

Youth, Ambition, and the Conundrum of War

By Jamel Saafi

Roosevelt winning his third term in 1940 was perhaps the American public's clearest response to the ongoing war in Europe and a strong vote in support of the president's declared neutrality policy. Yet despite isolationism one might speculate that this neutrality was overridden by economic partiality and that the war machine had already been set in motion quite some time before. The US' indirect partisanship was framed by the same far-reaching economic ambitions which had pressured President Woodrow Wilson during WWI and set the stage for America's first chance for global economic dominance. The zeal of another generation of "merchants of death" to achieve an economic boost and their greediness for still greater profits ultimately influenced Roosevelt, forced the nation to take the Allies' side, and resulted in the attack on Pearl Harbor and the US entering the war.¹ Consequently, despite Roosevelt's promise and presidential motto, American boys were indeed sent to fight in the "foreign war" by the tens of thousands. Many more were on alert at home and ready to ship out at any moment. The abrupt change in strategy was soon supported by the Selective Service Act of 1940. Millions of young men enlisted in the military to defend America and support its allies and perhaps better their own economic condition along the way². Among these was a young Russian-American man from San Francisco, California whose fate drove him to Patterson Field Air Force Base, Ohio. This young man, James Corbovic, found the time and the urge to write to his older sister Dana while he was in training³. Five of Corbovic's letters, totaling eight pages, were found and will be used as the primary source for this paper. They are part of a larger collection of family letters addressed to

¹ John M. Murrin et al., *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People*. (California: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 936- 975.

² *Ibid.*

³ All names in this paper have been changed to protect the privacy of this family.

his older sister, Dana. Despite complete certainty of the originality of this proposed project, further research was undertaken to eliminate any doubt that these letters had been analyzed before. A keyword search using Corbovic's first and last names in the two main search engines, Google and Yahoo, produced twenty three and thirty hits respectively. Among these, only three records were relevant and related to this research. In fact, one was a marriage record of Dana, the addressee. This record definitely referred to her as there are multiple references in the letters to her husband with the same name. The second was of her daughter's high school reunion. The third reported the current address of Paul, Corbovic's older brother. Four different academic databases were also consulted: Infotrack, JSTOR, Ulrich's, and Thomson Gale Group. Again, Corbovic's first and last names were used as keyword, subject, and all text searches and no matches were found. The letters are definitely an original primary source and an important historical document which will be examined in its historical context, its content interpreted, and an attempt will be made to understand the motives and psychology of its subjects.

James Corbovic's letters from Patterson Field Air Force Base during the Second World War, and dating between the years 1943 and 1944, are an important historical resource. First, they offer the reader a glimpse into Corbovic's life in the army, his callow personality, his unbound ambitions, and how he is representative of the typical US soldier of the time. Second, they expose Corbovic's mixed attitudes about the war and his family's fear for him and how they all reflect America's view of the "foreign war." Third, the letters point to the social and gender responsibilities among his family members and to how being in the military in the 1940s is an economic opportunity for the American middle class and its attempt to gain solid ground during those changing times. Finally, the letters illustrate an indisputable scene of that period and offer

invaluable insight to events which were experienced by Corbovic: the spread of influenza and life in the barracks, his fascination with photography, and access to a typewriter for personal use.

It is still a common practice and a well known ploy for the military to target and appeal to young men who are strong yet easy to control. Corbovic was no exception. He was likely in his early twenties in 1943 when he was serving in the Air Force. The letters mention two older brothers, Paul and Joseph, and besides Dana another sister, Amy. Corbovic constantly refers to himself as “lil” – indicating he was the youngest in his family of five. Public records show his next oldest brother, Joseph, was born in 1920 which suggests that Corbovic may have been born around the year 1922.⁴ Besides his young age, the letters reveal Corbovic was a typical inexperienced soldier who was uncertain about the present yet almost fanatically ambitious about the future.

