

DOCUMENT

THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF SAMUEL MAHON, SEVENTH IOWA INFANTRY

Edited by John K. Mahon

It would accomplish nothing to conceal the fact that Samuel Mahon was my grandfather. Indeed, except for that connection I should not have possession of his few surviving wartime letters. In all ways I have attempted to neutralize the blood tie. To begin with, the letters are reproduced just as he wrote them; nothing has been cut out except items that had no historical interest whatever.

Of the scores of letters my grandfather must have written during the four years of war, none have survived in the family except the thirty-nine addressed to his sister Elizabeth ("Dear Lizzie"). These three dozen letters — supplemented by a short autobiography written many years later — comprise the weight of this document. Letters and autobiography are in my hands.

Samuel Mahon was born in County Westmeath, Ireland, on August 31, 1840. His father, bankrupted by the potato famine of 1846, migrated to the United States in 1849 with his wife and seven children. Samuel was the youngest of the household but one. Moving in the current of the time, the family drifted slowly westward until, in the fall of 1854, it stopped in the town that was to become home, Ottumwa, Iowa.

Here, as soon as Samuel was sixteen, he went to work in a general store. Next, he taught school for one term. After that he returned to merchandising, this time in the employ of the Inskeep Brothers of Ottumwa. When Samuel left town, he left to go to war. This departure is well told in his autobiography:

I remained with them [Inskeep Brothers] until the breaking out of the Civil War, when I enlisted in a company organized by Charles W. Kittredge¹ and which became Co. F of the 7th Regiment of Iowa Volunteer Infantry. I had been greatly annoyed for a couple of years . . . by deaf-

¹ For a sketch of Charles W. Kittredge, see A. A. Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments* . . . (Des Moines, 1865), 513-20. After the war Kittredge married Samuel Mahon's sister, Charlotte.

ness which affected me every time that I caught a cold. . . . It became so troublesome that I had about made up my mind to try some other business and I enlisted on the principle of the kill or cure proposition. I was elected First Lieutenant of the company and on account of some experience gained by belonging to a militia company previous to the breaking out of the war and some hard study of military tactics, I did most of the drilling.

The company was ordered into rendezvous at Camp Warren, Burlington, July 12, 1861, where active drilling and organizing was continued. The regiment was mustered into the United States service July 24th. . . . we all had little or no money. The state furnished rations during our stay in Burlington and each man brought a blanket or comfort from home for bedding. We slept on straw in sheds and slept soundly. A Jewish firm of clothiers furnished the commissioned officers of the regiment their outfit of uniform, sword, belt and other equipment, trusting them until they drew their first pay. . . .

A week or two after we were mustered in we were ordered to St. Louis and were transported thence on a small steamboat towing two barges.² The one thousand men composing the regiment filled about every available space on all three of the craft. We landed in St. Louis and were marched to Jefferson Barracks; here our arms were issued to us consisting of the old-fashioned small ball muskets, caliber 72 carrying a one ounce lead spherical ball and three buck shot made up with a charge of heavy black powder.³ I think our officer's uniforms overtook us at St. Louis. The enlisted men, however, had no clothing except what they wore from their homes. . . .

At the time of his election as first lieutenant, Samuel Mahon was just one month short of twenty-one years old. The other two company officers were thirty-four and thirty-five, while most of the enlisted men were older than their second in command. Be that as it may, the night before leaving St. Louis the lieutenant wrote a letter to his sister.

² This was the steamboat *Jennie Whipple*. Histories of the 7th Iowa are: H. I. Smith, *History of the Seventh Iowa Veteran Volunteer Infantry During the Civil War* (Mason City, 1903); *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion* (6 vols., Des Moines, 1908-1911), 2:911-20.

³ This statement about the arms issued is open to doubt. Caliber .72 was much larger than the .58 generally used during the war. An official report entitled "History of the Regiment" says the two flank companies received Springfield rifles, the other eight companies got the improved Springfield muskets, caliber .58, which were the standard infantry weapons. The report cited is in *Report of the Adjutant General . . . State of Iowa, January 11, 1864 to January 1, 1865* (Des Moines, 1865), 1056.

Dear Lizzy

. . . I expect to come up next week from St Louis just as quick as K[ittredge] comes down I will have to take charge of the Company till he comes and it is no small job to regulate 80 or 90 men We will be some time at St. L—— as the men are generally undisciplined [sic] and all unarmed. The Boys cheered the announcement with enthusiasm and all seem delighted How does K—— grace his new plumage I had hopes of cutting a swell up there myself this week only for that unlucky order. But my time will come next. Gen Fremont is at St Louis and I suppose I shall see him

Mahon's prediction that the outfit would have to remain a while in St. Louis because the men were green did not prove to be correct. The situation in Missouri was precarious, and after a few days in the city, the command was sent out to the south.⁴

Ironton, Mo, Aug 18 1861

Dear Lizzy

After a good deal of banging about we have brought up at a god forsaken point called Pilot Knob in the South Eastern part of the State We have done a good deal of Soldiering for short experiences We were ordered to Rollo in the Western part of the State after getting our arms and just as we were on board the cars and our Baggage loaded the order was countermanded and we had to march to another station and take the cars to this place. . . . We are pretty well fixed We came on Thursday and our company was ordered out on picket guard about 3 miles from camp in a mountain road We had a very pretty place to camp and got plenty of apples and Roast Ears We came back to camp yesterday and today we are resting from our labors. On the Sabbath there is an unusual silence in the camp which is pleasant after the confusion of the week It is a blessing even in the tented field to have a few hours to ones self and think of things past and future there is no wildness whatever in our regiment most of the officers are steady men and many religious there is little or no temptation to vice or wickedness and a person has an opportunity to think of other

⁴ The original destination of the 7th Iowa was to support General Nathaniel Lyon, but his defeat and death at the battle of Wilson's Creek on August 10 changed the plans for the 7th, and the regiment was instead sent to Pilot Knob and thence to Ironton, south of St. Louis. Smith, *History of the Seventh Iowa . . .*, 6-7. For the battle of Wilson's Creek, see Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General* (3 vols., New York, 1949-1952), 3:32-3.

more serious matters. . . . I enjoy very good health and like the business well I will try to get a furlough the first opportunity. . . .

For the next three months the 7th Iowa Infantry was moved about in the vicinity of the Mississippi River between Ironton, Missouri, and Cairo, Illinois. Mahon, recalling in his autobiography his first picket duty which occurred at Ironton, remembered that the full weight of the war seemed to rest on his shoulders alone out in that dark night. Also, he made note of the Regiment's first march, a ninety-mile affair to Cape Girardeau, Missouri, which took some of the romance out of soldiering.

When the 7th Iowa received its baptism of fire at Belmont, Missouri, on November 7, 1861, Mahon was not present, having taken sick some weeks previous and been sent home on leave to recover. The baptism was a terrible one; out of about 400 engaged, 227 were casualties.⁵ The chances are good that Mahon's career would have been different had he been there. As it was, Captain Kittredge was severely wounded, and when Lt. Mahon got back to the unit he found himself, at the age of twenty-one, in command of Company F.

The remnant of the Regiment returned to St. Louis to rest and recruit. It remained there until early January, 1862, when, in bitter cold, it moved down the Mississippi toward the theater of Brigadier General U. S. Grant's next operations. Only one letter survives bearing on the Forts Henry and Donelson campaign. It contains nothing worth reproducing, but the autobiography has something to say on the capture of Donelson, February 6, 1862.

The culmination occurred on the evening of the third day, when Gen. Grant formed a column under the command of Gen. Chas. F. Smith. This column consisted of five lines of battle of infantry, the 7th being in the third line.⁶ They succeeded in capturing the enemy's position and holding

⁵ The 7th Iowa was under the command of Col. J. G. Lauman. For his report of the battle, see *The War of the Rebellion . . . Official Records . . .* (Washington, 1881), Series I, Vol. III, 296-8 (hereafter listed as *Official Records*). Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments . . .*, 165, gives the total casualties as 227. The surgeon's record, prepared at a later date, gives a total, as does Lauman, of 119 killed and wounded from the 7th Iowa, out of the total casualties of the battle of 402. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. III, 275. For a detailed account of the Battle of Belmont see Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General*, 3:75-100. For a personal account of the battle, see Smith, *History of the Seventh Iowa . . .*, 11-34. The author, H. I. Smith, was Captain of Company B, 7th Iowa.

