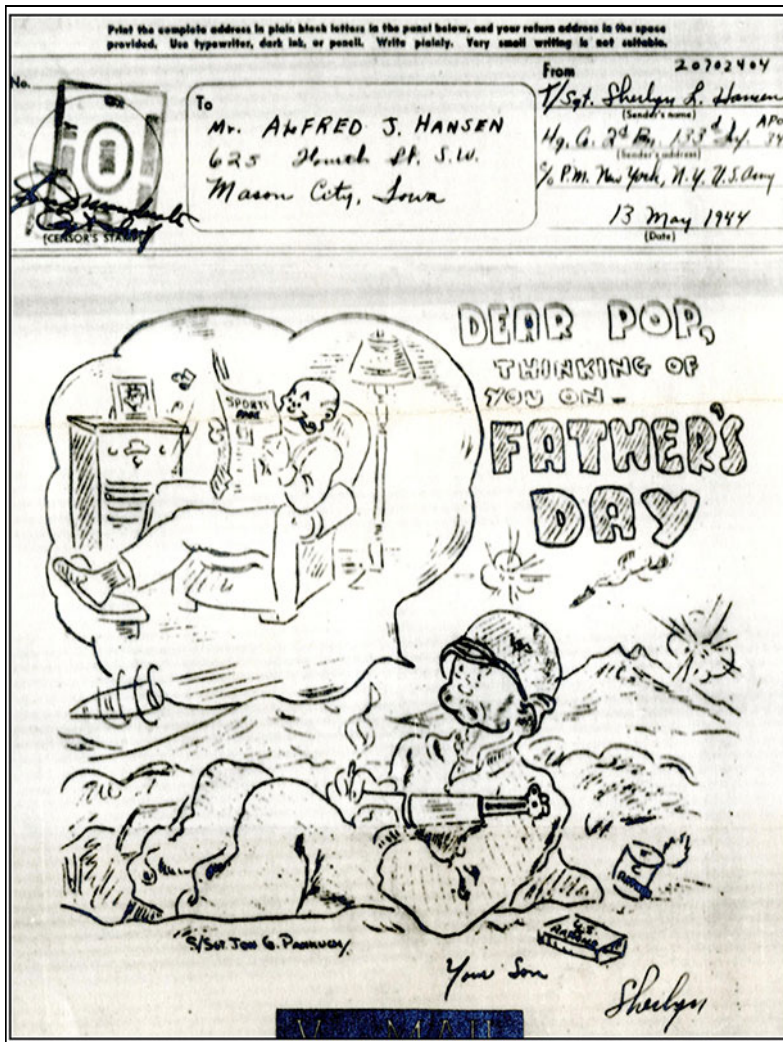


Father's Day - Army style

Capt. Douglas Lowery

Father's Day – Army style



“Dear Pop, Thinking of you on – Father’s Day”, wrote Sergeant Sherlyn Hansen on a cartoon which showed a Soldier lying in a fox hole, thinking of his father sitting in a chair with his feet up reading the newspaper and listening to the radio. Hansen sent this cartoon via V-mail to his father during World War II.

“So far all I know is that I have a son, weighing 7 pounds, 9 ounces (presume in the raw) and that Mother and Son are doing nicely, as the home town paper will say. So you must tell me everything. What does he look like? Etc. and etc...I’ll be waiting for your letter. I have had a usual work day amid accepting congratulations on my fatherhood. In fact, they’re beginning to call me “POP” around here. I dropped in at the PX last night, where our Signal Co. boys were, each

one I talked to wanted to bet me 2 to 1 I wouldn’t have a son. And I was taking all comers. So my beers won’t cost me a cent for the next few weeks.” B. McElvain (Walter McElvain 2010, 6: 62)

---Private 1st Class Walter McElvain to his wife Josephine, 25 April 1944. This was McElvain’s first letter after receiving a phone call from his Mother informing him of the birth of his son, Bill. McElvain was training for overseas duty with the U.S. Army 44th Division at Camp Phillips, Kansas.

Since our country’s beginning, tens of thousands of Soldiers have written similar letters home as their

duties precluded them from being present for their child's birth, family birthday celebrations, graduations, anniversaries, or other special days.

The origin of Father's Day can be traced back to Babylon some 4,000 years ago. In the United States, it is generally accepted that Ms. Sonora Louise Smart Dodd, daughter of a Civil War veteran, is the founder of the modern day Father's Day. In fact, President Woodrow Wilson approved of the festival in 1916.

In 1966, Lyndon Johnson signed a Presidential Proclamation which declared the third Sunday of June as Father's Day. Ultimately, in 1972 Richard Nixon established the permanent national observation of Father's Day on the third Sunday of June.



The U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center's (USAHEC) houses and preserves an archive and artifact collection which provides a detailed record of U.S. Army history. Located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, these hundreds of thousands of items tell the stories of Soldiers, in times of war and peace, close to home and far away, including a congratulatory letter to the parents of Brigadier General O. Benjamin Davis Sr. when he received his commission as a second lieutenant in 1901. Davis went on to become the first African-American to attain the rank of General Officer.

Brigadier General O. Benjamin Davis.

Within the collection there is evidence of the significance of Father's Day, including letters from Soldiers to their fathers while serving overseas during World War II. A great example is a World War II cartoon drawn by Sergeant Sherlyn Hansen which showed a Soldier lying in a fox hole, thinking of his father sitting in a chair with his feet up reading the newspaper and listening to the radio. The card was sent via V-mail.

Victory, or V-mail as it was commonly called, was the process of microfilming letters written on specially designed letterhead sheets, shipping the microfilmed copies overseas, "blowing" the letters up,

printing them at a processing center overseas, and then delivering them. The intent of V-mail was to free up valuable shipping and container space for war materials. A single mail bag of V-mail microfilm could replace 37 mail bags needed for 150,000 one page letters, reducing the weight from 2,575 pounds for letters to 45 pounds of V-mail. While V-mail did not replace traditional mail, it did substantially reduce the shipping space needed for traditional letters. Between June 1942 and April 1945, 556,513,795 pieces of V-mail were sent from the U.S. to military personnel overseas.

The USAHEC preserves materials, such as these related to Father's Day, to ensure the many different stories connected to the history of the U.S. Army live on forever. For more information about the USAHEC and its resources, visit: www.usahec.org

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