

PETER WILSON IN THE CIVIL WAR

1863—1865

This is the final installment of letters written by Peter Wilson during his service in the Civil War. For the last thirteen months he was a prisoner of war in Texas and only two notes seem to have been smuggled out during this period.

Rolla, Mo., Jan. 13th, 1863

Dear Brother:

I take this opportunity to let you know how we come on. We are so far on the way to Davenport. We have been looking round this town since yesterday morning and I think it is time to put some of what we have seen on paper. It won't make much difference to future generations but for my own satisfaction I will note down what I think of Rolla. We left Camp Benton Sunday evening and marched down to the depot. We left St. Louis the same evening and rattled along over the roughest road imaginable. Daylight found us 70 or 80 miles from St. Louis. The train stopped at a farmhouse where there were plenty of chickens. The boys commenced firing out of the car windows making some commotion among the feathered tribe but little damage was done.

We arrived at Rolla a little after sunrise, got out of the cars, took breakfast, and then came here to our present camp, a little east of town, beautifully situated among scrub oak timber. I promised to describe this magnificent town. The situation is high and dry like Fort Donelson, the homes mostly new, not painted yet. There is "Saloon" written on the door of every other house. There are a good many log houses. The town is something like the size of Toledo. It is

the present terminus of the Pacific Railroad and like all little towns of the same kind has plenty of speculation going on. There are a good many government buildings, storehouses, hospital, &c. There are a great many government teams getting ready to start to the frontier with supplies for the army. The recent troubles at Springfield were the cause of our being sent here. The citizens got scared and requested the commander of the post to send for more troops. There seems to be no cause for alarm as the Rebels have been unable to accomplish anything and are reported falling back. I don't know how long we may stay here. Perhaps if things get quiet we may soon start for Davenport.

The country in the vicinity of Rolla is something like the country below Toledo, the settlers much the same as in Dixie. Rambling round this morning with a comrade we called at a house to get some water. A girl came to the door, looked at us, then shut the door, and peeped out the window at us. We knocked again but got no satisfaction. I concluded it was rather singular conduct but perhaps the ladies were too much Secesh. Perhaps if we stay a week here we may call again and have the matter explained. Fresh pork, turkeys & chickens are continually coming into camp. The chance for jayhawking is not very good owing to the fact that so many have been here before us but we will glean up what is left.

We have 23 men in Co. G. The Col. is not with us. We have little restraint put on us. We have the small tent, five men in one. I like to be in tents much better than in barracks. They are warm enough for the climate and more quiet than in the barracks. I don't anticipate much fighting out this way. This being the depot for supplies for the frontier army has to be carefully guarded. The trains must be guarded against Bushwhackers. The road to Springfield is

about 140 miles and sometimes the Rebels capture the trains. I suppose there will be a heavy escort sent this time. I think that is why we are here, to guard the place in the absence of the regular troops who will go with tomorrow's train. The teams are the usual six mules and heavy covered wagon. It makes little difference to the drivers whether the mules are trained or not. It is amusing to see the monkey shines going on among the teamsters getting their mules hitched up. Six new mules make some motions at their first go off. Government teamsters get 25 [dollars] per month. They have rough times but their work is not as hard as those that work on a farm. This place is 100 miles from St. Louis. The railroad is graded some of the way to Springfield but the cars have not run beyond this place.

I was amused this morning at the appearance of the farmers that were in town selling their produce. One old fellow and his boy had eggs, butter, rabbits, squirrels, possums, turkeys, chickens, and two nice large fat deer. Commodities sell [at] a good price. There is generally a good market where there are plenty of soldiers. Saloon keepers seem to have the majority in all towns in slave States. I think if I was led blindfold into a strange town I could tell as soon as my eyes were open whether I was in a slave State or not. Here in Rolla the pigs and cows have undisputed possession of the front yards. The farmers round here wear the everlasting butternut. I hate that color ever since Donelson & Pittsburg. The women say that our soldiers have taken nearly everything they had. One old lady lamented her last old hen yesterday. One of our boys came along and killed it. He would have done the same had it been the last in Mo. For my part I seldom prowl after chickens. I think the people are to be pitied that live in this State. While I am writing one of the boys came in and reported having found a flock of sheep. About twenty are just

starting. They will be apt to have mutton for supper. I am writing on my knee so I will finish, not being used to it. You may direct as usual only keep off "Paroled", as we go by that no longer. Benton Barracks, St. Louis, Mo., Co. G, 14th Iowa, will find us here or wherever we may be. We did not receive pay yet, I think we will not get any for two months. I will not write any more this time. I will write from our next stopping place if we go anywhere else. For the present good bye, your brother,

