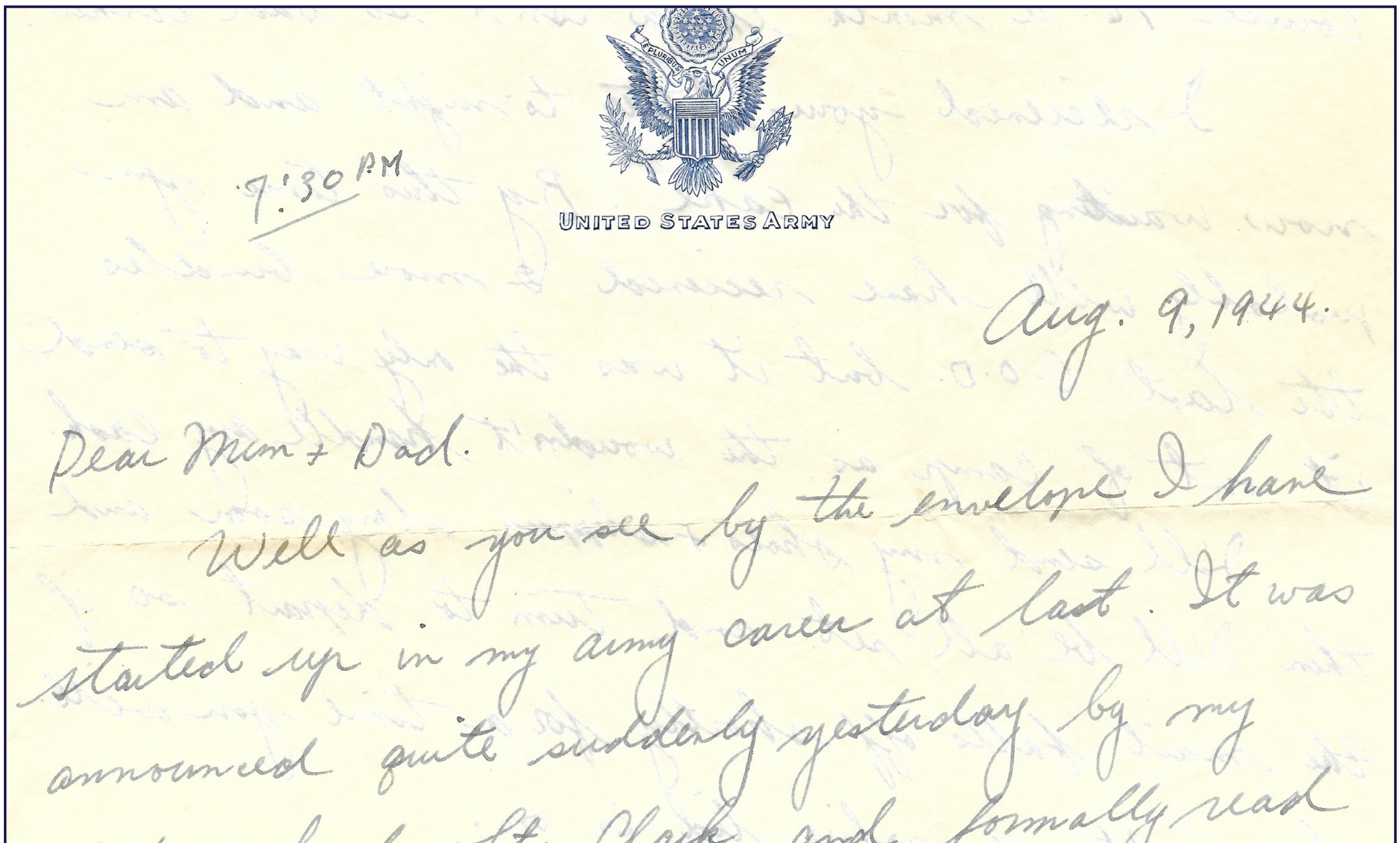
PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

How Personal Correspondence Can Shape Our Understanding of National Events


7:30 P.M

UNITED STATES ARMY

Aug. 9, 1944.

Dear Mum + Dad.

Well as you see by the envelope I have started up in my army career at last. It was announced quite suddenly yesterday by my

Lt. Clark and formally read

John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 August 1944, in possession of author.

ON THE NEXT PAGE

A section of Winfield Reiss' untitled 1933 mural. The mural was installed in Cincinnati's main rail terminal and depicted the rebuilding of Cincinnati by middle-class laborers. [1]

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Written for **Senior Seminar**
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AUGUST 13, 1944

Dear Mum and Dad,

This will perhaps be my last note from Colorado so don't expect anything for a time although we will probably receive my new address during the week[...]

This afternoon Jacowitz and myself went swimming at the Broadmoor and then a couple of "balls" at the bar after which we picked up another friend of ours and came back to the Antlers for a filet mignon complete with a champagne cocktail. I know it was extravagant, but we figured it will probably be our last fling[...]

This week I also took out the additional government insurance, so I now have the full $10,000 protection for $6.60 per month. I also made out a voluntary allotment which begins when I hit foreign soil and will amount to $40 per month[...]

Don't worry if you don't hear from me for a while as I've never felt better in my life, and fully equipped and garbed for anything that's in store for me. I haven't heard from Joan yet since before her birthday, so I won't for a while. Hope to see you soon.

Your loving son, John[1]

1944 WAS A YEAR of goodbyes for most families in America. This was the case for John Moynagh as he wrote to his parents a few days before his deployment to France. The past three years had sent millions of men to foreign shores to fight and die for their country. The herculean undertaking of dragging American culture out of its Depression-era mindset and into one suited for war had taken the Roosevelt administration years and required a vast network of propaganda to imbue every aspect of life with a war mentality. It required a total reconstruction of what it meant to be an American as well as the conventional values of American patriotism. Improvements in newspapers and radio as conveyors of mass media allowed for this new image of American culture to be spread rapidly throughout the nation. Yet in order to understand how this cultural shift took hold, we must look deeper than the masses of men and women seen on the newsreels putting all of their effort into the war and instead focus on the individual, a single cog in the massive machine of history.

Through letters, photos, and postcards, the men and women involved in the Second World War informed their family and friends about the state of the nation's efforts and were informed in turn of the efforts of their loved ones back home. These letters offered a moment of repose, a time to reflect on and record what they had witnessed. Yet not even the act of writing a letter home to mom and dad was completely free from the all-encompassing grasp of the war. Censorship of communications was paramount within military operations, and those overseas wrote everything with the eye of the censor in mind. However, there was a second, more sensitive type of censorship involved in the acts of letter-writing, one of a more social nature. Hopes, dreams, and—most importantly—fears had to abide strictly to the newly crafted wartime culture that the Roosevelt administration produced. New cultural norms of equating masculinity with a desire to serve the nation had been created within New Deal organizations and carried into the war. Adherence to this mindset dictated what could be shared and what must be kept confidential. Through this careful screening of text and emotion emerged the identity of the soldier-writer. Not a raw and unabridged identity, but an image carefully crafted for those at home within the lines of a few short pages. Though war is often depicted as a raging inferno of death and destruction, its

1 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 16 August 1944, in possession of author.

fire also offers those involved a forge, within which they can create an identity of their own in the most stressful and chaotic time of their lives.

