

**STUDENT LETTERS**  
**Published in**  
**“THUNDER: Stories From the First Tour”**

In December 1967, my brother-in-law Bill Evans' eighth-grade class at East Hartford High School, Connecticut, sent me 25 letters his students had written as a homework assignment. The letters were addressed to “a soldier in Vietnam” or they were addressed to me.

I reprinted Bill's letter to me below. I also republished the student letters but I have omitted the last names of the students.

“December 19, 1967

Dear Jack,

Congratulations on your promotion to Captain. Enclosed are a series of letters which some of my 8<sup>th</sup> grade students wrote. I thought that you might get a kick out of them. They're nice kids and wrote these at home and brought them in.

In just less than a week, Christmas will be upon us. We'll miss having you home, but with God's blessings, perhaps, we can all get together next year. The kids are higher than kites lately; they can't wait until the 25<sup>th</sup>.

We plan on heading for R.I. on Christmas day and will stay a few days. God Bless you, Jack; have a Merry Christmas.

Love,  
Bill”

1. “Dear Captain Heslin

This is the first time I have written to someone in Vietnam. How are things going over there? Are things real rough were (sic) you are now?

I understand that you're a helicopter pilot. What type of helicopters do you fly?

Everybody around here is getting ready for Christmas. Around were (sic) I live people have all their Christmas lights on outside their houses.

The football season for East Hartford High was pretty bad we lost all but one

game. Usually we're the number one team and take the CDC championship but things were just the opposite.

Sincerely,  
Dave B"

2. "Dear Captain Heslin,

As you know I'm an eighth grader at East Hartford High School so I'll tell you something else about myself like school very much and my favorite subjects are the one I do best in are Spanish and American history. I have two sisters and three brothers and I am hurt.

I'd like to tell you what a good job the soldiers in Vietnam are doing. I think you are doing the right thing helping the people of South Vietnam. I hope the soldiers keep trying their hardest to help these people.

If you get a chance to answer this letter please tell me more about yourself. I now must close my letter and even if I'm late in wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Sincerely,  
Susan B"

3. "Dear Captain Heslin,

Being a supporter of the American policy on Vietnam, I was more than happy to have the chance to communicate with someone who is right there. I have always wanted to become an Air Force officer when it is my turn to serve my country, and since you are a pilot, I jumped at the opportunity to write to you.

After viewing some television documentaries, I have received only a slight impression of the fighting in Vietnam, but enough to see that many soldiers are disturbed by the reports of demonstrations, draft card burning, and the like. These anti-war exhibitions should not concern you men, because perhaps at the most, three or five per cent of the United States' population is actually against the war. Some people may differ in their views on how it is handled, but let's not forget there have been "hawks" and "doves" in every war.

From the little experience I've had with logical thinking, I reasoned a possible theory as to why there is anti-war representation in our country. Because of man's nature, there were always demonstrations and petitions against every war, but because of the lack of communications, no one ever heard of those people, and the tyrannical rule of most countries put down most uprisings, even some peaceful ones. On the other hand, I believe that when the democratic type of government was introduced in the United States, the people were given much more freedom than in earlier civilizations. Realizing this, some American extremists began to present objections about almost all Federal decisions. As if this was not enough, Communists have definitely been the cause of some modern draft card destruction and anti-war protests. But please don't worry yourselves, because you men still have the full cooperation and backing of just about the entire United States of America. Doesn't that make you feel proud?

Sincerely yours,  
George D"

4. "To a soldier in Vietnam,

Hi, my name is Debbie and I am thirteen years old in the eighth grade at East Hartford High School. I thought I would write to a soldier, even though we haven't met because we all get lonely sometimes.

I want to tell you that I really appreciate what you are doing in Vietnam. I know, too, that the people of the United States are proud of our men.

The people here and myself know what you are fighting for; to stop the spread of communism. I hope and know you men will accomplish this task.

Sincerely yours,  
Debra D"

5. "Dear Captain Heslin,

I picked to write to you because I feel I know how the situation over in Vietnam is. My brother just came back from Vietnam in which he was over there for a year.

He wrote and told us never to stop writing because letters is what keeps the guys going. By writing letters you can relieve some of the pain of the war.