Columbus, Ky., Jan. 20th, 1863

Dear Brother:

I received your letter a few days ago and take the present opportunity of answering. The only news of importance is that we are all ready to leave Columbus and expect to start tomorrow morning. We go down the River,¹ rumor says to Texas but we only conjecture. The 6th Division is all going from this vicinity. Gen. Smith² commands the Division. Col. Shaw³ will command our Brigade. We will most likely see some active service this spring. The Reg. is in fine order as far as health is concerned. It is a severe time to leave our cabins as the snow is quite deep but no doubt we will go far enough South to get out of the cold. I send home my extra clothing; it is only some shirts and my coat. The shirts are in J. Felter's box. The coat is in a box sent to your address at Toledo. There is another coat in the box. You may leave it at Mr. Thomas's so the man can get it some time when he comes to Buckingham. We are leaving a good place to take the chances in the field.

We have fared sumptuously every day for a long time.

¹ The Mississippi River.

² Possibly Brigadier General Andrew J. Smith.

³ Colonel William T. Shaw commanded the Fourteenth Iowa Infantry throughout the War.

We may look forward to hard tack as our principal stand by now. I am glad we are going. I want to see some more of the South before our time is up. There are ten of Co. G enlisted in the Veterans and some more intend to go in. There are only about thirty old soldiers in the company. I suppose we will have a fine lot of recruits before long. They will see the elephant in full size before they are long in the service.⁴ I will write from our first stopping place. Until then good bye.

Benton Barracks, Jan. 21st, 1863

Dear Father:

We have just arrived at Benton Bks. I found your letter dated Jan. 8th upon arriving. I received one from James just before we left Rolla. I am glad to know that you are all well and getting your house up &c . . . I think you will tire of keeping a Nigger. There are plenty of them here, shiftless, good for nothing as may be.

It must be you jump at conclusions in thinking the first soldiers will all die or be killed. Of course bullets are no way particular who they hit but I am convinced that we stand much better chances of keeping our health in the South now than formerly. We have been out ten days in the worst kind of winter weather, we lost two nights' sleep in going and coming, I was up two nights on picket guard, we had rough times in all respects, but none of the men were sick during the time. Such a trip last winter would have been very different. There are but few of the 14th now, only 60 men were with us this time. I will put them against any men in the service for standing hard usage or fighting. I might as well say for jayhawking too. The people of Rolla

⁴ The meaning of this statement is not clear. Perhaps Peter Wilson refers to the story of the blind men who tried to determine what an elephant was like by feeling various parts of its body, such as the trunk, leg, tail, and side.

will remember us for some time. The amount of goods taken from the groceries yesterday would be worth at least 200 dollars. I don't justify such conduct nor have anything to do with it. I can't say that I pity the losers much. They are a lot of unprincipled suckers that make fortunes in a short time by selling goods at exorbitant prices to the soldiers. I think if they make much of the 14th they deserve it.

The country, what we saw of it between St. Louis & Rolla, is rather hilly but the land is pretty good. We had merry times coming in this morning. Having plenty of ammunition we sometimes took a shot from the car windows at dogs, sometimes at chickens round the houses, &c. Although we had rough times we liked the trip very much. I don't know what will be the next move. We will either come to Davenport or the Union Brigade will come here. If we come to Davenport I will most likely be home for a short time. If we stay here I cannot come home, but it is not much difference. This is a good place. My health is good. I have nothing to complain of in any way. Frank⁵ is much improved since he came here. John R. Felter is with us. He is looking well but not so well as when he left. The snow that fell a few days ago is melted and Benton Barracks is very muddy but we have little to do in muddy weather. It seems almost like home to be back in this place.

