

**MYRA STRACHNER GERSHKOFF  
PAPERS, 1941-1945****SC 20575**

**QUANTITY:** 8 boxes (2.0 cubic ft.)  
**ACCESS:** Open to research. Box 7 is stored in the vault. Two business days notice required for retrieval.  
**ACQUISITION:** Gift of Myra Strachner Gershkoff, October 8, 1992; accretion donated by Gershkoff family, April 2007. These donations included three-dimensional artifacts that were transferred to the New York State Museum.  
**PROCESSED BY:** Laura Cohen, Student Intern, State University of New York at Albany, January 1994.

**Scope and Contents Note:**

These papers are comprised of approximately 700 letters between Myra Strachner and Private First Class (PFC) Bernard (Bernie) Staller during World War II. The earliest letter, dated January 23, 1941, was written by Bernie when he and Myra were 15 years old. Though they both lived in the Bronx, they felt the need to communicate to each other in writing. These letters express their early attraction to each other. Bernie interrupted his studies at the City College of New York when he was inducted into the Army in February 1944, and was sent to Fort Dix. The correspondence becomes voluminous as the couple often wrote to each other daily, and sometimes more than once a day. Myra was living at home in the Bronx with her parents and sister while attending New York University. Her letters describe her life as a student, as well as her relationships with her family and friends. She freely and eloquently expresses her feelings, ideas and hopes. She comments on the news, and quotes from books and poetry. Of particular note are Myra's comments on the philosophy courses taught by Sidney Hook. She describes his teaching methods, opinions, and warm interest in her.

In March 1944, Bernie was transferred to Camp Wolters, Texas, for basic training. He was assigned to an anti-tank unit in the 53rd Infantry Battalion, 4th Platoon. His letters describe in detail his daily routine and training exercises, as well as his social life off base. Bernie's letters indicate that he adjusted well to army life, enjoying the routine and making friends. Bernie completed basic training in July 1944, and was sent to Camp Van Dorn in Mississippi. He requested placement in an anti-tank company, and was assigned to Company B of the 255th Regiment, 63rd Division of the 4th Army. The 63rd Division was known as the Blood and Fire division. Bernie's letters offer detailed descriptions of life in camp, the regulations, training exercises, work details, and social life. In November 1944, Bernie was promoted to Private First Class and shipped to France, where his division was attached to the 7th Army. His letters provide excellent descriptions of infantry life during the final months of the war. He tells of life in a foxhole, various billeting arrangements, army rations, and conditions in the local towns. Bernie

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describes his involvement in defensive actions and in patrols on the front lines.

Bernie's last letter is dated March 14, 1945. Three weeks later, he was reported missing in action. Over the following week, Myra continued to write to him, hopeful that he was safe. Her last letter is dated April 15, 1945. The following day, the Staller family was informed that Bernie had been killed on March 18 on the Siegfried Line in a German artillery barrage. Myra's letters to Bernie between February and April 1945, were returned to her unopened and marked "Deceased". Thereafter Myra received letters from Bernie's army friends, who tell of the circumstances of Bernie's death and express their sympathy.

These papers include typed transcripts of all the couple's letters from 1941 to 1945 prepared by Myra Strachner Gershkoff, as well as material from Myra's scrapbook and a recording of Bernie's voice. Also included are 67 photographs, most relating to Bernie's army career. A few of the original letters are missing. Myra's last letter to Bernie was published in the book, *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front*, edited by Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), page 237.

These papers contain an exceptional group of letters. Myra and Bernie were natural writers, and their letters are articulate, humorous and thoughtful. They explore their feelings toward each other, discuss their views on life, relive memories, exchange dreams. Both Myra and Bernie are of Jewish background, and occasionally they relate experiences and opinions that explore the meaning of their faith in their lives. The tone of the writing is far more mature than their years. The letters are rich in the details of both army life and the home front during World War II. They offer a poignant view of the human cost of war.

### Container List

Box 7 is stored in the vault. Two business days notice required for retrieval.

Box	Folder	Item	Contents
			<b>Letters, 1941-1945</b>
1	1		1941-1943
1	2		February 1944
1	3		February 1944
1	4		March 1944
1	5		March 1944
2	1		April 1944
2	2		April 1944
2	3		May 1944
2	4		May 1944
2	5		June 1944
3	1		June 1944
3	2		July 1944