First I will tell you what it is like over here and what is happening at the moment. It is almost Christmas and there is still no snow on the ground. It's cold but I guess not cold enough. Everyone is busy buying gifts, sending cards, etc. There are dances and parties practically all the time. But don't think for a moment any one forgets about you men. The people are always thinking about you guys.

You're doing a great job. I hope you don't have too much more time over there because I'm sure there are people waiting for your return.

I'm writing this as an English assignment and I hope we don't get marked. If we do I'll get an F because I'm a lousy writer. I guess you have guessed that by now. Well I think I better close now so I can finish my homework. Bye

(P.S. I hope you never run out of gas.)

Ha! Ha!

Yours truly,  
Nancy D"

6. "Dear Captain Heslin,

I am a thirteen year old boy living on a small street in a residential section of East Hartford, Connecticut.

Things around here can get pretty dull at times, but every now and then something exciting will happen such as a fire or a tree falling down.

According to the newspapers and television I can imagine how rough things are out there. You must get discouraged hearing about all the draft card burners and voters protesting the war.

I think that the men fighting in Viet Nam are doing a good job in stopping the flow of Communism from spreading around the world.

Yours truly,  
Ray D”

7. “To a soldier in Vietnam,

I want to tell you an honest opinion of what most people feel about Vietnam. We all realize the necessity of your being there, and we are real proud of you. Your (sic) really serving your country in one of the most honorable ways I know. The nuts that run around burning draft cards are certainly not doing much for the United States’ reputation.

I’ve been reading in newspapers and magazines that a letter from the Unites States is quite a morale booster. I’m not much for writing letters, but if this letter serves any good, it’s doing its purpose. It’s really hard to believe that this letter that I’m writing will really be read in Vietnam by a soldier, but I have no idea of what to say. Even now my choice of conversation seems far from interesting.

I’m an eighth grader and I attend the East Hartford High School. You’d be surprised how much the upperclassmen resent us being here. The school is real nice though, and I enjoy being here. (most of the time). We really miss the eighth grade sports, because some of the clubs don’t allow eighth graders.

I know it’s probably impossible for you to write back, but I would be very happy to receive a letter from you.

Sincerely,  
Sue D”

8. "Dear Captain John G. Heslin

I am writing to say what a great job the American men have done in Viet Nam. I, for one, believes this war necessary to fight.

I want to tell you a little about my family and myself. As you know, I'm an eight grade student in the East Hartford High School and I like it very much although the seniors found it a little hard to get used to us. I belong to a family of seven, four sisters and my parents, and I must not forget our dog, Spot. Things get a little wild at our home many times but nothing that can't be controlled.

I enjoyed writing to you and if you have time please write back. I wanted to know what you feel about the war.

Sincerely yours,  
Kathy G"

9. "To a Soldier in Vietnam,

In starting my letter I would like to say why I am writing. Captain John Heslin's brother-in-law, Mr. William Evans, is one of my teachers. He teaches us History, English, and Literature. For an English assignment we are to write a letter to Captain Heslin and he in turn will distribute them among his men. I hope to continue this correspondence with you further than the boundary of an English assignment.

I am for the American cause in Vietnam and I am well aware of what and why you are fighting this conflict for. The people who remonstrated the war are not doing you a good job in building morale.

To tell about myself is easy. My name is Paul H. and I am 13. I go to East Hartford High School in the accelerated eighth grade. I'm about 5'5" and I weigh close to 110 pounds. Enclosed you will find a picture of me. If you want to write me, my address is:

Paul H  
38 Mary Street  
East Hartford, 8, Connecticut 06108

In your letter tell me where you are from and what your address is. I would appreciate if you could tell me about yourself.

Sincerely yours,  
Paul H”

10. “Dear Captain

Judging from all these protests and war demonstrations you might have the question, is fighting in Vietnam. You should not let these people even bother you in the least. These people are remonstrating for something that they know little or nothing about. I know that this kind of behavior can be discouraging, knowing that some Americans don't want the United States in the Vietnam War. It can even be more distracting if these are protests by people who aren't even interested in the war at all.