I see no reason to dread the future. I think the war will go on and many must fall perhaps without doing much good. I trust that the Almighty hand that has kept me in health thus far will keep me still in safety although much danger may be before me. If it is God's will that I find my grave in the South I hope to be ready. Let it come when it may, I am determined to do my duty and come home honor-

⁵ Frank was probably Benjamin Franklin Thomas, who was an old and close friend of Peter Wilson's.

ably or never. Still I do not anticipate losing my life. I have strong hopes that I will go safely through. After what we have come out of already I think we should be more hopeful under difficulties in the future. There is not much prospect of the 14th being filled very soon⁶ and we are likely to be at some unimportant place for some time. I think if I had my choice I would prefer going to Dixie with a full regiment to staying in Benton Barracks the way we have been. The prospect of staying in Dixie perhaps for years I don't much like but if we have a good regiment I am willing to go South and see the war ended before coming back. We might be taken prisoners again but we might not in a long time. If we get a fair chance there is not much danger. I need not write any more now. If we come to Davenport I will be home soon after we arrive, if not I will write as usual.

Your affect. Son,

I expected to have sent home some clothes but it seems we cannot get our lost clothing now.

Jan. 28th, 1863

Dear Brother:

It is not long since I have written all that seemed worth writing but we have just been paid this afternoon and for once I must send some money home. I find that to keep my money is poor policy as there are so many ways of spending money here. There was only two months' pay due me up to the first of Jan. The boys here owe me 20\$ all of which I will get this time. C. Burright owes me 10 dollars. I will find him some time. I will send as much as I can spare this time.

⁶ The placing of newly enlisted men in old regiments was hindered by the desire of influential men to form new regiments and thus secure for themselves commissions as officers. Usually old regiments had few places for newly commissioned officers.

We have not been paid more than two hours and a good many of the boys have gone to town to have a spree. Some of the green ones may come back without much money. Some have left their money in safekeeping until they come back. I have about 200\$ belonging to different ones. It is needless to explain the kind of places the majority of soldiers frequent whenever they have money. More of the soldiers are ruined at such places than killed in battle. Gambling prevails to some extent; after payday I have seen a dozen or fifteen banks in full business at the same time in Benton Barracks. Dice is used more than cards for gambling but both are used. There are some sharp customers among the soldiers sometimes too sharp for the regular gamblers. I have sometimes watched the game long enough to see how it goes.

It is reported that we start tomorrow for Carondelet some ten miles from St. Louis to guard the Navy yard or properly speaking the new gunboats that are being built there. Only two Co's are going. Co's G & H are the ones. I hear no more of going to Davenport but still we may come after all. It looks as if we are to be cut up into small detachments to do small kind of business. It is just as well for us perhaps but somehow I would prefer being filled up and try it in Dixie. The boys are spoiling here. They hardly know how to behave any longer. One good thing there are no brawls among ourselves. The boys stand up for one another in all scrapes that any member may get into so that if some one does something that is against all rules such as knocking the lights out in a grocery in the evening and taking whatever is handy or taking a milk pail from a pedlar wagon, any kind of stealing whatever is never reported. If any one gets drunk the orders are to report him so that he may be sent to the guardhouse. Instead of doing so we stow them away in some quiet place until sober. We

have some hard cases in the Co. There is nothing too bad for them to do and they are seldom out of mischief of some kind. Some of the worst will desert as soon as we are ordered into the field again. How long before that time shall come I cannot guess.

I think we have some reason to fear that traitors in the North are going to trouble us. I see in today's paper that the 119th Ill. is under arrest for disloyalty and quite a strong party in the North is in favor of ending the war on any terms.⁷ I hope the government will severely punish northern traitors. If half of that regiment were shot it would be no more than they deserve. After all the blood that has been spilled it is too bad to give it up. It is poor comfort to the Ill. soldiers now in the field to see how the traitors at home are trying to undo all they have done.

To be sure little has been done, but if the war is carried on the western men will open the Mississippi and keep it open. I have not much hopes of the Eastern Army taking Richmond but I want to see the war go on some time yet and if we must acknowledge the Southern Confederacy let them sue for peace. Then and not before could a peace be made that would be honorable and fair in case of a separation. We must have Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland or nothing has been gained by the war. If the North concludes to stop fighting the South will claim all the border States. I have often heard the Secesh say they must have all the slave States and they will if they possibly can.

I suppose there are some of the people not ten miles from Buckingham that would indorse the treasonable speeches made in the Ill. legislature this winter. If they lived in Missouri instead of Iowa they would suffer for their opinions.

⁷ The term "appeasers" was evidently understood although it was not then in use.

Jan. 31st

We are now in Carondelet, comfortably settled in a stone schoolhouse something like the one three miles from Cedar Rapids. Co. G in the house and Co. G in the barn.⁸ We like this place the best of any place we have ever been in. Carondelet is about twice as large as Cedar Rapids. It is pleasantly situated on bank of the river. The Navy yard is at the lower part of the town. I have spent considerable time inspecting it but I cannot give much idea of the extent of it in this letter. There are five gunboats being built there. One will be launched Tuesday, two are afloat and almost finished.

