

earth by the Luftwaffe and suffered thousands of casualties. But Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris was defiantly unsympathetic:

SIR ARTHUR HARRIS. (*He is stern but reserved and not over-emotional.*) The Nazis entered this war under the rather childish delusion that they were going to bomb everyone else, and nobody was going to bomb them. At Rotterdam, London, Warsaw, and half a dozen other places, they put their rather naïve theory into operation. They sowed the wind, and now they are going to reap the whirlwind.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. The whirlwind descended on Dresden, Germany, the night of February 13th, 1945—less than three months before the war in Europe was over—and lasted for fifteen hours. Allied warplanes carpeted the city with incendiary bombs, and Dresden was soon engulfed in an ocean of flames.

HANS SCHRÖTER. (*Schröter is so emotionally cauterized by what he has seen and experienced that there is almost a lifeless quality to his letter, though small bursts of emotion reveal themselves.*) Dear Mrs. Ganze: I only just received your letter with its sad contents—my belated, heartfelt sympathy to you. But so many are experiencing the same. Fate's turn was the worst for me, and I don't have an interest in living any longer.

Saturday and Sunday evening I was at Marienstrasse 38 through 42. During the attack, the door of number 38 was destroyed, so only the emergency exit was left.

When I ran out, I saw my wife and son standing in Marienstrasse so helplessly, but I had an older aunt from Liegnitz, and I wanted to save her, so I said to my wife, "I'll be back in *two minutes*."

But when we returned in just that amount of time, my loved ones had disappeared. I searched for them in the cellar and on the street, but they were nowhere to be found. Everything was in flames. Everywhere were burned bodies.

I went with great haste to my home only to find my loves laying on the street so peaceful, as if they were sleeping.

Beat.

I believe you can imagine what I have been through since then.
Yours, Hans Schröter.]

Hans
Schröter
(American)
(German)

KURT
VONNEGUT
(American)

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Ironically, a group of American prisoners of war being held in Dresden lived through the firestorm virtually unscathed.

One of these POWs, a twenty-two-year-old private first class named Kurt Vonnegut, wrote to his family back in Indiana on May 29th, 1945.

KURT VONNEGUT. Dear people, I've been a prisoner of war since December 19th, 1944, when our division was cut to ribbons by Hitler's last desperate thrust through Luxembourg. The other American divisions on our flanks managed to pull out. We were obliged to stay and fight. Well, the supermen marched us, without food, water, or sleep to Limberg, a distance of about sixty miles. From there we were shipped to a Dresden work camp.

I was their leader by virtue of the little German I spoke. It was our misfortune to have sadistic and fanatical guards. After trying to improve our situation for two months and having been met with bland smiles, I told the guards just what I was going to do to them when the Russians came.

Beat, then a wry smile.

They beat me up a little, and I was fired as group leader. On about February 14th the Americans came over, followed by the RAF. Their combined labors killed 250,000 people in twenty-four hours and destroyed all of Dresden—possibly the world's most beautiful city.

Beat.

But not me. After that we were put to work carrying corpses from air-raid shelters. Civilians cursed us and threw rocks as we carried bodies to huge funeral pyres in the city. When General Patton took Leipzig, we were evacuated on foot to Hellendorf. On that happy day the Russians were intent on mopping up isolated resistance in our sector. Their planes strafed and bombed us, killing fourteen.

Beat.

But not me. I'm writing from a Red Cross Club, and I can't receive mail here so don't write.

Love, Kurt Jr.]

* Pronounced: Lipe-zuhg

He lay just as he had fallen, and his head was missing. His rifle and helmet lay close by, and we buried what remained of him. I tried to find something by which he might be identified, but it was impossible. Poor boy, in some faraway home someone will be mourning the loss of a husband, son, or sweetheart, and the saddest of all is, they will never know how he died or where he is buried. I must close for now. Love and kisses. Will.

KUWAITI FATHER. September 13th, 1994. Dear Jamal: Four years have passed since we lost your trace. The Iraqis are denying the existence of any Kuwaiti prisoners in Iraq, but they offered the possibility that some missing Kuwaitis are still wandering inside of Iraq, afraid to show themselves, so I am hoping that this is the case with you.

