer corner

- Compare packages and hourly fees carefully. Find out how many of each print you can expect and at what cost. Will you get a set of prints to keep, or will you only be allowed to keep them long enough to place an order? How much does the photographer charge for different size reprints? You should know the answer to these questions before making a commitment, as professional photographs can be very expensive.
- If a deposit is required, is it refundable?
- Will you be charged a sitting fee, travel fee or proof fee?
- Read all contracts carefully before signing. Does the contract have a cancellation clause for either yourself or the photographer? This will be important to make sure the photographer will be present on the scheduled day.
- Will the photographer sell you the negatives? If not, how long will they be kept on file? If it is important that you retain the negatives, you may want to consider a photographer who works out of

his or her home. Strapped for storage space, these photographers often automatically include the negatives as part of the package.

Hopefully, these tips will help you find the right photographer for your wedding. If you have problems with a photographer, please contact my Consumer Protection division at 1-800-432-2310.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and an agent will return your call promptly.

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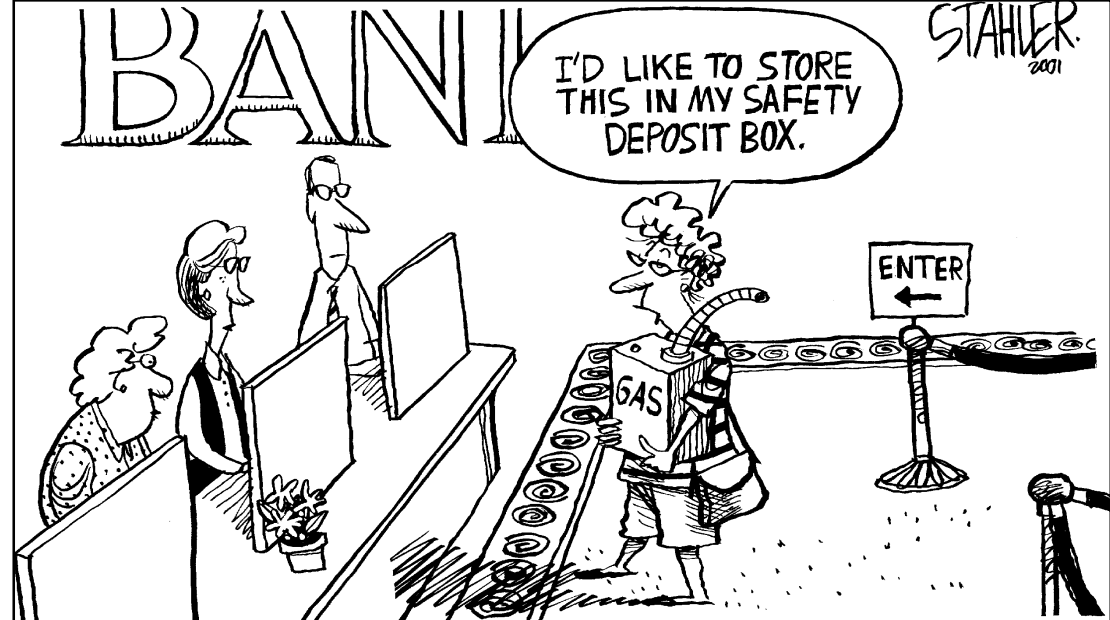
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