I'm a firm believer about the war. It is very implicit that in my mind and more than likely armies of other people feel the same way. If we pull out of the war Communism would keep on spreading until it could rule the world. The next thing the Americans would know is it would be knocking on our own United States.

I know sometimes the war can be quite unbearable. People over here can sometimes be extremely weird. They put gasoline on them and burn themselves for no reason at all. It can be quite discouraging for the soldiers who are over in Vietnam. Well, I must start my History so your brother in law Mr. Evans, won't get upset and the studying will help me in my test tomorrow.

Sincerely yours,  
Bill H”

11. “Dear Soldier,

I am writing you because I believe in what you're doing and would like to help as much as possible. I feel that by writing this letter I am helping to remind you that people are always thinking about and thanking you for what you are doing.

I think I should tell you a little about myself so you may understand what kind of person I am. I go to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade I am 13 I like cars.

I would like you to write if possible the address is  
Durfee H  
1677 Main Street  
East Hartford 8 Connecticut 06108

I would like to know what it's really like over there.

Sincerely yours,  
Durfee H”

12. “To all the G.I.s around at the time of mail call:

I am a thirteen year old boy, in the eighth grade attending East Hartford High School, or known around here as E.H.H.S. Owning a newspaper route I have a working knowledge of many matters and since I like to know what's going on I keep pretty well informed about the world events and I follow the news about Vietnam and what's going on.

First on the list of things I would like to tell you that I am 100%, well, maybe not 100% but at least 99.9% behind you guys in this war you are fighting over there, and that if I get a chance to fight in the very same war I shall go willing and not like some of the college students over here burning their Draft Cards and protesting. It seems all they are really looking for is their name in the paper and the publicity. Actually, to be truthful with you I do not fully understand what this war is all about or how it started but for some reason I feel the reasons must be pretty close to what this country was fighting about way back in 1776, somehow you don't seem to need a reason for trying to stay free and able to speak as you wish. I honestly hope that people will begin to realize that in this crazy-mixed up world in order to keep our freedom and our country free of narrow-minded communists we have to be over in that part of the world letting them understand that we are willing to protect our interests.

Another topic that is on my mind is this, I know that you guys like to receive letters from the States and me with my wander-mind was trying to think of a way I could get a correspondence started with at least one of you who is interested in a pen pal sort of thing. The more interested in writing to me the better I know some of you won't be able to but those who do I'll send clippings of the old home team to each of you and anything that might be of interest to you if you let me know. I



hope I get a good response and I'll return it double.

Another thing just in case I'm unable to get another letter off before next week, I certainly wish each and every one of you the Merriest of Christmas's and of course a New Years which will better for all of you.

I have many interests, you name them and I usually have a finger trying them, reading, playing the accordion, models collecting coins some to spend and some to save for a rainy day you know what I mean. So hoping to hear from some of you soon.

Very Sincerely Yours,  
Ron J"

13. "To a soldier in Viet Nam,

I am very happy that I have the pleasure of righting (sic) to a soldier. Because I think you are in Viet Nam for a very good cause. All our 8<sup>th</sup> grade class is writing to some soldier's in Viet Nam. We hope that everyone does this because we know it must be hard to keep the moral of all the soldiers high.

Now let me tell you about myself. I am thirteen years old and in eighth grade. The city I live in is East Hartford and go to East Hartford High School. In my family I have one brother, one sister, mother, father and a beagle dog. My sister is only 10 and my brother is 6. I am the oldest in the family.

Right now we are preparing for Christmas. You should see the beautiful Christmas lights on Constitution Plaza in Hartford. They would be even prettier if we had some snow. I suppose we will have some snow for Christmas.

I hope that you and all the soldiers will be home for Christmas 1968

Yours truly,  
Vicky J"

14. "To a Soldier in Vietnam,

Hi, I am twelve years old, in the eighth grade and I go to East Hartford High School. I like school excepting a few subjects such as Algebra and History. They would be interesting if you understood them. You would'nt (sic) believe the marks I have in History. My report card wasn't that terrific either.

Right now it's beautiful outside (that is for this time of year) It's already December 14, almost winter! My birthday is December 19, and I will finally be 13 years old.

