

Two Soldiers—Two Wars—One Patriotism

General Overview

Two soldiers in different wars wrote letters home that express powerful feelings of patriotism. As they wrote, each knew he was either dying or about to die.

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to

- Use interpretation of documentary sources to analyze the two soldiers' attitudes about their roles.
- Examine how the wars affected the lives of each man and his family.
- Examine how each man felt about his country.
- Define and discuss the meaning of patriotism.
- Become aware of the importance of archival collections

Preparation

Students should read the two letters.

Avery Letter:

- <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/u/?p15012coll11,35>

Strickland Letter:

- Attached to this document

Activities

Students should read aloud the Avery letter and excerpts of the Strickland letter. The following questions should provoke discussion.

- What do the two men have in common?
- What are the obvious differences in the two soldiers?
- PFC Strickland had a premonition that he would die in the upcoming battle. Have you ever had a premonition about something that might happen?
- How did Col. Avery want his father to remember him?
- What does PFC Strickland say in his letter that indicates that he was proud to be an American?
- How did each man's family feel about the letter of their loved one?
- Why do you think these letters were donated to the North Carolina State Archives?



Enrichment and Extension

- Students should expand their research by exploring the battles in which the men met their deaths.
- Students should research period newspapers for mention of the men's deaths.

Sources

PC 1190, Isaac E. Avery Paper, North Carolina State Archives.

- <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/u/?p15012coll11,35>

PC 1340, Hiram Strickland Papers, North Carolina State Archives.



Colonel Isaac E. Avery

Col. Isaac E. Avery of the 6th NC troops commanded Hoke's brigade when General Hoke was wounded at Chancellorsville. In July 1863 Avery led the attack on Cemetery Hill at Gettysburg. The only mounted man in the area, he was shot through the neck and shoulder. As he was dying he wrote a message to Major Samuel McDowell Tate. The message says, "Major. Tell my Father I died with my Face to the enemy. I. E. Avery."

His blood fell on the small piece of paper, donated by a family member, and now in the custody of the North Carolina State Archives. Colonel Avery died July 3, 1863.

PFC Hiram D. "Butch" Strickland

Private First Class Butch Strickland lived in Alamance County until he joined the U. S. Army. In the Vietnam War he was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery, B Battery. Strickland died in battle in the central highlands of South Vietnam on February 1, 1966 while attempting to aid a wounded comrade. His commanding officer sent the letter, found in his belongings, to Strickland's parents. The letter was donated to the North Carolina State Archives by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Donald A. Strickland. In 1967 the General Assembly of North Carolina issued a joint resolution honoring the life and memory of this courageous young man.





Dear Folks,

I'm writing this letter as my last one. You've probably already received word that I'm dead and that the government wishes to express its deepest regrets.

Believe me I didn't want to die but I knew that it was part of the job. I want my country to live for billions and billions of years to come. I want it to stand as a light to all people oppressed and guide them to the same freedom we know. If we can stand and fight for freedom then I think we have done the job God set down for us. It's up to every American to fight for the freedom we hold so dear. If we don't the smell of free air could become dank and damp as that of a prison cell. We won't be able to look at ourselves in a mirror much less at our sons, and daughters, because we know we have



failed our God, Country, and our
future generations.

I can hold my head high because
I fought, whether it be in heaven
or hell. Besides the saying goes
One more O.C. from Viet Nam St Peter
I've served my time in Hell.

I fought for Sonny, Nell, Gale
Mom, and Dad. But when the twins
and Sonny's kids get old enough
they'll probably have to fight too.
Tell them to go proudly and
without fear of death because
it is worth keeping our land free.

I remember a story from Mr
Williams English classes when I was
a Freshman. It said, "The cowards
die a thousand times, the brave die
but once."

Don't mourn me mother for
I'm happy I died fighting my
country's enemies and I'll live
forever in people's minds.



I've done what I always dreamed
of. Don't mourn me for I died
a soldier of the United States
of America.

God bless you all and take
care. I'll be seeing you
in heaven.

Your loving son & brother
Butch.

The "Butch" Strickland Letter

The following transcript is from a letter written by Private First Class Hiram Dillard "Butch" Strickland, United States Army. The son of Mr. and Mrs. Donald A. Strickland, "Butch," as he was known, grew up near the town of Graham in Alamance County, N.C. He was a patriotic young man who wanted to serve his country. He chose to do so at a time when many his age were denouncing the nation and its military for our growing involvement in the war in Southeast Asia. Not wishing to be drafted, Butch Strickland enlisted in the Regular Army. Following basic and advanced training as an artilleryman in the United States, he was deployed to South Vietnam where he began his projected twelve-month tour of duty on Sunday, November 28, 1965.

On Tuesday, February 1, 1966, the enemy attacked Butch Strickland's unit. During the firefight, with total disregard for his own personal safety, he left his covered position and rushed to the aid a wounded comrade who lay helpless in the open. His selfless act of heroism cost him his life. He was shot down and killed as he attempted to save a fellow soldier. Butch Strickland had only been in country two months.

In 1967, Butch Strickland's letter won the Freedom Foundation of Valley Forge's George Washington Award as "the best expression of faith, love and devotion to God and country" in the nation for 1966. That same year, the General Assembly of North Carolina passed a joint resolution honoring the life, service, and memory of this young patriot. The original document was presented to Governor Dan K. Moore by Strickland's parents in a ceremony on May 15, 1967. It was subsequently placed in the State Archives and is now preserved in Private Collection #1340.1.

This remarkable letter is significant for several reasons. First, since it was probably written in late January, and was found among his effects after his death, it was likely the last letter Strickland ever wrote home. Second, in contrast to an ever increasing anti-war feeling in this country at the time, it expresses his deeply patriotic views on service to one's country, and his desire to give his life if necessary to share with others the ideals on which it was founded. Lastly, and with eerie accuracy, in the letter twenty-year-old Butch Strickland foresaw and predicted his own death.

As you read this letter, I hope you will pause to reflect on the true meaning of the oft-repeated saying, "freedom is not free." Never forget that Butch Strickland, and a lot of other "Butch Stricklands" throughout this country's history, bought and continue to preserve with their own life's blood the freedoms we all enjoy. They gave all of their tomorrows so that we might have our today.

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Special Collections Branch
Archives and Records Section
North Carolina Division of Historical Resources

[Letter: PFC Hiram Dillard "Butch" Strickland, U. S. Army, circa January, 1966, South Vietnam]

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I'm writing this letter as my last one. You've probably already received word that I'm dead and that the government wishes to express its deepest regrets.

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I can hold my head high because I fought, whether it be in heaven or hell. Besides the saying goes [“]One more GI from Viet Nam [sic] St. Peter[,] I've served my time in Hell.[“]

I fought for Sandy, Nell, Gale[,] Mom, and Dad. But when the twins and Sandy's kids get old enough they'll probably have to fight too. Tell them to go proudly and without fear of death because it is worth keeping our land free.

I remember a story from Mr. Williams [sic] English classes when I was a Freshman. It said, “The cowards die a thousand times, the brave die but once.[“]

Don't morn me mother for I'm happy I died fighting my countries[sic] enemies and I'll live forever in peoples[sic] minds. I've done what I always dreamed of. Don't morn me for I died a solider[sic] of the Uninted[sic] States of America.

God bless you all and take care. I'll be seeing you in heaven.

Your loving son and brother

Butch