



Vel and Dorothy Blankenship
Korean War Years

Korean War Years



Wedding Day
September 16, 1950



Drafted for Service

Leslie Velpo "Vel" Blankenship reports for duty at Camp Chaffee in Arkansas, starting January 13, 1951.



Tour of Duty in Korea

Departed from America on May 31st and arrived in Korea on June 20, 1951.

Return trip began March 22, 1952, and lasted one month.



Honorably Discharged from U.S. Army
October 11, 1952



Vel earned the rank of Staff Sergeant during his time in the U.S. Army.

Drafted into the Army

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM
ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION

Approval of Budget Bureau not required.

Texas Local Board No. 98
Selective Service System

Doscher Bldg.
Sweetwater, Texas
(LOCAL BOARD DATE STAMP WITH CODE)



1 January 1951
(Date of mailing)

The President of the United States,

To Leslie Vilpo Blankenship 41 96 29 148
(First name) (Middle name) (Last name) (Selective Service Number)

Route #3
(Street and number)

Roscoe, Texas
(City) (State)

GREETING:

Having submitted yourself to a Local Board composed of your neighbors for the purpose of determining your availability for service in the armed forces of the United States, you are hereby ordered to

report to the Local Board named above at Room 307, Doscher Bldg, Sweetwater, Texas
(Place of reporting)

at 7:30 A. M., on the 12th day of January, 1951, for
(Hour of reporting) forwarding to an induction station.

This Local Board will furnish transportation to the induction station where you will be examined, and, if accepted for service, you will then be inducted into a branch of the armed forces.

Persons reporting to the induction station in some instances are found to have developed disqualifying defects since being examined and may be rejected for these or other reasons. It is well to keep this in mind in arranging your affairs, to prevent any undue hardship if you are rejected at the induction station. If you are employed, you should advise your employer of this notice and of the possibility that you may not be accepted at the induction station. Your employer can then be prepared to replace you if you are accepted, or to continue your employment if you are rejected.

If you are not accepted, return transportation will be provided.

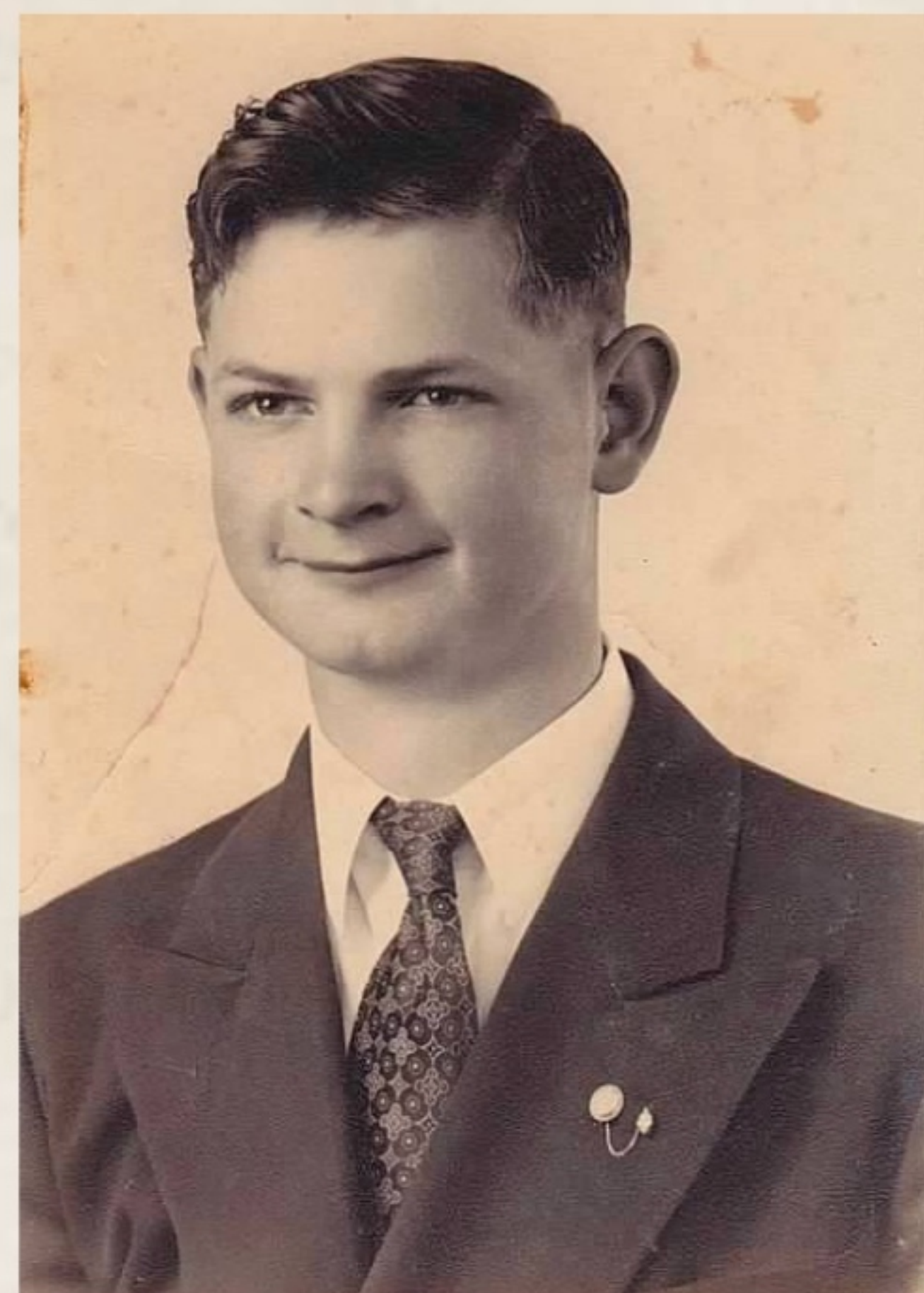
Willful failure to report promptly to this Local Board at the place specified above and at the hour and on the day named in this notice is a violation of the Selective Service Act of 1948, and subjects the violator to fine and imprisonment.

You must keep this form and bring it with you when you report to the Local Board. Bring with you sufficient clothing for 3 days.

If you are so far removed from your own Local Board that reporting in compliance with this Order will be a serious hardship and you desire to report to a Local Board in the area of which you are now located, go immediately to that Local Board and make written request for transfer of your delivery for induction, taking this Order with you.

Wm. E. Austin
Member of Local Board

SSS Form No. 252 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1948 O - 792517 16-10271-1



Leslie Velpo "Vel" Blankenship
Born July 7, 1929 in Roscoe, Texas
Died January 25, 1982 in Kerrville, Texas

IN THE ARMY NOW.



BOOT CAMP



Dear Dot.

Bay an I missing you? We are at Camp Chaffee now. We didn't get here un til 8:00 last nite. After we got here we got our towels & Barracks bags. They gave us a haircut and they really boogered it up. We took a shower and another check up, a small pox shot. We got our bedding and they assigned us, our Barracks. Then we learned how to make our bed. Ha. The beds are two deck and I got a top bed. Be bad if I fall out again won't it?

Velpo's first letter to Dorothy from Camp Chaffee in Fort Smith, Arkansas, written Sunday, January 14, 1951. They had been married four months.

In the first week at Camp Chaffee, those drafted into service took tests on reading, math, mechanics, radio, electricity, and code. The next day, Vel found out that he passed the test for Officer Candidate School (OCS) scoring 124 (passing required 115).

Dear Dot,

Jul. 16 - Jan - 1951
Camp Chaffee Ark.

He I am again. I don't know much to say to nite, I have a little headache but it isn't very bad. We took our tests today. We had tests on about everything, I don't know what I made on all of them. I passed enough of them to take the O.C.S. test. I don't know what I made on it, I don't think I passed it but I didn't think I made enough on the others to even take it. If I pass + want to go to Officers school I have to sign up for three years. I don't know what to do but I guess I can find out more about it and make up my mind then.