I will finish by giving you some idea of our duty here. In the daytime we have nothing to do. We have to do our duty in the night. We will be on duty about four hours every third night. The first comes on at six and is relieved by the second at ten. They are relieved by the 3rd at two and the third stand until six. Then the workmen commence for the day. There are five or six hundred men working on the boats. It sounds something like a boiler manufactory. The noise is intolerable. Of course we need not stay in longer than we please. There is so much machinery it is quite a treat to spend a few hours looking at it.

I need not write any more this time. I will try in my next to describe some of the gunboats.

Your brother,

Benton Barracks, Feb. 11th, '63

Dear Father:

As it is time to write so as to give the letter time to get through in the usual time I proceed to write a few lines although there is nothing worth mentioning without it is the state of the weather, roads, and Benton Barracks in

⁸ This is apparently a slip in writing. The two companies were G and H.

particular. Mo. against the world for mud and Benton Barracks against any part in the State. One good thing we can keep out of it as we have little to do. The winter has been unusually mild and but very little frost but plenty of rain. There seems to be more sickness this winter than there was last not in our Regt. but in the new, and among citizens. There is considerable small pox both among soldiers and citizens in St. Louis. No cases that I have heard of have been known in this camp but in the hospitals in the City and in some parts of town. The small pox hospital is far enough out of the way to be safe and all who take it are sent there. I have visited some of the large hospitals to see acquaintances and found them very well conducted and good care taken of the patients.

Since coming back to the Barracks⁹ we have not done much nor made any move towards filling or reorganising the Regiment. I think there is no particular line of action marked out for us yet. It seems to me there is a good deal of uncertainty in the most of Uncle Sam's affairs at present and small hopes of their getting better. Still we must carry on the war, hoping to have more success in future. The men that want to make peace now are nothing but Secesh and ought to be dealt with as such. I see no way but stick to the President in all his measures and if they agree to arm the Negroes so much the better. But I need not discuss such affairs. The subject is too extensive to go into. The unsettled state of affairs in the Regiment makes it an easy matter to get discharged from the service now if any thing is the matter. Quite a number have been discharged this winter that were in good health and some on pretence of being unfit for service. If I should have a spell such as I had in Memphis I could easily get a discharge but I have

⁹ No explanation is given in the letters preserved of the return to Benton Barracks.

not seen a sick day since I was home and hope I may continue so. I would much rather see the war ended before I come home than be discharged for disability.

I need not add your affect. son,

Benton Barracks, Feb. 18th, 1863

Dear Brother:

I have just received your letter and proceed to reply, though nothing new is to be the subject. We have been here since coming from Carondelet and we neither drill nor anything else. Sometimes it is whispered that we will be consolidated with the 8th & 12th and commanded by Col. Geddes¹⁰ of the 8th but whether such will be the case we can't find out. If the three Regts. could be brought to the arrangement peaceably they would make a first rate regiment but there are too many aspirants whose hopes of a commission would vanish to make the thing comfortable, so it will be against the wishes of most of the men. But I don't know as it will be done so I will not write any more of the matter. In any case it won't matter to me. It will bring us sooner into the field and I would just as soon go there as any other place. The spring is coming and it will be more pleasant now camping than in the winter.

You must be in good spirits at home getting so much for wheat. I don't expect to save much money in the army as it is almost impossible to do so being paid regularly and in company all the time but if I keep well it won't make much difference.

I received a letter from Uncle David today. He says they have expected us at Davenport for a long time and meant to have roast turkey &c when we came. Perhaps we may come yet and if so we will have good times at the Grove,

¹⁰ James L. Geddes, of Vinton, had commanded the Eighth Iowa during most of its service.

but I have but small hopes of coming this time somehow. For the short time I spent there I took quite a fancy to the place or the people I don't know which. The Union Brigade is still at Davenport and we hear nothing of their being sent here. It seems to me we must get together sometime. I want to see C. Burright to get what he owes me. You may pay Gaston 11\$ dollars although I had only agreed to pay John when Corniel paid me. There are some things Frank, John, and I sent in company to Mr. Thomas. I had intended if we received our lost clothing to send home all I did not need, but we have not got it and some things I did not need I sent among Frank's things. I have no more to write this time. Give my respects to inquiring friends &c.

