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## ENTERTAINMENT

# Theater performances explore war, one letter at a time

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By **Gale Fiege**  
Herald Writer

Published: Friday, November 7, 2014, 12:01 a.m.

Korea, 1951

Dear Paw en Maw en All...

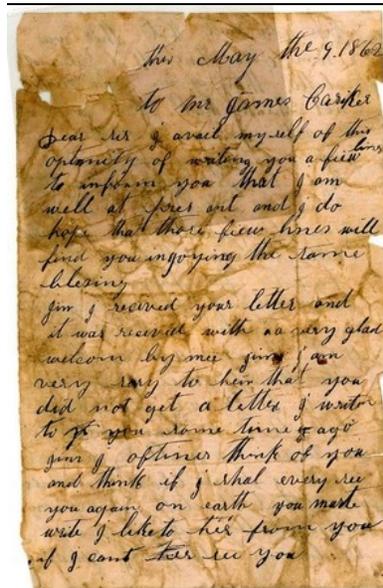
We have been working up towards that 38th parallel. 'Twas pretty awful the first time we found one of our boys lying in the snow, stripped of his shoes and clothes. We cursed and we cried too. Gosh he could have been anyone of the gang from home. Anyway, he was some mother's son.

Had a dream last night. I was sitting near our kitchen range at home. Mom was baking and she just pulled some beautiful rolls out of the oven. When I woke up, I had a hunk of snow and I was chewing on it.

Our squad leader just came by and told us to shave and wash up. What does he think? We all washed up just a week ago.

Your wayward son,

Johnny



Civil War letter from Gettysburg. National Archives

EDMONDS — Longtime actor Paul Morgan Stetler, known for his work with every professional theater company in the region, grew up in a literary family.

He enjoys reading, he likes history and he loves acting. His latest gig lets him put it all together.

Stetler, 51, is the founder and curator of Letters Aloud, a theatrical performance group that reads private letters to live audiences, with musical accompaniment and a slide show of photos that provide context.

"No other theater out there is doing this sort of program or exploring it the way we do," Stetler said. "It's deeply personal, almost voyeuristic, but vital. Someone described it as 'literary crack.' The literary set loves it, the 20-somethings love it. We hold up a mirror and cause people to think about their own letter-writing habits."

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## DAILY DEAL



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Letters Aloud returns to Edmonds Center for the Arts with its Veterans Day program “From the Front: Letters of Service and Honor” at 7:30 p.m. Monday.

Going to war, surviving in battle and returning home are among the topics covered in letters to and from military personnel.

A highlight surely will be Seattle playwright (“Another Day in Baghdad”) and Iraq war veteran David Tucker II reading from a letter he wrote to his sons.

The audience also will hear from a World War II veteran writing to his mother in hopes that his father will have patience as the soldier, who lost the use of his right hand in combat, learns how to bowl left-handed.

Another letter is from a World War II Japanese kamikaze pilot to his children, imploring them to care for their mother.

Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross, writes in 1862 to a relative about listening to some Union soldiers sleep. She wonders who among them will be alive to sleep the following night.

Humorous letters are part of the show’s mix, along with touching and thought-provoking correspondence.

Consider the letter from a soldier who believes he has sent his girlfriend a gift of silk gloves. The soldier tells his girl that he had admired the sales clerk’s pair. Unfortunately, because of a mix-up, the girlfriend actually receives a pair of panties.

Then there is the letter written by Cpl. Rupert Trimmingham to “Yank” magazine in April 1944.

“What is the Negro soldier fighting for? On whose team are we playing?”

“Myself and eight other soldiers were on our way from Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, to the hospital here at Fort Huachuca. We had to lay over until the next day for our train... (and) we could not purchase a cup of coffee at any of the lunchrooms around there.”

Stetler’s audience Monday will find out who Trimmingham saw eating in those lunchrooms while he and his fellow black soldiers were turned away.

The Letters Aloud staff, which includes Stetler’s partners Jessica Reading, Jamie Herlich and Louis Broome, previously produced Valentine’s Day, Father’s Day and Mother’s Day shows, which all debuted at Edmonds Center for the Arts.

“It takes quite a bit of research to find the letters,” Stetler said. “It’s interesting because we go on a journey to celebrate the past via the modern convenience of Internet searches.”

The most difficult part, however, is narrowing down the number of letters to be performed, he said.

“Letters Aloud has an old-fashioned quality,” Stetler said. “But the nature of correspondence is one we should think about today.”

#### If you go

“From the Front: Letters of Service and Honor” by Letters Aloud, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 10, Edmonds Center for the Arts, 410 Fourth Ave. N., Edmonds. For tickets, \$19 to \$29, call 425-275-9595. Students are \$15 each. Veterans can buy half-priced tickets by mentioning the code VET1114. More information about Letters Aloud is at [lettersaloud.com](http://lettersaloud.com).

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**Story tags** » • Comedy • Culture (general) • Theater • Edmonds

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