Your mother is still keeping your personal belongings in your room, checking them every morning as if you will be coming home soon—perhaps today or tomorrow. Exactly four years have gone since I received that telephone call informing me that you had been detained by the Iraqis. Your voice is still shaking in my head from when I went to the police station to get you out. The Iraqis denied that you were even there, but you heard me arguing and called out saying, "Father, I am here!" And then I heard you screaming from pain when they began lashing and hitting you, and your voice was silenced and has vanished to this day. My Dear Jamal, if you receive this letter through the International Red Cross, be assured that we have not forgotten you. May God be with you, dead or alive. On behalf of all the family, your grieving father.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WWII AIRMAN OSCAR MITCHELL.

April 15th, 1944. Dear Sylvia: You say that you wish you were over here. Although most people think that they are "war conscious," are they really? So far removed from the far-flung battle fronts, how can they be? You are really "war conscious" when you see the airplanes, in formation, early in the morning, flying to meet their rendezvous... and then see this same formation returning in the evenings. But the number is not the same. Twelve went out, but only nine returned.

You stand there, looking up, watching them fly into the distance; into and part of the horizon, then disappear. You wonder, what really did happen? Those who went down in flames. Do they die as

Oscar
Mitchell
(American)

START

you see them in the movies? I don't think so. Not with a smile on their lips and a happy gleam in their eyes, but rather painfully and with the knowledge that *this is it*.

You'd have to see the wounded streaming back from the front after a battle, above all, to see the light go out of men's eyes. Young men shaking from nervous exhaustion and crying. Strong men they are, or were, who did not or will not have the chance, ever, to live normal lives. People may think they know what war is like.

Their knowledge is facts of the mind. Mine is the war-torn body, scared to soul's depth. When I was in the States, war was far away, unreal. I had read, I had seen pictures, but now I know. Oscar.]

STOP

DE'ON MILLER. Aaron Cole Austin was born on July 1st, 1982, in Amherst, Texas. Sent home on the Fourth of July, he was my breastfed, blanket-sucking baby boy. He threw his blanket away when he was ten. God, how I wish for that blanket now. It surely would have carried some scent. You couldn't even bleach it out. Lance Corporal Aaron Austin, Team Leader. Echo Company, 1st Marine Division. Killed in action on April 26th, 2004, in Fallujah.

Beat.

My mother once told me that, when it came to Aaron, my parenting skills bordered on contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Aaron always knew how to charm me, how to make me smile. He used to call me "Momma" when he wanted something. I got called "Momma" a lot.

At times I believe I can learn to live a life without my son. After all, I must. And I am certain there are other mothers who have lost their boys who can shop at the local grocer's without the macaroni-and-cheese boxes suddenly causing them grief. But the memory of Aaron is in everything around me.

So much of him has been lost, is fading, breaking down. His blanket, his watch, his uniform. Long after he died, I found a letter I wrote to him that he never received. It's not really something of his, since he never got it. But still, it's *ours*.

In my mind, I add a postscript to the letter. What I would write to my son if I could: "I miss you, Aaron, with all of me, all of the time. I was, am, and will always remain so very proud of you. I just never really believed that your time would come before mine. But son,

Robert Guttman (American / British / French
Canadian)

Start

ROBERT GUTTMAN. October 11th, 1990. Desert Shield. Dear Brudda: Can't say where I am exactly, loose lips and all that, but it's the place to be this season. Clear skies, bags of sun, temperatures in the low 110s. What more could anyone want?

Everybody who's anybody is here as well—all you have to do is listen to the VHF radiotelephone.

(British accent.) "This is the British warship calling the vessel four miles off my starboard beam. Be so good as to respond on Channel 16 or I shall reluctantly be compelled to blow you out of the water. Over."

(He takes a deep drag on a cigarette, tosses it on the floor, and squashes it out, and then says in a petulant French accent.) "Zees ees zee French warsheep calleeng zee sheep on mah port quar-tair. Eedenteefy yoursalf, ovair."

(British again.) "French warship be damned! I fly my sovereign's colours, and I'll not heave to for any snail-chewing, garlic-breathed swab of a frog. And Ye may lay to that! Over."