Benton Barracks,
March 4th, '63

Dear Father:

I neglected to write last week because I had nothing to write and it is not much better yet, but I will send a few lines this week to let you know that we are still in Benton Barracks working at the same trade and in good health. We have almost come to the conclusion that the War Department has forgotten us. I have not heard a whisper of what we are going to do or whether we are to take any more active part in the seemingly endless war. It seems the longer we fight the less success we meet with. If we lose a few more gunboats the Rebels will have as good a fleet as we. I think the North is in rather a ticklish place. They can't honorably give up the struggle and there is not much encouragement in carrying it on. I think the best way is to put it through right or wrong until some side says enough, as the saying is in common terms. The number that fall in the struggle must be very great. Take for instance the 3rd Iowa Regt. They were in this camp last Sept., 950 men as

good looking as ever came from Iowa. They are here now and have only 100 men fit for duty. They were only in one battle, that of Arkansas Post, where their loss in killed was but slight. They have perhaps 100 men dead and 150 deserters; the balance are in the hospitals. I think that is the worst state of affairs in any of the Iowa Regts. Some of the others are not much better. The old Regts. seem to have a better sort of men in them. I think the aggregate of deserters from the 14th would not amount to more than twenty and we have now been 16 months in the service. We have at present very few sick men but we may account for that in having good winter quarters and not undergoing the privations of soldiers in the field.

If we went to Dixie where the common chances of war would give some chance for advancement I think my prospects would be good. As it is there is nothing going on. I think in filling the vacancies that are now in the Co. I can get only one step higher but the next, if ever that comes, my chance is good for a commission. So the sooner we go into active service the better it will suit me, but I am only hoping that we may go South without any probability of our going. Governor Kirkwood is trying to get us to Davenport and if he succeeds he will then have us sent to the frontiers. This would be all very good if he can accomplish it. I received a letter from James today. I need not answer it this week as this is sufficient. I think the boys might go at it and write me how all the business in their charge is progressing. I am mostly idle and a letter from the boys would be very acceptable. I need not write any more this time.

Benton Barracks, March 12 [1863]

Dear Brother:

I will send a few lines this week as usual but I don't know what to write. The prospects of filling the vacancies

in the Co. is all over for the present. I think after all our waiting we will go to Dixie just as we are. Of course there must be an organization of some kind. They will most likely make three companies of the 14th and attach us to something else. The law is to consolidate Regts. that number less than 505 men. If we get no more recruits and go south now we will soon get below that number so we may as well expect to be consolidated sooner or later. If they would fill us up and send us to active service and as quick as vacancies [occur] in the commissioned officers fill them from those entitled to promotion there would be more encouragement in the business. There is a surplus of commissioned and noncommissioned officers now so of course there is no promotion at this time.

It seems too bad to keep those that came out in the first call in the ranks and give them no chance to get up and so many more regiments raised since they came out. I don't know how they mean to officer the conscripts. I hope they will fill the 14th with them. I suppose they will make new regiments with them and do the same in all respects as with volunteers.

How do you like the conscript law and what do you think of the prospects of the war for the Union? I think it looks uncertain but I hope it may go ahead for years rather than stop without accomplishing the desired end. Sometimes I see letters to the boys in this Regiment so full of Secesh notions that if the writers were exposed they would be severely punished, letters encouraging desertion &c. It seems there are numbers of Copperheads in Iowa. I hope the conscription will find some of them. I respect an open enemy that will fight for what he believes in but those in the Northern States that can find nothing better to do than work against us in every mean sneaking way ought to be put into the service and made to toe the mark. It would at

least get them where they would get less in numbers. Frank, John, and myself will send a box in company. I will send my overcoat and one of my blankets. I know now what is necessary in Dixie so I will not take anything more than is necessary with me, one rubber blanket and one government blanket are all that I will carry besides some shirts &c.

There is some talk of our starting down the river soon. Our Lieut. Col. has resigned.¹¹ He is not much force so no one cares. Our Major is ditto.¹² Somehow our field officers always were of the poor sort with the exception of old Shaw¹³ and he is fishing for a brigadiership. Governor Kirkwood gives his friends appointments in the army without knowing how they are qualified. So it goes, but I must finish for this time. I enclose a list of Co. G. It may be of use to refer to if I wish to do so at some future time so I will send it where it can be kept safe.