⁶ Each one of these lines of battle was composed of two ranks of men. Although the lines started the assault with a distance of a number of yards between them, all

it under a sharp fire from an interior line until darkness fell. The night was a dreary one owing to the cold, fires being forbidden and rations exhausted. The dawn came welcome to the benumbed combatants, the more so as the Union pickets discerned as the daylight advanced that there were white flags displayed along the enemy's line. . . . [The surrender followed] In the joy of the moment cold and hunger alike were forgotten and cheer after cheer went up in celebration of the victory. The regiments composing the column which captured the works were accorded the honor of capturing the fort. The 7th regiment were fortunate in being quartered inside the fort, a very comfortable log building occupied by a Confederate Tennessee regiment. . . . The officers and men of the two regiments fraternized. The Confederates had abundance of food in the fort and I shall always remember the splendid breakfast which the Confederate officers, whose quarters we jointly occupied, prepared for us by their black servants; half-starved as we were, we thoroughly enjoyed the fried ham, hot biscuits and coffee. In a very few days the prisoners of the garrison were sent North leaving our army in full possession. The sanitary conditions of the fort were bad at best, partly owing to ignorance of proper methods of a newly organized volunteer army, and from this cause and from exposure and fatigue of the short campaign, the men sickened rapidly and many died.⁷

There are no more letters until July 9, three months after the battle of Shiloh, April 6 and 7, 1862. Of that battle, the autobiography says:

The 2d Division to which the 7th regiment belonged had its camp back by the Landing fully one and one-half miles from where the battle opened. It was a beautiful Sunday morning and the men were lounging about camp preparing for the Sunday morning inspection, or writing letters home without a thought of impending peril. Suddenly the orders came to fall in at

the lines fused into one mass by the time the works were reached. This was a very costly formation. See Arthur L. Wagner, *Organization and Tactics* (7th edition, Kansas City, Mo., 1906), 266. Wagner prepared a diagram which shows the 7th Iowa in the seventh and eighth lines.

⁷ For a detailed account of the capture of Fort Donelson see General Service Schools, Ft. Leavenworth, *Fort Henry and Donelson Campaigns: Source Book* (Ft. Leavenworth, 1923). See also Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General*, 3:199-259. At this time the 7th Iowa was in the brigade commanded by its own colonel, Jacob G. Lauman, of C. F. Smith's division. For an account of Fort Donelson written by Mahon in later life, see "Incidents of Fort Donelson," in Smith, *History of the Seventh Iowa* . . . , 41-4.

once with a supply of ammunition and in a few minutes the brigade was moving to the front on quick time. More or less firing had been heard through the morning but no attention was paid to it. We soon however, began meeting evident signs of trouble at the front in the way of stragglers coming back and fragments of batteries which had evidently been knocked out of action. As we advanced the sounds of battle became more and more plain and the conditions evidenced by the stragglers falling back became ominous. We took a position covering ground that had not yet been occupied. We did not have long to wait until the enemy advanced on our position flushed with success. Shortly after taking position the 8th Iowa Infantry was formed on the left of our brigade and thenceforth formed a part of it during the day; thus the five Iowa regiments in the following order from right to left, the 2d, 7th, 12th, 14th and 8th held this exposed position for five or six hours until from four to four thirty in the afternoon, resisting every effort of the enemy and repeatedly charging the position to dislodge them. It was the only fixed point of the Union line . . . and was only abandoned after being outflanked right and left. As we lay through the long hours we could hear the firing on both flanks gradually advancing, until when the order to retire was given the sound of firing seemed directly in our rear. The 2d and 7th regiments received the order and fell back in good order, barely escaping through the narrow outlet not yet quite closed by the enemy and exposed to a fire from both sides. The other regiments failed to receive the orders to fall back . . . and were later captured entire.⁸ . . . The two regiments were conducted quietly to a point near the Landing where they formed in the last line of defense and spent the night lying on their arms.

The next morning early they moved to the front in the second days battle supporting in reserve to Gen. Rosseau's [Brig. Gen. Lovell H. Rousseau] division of Buell's [Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell] army which had arrived during the night and took position in advance of our line. The regiment was under fire on the second day and in the afternoon occupied a battery

⁸ This spot was called "The Hornet's Nest" by the Confederates. The name was adopted by the brigade. Curiously enough, no more than 12 of the 7th Iowa were killed in this very hot fight. William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses . . . in the Civil War* (Albany, 1889), 407. Lt. Col. J. C. Parrott, who commanded during the engagement, gave the number as 9. *Report of the Adjutant General . . . State of Iowa . . . 1864*, 1059. The final official figures were 10 killed (1 officer and 9 enlisted men); 17 enlisted men wounded; and 7 enlisted men captured or missing, for a total of 34. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. X, Part I, 101.

of the enemy after it had been practically silenced. . . . It was one of the bloodiest sights I think I ever witnessed. Every horse of the battery had been killed or wounded and most of the men, so that it was almost impossible to walk around the position without stepping in blood. This ended the battle of Shiloh so far as the 7th regiment was concerned. . . .⁹

After the battle, there was a period of rest followed by General Halleck's deliberate movement against Corinth, Mississippi. When Corinth fell without a fight, the 7th Iowa settled into Camp Montgomery about three miles east of the town. Meanwhile it had become apparent that Charles Kittredge would not again be fit for service as a company officer because of his wounds, so on June 12, 1862, Mahon received a commission as captain. He remained at the head of Company F which he had commanded as a lieutenant for more than half a year. Writing from Camp Montgomery on July 9, he said:

. . . I have been cruelly abusing your anxiety for me and I know it but . . . everything has been so unsettled before our encampment here that I had no heart to write. I would have written immediately after the Battle of Shiloh but Kittredge [wrote] 2 or 3 letters next day and that was sufficient to satisfy your anxiety. . . . There is every appearance of a permanent establishment here. One of the Divisions is fortifying the position. Stationary camp life is very dull. No society of any kind except in the Regiment. We don't see a woman once a month except once in a while some of the natives. Also a single specimen belonging to the Regt but she does not wear very clean stockings so her attractions are lost. I wish I could take a run home for a few days and see somebody and go to some of those parties you spoke of but I suppose I shall enjoy them all the more when I do get to come. A person being a long time away from home learns almost to forget it, but once in a while something strikes a chord and the feeling rushes on a person strong as before. . . . The weather is very warm here. The insect tribe is abroad in its might. Anything from a Lizard down to a flea can be had in abundance. You can see a thousand bugs and no two alike.

Largely owing to the regulations and instructions of the sur-

⁹ The 7th Iowa was in J. M. Tuttle's Brigade (First), W. H. L. Wallace's Division (Second) of the Army of the Tennessee at Shiloh. For greater detail on the battle see Otto Eisenschiml, *The Story of Shiloh* (Chicago, 1946).

geon, the health of the Regiment was excellent during the summer of 1862. Cleanliness was enforced and the food rigidly inspected.

Corinth Miss Sept 5/62

. . . I was gratified at Wills success in raising his Company. By this time he is in Keokuk tasting some of the romance of Camp life Why cant Steve go ahead and raise a company anyhow and go into some other Regt if O'Connor has abandoned raising the Irish Regt.¹⁰ I suppose by this time the fate of many of the Ottumwans is sealed and the balance are much relieved. You must write me all who are drafted that I know. I saw Kits name in the papers as Colonel of the 36th Regt which did not surprise me although I knew nothing about his plans. I am glad he got it. Will it be a Volunteer or a drafted Regt. . . . everything down here is quiet as usual The Rebels have most of their forces in front of Buell and in Kentucky. . . . We have the same routine of duties Revielle [sic] or Roll call at 5 oclock in the morning. Breakfast at 6 The camp is all policed and tents cleaned out between these hours. Then the Surgeons call is beaten at 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ oclock and all the sick lame and lazy of the different companies are marched up and prescribed for by the Doctor. Drill Call is at 7 when we drill an hour on the parade. At 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ the guards are mounted 12 oclock dinner call Drill Call again at 5 PM supper at 6 and dress parade at 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ when the Regt turns out in their best clothes. Tattoo at 8 and "Taps" at 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ when all lights must be extinguished And so passes the day the same from one weeks end to the other. Our Guard duty is very heavy at present the men standing Guard every 3 and sometimes every 2 days The labor is not so much as loosing [sic] sleep Smoking is a great luxury when a person has to be up at night. It cant be appreciated until one has campaigned for a while. it is society when you are lonesome Every soldier should smoke. The officers made a collection last week and sent by the Sutler for some books We got quite a library and some very good books among them Motleys "Rise of the Dutch Republic" and a number of other histories which are very instructive. They help to pass time

The summer quiet was broken when the Confederate forces under Generals Earl Van Dorn and Sterling Price moved against

¹⁰ Will was Mahon's brother, who had raised a company for the 36th Regiment, Iowa Infantry. Steve (Stephen Keith) was another brother who later joined the 36th Iowa as sergeant major and in time became adjutant.

the Corinth area. The 7th Iowa was so posted that it did not take a direct part in the battle of Iuka fought on September 19, 1862. It fought, however, in the battle for Corinth, October 3 and 4. This was a rough engagement in which the Regiment lost 122, or one-third of its members who participated. Mahon was sick in bed when the fight began, and he missed all of the first day. He got out of bed, however, to take part the second day.¹¹

When the Confederates were repulsed at Corinth, the quietness of the summer before once again returned to the sector. The 7th Iowa, because it was so decimated, was left in the district as part of the 1st Brigade, 2d Division, 16th Corps.¹² As a result, it did not take part in the Vicksburg campaign, but engaged instead in the passive business of holding part of the long Union line that stretched from the mouth of the Shenandoah River to the mouth of the Mississippi. The entire winter, however, was not perfectly tranquil.