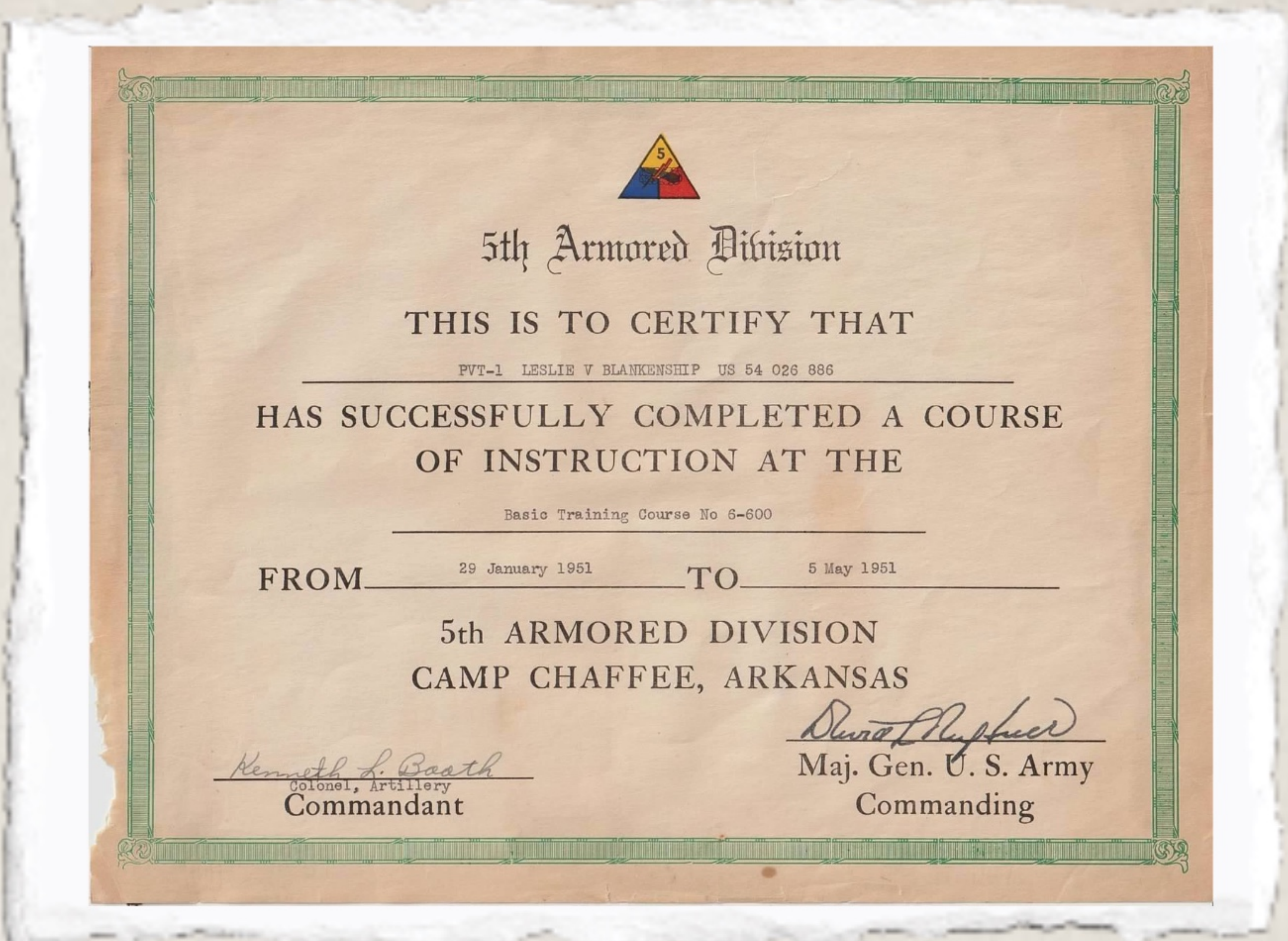


Velpo in uniform in 1951.

Velpo (left) with Army buddy "Benskin" at Camp Chaffee in 1951.



Benskin + I



Monthly Earnings



Daily Schedule

During Boot Camp, Vel's monthly paycheck tallied \$115, and he allocated it as follows:

\$30 for Vel, which covered laundry, insurance, income tax, and various odds-and-ends. He was determined to save all he could to "come home on".

\$85 for Dorothy's expenses back home.

(Described in letter dated 01/15/1951, page 3.)

5:00 AM - "Hit the Floor"
5:40 AM - "Chow", Clean the Barracks
(wait for daylight)
7:20 to 8:00 AM - Training Begins
17:00 to 17:30 PM - Off Duty, Free Time
21:00 PM - Lights Out
(Described in letter dated 01/15/1951.)



HONOR. COURAGE. COMMITMENT.



Roscoe, Texas
Route #1
January 26, 1951
Friday nite
my tenth letter to you.
my dearest husband,
you've been gone 2 weeks today. It seems more like 2 eternities. I've missed you more than I'll ever be able to tell you, Vel. No one would believe me if I did tell them, no one but you, darling, and you know without my telling you. The love each other so much, you can tell everything I'm thinking. You'll know how much I've missed you when you kiss me, you'll know how I've

Dorothy's letters detail events happening at home and how hard newlywed life was without the love of her life present.



Vel gives a description of target practice in the bitter cold in his letter from January 31, 1951.

We got our rifles to day. Also our steel helmets our pistol belt. Now we have a rifle to clean too. I guess we will start our processing next Mon. We didn't get started this week because we didn't have our rifles. Now we have them.
Well we have been doing alot of marching and exercise. We have an hour of exercise every day. It is about sun up so there is still frost on the ground. We have to pull our caps coats + gloves off. It gets a little cool that way even if you are taking exercise.
We have mail call 2 times every day. Once right after dinner + once about 5:30 in the eve. I got a letter from you at dinner, 1 from your mother, and one from my mother this eve. I sure am glad to get letters. I got 5 of your letters at one time day before yesterday. 1 yesterday and 1 today. I have read them so much that I could nearly repeat them all word for word. I love you so much + miss you so much. I don't know how I can stand being away from you much longer. I don't know how soon

In the letter to Dorothy on January 26th, Vel describes receiving his rifle, pistol belt, and steel helmet. He also details the strenuous activities that were required during the 14 weeks of Basic Training at Camp Chaffee.

Tell him that we have to lie down on our belly in the snow and shoot a rifle. And if the bullet (3) holes are more than 1 1/2 inches apart at 200 yards you get chewed on and have to fall out in the middle of the night and march around in the dark + cold for an hour or so. They turn on the lights and you have 5 min to get up and dress and fall out. That isn't much time

Dear Dot.
Sun. Night 21-Jan-51
Howo my dear sweet little wife tonight I hope you are doing OK. I am doing alright today. I have felt better today than I have since I have been in the army.

An excerpt from Vel's letter to Dorothy on January 21, 1951.

Well I have run out of anything to say again. You know I never could say much. I can always think of so many things but when I start writing I forget everything. But you know I love you and always will, no matter what. Even if I can't tell you like I want to. I wish I knew where you were tonight I would call you. But I will just have to think of you sweet voice and make believe I am with you. I love you so + miss you so that I can't think of anything else. I am sure glad that

Mr. W. C. Blankenship
Roscoe, Tex. Rt. 3.
Pvt. Leslie V. Blankenship
U.S. 54026886
Btry. C 47th Armd. Div. 57.
5th Armd. Div., Div. Arty.
Camp Chaffee, Arkansas

A portion of the letter from Vel's mom dated January 22, 1951.

We sure miss you and wish you were near home. Well you know we rather you didn't have to go at all but of course we can't help it, you be good and allways rember we all love you more than you can ever know. Write me love to hear from you
lots of love
mother

Mrs. S. V. Blankenship
Route, #1
Roscoe, Texas
Monday night Feb 19-1951

Post Leslie V. Blankenship #15. 54026886
Btry C, 47th Armd F.A. BN
5th Armd Div is Div Art'y.
Camp Chaffee, Arkansas

U.S. ARMY

My Dearest Wife,
I hope you are't too lonely tonight. I am pretty lonely some but I am so happy that I got to see you over the weekend. You know I love you so much. I am so glad you came and got me out! You are a good lawyer. And you are so sweet. I didn't sleep much last night. I just lay and thought about you and what a good time we had. It was so wonderful. I just live off of that until I see you again. You know what I mean. I love you!
Well darling, how was the train ride home? Did everyone treat you as nice as they did coming? I hope so. Just be friendly to people and they will help you. I hope you weren't sick and hurting too bad. I guess I will get a card from you tomorrow. I got two letters from you today + 1 from Mother and I also got a package from you. The pies you told me about, they sure were good. I thank you sweet heart. I love you more every time I think about you and that is pretty often! I may just



Dearest Darling,
We are at the depot and are trying to leave on the 7:30 train. It's 7:00 now and the chaos is going to be early, they say. I'm not sure about the layovers but if we have to I guess we will.
Honey, I enjoyed the weekend and so very much. I'll write you soon as I get home all about it.
I'm still just warm + happy all over from all that happened. I'm missing you, of course but I'm coming back real soon. I sure hope to talk to you Thursday. Well, love, better



Family photos of the Blankenships in Roscoe, Texas, before Vel's days in the Army.
Left to right: Vel and Dorothy, Dorothy next to "the Ford", and Vel's parents on Christmas Day 1950.

Sue. Mar. 20-51
Dear Vel,
Now are you we haven't heard from you since we saw you. I sure hope you are well. It sure seemed good to see you and hear you talk again. I wish this old war would be over and we didn't have to be training for war, all the time. And all the boys could be with their families. We must pray that God will save us from a world war and that the American people will turn back to God.
Everyone ask about you, you sure have lots of friends around Roscoe. How is your

Mrs. W. E. Blankenship
Roscoe, Tex., Rt. 3

Post Leslie V. Blankenship #15. 54026886
Btry C, 47th Armd, F.A. BN
5th Armd Div, Div Art'y.
Camp Chaffee, Arkansas.



In this letter from Vel's mom, Essie Estelle Blankenship (shown here with her husband William Blankenship in 1953) describes her prayer that the Korean War not turn into a third world war. God answered her prayer!



my thirty-fifth letter to you Route #1, Box 305
Roscoe, Texas
February 12, 1951
Monday Morning

Hello Sugar,
I love you and just can't
keep from writing to tell
you about. I'm that awful
I'm gonna make us go
bankrupt from buying so
much stamps & stationery.
I'm not worried. You're
precious to me.

Letters from Dorothy to Vel dated February 12 and
March 27, sending her love through the postal service.

my mind is on you constantly
Velo, I kiss all the stamps I
put on your letters. you
can kiss them when you
get them and know I had
my lips there. you kiss your
stamps, too, eh? Nobody
else would think that
was silly but I don't
think you will. I will
be something just you &
I know. He likes secrets,
don't you?



Easter Weekend in
March 1951,
Fort Smith, Arkansas.



Fun Facts



In 1951, burgers were 30¢, gas was 23¢ per gallon,
and postage stamps were 3¢ (only 1¢ for postcards).
These love birds invested heavily in gas and stamps
during Vel's time at Boot Camp!

Their song was "Mockingbird Hill" by Patti Page.

Vel's three closest friends at Boot Camp were:
Benskin, Doggett, and Bavousett.

Dorothy lived with Vel's brother Dub and his wife
Wanda and their son Fred in Roscoe while Velpo was
at Boot Camp.

During Vel's deployment, Dorothy moved in with her
parents who also lived in Roscoe, Texas.

(Described in Dorothy's letters from April 1951.)

Boot Camp Timeline

Jan. 13, 1951 - Velpo arrived at Camp Chaffee for Boot Camp.

Feb. 17-18, 1951 - "Second honeymoon" after being apart for
five weeks! They had now been married five months.

Mar. 3-11, 1951 - Dorothy's second visit to Fort Smith,
Arkansas. Vel got two weekend passes in a row.

Mar. 24-25, 1951 - Easter weekend pass, see photos above.
It was their first Easter as a married couple.

Apr. 7-8, 1951 - Dorothy and her mom visited Fort Smith
for the weekend.

May 1, 1951 - Dorothy told Vel that she was expecting their
first child, and her due date was December 20th.