3	3		August 1944
3	4		August 1944
3	5		September 1944
4	1		September 1944
4	2		October 1944
4	3		October 1944
4	4		November 1944
4	5		December 1944
4	6		January 1945
5	1		February 1945
5	2		March 1945
5	3		February-April 1945. From Myra, returned unopened and marked "Deceased"
5	4		May-June 1945. From Bernie's army friends
5	5		Transcripts of letters, February-May 1944
5	6		Transcripts of letters, May-October, 1944
5	7		Transcripts of letters, October 1944-April 1945
			<b>Photographs</b>
6	1	1	Myra Strachner, late 1944 or early 1945
6	1	2	Bernie Staller, USA - late 1944
6	1	3	U.S. Military Cemetery, St. Avold, France
6	1	4	1939 Public School Graduation
6	1	5	Bernie - far right, 5/12/40
6	1	6	Bernie and his parents, 1941
6	1	7	Bernie, 1941
6	1	8	September 1942, Bernie and Myra, corner of Unionport Rd
6	1	9	6/43 H.S. Grad., James Monroe H.S.
6	1	10	Bernie Staller
6	1	11	James Monroe H.S. Track Team?
6	2	12	Bernie Staller, 6/43
6	2	13	Staten Island, Spring 1943
6	2	14	Staten Island. When was it?
6	2	15	Staten Island, May 1943
6	2	16	Staten Island, Spring 1943
6	2	17	Staten Island, May 1943
6	2	18	Staten Island
6	3	19	Day before Bernie was inducted into the Army, February 1944
6	3	20	Parkchester, The Bronx
6	3	21	Parkchester, The Bronx, 1944
6	3	22	Feb. 1944 - taken by Bernie
6	3	23	2/44, Myra and Bernie

6	3	24	Myra and Bernie
6	4	25	First time home from the army
6	4	26	Bernie Staller
6	4	27	Weekend pass from Ft. Dix, March 1944
6	4	28	Bernie Staller, gas mask
6	4	29	Camp Wolters, Texas, 4/44
6	4	30	Gun, layout, helmet, Camp Wolters, Texas
6	4	31	Camp Wolters, 4/44
6	4	32	Camp Wolters, 4/44
6	4	33	Camp Wolters
6	4	34	Camp Wolters
6	4	35	Sad Sack
6	4	36	4/44, Bernie Staller
6	4	37	K.P. Again!
6	5	38	Bernie Staller, color
6	5	39	Orchard Beach - This is everything I want, Furlough, 1944
6	5	40	Orchard Beach, Curly locks!
6	5	41	1945 - Atlantic City, April, 1945, Before the telegram
6	5	42	Baton Rouge, LA. Left - Howie Sarner, Center - Bernie Staller, Right-Zinker
6	5	43	Baton Rouge, LA, Bernie Staller, ?
6	5	44	Doesn't he look like a soldier?
6	5	45	Riding horseback
6	5	46	You figure it out!
6	5	47	Grace & Beauty
6	6	48	See no Evil
6	6	49	After this picture was snapped
6	6	50	Ten Minute Break!
6	6	51	Natchez, Miss. Bernie Staller, Irene Wooten
6	6	52	Natchez, Miss. Left - Christine, Center - Bernie Staller, Right - Irene
6	6		Wooten
6	6	53	Natchez, Miss. Bernie Staller
6	6	54	Bernie Staller and friend (reclining)
6	6	55	Bernie Staller and friend (standing)
6	6	56	Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi, 1944. Last pictures of Bernie
6	6	57	Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi, 1944. Last pictures of Bernie
6	6	58	Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi, 1944. Last pictures of Bernie
6	6	59	Myra, Nov. 1944
6	7	60	Photograph enclosed with letter from Myra Strachner, 7/31/44
6	7	61	Photograph enclosed with letter from Myra Strachner, April 6, 1945, Catch me!

6	7	62	I look skinny, huh?
6	7	63	I look fat in this one
6	7	64	I almost took this outside the men's room
6	7	65	I'm really much prettier than this
6	7	66	Like the hairdo?
6	7	67	Honest, it's all me!
6	8		Ephemera, from Myra Strachner's scrapbook
			<b>Audio tapes and sound recordings</b> (stored in the vault)
7		1	1 sound disc: analog, 78 rpm, mono. Bernie Staller, 1944
7		2	1 sound cassette: 3 7/8 x 2 1/2 in., 1/4 in. tape. Copy of disc. – Missing 7/00
7		3	1 sound tape reel: 7 in., 1/2 in. tape. Copy of disc. – Missing 7/00
			<b>Accretion donated by Gershkoff family, April 2007</b>
8	1		Diploma of Bernard Staller from James Monroe High School, Bronx, N.Y. , June 1943
8	2		Newsletter of a local Jewish youth club with tributes to Bernard Staller, April 1946
8	3		<i>The Crestonian</i> , P.S. 79 The Bronx, June 1946 (includes a tribute to Bernard Staller, pp.4-5)
8	4		Life insurance policy papers, 1944-1945
8	5		Papers from the United States War Department regarding the burial site of Bernard Staller and awarding of the Purple Heart, 1945
EL	1		Certificate from the President of the United States in memory of Bernard Staller's service of his country, March 1945
EL	2		Certificate of Purple Heart Award, June 7, 1945

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