

Dear America

There are no simple truths about the Vietnam War. It was our longest war, costing 58,000 American lives and 300,000 wounded leaving a legacy of bitterness and sacrifice. For the soldiers, correspondence to and from home—contact with the World—was an outlet and a refuge. “Your letters are sanity in an insane world,” one GI wrote to his pen pal. “How much I’ve relied on getting a note of concern, a phrase that conveys a thought of interest, a word that asks of well-being.”

In base camps and foxholes, in sandbagged bunkers and air-conditioned offices, soldiers wrote about what they saw and what they did, what they felt and what they yearned for. They wrote to mothers and fathers, brothers and buddies, sisters and sweethearts and wives.

Complete the following activities based on actual letters in order to see Vietnam through the eyes of an American soldier at war...



1. Read each of the letters and poems in the folder then discuss the following:
 - How do you think the people receiving the letters felt when they read them?
 - What do you notice about the ages of the writers? What does this make you think?
 - Does reading the biographical information at the bottom of the pages (branch of military, hometowns, where they're stationed, whether or not they survived the war) affect your reaction to the readings?
 - Do you think the authors would have wanted to share these letters with the world? Why or why not?

2. Many of the letters talk about fears of death and dying. For most of us, we do not have to think about the inevitability of our death but in a war the thought of dying is an unavoidable fear. Often the biggest worry is not having the chance to tell those you love and those you leave behind your feelings. Listen and read along with the lyrics to "If You're Reading This" by Tim McGraw and then answer the following question in a personal journal entry.
 - If you were a soldier in the midst of war, who would you want to write one last letter to and what would you want to be sure to tell them?

3. Currently American troops are still in harms way in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. How has modern technology made it easier to communicate with each other? What impact do you think this has on the troops?

Send your own message to a member of the service by going to the following website—Operation Dear Abby. Do not include your whole name or any other personal information.

<https://206.37.214.123/>