Although his letters were intended to be informal, the style is quite simple indicating that he might not have received a college education. Being an unskilled writer is plausible; however, enlisting in the army instead of going to college is often evidence of a lack of opportunity in life. It is most likely he joined the military and received training as an airplane mechanic: "they may not let me go from here, as they need Airplane Mechanics here badly."⁵ At that time the military provided assistance to those who sought specialized training for mechanical and clerical work or even leadership. These skills were evaluated by the Mechanical, Clerical, and Military Aptitude Tests. Those who qualify, commit to at least a two – year program.⁶ Although such training allows the recruits to do actual work in the military, it does not seem that Corbovic was actually

⁴ The White Pages, “person search”; available from www.whitepages.com/5050/log_feature/search.suggestion/search/FindPerson?name=.....&search_suggestion (part of URL address was omitted for confidentiality); accessed March 19, 2007.

⁵ Corbovic, Letter Four, p. 1. Sent from Fairfield, Ohio, addressed to Dana Corbovic from San Francisco, California. Dated January 18, 1944.

⁶ John R. Craft. “From School to the Army,” *Stanford Business Bulletin*, March 1943. [Online] Available from <http://www.gsb.stanford.edu/history/timeline/military.html>. Accessed April 25, 2007.

doing much work at the base. He wrote in one of his letters "I sleep from 12:00 midnight to 12:00 noon then get up wash go and eat come back to the barracks lay around for an hour or so and eat again and off to loaf, oops! I mean to work. I like action and hope to be getting it soon."⁷ He is referring here, with such impatience, to being shipped abroad which is perhaps one of the reasons he joined the military. He particularly mentions England as his favorite shipment location, "I hope I have something of interest to say next time, and I hope it's England."⁸ His lack of day-to-day life experience, limited knowledge of the reality of fighting in a war, and eagerness for action perhaps reveal his anxiety about his state in the military. He sarcastically acknowledges, "any body who has brains goes nuts in the army. It's just us morons that get along so well...you have to be ignorant to be a good soldier. That's why I'm a good soldier."⁹ This discovery, though now late, has perhaps begun to plant seeds of disappointment in him. His boredom and frustration with the wait and his uninformed thirst for "action" is typical feverish youthful behavior lacking judgment and revealing a miscalculation of the magnitude of the risk involved.

Although Corbovic wrote to his sister regularly, his writing style reveals a lack of enthusiasm about his condition at the base. In telling his sister about events taking place in and around the base, Corbovic's writing was characterized by the use of simple sentences each consisting of a subject, a verb, and a simple complement. Usually, a subject is used to isolate the topic being described, a verb makes a comment about that isolated element, and a complement usually completes the verb by giving specific information about the relation between the subject and the verb. Adjectives describe nouns and show the idiosyncratic view and attitude of the

⁷ Corbovic, Letter One, p. 1. Sent from Fairfield, Ohio, addressed to Dana Corbovic from San Francisco, California. Dated December 3, 1943.

⁸ Corbovic, Letter Three, p. 1. Sent from Fairfield, Ohio, addressed to Dana Corbovic from San Francisco, California. Dated January 4, 1944.

⁹ Letter One, p. 2.

writer and are crucial for voicing one's opinion or judgment. However, Corbovic's letters lack adjectives almost entirely. Out of eight pages, only five to eight adjectives are used per page. The lack of enthusiasm during the pre-shipment period must have been a weighty time for Corbovic. He openly expresses his boredom with army life, "I'm still taking life easy, in fact too easy and it's getting on my nerves."¹⁰ Confusion and uncertainty result; "it's got me so I don't know whether I want to be happy or to be sad" with army life.¹¹

