

January 2017

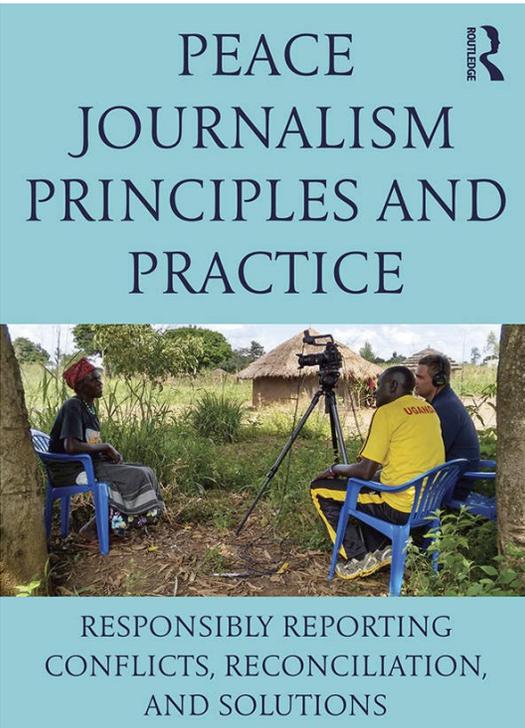
## First Amendment under Fire with Professor Steven Youngblood

On **Tuesday, January 24 at 6:30 p.m.**, the National Archives will host Park University Professor **Steven Youngblood** for a lecture titled *First Amendment under Fire: Global Challenges to Press Freedom*. A free light reception will precede the program at 6:00 p.m.

Since its inception the Bill of Rights, which comprised the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, has sparked debate. The First Amendment states: *Congress shall make no law*

*respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances,* is most often challenged within legal battles across the United States on a regular basis. As the world has become more digital and globally connected, journalists often find themselves in situations where their press freedoms are under fire. Park University peace journalism professor Steven Youngblood will discuss challenges to the First Amendment in the U.S., and how those relate to threats to free press around the world. *This program is presented in partnership with Park University.*

Reservations are requested for this **free program** by calling 816-268-8010 or emailing [kansascity.educate@nara.gov](mailto:kansascity.educate@nara.gov). Requests for ADA accommodations must be submitted five business days prior to events.



STEVEN YOUNGBLOOD

## National Archives News and Notes

- Last month the National Archives at Kansas City co-hosted a program on December 7 in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The entire program can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JYR1fiviUg>
- A new and free National Archives eBook is now available from iBookstore/iTunes on the 225th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. This eBook is a primary source-based workbook exploring protections found in the Bill of Rights. Download it here: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/book/putting-bill-rights-to-test/id1179125906?mt=11>
- In 2017, the National Archives will continue the Amending America National Conversations Series focused on a range of contemporary issues, addressing the tension between individual rights and collective responsibilities, a process that began with the Bill of Rights. The next National Conversation will be held in Dallas, Texas, in February. For more information visit: <https://www.archives.gov/amending-america/join>

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## Upcoming Events

Unless noted, all events are held at the National Archives  
400 W. Pershing Road  
Kansas City, MO 64108

- JAN. 24 - 6:30 P.M.  
EVENING LECTURE:  
*FIRST AMENDMENT UNDER FIRE* WITH PROFESSOR STEVE YOUNGBLOOD
- FEB. 1 - 6:30 P.M.  
FILM SCREENING AND DISCUSSION: *ALTHEA*, POST-FILM DISCUSSION WITH COACH DANIEL WELLINGTON

# Hidden Treasures from the Stacks

## 'N.P. is my Fighting Name:' The Strange Story of an English Tommy

In the early months of 1919, the American military began the long process of demobilizing its troops from Europe following the Great War. The Armistice had been signed the previous November, and peace talks were underway in Paris. In London, the Belgrave Mansions Hotel served as the headquarters for Base Section No. 3 of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). With so many doughboys returning to the United States via England, the fledgling Military Police Corps established its headquarters at the hotel. Its purpose was to act as a safeguard between the thousands of American soldiers shuffling through the country and the English civilians, still suffering from the dreadful casualties incurred during four years of war.