Corinth Miss Jan'y 5/63

Our communication with the outer world is at last open for the first time since December 18th and I hasten to set any anxiety at rest which you may have had about me. . . . The railroad was destroyed by a force of 6000 Rebel cavalry and 6 guns and they held it at different points all the time eluding the Federal Forces sent against them. the 7th was in two expeditions sent after them from here but we only succeeded in marching ourselves nearly to death without seeing them the first one we started Dec 19 and marched 100 miles in 4 days making a march of 35 miles the first day the next time we started Jan 2d and marched 30 miles in 1½ days through a drenching rain and mud ankle deep Accounts reach us now that Genl Sullivan¹³ attacked near Jackson Tenn and routed them taking many prisoners and all their artillery. So that is the end of the great "equestrian raid" which has cut off all Grants communication for three weeks. Our 30 mile march was to cut them off after Sullivan whipped them but we were too late as soon as communications were cut off the Garrison were put on

¹¹ Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments* . . . , 173. The 7th lost 21 men killed, 87 wounded, and 14 captured or missing, for a total of 122 men. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, 175.

¹² Previous assignments of the 7th Iowa, together with brigade, division, district, and departmental commanders, may be found in Frederick N. Dyer (compiler), *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* . . . (Des Moines, 1908), 501.

¹³ Brig. Gen. Jeremiah C. Sullivan of the U. S. Army, in command of the District of Jackson. For accounts of this engagement, see *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, 551-3.

half rations and have been so ever since we are now eating corn meal foraged from the Country but we are thankful for that we will have plenty in a day or two our Holiday dinners were rather meagre but we had a fine Goose for New Years it was procured on a foraging expedition and if stolen Goose is sweet I think this one was stolen However he had no business to have been Goslinged in a Secesh locality. The heaviest sensation was a Grand Ball at the Tishamingo Hotel New Years there were 120 officers present from General down the district was ransacked for ladies and they succeeded in scaring up about 25 mostly officers wives and daughters and a few natives. it required ingenuity and management of a very high order to obtain a partner your humble servant succeeded tolerably well considering that many did not get to dance at all toward the last it became rather too noisy to be dignified but it was not owing to stimulating beverages for unfortunately Corinth was nearly destitute of everything in that line when the RR was cut the festivities ended by a grand choral effort on the part of the officers after the ladies had gone home which was more remarkable for quantity than quality. . . . We have just heard that Vicksburg has been taken by Genl Sherman. It seems unaccountable that Burnside has been repulsed on the Rappahannock¹⁴ he must have an immense army the east seems to be the dead lock of the War. the right man will come after a while We must only fight and wait. destiny is being worked out and it will come sooner or later.

Bethel Tenn Mar 14/63

. . . Since I last wrote we have experienced one of the vicissitudes of soldier's life a change of station We have exchanged the noisy monotony of a garrison of 8,000 men for one of 2 regts our own and the 43d Ohio. Bethel is situated 23 miles north of Corinth on the Columbus Railroad and in its palmy days consisted of a dozen houses a grocery "Emporium" a Blacksmiths shop and a meeting house. Three of the houses are now occupied by families and its commercial importance has become a myth. But the country around is pretty well settled and [there are] any amount of big girls

Col Rice¹⁵ is commander of the post and dispenses military justice in the

¹⁴ The rumor of the fall of Vicksburg was, of course, incorrect. That city held out until the following July 4. His reference concerning Burnside is about the Battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862.

¹⁵ Elliott W. Rice of Oskaloosa, Iowa, who was the second commander of the Regiment. He had been made a major on August 30, 1861, being raised from a non-

Vicinity the government policy seems to be conciliating here and the people are not disturbed. Most of them are making preparations for farming the coming season. The regiments that we relieved were here since the evacuation of Corinth and got well acquainted with the people. Parties were very frequent and a number of them got married. When they went away the people came in from all directions to see them off. It seemed like leaving home. I do not know what success we will have in making the fair sex forget their sorrows and their departed lovers. I have not struck out yet but my enterprising Lieutenant has made several voyages of discovery and returned each time stepping like a turkey in stubble and seemingly much gratified. The people seem anxious to get acquainted with the soldiers to secure their good will. The prospect is that we will remain here during the summer and the only chance we have to escape a frightful monotony is to get acquainted and have the best time we can but I shall not get married without letting you know. . . . I have read "Les Miserables" all but the 4th volume which I am unable to obtain. . . . Send some good butter if you send anything. I wont write anything about my health for none of you seem to believe anything I say on that subject. . . . you cant prove me a liar by demonstration for there is not the remotest chance to obtain a furlough. . . . the weather is fine and warm we are going about in shirt sleeves. . . . All are looking toward Vicksburg. I would like to give a piece of my mind to some of your Butternut neighbors. it would be more forcible than elegant.

Bethel Tenn Apr 30/63

. . . the expedition from Corinth as I expected did not do much fighting. our troops have possession of Tuscumbia a strategic point on the Tenn River with a view of making it a point to cooperate with Rosencrans [sic].¹⁶ We still keep watch and ward over the classic and sacred Bethel. Since the other Regt left the orders have been very strict. no soldiers going out or citizens allowed inside the lines. the orders are merely precautionary and dont indicate any thing serious the principal trouble being felt by susceptible young Gentlemen having tender associations outside the lines whose commissioned grade to that rank. He received a colonelcy and the command of the unit after Donelson, when the first commander, Jacob G. Lauman, was made a brigadier. Both men, along with the Lt. Col. of the Regiment, Augustus Wentz of Davenport, who was killed, had been wounded at Belmont. *Stuart, Iowa Colonels and Regiments* . . ., 163ff., 171ff.

¹⁶ Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans, commander of the Army of the Cumberland.

plans and appointments are thus broken in on. . . . I have been thinking some about what you wrote in regard to the money and can understand the difficulty of doing anything with it I would like much to come home and see about it myself but fear it is impossible. if there is no good chance of investing it just let it lie. Keep the Gold and legal tender notes and use the other for spending money. We were paid 4 months pay on last Friday I sent 425\$ to Jos. H. Merrill¹⁷ do what you can with it The Co sent in all nearly 1800\$ we are now paid up to March 1st and will not probably get any more for sometime. I have kept enough to last me.

Bethel Tenn May 27/63

. . . We have not had as much to disturb us in six months as your letter describes. not even a man killed. the only foe we have here are of the feminine [sic] gender I dont think their charms will prove as destructive as the muskets of their Butternut friends in Dixie. . . . the 7th Ill is now with us at this post the other Regt having gone they are familiarly known as "Cooks Crampers" the term is significant implying that any thing alying [sic] around loose has an extreme liability to stick to their fingers. . . . it was one of that Regt that carried a heavy grindstone for a mile on the forced march from Ironton merely to keep his hand in. the two 7's will make a strong team. The weather is getting very warm but the health of the Regt continues excellent If we had a little more to do it would be better for us. We are living on the excitement of events transpiring at Vicksburg. the regret it that we are not there. We have been in the front of the chace [sic] since the war began and would like to be "in at the death" . . . I am glad there has been some disposition made of the money I was very anxious about having so large a sum about the house depositing it in Burlington is the best thing could be done at present What do you think of investing it in U. S. Bonds they will be good without the country goes to the mischief and then we might as well go with it. . . . We are living quite high in our mess at present it is composed of Lieuts [Benjamin B.] Gale and [Joseph B.] Morrison of Co D, Charley and myself We have young onions, greens, radishes, salad eggs, butter milk and best of all a good cook we often laugh over the sighs of our friends at home thinking

¹⁷ After the war Mahon engaged very successfully in the wholesale grocery business in Ottumwa with Joseph H. Merrill. The firm name, J. H. Merrill & Co., lasted until 1915 when it was changed to Samuel Mahon Co. That was the year of Mahon's death.

that we are living on rusty bacon and hard crackers but there is no telling how long our epicurean life will last. for a Soldier knows not what days may bring forth We have however philosophy to enjoy it while it lasts

Corinth Miss June 8/63

. . . we are again back at Corinth greatly to our disgust. Bethel is evacuated by the federals all except what affections were left behind. . . . It is horribly dismal today we all have the blues. all the other Regts here built fine frame barracks since we left and we are back and have nothing but old tents their resistance of moisture is now being tried sorely for it is raining like the mischief. . . . When marching orders came . . . Ah then and there were hurryings to and from and gathering of tears and tremblings of distress and cheeks all pale. . . . the 7th will long remember Bethel it has been the poetical part of their war career both as regards love and good rations some took one and some the other. Alas! goodbye pretty girls. . . . Angels that deigned to lighten the path of the "cursed" Yankees with their smiles and let them "set up" with them and perhaps occasionally grant a chaste kiss.

Corinth Miss June 24th/63

. . . We are up to our eyes in work on our barracks the wet weather having delayed us. . . . I attended a grand presentation of a stand of Colors to the 1st Alabama Africans last week. . . . there were a number of speeches made. two of the Negroes spoke they were rather amusing and made some good hits without knowing it the first one speaking of the amalgamation feature of slavery pointing to a number of Negro children who were present. look said he look at the *stain* of the white mans blood in the faces of one half of your children. . . . They were a fine looking body of men and I dont think they will disgrace their colors.