What authors leave behind in their letters, and perhaps more importantly what they omit, offers the historian a chance to see what they reveal about themselves to others, intentionally or not, and how they choose to write their identity. This paper is a case study of a single soldier, using his personal correspondences to follow him through his life during the prewar years, his various training stages, his experiencing the horrors of war, and his role post-hostilities. Through the lens of evolving ideals of American masculinity, this paper will examine how letter-writing can reveal the pressures of macroscopic, national changes on the individual identity of an American man.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LETTERS IN WARTIME AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

THE PRIMARY SOURCES within this paper are a collection of letters written by John Moynagh, a 21-year-old Army enlistee in 1943. Moynagh wrote to his mother, father, and younger sister Joan for the duration of the war. The collection spans from January 1941 to December 1945, covering his entire active-duty career. Though telephones and telegraphs existed during this time and were widely available to everyone, the preferred method for long-distance communication was letters. This medium offered a way for people separated by long distances to create a constant, interconnected correspondence that could last far longer than other communication forms of the time. Not only was the letter unrestrained from the word counts and time limits of telegraphs and telephones, it was also far more permanent. For military families like John's, letters offered the ability to create a storyline of experiences that could be built upon despite large gaps in time between installments. Upon receiving a letter, a family member could revisit old writings to help recall what was discussed previously, allowing for a continuous conversation to form through multiple letters spanning multiple weeks or months. For a soldier, the ability to fold a letter into his coat pocket to be re-read whenever and as frequently as he wanted allowed for letters to take on a sentimental, therapeutic value that connected deployed soldiers to their loved ones back home.

In modern warfare, too, soldiers recount the value of writing letters. Since the War on Terror began in 2003, there has been a large movement to bring veteran accounts into the hands of the public. Former Marine Tracie Crow describes how important writing has been in her life as a veteran and for those around her. She writes that when "[speaking] to soldiers like Brooke King[…] who is willing to share how writing helped her," they often explain that writing "'helps to make sense of what is happening to [them].'"[2] These modern experiences suggest that writing was perhaps even more important to the soldiers of WWII than they understood. Though no psychiatric methods of coping with the stresses of military life were formalized in the U.S. Army during the Second World War, whenever a soldier picked up a pen to record his experiences, he often engaged, knowingly or unknowingly, in a therapeutic process. Crow continues by adding that though there is a "natural association to assume [that] a military story equals a story about war," many soldiers' stories often include "a rich amount of mundane and humorous material—the sort that can still provide readers with insight into who we were during those years."[3] It is here that Crow draws the real connection between the therapeutic aspects of writing and a historian's analysis of these letters. Letters written by soldiers are not always about war because they may not want, or may not be able, to write about their experiences. Instead, authors may fill their lines with other news that can be shared in an effort to quantify their activities for their loved ones. One letter filled with what Crow calls "mundane material"[4] may only give a glimpse into the author's life at the time of writing. But when read as one chapter in a book of many letters, isolated and mundane acts, even if they are shared as a way to self-censor and avoid discussing the war, form a more detailed picture of

2 Tracie Crow, *On Point: A Guide to Writing the Military Story* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, (2015), 10.
3 Crow, *On Point,* 13.
4 Crow, *On Point*, 10.

the writer's identity. Finally, when these letters are combined with other sources like contemporary propaganda, historians can analyze whether this picture conforms to their understanding of the time or if the individual experience conflicts with it.

The letters of John Moynagh are no different; they are not meant simply as a scribbled check-in, but instead as an ongoing conversation with loved ones, an unintentional biography that spans years. Within them is a massive quantity of the seemingly mundane. But as historian Michel Foucault explains, from the perspective of the writer, anything contained within a letter is "never pointless, futile, or petty, and never unworthy of being narrated."[5] Diana Gill builds on this theory, writing that "war forces letter writers and diarists, short on time, energy and paper, to focus on the truly relevant."[6] Gill's theory on the act of letter-writing allows for those most mundane tasks that may originally be overlooked to suddenly burst with meaning. Within this theory the act of something as simple as going to the movies is a fact worth noting and dissecting, because to the author, that act meant enough to be shared.

As Gill explains further, "socially, people convey themselves through the stories that tell others of their distinctiveness."[7] Distinctiveness is determined by the standards of the day—whether that be who is the smartest, strongest, most popular, or some other metric. In John's writings, the standards reflected are the masculine ideals introduced during the Roosevelt administration's reconstruction of the male identity during the New Deal, namely that one's manhood is determined by strength and physical prowess. These letters, though filled mainly with the "boring" parts of Army life, nevertheless come together to "serve as a way of exposing the writer's identity. They are a narrative stage upon which 'one opens oneself to the gaze of others.'"[8] They become the soldier's biography and, in doing so, reflect his personal identity and the societal standards that influenced its creation. Though John's identity evolved during warfare, it did not begin there. It began years earlier, before war in Europe was a thought, and Americans were dealing with far greater struggles at home.

THE NEW DEAL AND ITS INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN MASCULINITY

IN THE YEARS following the stock market collapse in October 1929, the wealth of the Roaring Twenties came crashing down and settled in the Hoovervilles that dotted the country as America's unemployment rate rose to a peak of 25% in 1933. Sociologist Michael Kimmel states that "never before had American men experienced such a massive and system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families,"[9] and as a result the identity of the average man, which had been founded on the idea of being the breadwinner of his family, collapsed. Men felt this emasculation not only in their minds but in their homes as well, as "unemployed men lost status with their wives and children and saw themselves as impotent patriarchs."[10]

As the Depression worsened into the 1930s, the newly elected Roosevelt administration began its attempts at rebuilding the American economy and society. To accomplish this task it looked to harness the "men-as-breadwinner" ideal as a way to push the hundreds of construction projects it wished to pursue into reality. Within its first hundred days, the Roosevelt administration created multiple organizations that attempted to get Americans back to work. Of these, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was the largest and most well-known. Created in 1933, "employment in the CCC[…]was specifically limited to young men between the ages of 17-25 […] and employed more than 2.9 million single, jobless, primarily working-class men during its nine years of existence."[11] As Christina Jarvis

5 Michael Foucault, *"Society Must be Defended:" lectures at the Collège de France*, 1975-76, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 67.
6 Diana C. Gill, *How We Are Changed by War: A Study of Letters and Diaries from Colonial Conflicts to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 29.
7 Gill, *How We Are Changed by War*, 22.
8 Foucault, *"Society Must be Defended,"* 67.
9 Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 192.
10 Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 199.
11 Christina A. Jarvis, *The Male Body at War* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 20.

observes, the CCC not only subliminally propagated the "men-as-breadwinners" identity, but leaned into it fully and publicly by declaring that "the CCC was explicitly a 'man-building agency'" with the Corps director James McEntee going so far as to "title his 1940 book on the agency *Now They Are Men*."[12] McEntee and the CCC as a whole were focused on rebuilding American masculinity, because they believed it would accomplish the agency's main goal, to support the families of the workers within its program. Though only one man per family could participate in the program, the Corps was able to make each man's contribution to his family stretch by including within their rules that each man was required to send a minimum of $22 of their $30 pay each month to their families.[13] This reinforced the mindset that the men were not there for themselves, but to work for their family's prosperity. Framing CCC participation in this way helped to restore the men's status as breadwinners both physically and psychologically.