I will write next week. Perhaps we may know how soon we may start by that time. You might write a longer letter and give me your opinions on matters and things. I have dropped most of my correspondents so I don't get so many letters now as formerly.

March 13th

I have just received a letter from Flora¹⁴ enclosing one from Scotland. A letter from Scotland is so much out of my line it don't interest me much but still I was pleased to get it. I would like to know their sentiments on the Secesh question. I suppose they are not particular how it goes if they only have good times in Scotland. Quite unexpectedly we received orders this morning to elect a First Lieut.

¹¹ This was Edward W. Lucas of Iowa City.

¹² The name of this officer has not been found.

¹³ Colonel William T. Shaw.

¹⁴ Flora Wilson, an older sister and one of Peter's faithful correspondents.

Sergts. Hazlett & Shanklin¹⁵ were the candidates. Hazlett was elected by a large majority. I think if we fill any more it will be done according to seniority. If so Shanklin will be Second Lieut. Gallagher¹⁶ is Capt. now. All the troops here now except the 14th have marching orders.

According to a recent order from the War Department if a Company has less than fifty men they can't have more than two commissioned officers so there is no telling whether we will get the number or not. I think if Col. Shaw stays with us we will be all right. It is not certain whether we will leave this place soon or not. The Union Brigade has not joined us yet and of course they will before we leave. I am in good health and spirits. Let things go as they may I mean to keep a stiff upper lip, but I must finish as my letter is too long for anything there is in it. I forgot to mention that we are becoming adept in the bayonet exercise.

Benton Barracks, March 19th [1863]

Dear Father:

The time for receiving letters from home this week has gone by and none has come so I must write now or you will not get this next week. I scarcely know what to write as little is going on here. There is no immediate prospect of leaving Benton Barracks. It is rumored that Pope¹⁷ is bound to get us into Iowa. He keeps the Union Brigade and perhaps he may succeed in getting us into his Department. Of course we would prefer going to the frontiers to going South but as it is not certain I need not write about it. How do the folks like the conscript act? It seems to me if the Copperheads mean to kick up a fuss in the North their time has come. There may be some resistance to the conscription but I think if Jeff Davis can make it work we can.

¹⁵ Andrew H. Hazlett of Shueyville and Joseph A. Shanklin of Toledo.

¹⁶ William Gallagher of Toledo.

¹⁷ Probably Major General John Pope.

There is no use in thinking of peace until the South or the North is conquered. The South has all their available force now in the field and if we get 500,000 more men and go ahead I don't feel uneasy as to the result. We must do it and we must have men, so the soldiers indorse the conscript act and the sooner we get 500 of the rankest Northern Secesh into the 14th Iowa the better we would like it. Of course many of the conscripts will make as good soldiers as volunteers but there will be some that would not fight at all if they could help it and if they had their choice would fight against us. They will have to toe the mark to atone for their disloyalty if they get into the old Regiments. It seems as though war matters must come to an end in this year. The South cannot be conquered at all if another year goes by and nothing accomplished. The longer I stay in the Army the more I hate the South and worse still their friends in the North. Perhaps if we had been in the field this winter I might feel differently on the subject but we have long wished to be organised and sent into the field. As long as we are obeying orders we are not responsible for our idleness.

There is one thing sure if we were in the field it would be better for a majority of the men. There are some of the boys that are completely spoiled by being so long in a city with plenty of money and nothing to do. It is getting fashionable to steal anything they can. A few nights ago the post sutler's store here in camp was broken into and several hundred dollars worth of revolvers, watches, &c taken out. The thing was done in a reckless manner and the Provost Guard was soon on the ground but I think they will not succeed in proving any one guilty. There is any amount of mischief going on all the time and if we were sent to Dixie such work would come to an end. But I must finish this scribble. The weather is fine here and the fields begin

to look green. If you have such weather in Iowa I suppose you are sowing wheat.

Benton Barracks, March 27th, '63

Dear Father:

I received your letter this week too late to answer it but as I write to some of you every week I suppose you hear from me often enough. As long as we stay in Benton Barracks I can have nothing new to write. We expect from time to time to leave for some point down the River but there is no time set to leave yet. The latest reports we have had is that as soon as the Union Brigade comes from Davenport we will report to General Grant at Vicksburg. There is no telling when the Union Brigade may come. We don't much expect to leave for some weeks at least, perhaps longer. We will get paid and exchange our Austrian muskets for Enfield or Springfield rifles before we go. If we have to wait for conscripts to fill the Regiment it will be two months before we get them.