(Smiling and super friendly.) "Heyyyyyyyyyy, this is the Canadian warship calling the vessel aboot— *(Looks off into the distance and gestures like he's completely guessing.)* three miles away from me. How's it going, eh?"

And then, of course, there are the Americans. The Americans don't actually speak English at all. They speak Navy.

(Without pausing and in a straightforward, monotone, almost bored voice.) "Merchant vessel on course three five two speed one seven this is Charlie Oscar US Navy warship three five zero zero yards bearing two five five relative what are your intentions regarding my unit over?"

This—*this*—to an Albanian Tanker, where there may be only one person onboard who even speaks English at all, and badly at that.

Well, in any case, you see that we don't lack for free entertainment. We have a couple of World War II veterans onboard, both merchant marines. They volunteered for this trip. After dodging U-Boats and kamikazes, they find this a bit of a yawner.

Give my best to everybody. Hope to see you soon.

Robert.

end

over here. They are much more our brothers and sisters than I think we know.

Tetsuko Tanaka and Richard Luttrell cross to stand in front of the other actors. Their prominence should indicate that the play is coming to an end.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. Many individuals who had caused others to suffer reached out, as best they could, to make amends.

TETSUKO TANAKA. Towards the end of the War in the Pacific, we were taken out of our classroom and sent to a war plant to build balloon bombs. After defeat, we were told that some of the balloons had reached the United States but were useless as weapons, having caused only a few forest fires.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. In May 1945, a woman named Elsie Mitchell and five young boys and girls were out picnicking on Gearhart Mountain in Oregon, when one of the children picked up a balloon bomb, not knowing what it was. As they all gathered around the shiny, toylike object, that's when it exploded.

TETSUKO TANAKA. Forty years after the war, we learned for the first time about what is known as "The Oregon Tragedy," involving the loss of six lives. We, who at the time were only school girls, were nevertheless full participants in the war and had brought great suffering to others. My heart was pained to learn that the six victims were Sunday school children on what was meant to be a joyful picnic.

Beat.

I am enclosing 1,000 paper cranes folded, one by one, by those of us who made the balloon bombs. We seek forgiveness and offer a prayer for peace, and a vow that the error of the past shall never again be repeated.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. And, finally, decades after serving in Vietnam, a veteran named Richard Luttrell went to "The Wall" in Washington, D.C., and left behind a letter he had been meaning to write for years.

RICHARD LUTTRELL. Dear Sir: For twenty-two years I have carried your picture in my wallet. I was only eighteen years old that day we faced one another on that trail in Chu Lai. Why you did not

Richard
Luttrell
pg 47/48

(American)

take my life, I'll never know. You stared at me for so long, armed with your AK-47, and yet you didn't fire. Forgive me for taking your life. I was reacting the way I was trained, to kill—Hell you weren't even considered human.

Since that day I've grown a great deal and have respect for life and other peoples of the world. So many times over the years I have stared at the picture of you and your daughter. I have two daughters myself. Today I visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I have wanted to come here for several years now to say goodbye to many of my former comrades. I truly loved them, as I'm sure you loved your comrades.

We are no longer enemies. I can now respect the importance that life held for you. I shall try to live my life to the fullest, an opportunity that you and so many others were denied. Until we chance to meet again in another time and place, rest in peace.

Respectfully, Richard A. Luttrell, 101st Airborne Division.

The actors remain, and if the main cast is more than six actors (not including the Narrator/Carroll), all additional actors take the stage. For the sake of clarity, the actors are assigned numbers in this concluding scene, but the director has discretion over who speaks each fragment. If there are only six main actors, the actor who reads 1A also reads 1B and 1C, and then the same goes for the other five actors (i.e. the second actor reads 2A, 2B, and 2C, and so on). It is recommended that the actors who played Spotswood Rice and Chaim speak the words "like slaves" and "concentration camp inmates," respectively. By the end of the scene, all of the actors should be standing and holding their "letter" rolled up in front of them so that it's clear to the audience that they're not all about to begin reading another section of letters. It's important that the audience realize that this is the end of the performance.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. They wrote at every opportunity, when the memories were still fresh. They wrote—

ACTOR #1A. inside barracks,

ACTOR #2A. and trenches,

ACTOR #3A. and foxholes,

"At some point," he said, "it has to stop. It just—has—to stop."
Perhaps *this* was the extraordinary, overlooked story I was searching for, the one that often goes unnoticed, but—for so many of the writers, as it became increasingly clearer while reading through their correspondences—they believed absolutely *had* to be remembered.