The physical work performed by the CCC operated hand-in-hand with a newborn propaganda network. McEntee's marketing of the CCC only meant so much without proof, which came in the form of photographs distributed on the pamphlets and advertisements put out by the CCC, showing "generally fit, lean men completing tasks requiring obvious physical strength."[14] Statistics supplemented these photographs, showing that enrollees gained "12 pounds and grew 1/2 inch in height during their stays."[15] All of this marketing was headed off by McEntee's statement that the "ultimate goal of the CCC […] was to produce better husbands […], better workers, better neighbors, and better citizens.'"[16] The goal of producing "better men," as Jarvis notes, meant instilling "respectable masculine values associated with the middle-class breadwinner ideal."[17] To support this, enrollees were often depicted within pamphlets reading in camp libraries, playing team sports, and regularly attending religious services. These portrayals instilled the image that the CCC "sought to eradicate enrollees' former rough

H.M. Talburt's depiction of Roosevelt as a burly lion tamer shows the Presidents connection with the working-class and America's unified effort to fight back against the depression. [2]

recreational activities such as drinking, gambling, and 'bumming around.'"[18]

Though high CCC enrollment showed the Roosevelt administration that its constructed American identity was gaining popularity, it was not the only federal organization used in creating this reconstruction. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired artists of all styles and put them to work forwarding the middle-class, working-man ideals that the CCC was exemplifying. This project was known as the Federal Art Project (FAP) and as Laura Hapke explains, "in return for being supplied with materials and tools, artists were expected to reconcile themselves to what might be called factory time."[19] Artists created works for the FAP that could be used as marketing for the WPA and the New Deal's progress as a whole. Hapke states that the FAP's main goal "was an agenda to

12 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 21.
13 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 21.
14 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 21.
15 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 22.
16 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 22.
17 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 22.
18 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 23.
19 Laura Hapke, *Labor's Canvas: American Working-Class History and the WPA Art of the 1930s* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 3.

resurrect the flagging spirits of a workforce construed as masculine[…the Depression] was a crisis of masculinity that visual artists needed to help resolve."[20] Hapke observes that within their 340,000 portraits, landscapes, and still-lifes the FAP, "whether representing the […] farm or factory, city or countryside, frequently captured the heroism of everyday life […] through representations of Americans engaged in purposeful labor."[21] Many of these depictions were created on the locations of New Deal projects and presented to the American people as visual proof of the progress that was being made to put people back to work and move the nation forward.

Besides portraying progress, the FAP's art also presented the new ideal body politic to fit the middle-class breadwinner image. The portrayals of workers in the FAP's art were a stark contrast to the men seen on every street corner. Instead of the unhealthy, "weak" men who lined the streets in front of soup-kitchen doors, the FAP's workers took on the proportions of the newly created superhero aesthetic born from the recent popularization of comic strips. Introduced in the mid-thirties, the superhero aesthetic portrayed the subject with broad shoulders, massive chests, and bulging arms, all meant to convey inhuman power, while retaining a human likeness. The WPA embraced the style within their own works, using it to project a long-lost strength directly onto the middle-class workers within their paintings. Even President Roosevelt, wheelchair bound by childhood polio, was privy to the makeover of the new working-class image. In a 1930s political cartoon, the President was depicted in a plain shirt, his sleeves rolled up to reveal bulging forearms, and brandishing a whip against a lion labeled 'Financial Crisis'.[22] The workers in FAP art, too, were often depicted with massive tools in hand, such as jackhammers or other heavy machinery, promoting the image of America's industrial strength. This fusion of man and machine became increasingly important for the marketing of the American masculine ideal in the build-up to war.

Despite America officially being neutral in world affairs, it was apparent by 1939 that the New Deal's middle-class breadwinner identity would require a re-fit to prepare the United States for war. These changes began once again within the CCC, which slowly implemented

Harold Layman's Driller exemplifies the portrayal of American bodies fused with massive industrial machines. This visual theme would transfer from machinery to weaponry as the country's wartime propaganda took over the role of the WPA. [3]

more militaristic policies. These included the wearing of spruce-green uniforms and the use of over 225,000 World War One veterans to act as camp commanders.[23] Paralleling the increased militarism of the CCC was the announcement in September 1940 that President Roosevelt had authorized the first peacetime draft for the United States Army, which called for the registration of all males from ages 21 to 35 in the Selective Service system.[24]

Though too young to be eligible for the first round of draft registration, John Moynagh still had plenty of exposure to the growing might of the armed forces. As the Army rebuilt its numbers, the Navy was simultaneously rebuilding some of its old infrastructure, calling on the

20 Hapke, *Labor's Canvas*, 3-4.
21 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War,* 25.
22 *World Telegram*, March 10, 1933, found in Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 33.
23 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 23.
24 U.S. Congress, *United States Code: Selective Training and Service Act of , 50a U.S.C. §§ 302-315 Suppl. 1*, 1940.

help of civilian contractors and organizations created by the New Deal to rebuild fuel-depots, bases, and fleet anchorages. In January of 1941, John, working with Platt Construction, travelled to one such fleet base in Melville, Rhode Island to install fire suppression systems. He wrote a letter to his sister Joan about the new base and explained that "this week I have been working on new additions to the naval hospital."[25] He described the anchorage as "the real thing out there. Torpedo storage houses, mines, submarine nets etc." and asked her to "tell Dad those torpedoes look like a bar of 12 inch [steel] peened over on one end and a regular little engine on the other. Man! What a messenger of death."[26] Though this is the only mention of the construction on the hospital, the work must have been extensive; when John became eligible for the draft in February of 1942, his place of employment was still listed as Platt Construction: Melville, RI.[27] The work on the Naval hospital was considered vital to national security, and as such, John was exempt from the next round of drafting.

The open secret that the U.S. military was preparing for war and the large numbers of men enlisting led to a shift in the body politic of America even without the guiding hand of the Roosevelt administration. Born from the new Selective Service screening procedure came new terms to the American lexicon, draft classifications 1-A and 1V-F. As Jarvis explains, these classes were based on "the individual's mental, moral, and physical fitness, [and he was] either classified as 1-A, 1-B, or 1V-F (unacceptable for military service)."[28] A classification of 1-A meant individuals were "free of disease[…]and [had] no disabling complications,"[29] 1V-F meant that for any number of physical or neurological reasons a registrant had failed to qualify and was exempt from service. Icons of pop-culture picked up on these new standards as early as October 1941. In Helen Frost's 1941 hit single titled "He's 1-A in the Army, and He's A-1 in My Heart," her "man of mine, he ain't missin' nothin'" due to his classification of 1-A. She goes on to sing that "he's gone to help the country that helped him to get a start."[30] Frost's lyrics and those of countless other performers showed millions of Americans that being classified as 1-A proved not only that you were fit to serve your country, but also that you were a desirable man.. As Jarvis puts it, "although the 1-A classification was intended to denote physical and mental fitness for general military service, it took on an added meaning in popular discourse as it marked an idealized type of masculinity."[31]

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the gradual societal and industrial buildup of militarization became a tidal wave. As historian Gerald Shenk explains, the wave of patriotic fervor that followed Pearl Harbor, combined with the "18,633 [men that] were inducted for a one-year service obligation, and another 800,000 reservists (many of them on CCC rosters), [that] were called to active duty"[32] created a surplus of recruits at first. Yet the Army knew that this would not be enough to sustain their numbers for a prolonged fight and began a heavy recruitment process on the back of the patriotic wave. This campaign and the hundreds of others at the local level inspired millions to join up to active duty throughout 1942. The Army Reserves offered a way for those like John who were working civilian jobs deemed vital to national defense to show they were still doing their part. Despite the massive influx of Army recruits, the civilian jobs necessary to national defense were not short of applicants, and John wrote frequently that "there have been quite a few layoffs[…]and they are cutting lose [sic] all the driftwood."[33] These pressures, combined with the ever-increasing pressure to join in the fight for the nation, eventually led John to leave his job and enlist with the U.S. Army. In his first letter home he described his feelings on his new role: "if this is army life let's have it! – but I'm afraid it's too good to last."[34]

25 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 22 January 1941.
26 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 22 January 1941.
27 John Moynagh, Selective Service Registration Card.
28 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 59.
29 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 59.
30 Redd Evans, *He's 1-A in the Army and He's A-1 in My Heart*, Helen Frost, October 29, 1941. Vinyl Disc.
31 Jarvis, *The Male Body at War*, 60.
32 Gerald Shenk and Henry C. Dethloff, *Citizen and Soldier: A Sourcebook on Military Service and National Defense from Colonial America to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 111-112.
33 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 27 September 1941.
34 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 26 April 1943.

