

After 50 Years 'Mrs. H' Still Writing Soldiers Overseas

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CENTRAL CITY, Ky. (AP) — Four wars ago, "Mrs. H." had an idea how to make combat more bearable to the servicemen of Muhlenberg County.

She'd write to them. All of them.

It was 1917 and Mrs. Agnes Harralson was a young postmistress in a small Western Kentucky coal town named Graham, knowing too well who went letterless "over there."

Fifty years later, the 71-year-old Mrs. H.'s unflagging correspondence is legendary among generations of soldiers in her county.

What's now a full-page, unpaid column "The Service Star" in The Central City Times-Argus began with an airmailed round-robin letter to World War 1 and an answer:

"Miss A. I'd like to see the old Kaiser sweeping the streets of one of these little French towns and after every step, someone prodding him with a sharp bayonet. I can't think of any punishment horrible enough for the old bird." R. W. Walker; Tours, France; 1917.

World War II found her, a Sunday school teacher, then, mimeographing the first Star which 500 from the county were to receive once a month.

"Lt. Mickey Edwards was wounded seriously during the push on Rome. Shrapnel. Both

legs. He writes us he 'zigged when he should have zagged.'" Star, July, 1944.

Korea erupted and Mrs. H. was approached by Larry and Amos Stone who couldn't forget their well-worn Stars of the last war. Now newspaper publishers, they offered her the page whenever she was ready.

Again, her mailing list peaked at another 500 soldiers.

"Miss A.; Got the star yesterday though our mail plane was shot down. The mail and parts of the Star were burned, but I read all I could." M. W. Whitmer aboard the USS Alvin C. Cockrell, December, 1950.

Then, Vietnam.

"Mrs. H., 12 of my friends just died. I can't write this to my mother and have her worry, but I had to tell somebody," X, Da Nang, July, 1967.

Biblical scripture often tiptoes between her pecked-out paragraphs. Mrs. H. knows how a lonely trench or foxhole can start her boy-men thinking for the first time.

Sometimes, she says, a soldier's wife is untrue, he might lose an arm or leg, or . . .

"Mrs. H., I killed four men today. Is it right, Mrs. H.?" X, Dak To, August, 1967.

Sometimes, she says, she doesn't have an answer.

Mrs. H.'s doctor-husband died in 1951, leaving her with one

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THEY REMEMBER HER — Mrs. Agnes Harralson, of Graham, Ky., holds a plaque sent to her by two soldiers from Vietnam. They are among the thousands of GIs with whom Mrs. Harralson has cor-

—AP Wirephoto responded. She started writing to doughboys in World War I, then continued it through World War II, the Korean War and now the war in Vietnam.

After 50

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son, John, now employed as one telephone manager in Louisville.

They're well versed in why Japanese air raids sometimes missed their mark, why Hanoi Hanna's radio propaganda today isn't as good as 'Tokyo Rose' and how to catch rats with peanut butter.

When pressed to remember, Mrs. H. says the worst battle of all was Iwo Jima, no, maybe, the Belgian Bulge.

Current draft laws "stink," she says, too many exemptions.

"Hi, Mrs. H. By some stroke of luck, I bumped into my brother Howard over here..." Ray Heltsley, Anzio Beachhead, April, 1944.

Vietnam, she says, is a young war, a frustrating war in many perhaps minor-league ways.

"William Duke's scout dog, Prince, is back in the dog hospital at Pleiku." Star, October, 1967.

Always major league is the war against loneliness.

So every Sunday night, Mrs H. sits back down at her typewriter. And every Thursday she collects 136 papers, ripping out her column and mailing it once again with stamps paid for by local civic groups.

And somewhere in between, she'll round up that large Rebel flag for Billy Dickten in South Vietnam, telephone countless mothers to keep her addresses up to date and worry about Dragon Mountain and Hill 861.