It seems that although Corbovic was financially profiting from being in the military, he was not the ideal soldier. His joining the military was perhaps motivated by two reasons – high unemployment and the need for enlistment during a time when maybe hundreds of unqualified men were admitted by the draft boards to sustain the shortage in the military.¹² The unemployment rate in 1940 was above fourteen percent.¹³ The shortage in the army was soon reversed by Congress passing the Selective Service Act of 1940 to boost the meager size of the US Army which ranked eighteenth in the world.¹⁴ The Act made it mandatory for every male citizen between the ages of eighteen and thirty eight to enlist and was greatly reinforced through decentralization where draft boards played a major role. Young recruits were often the military's best bet and most qualified group to be enlisted and to jump into the frontline. This is most evident in the number of casualties and disabled soldiers during the war. By 1943 there had been 7,037 disabled veterans younger than twenty two years old. By 1944, that number jumped to 208,519. The average age of this group was twenty two to twenty five years old.¹⁵ The numbers of these unfortunate young soldiers speak for the magnitude of human loss and also of the

¹⁰ Ibid, 1.

¹¹ Ibid, 2.

¹² The Selective System Website. Retrieved from www.sss.gov/fslocal.html. Accessed March 1, 2007.

¹³ Pearson Education [Online Database], Overall Unemployment Rate in the Civilian Labor Force, 1920-2006. Retrieved from <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0104719.html>. Accessed April 29, 2007.

¹⁴ John R. Craft.

¹⁵ The administrator of Veterans' Affairs Annual report Departmental Edition, Pensions and Compensation: Fiscal Years 1931-1945, Vol. 15, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O), F.Y. 1943, p. 13; F.Y. 1944, p. 15

adverse fate of those young soldiers. Besides favoring young age, the military had two main criteria for recruitment: testing and physical fitness. The Army General Classification Test was designed to test the recruits on their ability to learn and adapt to the military lifestyle. Recruits were tested on their vocabulary skills, arithmetical reasoning, and block counting ability. Physical fitness, besides age, was truly the most important asset. Physical fitness was strongly sought and easily identified among young men by the local boards which were the communal networks of the military.¹⁶

Regardless of his impatience to join the battlefield in England, Corbovic still did not seem to have made sense of his life in the military and even of the actual reasons that led him to join the military in the first place. Sometimes he felt like “there isn’t a thing to do to take a fellow’s mind off this army life”¹⁷ and that he yearned “to be a civilian more than ever.”¹⁸ Other times, he appeared most content with being a soldier and shared that “he is in good hands... [because] everything has been swell” with him and that he was going to hate to leave the military when he ultimately has to.¹⁹ Perhaps some of his uncertainty is related to the uncertainty about the progression of the war itself. On December 3, 1943, the same day Roosevelt held the Cairo Conference, Corbovic remarked, “the War news looks pretty good from tonight’s paper, but then again one day things look pretty rosy and the next day it’s just the opposite.”²⁰ In fact, the war was going so well for the United States that just the day after, the U.S. attacked the Marshall Islands and six Japanese transporters were sunk and another fifty-five aircraft were shot down.²¹

¹⁶ John R. Craft.

¹⁷ Letter One, p. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid, 2.

¹⁹ Letter Four, p. 1.

²⁰ Letter One, p. 1.

²¹ The world at War: History of WWII 1939- 1945. [online]. Available from <http://www.euronet.nl/users/wilfired/ww2/ww2.htm>. Accessed on April 26, 2007.

In another letter, Corbovic further remarked, “they are taking the guys out of here right and left”²² and “the field was on alert for about a week here because of shipment of a bunch of fellows out of here.”²³ Apparently, despite his impatience to ship out, Corbovic also had some anxiety and fear about what the war would have in store for him. He usually read the paper to follow the news and must have read about the deaths of soldiers in the battlefield which may explain his perplexity over what to think of the war.

Corbovic's detachment from the present and desire for combat was set off by his exaggerated optimism in the future. A close examination of the language Corbovic uses in his letters reveals that despite the little or no interest in his current situation in the army barracks and his yearning for shipment, he rejoiced at receiving his monthly paycheck, especially since he was getting paid for doing nothing but “eat, sleep...come down to pound on the typewriter.”²⁴

Perhaps the wartime propaganda created by the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) and the Office of War Information (OWI) had tempted Corbovic to join the battlefield if not enlist in the first place.²⁵ The significant advances of the Allies and the success achieved in North Africa might have been the source of his drive for action. The non-steady but overall progress of the Allied forces and the dramatic loss of five hundred and forty-two thousand German soldiers by early December 1943 perhaps also lured him into taking part in the war.²⁶ But the monthly paycheck may have been the bait that kept him in the barracks.

