

The World of *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*



A serviceman and his sweetheart - one of millions of couples whose relationships were shaped by wartime distance.

A closer look at the history surrounding Jack and Louise: the war abroad, the home front, Tampa Bay's transformation, and the letters that carried love and hope across extraordinary distances.

WORLD WAR II TIMELINE

From the outbreak of war through surrender.

TAMPA BAY AT WAR

How the conflict transformed our own community.

SERVICE & THE HOME FRONT

The people, branches, and industries behind the effort.

LIBERATION & REMEMBRANCE

Jewish soldiers, survivors, and the camps' liberation.

History, Made Personal

Dear Jack, Dear Louise unfolds through letters exchanged during World War II - a time when millions of people depended on the written word to sustain relationships across military bases, oceans, and continents.

The scale of the war is almost impossible to comprehend. The play invites us to experience that history through two individual voices: a reserved Army doctor and an aspiring performer discovering one another sentence by sentence. Their humor, uncertainty, longing, and hope remind us that history is never only a sequence of battles and dates. It is also made of private lives, interrupted plans, and envelopes people waited desperately to receive.

World War II at a Glance

The conflict began in Europe in 1939 and grew into a global war involving more than thirty nations. The selected events below provide context for the world in which Jack and Louise began writing.

1939**War begins in Europe**

- September 1: Germany invades Poland.
- September 3: Britain and France declare war on Germany.

1940**The Axis advances**

- Germany invades Denmark, Norway, France, and the Low Countries.
- The evacuation at Dunkirk rescues hundreds of thousands of Allied troops.
- The Battle of Britain prevents Germany from gaining air superiority over Britain.

1941**The conflict becomes global**

- March 11: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Lend-Lease Act.
- December 7: Japan attacks Pearl Harbor.
- December 8: The United States declares war on Japan and enters World War II.

1942-43**The war begins to turn**

- The United States wins a decisive victory at the Battle of Midway.
- Allied forces advance through North Africa and invade Sicily and Italy.
- German forces surrender at Stalingrad, halting the Nazi advance in the East.

1944**The liberation of Europe begins**

- June 6: Allied forces land in Normandy on D-Day.
- August 25: Paris is liberated.
- Allied forces continue advancing from the west while Soviet forces advance from the east.

1945**Liberation and surrender**

- Allied troops liberate concentration camps across Europe.
- May 8: Victory in Europe Day marks Germany's unconditional surrender.
- September 2: Japan formally surrenders, ending World War II.



Crowds celebrate the announcement of Nazi Germany's surrender in May 1945.

Tampa Bay During World War II

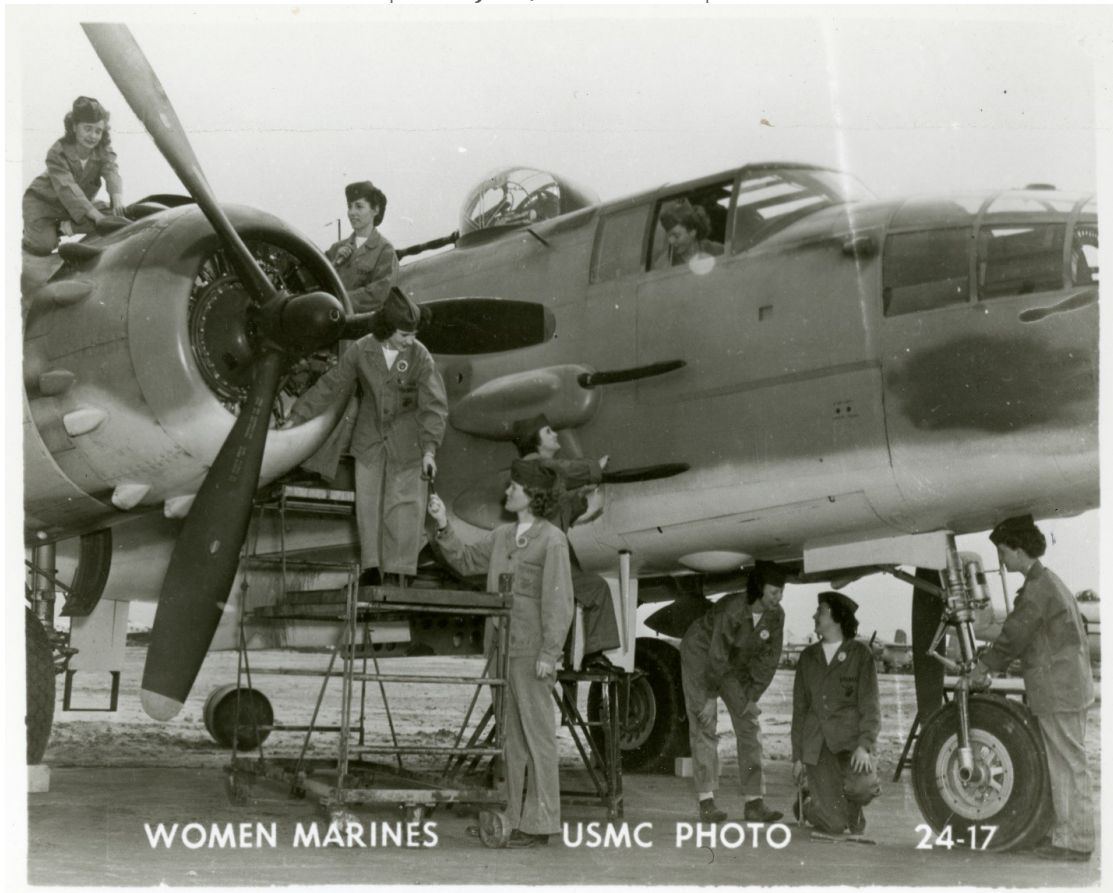
World War II transformed Tampa Bay from a growing coastal community into an important center of military training, shipping, and wartime industry.