Corinth Miss July 17/63

. . . We have been preparing for some time for a prize drill which transpired on the 15th. The two best drilled companies from each of the 4 Regiments in the Brigade were the competitors [sic] My company was honored with being chosen from the 7th the other company from the 7th was Co D from Fort Madison 8 companies in all it was a fine sight in every respect. Appearance dress and drill. My men all had white gloves. each company drilled for 1/2 hour in the manual and maneuvers in "quick" and "double quick" time. The drill was splendid you could not discover the variation of an inch in the line of men as they rushed by on the Double

Quick. Mine was the first company that went through the ordeal under the eyes of the whole Division Genl Dodge, Genl Sweeney¹⁸ and others too numerous to mention it was pretty hard on the nerves at first but that soon wore off the decision has not been announced yet Col Rice sent me an order complimenting me in the highest terms on the performance of my company. . . . everybody is anxious to hear the decisions. the prize is to be honorably mentioned in general orders from departmental Head Quarters at Memphis You will think probably that this is very different kind of work from fighting but it all goes to make up the sum of a soldier. . . .

Moscow Tenn August 23/63

The old adage that "fools build houses and wise men live in them" was never better verified than in our case. You will very naturally inquire where Moscow is. I answer it is not that celebrated city where the great European Conqueror got his fatal blow but it is an inland city on the C & M RR about half way between Memphis and Corinth. . . . In just two hours time from when we first heard it we cast a last sorrowing glance at our fast receding Barracks. . . . I lay on top of a car preferring it to the crowded inside and had a fine opportunity to study astronomy and estimate the precise amount of dew it takes to wet a man through. We arrived at our destination next day. A cursory view of Moscow revealed the fact that the population consisted of one man a woman a boy and a baby. The quartette keep a hotel and a very dirty one too. . . . We marched out to our camp ground a waste of Rag Weed and grasshoppers. . . . How long we will stay here the Lord only knows but I hope not long. I have just recd a detail to report as a member of a Court Martial at La Grange 8 miles up the road. . . .

La Grange Oct 20th/1863

. . . We have had a hard time but not in the fighting line. The evening of my arrival information was received of the advance of the enemy with the intention of cutting the road Our Brigade was immediately started after them with 3 days rations and our blankets instead of 3 days we were out

¹⁸ Grenville M. Dodge, of Council Bluffs, original colonel of the 4th Iowa, had been promoted to brigadier general, March 31, 1862, and had assumed command of the left wing of the 16th Army Corps on July 8, 1863. See Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments* . . ., 109-116; and J. R. Perkins, *Trails, Rails and War, The Life of General G. M. Dodge* (Indianapolis, 1929). Thomas W. Sweeney had served in the Mexican War, in the U. S. Army, and with the Missouri Volunteers during the Civil War until appointed colonel of the 52nd Illinois. He was commissioned a brigadier general on Nov. 29, 1862. *Dictionary of American Biography*, 18: 242-3.

10 foraging on the country for rations and breaking our hearts marching after cavalry which we vainly attempted to catch. Their object was not to fight but to destroy the road and they eluded us at every point. . . . the day after we started out the enemy attacked Collierville which was garrisoned by a part of the 66th Ind Infy about 300 men. Supposing they would fall an easy prey and the enemy could then destroy the road from that point but the accidental arrival of the 13th Regulars on the Memphis train which had also on board Maj Genl Sherman and his whole staff enabled them to beat off the enemy with severe loss. Three of the nights we were out it rained very hard which we took as philosophically as we could. one comfort we had and that was plenty to eat. part of the country we marched through had never before been visited by our army and we helped ourselves liberally. the feathered tribe were the especial object of attack. . . . some of the country was almost a paradise, the Houses were magnificent but the hand of the ruthless invader despoiled them. . . . We had our election on the march the Regt cast 306 votes Tuttle¹⁹ only got one. There was 29 votes cast for the Wapello County ticket all Union. it may interest some of the county candidates to know how we went. the soldiers vote may beat the Copperhead majority in the County.

Pulaski Tenn Nov 12/63

. . . Here we are again in communication with the outer world. We left Iuka Miss on the 5th crossed the Tenn at Eastport the same day. We had a rough time of it too our Regt worked hard all night loading and unloading Baggage trains artillery etc on the ferry boats it was a cold night and our train for the Regt with our blankets was the last over and that night we had to do without them it took 50 and 60 men to haul the pieces of Artillery up the steep banks of the river. All were got over about nine o'clock next morning and at 11 we bid good bye to the outer world. We marched 11 miles that day and went into camp tired sleepy after marching 2 days and working hard one night without any rest. . . . Next day we marched 13 miles and did not get into camp till midnight we were delayed pulling the artillery through some infernal swamps minus a bottom. the 7th formed the rear guard and had to help everything out the next day we

¹⁹ James M. Tuttle, colonel of the 2nd Iowa, had been promoted to brigadier general June 9, 1862. In 1863 he was nominated for governor of Iowa on the Democratic ticket, but was defeated by a colonel—Wm. M. Stone. For sketch of Tuttle's war service, see Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments* . . ., 51-8.

marched 23 miles through a beautiful country next day 18 and the next 18 arriving here yesterday having marched 82 miles from the Tenn River in 5 days which is pretty well considering that the men had to carry about 45 lbs each and we have a provision and ammunition train of about 300 wagons to guard. The rest of Shermans corps kept 2 days ahead of us all the time and I dont know their whereabouts. Our Division marched by itself Pulaski is 75 miles from Nashville and 50 from Tullahoma There is a RR running from here to Nashville but it is only repaired from Nashville to Columbia about thirty miles from here our wagon trains start to Columbia in the morning for ration with a Cavalry Guard and that is the way this letter is going Pulaski is a very pretty town as large as Ottumwa the Rebs have occupied it all summer how long we remain here I dont know. . . . I stood the march finely did not ride one step of the way We looked rather rough however when we got through We were unshaved unwashed and dirty as you please. I meditate a grand scrub this evening and expect to enjoy the luxury of a clean shirt. I brought Fannies wine with me and am waiting patiently for a chance to use it medicinally [sic]. the brandy was used as a preventive to chills and fever of cold mornings. . . . direct letters via Nashville Tenn to 7th Regt Iowa Infy, 1st Brigade, 2d Division, 16th Army Corps

Pulaski Tenn Dec 11th/63

. . . Things here progress smoothly no news no nothing. We have worked on our quarters till like Peggoty we are "pretty comfortable" the report now is that Grants whole army are going into winter quarters I recd my trunk from Corinth via Nashville a few days ago and rejoiced once more in a white shirt also my books and I intend immediately to prosecute French vigorously. . . . I have at length become acquainted with one of the "dark eyed darlings" of Pulaski only her eyes are blue and her hair molasses candy colored. She sings the Bonnie Blue Flag with a vengeance and talks about the brave and heroic Southern Boys. and then I laugh at her and cite her to instances where they have displayed remarkable capacity in the athletic and healthy exercise of running. her Father is immensely wealthy he generously freed his 100 slaves when our forces took possession here and he could hold them no longer. Miss Laura is horrified at the idea of making soldiers of them. the thought of the dear Southern Boys being shot by a "nigger" was terrible. Nobody who had not seen a good deal of slavery can concieve [sic] in what utter contempt they hold the

negro. . . . There are plenty of young ladies here but they all have some long haired individual in the Rebel army who engrosses their whole attention to the utter exclusion of the abominable Yankees. I think they will get a little more used to it after a while. . . . The Regt was paid off yesterday 2 months pay $\frac{1}{2}$ of my pay was stopped during my "Leave of Absence" going home is pretty expensive but I did not regret it. I shall send some money home tomorrow. In regard to my going into the Regular Service I shall be only too glad if I succeed. The Regts time will be out in 8 months and it is uncertain now whether the war will last much longer. after the war there will be thousands of young men thrown on civil life with nothing to do and every department of Business filled and the lord knows what will become of many of them. besides I am afraid I shall not be fit for much else. I like a military life and 3 years service goes far toward unfitting a man for any other occupation and if it becomes a matter of necessity I can resign at any time. In the Regular Army I likely will not be placed in active service and will stand a chance of seeing more of you all than I do now. All the detached duty in the northern states is done by Regular Army Officers and especially newly appointed ones

Pulaski Tenn Dec 28/63

. . . part of the train consisted of contributions from Iowa for a Christmas treat for the 2nd and 7th each company got quite a lot of can fruits and nuts of different kinds but the beauty of it all was they sent several boxes of common Turnips. . . . I am afraid the turnip donor was not appreciated. We made the trip just in time for Christmas When I got back I found the Regt in an uproar about enlisting in the Veteran Service Co F was awaiting my return. Next day the matter was started and up to this time 34 men have reenlisted I enclose their names We are now waiting to get mustered in before starting home on a thirty days Furlough in the State. The Company goes as a Company taking with us our arms accoutrements and camp equip[a]ge. . . . We are all looking forward anxiously to the time when we will march through the streets of old Ottumwa that we left nearly 3 years ago. The only sad feeling is in looking over the thinned ranks and thinking of the many brave boys that left never to return now sleeping their last sleep under Southern bloodsoaked sod no more to be roused by the shrill bugle call or hoarse roll of the drum to prepare for the midnight surprise or deadly charge Many a tearful mother will look in vain for some loved form upon which she invoked Gods blessing with a

breaking heart when he went forth at Sumpters [sic] signal gun to fight for his country Well they have fought a good fight and gone to a merciful god. It would be very gratifying to the company to get some kind of a reception on their arrival but of course it would not do for me to prompt the movement. it could be gotten up very easily by some of the leading spirits in town. I would write Joe Merrill if I had time but am very busy in making out an endless amount of papers and returns. The company expect some kind of a public reception and they ought to get it. I would like to have the Band at the Depot when we come in as we shall have no music with us except a bugle. . . . I shall telegraph from Nashville Cairo or Decatur what day we may be expected so that the friends may be in readiness to recieve [sic] them. . . . let Ottumwa do her best. . . . better have the fact of our coming and the list of names published in the Courier

Mahon had his wish, and Ottumwa turned out to welcome the veterans of Company F. As is always the case, the furlough was too soon over. Hardly had it seemed to start than February 27 arrived and the Regiment was on its way from Keokuk by steamboat to return to the field. Although they did not know it, the Veteran Volunteers of the 7th Iowa were about to embark on their first service in the line since the battle of Corinth, October 3 and 4, 1862.²⁰ After eighteen months free of major engagements, they were about to enter some of their roughest fighting.