It was in this setting – in late February – that a strange letter was received at the Belgrave hotel. The letter was addressed to “The Provost Martial” of the United States, located at “Army U.S.W.O. Headquarters.” It was handwritten and postmarked from Brighton, England. A return address was not included on the envelope, but there was one on the letter. A name was also included. The letter has been reproduced verbatim (not corrected for errors) here:

18 Chatham Place  
Brighton  
Sussex  
Thurs-Feb-27-2-19

Dear Sir,

I beg to inform you that your not to try to put the wind up me that way. Its true positivly true that I was in the U.S. Irregulars, verry much Irregular. Next time you come or send to arrest me please dont send a policeman. I prefer a military escort any day. Iff you canot undertake to arrest me in civilian clothing, please send a suit of khaki, and make the escort arrest possible. Take me now. Youl kneed some men to capture Villa, and Im just dying to do something for that country that made something of me. Will you give it a trial, if so I can be an American for the ocaasion. Dol Gosh I can.

Respectfully your's,  
Nelson Passells

From the context of the letter, it seemed the writer had some sort of previous relationship with the Provost Marshal, and was complaining about the treatment he received from some of the Marshal's officers. But the Provost Marshal of Base Section No. 3, Major R. Potter Campbell, was confused. He had never heard of anyone named Nelson Passells nor could he recall giving any orders to have this person arrested. The letter was set aside as a possible hoax, and no immediate action was taken.

The next day, March 1, another letter was received at the hotel. It was signed by the same person, Nelson Passells, and was even stranger than the first one:



Above: Photo of Nelson Passells in military uniform. Record Group 120, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces; Correspondence and Reports of the Division of Criminal Investigation, 1918-1919; Case File #22; National Archives at College Park, NAID 5757171.

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18 Chatham Place  
Brighton  
Sussex  
28.2.19

Dear Sir,

Please excuse the extra paper. I've had to reopen your letter on account of a letter reaching me from the Pension people. They tell me to hand in the kings fund check for £25 they sent me two months ago on account of me not being able to get to the dear old U.S.A. Its a mighty hard thing to do, I mean to hand it in. Cash is scarce, now a days. Come to think of it I did draw out papers in Norfolk to join your army. I hope they will be of some help, but they are in the North Square Seamans home at Boston. I left them there for safe keeping, or what was left of them.

Respectfully,  
Nelson Passells – late A.S.C.R. verry late states Malitiamen

God bless the Star Spangled Banner (over)

Please Sir dont forget to send down that suit of khaki:

Breeches to fit man 6ft. 5ins. in height  
Length of leg 37 inches  
Waist 36 inches  
Chest 37  
Hat – Stitson  
Boots – 12  
Putties – 20 yards long each  
Shirts – Bell tents

This time the two letters were handed over to detectives from the Criminal Investigation Division (CID), a small arm of the Military Police Corps. Captain Francis V. Lowden, recently selected to command the new division, was assigned the case. Lowden was a veteran of combat in France and had climbed through the ranks of the military since enlisting in 1912. His partner on the case was Sergeant David G. Proctor. A native of New York and an aspiring actor, Proctor was hand-picked by Lowden to join him at the CID. Both men had extensive police experience. This proved useful in dealing with the special brand of law enforcement needed in England at the time.



The detectives' immediate action was two-fold. First, they had to determine who

Above: Passells expressing his love of the United States in this hand-drawn image that accompanied one of his letters to the American Expeditionary Forces. Record Group 120, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces; Correspondence and Reports of the Division of Criminal Investigation, 1918-1919; Case File #22; National Archives at College Park. NAID 5757171.

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Nelson Passells was and if that was the author's real name. And second, they needed to find and interview Passells in order to discover his motive for mailing the letters. Technically, no laws had been broken. But the letters were suspicious in nature and needed to be vetted. Whomever Nelson Passells was, he did not wish to remain anonymous. Not only did he sign his real name (unknown to the investigators at the time) but he also included a valid return address on both letters. Therefore, Proctor and Lowden knew exactly where to start searching.

According to a preliminary case report dated March 1, 1919:

"On 28 February 1919, a letter, a copy of which is attached and marked "Exhibit No. 1," was received by Provost Marshal. It led to the suspicion that the writer was a deserter from the U.S. Army. The civil police of Brighton were telegraphed to and requested to investigate. On March 1 another letter, a copy of which is attached and marked "Exhibit No. 2" was received. It was decided, from the tone of the letter, that the writer was either "crazy," or else was a practical joker, who knew a lot about the American Army. Captain Lowden and Sgt. Proctor decided to go to Brighton and investigate."



*The Good Angel. Nelson the rum is geving out  
Nelson - All right old chap there's another can, below, here's  
a yar of the best Scotch and three nine gallons of  
beer in our wake just scout round and see iff  
you can see Cape Codd anywhere, We'll have to save  
some to brube or can the Immigration officers up with*

Above: Hand-drawn image by Passells that accompanied one of his letters to the American Expeditionary Forces. Record Group 120, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces; Correspondence and Reports of the Division of Criminal Investigation, 1918-1919; Case File #22; National Archives at College Park. NAID 5757171.

