



## MARKET GARDEN VETERANS ASSOCIATION

### Wartime letters from estranged mother arrive 60 years too late

A former soldier has spoken of his heartbreak after receiving a series of letters that would have changed his life-60 years too late. Ken McKernan was estranged from his mother, Maude, during the war. Thinking that she had not cared enough to send any letters, he did not write to her. Mr. McKernan, 79, has now received a series of heart-rending letters written in 1944 in which his mother made clear that she wanted a reconciliation. Addressed to "My darling son", the letters urged Mr McKernan to move to America after the war. He said yesterday that he would have moved to be with his mother had he received them. One letter said: "I wish you were here with me, we're like two strangers. I only have one son and he is miles away from me".

The letters, along with others from two woman friends, never reached Mr McKernan and were found in a dusty box by a Dutch museum curator. He wrote to the address of one of the girls, who had moved decades ago. But the woman currently living at the Liverpool house put out an internet appeal for a Ken Kernan (sic) to get in touch. This was seen by Mr McKernan's son in San Diego, who contacted his father. Mr. McKernan said yesterday that the letters could have changed his life if he had received them at the time. "I didn't know about the



Mrs McKernan had left her four-year-old son in 1928 and moved to America to start a new life. She asked her son if he wanted to move to America when he was 12, but he decided to stay in Britain with relatives as he did not want to be uprooted from his friends. He was only 19 when he became one of the first wave of British soldiers to land on Juno Beach in Normandy during the D-Day invasion. He also fought in the Netherlands during the war but has no idea how the letters found their way to the museum. Because of the delay in the delivery of the letters Mr McKernan and his mother were not properly reunited until the 1970s. Mrs



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letters from my mother but I travelled to Holland to see the other letters," he said.

"When I opened the folder, the first thing I saw was the words 'My darling son'. It brought tears to my eyes and was so hard to read." He added: "When I didn't receive any mail from my mother I presumed she'd forgotten about me. I was quite bitter about it. If only I'd known, I definitely have gone to join her in America. My life could have been a totally different story." miles away from me.'

Mr McKernan served with the Royal Fusiliers during the Second World War.

McKernan then returned to Britain and moved into the same Liverpool street as her son until she died nine years ago.

"It is heartbreaking to read my mother's words from all those years ago," Mr McKernan said. "It has given me some peace to know that she was thinking about me."

'My darling son, I hope you're well and save. I do not know where you are as it has been such a long time since I've heard from you. They say war is hell, I guess you know it. It's terrible, young boys away from home and out on their own, but God will keep you save, Ken. I know He will because some day we will be together again... I'm living in hope of you coming home after the war. I wish you were here with me, we're like two strangers. I only have one son and he is

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*by Nicola Woolcock*