Prospect Tenn Mch 9/64

[We came] by River all the way and arrived in Pulaski in just one week from Keokuk We got to Pulaski in the evening and were ordered next morning at daylight to march to this place 17 miles south of P—— you may believe it was a rough introduction after our Furlough. . . . the mud was boot top deep and we floundered along casting many a retrospective thought back on our now vanished Furloughs. I remembered bitterly and my stomach ably abetted my memory over the cozy Breakfasts Fannie used to fix for me and thought what an infernal fool I was not to eat more. . . . my furlough seems like some dream I can hardly realize I have been home

²⁰ They were joining Sherman's campaign into Georgia. The 7th Iowa remained with Sherman thereafter until the end of the grand review in Washington, D. C., May 23, 24, 1865. For a brief military study of the movement against Atlanta see Matthew Forney Steele, *American Campaigns* (2 vols., Harrisburg, Pa., 1949), 1:535-54; 2:281-8. For more elaborate accounts see Jacob D. Cox, *The March to the Sea* (New York, 1882); Grenville M. Dodge, *The Battle of Atlanta and Other Campaigns* (Council Bluffs, 1911).

it reminds me of Mohammets visit to heaven. I am at present supporting the dignity of Commander of the Regt and also the Post both field Officers being absent I hope the elevation wont spoil me as I shall be let down this evening when Col Parrott arrives . . .²¹ everything looks like spring except the absence of any farm work. the plantations are mostly deserted every thing has the mark of War Devastating and destructive the contrast is greater by seeing every thing in Iowa going along in peace and quietness

Camp Chickamauga Creek Ga May 6/64

. . . the day after I wrote our Corps got marching orders and two days afterwards saw us all enroute for this place.²² . . . We left Prospect on the 29th and marched out 12 miles joining our Division next morning two more days marching brought us to Huntsville Ala. . . . Huntsville is a very pretty place with a beautiful country around it but all more or less marred by the destruction incidental to mass desolation we left the town next morning and marched 15 miles and went into Camp to enjoy a good nights rest on Uncle Sams feathers which being translated means the ground. No mortal can appreciate the blessing of sleep till they make a campaign. . . . the next day we were put through to the tune of 25 miles in order to reach the RR at Larkinsville to take the train to Chattanooga We were awfully tired that night the distance is equivalent to marching from Otumwa to Oskaloosa only we had a mountain road instead of a level one. I fared pretty well but it was hard on the men who had to carry their knap-

²¹ Lt. Col. J. C. Parrott was in command of the 7th Iowa. Rice, who was still colonel and in nominal command, was acting as commander of a brigade composed of the 2nd and 7th Iowa, the 52nd Illinois, and the 66th Indiana.

²² "We broke camp May 1st, and started on the march overland to Chattanooga to join the army under General Sherman to take part in the Atlanta campaign." Smith, *History of the Seventh Iowa* . . ., 113. For Sherman's own account of this campaign, see *Memoirs of Gen. W. T. Sherman* . . . (2 vols., New York, 1891), Vol. 2. See also Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman, Fighting Prophet* (New York, 1932). Grant had been promoted to command of the armies, and Sherman had taken Grant's place in command of the Military Division of the Mississippi, which comprised the Departments of the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, and Arkansas. The plan of campaign was for Grant to move against Lee in the East, and for Sherman to take Atlanta and proceed southward through Georgia, thus cutting the Confederacy in two. The date set for the combined movement was May 5, 1864. Sherman's troops consisted of the Army of the Cumberland, under Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas; the Army of the Tennessee, under Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson (the 7th Iowa was attached to this Army, being in the 1st Brigade, 2d Division, of the 16th Army Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Grenville M. Dodge); and the Army of the Ohio, under command of Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield; a total of 110,123 men. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXXVIII, Part I, 89-117.

sacks canteens and haversacks with 3 days Rations and their arms and accoutrements and 40 rounds of ammunition. they stood it though as a soldier must. My recruits stand it better than I expected. One of them was sunstruck the first day but he was able to march the next. . . . We reached Chattanooga next evening distant 60 miles by RR disembarked and went into Camp for the night here I saw Lookout Mountain and the famous Mission Ridge the scene of Grants late glory²³ the mountains tower up several thousand feet. the Lord knows how our troops ever stormed it but they did it that is certain. Chattanooga is an insignificant struggling little town important only from its strategic position Next morning (yesterday) we marched south from Chattanooga 14 miles and are lying here today waiting for orders. . . . There is an immense army concentrating here. When we were coming into Chattanooga on the RR the road which runs Parallell [sic] to the RR was one continuous column of men for 15 miles. there are 5 Army Corps here so if you hear of any fighting you must not take it for granted we are in it.

Dallas Georgia May 30th 1864

. . . I am writing this on an old letter recd from one of my men being unable to get other paper. We are now occupying a fortified position near Dallas. Co F has lost no more men since the Oostanaula except two slightly wounded²⁴ We made a forced march from Kingston marching almost day and night but are in good health and spirits except being fatigued. The enemy attacked our position on the 28th but was repulsed with the loss of about 4000 men our loss was almost nothing. our Brigade which took part in the fight hardly lost a dozen men. so much for our fortifications.²⁵ last night (Sunday) the enemy made several determined attacks on our position but was repulsed every time the fight lasted all night. the firing was ter-

²³ For Grant's victory at Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge (also known as the Battle of Chattanooga) in November, 1863, see Lewis, *Sherman . . .*, 318ff; *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (2 vols., New York, 1886), 2:61-88; Sherman, *Memoirs . . .*, 1:392ff.

²⁴ The crossing of the Oostanaula River on May 15, 1864, at Lay's Ferry had resulted in a sharp fight for the 7th Iowa in which it lost 61 men. Report of Lt. Col. Parrott, *Report of the Adjutant General . . . State of Iowa . . . 1864*, 1061. Many years later Mahon wrote an account of this encounter for the regimental history. Smith, *History of the Seventh Iowa . . .*, 120-22.

²⁵ The 7th Iowa fought behind breastworks for the first time at Dallas. Thereafter, they threw up hasty field fortifications whenever they halted. This was one of the innovations in warfare to come out of the Civil War. Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments . . .*, 175-6.

rific. today we are sleeping as well as the skirmishers will allow us. they keep a continual rattle in front but we are getting pretty well used to it. some of the Regts fired 80 rounds of ammunition last night. . . . We have reports this morning that the Rebels lost 4000 men in front of Hooker²⁶ last night we heard the firing before our ball opened. We would be a tough looking set of customers now to present ourselves in Ottumwa. I am tanned as black as a pot, dirty and seedy. have not seen my valise for ten days. our principal cares are our Arms and ammunition and something to wear. Much the most important items in this country. . . . we are 30 miles from Atlanta. . . .

In the Field near Marietta Ga June 26th/64

. . . I sometimes think I am the most fortunate individual in the circle of my acquaintance. So far I am all right my health is excellent and I enjoy it as well as one can in a bake oven. You speak of not getting letters from me regularly. . . . I have written almost every mail. every paper we get chronicles some fight Sherman has had and then I think well when the folks read this they will be in a stew and forthwith I write to some of you announcing the continued excellence of my very valuable health and the still whole condition of my skin and bones I got nearly angry when you asked me if it was myself was wounded. I wish you would try to look on the bright side . . . and not always think the world has formed a coalition for the express purpose of decieving [sic] you. . . . Our division is at present in the Reserve Line the Rebs are on two Mountains that rise abruptly out of the plain immediately in our front.²⁷ most of the fighting on this part of the line is Artillery and skirmishing we are literally digging them out advancing inch by inch. Their works are in plain view on the face of the Mountain and their artillery fire especially at night makes a grand display of fireworks this position is their strong hold to cover Atlanta. once we are in possession of this tis said we can march direct on that city. the lines are very quiet today usually so noisy. Why I cannot say. a person

²⁶ Joseph Hooker who had been in command of the Army of the Potomac when it was beaten at Chancellorsville. With Sherman's Army he was in command of the 20th Army Corps, Army of the Cumberland.

²⁷ There were actually three so-called "mountains" in the vicinity—Kenesaw, Pine, and Lost—where the Confederates were entrenched. Pine Mountain had been abandoned when Sherman's forces moved to attack it on June 15; Lost Mountain was abandoned on June 16, and the defense concentrated on Kenesaw. It took Sherman's army until July 4 to take Kenesaw Mountain. See Sherman, *Memoirs* . . . , 2:50-64.

is not expected to know anything down here only to do as you are told and eat all you can get the latter is by no means difficult as regards quantity. . . . I want a pair of boots Mr. Miller has my measure. I want Calf Skin single upper, double sole square toes wide heels. . . . have him make them and send them down to me the first chance you get of any body coming down dont send them by express there is none here send me some postage stamps in next letter.