May 7, 1951 - Vel went home for 17 days of furlough.

May 31, 1951 - Vel left the USA for Korea.

Route #1
Roscoe, Texas
May 1, 1951
Tuesday, 9:45

My most precious husband,
It's so thrilling to write
you this letter tonight. I'm
going to tell you something
that I've never told anyone
before. I don't know how
to say it except - we're going
to have a baby. Isn't that
what you've been waiting
to hear. Does it make you
as happy as it does me?
I wish I were with you
when you got this letter -
if I know you you'll
be excited.
I went to Dr.
Richardson this morning.



was very good. Vels,
when we get together
to live again. It's read
our bible and pray
every night together.
I don't think a home
could ever break up
with a basis like that.
do you? I think we
should say the
blessing at the table
too. I want our
children to be brought
up in a home like
that. Please tell me
what you think.

With the news that they were expecting their first
child, Velpo and Dorothy began planning how they
would structure their home to honor the Lord.

Thursday night May 3, 1951

My Dearest wife + "Lt."
How are you both getting along? That is
a little silly because I just got through
talking to you and I know you are A.K. I'm
just a wee bit excited tonight Darling. I got
so much to be happy + excited about. Just
I get your letter confirming all my largest
wishes + dreams, and then I got to talk to
you besides! Darling I am so terrible happy.
I'm so happy that I'm afraid it all may
be just a wonderful dream and I'll wake up
at any time. It couldn't be a dream tho. Just
think, me a Papa! Can you feature that?
What kind of a Daddy do you reckon I'll
make anyway? I'll do my best and hope
it will be good enough.

(May 2, 1951) I think we should have a
good Christian home like you said in your
letters Darling. We both know we are going
to need God to be a happy family. There
just isn't any real joy and happiness if He
isn't there. I sometimes wonder what God



Evangeline "Vange" Blankenship entered the
world on December 18, 1951,
while Velpo was deployed in Korea.

I read a chapter
in Deuteronomy tonight
that was really good.
I want you to read
it when you get home
or if you can get a
bible there, it is
Deut. 6. I think it
means to read the
bible & pray at home
I also tell a lot
more.

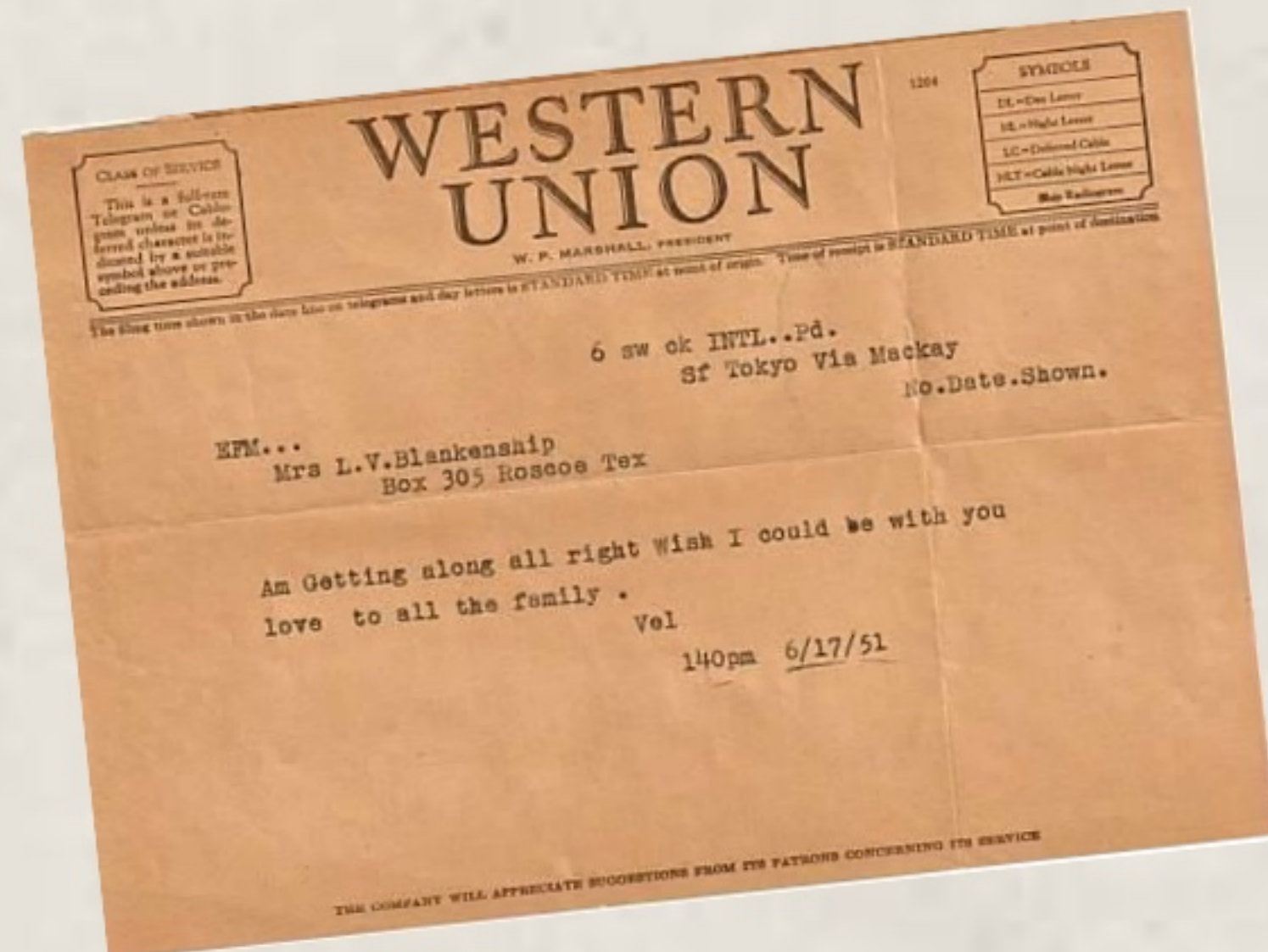
Dorothy read in her Bible: "...and these words which I
command you today shall be in your heart. You shall
teach them diligently to your children..." (Deut. 6:6-7).

Tuesday 26 June 1951

Darling Wife,

This is your faraway husband again comming to
by air mail and fountain pen. Tonight I have a
program all lined out about two different stories that
might be of interest to you, but first just a few
words from my sponsor, "The Traveling Man."

In this four-page letter, Vel showed his whimsical side in a creative
recounting of his military journey from January to June 1951.
We join the story when "The Traveling Man" receives a
"very business-looking letter" from Uncle Sam.



Vel let Dorothy know via telegram that he arrived safely in
Japan, awaiting the next leg of his journey to Korea.



The USS Marine Lynx left the USA on May 31, 1951,
and docked in Yokohama, Japan, on June 14th.
After a few days in Japan, Vel then sailed to Korea,
arriving on June 20th.



Now Uncle Sam, who I will call U.S. for
short, told the young man that he would be delighted
for the young man to come and work for him for
a couple of years. The young man, who I will call
L.V. for short, didn't care to work for U.S. It meant
giving up all the things in his life that he had and
leaving his dear wife all alone. But U.S. became in-
sistant and the young man finally went away to work
for him. He was very unhappy and lonely for his
loved one but the two managed to see each other
for a few precious hours once in awhile. Now during
this time L.V. was just learning this new job that he
had. And then one day U.S. said that L.V. was an
skilled man and was ready to go to work. Now this little
job was far across the deep blue sea so U.S. let L.V.
have a 2 week paid vacation before leaving. That was
one of the best things that he had ever done for L.V.
and for 2 weeks L.V. and his wife Pat. were very happy.
They were together again at last. They were so happy
because they had discovered that they were going to
receive a visit from ole' brother stark! But there
was one sad thought in thier minds, and that was
that L.V. was going to have to go away and leave Pat
all alone to have the baby. But they didn't let

(page 2, continued)

this bother them too much. They went ahead visiting each
other and thier families who were very glad to see them
so happy together. They talked and loved and drove
around and had what you could call a second
honey moon. They were very happy together. Then
the fatal day came and L.V. climbed aboard a plane
and left his dear wife crying after him. It hurt him
so to see her getting smaller and farther away. He will
never forget how lonely and forsaken he felt and knew
she felt the same. But there was nothing he could do.
He flew away to a faraway land over the hill and plains
across rivers and fertile valleys, until he came to the
city by the sea. The huge ships were waiting for
him and some other young men like him so he sailed
away. This took about 3 long ~~day~~ weeks during which
time he heard not one word from his beloved wife.
But he thought of her all the time and he imagined
he saw her sweet face in the waves. Oh how he wished
he could see her! At least get a sweet letter from
her but alas the great monster of steel kept up the
relentless journey farther and further away. And then
one morning L.V. awoke to the strange sights and
sounds of faraway Japan. In this strange country he saw
only strange little people who reminded him in no
way of his beautiful wife. They were dirty jabbering
strangers and it only made him all the more lonely
for her. But when he got on a train to go to the city
where his U.S. had told him to go he received 12 sweet
letters that his wonderful wife had written to him while

(page 3, continued)



Vel (left) pictured with an unknown Korean man.