The arrangement made for giving furloughs to the soldiers has not been used here yet. I suppose they will give some furloughs this summer but if we go three or four hundred miles down the River it would take so long to come home it would not pay to take a short furlough. I think there is not much chance of my coming home this spring. As long as I am in good health it don't matter much.

If we are paid I will send the boys some books before we go down the River. I can get books very cheap in St. Louis, if they let me know what kind to send. The History of England in five volumes costs only two dollars. Byron, Shakespere, Scott, Pollock, or any such can be had for reasonable prices and I can send them in the trunk we send our surplus clothes in. We have had plenty of time to read this winter and I have improved it to some extent. I found it

more to my mind than studying grammar. I guess I was not meant for a student so I must not go against what seems to be ordained.

It is surprising that Uncle Dodd¹⁸ would come out at a time like this. It must be he has more pluck than some of our relations that preceded him. I suppose he will find a hearty welcome and no doubt he will like Iowa. If the war was carried on in the North instead of the South there would not be much immigration to it. The South will be reduced to a wilderness in a few years if they keep on fighting. If accounts are true they begin to be in straits for provisions now and they will get worse. The loss of Vicksburg if they do lose it and with it the Mississippi will stop them from getting supplies from Texas. If they can hold out much longer I think they will learn to live on short rations something that few soldiers can tolerate.

But I will change the programme and write a little about raising garden vegetables in the vicinity of St. Louis. This morning John R. Felter and myself went out of camp to take a ramble in the country or rather the suburbs of St. Louis. Among the various objects of interest we noticed on a hillside a good many glass houses or rather frames covered with glass roofs and fronts and looking so much like Uncle West's cabbage plant houses we thought we would go in and look at them. There was something like half an acre in beds of different plants all in good condition, cabbage plants of the early Oxheart kind just big enough to set out looking very thrifty and healthy. All kinds of plants generally raised by gardeners were there in tens of thousands. They were setting them out today and they have some twelve or fifteen acres of very good land.

I think from the prices of their produce they must have a

¹⁸ This was, apparently, Andrew Dodd, who had married Christine Wilson in Scotland.

good business. He told me he had his cabbages into market about the first of June. He is selling some of the early stuffs already, such as lettuce, radishes, &c, at prices not profitable to the consumer. He says the war hurts his business and particularly the blockade of the River. There is not so much business done in St. Louis now as when the River was open to New Orleans. Still there seems to be a great amount of business going on. I have just received a letter from D. Galt, so I must finish and write a few lines to him.

Benton Barracks, April 6th, 1863

Dear Father:

You have heard before this time that we had gone from Benton Barracks so I will give you a short account of our trip. We went to Memphis to guard the Paymaster and some seven millions of greenbacks down the River. We had a pleasant trip and had no mishap of any kind. The boat had a valuable cargo of government stores besides the money to pay the soldiers. We stopped at Cairo, Columbus, Island No. 10, Fort Pillow, and other places of note on the way down and arrived at Memphis and deposited our charge in the bank all right, then spent 24 hours in the city. It pleased us to visit our old prison under such different circumstances. Memphis is strongly fortified and I think it will stay in the Union if fifty heavy guns in one of the best forts I have seen is any argument. The city could be demolished in a short time and a small force in the fort could hold the place against a host.

Contrabands were coming in by the hundred, little wooly niggers looking more like a new species of monkey were piled up on the wagons, men and women walking by the side. They must have brought their masters' best furniture along judging by the bureaus, bedsteads of the best quality, feather beds, &c, that were piled on the wagons. I wonder

what is to be done with them. They are a kind of people I would not like to have for neighbours.

The soldiers down at Memphis and other points on the river are in very good spirits. They are more than ever in for fighting to the end. The general health is good. They think the time is not far distant when the Southern Confederacy will be numbered among the things that were. We found the Union Brigade at the Barracks on our return and we are under orders for Vicksburg. I think we will start in a few days. I will send some books to the boys if I can get time to go to St. Louis tomorrow or before we start. I need not write to Janet this time. I will write when we get to Vicksburg. You may not get my letters very regular now as it will be so far, I suppose it will take a week to get there. I may write from Cairo or Helena on the way down. I will write to Grandfather before we start.

