

**NATURAL  
HISTORY  
MUSEUM**  
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

# SEAVER CENTER FOR WESTERN HISTORY RESEARCH

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## **Notes From the Archive**

### **FALL 2023**

This is a publication of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, a section of the History Department. If you are informed by what you read here, please share it with a friend or colleague.

# **A Veterans Day Tribute**

During 2023 we had several opportunities to explore aspects of the Second World War, and the following is a timely account as Veterans Day nears.

## **Collection Highlight: Peter Aguilar Despart Papers**

The papers of Peter Aguilar Despart (1906-1997), a World War II and Korean War veteran, were donated by his family earlier this year.

Despart served stateside during the Second World War and was stationed at Camp Haan in Riverside County where he was an MP (Military Police). His

accomplished life is documented by the collection that includes the following two occasions. He was close friends with the Wagatsuma Family in Los Angeles. When the bombing of Pearl Harbor led to the incarceration of Japanese Americans, Peter helped the family settle their personal affairs and businesses in the midst of their departure to the Manzanar War Location Center in Spring, 1942; within a couple of months Peter was serving in the U.S. Army at Camp Haan. Following the close of the Korean War, in 1953 he filed the application that eventually created the Eugene A. Obregon American Legion post located in East Los Angeles.

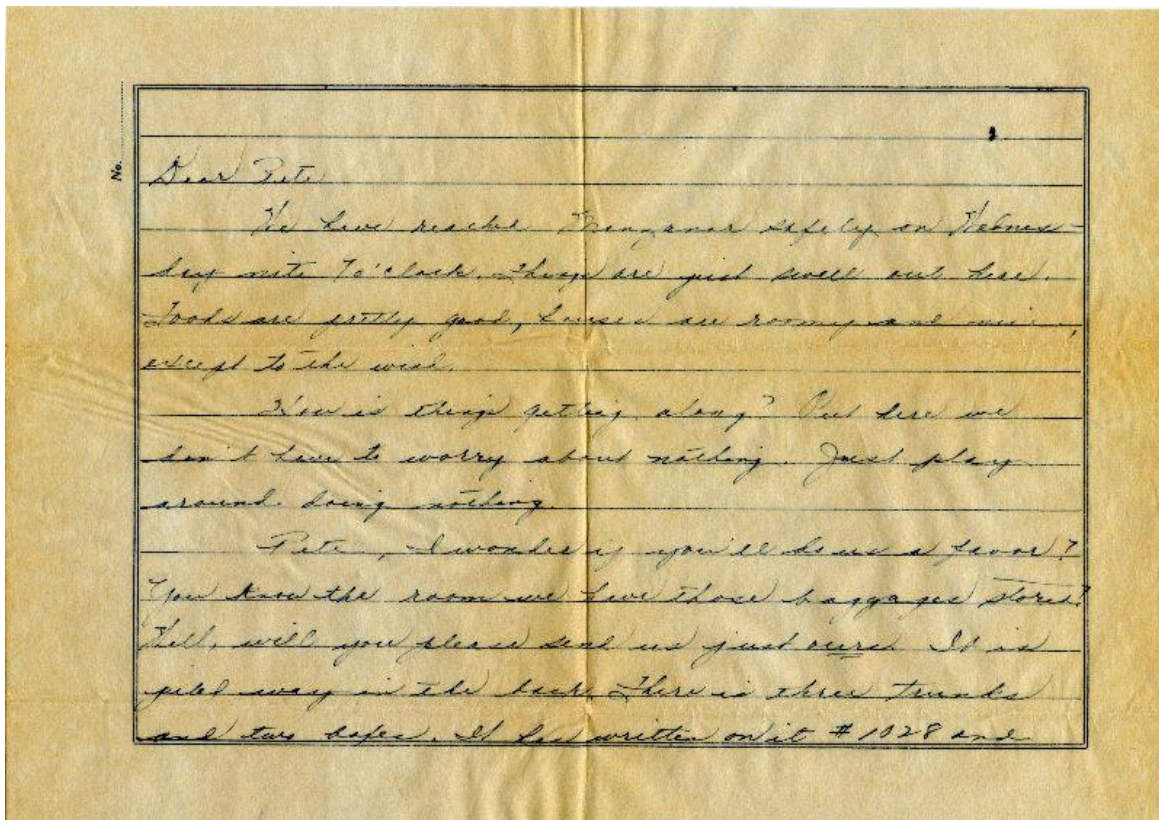


Bobbi and Richard Polanco show some of the photographs collected by Bobbi's uncle Peter Aguilar Despart



In this publicity photo, Despart is looking at his draft card no. 158. His number was the first drawn by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940 as part of the media attention for the newly proclaimed Selective Service Registration.





Shown here is page one of a letter from Mrs. Wagatsuma to Despart dated April 6, 1942. She mentioned her safe arrival at Manzanar and then asked her friend to send her baggage.

