

WW II V-Mail

By Debbie Kmetz

This article appeared in the DCHS Newsletter as part of the *Records Center Highlights* series. The series features noteworthy pieces and little known treasures found in Dane County Historical Society's Otto Schroeder Records Center.

It is a modest 8 ½" x 11" red, bound volume almost an inch thick. Gold letters on the cover read *V-Mail Edition: The Wisconsin State Journal, 1943-1945*. The Publisher's Note in the front of the volume reveals that the book is an original file of all of the newspaper's World War II V-Mail sent overseas to service men and women, and later bound in a limited edition of only six copies. The Dane County Historical Society owns copy Number 1, donated by Don Anderson, publisher of the *Wisconsin State Journal* during the war years.

In the Publisher's Note, Anderson explains that during World War II, newspapers throughout the United States printed condensed versions of local news and sent them as V-Mails to those in the service overseas. But only the *Wisconsin State Journal* and a few others continued publication from early in the war until after the peace. For almost two and a half years – March 22, 1943 to October 27, 1945 – the *Wisconsin State Journal* sought to offer those in the armed forces a tie to home. The first issue promised, "We'll tell you about the weather, and who's doing what and what the crops are like, and how rationing affects us." The newspaper was true to its word.

Each of the weekly newspaper digests was printed in black ink on a V-Mail form in which instructions appeared in red ink. A red circle for a censor's stamp marked the upper left hand corner. The form provided space for approximately 40 lines of type