THE INFLUENCE OF MASCULINE IDEALS ON NEW RECRUITS

JOHN AND THE other recruits quickly learned that Army life would adhere strictly to the portrayals of masculinity that the New Deal campaigns created with only slight modifications. The 1940s Army program was designed to take a large group of men from all walks of life and turn them into a standardized military force within a few short weeks. The main problem for the Army to overcome was the incredible range of fitness levels that passed through the selection process. As a result, basic training in John's words found the men "kept busy from five in the morning to five at night and I mean busy. We are out in the yard at seven ready for business, usually drilling and calisthenics until 11:30 am. The afternoon is the same except with a lecture or movie (of a military nature) thrown in."[35]

These calisthenics involved all manner of stretches and aerobics as well as physical activities such as games of strength. Those who succeeded in these activities were often rewarded with unofficial titles or leave from extra duties, while those who failed were given more exercise and other assignments such as the dreaded Kitchen Police (KP). As a result, fierce competition took root within these games and it became a source of pride when one was the winner. This is evident when John writes to his parents about his victory in not just one, but two of these games. He described the two games in great detail, the first of which was an exercise in which "49 [men] form a circle with arms locked and some poor goat is thrown in the center and has to try and get out. The other day no one would volunteer so I went in and broke out twice to be crowned Bull of the Ring."[36] The second game, more gladiatorial in nature than the first, was titled King in the Ring and involved "a circle about 25 feet in diameter […] installed on the ground into which the 50 men fight and throw each other out until one man remains[...] that was really my day for I am also the King of the Ring."[37]

The use of these games in basic training was important for three reasons. Not only were they a way for recruits to gain both muscular and cardiovascular strength, but they also taught them basic lessons in teamwork necessary to complete an objective. Finally, these games were a morale booster to the victors, whether they escaped the circle or prevented someone from escaping. This must have been an especially important point as noted by the space the description takes up in John's letter home, covering over half of the total text. Foucault reminds us that when a writer mentions something in a letter, that it is "never pointless"[38] and therefore these games must have a perceived importance to John greater than the simple description that was written. Though on the surface he described what could pass as a schoolyard game, to him it was a show of strength. At the time of writing, he had only been in the Army for a month, and yet he was already the strongest of fifty men, at least for a day. This was a great achievement for John and his eagerness to explain it to his parents shows the pride he took in his physical growth from civilian life. As Jarvis explains, the Army encouraged this assessment of personal growth among their recruits through the use of "personal record books[…]in which men could record their measurements on five different dates to keep track of their height and weight as well as chest, bicep, waist, and calf sizes."[39] Similarly, the Navy published results of their pre-flight cadets after finding they had gained over 5 pounds and lost two inches around the waist, proving that "the Navy has "rebuilt" these men in both body and character, eliminating the softness of "easy going civilian life" while instilling military values and discipline."[40]

The theme of gaining strength and, thus, masculinity, was another recurring theme of John's early writings. His insistence that training was somehow too easy was a common occurrence and throughout basic training he continued to relay to his family that he was getting stronger and fitter, sometimes to the point of contradiction. Writing to Joan, he exclaimed that "last Friday was the

35 John Moynagh to Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 16 May 1943.
36 John Moynagh to Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 21 May 1943.
37 John Moynagh to Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 21 May 1943.
38 Foucault, *"Society Must be Defended,"* 67.
39 Jarvis, *Male Body at War*, 66.
40 Jarvis, *Male Body at War*, 66.

worst day I ever put in – we drilled all day, and it must have been at least 110 out there in the broiling sun. There were five ambulances going all the time as about 60 or 70 men heeled over – however I felt fine and it seems to take off some lard."[41] Despite the shocking account of over sixty men collapsing from the heat, John found it essential not only to assure his sister that he was strong enough to feel fine after the ordeal, but also to casually mention that he found it helpful in trimming down his waistline. Similarly, when writing to his mother, he stated flatly that he was "getting too used to the workouts now – so I wish they would really give us the works as I know I'm far from top shape and would like to be physically perfect before going into a combat area."[42] Throughout these letters, John is attempting to toe the line between bragging and complaining about his experiences. The reality of the Army's training regimen was that it was a grueling and difficult task that John felt the need to vocalize. But there was a pressure put on the recruits to live up to the propaganda produced by the army. To show that they were building themselves up to match the image of the ideal American soldier. Because of this, John's writings reveal a conflict as he attempts to voice his displeasure at the training while simultaneously proving to his family that he is succeeding in becoming the ideal soldier.

McClelland Barclay's 1942 Navy recruitment poster shows the use of the working man's physique to project the same masculine traits onto soldiers.working-class and America's unified effort to fight back against the depression. [4]

John's insistence that his physical performance was rapidly increasing was not just an effort to impress his family. The stories told by enlisted men that military life rapidly scrubbed cadets clean of their civilian "softness" were wildly popular, and the military had long taken over the reins from the FAP in producing propaganda to showcase this new belief. By 1942, artists had replaced images of barrel-chested workers holding jackhammers in their arms with portraits of similarly built sailors effortlessly slinging enormous shells into the breech of guns, underscored by commands to "Man the Guns – Join the Navy."[43] This new ideal for what the military man looked like likely encouraged John to prove to his family that he was on par with the men the propaganda depicted. Even Uncle Sam, much like Roosevelt, was given a face lift. Unlike the famous "I Want You" posters of the 1917 Army, Army propagandists rebranded Uncle Sam with his jacket shed, sleeves rolled, and fists bared, daring those who looked on to "Defend Your Country."[44] Even movie directors and Broadway playwrights bought into ensuring that the new image of masculinity in America was not complete without a uniform. One of the top grossing musicals of the forties, before being adapted for the screen, was titled *This is the Army*. Its opening number finds newly drafted cadets being dragged on stage in mismatched clothes and marching clumsily in line while singing about their first experience with their sergeant. By the end of the number, the men had not only transformed in their appearance, shedding their ragged and oversized civilian clothes for crisp Army dress uniforms, but in their physique as well. They no longer slouched

41 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 6 June 1943.
42 John Moynagh to Mrs. Irene, 13 June 1943.
43 McClelland Barclay, "Man the Guns, Join the Navy" (1942), found in Jarvis, *Male Body at War*, 13.
44 Colonel Tom Woodburn, "Defend Your Country, Enlist Now" (1940), found in Jarvis, *Male Body at War*, 41.

or stumbled but instead marched in perfect unison to the music before exiting the stage in tight formation. The reaction of the on-screen audience to the men was staged: they laughed and jeered at the stumbling civilians in the beginning and gave a standing ovation to the soldiers at the end. The men watching the choreographed reaction in the theater would have received the message as well. If a man was to become worthy of praise or applause within wartime America, he needed to be in uniform.

By the time John joined the Army in 1943, it had become clear that though a uniform was a stepping-stone on the way to societal acceptance, it was no longer enough to simply be in the service. As the nation embraced its war-efforts and millions of men had joined the various branches of service, the standards of masculinity shifted. It became common to see American men in uniform and new hierarchies separating the ideal servicemen from the sub-par began to form. Though the old standards of I-A and IV-F remained, in a society where every man was dressed in standard-issue gear, the rank on the sleeve held more meaning than the uniform it was attached to. John's first acknowledgement of this hierarchy came within a month of arriving at basic training. Writing to his mother about his week and his training progress, John concluded, "well this army life is swell as far as I am concerned, but I'll like it a lot better when I learn of what my chances of advancement are."[45] John made it clear: the higher the rank he could achieve, the better. Between May and July, John sent eight letters home to his parents. Within every single letter he made some reference to his attempts at getting into a program for advancement. Some references were simple comments about his feelings of optimism towards promotion, but other references took up pages. In a four-page letter to his father, John spent over three-quarters of it describing the interview process he underwent. He wrote in detail about the results of his officer aptitude test, including that his score of "127 [was] a very good mark" and that "I made out well in all my other tests here[…] it was written on my card that I was a candidate for the Army Specialized Training Program" (ASTP).[46] This was the longest letter John sent throughout his four-year correspondence; the fact that it contains so much information on the prospects of his advancement indi-

500 Army Students To Study At The Heights Under New Specialized Training Program

About 500 new students will come to N.Y.U. on July 12 to take part in the Army Specialized Training Program. These men come from all parts of the country and will stay here for a maximum of 72 weeks.