MacDill Field

Construction of MacDill Field began in 1939. During the war, it became a major training center for bomber crews, including those flying the B-17 Flying Fortress and B-26 Marauder. Training was intensive and dangerous, and military aircraft crashes occurred in the bay and across the surrounding region.

The Port and the Shipyards

Tampa's port and shipyards helped construct, repair, and supply military and cargo vessels. As growing numbers of men entered military service, women assumed industrial and technical jobs traditionally held by men, becoming part of the nationwide workforce represented by "Rosie the Riveter."



Members of the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve work around a B-25 Mitchell bomber during World War II.

War Close to Home

German U-boats operated in the Gulf of Mexico and along the Atlantic coast, attacking merchant and supply ships. Tampa-area residents observed blackout restrictions intended to prevent coastal lights from helping enemy submarines identify vessels offshore. Tar, oil, and wreckage from attacked ships sometimes washed onto Florida beaches.

Daily Life

Families faced rationing of gasoline, food, rubber, and other materials. Residents bought war bonds, collected scrap metal, volunteered, and adjusted their everyday lives to support those serving overseas. Local theaters and public gatherings became important places for entertainment, fundraising, and community connection.

Service and the Home Front

During World War II, Americans served principally in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Army Air Forces. Each branch performed a distinct role, but the war effort depended equally on logistics, medicine, communications, transportation, manufacturing, and the labor of civilians at home.

ARMY	The nation's principal land-based service and its largest military branch during the war.
NAVY	Protected shipping routes and fought major naval campaigns in the Atlantic and Pacific.
MARINE CORPS	An expeditionary force closely associated with amphibious campaigns across the Pacific.
COAST GUARD	Protected American shores, escorted convoys, operated landing craft, and served as part of the Navy during wartime.
ARMY AIR FORCES	Conducted American military aviation operations. The independent U.S. Air Force was established in 1947.

Entertainment as Service

The Stage Door Canteen in New York offered food, music, dancing, and companionship to Allied servicemen. Performers, volunteers, and civilians created a space where military personnel could briefly step away from the pressures of wartime service.



The 1943 film Stage Door Canteen and a crowded wartime performance at the original New York canteen.

Jewish Soldiers and the Liberation of the Camps

As Allied forces advanced across Europe in 1944 and 1945, they discovered and liberated Nazi concentration camps. The encounters forced soldiers and the wider world to confront the enormous scale of the Holocaust.

Jewish American, British, Soviet, and other Allied soldiers played a particularly meaningful role in assisting survivors. Some spoke Yiddish or Hebrew, allowing them to communicate immediately with people who had endured years of persecution, imprisonment, and isolation. Soldiers offered food, clothing, medical care, religious materials, and help searching for surviving relatives.

Military personnel photographed the camps and recorded eyewitness accounts, helping reveal Nazi atrocities to the world. Their evidence later contributed to the prosecution of war criminals. Jewish service members also helped survivors begin rebuilding religious and communal life within displaced-persons camps.



Liberated Jewish survivors and Jewish U.S. Army soldiers gather for a Shavuot service led by Army Chaplain Rabbi Herschel Schachter at Buchenwald, May 18, 1945.

“The service became a powerful moment of mourning, survival, faith, and renewal.”

Selected Liberation Dates

- July 23-24, 1944 - Lublin-Majdanek liberated by Soviet forces
- January 27, 1945 - Auschwitz-Birkenau liberated by Soviet forces
- April 11, 1945 - Buchenwald liberated by U.S. forces
- April 15, 1945 - Bergen-Belsen liberated by British forces
- April 29, 1945 - Dachau liberated by U.S. forces
- May 5, 1945 - Mauthausen liberated by U.S. forces
- May 8, 1945 - Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender becomes official

Letters Across the Distance

For military personnel and the people waiting at home, mail was a lifeline. A letter might carry ordinary news, romantic possibility, family reassurance, fear disguised as humor, or a future imagined in the midst of uncertainty.

Wartime correspondence was shaped by delays, censorship, changing assignments, and the knowledge that any letter might arrive after circumstances had already changed. Yet those pages gave people a way to remain present in one another's lives. In *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*, the act of writing becomes an act of trust - and gradually, an act of love.



Servicemen and civilians celebrate together as the war in Europe comes to an end.

Continue Exploring

These organizations preserve photographs, testimony, documents, and artifacts that illuminate the history surrounding the play.

<u>United States Holocaust Memorial Museum</u> Holocaust history, survivor testimony, and educational resources.	<u>The National WWII Museum</u> Research, collections, and stories from the war abroad and at home.
<u>National Archives</u> Military records, photographs, films, and government documents.	<u>Library of Congress</u> Historic newspapers, letters, photographs, oral histories, and maps.
<u>Tampa Bay History Center</u> Resources on Tampa and Hillsborough County during World War II.	<u>American Victory Ship & Museum</u> A preserved World War II-era cargo ship located in downtown Tampa.

History, One Letter at a Time

The war changed the world. Jack and Louise remind us that even within history's largest events, two people can still find one another.

COME TOGETHER WITH TAMPAREP.