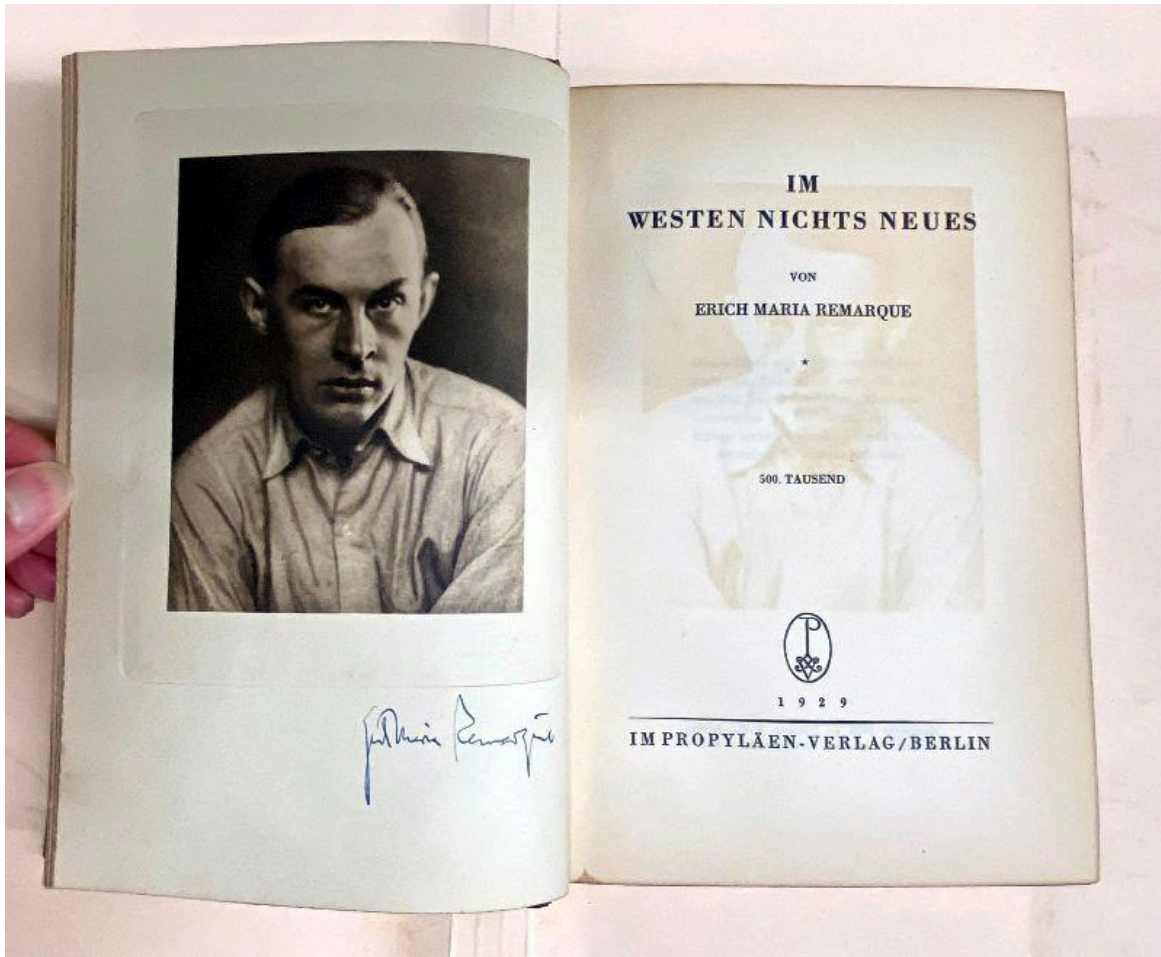
## Collection Highlight: *Im Westen Nichts Neues* by Erich Maria Remarque

An original, German edition of *All Quiet on the Western Front* signed by the author was donated by Carl Laemmle, the German-Jewish film pioneer best remembered as the founder of Universal Pictures. In late February of this year the Seaver Center hosted visitors from the Czech Republic -- that happened to be the primary film location of the 2022 remake of "All Quiet on the Western Front." John Cahoon had the keen sense to pull the special book for the guests.

The well-received 1929 novel was based on the First World War. In 1933 the Nazis banned the book and staged book burnings.

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

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**Researcher Highlight: Adam Longenbach and the  
*Annadorf* German Village**









Adam Longenbach recently tracked down a sizeable number of photos from the Historical Society of Southern California Collection documenting wartime activity between 1942 and 1943 in the San Gabriel Mountains at Big John Flat. He is a PhD candidate in the Department of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Planning at Harvard University. For his dissertation, he researches the mid-twentieth century entanglement of wartime policies, government agencies, private sector collaborations, and mass media technologies that led to the production of military “mock villages.” Constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in collaboration with architects, landscape architects, and Hollywood scenographers, mock villages were—and remain—elaborate stage sets where the U.S. military rehearsed combat operations before conducting them in actual theaters of war. His project focuses on the Pacific Theater and especially the western United States where, in the 1940s, mock villages emerged as a key military technology in the war between the U.S. and Japan. With the help of the Seaver Center, Adam is currently looking into the work of Arto Monaco, a former Hollywood set designer who, during World War II, constructed what might be the earliest example of a “combat town”—a mock German village where troops from Camp Santa Anita (outside of Los Angeles) trained prior to their deployment overseas. If you have more information to share about Arto Monaco and Annadorf, or if you would simply like to get in touch with Adam, he can be reached at [adamlongenbach@g.harvard.edu](mailto:adamlongenbach@g.harvard.edu).



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# Digitized Collections

The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

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