Col. Chamberlain will be in charge of the men as far as housing and food is concerned and Dean Saville of the College be sent to various units over the country as technical specialists or to officer's candidate school for further training. In the meantime, they will hold the ranks they had before coming to N.Y.U. but will have cadet ratings when here.

The men are all carefully picked and have come from high school as basic students or from

A newspaper clipping included in John's July 21, 1943 letter which describes the arrival of ASTP students to school at New York University. [5]

45 John Moynagh to Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 13 May 1943.
46 John Moynagh to Mr. John R Moynagh, 16 May 1943.

cates how important the program was to John. But the ASTP was not the end goal, as he reminded his father: "the point to be remembered is that once I am enrolled in that school I can then apply for OCS [Officer Candidate School] in any branch I desire which would be the engineers or infantry. Now I just wait for a while as another interview about the ASTP is coming soon."[47]

The ASTP was not the usual path of advancement for enlisted men like John, but the incredible wave of manpower that flooded the Army in 1942 and 1943 had created a leadership crisis. As historian Louis Keefer describes, the ASTP was "conceived in mid-1942 to meet the Army's avowed need for university-trained officers"[48] to supplement the millions of newly enlisted men. As a result, universities across America like New York University were commandeered by the U.S. military to train soldiers in technical fields. By 1943 the ASTP's mission of turning enlisted men into candidates with potential for Officer Candidate School was well under-way. For men like John, who scored higher than a 115 on the officer aptitude test, the ASTP allowed them to forego the usual means of climbing the enlisted rank ladder by instead attending these schooling programs with the supposed promise of an OCS commission upon completion. As such, John faced a decision in June. In a letter to his mother, he explained that he "took over the Drill Master job and put the men through their paces – it certainly felt swell, I would apply for the job but I think I'll just await the outcome of my interview which should come this week."[49] The assignment to the Drill Master position was a sign to John that he was a candidate for advancement to ranks like Private First Class, Corporal and eventually even a Sergeant. It could be presumed that John included the assignment to show his parents that he had alternatives for advancement if the interviews fell short. But it was clear from John's hesitation to accept that he felt that the ASTP was a better option for a faster and more prestigious path to ranks like Lieutenant or Captain; a far cry from a lowly Private First Class or Corporal rank.

MISLEADING PROPAGANDA AND ITS EFFECT ON ASTP ENROLLEES

JOHN'S LETTER TO his parents dated July 21, 1943 shared the news of his acceptance into the ASTP and included a newspaper clipping hastily cut out and folded together with the class schedule for his first semester. The headline read "500 Army Students to Study at The Heights Under New Specialized Training Program"[50] and detailed the influx of new ASTP enrollees from around the country. John relayed to his parents that "everything is fine although we have a full schedule" stocked with the typical civilian college courses of chemistry, history, and calculus. Despite the workload, John was optimistic and seemed to enjoy the fact that though "most of us are kept pretty busy, it is pleasant to walk down to the corner at night and have a milkshake without having to get permission." Despite the luxuries offered by permission-free milkshakes, John was sure to include reassurances to his parents that his goals had not changed. He described the orientation talk given by a Lieutenant Colonel and informed his parents that "we are definite potential officers if we make the grades as only a very small number [of officer candidates] will be taken from the field from now on."[51] Despite the seemingly civilian life, John wanted his parents to know that he was there to move forward with his army career. In fact, he had already begun to show his advancement up army ranks through his dress. He wrote that "because of our superior position [as students preparing for OCS] the finest department is expected[…]we are dressed in Class A's [dress uniforms] all the time and have no details."[52] Class A's were decorative, meant to be worn only for special events and other prestigious occasions. The fact that John now wore them

47 John Moynagh to Mr. John R Moynagh, 16 May 1943.

48 Louis E. Keefer, "Birth and Death of the Army Specialized Training Program," in *Army History*, no. 33 (Washington D.C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1995), 1.

49 John Moynagh to Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 13 June 1943.

50 "500 Army Students to Study at The Heights Under New Specialized Training Program," unattributed newspaper clipping, ca. July 1943, in possession of author.

51 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 21 July 1943.

52 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 21 July 1943.

Col. Tom Woodburn's 1947 Army recruiting poster depicts a younger, stronger , more aggressivelly postured Uncle Sam than his 1917 counterparts. [6]

all the time showed the prestige of his program to his family. It also elevated John from his recent recruit status at basic training, where dress uniforms were unsuitable for the intense physical training recruits went through. The Class A's signified a cleaner, more intelligent, and more prestigious side of the Army that John was now a member of, and he made an effort to show this off.

Whether through misconstrued language of the Lieutenant Colonel or the over-eager assumptions of John and other ASTP candidates, the promises of OCS offered by the ASTP were less concrete than John described to his parents. Keefer notes that the statement by the War Department said that ASTP only made trainees "*available* to attend Officer Candidates School."[53] This was mistaken by most enlisted men as a formal commitment. Throughout the program's run time "Secretary of War Stimson, took great pains directing that ASTP-ers not be called "cadets" and that they be considered soldiers first, students second."[54] This meant that the threat of transfer was constant, and rigorous testing ensured that those who could not keep up were shipped off to fill manpower shortages. John's concern for this possibility soon bled into his writing. In August 1943, he wrote to his parents that "we had a big chem test Saturday and a math test this morning[…]on the basis of these and past marks it will be determined who is to stay after next week and who is to depart so we shall see."[55] By looking at just one letter, this might be overlooked as concern for a specific test, but over the course of the next several months John's cautionary rhetoric to his parents continued. John's assertion that he was constantly on thin ice may have been true but could also have been in response to Secretary Stimson's warnings that John and the other ASTP enrollees were always under threat of being used as filler material. This thought would have likely scared John, who had turned down enlisted advancement for the ASTP and was now threatened with the program being taken away. His cautionary rhetoric could have been a way to let his parents, and himself, down easy if his path to OCS became suddenly blocked.