(CENSOR'S STAMP)	SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2	(Sender's complete address above)
OVERSEAS V-Mail Edition V * The Wisconsin State Journal * V Madison, Wis. Nov. 8, 1943		
ON HOME FRONT		
City and suburban area residents have contributed \$383,991 or 96% of the \$400,000 War Chest quota . . . A 14-year-old boy, picked up trying to buy \$22 worth of war stamps, was turned over to probation authorities—police said the youth had stolen \$40.00 . . . Some 2,000 high schoolers held a noisy but comparatively damageless University Homecoming compared to last year's . . . County Highway M, from Highway 14 near Oregon to Middleton via Verona, surveyed as possible southwest outer beltline . . . First National bank got citation from Sec. of Treas. Morgenthau for service in sale of more than \$25,000,000 in war bonds.		
LAW TAKES STATE JOB		
Mayor Law appointed chairman of Wis. highway commission to succeed the late William Armstrong, Racine; to stay mayor 'til Dec. 1 to finish work on '44 budget. Gov. Goodland charged that the legislature showed a desire to serve its interest first, the state last; that it was susceptible to lobbyists; that it killed bills without regard to merit; and that it apparently found his economy ideas old-fashioned . . . Sen. Byrnes (R-Green Bay) and Assemblyman Thompson (R-Richland Center), legislative leaders, denied the charges, called the report an "insult."		
DEATHS		
Chauncey E. Blake, 62, leading attorney, ex U. S. court commissioner, 1016 Sherman ave. . . Paul F. Niebuhr, 60, 1127 E. Gorham St., veteran city water Dept. employee, member of pioneer family . . . Hugh J. Home-wood, 49, Maple Bluff, Gisholt Machine Co. treasurer, suicide . . . Chief Petty Officer William P. McPherson, 62, 2434 Commonwealth Ave., navy veteran.		
PEOPLE		
A Dane county soldier serving overseas sent \$100 to county juvenile authorities to aid an unwed mother or mothers; he used to be interested in Children's Aid society . . . We learned that Lieut. Col. Philip F. LaFollette, ex-governor, is on Gen. MacArthur's public relations staff; Col. McCormick of Chi-Trib has said a congressional investigation is in order because La Follette's letters to McCormick have been censored . . . Ely Culbertson spoke at Union on his world federation peace plan . . . Home after 3 years in the Pacific, Tech. Sgt. George Lynch, 513 N. 6th., who has won 5 medals for air exploits, noticed 2 big changes—shorter skirts and use of ration books . . . And Gordon Gardner, aviation chief radioman, aerial gunner in dive bomber which sank 1st Jap ship in Coral sea battle, and his brother, Staff Sgt. Royal Gardner, visited mother, Mrs. Daisy Gardner, 15 W. Doty		
promising not to sneak into Badger football game like they did when kids . . . Another Madison cousin of Nazi Norway Puppet Vidkun Quisling has gone to war—He's Dr. Rolf Quisling, Lieut. in naval medical corps, twin brother of Capt. Gunnar Quisling, in army medical corps. Atty. James D. McDonald appointed divorce counsel . . . Journal Publisher Don Anderson, came back from real army show at Ft. Knox convinced that the war won't be quick or easy, but that the American soldier is best trained and equipped in the world . . . Amelia Yaeger elected vice-pres. Wis. Federation of Teachers . . . John Mathews elected master councillor of Order of DeMolay.		
AT UNIVERSITY		
Faculty approved a single 6-week summer session for '44 . . . Regents refused appointment of Walter W. Wilcox as ag. economics prof. pending investigation of his connection with oleomargarine controversy at Iowa State . . . Problem of additional library facilities left to bldg. committee . . . Regents approved creation of a special committee to start plans for UW centennial celebration in 1949 . . . Lieut. (jg) James Watrous won State Journal's award for water color painting at 10th Wis. Salon of Art; Alfred Sessler, Milwaukee, won award of merit for most outstanding work, an oil, also sculpture award when Judge Thomas Hart Benton found no sculpture worthy of prize . . . Oscar Mayer and Co. gave \$10,000 to UW for research in college of ag . . . The song, "Pioneers of Wisconsin," composed especially for Wis. by Fritz Kreisler, renowned violinist, and with words by Pres. Dykstra, had premiere at Homecoming.		
SPORTS		
The Badgers lost to Northwestern, but by 41 to 0, as Otto Graham put on the Homecoming show, scoring 27 points himself and tossing for another touchdown. Center Joe Keenan, Guard Lester Zych, and Backs John Kuenzler and Ray Dooney stood out for the Badgers . . . Michigan is next for Wis., and what Harry wouldn't give to have Hirsch and other lend-lease Badgers now of the Wolves playing for him . . . Other scores: Michigan 23, Indiana 6; Illinois 19, Iowa 10; Purdue 14, Minnesota 7; Notre Dame 26, Army 0; Great Lakes 12, Camp Grant 0; Iowa Preflight 46, Marquette 19; High school: West 6, Beloit 0; Wisconsin high 32, Ft. Atkinson 0; Edgewood 25, Mil. Country Day 7 . . . Johnny Kotz named to College All-Stars who will play Wash. Bears, pro champs, Dec. 3 . . . Schwoglers Alleys set new season 3-game record with 3,065; Fauerbach Beer, led by Sgt. Ed Easter's 691, set single game record of 1,120; Mel Schwogler took 3rd in Bomar diamond medal classic at Chicago with 1,672.		
REPLY BY V - MAIL		
HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?		
POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT PERMIT NO. 1 THE WISCONSIN STATE		

in two columns – 500 to 600 words. Standard headlines often included: “Weather Notes,” “Sports,” “Names in News,” “Home Front,” “Servicemen Department,” “Around Here,” and “Deaths.” Sometimes custom headlines highlighted special topics. “City Chickens” introduced the news that “Eleven residents in suburban villages given right to keep chickens on property,” a response to meat rationing.

The newspaper sought to keep service people abreast of how the war was affecting those at home. Many articles reported on rationing and its effects. The March 29, 1943 issue observed “Rationing has brought a big spurt in garden interest, and every vacant lot in town is going to sprout peas and radishes this summer. A couple was arrested in Stoughton for raiding an icebox, stripping all the meat off a ham, but leaving the bone.”

Gas rationing resulted in an increase in riders on buses and the March 13, 1944 V-Mail carried the note that “Westmorland, Sunset Village, Pilgrim Village, and Arlington Heights asked PSC provide better bus service.”