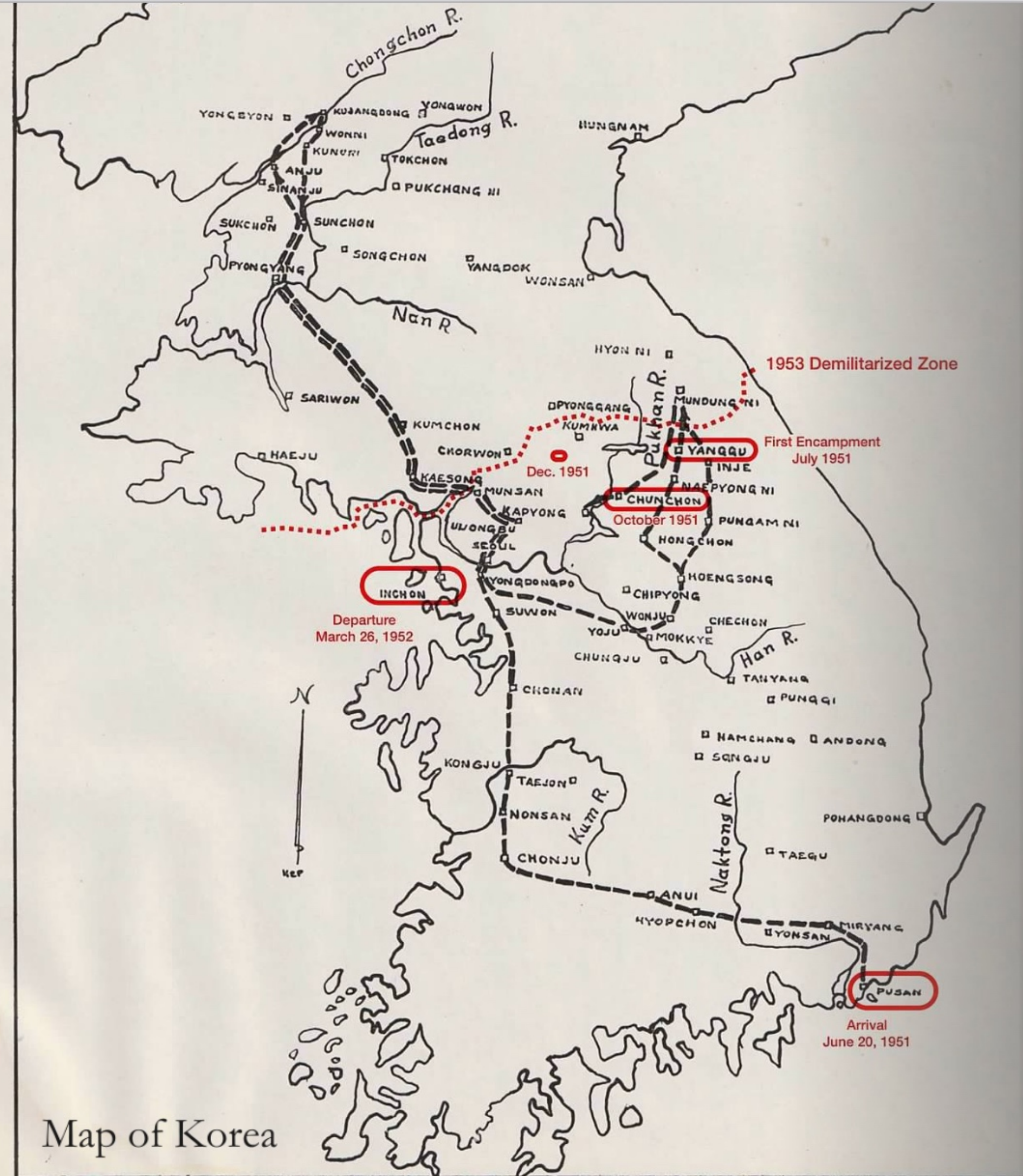
he was on the ship. He was so glad to hear from her again.
And then U.S. told him he had to go on to still another
strange land and so again he was riding and not
hearing from his sweetheart. And until this day he
is still waiting and wishing. Many strange places he
has seen and none of them are as wonderful as his
own home in the wonderful state of Texas. Someday
when his job is done he will return to his loving
wife and family. Then all of the loneliness and
misery he has had to share with his wife who
is still far away but close in his heart, will all be
behind like a bad dream and they will again be
happy. The End.

Goodnight and sweet dreams from
your lonely hubby Vel

(page 4, final)



Tour of Duty



the tops of these hills. They sure do look green with their tops in the clouds. In a way this is a pretty country. The hills are all green and the rice patches have enough volunteer rice to make them green. It still doesn't appeal to me though. I only want to return to the good old Texas black-lands and be forever with you.

On August 6, 1951, Vel described the Korean countryside and his longing for home.



A Summary of the Korean War

Information regarding the Korean War is not widely known by most people. At the time it was fought, it was just five years after World War II ended. It was recognized by the world as a confrontation between democracy and communism, and it was the first major conflict of the Cold War era (1947-1989).

The Korean War began June 25, 1950, when the Soviet-backed communist North Korea crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded the US backed anti-communist South Korea. In just a few weeks the communists had absorbed most of South Korea. The United States wasn't sure if they could respond to this act of communist aggression, because supplies, soldiers, and resources were depleted from World War II. The Soviets had recently developed the atomic bomb and Mao Zedong had come to power in China, and they believed the United States wasn't going to engage.

President Harry Truman sent troops to save the Allied perimeter at Pusan on the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula. By late September 1950, General Douglas MacArthur landed at Inchon and began counterattacks. He reclaimed the entire south and sent American-led United Nations forces into North Korea. He was met by hundreds of thousands of Chinese

Red Army troops at the Chinese border. Chinese troops greatly outnumbered the American troops and that forced the Americans back into South Korea.

General Matthew Ridgway assumed command and replaced General MacArthur in April 1951. Under his leadership, American-led UN forces pushed the communists back across the 38th Parallel. This was some of the fiercest fighting of the war. After two years of failed peace talks, an armistice was finally reached on July 27, 1953, establishing the 38th Parallel as the boundary. To the present day, the communist North Korea and the democratic South Korea have not made peace and are still officially at war.

Over 35,000 Americans died and over 100,000 were wounded in the Korean War. The war was the first major armed conflict of the Nuclear Age and one in which the United States had not clearly defeated the enemy and therefore didn't dictate the terms of surrender, despite spending \$30 billion and committing nearly 1.8 million soldiers to the war effort. South Korea remains a strong ally of the United States, while North Korea has starved and murdered millions of its own people and continues to be a communist country.

Summary based on the Prager University video
"Why Did America Fight the Korean War?"
viewed in August 2025.

Honor

Courage

*This is my tool layout
at the inspection the other
day. (2 sets)*



*Pictures of a parade where
an old Boy Co. got the
silver star. I missed this
parade thank goodness!*



Documenting History

*Darling I finally got my birthday package!
I got it late Sunday night. One of the boys
got my mail while I was working. I had a
letter and the package. I love my camera
and candy Darling. I thank you so much. I love
you for remembering me always too.*

In Vel's letter to Dorothy, written July 17, 1951, he expresses his appreciation for the birthday gift that she sent halfway across the world -- a new camera and rolls of film. Little did they know their family members would be displaying photos of Korea taken with that camera in this book, published nearly 75 years later.



Army Life in a Combat Zone



From July to September 1951, Vel shared a "pup tent" with buddies from the Motor Pool. Sleeping on the ground was not ideal and got old real fast. Vel is also shown with a battery charger, which he used to have light for writing letters to Dorothy at night.



Men Left. Motor Pool crew

Vel's converted cargo truck probably looked like this from the front, and may have even been this truck.



Did I tell you that I am sleeping in the truck now? Well I am. We have built 3 bunks out of ammo boxes and I put my air mattress on it and it smells pretty good. It is a heck of a lot better than sleeping in a pup tent on the ground.

By September 1951, temperatures were already dropping in Korea. Thanks to Vel's creative genius, the Motor Pool crew upgraded from their shared "pup tent" and converted a cargo truck into a mini camper (shown to the left). It was furnished with three bunk beds made from reclaimed ammo boxes. Vel covered his bunk with an air mattress and mountain sleeping bag. They also had a 12-volt light and gasoline stove to make things more comfortable. (Letters dated September 6th and 15th.)

I am back again. It is 3:00 now and raining again. I have got the stove lit here in the ~~truck~~ truck and it is nice and comfortable. It isn't going to be so bad this winter maybe. We have got the truck all closed in, a good big gasoline stove, a 12 volt battery for lights and good bunks built. I guess I am pretty lucky to be in the motor pool. At least I am comfortable now.

Sunday Feb. 3, 1952
4:00 P.M.

My Darling,
This Sunday afternoon once again with all its memories & thoughts to make a lonely heart lonely. I don't know if I like getting Sundays off or not because it gives me too much time with my thoughts. I love to think of you and home but the more I think the lonelier I get so maybe I should just keep right on working. It does give me some time to catch up on my writing though. Today I have written both our folks and now you.

DEPLOYMENT

bothered me too much. We did have a little excitement this evening too. One of the cook stoves blew up to and caught the mess tent on fire. It burned the tent down and ruined our supper. No one was burned but it is a wonder. It didn't take it but a few minutes to burn completely down.

You never knew what adventures the day held in a Combat Zone. At times things would blow up and other times tents would burn down! (Letter dated Nov. 16, 1951.)



Well I am on guard tonight so I had better go to bed. I have already pulled the first two hours. I am on the first shift. We start walking at 6:00 now and walk 4 hours. & the first part of the night and 2 the last part. I go on again at 12 and walk till 2 o'clock.
So sweet dreams my dear little mamma I love you.
your truly Papa
Vope



Mechanic in the Motor Pool

2) 144.

2222.

Darling I saw the note that the Lt.
over the motor pool wrote concerning
the orders for us. By my name he said
I was an excellent mechanic!! I didn't
know they had that kind of ideas about
me or I guess I could have done even
better. It just goes to show that one
should always do their best.

Vel was in his element working as a mechanic in the Motor Pool. He had to serve an extra three months in Korea in this position verses the infantry, but he thought it would be worth it to have a better chance of returning home. (Letter dated 08/06/1951.)



Sunday August 26, 1951
6:30 PM.

Hi Darling.

It is a beautiful Sunday evening, over here. The sun has been shining all day and it has been pretty hot. We have been working pretty hard today, too. We put a clutch in that jeep that they brought in yesterday. We turned it over on the side and dropped the transmission and transfer out. That thing sure is heavy, too. We also put a new U. joint on it and before I quit for chow I was in the process of putting on a new spring on the rear. So this Sunday has been an exceptionally busy one for me. It seems we always work harder on Sunday than we do any other day. I haven't been to church in a long while now. I wish I ever ~~home~~ to go with you. Over here they always seem to find plenty for you to do on Sunday.

In this letter dated August 26, 1951, Vel describes all the work needed to fix the Jeep below and included the photo for Dorothy to visualize it as well.