By the end of August, just three months after he enrolled in ASTP, the tone of John's letters had changed drastically. A series of delays and extensions to the course lengths prompted John to write to his parents that he was getting restless. He made sure to acknowledge that he "love[d] the military training in much of the course"[56] but quickly followed these assurances up by reinforcing to his parents that his "ambition has not changed, that is to get to OCS and *really go to war*."[57] In some ways that ambition had already begun to come true, as he had climbed the ranks to become "an acting Corporal now, armband and all, and of course addressed by the officers as such."[58] Just a week later in a follow-up letter, he informed them that he had been to the company Commander about getting to OCS and found out that "we all have to wait till

53 Keefer, "Birth and Death," 3 emphasis mine.
54 Keefer, "Birth and Death," 3.
55 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 August 1943.
56 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 20 August 1943.
57 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 20 August 1943.
58 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 20 August 1943, emphasis mine.

the three months are up and then are disposed of in any way the colonel sees fit."[59] This discovery prompted some of the strongest language found in these usually reserved letters, as John exclaimed that though he "would very much like to go to OCS at that time[…]I'll go back to the field and sign up for immediate overseas duty before I'll go another term of this. I positively hate mathematical subjects!"[60] Whether the frustration borne out in this letter was actually the result of calculus is up for debate; the true issue that prompted the outburst likely stemmed from John feeling stuck at home while every other man was abroad and engaged in combat. Compounding the frustration was the fact that as the war progressed, many films coming from Hollywood focused on the heroics and sacrifices of the U.S. military abroad. When John went to watch films such as *Bataan*, he would have seen the last stand of Sgt. Bill Dane, firing his machine gun from his own grave at waves of incoming Japanese infantry and being confronted with the ending card stating that "the final sacrifice of the defenders of Bataan helped slow the Japanese advance, making possible America's final victory in the Pacific War."[61] These images must have made John second-guess the importance of his time in the ASTP for many reasons. The heroes shown to the American people on screen were not dressed in Class-A uniforms like John or his peers, nor were they officers like the ASTP enrollees hoped to become. Instead they were gritty, Khaki-clad enlisted men on the screen, epitomes of bravery and self-sacrifice to Americans in the theaters. These new idols, as well as the failure of the ASTP to fulfill John's expectations, likely led to the frustration this letter expresses.

Though this anger within the August correspondence seems tame, John's feelings were common at the time and shared by many others within the ASTP. Though the carrot of advancement within the Army was a tempting one, many felt that the ASTP was causing them to miss the war. Though the term "miss the war" was widely used colloquially by Army trainees the fear was very real and was amplified for ASTP students like John. As Keefer explains, most trainees were "well aware of the good situation they had been enjoying and felt slightly guilty, knowing that many of their high school classmates were already fighting (and dying) overseas."[62] These facts had to be faced in every aspect of the ASTP trainees' life. By September of 1943, the war in the Pacific was in full swing, Italy had surrendered to the Allies, and the casualty lists reported in every major U.S. newspaper were growing daily. While these major actions were taking place, John sent word to his parents that there was "no chance of going to OCS after these first three months" and that after nine months he would only receive a specialist commission. The dream of Officer Candidate School had vanished, and he was still stuck within the program until he was transferred out or the war ended.[63]

Reading of the successes of the Army in the newspaper every day while entrenched in civilian classes weighed heavily on John's thoughts. John was still desperate to participate in the war effort, as seen when he wrote to his parents wondering why "you didn't mention in your last letter anything about me buying your next bond for you," claiming that he "[had] to do something by the end of the month or [he'd] look sad."[64] Though war bonds were a common item within American homes during the time, for John and all the trainees stuck in ASTP their purchasing was an important salve for their sense of duty. It allowed them to feel like they were still participating in the war effort while they were in school and as such it often became a point of contention as to who could put the most into these bonds. His parents either learned their lesson about the involuntary nature of this participation or other means of persuasion were used to encourage it, as John only mentioned the bonds one other time in his writing; briefly mentioning in February 1944 that the bond his parents ordered "will be on its way shortly."[65]

The guilt John and the other thousands of ASTP candidates felt about missing the war would soon be abated as the manpower crisis of the war reached its peak. As Keefer notes, by the end of 1943 "riflemen were the Army's greatest need, not men of 'special abilities.'"[66] Within the course of a few months, nearly half of ASTP candidates had exchanged their pencils for M-1 rifles.

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59 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 20 August 1943.
60 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 26 August 1943.
61 *Bataan*, directed by Tay Garnett, aired June 3, 1943 (MGM; United States Office of War Information, 1943), film.
62 Keefer, "Birth and Death," 6.
63 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 21 September 1943.
64 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 21 September 1943.
65 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 15 February 1944.
66 Keefer, "Birth and Death," 5.

However, for John and many others there was one more hurdle in the way of their ticket to combat: the Army physical and the determination of whether they were classified as I-A. For John, this hurdle was impassable, as he ended up being classified as I-B(L): Limited Duty due to his poor eyesight.

Writing to his sister, John brushed off his failure with humor: "Well! They caught up with me Sunday at the physical so I'm limited service. However I still move out with the rest on Sunday."[67] Despite the fact that John brushed off the failure of his physical and moved on to describe his enjoyable last few days in New York, it is clear that this must have been a heavy blow for him. For years, the social standard for a fit man had been one in uniform, with a I-A classification, a rifle in hand, and a rank on his sleeve. The demotion to I-B(L), on top of having the aspirations of being an officer stripped away, must have made John's transition more difficult; the train ride west was a long one.

CONFRONTING MASCULINE IDEALS AND ADAPTING TO LIMITED SERVICE

UPON ARRIVING AT Camp Carson in Colorado, John elaborated further on the situation he found himself thrust into so rapidly. He again wrote to Joan that "due to my failing eyesight, I'm in the Medics at least for a four week training period."[68] To his parents, his language was more severe and he wrote, crammed on a postcard, that "they hastily classified us on the spot[…]I don't know how many of us are due to be stretcher bearers – not for me!"[69] The overall disappointment for John reached a climax in a letter on May 5, 1944 in which he complained to his parents that "for the time being I have been assigned to the litter-bearer platoon which is just about the bottom of the barrel so just inform anyone who asks that I'm in the medics and let it go at that."[70] At this point, it is clear that John was so embarrassed by his new position that he would rather his parents hide his role in the war effort, because to him the truth was too shameful. His frustration bled out further in the letter as he explained that "in all branches our men [ASTP men] are being thrown in as privates, [and] naturally the older men will feather their own nest first."[71] These feelings of betrayal are noted by Keefer in his study that "even fifty years later, many former ASTP-ers harbor[ed] the feeling that the Army lied to them about their futures."[72]

Besides feeling betrayed by their commanding officers and the War Department, ASTP candidates had to deal with the mocking that came with being replacements from a failed program. Enlisted soldiers who had marched all the way from boot camp felt that ASTP-ers had tried to take the easy way out, attempting to bypass the rank hierarchy through a loophole instead of toughing it out by climbing through the enlisted ranks, and thus sacrificing their masculinity in the eyes of their fellow soldiers. This disapproval from the enlisted men is best illustrated by a cartoon from the 63rd Infantry's regimental newspaper in which the new ASTP replacement, notably wearing glasses, has massively overengineered a foxhole.[73] The bewilderment on the face of the enlisted soldier facing the reader, and the shocked expression of the sergeant facing the foxhole, were meant to communicate that the new man, a bespectacled and over-educated "infantryman," belonged in a laboratory instead of a battlefield. Beyond the enlisted men's disdain of ASTP-ers, there were still plenty of other divides to create strife between the men. After arriving at Camp Carson, John wrote to Joan that he found the men to be "mostly a rugged, uneducated lot from the Southwest[…]all nice fellows unless one is unfortunate enough to become embroiled – not me!"[74] The perception by John and other

67 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 22 March 1944.
68 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 3 April 1944.
69 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 31 March 1944.
70 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 5 May 1944.
71 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 5 May 1944.
72 Keefer, "Birth and Death," 3.
73 Unknown Artist, That's the New Man from ASTP, "Vanguard Section – Blood and Fire," July 8, 1944, found in Keefer, "Birth and Death," 4.
74 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 3 April 1944.

