

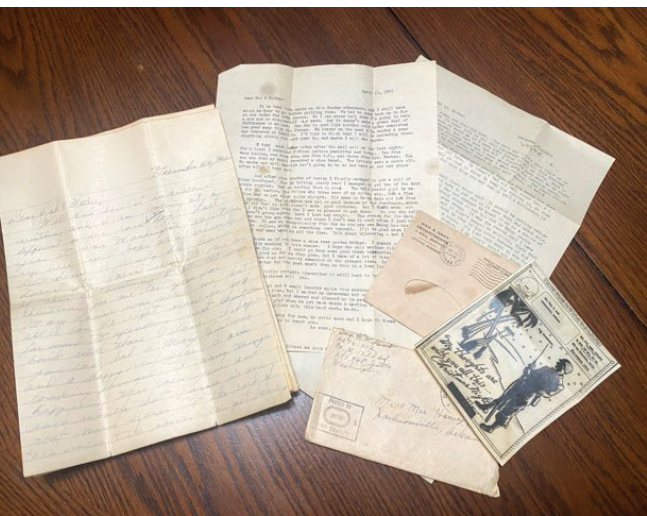
# A SPECIAL DELIVERY

## A letter carrier makes sure a WWII veteran's letters find their way home



Above: Alvin Gauthier and Jo Ann Lamb Smith

Below: Letters from Marion Lamb



**D**allas, TX Branch 132 member Alvin Gauthier has worn two uniforms since he joined both the Marines and the Postal Service in 1999. This year, a chance discovery in a mail hopper gave Gauthier another chance to fulfill his dedication to service, whether to customers or veterans.

On a routine morning in April, Gauthier was loading his truck when he spotted an unusual letter. Reading the address, he realized that it had been mailed in 1942. He soon found several other similar letters, dated from the World War II era and stamped “U.S. Army Postal Service.”

They were all addressed to the same people—“Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lamb”—but with no street address beyond the town of Jacksonville, AR. Gauthier surmised that they might be from someone who had been serving in the military far from home.

A letter with only a name and small town as an address might have easily reached its destination in 1942, but Gauthier knew it wouldn't make it today, especially if the recipients had died or moved. “It just looked really important,” he said. Gauthier made it his mission to find the family and deliver the letters.

Gauthier had joined the Marine Corps at age 19 and had also applied to the Postal Service. When he got a postal job a few months later, he switched from active duty military to the reserves. Originally from New Orleans, he moved to Grand Prairie, TX, to carry the mail.

When the Iraq War began in 2003, Gauthier was

called up. He served as the operator of a heavy machine gun mounted on a Humvee. “I was a grunt,” he said. He often wrote home to his family, so he knew how important mail is to soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. Gauthier came home after a year of duty and went back to his route, remaining a reservist until 2007.

## LETTERS FROM THE PACIFIC

More than 60 years before Gauthier went to war, Marion Lamb left Arkansas to serve in World War II in the U.S. Army's 96th Infantry Division in the Pacific under Gen. Douglas MacArthur. Nicknamed the “Deadeyes” for their sharpshooting prowess, Lamb's division trained in Oregon and Hawaii before participating in the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines, the landing that launched the liberation of the islands. As the invasion began, MacArthur famously waded ashore and announced, “I have returned.” The 96th later participated in the 1945 invasion of Okinawa and the fierce fighting that won the island.

Lamb served from 1941 to 1945 and wrote several letters to family members during that period. But now some of those letters were in the mail again decades later. Had they been lost in the mail for 80 years? The only clue Gauthier had for their intended destination was the name and town on the letters. But he was determined to bring the letters home.

An internet search yielded only a 2020 obituary for Lamb. To find his family, Gauthier contacted KARK-TV, the NBC affiliate in Little Rock, AR. The station ran a story about his search for the family and asked for viewers' help.

“I was in Iraq, and I wrote my parents’ home, and you boost your morale,” Gauthier told KARK-TV. “I just really want to get these letters to the right family.”