M-16
Front



① Tuesday night July 10, 1951

My Dearest Dottie,
Now is the sweetest thing this side
of heaven tonight, I hope you are
feeling good. I am fine even if I
am lonely. We didn't do too much
today so I'm not even very tired.
I worked on a M-19 which is a full
track vehicle that looks like a tank.
I even drove it some. Aren't you proud
of me? It is the biggest thing I ever
drove. It has two V-8 engines to pull
it and it is a hydro-matic drive. It is
a nice running little thing. Well so
much for me.



Tuesday 17, July 1951

But I am sorry I had to stop so suddenly. Sunday night while I was writing, a guy came in and said he was broke down so 2 of us had to go out and work on his M-16. It was about 11:30 when we got back in and the lights were out in our tent so I didn't get to write any more. Then we got up at



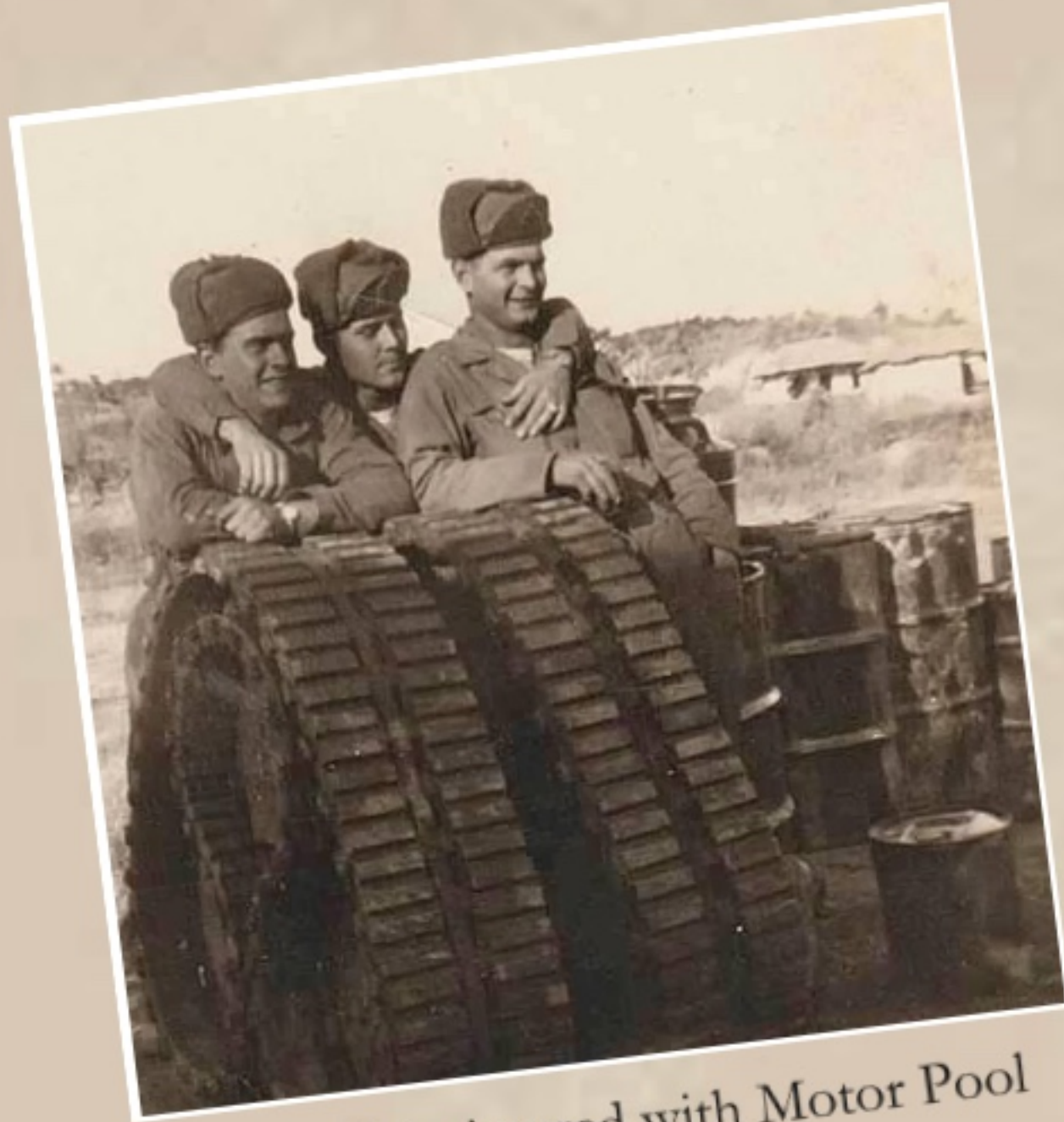
M-16
Side



almost every
 you today. You asked what a half-track was
 well it ~~is~~ has two front wheels like a truck
 but the back has a track like a bulldozer.
 I will try to draw you a picture. I made a
 picture of one but it may not take I hope
 so. They look something like this:

The sketches are hand-drawn in black ink on lined paper. The first sketch, labeled 'half-track M-16', shows a vehicle with a truck-like front and a bulldozer-like rear. It has two front wheels and a continuous track on the back. Annotations include '4 guns 50 cal' with an arrow pointing to the rear gun turret, and '2 guns 40 mil' with an arrow pointing to the front gun turret. The second sketch, labeled 'Full track M-7', shows a vehicle with a more complex rear section. It has a driver's compartment at the front and a large rear section with multiple gun turrets. Annotations include '8 drivers' with an arrow pointing to the front compartment, and '4 guns' with an arrow pointing to one of the rear gun turrets.

Vel's letter to Dorothy written July 23, 1951.



Vel (right) pictured with Motor Pool buddies and equipment.



Vel working on a power charger.



This is me working on M-16

Tuesday Sept. 25, 1951
7:25 P.M.

My Dear Wife,

How are you doing tonight? I hope you are doing mighty good. I am doing fine. I have worked all day today and I have enjoyed it. This morning we got the rear end for the jeep and put it together. Now we have another one that is out. I get one fixed and another one tears up. I also put a clutch in a jeep this evening. And just before dinner a jeep had a fuel pump go out so I put one on it. I got a new one from Bn. but it leaked gas so I had to put on another one. I stopped in the middle of dinner on it and ate dinner. The dinner wasn't worth stopping for either. After dinner I finished and put the clutch in the jeep.



Today I worked again. We had another search light truck to work on. We had a little trouble with it. We thought we were through with it but I got out in it for a road test and about 2 miles out the carburetor got plugged up and I had to come all the way back in with the choke pulled all the way out. The last 1/4 mile or so I came in low gear and it quit completely about 50 yards before I got back. I had to get in the jeep and go all over the country looking for a new carburetor for it. I finally found one up at an inf. outfit. They didn't want to let me have it but I told them search lights supported the inf. too so they finally let me have it. That was the first time I ever had to talk anything out of an officer. And me just a Pvt. too! Imagin that. I got a kick out of it really. I was a little shaky

Parts were hard to find at times. On July 31, 1951, Vel gained experience negotiating with another outfit to get a needed carburetor.

here. Today we had to haul some gasoline and go down about 10 miles to Ordnance for some parts. One part for a starter we had to have made in the machine shop and had to wait about 1 1/2 hours on it. We got back to the Btry about 12:30 and just barely did get any chow. It was not much to have missed though. This afternoon we worked on some 2 1/2 ton truck brakes awhile and got them to working. And a truck came in with a broken radiator hose and a loose generator. We fixed that. Outside of that

Some days were busier than others in the Motor Pool, but when the work came in Vel was sure to give Dorothy a good description.
(Aug. 7, 1951 letter above and Oct. 1, 1951 letter below.)

day. I have been fairly busy today. I put a spring on a 2 1/2 and pulled a jeep radiator to be repaired. We pulled a monthly on a halftrack and then after chow I had to go get the radiator and put it back on the jeep. Also a 3/4 ton had no lights and he had to go out tonight so I had to work on them for about an hour before I got them fixed. So I have just now finished.

Saturday Oct 13, 1951
9:00 P.M.

My Dearest Darling,

How are you doing tonight? I hope that you are feeling fine. I am OK. A little tired but OK. We have done some work today. We had a halftrack in Bn. for some work on a turret and after it came from there we had to put on a set of tracks. Also some Bogie wheels (the little wheels in the middle of the track if you will look at a picture) They are boogers to put on too! And to top it all off the motor Sgt. told me to put them on backward and I was just mean enough to put them on that way even though I knew it was wrong and I would have to change them. I get paid by the month anyway!

Well all the mechanics are back in the Btry area now. There used to be two out in both platoons. Now there are 7 of us besides the Sgt. Now we call one vehicle in every day and work on it. We have 27 of them so they will get a going over about 1 time per month. We will be busy every day but it won't be hard with all of us here.

Well Darling I can't think of much to write. I would sure love to be answering one of your letters but no soap. I'll go to bed and dream with you. Good night my love. Until we meet again
Love Vapi

Above excerpt from October 14, 1951, page three.



Men Left. Motor Pool crew

Today, one of the other mechanics and I went up to a jeep that had been hit by a mine and took the engine, transmission + rear end out of it. I don't know whose it was but it is ours now! That was this afternoon.

These back-to-back letters describe fetching parts from a wrecked jeep and adding them to a different vehicle (October 18-19, 1951).

I am OK. Today I put an engine in a jeep. It was the engine we got out of that wreck yesterday. I got it in and got it running OK. We used the winch on the front of the maintenance truck and an A frame of trees, to pull the old motor out and put the new one in. It was more like the kind of work I am used to and I really did enjoy doing it. Maybe I won't be completely worthless after all when I get home. I still like to tear them down and put them back together any how.

Well it is cold as the dickens tonight. A stiff north wind is blowing and it is

Tuesday Oct, 30, 1951

Same place, Korea

Hi Darling,

Maybe I can write a few lines to let you know that I am still alive and not liking this way of living. Darling, I got 2 letters from you today. You sweet thing you. I am as happy as I can be when I get letters from you!