JA cartoon from the 63rd Infantry's regimental magazine shows the shock and bewilderment of enlisted soldiers as they watch an ASTP recruit overengineer a foxhole. This was meant to de note that ASTP-ers did not belong on the battlefield. [7]

ASTP-ers that the men at Carson who weren't from ASTP were somehow less educated created two competing ideals of masculinity, yet John's disappointment in his limited service status made it clear that the enlisted men's ideal of combat-effectiveness was more impressive than the one of education. The remarks on being "rugged and uneducated" were disheartened jabs at those he found to be in some way superior to himself. Concluding the May 5th letter to his parents, he insisted that "I'm not despondent[…]for as long as we do our best[…]and maintain our sense of humor we can consider the sacrifice of our dignity minute over the supreme one that over 30,000 of our comrades have already made."[75] John's feelings of losing his dignity run parallel with his position in the masculine hierarchy of the Army. In the span of just a few weeks John had gone from the prestigious high of an ASTP enrollee bound for officer's rank to the low of a I-B(L) classification and filler in a medical unit. Instead of being clad in fine Class A's he was now watching men deemed fitter than him drilling for combat while he watched on the sidelines in a support unit. All of these emotions bled into his May correspondence and led to another revelation for John; that his family may not be as understanding of his position as he hoped they would be.

John's May 5th letter marks an anomaly in his writing as it breaks from the usually emotionally reserved and cautiously optimistic view of army life that John curated throughout his correspondence with his parents. The blatant voicing of frustrations and the severe complaints were enough to worry his parents, as well. Within his response to them on May 25th is an attempt to assuage their fears that he is falling into a depression. He writes that "whatever happens to me is really inconsequential until the war ends so don't think I'm ever depressed, by the way I had KP [Kitchen Police] last Sunday and we really had a fine time."[76] The May correspondences marked the end of John's complaints to his parents about his army life. He instead shifted the focus of his writing back to the relative safety of descriptions of his physicality. His writing began to draw parallels to his initial letters of optimism in basic training. He wrote of how he was the fastest man in the company with "300 yards in 39 seconds!"[77] He gave them his opinions of the D-Day landings when news reached Camp Carson, giving a formal analysis where he assured them that "some violent counterattack will be forthcoming shortly" and that the capture of the "fine port of Cherbourg will enable us to transport some heavy artillery, men and supplies […] which will perhaps turn the tide."[78]

Despite almost a letter a week to his parents, John mentions very little about the intricate details of army life he found so "swell" in 1943. He reserved all the details about his training, as well as the small gripes that came with it, for his sister Joan. It was while writing to her that he recounts his stories of the infiltration course where "5 machine guns pour lead 30 inches off the ground so you have to crawl pretty low,"[79] or how his medical company treated the wounded during simulations until two in the morning, when they "curled up in a blanket and tried to sleep, but froze instead."[80] Perhaps he hid these experiences out of an abundance of caution

75 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 5 May 1944.
76 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 14 May 1944.
77 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 4 June 1944.
78 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 June 1944.
79 John Moynagh to Joan Moynagh, 10 April 1944.
80 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 25 May 1944.

John's Medical Technician Grade 5 stripes denoting the equivalent rank of Corporal were included within a letter to his parents regarding his promotion. [8]

for his parents' concern for his well-being, though it is more likely that his change of tone was due to the embarrassment he felt at his position in the Medical corps and his parent's swift reaction to his display of dissatisfaction. By writing to his sister, John was able to distance himself from the expectations he had set for himself and his parents about his officer training in ASTP and the subsequent dashing of those expectations with his assignment to what he thought of as an inferior unit. As much is seen in his letter to them in August, where his voice shifted again to the optimism displayed when he began his transfer into the ASTP program. The return address on the letter reads "T/5 – John R. Moynagh" and the writing within described to his parents that "as you see by the envelope, I have started up my army career at last." After explaining to them that he received his commission as a Medical Technician Fifth Grade and relaying that he "felt quite proud to be one of the first new men receiving Army recognition," he concluded his remarks by claiming that "it's not the position I cared about but now I'm immune from KP and other details unless I'm put in charge of one."[81]

Despite the modesty of this conclusion, it is hard to believe his claim that he did not care about his promotion. From the beginning of his letters in the Army, John made it clear that his goal was to get to Officer Candidate School and then climb the officer ranks. His overwhelming dissatisfaction at the delays and cancellations of the ASTP and his palpable embarrassment about his physical classification and subsequent delegation to the medical corps all point in this direction as well. Even the opening phrase of the letter in which he finally found it acceptable to relay personal feelings about his army experience reflected this. The fact that he felt that his career was just now beginning, nearly two years since his enlistment in the reserves, meant that the rank of Technician, despite being far lower than the Lieutenant's bar promised to him by the ASTP, was immensely important to him. So important, in fact, that he included one of his rank patches within the letter, as physical proof for his parents—and himself—that he was now officially an Army man.

A SHIFT IN IDEALS AND AN OVERSEAS PERSPECTIVE ON SERVICE

JOHN MAINTAINED his rank throughout his campaigns in Europe. Over the course of 195 consecutive days of combat, John and his medical company were charged with the task of tending to all the horrors a battlefield could wreak as they slogged through France and on to the German town of Inden. There, John found the time to write a letter to his grandmother. Maybe the knowledge that his letter would pass under the rubber stamp of "Army Examiner 43268" restricted his thoughts, but despite 88 days of combat John's letter was relaxed. He supposed that "if I was at home this time of year, it would be quite a job for me to get out of the house without doing some shoveling," and noted that the weather had been kind to them so far.[82] He then described to her the situation that

81 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 August 1944.
82 John Moynagh to Mrs. Catherine Fennelly, 4 December 1944.

German towns were in: "you would think these people would give up before we destroy all of Germany. Most of the people in the villages we capture are glad it's over for them even though defeated."[83] He wrapped the letter hoping that Santa was good to her and included a Christmas present of a handkerchief with the flags of the allies surrounding a German shield with the words "Souvenir De Belgique" painted above them, writing "since I was in Belgium."[84] The relaxed nature of John's writing and the somewhat ironic phrase on the handkerchief painted his experience as one of relative ease.

Though the December letter is the only written correspondence from John's time in active combat, it provides a glimpse into the therapeutic effects that letter-writing can have for soldiers. The letter shows a shift away from the introspections seen in many of his letters from training. Instead, John focused on his surroundings and the mindset of the German civilians around him. The only mention of himself comes in the form of his opening remark about shoveling snow, which could be viewed simply as a way to find some common ground. One can infer that writing about his personal experiences was difficult for John, especially knowing that disclosing too much information in a letter could mean it was literally cut off the paper by a censor. But writing about the destruction around him was permissible, and the gratitude shown by the civilians must have proved to be a positive experience for him, as he felt it necessary to include it within his letter. The shift away from himself, and onto the experiences of others, is an important one for understanding how John has grown since his early days in the army. His deployment overseas allowed him to distance himself from the pressures of the homefront and Army training, and his engagement in combat shifted his focus onto more pressing and humanitarian matters. This type of growth would continue in John's correspondence overseas.

A common line among Army strategists is that there is always a plan until the fighting starts. John's plan of climbing the rank ladder was put on hold once he stepped off the ramp in France to begin his overseas duty. Despite the relaxed nature of his letter to his grandmother, by 1945 he had seen the worst that Europe had to offer. From the Liberation of the Netherlands to the Battle of the Bulge to the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp, the chaos of constant battle provided no opportunity for John to advance up the ranks. Yet as the fighting wound down in Europe, a final opportunity arose. Lessons learned from the ASTP led the Army to develop a method of officer training for enlisted men who had shown potential during their combat experience. The Officer Candidate Course (OCC) was established in April of 1945 at Napoleon's summer residence of Fontainebleau. In May, John was accepted to join the program, graduating eight weeks later on July 7th with a commission as Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army Infantry.[85] Though no written correspondence survives from this moment, it can be readily assumed from John's August 1944 letter that he would have told his parents the good news as soon as he could. As an officer, he could now accept a command post, and he would not have to wait long. On September 17, John was assigned as Executive Officer in Labor Service Company 1703, a camp for German POWs. By November 6, he was promoted to Commanding Officer. In a letter to his parents dated December 9, 1945, John's tone changed again from the letters written during his time in training. He opened with a report of the cold weather they received in the past week and noted that "the Germans get an allowance of wood that is none too adequate, but we pick up fuel here and there."[86] He continued this thread by asking if his parents would send him a pack of "15 or 20 of the small tins of tobacco – no, not [for] the black market, I use them as prizes for the best jobs done by my charges."[87] He also asked for a box of razor blades as well, as "they make quite a bonus."[88] He concluded the letter with Christmas wishes and a promise to try and call them on New Year's.