Yet there was often humor involved, as if to acknowledge that the hardship at home was little compared to the conditions faced by those in the war. The July 19, 1943 V-Mail comments “Such things as steaks not only are no longer something of memory; they’re subjects of editorials.” Shortages even included liquor, and the August 2, 1943 issue says “Shortage of help and hootch compels 25 taverns here to close one day a week ...”

The issues also provided service people with a sense of daily life at home: social activities, state and local government issues, law enforcement activities, fishing reports and sports. The July 26, 1943 issue observed that “They had a large crowd out at the Skare farm, about two miles east of McFarland, for the picnic of the Madison Sons of Norway lodge.” The June 7, 1943 issue reported “Two more townships, Burke and Westport, refused to let Madison’s garbage come in.”

The headline “The Glorious Fourth” in the July 6, 1943 issue brought this news. “It was quite a holiday weekend, with plenty of people having time off from Saturday noon until Tuesday morning. Trains and buses were packed with folks going and coming, and there was fairly heavy auto traffic, too. ... Fifteen thousand spectators saw the Independence day parade on Capitol square. It featured jalopies destined for the scrap heap, with the Shrine camels, bands, floats, and uniformed marchers for good measure. ... Holiday sports events included baseball, golf and boat races. ... Bowman dairy and Riley won Industrial league ball games.”

The V-Mails also communicated to the service personnel the support of those back home. There are many notices and updates about war bond drives, E flag awards, relief efforts – even news about a penny carnival held by eleven children at Spring and Mills Streets in Madison. They raised \$31.53 and gave it to the Red Cross. The Oct. 4, 1943 V-Mail issue reports “At end of third war loan drive Dane county had passed its \$12,040,500 quota with \$13,979,963, and happily kept on buying ... Examples: Boy Scout Troop 32, with East Side Business Men’s assn., sold more than \$90,000 worth in one-day rally at Schenk’s corners ... Local 1404, United Steel Workers of America at Gisholt, bought \$1,000 worth ...” Two weeks later an issue reports “A young bride-to-be gave a 25-pound bag full of old silk and nylon stockings for salvage when applying for a marriage license ...”

Initially written to communicate with service personnel across thousands of miles, the V-Mails also provide valuable information about the past for readers today. A researcher interested in the labor shortages and role of women during World War II will find fascinating references. The

April 12, 1943 issue observes “The manpower shortage has real[ly] hit Madison. Madison Bus Company is going to try women drivers.” Six months later, an October V-Mail reads “Betty Cass notes a sign in University ave. restaurant HELP WANTED – ANYBODY!”

By May 29, 1944, the news includes “Gisholt advertised for women to help in foundry.” And from the Jan. 22, 1945 issue, readers learned “Story revealed that 3,000 city women could fill job vacancies, battery-making, meat-processing, especially.”

The V-Mails also carried news about the soldiers themselves. The Jan. 22, 1945 issue honors “Sgt. T.O. Olson, Cambridge, awarded Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for Anzio bravery, credited with saving his company from annihilation...”

The May 5, 1945 issue offers this: “T/5 Paul Dalton, 615 N. Henry, described how a torn sheet laid out as an SOS in Zeigenhain prison camp brought rescue to him & others. Once a fellow prisoner of (Pfc. Francis) Mielcarek, he also confirmed starvation attempts.”

As the V-Mails extend into 1945, coverage includes end of the war celebrations. The V-Mails also start to address the effects that the returning G.I.s will have on the area. The Sept. 1, 1945 issue states “State Journal employment series showed Oscar Mayer & Co. planning 20% increase in employment above normal; Red Dot Foods planning expansion; Ray-O-Vac needing more workers as its peacetime potential zoomed.” Recognizing that many returning soldiers would have grown up on farms, the Oct. 23, 44 issue reports “New veterans returning to farms can find better setup than dads did, officials said, if they utilize state & federal help now being planned.”

This fascinating collection of correspondence offers insight into the war years from the perspective of those at home.

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