

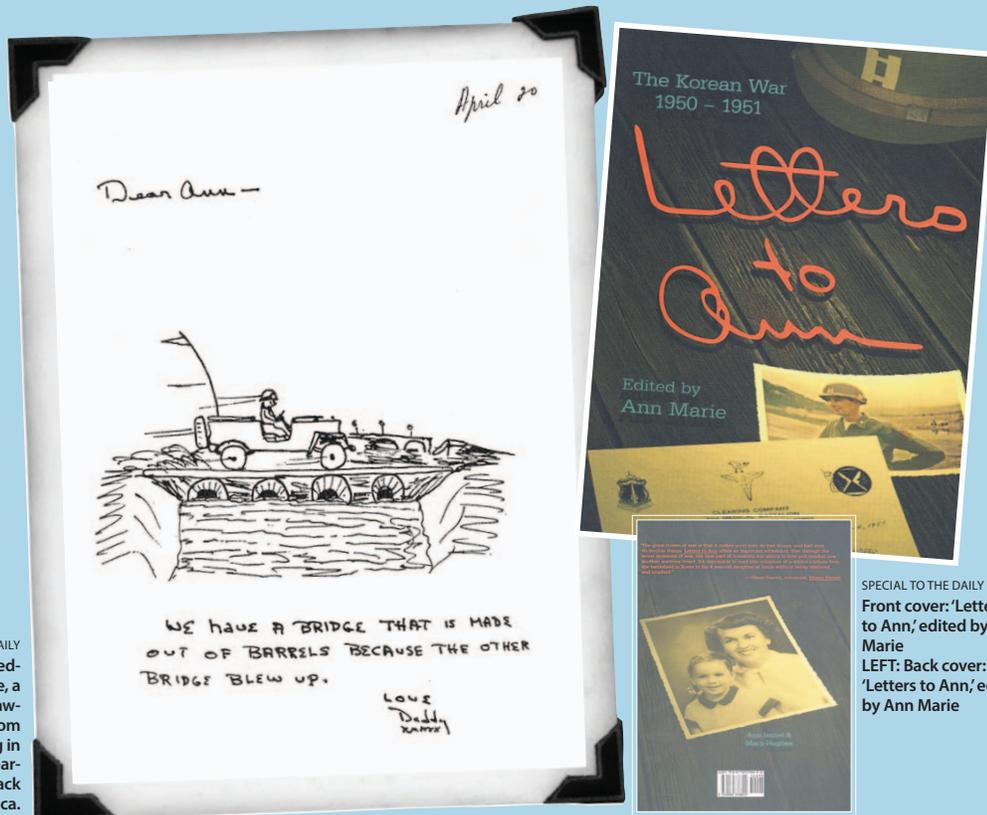
DISCOVER



A father's telling of the 'Forgotten War'

'Letters to Ann' puts a human face on one soldier fighting the Korean War

by KARINA WETHERBEE



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY
'Letters to Ann,' edited by Ann Marie, a collection of drawings and letters from a father serving in Korea to his 4-year-old daughter back home in America.

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY
Front cover: 'Letters to Ann,' edited by Ann Marie
LEFT: Back cover: 'Letters to Ann,' edited by Ann Marie

THE KOREAN WAR IS OFTEN CALLED THE "FORGOTTEN WAR," AS IT TOOK PLACE SO CLOSELY ON THE HEELS OF WORLD WAR II AND IT PLAYED OUT A WORLD AWAY FROM AMERICA'S SHORES.

To those who experienced the war, firsthand or as a family member, it is, of course, anything but forgotten.

Written remembrances of wars are most often grim and dramatic, as is natural, given the subject, and inherently the topic of war is not handled lightly. It is refreshing, though, to see a perspective on war such as editor Ann Marie (not the Ann of the letters) has assembled in "Letters to Ann," a collection of drawings and letters from a father serving in Korea to his 4-year-old daughter back home in America.

Delightful, hand-drawn sketches,

often humorous, often overflowing with love and longing, fill this picture book in a unique example of how war reaches deeply into the fabric of a family, linking the soldier with his or her support group back home. Interspersed with the drawings are telegrams, maps, photos and explanations of the time line of the war as it relates to the young soldier on duty as the front lines ebb and flow, through staggering heat and bitter winter cold.

Images of "M*A*S*H" come to mind as Capt. John Hughes describes the deeply serious subject of war in such a manner as to reassure and charm his young daughter, who remains safe and ignorant of the true realities of the conflict. Instead, we hear the father's gentle reprimands to Ann to stop wetting her bed and to obey her mother's rules.

We see, also, light-hearted sketches of

events that must surely have been traumatic, uncomfortable or disconcerting to the father as he experienced them, but which are rendered in such a way as to tell the story of his days in a manner comprehensible to such an innocent. For instance, the letters describe many Korean children whom the father encounters, and his descriptions of them to his daughter are heart-warming and certainly must have served to help him feel closer to his own child so far away.

The letters are presented chronologically, which provides fascinating insight into the mental state of the soldier, as the sketches become rougher and hastier and the handwriting sloppier and riddled with typos as time progresses and the war becomes more entrenched and more bitterly fought.

Throughout, though, a positive theme

is maintained, as Capt. Hughes never loses sight of the innocence of his reader. In the style of the poignant movie "Life Is Beautiful," in which a father lovingly makes his son's experience in a Nazi concentration camp bearable through humor, similarly does this father keep things light for the sake of his daughter, and underneath the drawings and the jokes runs a deep thread of comfort and connection that must have been vital to the soldier's own survival. Present, too, though muted and apparent in the words not said, is the behemoth of war, which this father will feel the weight of for the rest of his life.

Overall, the collection of letters is unique and valuable, giving a vivid human face to the life of one soldier among thousands from the "Forgotten War."