



Phil Woodall wrote about his platoon leader Gary Scott (above).

“SOLDIERS’ STORIES: WAR IN THE FIRST PERSON”

An exhibit at the Charlotte Museum of History is touching the hearts of those of us with war on our mind. “Soldiers’ Stories: War in the First Person” explores the deep and turbulent emotions evoked by battle. Visitors touring the multimedia exhibit listen to intimate letters written by or to North Carolina soldiers, hear taut radio broadcasts, and watch historic newsreels. “Soldiers’ Stories” is on display through September 2004.

To give people a safe place to express their feelings without being judged, museum staff included a “magnetic word wall” that encourages visitors to post their thoughts about war. A map of the Middle East shows major sites for U.S. military personnel serving there, along with firsthand accounts from recently deployed soldiers. The self-guided exhibit is presented in Spanish and English.

The passionate letters, read in dramatic interpretation, reveal young and old from North Carolina caught in the perils of war, alternately gripped by despair and buoyed by hope. The sounds of popular singers Frank Sinatra, Tommy Dorsey, George Jones and Billy Joel add a bit of levity. “Not everything is deadly serious, even though the theme is. We didn’t want to make it too dark,” says Kris Carmichael, vice president for collections and exhibits at the museum.

Items that add ambience include period artifacts such as a Revolutionary War musket and powderhorn, Civil War bonnet, Vietnam-era POW uniform, Iraqi Republican Guard beret, POW-made Confederate items such as jewelry, and a silk survival map (fliers favored the detailed maps for their lightweight durability). Communication devices include a white goosefeather quill pen, vintage folding personal typewriter and today’s PDA (personal digital assistant).

The emotional notes left in a comment book reveal a moved public. Carmichael says some visitors’ notations seem to be written directly to loved ones. For example, “D.H.J.” writes: “My grandfather ... was a World War I veteran. Thanks Grandpa for the sacrifices you and all soldiers made!”

“It’s like they’re reaching right across,” Carmichael says. “We’ve gotten them thinking about individuals, and obviously they’ve having a very personal connection to the exhibit.”

— Karen Olson House

The Charlotte Museum of History: 3500 Shamrock Dr., Charlotte. Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday, 1–5 p.m.; Open Mondays from Memorial Day to Labor Day, call ahead for hours. Admission: \$6 for adults; \$4 for seniors and students; \$2 for children ages 6–12. Sundays are free for everyone. Call (704) 568-1774 or visit www.charlottemuseum.org.

EXCERPTS FROM "SOLDIERS' STORIES: WAR IN THE FIRST PERSON"

PHIL WOODALL

VIETNAM, 1968

Private First Class Phil Woodall was 19 years old when he landed in Vietnam with the 101st Airborne Division in 1968. His war-time correspondence led him to become a writer. His work has been featured in the film "Dear America," as well as in the musical "Shrapnel in the Heart." He has published a book of poetry, "Rhymer in the Sunset," that is about his Vietnam experiences. In 1983, he established the Gary Scott Memorial Scholarship at the Syracuse University College of Environmental Science and Forestry, from which Lieutenant Scott had been the first black graduate.

Dear Dad:

On Friday, March 29 in our AO just south of Hue near the ocean, we received small arms fire from a village. My platoon leader, Gary Scott, 2nd Lieutenant Infantry, a Negro from Rochester, New York, was killed. He was a fine man, a good leader, yet he could not understand the whys of this conflict which called him 10,000 miles from his home – this conflict which killed him. Why?

Fighting for a people who have no concern for the war, people he did not understand. Yet they will say he died for his country – keeping it free. Negative. This country is no gain that I can see. Tonight the nation mourns the death of Martin Luther King. Not me. I mourn the deaths of real leaders for peace. The people who give the real sacrifice. People like Lieutenant Scott.

Tonight the nation mourns Mr. King. They drink their cold beer, turn on their air conditioner and watch their TV. We who mourn the deaths over here will set up our ambushes, pull our guard and eat our C Rations.

I will probably get a bronze star. Lieutenant Scott will get a silver star. That will help me get a job someday and it's supposed to suffice for Lieutenant Scott's life.

I guess I'm bitter now Dad. This war is all wrong.



*Your loving son,
Phil*

**Phil
Woodall,
1968.**



Robert and Jeanne Bush.



ROBERT BUSH

WORLD WAR II, 1943

Tech. Sgt. Robert "Bobby" Bush was born in Marion, N.C. and grew up in Morganton. He was an engineer with the 175th Engineers during World War II, serving in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. After the war he became an architect, and remained in the Army Reserves for 25 years. During their war-time separation, he and his wife, Jeanne Saunders Bush, wrote each other every single day. They were married 49 years until Mr. Bush's death in 1991.

My Darling Wife:

Sometimes dearest, I get so blue and lonely that it seems as if nothing I do will help any. But then I think of the thousands of boys that are in worse places than I am and I feel kinda ashamed of myself. If my staying over here for a few months or years will help bring the war to a quicker end, I'm willing to stay darling.