Around our neighborhood it is very quiet (excepting me). I have a few girlfriends around here but most of the kids are boys in college.

I guess I'll tell you some more about myself. I love fruit (especially oranges and grapfruits (sic)) My favorite sports are basketball and soccer. I don't only like to watch them being played but I like to play them.

Hope you enjoyed my letter and guess I'll let you go. I'll wright (sic) again and I hope you get my letter.

Sincerely Yours,  
Susan L"

15. "Dear Captain Heslin,

It doesn't look as though we're going to have a white Christmas this year. In fact, the kind of weather that we are having now is more appropriate for March. I want to have a Christmas where big fluffy snowflakes fall all day.

I don't think the bells that I wear on my shoes are going to help me get into the Christmas spirit, but since there is no snow I've got to do something! I suppose I could get our ice crusher out and attempt to make some artificial snow, but that would be rather absurd.

No matter what any naïve person says about "pulling out" of Vietnam, there are a hundred others who say that we should stay. We must try to understand those unfortunates who can't see the purpose of remaining there. These are the ones who

we should not hold them responsible for what they say.

Merry Christmas and may God bless you all,  
Claudia L”

16. “Dear Captain Heslin,

From the few things Mr. Evans mentioned about you and from what I see on the television you soldiers in the helicopter (sic) are doing a great job. The television shows the soldiers going in the middle of a conflict and send supplies and men or taking the wounded out. You also have many rockets which you fire at “Charlie”. I think the soldiers like you help very much in the war. From being a Captain you must run most of these platoons.

My cousin, Butch, is leaving for Vietnam January third and is going to guard a prison for the captured enemies. Butch is home now for a month before he leaves. When I talk to him he says that he is glad to help out and that the boys or men that go to Vietnam really learn to be a man before they go back home.

I know a little about how you soldiers camp and have camp packs to carry. I’ve been on many camping trips up north with older teen-agers. In my back yard and all around my neighborhood there are many woods about five square miles in size. My friends and I hunt with bows and guns during the summer and set out for a day for fishing. I know it’s nothing like you do but it tells you the kind of person I am.

Good luck,  
Frank M”

17. “Dear Captain,

Hi Captain Heslin of the 119<sup>th</sup> Assault Airborne, or something like that. I just thought I’d write and tell you how things are around here.

First I will tell you about myself. My favorite sport is football, and the Baltimore Colts are my heroes of the Professional Football World. I am 13 yrs. Old, my birthday is Saturday December 16. I am a boy, in case you didn’t know yet.

I think about Vietnam quite a lot and I do sincerely believe we should be in Vietnam. Communism should definitely be stopped, along with the Vietcong. Keep up the good work!

I enjoy fooling around with boys and girls, especially girls of course. Well, I guess I'll be leaving now so I can go fool around with some more girls, byeeeeeee (sic)

Very Sincerely Yours,  
Guy S. N"

18. "Dear soldier,

I am pleased and honored to be writing to a man whose efforts are helping to protect our nation. By stopping the spread of communism, you soldiers will keep us safe in the future. You are doing a great job. Keep up the good work.

My name is Judy and I live in East Hartford, Connecticut. My hobbies are skiing, skating, and swimming. Enjoying dramatics, I played the part of "Gretl" in the "Sound of Music". I like all sports.

What are the thirteen year old Vietnamese children like? I would sure like to know about them. If you have a chance would you write and tell me about them? Please write back to me and tell be about Viet Nam.

Your friend,  
Judith N"

19. "To a Soldier in Vietnam,

Hi! This is the first letter I've ever written to a soldier but I hope it's not my last. I'm a girl and my name is Chris. If you receive this before Christmas, I hope you have a wonderful one and I send my most sincere wishes. It's really cold here in Connecticut but we haven't had much snow. That's fine with me because I have to shovel it since my brother is away. He's in the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and I'm very proud of him because it's the biggest thing he's ever done and he's sticking to it.