In less than an hour after the story aired, dozens of people responded. Some wanted to help find the Lamb family. Some said they knew the Lamb family. And a few were *from* the Lamb family. That day, some of those family members connected Gauthier with Jo Ann Lamb Smith, 84, Marion’s youngest sister and only surviving sibling, who was still living in Jacksonville, AR.



Gauthier during his service in Iraq.

## MYSTERY SOLVED

Still, how had these old letters ended up in the mail again eight decades later? It turns out the letters had been sent as part of a package of Lamb family treasures mailed by a family member in Tennessee. They had fallen out of the package. The rest of the items were delivered in the pack-

age to their intended recipient, Debbie Smith—Jo Ann’s daughter and Marion’s niece—who lived on Gauthier’s route.

“He’s a Marine—he just knows letters are important,” Smith said. Though she had received the package, she didn’t know that some letters had fallen out. If it weren’t for Gauthier’s determination, they might have been lost forever.

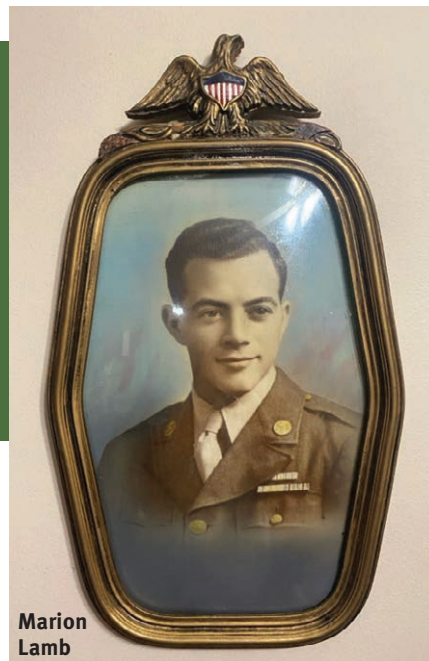
But bringing them to Debbie Smith wasn’t enough for the former Marine. He had already talked to Smith’s mother in Arkansas and vowed to deliver them there. So, on his day off and at his own expense, Gauthier drove five hours to Arkansas and, with Smith and other family members on hand, delivered the letters to Jo Ann Smith. The moment was captured by KARK-TV cameras.

“She had never seen these letters,” Debbie Smith said. Jo Ann was only a toddler when her brother was at war. “It was a lot more emotional than anyone knew it was going to be.”

Receiving the letters from so long ago brought Jo Ann Smith precious memories, Gauthier said. “She was tearing up because she didn’t have anything from her brother,” he recalled.

Debbie Smith’s father, who died in 2022, served two tours in Vietnam before retiring as a lieutenant colonel. “The connection we had with Alvin because of our military background was instant,” she said.

Gauthier and the Lambs became local celebrities and fast friends. The Lamb family went out for lunch with Gauthier at a restaurant that day and watched the local NBC story on the restaurant’s TV. Gauthier’s generous act ended up generating media stories across the country in outlets including *The Washington Post*, *Smithsonian* magazine, *People* and many local newspapers and TV stations.



Marion Lamb

Gauthier’s selfless act wasn’t the end of the story, though.

“I got a whole new family out of it,” he said of the Lambs. “I call them my aunts.” He dubbed Jo Ann Smith his new “grandmommy.” Gauthier now has a new extended family to visit with his own wife and two sons. He communicates weekly with the Lambs in Arkansas.

And he takes good care of Debbie Smith on his route. But Smith says Gauthier was always helpful even before their families met, taking special care with packages that didn’t fit in her mailbox, for example.

“Even before this story, even before I knew who he was, he went out of the way to take care of our mail,” Smith said. “He just goes above and beyond the call of duty.” **PR**



Gauthier meeting with Lamb’s family (to the left of him are Jo Ann Lamb Smith and her daughter Debbie Smith) and the TV reporter (far left) who reported the story.