The difference between this letter and the usual tone of John's letters from 1943 and 1944 is stark. Though John must have taken considerable pride in the fact that the return address on the air-mail envelope read "Lt. John Moynagh Jr.," there was almost no discussion

83 John Moynagh to Mrs. Catherine Fennelly, 4 December 1944.
84 John Moynagh to Mrs. Catherine Fennelly, 4 December 1944.
85 John Moynagh, Officer's Commission, 1945.
86 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 December 1945.
87 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 December 1945.
88 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 December 1945.

of himself. Instead, the letter focuses on the German "charges" under John's command.[89] The responsibility that came with the rank seemed to have changed him. John's attempts to gain rank, and the constant setbacks that prevented his achievement of that journey, all affected the meaning of the rank to John. As we have seen, John's claim in August of 1944 that "it's not the rank I cared about"[90] was contradicted by the fact that he constantly shared with his parents the importance that an officer's rank held to him. Though his wish had originally been to lead men in combat, his eyesight had squashed those dreams. By the standards of masculinity established across America by the Roosevelt administration, the Army, and the media, he fell short. But by the time he wrote his December 1945 letter, he had overcome those challenges. The meaning of the rank also seemed to be reflected in John's demeanor as, after acquiring his Lieutenant's rank and accepting his role as Commanding Officer, John stopped thinking, and writing, about himself. The newfound concern for the men in his charge is notable but should be analyzed as another layer of John's personal reaction to social cues. Though John was an enlisted man for most of his active service, his ASTP courses, OCC course, and his time serving under officers all gave him valuable insight as to how officers were *supposed* to act. They were taught to be leaders, to think about those underneath them, and to ensure their care to the best of their ability. John, as a newly commissioned officer, would have wanted to prove that he was of acceptable stature for the officer role and as such made sure that any concerns he voiced were for his subordinates. His tone had to match his position, and his position meant that he no longer followed, he led.

Over a year passes between John's August 13, 1944 letter, in which he bid goodbye to his parents, and his December 9, 1945 letter. All that is recorded in this time is the letter to his grandmother in December 1944, for a grand total of two letters from his overseas service. It can be said that there is not enough evidence to support the claim that John's identity changed between that time. But an analysis of the tone, focus, and minutiae of earlier letters reveals what was important to John, and, crucially, what was no longer important. John's identity throughout his training hinged on his ability to climb the rank hierarchy. For two years, his tone and mood fluctuated depending on his circumstances relating to the outcome of promotion. News of these fluctuations, whether it was acceptance into the ASTP or exclusion from the infantry due to his eyesight, was always important enough to reach his parents. Yet John dropped any news of his rank during his time abroad, especially during his December 1945 letter, signifying that John's identity evolved. He was no longer concerned with the same issues that interested him a year before. Now, his focus was on those around him instead of himself. Whether from his superior position as a liberator in December 1944, or his superior position as an officer in December of 1945, the inclusion in his letters of disbelief towards the German civilians and the concern for his "charges" was of greater importance than his pursuit of rank.

CONCLUSION

SOCIOLOGIST Norman Denzin wrote that there "is no separation between self and society," and that personal identity is formed from an amalgamation of "material social conditions, discourse, and narrative practices."[91] This theory rings especially true in the case of John's correspondence. Throughout his letters is a constant connection to the societal norms that influenced him on his journey. The constant push of military propaganda to influence the American idea of the optimal man can be seen in John's recounting of his physical growth. His acceptance into ASTP and the delays to deploying overseas that wracked him with guilt reflects society's total indoctrination into every aspect of the war effort. The embarrassment and despair that accompanied his I-B(L) physical classification shows the influence that the military system had in shaping a man's social image and self-esteem. The meanings behind each opportunity or setback influenced how John recounted it to loved ones. We have seen that John took demotions with good humor because becoming too depressed about one's role in the war was questioned immediately. Similarly, he

89 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 December 1945.
90 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 9 August 1944.
91 Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Interactionism*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, Illinois: SAGE Publications, 2001), 58.

maintained a focus on the positive aspects of physical growth and the visual status portrayed by dress and visual cues of prestige. All of these mundane components come together to create a detailed picture of John's identity, which, when passed under an analytical lens, show that his evolution is a result of society's evolving standard for model manhood, and John's position within that standard.

Gill explains that "all members of a society represent their society, each member contain[s] the essence of the group that has formed them."[92] When John says goodbye to his parents on August 13th, 1944 he tells them that "I've never felt better in my life, and fully equipped and garbed for anything that's in store for me."[93] The statement is reflective not only of John's emotions, but an affirmation of the messages coming from the Army that their soldiers are the fittest men in the country. Though it seems that John truly believed that the Army had trained him well, it is also obvious that John's rhetoric follows the messages that every news outlet in the country had propagated for years. The scope of influence of these messages is only seen through the jigsaw puzzle-like biography that over four years of personal correspondence can create. To examine a play or newspaper from the wartime era shows us that there was a well-maintained culture that provided a pro-military ideal. But the minds of analysts seventy-five years in the future will never independently understand the influences of the subliminal messages these campaigns created. Biography through letter-writing provides us with the clarity to understand how the messages were interpreted by a single person. Letters allow for an opening into the mind of an individual but reflect the views of the society within their thoughts. The deep dive into one person's experiences allows for a much more focused analysis of the experience of a nation.

It seems naïve to think that a set of letters from one man can grant us some vast insight into the experience of an entire country; this is because historians typically focus on the macroscopic. Tomes and volumes are written about the deeds of nations and, if we are lucky, a few men and women that historians deem "great." But scholars often toss ordinary citizens together into an anonymous mass, whose views are analyzed as a collective. A set of letters, even from just a short span of time, provides us valuable information about that anonymous mass at a personal level. Unlike newspapers or books, authors wrote letters as a private discourse. They were not intended for an audience wider than the recipients. They wrote a private discourse meant for a select few, and their letters offer a version of events from a more vulnerable viewpoint than historians regularly recognize. The massive mobilizations of manpower during WWII are common knowledge. The ways that this mobilization was achieved are lesser known but still attainable. How these programs affected those involved, however, how they shaped the identities of millions one at a time is underappreciated. Personal correspondence provides documentation that allows for the analysis and appreciation of the changes these events created. Buried under the minutiae of daily life is the reasoning for *why* those minutiae have become a part of a routine, and if one person is performing those actions, or thinking those thoughts, it is understandable that others may be as well. The change in direction of an entire nation does not happen with one voice, it is a collection of millions of individual voices who decide to change in similar ways, and letters allow us to find out why.◆

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS PROJECT WAS born out of a desire to uncover the truth about my grandfather's service in World War Two and to try to understand a man I have never met. Over the past four years I have pieced together over 100 letters, postcards and photos from John's sister Joan, my great aunt, and other family members to create his story. His writings influenced me to study abroad in Berlin and travel through Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium to see the places he saw and wrote about. When I returned home, I crafted this paper to present an example of how a historian can use the private writings of a person they've never met, to find out more about them and their lives than they could ever expect to know.

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92 Gill, *How We Are Changed by War*, 46.
93 John Moynagh to Mr. John R. Moynagh and Mrs. Irene Moynagh, 16 August 1944.

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[6] In possession of author?

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