What is your job while your (sic) there? I'm kind of lucky; none of my family or friends have gone yet. But it really hurts when you here (sic) how the soldiers are dying. I'm all for the war, though, because I know they're doing it for their country. There's a song out called "An Open Letter to My Teenage Son" and the last line goes "If you burn your draft card, burn your birth certificate too, because from that moment on, I have no son." After that, I get all emotional and start crying. First I'm emotional and secondly I'm proud to be an American. I know that since you are there, you're just as proud as me and just as willing to fight for it.

Well I have to close my letter since I have no more to say. So again I wish you a very Merry Christmas.

Very Sincerely Yours,  
Chris P

P.S.

If you have time, could you please write back? Thank you, Bye again."

20. "Dear Captain Heslin,

I am writing because I want you to know just about everyone is behind you men in Viet Nam. People in America can't thank you enough for what you are doing. There are a few "draft card burners" but these "men" don't deserve to be called Americans anyway.

I am on eighth grade student and at home my father often talks about protestors. Everyone should be proud of every American in Viet Nam. Fortunately most people are. There is only a small percentage of protestors but newspapers make it seem like there are so many. Even though I'm only in the eighth (sic) grade I go to the high school in East Hartford. There is a great advantage of going to high school such as a nice gym and good equipment, but when you're thirteen in a high school you're real small.

Sincerely yours,  
John P"

21. "Dear Captain,

This letter is not to make you homesick, but to tell you what is going on here in Connecticut. Winter is just around the corner here and it is still nice weather out. The average temperature of today was 50.

Being an eighth grader in a high school does have its disadvantages. I am small and walking through a corridor with tall seniors in it doesn't please me. Well that's enough about me.

The situation toward Vietnam shows that we are for you. The demonstrators, what few there are, shouldn't bother you. I know and I both hope the fighting is over soon and I also know that you are doing your best job. The fighting is for a good cause. I hope this war stops the spread of Communism.

Yours truly,  
Mark P"

22. "Dear Captain Heslin

Here in Connecticut everything and everybody is bustling with Christmas Spirit! There's a lot of colorful lights, beautiful trees and many little tots with hopes of Christmas. If you walk down Main Street in Hartford you will see people of all shapes and sizes doing all kinds of shopping, but they have one thing in common, their smiling!

As you have guessed from this letter, I'm a girl and I don't really know very much about the war in Vietnam. But I do know one thing, the men fighting there for their country are really great and deserve a lot of recognition (sic). People in the United States that are old enough to know what the war is all about, are really thankful to you for what you're doing for us.

Sincerely yours,  
Sharon P"

23. "Dear Captain,

Judging by your position in Vietnam, I expect the war to last until 1972. When will your superiors start something big!!!! I hope it is very soon to end the war, and bring you soldiers back home, and commend you for the wonderful job you have done.

Recently I have been into downtown Hartford to see the "Festival of Lights." It is a beautiful sight to see, and all persons believe praise is the word to the people who set up the "Festival of Lights."

My name is Jeff R. I am 5 feet 10 inches tall, 135 pounds, like all types of sports, and very ambitious. I have medals and trophies for swimming, basketball, baseball, football, bowling and hockey. Sometime in the distant future I hope to meet you man-to-man and talk about the war in Vietnam. I also hope to end the war in Vietnam as I have stated.

Sincerely yours,  
Jeff R"

24. "Dear Captain Heslin,

My teacher has informed me that you are the pilot of a helicopter. I have always liked helicopters, and I long to ride in one.

I have a book on helicopters and I can just imagine the one which you pilot. It would give me great pride in knowing that I rescued wounded soldiers, as you do.

I can just imagine, you and I zooming over the land, spotting men in distress, going down to pick them up, and then "tear" back to a hospital. But I don't think we'll get our chance, because the men over there are fighting such a great battle, the whole thing ought to be over soon.

I want to wish you the best of luck in all the years to come, also a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Sincerely Yours,  
Steve S"

25. "To a soldier in Vietnam,

The soldiers over there are doing a great job. I feel that our being in the war is right.

There is really nothing good happening around here. Since Christmas is coming the lights are going on in Constitution Plaza in Hartford.

In my family there's my mother, father, sister and me. Everybody's good to me especially my sister who is nineteen.

Well I hope you have a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

A friend in the States,  
Kathy S"