The paper Corbovic used to write to his family had the logo “Office of Chief, Maintenance Division” at the “Fairfield Air Force Command.” Corbovic referred to himself as an “airplane

²² Letter Three, p. 1.

²³ Letter Four, p. 1.

²⁴ Corbovic, Letter Two, p. 1. Sent from Fairfield, Ohio, addressed to Dana Corbovic from San Francisco, California. Dated December 10, 1943.

²⁵ John M. Murrin et al. ; 963.

²⁶ Time magazine (Dec. 20, 1943). “*More flu.*” [Online].www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,790910.html. Accessed March 4, 2007.

mechanic” or an “airman” of which there are four different ranks: E1 through E4. The earliest recorded paycheck charts in the military for these ranks only go back to 1949. Using those monthly salaries, an airman with a rank E1 received eighty dollars, eighty two dollars for E2, ninety five dollars for E3, and a hundred and seventeen dollars for E4.²⁷ These salaries were based on a minimum of two service years; they were slightly higher for soldiers with longer years of enlistment. The latest reported military salaries for these ranks are for fiscal year 2005. they are \$1,235 for E1 rank, \$1,384 for E2, \$1,456 for E3, and \$1,612 for E4.²⁸ It is interesting to see that the 1949 salaries have almost the same purchasing power of their 2005 counterparts which suggests some kind of consistency in determining how much to offer a soldier relative to the economy. As a matter of fact, eighty dollars in 1949 was worth \$1,111 in 2005 and a hundred and seventeen dollars equaled \$1,634 in 2005.²⁹ Based on this fact, one could speculate that Corbovic was getting the equivalent of \$1,100 to \$1,600 per month in today’s dollars. His salary would have been between eighty to one hundred dollars per month, about nine hundred and sixty dollars a year. This is an inciting salary in the post Depression era especially when the unemployment rate was over fourteen percent³⁰ and the average yearly income was a close nine hundred and eighty five dollars.³¹ More seditious is the fact that Corbovic was getting paid for laying around all day and that he was sending twenty to twenty five percent of his monthly pay to his sister to deposit in his savings.

²⁷ The U.S. Defense, Finance, and Accounting Service.[Online].<http://usmilitary.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.dfas.mil>. Accessed on March 4, 2007.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The purchasing power of past currency: www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare. Accessed on March 4, 2007.

³⁰ Pearson Education.

³¹ Thomas Piketty & Emmanuel Saez: Income Inequality in the United States, 1913-1998, (Harvard: Harvard University and NBER). Retrieved from: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/macarthur/inequality/papers/PikettyUS.pdf>. Accessed on April 29, 2007.

Pearl Harbor was perhaps an unavoidable act of political retaliation from Japan against the US for its “cash-and-carry” policy which left America no choice but to join the war.³² Most Americans were still outraged by the results of the Nye committee which exposed the truth behind the US joining the First World War to serve the interest of the greedy “merchants of death.”³³ To some extent, this war’s propaganda would face closer scrutiny. Although Corbovic was impatient and anxious to be shipped to Europe, he had mixed feeling about army life and the war itself, and his family’s worry about his fate illustrate America’s mixed view about the war in Europe.

