A week before the battle of Bull Run Sullivan Ballou, a Major in the 2nd Rhode Island Volunteers, wrote home to his wife in Smithfield.

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| July 14,1861 Camp Clark, Washington DCDear Sarah:The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days - perhaps tomorrow. And lest I should not be able to write you again I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I am no more.I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing - perfectly willing - to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt.Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but omnipotence can break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly with all those chains to the battlefield. The memory of all the blissful moments I have enjoyed with you come crowding over me, and I feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that I have enjoyed them for so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes and future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and see our boys grown up to honorable manhood around us.If I do not return, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I loved you, nor that when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name...Forgive my many faults, and the many pains I have caused you. How thoughtless, how foolish I have sometimes been!...But, 0 Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they love, I shall always be with you, in the brightest day and in the darkest night... always, always. And when the soft breeze fans your cheek, it shall be my breath, or the cool air your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by.Sarah do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again...Sullivan Ballou was killed a week later at the 1st Battle of Bull Run. |

\*Further information about the Sullivan Ballou letter:

Sullivan Ballou grew up in Rhode Island. His own father died when Sullivan was 14; thus he understood in a most poignant way what it would mean for his own sons to lose their father. While growing up Sullivan had to work at various times to support his family, but he fought hard to acquire an education. After attending public schools, he went to Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts and attended Brown University for two years. He was admitted to the Rhode Island Bar in 1853. A passionate Republican, and ardent supporter of Lincoln, Sullivan naturally gravitated to politics. (The second paragraph of the letter in many ways foreshadows the Gettysburg Address.) He was elected as clerk of the Rhode Island House of Representatives. By 1857 he was so well respected that he was chosen Speaker of the House. While his further forays into politics were for the moment stymied, his law practice flourished. He married Sarah Hart Shumway in 1855. He died after his leg was amputated following the battle of Bull Run.
His wife never remarried. As Sullivan predicted, Sarah was able to successfully raise their two sons; one graduated from Brown University and became a lawyer like his father.

While Sullivan mailed other letters to his wife, this one was found in his trunk. It was probably intended for her eyes only upon his death, and may explain why he allowed himself to give into his forebodings. Another interesting fact about the letter is that it has never been found in Sullivan’s own handwriting. Perhaps he dictated it in the hospital, or perhaps his wife would never part with the original copy. Sullivan Ballou has no surviving heirs.
(\*This information is based on an article that appeared in the Brown Alumni Monthly, November 1990, written by Charlotte Bruce Harvey.)

**Questions:**

1. How did this letter make you feel?
2. Why do you think Sullivan Ballou wrote this letter?
3. In how many ways does Sullivan comfort his wife by what he writes to her?
4. Why do you think Sullivan enlisted in the Union army?
5. Sullivan writes that he “communing with God, my country, and thee.” What is his relationship to the claims that each of these make upon his life?
6. Sullivan says that he is perfectly willing to die to pay the debt owed to those who fell in the American Revolution. What debt

**Letter #1**

November the 8th 1863
My Dear Wife

I take this opportunity to inform you that i am Well at present and hoping that these few lines may find you in the same state of health i receive your letter on the 5th of this month and i Was very glad to hear from you all and i happy to hear that you have got such good health since i left home but i am afraid that you are going to hurt yourself Working i don't think that you ought to go out in the field to husk Corn or do any such Work i don't think nothing of you Working at Mr paterson some times but i don't Want to hear of you going in the field to any more and you need mind What you hear all the talk that his son Can talk Won't Hurt you i he think that i Won't get home soon but i Would a Come home this time but i thought We Will get our money in a few days and as soon as We get it i Will be at home to stay a Will and i have only got a dollar now but if you look in the next letter i Will send you some home We have got about ninety Dollar Coming to us now and tell me how hold the thing for you you [*unclear*: sed] [*unclear*: robsen] boys What [*unclear*: robson] Was it for i Want to now give my love to your father and lysbeth and solomon harson and aunt merrey harson and tell them to write to me Wants give my love to all the friends

nothing more at Present but still remain

your Dear husband

*David Demus to mary Demus*

Direct Mr David Demus
Hilton Head SC
54th Regiment
massachusetts
volunteers

**Individual Observations Sheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Letter # and Author: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **Major Topics Covered/ Major Concerns of the letter writer** | **Motivations for fighting/ Description of Wartime experience** | **Role of women in the Civil War** |
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**Why are Civil War letter so important to historical research? What can we learn from these letters about life during the Civil War, both on and off the battlefield?**