Darling I am glad you liked the pictures. I don't always get a chance to take pictures when I want to but I do get one in once in awhile. I have some in Japan now. They will be on the way to you in a few days. I took a few of the people down here to show you how they dress and work. Have you made anymore of yourself yet? Send me all you get made. I love to look at them.

Today has been pretty busy. We took the pair off one M-16 and found a burned out rod as it went to ord. for a new

engine. We also had to tear a rear end out of one and rebuild it. That took about 3 hours. This was up at the first Platoon and I drove back in a truck that we got back from ord with a new engine. ~~Tomorrow~~ ^{Today} I have to take another truck up for a new motor. It has a burned at rod too. Also have to go to a different ord. and pick up a jeep radiator that I left to be repaired. I have to put 2 magneto's in an M-34 to this morning.

Well I guess you know I have no news. It is hard to write when nothing happens to write about. I do love you





Monday, Oct. 22, 1951
6:45 P.M.

Hi Angie,

How are you this cold winter morning? I hope you weren't as cold last night as I was! I was on guard again, last night and on the last shift too. There was a big frost all over everything too. It is about to become winter I guess. I didn't get to write last night even if I didn't go on guard until 10 o'clock because I had to work on a halftrack. I sure had a big time trying to get it to run! I wouldn't get enough gas. I put on a new carburetor, fuel pump, fuel line, blew out the fuel line, drained the tanks and it still wouldn't run! I was beginning to get mad before I finally found the trouble. It was the gas filter gasket sucking up into the outlet hole. It runs good now but I had to work until almost time to go on guard.

I didn't do much today. I worked some on a 2 1/2 brakes, put a drive shaft on a 3/4, and a radiator on a jeep. I also worked on the power plant for the lights. That was about all I did. Oh I did put on a couple of jeep wind shield wipers too. Anyway I haven't been too busy. They took 2 of my worst mechanics and transferred them to the 503rd Heavy arty. so I was a little short handed. Also one of them had to drive a truck and Schmitt is on R+R so there was 3 of us counting myself. We managed though.

I got a package from mom a day or two ago. I don't remember how it felt when I got it.

Above excerpt from November 1, 1951, page two. The week before, Vel's unit moved to Chunchon, Korea, which he estimated was about 40 miles from the big city of Seoul. He was still located in a Combat Zone, so he was glad it did not lower his monthly pay, especially with a baby due by the end of the year.

you. Darling I didn't get to write to you last night. Last night a little after dark, I was just about to start my letter to you and one of our jeeps turned over down the road about 1/4 mile. Of course I had to go down and see about it. It took about 2 hours to get it turned on its wheels and pulled back up on the road. It was in a nice patch about 20 feet down the side of the mountain. The mud was about knee deep and I got all wet & muddy. It didn't hurt the jeep too much. The fan went through the radiator & the windshield was broken and bent. It bent it up here and there but it isn't in too bad shape. One boy in it got a broken nose, cuts on the nose & face and a concussion on his noggin. It didn't hurt the other fellow. They were lucky. A jeep is about like a convertible when it comes to turning over in them. We have worked harder today than we have all week.

The Korean mud was a constant struggle for military vehicles in the rainy season. The photos on this page show how much they could sink down in it! (Letter dated November 18, 1951.)

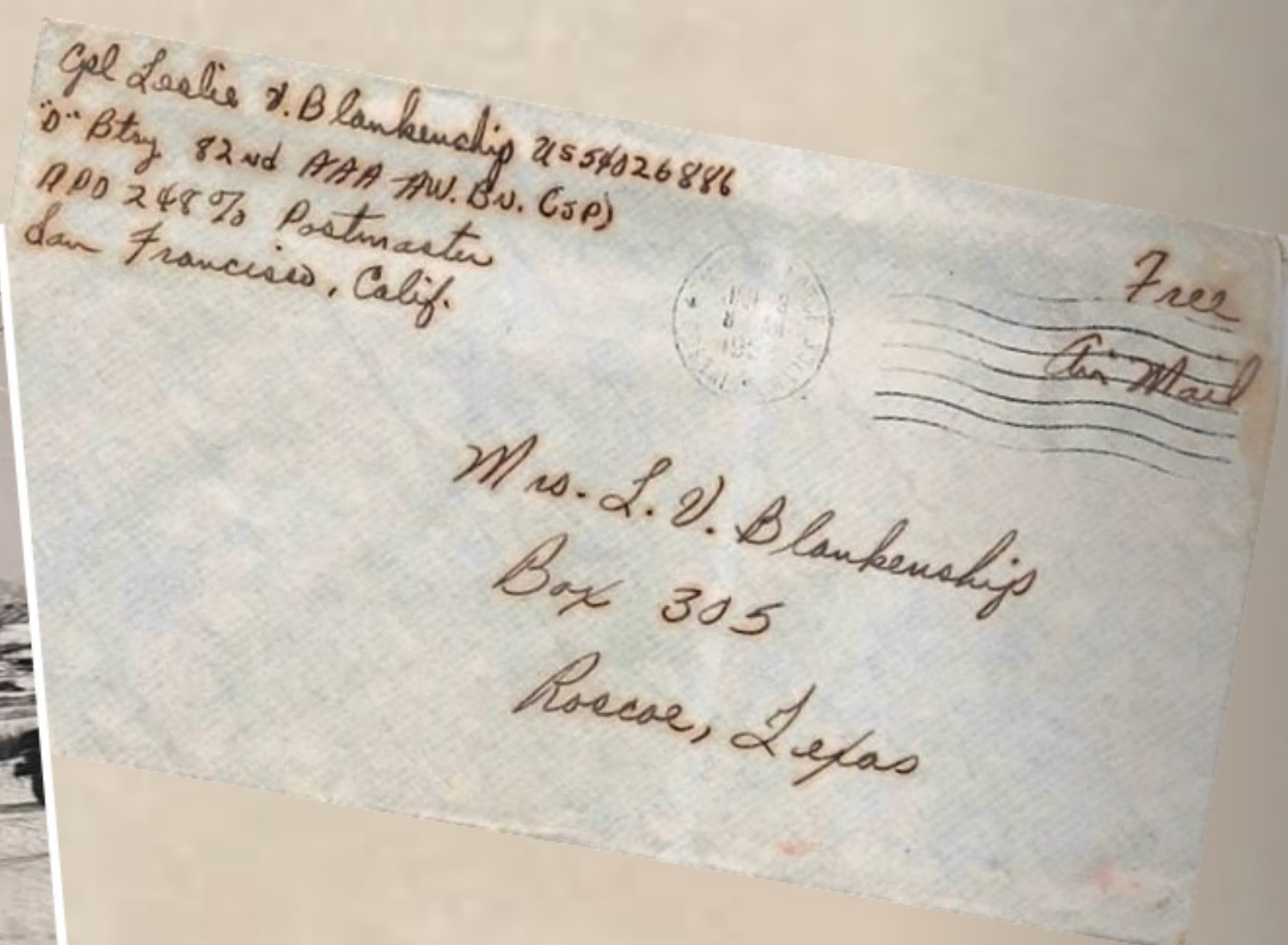
Saturday 15 Dec.
8:00 P.M.

Hello Darling,
Well I finally made it back. I was out all night last night. Aren't I a bad boy? I left Bn. Friday evening and got down the road about 12 miles when we steering lateral went out on the M-39 I was driving. I went off the road and slid down a small cliff. It didn't hurt a thing but it threw both tracks off. I had to spend the night there and it took us until 5 this afternoon to get the tracks back on. Boy was it ever cold sleeping out last night.

Perhaps I should tell you what I did today. We went to Bn. this morning and put tracks on an M-39. That doesn't sound like much but believe me it is quite a bit! The tracks are about 40 ft. long when they are laying flat on the ground and have 83 sections in it. It weighs about 1800 lbs and that makes it quite a job. And the temperature today was 10° above zero at the warmest part of the day! A fire sure does feel good now. It is supposed to get colder I heard tonight. That just means I'll be that much closer to the fire!

Well I got a X mas card from

Letter excerpts from December 15th and 29th.



Tuesday Dec
January 1

My Dearest Wife + Daughter,
Happy New year my sweethearts. This day ends the first day of this new year and also makes one less for me to stay here. Day by day the time is passing. Enough of them added together and I will have my time in over here and will be coming back home to my wife and family! I wish I didn't have so much adding to do though!

Well Ange I didn't get those letters today either. I guess I will have to wait until tomorrow. I sure do hate to miss them now Darling.

Vel's first letter of 1952 described the process of replacing a radiator on an M-16.

Well we still have the snow and it is still cold. It snowed about 1 more inch last night but it was clear all the rest of the day. Today we went out and took a radiator off an M-16 to be repaired.

It is a pretty good job because all the armor has to come off the front end and that is heavy stuff. We got it off in about 1 1/2 hours though. We didn't get it fixed yet because no one else had to work today.

Well Sugar I don't have much to say so I'll close. I love you Darling and think of you always. Take care of yourself Darling and also take care of Ange. I love you both.

Your loving daddy
Vapi

have it tomorrow night. By the way I guess you noticed my change of address! It will mean a few more dollars for us Darling. ♂ How do you think I'd look with that on my arm?
Goodnight sweet. I love you so much
Take very good ~~care~~ care of yourself & the wee one.
Your Lonely little Papa
Vapi

to go back tomorrow. This is some what a new experience for me. I have always before done the work myself. Now I don't do so much. I just see that it is done. I get a lot of my orders from the Capt. himself too. I have learned to talk to them just like anyone else. They all know me and even when the motor Sgt. is around they tell me what to do and he just agrees.

After Vel's first promotion, he learned to manage a team of mechanics and receive orders from a higher ranking officer.
(The letter above is dated October 28, 1951, and the letter to the left is from October 15, 1951.)



interest you Darling. you have probably already noticed it from the envelope but I'll tell you anyway. I have finally got another raise! Not much but maybe it will help out some. It seemed like it never would come through but it finally did. You should see all those stripes I am wearing now! Boy it is enough to make you cover your eyes! I don't like them that well really but I am glad to get them. Now if I can just keep them.

Promotions



During Boot Camp in the spring of 1951, Vel's rank in the Army was Private First Class (PFC) and he earned \$115 per month.