Near Roswell Ga July 15th 1864

. . . While we were pursuing the Rebs after their retreat from Kenesaw Mountain there was no time to do anything. the 4th of July was quite lively there were several attacks made on different points of the Rebel line of retreat but no general engagement. Our Brigade was only engaged as skirmishers except the Artillery but we had to build a line of Rifle pits under fire of the Reb Batteries just enough to make the men work lively our regt lost only a few men. it was about the quickest piece of work completed I ever saw. . . . on the 8th our Corps was moved from the Right to the extreme left 25 miles and we are now across the Chattahoochie River at a point 9 miles east of Marietta. We had to wade the River as the Rebs burnt the bridge behind them. it is larger than the Demoine [sic] at Otumwa and was waist deep in some places. Our Corps crossed in two Columns the sight was decidedly picturesque. . . . we fortified our position and have been here since taking it easy and picking Blackberries. . . . a detail is made to pick them the men taking their arms with them they are the best thing could be possibly had for the Army in their present sanitary condition.

Before Atlanta Ga Aug 6th 64

. . . We are . . . protected by heavy works our only wish is that the Rebs would attack them but they are getting too sharp for that. . . . everything has been quiet in our front since the battle of the 28th except some sharp skirmishing and artillery duels which hurt nobody the left wing of our Regt had a warm time of it day before yesterday being out on picket the picket line was ordered to be advanced they went forward on a run easily driving the enemys pickets some half a mile where they halted and were throwing up hasty defenses but the Rebs came out in force before they got them done and our fellows came back a good deal faster than they went with a loss of 8 men. I consider it getting off cheap at that. we thought for a while that most of the whole five companies were gobbled.

Co F was not in the scrape. . . . We can see the city. Its spires and cupolas glittering in the sun and seeming to defy the Yankee invader outside. May its pride fall the way Babylons fell. My faith is strong. I am now in command of the Regt being the Senior Captain the Major having resigned and Col Parrott is sick in Hospital. the old gentleman is about worn out he cant stand it much longer everybody advises him to go out of service but he hangs on. I gave the Major an invitation to call at the House. . . . Several of the Boys who have gone home will call. treat them the best you know how. . . . One great beauty about commanding the Regt is I can ride instead of having to march.

Mahon's commission as major was dated August 7. He replaced the resigning officer, James W. McMullin, and was known as Major Mahon throughout the rest of his life.

Before Atlanta Ga Aug 22nd 64

. . . there is nothing new to relate in regard to operations. Our hammering away at Atlanta has become an old story and we are waiting patiently for the sequel by Genl Sherman. . . . Genl Dodge was wounded on the skirmish line a few days ago. he commands the left wing 16th Corps the wound is severe but not dangerous. Sergt Balcom who was wounded on the 22d has recd a furlough. he lives in Chillicothe. when he returns send down the boots by him. . . . I am now wearing a pair that could vie without blushing with a pair of Connaught Brogans. they are very good but like the man and the Bed bugs I have not the strength to spare to carry them. fortunately there is not much locomotion required. . . . they have put a 4½ inch Rodman Siege Gun in a fort about 40 feet from my Hdqts. It is fired at the city every 10 minutes day and night. it is not the best opiate in the world to produce sleep but we are getting used to it and snore away²⁸

HdQtrs 7th Iowa Infy Rome Ga Oct 3rd 64

. . . Our division was ordered up here very suddenly on the . . . ult with 4 days rations in Haversacks and in light marching order. We came here on the train bringing no wagons and supposed we would be pushed out through the Country . . . on a raid but we were put in camp and are waiting patiently for our baggage to come up. . . . there were 2 RR Trains captured between here and Atlanta day before yesterday and there

²⁸ Atlanta fell, after a long siege, on September 2, 1864. Sherman, *Memoirs* . . . , 2:96-136.

is an unpleasant rumor in circulation that our Wagon Train and Baggage has also "gone up." . . . if it should turn out true my Valise and promiscuous traps are doubtless by this time contributing to the toilet of some ragged Cavalier of the [illegible] persuasion. . . . Rome has been a very pretty place supported a considerable aristocracy and was lighted with Gas its glory and gaslight have departed and the best houses in town are in use as hospitals where most of the sick and wounded in the Army of the Tenn have been sent during the summer there were at one time as many as 4000 sick and wounded in the place. . . . Col Parrott has not yet returned probably on account of the communication being again interrupted Genl Forrest²⁹ being at present in charge of the RR between Chattanooga and Nashville. . . . We havnt had a Mail for nearly two weeks and have almost quit expecting one. I am writing this so it will go through on the first train that gets over the road. We have not been paid yet for some unknown reason. It will be quite a new sensation to have money in ones pocket everybody here is strapped alike

Rome Ga Oct 22nd 64

. . . Military matters have been pretty lively here since the Altoona [Allatoona] affair our Division has not been with the Main Army.³⁰ We are nevertheless kept constantly moving about Rome in every point of the Compass. Genl Hood³¹ it seems after attacking Altoona marched directly north and before he could be headed off took Dalton and played smash with the Road this is only 30 miles from Chattanooga. On Shermans coming up he skedaddled again passing him and struck south and the Lord only knows where he is now. My private opinion is that Genl Sherman was slightly out witted in the movement but the thing only amounted to a raid making the most of it and the RR can be repaired in a few days. The Rebel Army is now so much inferior in numbers they can attempt nothing permanently offensive. . . .

Rome Ga Nov 5th 64

I recd your letter of 27th Oct this evening the first I have recd for some

²⁹ Nathan Bedford Forrest, celebrated Confederate cavalry leader.

³⁰ Due to a railroad accident, the 7th Iowa did not reach Allatoona on October 5, 1864, until the bloody battle was already won. *Report of the Adjutant General . . . State of Iowa . . . 1864*, 1061.

³¹ General John B. Hood in command of the Confederate army opposing Sherman's invasion. Hood was given the command after Joseph E. Johnston was relieved July 17, 1864.

time. . . . I wrote an account of the Altoona affair but presume you did not get the letter. Mails in this country have become problematical. My valise came through all right. . . . I was rather surprised at hearing of Ottumwa becoming a base of military operations. I should like to have seen the forces drawn up in line. Kittredge must have been proud of his army. . . . the Rebel Army have crossed north of the Tenn River and the Army of the Cumberland is after them. We (the Army of the Tenn) are preparing for a long campaign in some unknown direction. everything is being removed from Rome preparatory to an evacuation. all the large Hospitals are gone north. We are stripped of all surplus Baggage all tents etc and have sent all men unable to march to Chattanooga fully prepared for a fight or a race. Our Division will leave this place tomorrow or next day for Atlanta to join the Army. My theory is that we will make a break for either Mobile or Savannah cutting loose from all communication and subsist on the Country which can be easily done. it will be rather a rough physic on the bowels of the Confederacy. they have no adequate force to oppose us as the Main Rebel Army is in Tenn confronted by the Army of the Cumberland. What they are trying to accomplish the Lord only knows for by the movement they have left all Southern Georgia open to our inroads. We expect to be paid 8 months pay tomorrow. We have waited long and patiently for it. I shall make a remittance if I get an opportunity of sending it by any person. dont be uneasy if you dont hear from me very soon as we may "cut loose" any hour. . . .³²

Savannah Ga Dec 22/64

I sent Fanny a letter day before yesterday with a short account of our campaign. Yesterday morning it was discovered that the enemy had left our front. at daylight the line was pushed across the Causeway and at noon we entered Savannah capturing the few remaining Rebels³³ the main body

³² Sherman was preparing his troops for his famous march through Georgia to the sea, which began on November 15, 1864, when his troops left Atlanta. Sherman, *Memoirs* . . . , 2:177. The 7th Iowa, now under the command of Brig. Gen. John M. Corse (Dodge having been wounded in the fighting around Atlanta), was a part of the 1st Brigade, 4th Division, 15th Army Corps, which was a part of Sherman's right wing under command of Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLIV, 20.

³³ Sherman had reached the sea and Savannah fell on December 21, 1864, whereupon he triumphantly telegraphed to President Lincoln: "I beg to present you, as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah, with 150 heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, and also about 25,000 bales of cotton." *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLIV, 783.

having escaped across the River (Savannah) the night before and made their way into South Carolina. We supposed the City was entirely invested but this one loophole was left and they got out through it. . . . they left everything women in their flight barely getting away with their men. about 200 cannon immense quantities of Ammunition RR Cars etc fell into our hands. . . . all the Rebel fleet including 2 Ironclads we captured or were destroyed. the city is much the handsomest I have yet seen in the South and the people appear well disposed toward the "invaders" in fact they petitioned the Rebel Genl Hardee to give up the place without fighting. An assault was planned for the following night . . . but the evacuation has given some of us a little longer lease of our previous existense [sic] You remember I wrote in my last that in our front there was a deep creek and swamp. Well on the night of the 19th I took a small boat and 4 men and had it carried for half a mile through a swamp launched it and crossed the Creek under 2 of the Rebel Batteries. the object was to find some ground on the opposite bank practible [sic] for troops to land. I paddled down the Creek some distance using a spade for oars but found nothing but bottomless marsh overgrown with tall reeds. I returned just in time to our own side as the moon which was just rising would have revealed our movements. higher up the River however the other Brigade discovered a practicable landing and here the assault was to have been made the troops crossing in boats but the evacuation made it unnecessary. the weather is splendid and we are all in fine spirits. a few days rest then Ho for Charleston the hot bed of treason. Shermans columns will make short work of it. South Carolina cried out the first for war, and she shall have it to her hearts content. She sowed the Wind. She will soon reap the Whirlwind³⁴ she will yet weep tears of blood for her folly in firing at our glorious old flag. . . . Well may she tremble. her insolence will avail her but little now.