Although his family did not prevent him, or his two brothers, from joining the military; they express great concern for him and fear his going into combat. Corbovic’s letters reference family comments and concerns about his safety and fear from of him being shipped out. He repeatedly attempts to ease their anxiety. He writes persuasively, insisting that there is no basis for their fear and that he was confident he was not going to be shipped. Sometimes, his letters contained direct pledges and assurances, “now don’t go worrying about me going anywhere...say hello to mommy and tell her not worry.”³⁴ Other times, he even shared discreet information, “there has been a rumor that the mechanics will not be taken from here.”³⁵ The family’s anxiety however is the price it pays for taking part in the military which will better the family economics. In a sense, the Corbovic family may be regarded as an image of the country. There seemed to be a great opportunity on the horizon for economic and political power which would have the potential to reinforce the recent gains the US had made by taking part in WWI and further guarantee production for the war machine profiteers. However, that opportunity came

³² John M. Murrin et al., 937.

³³ John M. Murrin et al., 937.

³⁴ Letter Four, p. 1.

³⁵ Letter Three. p, 1.

at an unavoidable and dear human cost. In the end, the economic lures won over the fear for human life in both the Corbovic family and US politics. In either case, the men joined the military and waited to ship out and the women were left with ample tasks at home.

The Corbovic family was three sons, two daughters, and their mother; there was no mention of a father or step-father in any of the letters. Corbovic makes clear reference to his older brother being in the service by remarking that he "was glad to hear about [Joseph's] added stripe."³⁶ Other letters in the collection indicate that Joseph was sending letters to the family from the U.S.S. Cleveland. The letters hint at the socioeconomic status of the sisters and from them Dana's birth and marital status could be traced. Dana was born in 1910 and married at age twenty on June 28, 1930 to William Zaharov, two years her senior.³⁷ There were no records for Amy. All three brothers were servicemen, perhaps building their "risky" careers in the military before starting families of their own.

There was no indication that either of the women worked outside the home. There is bountiful reference however of their domestic tasks and social activities. It should be no surprise that a soldier would write of his sisters' brilliance in the kitchen. Corbovic recalled in one of his letters how tasty the food was that the women in the family sent him over Christmas. "[Amy] baked some cookies and sent them to me and [Sue] also sent me cookies, candy and a nice big salami with some ritz crackers, um! It was delicious."³⁸ Shopping seems to be another frequent activity for the Corbovic women. Dana was responsible for her brothers' Christmas shopping. In one of his letters, Corbovic noted his appreciation of his sister for doing Christmas shopping for him, her own family, and for her other two brothers. He reminded his sister of his lack of expertise when it came to shopping, perhaps as an attempt to justify his aggravating her

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The White Pages.

³⁸ Letter Three, p. 1.

household duties. He wrote, "you know me when it comes to shopping...I make a better butcher."³⁹ Another female responsibility in the Corbovic family was to discuss the family's social matters - even those relating to the men. In his letters, Corbovic is constantly nervous about the family's opinion of his girlfriend, Gina. He asks worriedly, "What do you think of my little honey? Does she pass your approval? ...Do you put the okay on her for my future wife?"⁴⁰ He also comments on the frequent visits the women paid to each other which further worried him. He points out, "you mentioned something about a confab with mother...what do you discuss ...about me, do you tear me apart?"⁴¹

As for the men in the Corbovic family, all three of them seem to have sought the military for employment. With three boys in the military the mother is burdened with the social task of mothers the world over – fretting over her sons' well being. James often commented "how is mother and how has she been doing, still brooding over her bunch of boys who have just grown up and taken away from her."⁴² As demonstrated earlier, James was perhaps making about the average income while in the military and was able to afford saving at a period when the economy was just coming out of the depression to be drained by the war.

The women stayed in the home to settle the affairs of the house and the family. More importantly however was the difference in the fate of this new male generation that was preparing to take charge over the one before it. Among the Corbovic family's five young adults, while Corbovic and his two male brothers enlisted in the military to secure their economic conditions, it seems the sisters improved their status in the more time-honored tradition of getting married. Although this gender difference was theoretically being reduced due to the

³⁹ Letter Two, p 1.

⁴⁰ Letter Four, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

incorporation of women in the work force, it survived within the Corbovic family as it was certainly still the predominant social norm.