On October 15, 1951, Vel wrote Dorothy that he had received a promotion to Corporal, with a raise of \$40 per month more. This would help with expected expenses for the birth of their first child in December.



On January 15, 1952, Vel was excited to add more stripes to his rank. Making Sergeant brought his pay to \$223.15 per month. Over seas pay made up \$16 of this amount. (Vel's drawing below is taken from the letter dated 01/21/1952. The letter to the right is dated 01/15/1952.)

you Darling. Be sweet for
your loving Daddy
P.S. I have a stripe like this:
I guess you know what it
looks like anyway.
Vapi

Saturday 16 Feb. 52
7:00 P.M.

My Darling, Wife,
I hope you are in better spirits tonight than I am. I haven't had any mail in so many days now that I am beginning to wonder if they have forgotten us guys over here in Korea. I know that you haven't forgotten me Darling but I think they must have stopped the mail planes or something! The last mail I got was those last 5 letters I got. I can't remember just when that was it has been so long and so much has happened since. I didn't get to write to you last night my Angel. I am sorry but I worked on the Motor Pool books until the lights went out. It has got to the point where we have to type most of our records and the only time we can get the type writer is at night. We had another big inspection this evening and I had to get the records ready. I was also Sgt of the Guard and had the telephone ringing at all hours. I wish I could tell them to stick it all up their you know what! I can't though because I have my Darlings to think about and if I told them what I would like to, you might not have any check coming.

Once Vel became Senior Track Mechanic, his work load increased in the quantity of both hours and frustration.



Vel's stripes earned in 1952.





Elements of War

fire for a better than a mile. I sure am glad I am a mechanic. I may not win any medals but I will be satisfied to stay in one piece!

Vel's letter dated July 17, 1951, describes his relief to not be on the front line of the war.



I listened to the radio all day yesterday hearing all about Truman firing MacArthur. I listened to several news casts today. It is certainly stupid about how many scraps this government can get into. The whole dern mess makes me sick.

On April 11, 1951, Dorothy heard the news over the radio that President Truman had fired General Douglas MacArthur from command of U.S. forces in Korea, replacing him with General Matthew Ridgway for the remainder of the war.



Enemy hideout.



In a letter dated July 30, 1951, Vel counted his blessings that he only saw as much action as he did in Korea. It was more than enough for his tender heart. In multiple letters he tells Dorothy he had seen things that he never wanted to discuss in the future. He planned to put it all behind him when, Lord willing, he returned home.

Things are getting pretty hot in the hills ahead of us. The hill just passes back and forth between the chinks and the U.N. forces. I could tell a few war stories now myself. I'll tell you a few of them someday. Right now I don't even want to talk about it. I hope you will understand. I have been lucky so far and so there is no use worrying about me. It wouldn't do near as much good as a prayer once in a while. And don't forget to thank Him for keeping me as far back as I am. I still love you, Sweetheart and



Vel is shown (second from right) with his Army buddies.

SIR YES SIR!



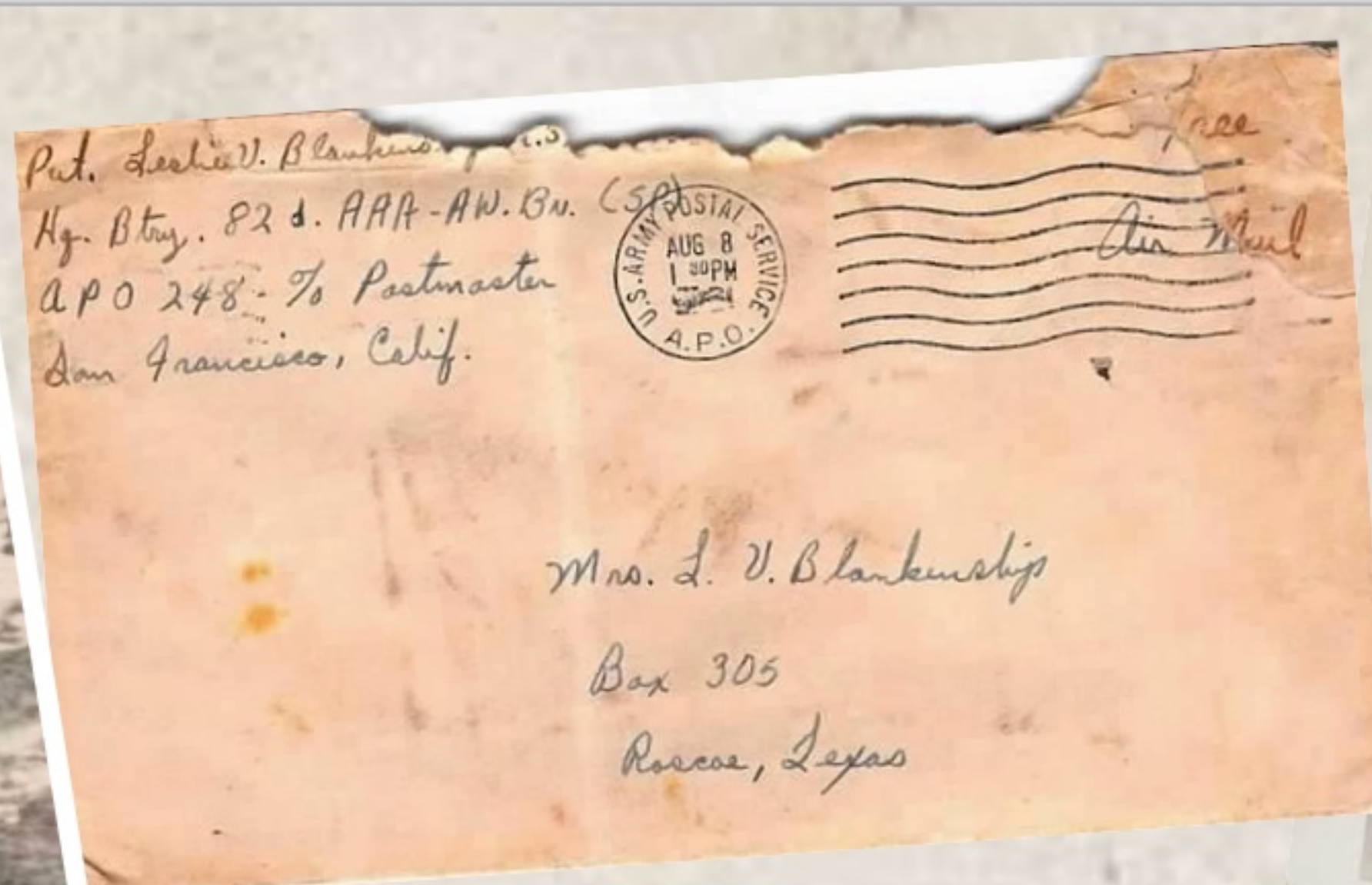
Vel experienced a boiling summer followed by a freezing winter in 1951.

Friday night July 20.
Hi Darling,
Here I am again. I hope you didn't go away. I know you didn't go too far though. Because I know you will want to hear from me to know if I'm OK. I'm not trying to be vain but I know how you feel because I feel the same way.
I just got the pee scared out of me. The engineers are working on a road about 1/4 mile up the hill from here and they set off a charge of dynamite. I was here writing a letter and it sounded like a shell hit right outside our door. I grabbed my shirt and rifle and took off for my fox hole. As soon as I saw where the smoke was I knew what it was and went back to the tent. There was 9 other guys right behind me too. I hope they don't do that very often. It might stunt my growth! I might have to wash my pants too.

6:00 PM
a summer anything.
We have had a big battle going on up ahead of us all day. I've been taking a hill. The heavy artillery started going full blast at 4 o'clock this morning. They blasted away until 9 and then the planes took over for awhile. The report came in that the dog was on top of the hill at 4 this evening. They are still shooting at a few little spots on the side of the hill but they have almost stopped.

Vel's letter above, from July 26, 1951, describes a battle near his tent about 5 to 10 miles behind the lines.

① Sunday July 29, 1951
Dear Dattie,
How is my darling wife today? I am doing fine and I sincerely hope you are too. It is 4:00 on a sunny hot Sunday afternoon. The sounds of war are going right on. The big guns are booming, the planes diving and bombing and strapping. Sunday doesn't mean much over here. I worked just a little this morning clean-



HONOR. COURAGE. COMMITMENT.

It is just plain hell over here any way you put it. Nothing goes right. Dand blows in you food when it is dry and you have to stand up and eat when it is wet. It (the food) either isn't worth eating or there isn't enough of it. It is almost always hot. We never have the parts we need to work on anything and not enough tools to do it with. Some one is always looking over your shoulder to see if you do it right and you know how that bothers a grease monkey! It is raining like 60 right now and has been for about 30 minutes. And to top it all off I am so very far away from the one I love. That is the worst part of it all. I can stand the rest of it for awhile but it sure is hard to

do without you my Darling. I don't know if I can stand it for 6 months or not.

After 45 days in Korea, Vel vented his frustrations with the working conditions, the weather, and the atrocities of war, although he said that being away from Dorothy was the worst part of all (August 4, 1951, pages 7-9).

sooner. I wish people could see how bad things are over here. I then maybe they would realize that it is something to talk to God about. When 3800 of our boys get killed in one day on one little mountain it is bad. The people at home don't know the half of it. They never tell how many get killed. Some of our planes made a mistake and a whole Co. of inf. was wiped out. Whose fault was it? Maybe noones directly, but if things had been run different in the years before, all this wouldn't be taking place.

I am getting morbid or something so I'll close for tonight. Goodnight my darling. Sleep tight and don't forget our dreams. I'll be there in a few short minutes. I love you my wife.

Love from your only hubby
Vel

Friday, August 24, 1951
6:30 P.M.

Dearest Datti,
How's my angle tonight? I am alright myself. I had a stomach ache for most of the day but it feels better now. It may not be the 1st's again like I was afraid for awhile. I sure do hope not anyway.