I know it can't be very much longer until it will be over and then we can have a wonderful lifetime together. So darling, even though we can't be together, any time that you need me just hold out your hand and I'll clasp it across these many miles and be right beside you.

Goodnight my darling, God bless and keep you.

*Always your own,
Bobby*

EXCERPTS FROM “SOLDIERS’ STORIES: WAR IN THE FIRST PERSON”

PENELOPE LITTLE BLOUNT

WAR OF 1812

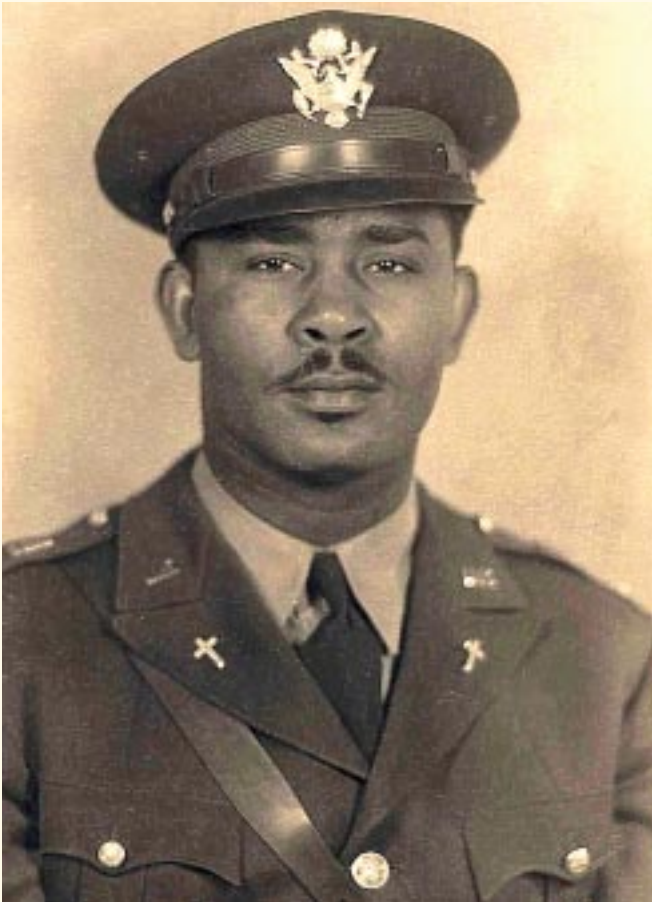
Penelope Little Blount of Washington, N.C., was born in 1773. Her father was a captain in the Revolutionary War. She married into a wealthy, influential family with vast landholdings in North Carolina and Tennessee. One of her brothers-in-law, Willie Blount, was governor of Tennessee, and another was a U.S. Senator. She counted among her friends the First Lady of the United States, Dolly Madison of Guilford County, N.C., to whom this letter was written. Penelope was a recent widow with three children when she wrote this letter. Only one of her children would survive to adulthood.

My Dear Friend:

We are in hourly expectation of the British coming up here. They have taken Portsmouth and Beaufort and are expected to attack New Bern and this place. They have landed 500 men The people are in the greatest distress moving themselves and families out of town. I shall leave this [place] tomorrow for Tarboro ... Poor Mr. Gaston has had the misfortune to lose his lady. She was so frightened – being in a family way – when she was told the British were coming up the river that she was taken with fits in which she never recovered.

Oh my friend, what distressing news this very moment! We have fresh news of the British depredations. It is now said there are 10 ships off the Bar. I am so frightened that I scarce can write. The men flying to arms and the drums beating. I am just going to start. I can stay here no longer. Please remember me to my friends.

*Yours affectionately,
P.L. Blount*



K.D.S. Pogue

K.D.S. POGUE

WORLD WAR II, 1943

Captain King David Solomon Pogue was a chaplain for African-American units in the U.S. Army during World War II. He trained with the 92nd and 93rd infantries at Fort Huachuca, Ariz. He served in the 99th Coastal Artillery at Camp Davis near Wilmington, N.C., where he met his wife, Ruby Mitchell, who worked with the USO. This letter was written to the Johnson C. Smith University Bulletin in Charlotte for its 1943 commencement issue. He received his master's degree in divinity from the university. Rev. Pogue went on to serve many years as a minister, as well as a chaplain for the Veterans Administration, retiring from the Army Reserves as a lieutenant colonel. He died in 1990.

Dear Friends:

Although I'd love to be among you now I know of nothing for which I would exchange my experiences. Out of chaos and adversity I have learned needed lessons for my soul. Life for me is now vastly richer than it was two years ago. Under conditions which I am now serving one truly learns the meaning of the word "minister." For here I am confronted daily with problems of the whole man.

I say to you, my friends on the home front, carry on. Preach the word. Keep 'em flying. Keep 'em rolling. Keep the light burning for one day some of us over here will return. And we want something to return to. We are confident that you are safeguarding what we've left behind. That something just and lasting will evolve we must believe, lest we despair of human nature.

*Believe me faithfully yours,
K.D.S. Pogue
Captain A.U.S. Chaplain*