Despite being a period of war and catastrophe, the 1940s were also a time of great scientific and technological discoveries. The magnitude of the war and the risks taken along with it created highly competitive scientific and technological environments between the governments of the Allies and Axis forces. Technology would eventually be the determining factor in winning the war when nuclear bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Besides the drive to advance their chemical warfare, the US and the developed world were trying to improve their communications and interception capabilities, aircraft, and armament. In order to remain highly competitive, the military had to employ the most recent technological and scientific discoveries in its daily operations on bases and on the front line. Soldiers were often exposed to innovations before they were made available to the public. Being in the military gave Corbovic the adventure and advantage of experiencing his time's innovations.

Corbovic's letters illustrate an indisputable scene of their time period and offer a valuable insight to events which were recorded by his direct observation or were part of his routine at the base. Besides the manual typewriter and access to photography via now-discretionary income, Corbovic observed the spread of influenza in the new centrally heated barracks. The letters provide an insight to Corbovic's thoughts and feelings about the historical flu epidemic of the 1940s. The world wide flu epidemic of 1918 which killed over half a million Americans was probably not far from the soldier's thoughts. In all previous wars, more American soldiers died from disease than in battle.⁴³ He seemed extremely worried and cautious about his health after he "read in the town paper... where there were few cases of influenza ...at the field" and that

⁴³ Alfred W. Crosby: *The Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 1.

“there was death from the flu.”⁴⁴ He had a cold at the time and “after reading [about the flu, he was determined he was] going to do something about it.”⁴⁵ Corbovic does not name the paper he reads and attempts to find the article were in vain. The “Fairfield Echo” requires membership so its archives could not be accessed. The “Dayton Daily News,” “This Week Newspaper,” and the “Dayton Business Journal,” have no archival references to Influenza stories. The air base’s own “Wright-Patterson Wrighter” did not contain any reference either⁴⁶. However, Time magazine reported that the epidemic was growing out of control - especially in the Midwest - where between thirty and forty percent of the population had been affected by the uncontrollable epidemic.⁴⁷ Time magazine further recorded the difficulty scientists were facing trying to find a cure for the virus. Corbovic does not mention any medical response at the base to prevent him and other soldiers from getting the virus. His dread and fear of the flu is greatly justified as he mentions many eventually died. About the same time he wrote this to his family, December 1943, the Naval Research Library at the University of California reported that their tedious work and experiments were doomed to failure against the uncontrollable epidemic.⁴⁸ This fact might have been a disincentive for the military to try to treat the epidemic which was perhaps why Corbovic seemed extremely worried and powerless.

The letters also made multiple references to the technology of heating in the base and life in the barracks. Corbovic remarked, “the barracks have too much heat in them and the air is all dried out and then step out in the cold air and ‘Zowie’ it almost knocks us over.”⁴⁴ This technology cannot have seemed “advanced” under the circumstances. Heating seemed more of

⁴⁴ Letter One, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The Patterson-Wright Air Force Base website: www.wpafb.mil. Accessed on March 3, 2007.

⁴⁷ Time magazine. (Dec 27, 1943). [Online].

⁴⁸ Time magazine: “*More Flu*” (Dec. 20, 1943). [Online]. www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,932641,00.html. Accessed March 2, 2007.

an annoyance to him than a luxurious commodity. Perhaps the heating fuel the military was using instead of coal may have been something Corbovic was not used to at home, if at all. The 1940 Housing Census reported that of the twenty nine million houses in the US, only forty two percent had central heating systems in them and that only about ten percent were fueled by petroleum. Most homes, fifty four percent, still used coal or coke.⁴⁹ Fuel heating was much more efficient compared to coal and provided greater heat - one of the reasons fuel has completely overtaken coal today. The barracks were also another commodity which grew out of the war. They were usually made of inexpensive and easy to assemble steel, about sixteen feet by thirty six feet, covering about five hundred sixteen square feet. About 150,000 to 170,000 barracks were manufactured. Most of them were sold to the public after the war for \$1,000 each to be used for shelter and storage.⁵⁰

