Our experience during and after World War II conclusively demonstrates that unless early action is taken, hundreds of thousands of servicemen and women of voting age will be deprived of their constitutional right to vote this year.

—Harry S. Truman, 1952

Once World War II ended in the summer of 1945, attention toward doing anything more for absentee voters and military voters in particular waned. As was the case after the Civil War, efforts related to the armed services shifted to demobilization, transporting the men home, and getting them back into civilian life. The general euphoria of winning the war overshadowed any interest in the military voter enfranchisement.

In 1946, Congress passed some amendments to the 1944 law, but those amendments were limited in impact. Passed unanimously by voice vote, the Servicemen’s Voting Act of 1946 did little. The act removed the federal war ballot and abolished the War Ballot Commission. It did expand the coverage to peacetime as well as wartime, but the war clause from the 1942 statute was retained. Some states that maintained their absentee voting laws for military overseas personnel continued to use the old war ballots from World War II, but merely crossed out the words “war” on the envelope (see figure 6.1).

The new law recommended seventeen actions for state governments and provided for some coordination on the part of federal officials, including free postage for ballot mail. As before, it was left to the states to take action. There was no enforcement mechanism, and the federal government had not taken any state to court over failure to comply with the law.
No data were collected by either the newly established Department of Defense or the Census Bureau regarding military voting in the 1946, 1948, or 1950 elections. However, it was generally assumed that military voter turnout had decreased after the 1944 election, largely because the war was won and interest had moved elsewhere. It was assumed that most soldiers would take part in the elections either in person or use the normal absentee balloting procedures in place. While military forces were still stationed overseas, largely in Germany and Japan, they were in smaller numbers than during the war and, because it was peacetime, mail moved more easily and safely.

Circumstances for absentee military personnel actually worsened following the war. Several states simply allowed the temporary measures of 1944 to expire without taking any action to revise or replace the provisions. Two states, New Mexico and South Carolina, had no provision for absentee balloting under any circumstance. Texas had no measures for voting by military service personnel. Six states (Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Utah) required registration in person, even for service personnel. Five states (Alabama, Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) would not mail out absentee ballots until twenty-one days prior to the election. Four states (Delaware, New Hampshire, New York, and Rhode Island) made no provision for absentee voting in primary elections.

Thus, despite federal attempts to coordinate and smooth absentee voting by military service personnel, progress had been stymied by lack of