U.S. Army. It was found that Nelson Passells, residing at 18 Chatham Place, Brighton, a giant in statue [sic], is a lunatic, having been recently released from the Sanatorium at Hastings, England. In 1913 Passells, then aged 22 years, enlisted in the Virginia N.G. [National Guard] at Franklin, Va. He came to England in 1914, being a British subject, and enlisted in British Army, serving for two years until declared "unbalanced," and sent to Asylum. He draws a pension from British Government. Passells was talked to and has an idea that as he was a "malitiaman," as he puts it, he should be obliged to go back to Virginia and serve his time."

The investigators made the 50-mile trip south to Brighton. Nelson Passells was indeed the author's real name and he lived at 18 Chatham Place, the address listed on the two letters. When the investigators arrived at the house, they found Passells living with his mother. He made no attempt to falsify his identity nor did he deny sending the letters. According to the final case report filed on March 3, 1919:

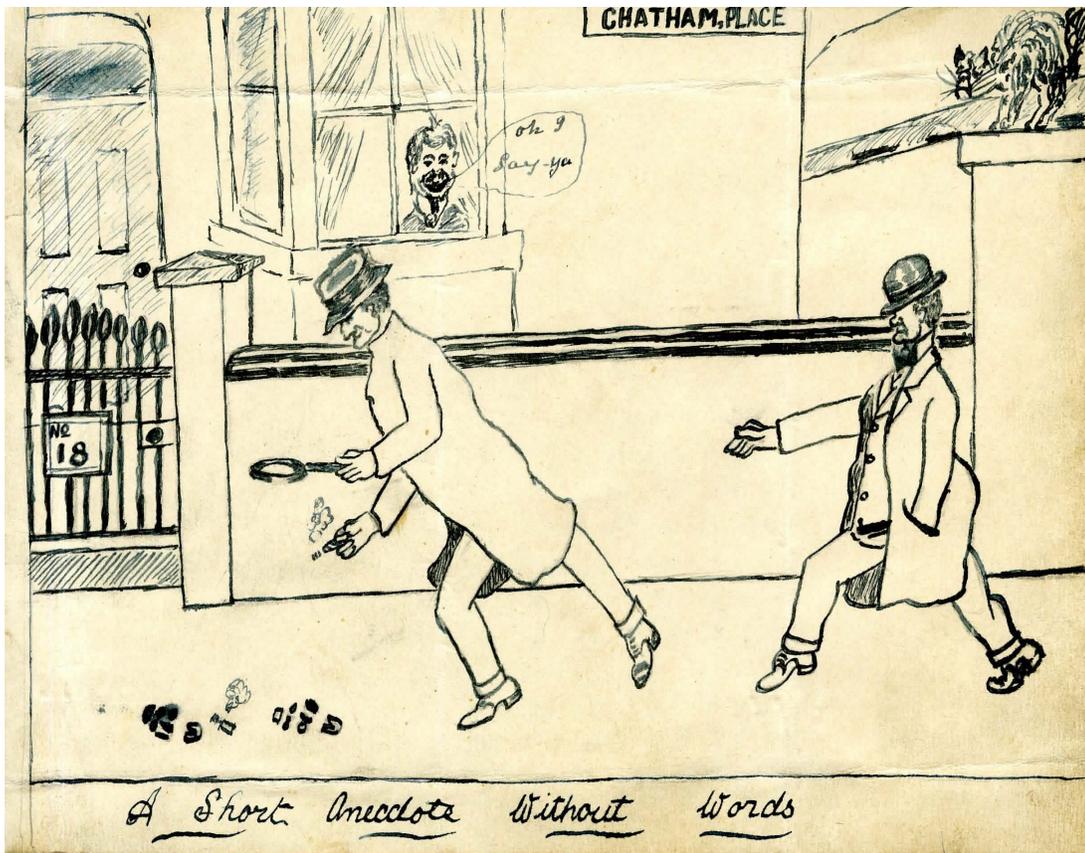
"Capt. Lowden and Sgt. Proctor went to Brighton, England, and interviewed the writer of certain letters to Provost Marshal, Base Sec, No. 3, London, England, suspected of being a deserter from

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This report concurs with a similar report made by Inspector Henry Latter of the Brighton Police Department. On February 28 – in response to Lowden's initial telegraph – Inspector Latter visited Passells at his house. Later that day he sent the following message to the CID:

"I beg to report having seen Nelson Passell, 18 Chatham Place who stated he was born of British parents at Portsmouth, England. About 14 years ago he went to America whilst at Franklin, Virginia joined the U.S. Militia. In 1914 there was trouble at Mexico and it was thought the Militia would be called up and sent there. Passell preferred to fight in the British army so he came to England and 7<sup>th</sup> March 1915 joined the Army Service Corps (Remounts) at Latham Park. On 5<sup>th</sup> October 1916 he was discharged at Woolwich Dockyard being no longer fit for war service. Since that date he has been in a Sanatorium for consumption and in October last went to reside with his mother at the above address and is still there. Passell produced his army papers to support the above statement. In view of the above facts I did not arrest this man. This man admits being an absentee from the U.S. Militia and would like to return to America. He is in possession of a passport but owing to his ill health the Emigration Authorities decline to pass him."

The investigators did not charge Passells with a crime and quickly closed the case. But to the annoyance of Captain Lowden, Passells continued to send odd letters and drawings to the Provost Marshal. In response to a letter received on March 18, the American officer replied with a letter of his own:



Above: Passells depicting the American Expeditionary Forces investigators visting his home. Record Group 120, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces; Correspondence and Reports of the Division of Criminal Investigation, 1918-1919; Case File #22; National Archives at College Park. NAID 5757171.

March 19, 1919.

To: Mr. Nelson Passells,  
18 Chatham Place,  
Brighton.

My dear Passells,

*I am in receipt of your letter of March 17, and beg to inform you that the United States does not want you at all, and it would be absolutely impossible for this office to get you to the United States. I do not think it will be necessary for you to write this office any more.*

Francis V. Lowden  
Capt. F.A. U.S.A.  
D.C.I. M.P.C.

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The polite rejection did not work, however, and Passells continued his correspondence for almost another two months. Lowden believed the Brit to be relatively harmless and more of a nuisance than anything. Besides describing him as a “lunatic” in his final case report, Lowden also described Passells as a “harmless imbecile, who had at one time been a member of the N.G.U.S.” Lowden’s comments could be interpreted as insensitive today, but in the early twentieth century terms like “lunatic” and “imbecile” were common expressions. Quoted verbatim below are a few of the more colorful passages from Passells’ letters:

“Another time you send plain cloth [sic] officers down to number 18, just you give them the tip not to go swinging the glad eye at my mother. I’ve had one father, he was too much for me. By the way get a hustle on and pinch me.” - March 17, 1919

“The Doctor talks about putting a nurse over me, he says I get about too much, and I should have somebody keep an eye upon me. Just fancy seeing me toddling along behind a grey headed toothless, cross eyed old nurse. It would be a different thing if she were about 21 or 25. But an old squaw of 49 and 50 years of inproportion [sic]. It’s enough to turn the hairs on your artificial gold teeth grey.” - March 17, 1919

“Say, if you won’t take me back in khaki, take me back as a mascot. A regiment ain’t complete unless it has one. Do you think I could get sent back for violence? If so, I’ll come up and bat the provost on conditions that he carries no guns and is sitting down when the test is being performed.” - March 22, 1919

“I don’t know whether I took my citizen papers out under the name of Nelson Passells or Hubert Nelson Algernon Passells. I forget which now. You see that’s my full name. N.P. is my fighting name.” - March 22, 1919

“I wish you would take me back into your khaki. The only thing wrong with me is bodily weakness. But no tiles loose in the upper story.” - April 16, 1919

“I’m going to Mexico now. I believe there are some high doings down that way. I see by the *Chicago Daily News*, April 18, 1919, that the bandits are blowing up railroads. Say now just isn’t that a champion opportunity for a chap like me with nobody dependent on him?” - May 10, 1919

The American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) was established under the War Department by General Order 1 on May 26, 1917. The AEF conducted military operations against Germany during World War I; conducted military operations in North Russia; provided medical and sanitary relief in Poland; and occupied Germany after the war. The agency was abolished on August 31, 1920. For more information about the American Expeditionary Forces records visit the [National Archives Catalog](#).



NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES

KANSAS CITY

GENERAL INFORMATION: Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Closed on weekends and Federal holidays. Hours are subject to change due to special programs and weather. The National Archives is located at 400 West Pershing Road, Kansas City, Missouri, 64108.

The National Archives at Kansas City is home to historical records dating from the 1820s to the 1990s created or received by Federal agencies in Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

For more information, call 816-268-8000, email [kansascity.educate@nara.gov](mailto:kansascity.educate@nara.gov) or visit [www.archives.gov/kansas-city](http://www.archives.gov/kansas-city). Find us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/nationalarchiveskansascity](http://www.facebook.com/nationalarchiveskansascity). Tweet us @KCArchives or #KCArchives.