Despite the greater risk of getting the flu while in the poorly managed barracks, Corbovic now had discretionary income to purchase expensive photos he often had taken of himself. He seemed to have a great interest in having his photos taken. He once asked Dana: "have you had them pictures developed yet? Send me all of them no matter how lousy they come out, and also send me the blue box with my other pictures."⁵¹ Photography is one area where Corbovic writes with great enthusiasm and detail. He reported to her every time he had a chance to have "some pictures taken" or received "an offer for a free photograph."⁵² Corbovic's reports that photography was quite costly seem reasonable since color photography had only been introduced a decade earlier. Although black and white photography existed for quite some time before,

⁴⁹ Howard G. Brunzman & Dave Lowery, "The 1940 Housing Census," *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 89-93, in JSTOR Database. Retrieved from: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=15489000%28194302%2919%3A1%3C89%3AFFT1CO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H>. Accessed on April 02, 2007.

⁵⁰ US Military: www.military.com/. Accessed on April 10, 2007.

⁵¹ Letter One. p. 2.

⁵² Corbovic, Letter Five, p. 1, Sent from Fairfield, Ohio, addressed to Dana Corbovic from San Francisco, California. Dated January 31, 1944.

German color film, Agfacolor, was only introduced in 1932 and the American Kodak followed three years later.⁵³ Cost notwithstanding, Corbovic did not hesitate to get “a set of six poses” which allowed him to “have quite a collection of proofs to choose from.”⁵⁴

The final historical detail in Corbovic’s letters has to do with the use of the typewriter. Even though it was one of Corbovic’ ways of wasting time, having a typewriter for his personal use was indeed a luxury. For instance, except for his letters, none of the other almost one hundred letters in the family’s collection were typed. The Underwood brand was the most common typewriter at the time and sold over four million typewriters during the first three decades of the twentieth century alone.⁵⁵ Underwood was also the long time standard typewriter for almost all government agencies and the military.⁵⁶ The typewriter could also have been an Oliver, which was the second most common typewriter after the Underwood, and which sold about one million during about the same period.⁵⁷ Besides the luxury of the best brand, having a typewritten letter must have been remarkable for the Corbovic family and a convenient method of correspondence for Corbovic.

Corbovic’s letters are an important historical wartime record. They offer a firsthand account of a critical historical era and a realistic portrayal of some of the Second World War’s events, ambitions, and concerns. The letters inform the reader about an average middle class family whose members have, just like America itself, found themselves in the middle of an overwhelming war. But once closely examined, an attentive reader can see a family torn between the benefit of economic gain and the real threat of loosing a dear life; between its quest for

⁵³ WWII In Color: History of Color Photography, [online] <http://www.ww2incolor.com/history-of-color-photography.html>. Accessed on April 16, 2007.

⁵⁴ Letter One, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Early Office Museum: The Earliest Writing Machines, [Online], retrieved from <http://www.officemuseum.com/typewriter.htm>. Accessed April 7, 2007.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

economic survival and its faithfulness to its unity. The family's deep sympathy is real and is suggestive of a deep divide from within between America's great aspiration for socioeconomic success and the threat to its safety while in pursuit of that goal. The letters belong to a young soldier and reveal an unrefined writing style which is suggestive of both vulnerable youth and shattered thoughts trying to make sense of the war. The letters are also an exemplary historical record beyond Corbovic's own experience. They tell of the personal experience of the young soldiers whose fate, or more accurately, the decision of others to go to war puts them on the war stage, deeply affects their lives and the lives of their families. The letters inform us of the often unspoken struggle of young military recruits and their effort to cope with their circumstances where their own lives are often put on hold and their youth stolen from them. Perhaps, Corbovic wrote to his sister out of boredom and in search for something to take his mind off the army life, the dull scenes of the gothic barracks, and the still and motionless atmosphere around him. His letters were his sole refuge and connection with the outside world. Now, six decades later, those same letters become window of opportunity for him to be remembered and for his experience to give insight to those who wish to consider it and perhaps learn from it.

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