This is a critical part of the play, and it is imperative that the actors infuse as much joy or at least sweetness into these letters so that the audience can feel a sense of inspiration after having heard so many depressing and horrifying stories.

WWI BRITISH SOLDIER ALFRED CHATER. (*He is very energetic and upbeat, and he has a thick Cockney accent.*) I think I've seen one of the most extraordinary sights today that anyone has ever seen!!!

NARRATOR/CARROLL. As the First World War raged throughout Europe, a British private named Alfred Chater described to his mother a moment of shared humanity between enemy soldiers that occurred in late December of 1914:

ALFRED CHATER. About ten o'clock this morning I was *peeeeeeeeeeeping* over the parapet, when I saw a German waving his arms, and two of them got out of their trenches and came towards ours. One of our men went out to meet them, and in minutes the ground between the two trenches was swarming with men and officers of both sides, shaking hands and wishing each other a happy Christmas.

The truce has been quite impromptu. We exchanged cigarettes and autographs and some people took photos! I don't know how long it will go on for. We are, at any rate, having *another* truce on New Year's Day, as the Germans want to see how the photographs come out! **]**

NARRATOR/CARROLL. In November 1945, twenty-four-year-old Army Sergeant Richard Leonard wrote the following letter from Japan to a friend back in the States less than three months after the country had surrendered.

US SOLDIER DICK LEONARD. Dear Arlene, Greetings from Kure. The Japanese are being as polite as they can and treating us like kings, and you just can't hate them for hate's sake. I don't think I've

* Pronounced: KOO-ray

ALFRED
Chater
(British
Cockney)

He lay just as he had fallen, and his head was missing. His rifle and helmet lay close by, and we buried what remained of him. I tried to find something by which he might be identified, but it was impossible. Poor boy, in some faraway home someone will be mourning the loss of a husband, son, or sweetheart, and the saddest of all is, they will never know how he died or where he is buried. I must close for now. Love and kisses. Will.

Kuwaiti
father
(Arabic)

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NARRATOR/CARROLL. Vonnegut's reference to the massive number of people killed at Dresden caused me to think that maybe *this* is what I needed to hone in on—war letters that documented the sheer, staggering size and magnitude of it all.

This section should be done at an increasingly fast pace, and the actors can talk over one another—except when speaking numbers, as these must be heard clearly.

SOVIET
SOLDIER
(RUSSIAN)

WWII SOVIET SOLDIER. I understand how difficult it is to endure this grief, Mama. But your sorrow, our sorrow, is not the only one. I've seen worse during my travels. In the mines at Shakhty, we found 4,500 people killed by the German butchers. There were babies and children, women and old men. Wherever the Fascist monsters go, they leave behind them a river of blood and innocent Soviet dead.

AMERICAN REVOLUTION SOLDIER. The British came to Elizabethtown and at about twelve o'clock at night we attacked. *There was 5,000 of them.*

We kept up a hot fire about four hours and I got a wound in the head, but with the assistance of God, I shall get well.

FEMALE AMERICAN MISSIONARY. It's been one week now since the collapse of Nanking. In case of resistance, there is a bayonet stab or a bullet. Thousands have been butchered in cold blood, some believe it approaches the 10,000 mark.

FEMALE WWII NURSE. The camp had a large crematorium and they burned the dead and sometimes the live ones. There were huge pits in back filled with ashes and bones. A Polish doctor told me that the ashes in the pits represented 13,000 people.

INDIAN WWI SOLDIER. The battle is being carried on very bitterly. It looks as if not a single man can remain alive on either side, and the division is finished. Think of it—in taking fifty yards of a trench, 50,000 men are killed.

NARRATOR/CARROLL. War's brutality is the secret that even civilized nations keep from themselves, concealing it under layers of verbal camouflage and euphemisms like collateral damage, soft targets, and friendly fire.

Beat.

* Pronounced: Shock-tee