Well Darling I am just a wee bit scared right now. I'll say this much. I am writing tonight with my clutch slipping ready to take off. We are having a little Red air attack. I am sitting right beside my little fox hole and waiting. They are not bothering us back here so far but we can see them up a ways. This little boy is taking no chances! I don't think they will come this far back but—. Don't be worried about me too much though sweet. I am looking out for Papa.

Vel described waiting in a vehicle next to his foxhole as he watched a Chinese airstrike nearby. He was ready to move out or dive for cover.



I saw one man get blown up in a jeep. He was passing several of us that were stopped at a pass in trucks. His jeep hit a mine on the edge of the road and I don't suppose he ever knew just what hit him. I shouldn't tell you all this but I have too. I ran over one myself in the truck but it was the back wheel that set it off and I was going fast enough that it didn't hurt anything much. It tore the tires off one side of the rear wheels and put a few holes in the body of the truck and almost scared me to death. Otherwise nothing was hurt.

On September 12, 1951, Vel witnessed a mine explosion that killed a soldier. He counted his blessings when he, too, ran over a mine that blew the back tires off his truck, but he was not harmed.

I just now was out for about 2 hours. We had a red alert and had to hit the shit + guns for a while. We don't get too much sleep anymore because of the Red planes. Last night we were up and out till 4:30 again then we had to get up at 6:30 for Reville! They sound a Red Alert if a Red plane gets within a 50 mile Radius of us so there is almost always one that's lost. We haven't seen many of them so far. But I sure am in a hurry to get out of here! They're getting thicker all time. Don't worry about me though Darling. I have a nice deep bunker to get into. And if things get too hot I can always head for the hills! They are plenty of hills right close. Besides I have too much to come home to to get myself hit!

Red Alerts were sounded if an enemy plane was within a 50-mile radius (February 12, 1952).



Bomber Command planes of the U.S. Far East Air Forces rain tons of high-demolition bombs on a strategic military target of the Chinese Communists in North Korea in 1951.



A command post somewhere in South Korea, as American soldiers keep on the alert with their straw covered camouflaged weapons carrier.



Paratroopers drop from U.S. Air Force transport planes during an operation over an undisclosed location in Korea.



Tanks of the 1st Marine Tank Battalion bark death and devastation into the Korean night, as Marines fire a night mission at supply installations.



An enormous pile of empty artillery and mortar shell casings at a collecting point near the front lines.



The war essentially ended a year after Vel returned home, and after two years of failed peace talks. Finally, the Military Armistice Commission on July 27, 1953, resulted in a demilitarized zone to divide Korea along the "38th Parallel" which is still in effect today.



Friday 21 March, 1952
6:00 P.M.

My Darling wife,

I think I have some news that you will be glad to hear tonight. I leave here in the morning at 9:00. So this may be the last letter I will get to write for a while. Do you think that you can stand not hearing from me for a little while? I don't know just how long I will be getting there because I may have to wait on a ship or I may not. So I may be staying over in Japan a few days. If so I will write to you and let you know just what the scoop is. I am hoping to come right on through but I have been held up so many times that I don't know what to believe till I get there. I will let you know when I hit the states and about when I expect to get home. At any rate I am the same as on my way. They will have to stop me quick or I will be long gone.

This quota slipped up on us all. I was up at En. when it came in and we had to go right down this afternoon and ~~take~~ take our ~~physic~~ physical and then come back and turn our cloths in and draw some stuff that we have to have to rotate. Now I have eaten chow and just had to write this letter the first thing. I couldn't hardly eat I was so excited but I managed to get some down because I will need the energy for the truck ride to Div. Rear tomorrow.

Heck Honey I am so happy that I can't think of a thing to write so I guess I will just have to say I love you and will be seeing you soon now. At long last our long dreamed dreamed have materialized. It has been a long time in coming but it is here at last and we can stop wishing. So goodbye till about a month when I think that I will be there unless they do decide to fly me home. In that case I don't know just when I will be there. The sooner the better eh Honey?

Tell all the folks to knock off writing now because I wouldn't get them anyway. I'll let you be the one to break the news to everyone Darling. I'll bet that you will get a big kick out of it.

I love you Angle and can hardly wait to get home to you. Be good and careful till I get there Darling. I'll be seeing you real soon.
Your old loving daddy on the way,
Vapi

The Journey Home



March 22, 1952 - At 9 AM, Velpo left his post near Kumhwa, Korea. Four long days of processing and travel followed.

March 26, 1952 - Vel departed from Korea through Inchon Harbor and headed for Sasebo, Japan.

April 7, 1952 - Service men returning home boarded a ship headed for San Francisco, California. A few weeks at sea could not pass quickly enough. Vel then flew to Oklahoma.

April 23, 1952 - Dorothy received a phone call from Vel, who had arrived at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He would be home the next day!

April 24, 1952 - After 11 months apart, Vel and Dorothy were finally in each other's arms! And Vel was introduced to his daughter Vange (shown to the left) for the first time in person. Vel enjoyed a 30-day furlough at home in Roscoe.

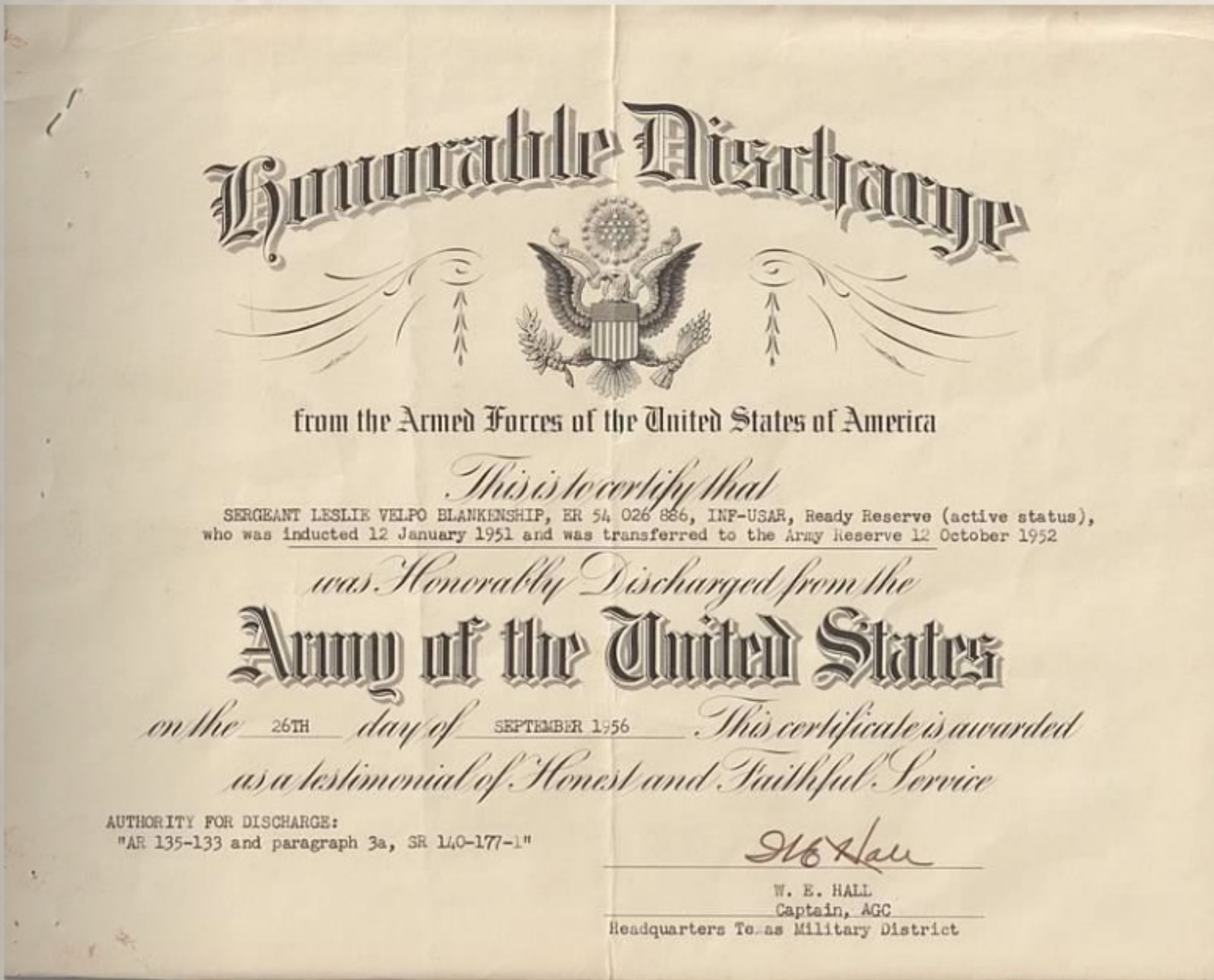
May 31, 1952 - Vel, Dorothy, and Vange traveled to the East Coast to complete Vel's time in the service. They spent 10 days in Columbus, South Carolina, and then Vel was stationed in Columbus, Georgia, for his final assignment.

October 11, 1952 - Vel was honorably released from active duty and his Army career ended as a Staff Sergeant. (Drafted service members were required to complete two years, but those who served over seas were allowed to cut three months off that requirement.)

WELCOME HOME



The next time you celebrate the freedoms in our great U.S.A., remember the sacrifices of our soldiers past, present, and future. (Soldiers pictured at Camp Chaffee in 1951. Vel Blankenship is located on the second row from bottom, second man from the left.)



NA - Not Applicable		REPORT OF SEPARATION FROM THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES		DEPARTMENT: ARMY	
HONORABLE		Blankenship Leslie Velpo		US 54 026 886 Sgt(T) 14 Jan 52 AUS	
1. QUALIFICATIONS		2. SERVICE NUMBER		3. GRADE - RANK AND PAY COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS	
4. EFFECTIVE DATE OF SEPARATION		5. EFFECTIVE DATE OF SEPARATION		6. TYPE OF SEPARATION	
7. DATE		8. PLACE OF SEPARATION		9. GRADE - RANK AND PAY COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS	
10. DATE		11. DATE		12. DATE	
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Lovingly Created By:

*David & Ann Blankenship and
Danny, Reed, & Elizabeth Hewitt*



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