I would like to be with you all at Christmas to enjoy some of your home preparations but I guess Ill not come this time

Savannah Ga Jany 15th 65

. . . It seems an age since I heard from home last my latest dates are

³⁴ Sherman is charged by many, historians among them, with having indoctrinated his troops in methods of warfare that violated the rules of civilized conflict. Be that as it may, Mahon's metaphor was one Sherman himself used; see Sherman to Mrs. Sherman, June 27, 1863, in M. A. De Wolfe Howe (ed.), *Home Letters of General Sherman* (New York, 1909), 158, 159. In no place in any of Mahon's letters is there the slightest sympathy shown for the Southern civilians who were the victims of Sherman's methods.

Dec 10th. . . . some of the letters must get lost in trying to find us. . . . I am at present on duty in the City on a court martial the Division is about 2 miles out of Town so I have taken up quarters and board in town and am living in style. . . . the Family took a good deal of pains to inform us that they never kept Boarders before but they would rather have us on account of getting protection. they are very pleasant however and do all they can for us. . . . I attended the Presbyterian Church this morning the building was crowded citizens and soldiers all together it is the first opportunity I have had of entering a church since leaving home last winter. it awakened some old and powerful associations that seemed almost forgotten [sic]. I have felt better all day and shall attend regularly while I remain in the City. . . . Our Corps was reviewed again last week by Genl Sherman in the City it made a good appearance. all of the 4 Divisions were on review some 50 regiments and 4 batteries. the day was fine and the rich strains of the Brass bands mingled with the rattle of the drums made everybody lively and enthusiastic as far as you could see up the long street the dense mass of Bayonets filled its whole breadth. as the different Regiments passed the General in Chief he saluted their torn and tattered flags that rode out the storm of many a Battle with a reverence that was almost worship all glory to him he is proud of his army and they would follow him to death. You need not be surprised to hear of a movement here any day in fact it has already commenced. . . . our Division will get away probably the latter part of the week The Secty of War is now here on a visit to the Army and is scattering Genls commissions broadcast Genl Corse has been Brevetted Major General for gallantry at Allatoona. every Division Genl in our Corps has been made a Major Genl. . . . Did you receive that Draft for 750\$ I sent before leaving Rome I fear it has been lost in the mail I want to know so I can take measures to procure a duplicate

Savannah Ga Jany 25/65

I received your letter of the 8th inst two days ago. I was almost angry when I found you said nothing in it about that 750\$ Draft whether it has been received or not I have mentioned it in every letter I have written since coming to Savannah. . . . Most of the Army has left here.³⁵ Our

³⁵ On January 19, 1865, Sherman's forces began to move northward through the Carolinas, to join forces with Grant who was before Richmond. Sherman, *Memoirs* . . ., 2:253.

Division started on the 19th but owing to a heavy rain Storm which began in the morning and the enemys cavalry cutting the dykes of the Savannah River up the Country the road became impassible after wading around in mud and water all day we were very glad to escape back to the City. Some of the Troops who were farther out than we had a serious time of it but finally all got out. . . . I have been sick for several days in consequence of my wetting of the 19th disease diarhea [sic]

Tell Fannie this is the first money I have sent home since I was home last winter it was the first time we recieved [sic] pay during the time. tell her also she may close the account at Merrills if she thinks it best if the 750\$ is all right try and secure 500\$ more bank stock

Goldsboro N. C. Mch 28/65

We have again come to light once more at this place after being immersed for nearly two months in the heart of the Confederacy our Corps reached here on the 24th the rest of the Army being one day in advance.³⁶ . . . Yesterday we recieved [sic] all our back mail in one lot. I recd a number of letters the latest from yourself being Feby 28th and nothing yet from poor Steve³⁷ I had hoped to hear of his release by the time we got through poor fellow he is getting a bitter taste of the War. . . . The campaign just closed has thrown the Georgia Campaign far in the shade I can give you no conception of the Swamps of South and North Carolina the army waded in water for days. at South River the 7th Regt with their cartridge Boxes tied around their necks waded a swamp $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile across up to their waists in Water in order to flank the enemy and drive them away from the crossing on the road and then lay all night without anything to eat or even a Blanket the Knapsack having been left on the other side this is about the way the whole Campaign has been performed. We had heavy fighting 3 days before entering Goldsboro it fell principally on the 14th and 20th Corps the Rebels in a desperate effort to drive Sherman back attacked them while the other two Corps were 9 miles distant on another road they however repulsed every attack but losing heavily. While we by dint of hard marching all night we passed round the Rebel flank and

³⁶ Goldsboro, N. C., was 425 miles from Savannah. By March 24 Sherman's whole army reached Goldsboro. Sherman called this "one of the longest and most important marches ever made by an organized army in a civilized country." *Ibid.*, 2:306.

³⁷ His brother, Stephen Keith, had been captured with his Regiment, the 36th Iowa, on April 25, 1864, at Marks Mill, Arkansas. He was imprisoned at Tyler, Texas.

by daylight next morning were bowling down the road in the Rebel rear they however discovered their situation [in] time enough to get out but not without serious loss our loss in the two days fighting foots up 3000 the Rebels fully double that number. We are now camped near the Town waiting for clothing supplies ect [sic] preparatory to another start. . . .

Morrisville N. C. Apr 19th/65

. . . ere this reaches you you will have heard the glorious news of Johnsons [sic] surrender to Sherman both of his Army and all the states from the Rio Grande to the Atlantic. . . .³⁸ the work of the Army is done a few months easy duty and then like Othello our occupation will be gone. then the grave question arises what will a person go to work at it is rather a serious question with your humble servant coming as he does under the general Scripture dispensation by the Sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread. if you happen to light on any chance for a "promising young man" of slender means of a good opening in the world please let me know the openings in this country have always been of too *grave* a character and so have kept out of them. . . . Our joy at the glorious termination of the war has been checked by the announcement of our beloved Presidents death it shocked the whole army from Private to Genl and well was it for the South that Johnson surrendered as he did had Shermans Army again been compelled to march through the country against the Rebels they would have heaped a vengeance high against the people that sanctioned the act of the bloody assassin. the Rebel Genl Johnson denied any knowledge in the deed and professed himself deeply pained. . . .

Petersburg Va May 8th 65

We have again turned up at this far famed city having marched across the country from Raleigh N. C. making the distance 150 miles in 7 days including the crossing of 2 Rivers which had to be pontooned the march has been extraordinary for its rapidity considering the size of the Army the only way we can account for the haste is the rivalry among the Corps Commanders each one trying to out march the other. Our Corps beat them

³⁸ Just as Sherman left for his meeting with the Confederate commander, Joseph E. Johnston, on April 17, he received word of the assassination of President Lincoln. Fearing reprisals by his soldiers on the people, he kept the assassination a secret from his own officers, but did reveal it to Johnston, who thereupon agreed to secure permission to surrender all the remaining Confederate forces. (Lee had surrendered to Grant on April 9.) Johnston's surrender took place the following day, April 18, 1865. Sherman, *Memoirs* . . ., 2:347-54.

all and recd a complimentary telegram from Genl Grant for the race. . . . tomorrow we take up the line of march for Washington where it is supposed we will be paid off and mustered out of Service. it will take some time to do this however and in the meantime tis understood we are to have a grand review in Washington after drawing new Uniforms at Alexandria. they want to dress us up in becoming style and put on all the flourishes before appearing to the fastidious Washingtonians. for my part I [would] rather go up Pennsylvania Avenue as we marched through Goldsboro after the Carolina Campaign. Ragged dusty and weather beaten we would look more natural besides creating a decided sensation. . . . we will be near Washington by next Sunday that will complete our circuit around the Confederacy on our march to this place no foraging was allowed and the inhabitants were carefully protected they came from all directions to the road to see the troops pass and expressed themselves rejoiced that the war was over. . . . The Army here is justly indignant at the way the northern papers are "coming down" on Genl Sherman³⁹ ¾ of it all is a dirty political trick practiced by some Washington politicians to injure his reputation because they are afraid of his splendid record and the people always duped are swallowing it all. . . . they were cheaply patriotic building bonfires . . . at the announcement of the Victories achieved in the far South when the fate of the Nation depended on Sherman and his army in their perilous marches through the heart of the Confederacy and when defeat would have been annihilation and after their bonfires and speeches they go home and feel they have done their duty toward the thousands of our gallan dead who lie uncoffined in the Southern swamps from the Mississippi to the Atlantic little realizing the condition of our poor fellows wounded and compelled to be jolted day after day in rough vehicles for hundreds of miles over corduroy roads. . . . Shermans army are with him to a man and his reputation is their reputation. his error if any has been of the head not of the heart. some of his memorandum of agreement with Johnson I dont approve of but the Papers have twisted and distorted them . . . but I have no patience to talk about it

