**“On the first day of the year [i.e. January 1st] you have written to your fiancée […]. I think more about you than you about me. […] In any case I wish you a happy new year filled with blessings of the Lord. I think I am for the tomb, I have been ill for three weeks. Give my compliments to Varin [a shipmate], it is only his wife who gives me your news.”**

**Women in Wartime**

Over half (59%) of the letters were signed by women and provide precious insights into female literacy, social networks, and experiences in wartime.

“These letters shatter the old-fashioned notion that war is all about men,” Morieux said. “While their men were gone, women ran the household economy and took crucial economic and political decisions.”

In this period, the French navy manned its warships by forcing most men living near the coast to serve for 1 year, every 3 or 4 years. This system was as unpopular as press-ganging in Britain and many French sailors ran away once in port or applied to be released on the basis of injury.

The sister of Nicolas Godefroy, a trainee pilot, wrote:

**“What would bring me more pain is if you leave for the islands”.**

She meant the Caribbean where thousands of European sailors died from disease in this period. Nevertheless, Godefroy’s sister and mother both refused to apply for his release from the navy. They feared that his proposed strategy could backfire and force him to stay at sea **“even longer”**.