Near Washington D. C. May 26 '65

I have not written home since arriving at the Capital from the fact of my not having the time to spare Our Corps reached Alexandria and went

³⁹ For the efforts of the Radicals, led by Stanton, to discredit Sherman's terms of peace, see Lewis, *Sherman* . . . , 544-72.

into Camp on the 20th 10 miles from Washington leaving us only 3 days to prepare for the grand review after coming off a campaign So you can imagine how much time we had for writing Clothing had to be drawn for the men blacking and brushes procured in fact everything to transform the rugged travel stained battallions [sic] into clean and respectable Sunday soldiers it rained too most of the time rendering the renovation more difficult. but despite the shortness of the time and unfavorableness of the weather the review was a splendid success the Army of the Potomac was reviewed on the 23rd and Sherman's on the 24th⁴⁰ both days were clear and pleasant. . . . long before daylight on the 24th the Reveille Bugles awakened the Army into activity and at day break the Column was rapidly crossing the Long Bridge into the City and massing in heavy columns east of the Capitol. at 9 O'clock precisely a signal Gun was fired and the head of the 15th Army Corps in the advance of the Army wheeled into Pennsylvania Avenue and began its grand march We were in close column and looking up the long Avenue for a mile you could see as it were a moving wall of bright blue tipped with glittering steell [sic] every man keeping step the whole looking like one connected living body.⁴¹ the side walks for 2 miles were crowded with a dense mass of humanity excited and exultant the applause of the crowd would occasionally find vent in cheers as some riddled and torn flag would be born[e] past them. the banner of the old 7th attracted considerable attention and "what Regt is that" was asked a hundred times during our march. then the waving of the hands of the fair ones was tantalizing for we could not turn our heads to look at them. Most of the Genl Officers had wreaths thrown over their horses Genls Sherman and Logan were literally covered with them. even your humble servant as [he] moved in the grand Ovation on his prancing steed recieved [sic] the affectionate regards of some damsel in the shape of a Bouquet which he tied to his Sabre. I only hope she was young and good looking having no means of judging from personal observation as it was received through the Medium of a "small boy" with "compliments" It is estimated that 200,000 people were present to see the review Many people from the west came in

⁴⁰ For a vivid description of the review, see *ibid.*, 572-7. See also Sherman, *Memoirs* . . . , 2:377.

⁴¹ Sherman wrote proudly of his army, ". . . the sight was simply magnificent. The column was compact, and the glittering muskets looked like a solid mass of steel, moving with the regularity of a pendulum." Sherman, *Memoirs* . . . , 2:377.

and wonderful to relate it [was] the general conviction that we eclipsed the Army of the Potomac even on the review . . . but the dicipline [sic] a long boasted quality of the Army of the P was better the marching better and the general appearance of the men better. physically our men looked larger tougher and sinewey [sic] the qualities that go to make a soldier then we marched with heads straight to the front. . . . We were there to be seen and not to see and every man felt it.⁴²

Hd Qtrs 7th Regt Iowa Infty, Louisville, June 22 '65

. . . it is getting to be awful dull here I am in Command of the Regt a few days in the temporary absence of Col Parrott which is some relief to the monotony. . . . We were paid off day before yesterday and I sent a Bond for 500\$ home by express yesterday they draw 7.3 percent interest payable semi annually and the Coupons are attached to the Bond. . . . I presume Steve will soon be home speaking of Steve puts me in mind to ask you about something. I want to gather up every cent I can scrape in order to start Steve in some kind of business when he leaves the Service. We can get enough together by practicing a close economy to make a very respectable start say 3000\$ and if the 7th Regt is mustered out to go in with him myself the only difficulty is to get a good location in this point I have thought a good deal but have come to no conclusion Ottumwa has got too far along I suppose to try an opening there although 5 years ago hardly a merchant in it had any more capital than the amount I have stated. I thought of some point in the South but know of no definite place. . . . A very liberal system of Furloughs is now being practiced in the Army here 50 men are allowed furloughs in the 7th Regt and several Officers I dont think however I will try to go home till Will and Steve get out of the service and are at home I want to have some talks with them the agent of Cornell College Mt Vernon Iowa for the education of disabled soldiers and the War Orphans left here this morning he collected 1630 dollars in the 7th Regt the same number of persons at home would hardly have done as well⁴³

⁴² The Army of the Potomac marched in review on May 23; Sherman's Army of the Tennessee on May 24. Grant wrote of these two reviews: "The [Army of the Potomac] had been operating where they received directly from the North full supplies of food and clothing regularly: the review of this army therefore was the review of a body of 65,000 well-drilled, well-disciplined and orderly soldiers inured to hardship and fit for any duty, but without the experience of gathering their own food and supplies in an enemy's country, and of being ever on the watch. Sherman's army was not so well-dressed as the Army of the Potomac, but their marching could not be

Hd Qtrs 7th Iowa Infty, Louisville Ky

July 4th 65

. . . tell Father I dont think it advisable to sell the farm at the price he mentioned. . . . I have been very hard at work for the last 4 days preparing for a prize drill of the Division which came off on the 3rd. there were 3 regiments drilled one from each Brigade which were selected by the Brigade commanders the regts had about 10 days in which to prepare Genl Rice was anxious to have his Brigade represented by his own old Regiment but was afraid to trust it to Col Parrott on the Drill ground so he selected another Regt but 3 days before the drill came off from causes that are not necessary to state the Regt he selected could not drill so the General got Col P Ordered to Iowa on some trifling business and then ordered me to prepare the 7th to go on the Drill I had to work day and night to get the men clothed and equipped and drilled hard six hours a day I did not hope

excelled; they had the appearance of men who had been thoroughly drilled to endure hardships, either by long and continuous marches or through exposure to any climate, without the ordinary shelter of a camp." Grant, *Memoirs* . . . , 2:534-5. But, according to Sherman, the men of the Army of the Potomac, on the previous day, had "turned their eyes around like country gawks to look at the big people on the stand," and he was determined that his men, ragged and barefoot though some of them were, would make a better showing. Therefore, he issued orders that the men should "keep their eyes fifteen feet to the front and march by in the old customary way." Loyal to their "Uncle Billy," Sherman's men obeyed orders, and when he saw them marching, "every man locked in steady formation — formal for perhaps the first and the last time in their lives," it was "the happiest and most satisfactory moment" of his life. One observer commented: "They march like the lords of the world," while the German ambassador observed, "An army like that could whip the devil." Lewis, *Sherman* . . . , 573-6. A soldier of the 39th Iowa wrote a letter to the Des Moines paper which expressed the feeling of Sherman's men for him: "There was not one who passed that stand on that day from the private in the ranks to Major General O. O. Howard, who did not ache to give expression of their love, respect and confidence in him by some act or expression of enthusiasm, but *his order* had forbidden all expressions of the kind by the command, and his presence reminded them of the order, and he was greeted only by the steady tread and lofty carriage of his proud soldiers; proud as I have heard hundreds express themselves since, to see the commanding form and noble face of Uncle Billy (as the soldiers call him amongst themselves) on the stand and himself overlooking them." *Des Moines Iowa State Weekly Register*, June 7, 1865.

⁴³ The trustees of Cornell College, in an effort to raise funds for the education of disabled soldiers and orphans of soldiers, had sent the college's president, William Fletcher King, to Savannah early in 1865, where he joined Sherman's army on its march northward. He told his project to some eighteen Iowa regiments, and when he returned home he had collected some \$14,000. The money was invested in government bonds, and the proceeds helped many boys and girls through college. See Marjorie Medary, "The History of Cornell College," *The Palimpsest*, 34:162 (April, 1953).

to get the prize of a handsome silk Banner on account of having so short a time to prepare still the Regt acquitted itself splendidly and was highly complimented. . . . I had rather a dry 4th our Division was under arms nearly all day waiting to receive Genl Sherman he came at last about 5 in the evening and we waited all the time buttoned up in dress uniforms and the weather oh so hot. . . . it was a little pleasanter however than our fourth a year ago when we were working for our lives near Kenesaw throwing up works under fire of the Rebel Batteries their shot and shell plowing the dirt all around us. . . . I well remember one shell crashing through our unfinished works knocking six men out of one company

July 7th We have recd orders to muster out the Regt and are now busy on the Muster out rolls it will probably be ten days or two weeks before the Regiment reaches Iowa

Davenport Iowa July 14th 1865

The Regt arrived here this morning from Louisville to be paid off and discharged. We left Louisville the evening of the 11th We got away several days sooner than we expected owing to our happening to have muster out rolls on hand of which there was a great scarcity in the Army and then we worked day and night to get them done and get away. We are now in McClellan Barrack awaiting payment which will probably be finished Monday or Tuesday and you may look for me home on Wednesday or Thursday a full citizen once more. if any of the Company (F) come to the House enquiring the whereabouts of the Regt tell them to come to Davenport the Company will not come to Ottumwa as a company as the men when paid off are free to go wherever they please and they will scatter in every direction