Benton Barracks, April 8th

Dear Brother:

I take this opportunity of sending a few lines just before we leave. We start tomorrow morning for Memphis. We know not whether we may go farther than there at present. I have sent some things home by David Zehrun¹⁹. My overcoat, one blanket, and my cap are all that were worth sending. I sent some books. You will see what they are. The whole cost only seven dollars. I think the boys will like Scott's works. For my part I think Pollock the best work of the kind that ever has been written but if they had sent for any particular book I would have sent it. We have been paid two months' wages and I must keep considerable as it may be some time before we get any more.

Joseph Shanklin has been promoted to Second Lieut. without being elected by the Co. I don't much like it, ditto

¹⁹ David Zehrun was from Tama County.

Frank, as either of us might have beat him. Gallagher is Capt. now and he seems to have taken matters into his own hands in regard to promotion. The vacancies in the Sergeants will be filled in a few days. If we could have an election I could get nine tenths of the votes for first Sergeant. Still I am not certain if Gallagher appoints them himself that I will be promoted at all. There is some mischief kicked up in the Company almost every day, that is the boys will rob pedlars, saloon keepers, &c, and some sneak told Gallagher that I took no pains to prevent such things. He believes it, I suppose, but as he never mentioned the matter to me I have not attempted to clear myself. One thing is I am satisfied of having done my duty to the letter. I will not curry favor with any officer, as I consider myself as good either as a man or a soldier as any of them. I feel somewhat vexed that I cannot get what the boys would give me now as the next step from that is a commission. You see it is not all smooth sailing in the Army. However I can get along, if I must remain in my present place, so I mean to go ahead and do my duty let things go as they may. I enclose a likeness for Aunt McCosh with my respects. I got sunburnt black as the picture on the trip to Memphis.

I enclose ten dollars. It is not much but I have given up the notion of saving money soldiering at thirteen dollars per month. I will write from Memphis in a few days. Give my love to all. Agnes must excuse my not answering her letter this time. I will do so before long. Direct as usual.

Cairo, Ill., April 12th, 1863

Dear Brother:

I take this opportunity of sending a few lines to let you know where we are and how we are. It seems that the 14th is elected for good times yet awhile. We left St. Louis

calculating to soon be in front of the enemy but on arriving here we found that we had to relieve the 35th Iowa from duty at Cairo and let them have a chance to show their mettle at Vicksburg. So we are now stationed here as Provost Guards. We have to patrol the levee, guard the fort, prison, &c. We have good quarters and though Cairo is an unhealthy place, low and swampy, we are better off than at any point below. I have little fear of ill health now and I don't much mind where we go. As a general thing the boys are not particular where we go or stay. If we stay here we will have good times. The Lieut. Col.²⁰ is in command. Old Shaw is on duty at St. Louis. The Lieut. Col. is recently promoted from Capt. He is very strict. He puts the men in the guardhouse for missing one roll call or stealing an apple from a pedlar. If he continues he will get something like discipline in the Regt. I am glad to see it. I am tired of the system of plundering that has been in fashion for some time.

As I expected we have had no election for Orderly Sergt. The system of regular promotion has been introduced. Some of the Union Brigade were appointed Sergts. while we were on parole and Gallagher leaves them above Frank and myself, something unfair, as an election would have made us all right. I am Fourth Sergt., Frank Fifth. There may be a change in the program sometime. If election should ever be the order of the day to fill a vacancy in the commissioned officers I think I can come in. If regular promotion is the way, I think there is small chance of my ever getting a commission particularly if we stay in places of safety like this. But I will not mention this matter any more. At present numbers of the old officers of the 14th have resigned since the Battle of Shiloh and their places are

²⁰ The Lieutenant Colonel of the Fourteenth Iowa Infantry at this time was Joseph H. Newbold. He was killed in action in Louisiana on April 9, 1864.

filled, some of them by smart men and some by the stupidest greenhorns in the Regiment. Some that were commissioned in the Union Brigade are of that kind that cannot smell powder without getting faint and falling to the rear. I am glad that Co. G has officers of good pluck and common sense, if some are not the choice of the men. Capt. Gallagher is the best officer in the Regt., if he has used partiality in filling vacancies.

Jonesboro, Ill., April 29th, 1863

Dear Brother:

I take my pen to scribble a few lines to pass the time this afternoon as I am not busy. Yesterday and the day before we had hard marching and today we are resting. The raid by Marmaduke²¹ into Mo. caused some stir up that way. As we are only 25 miles from the Cape²² of course we had orders to go and help but we were too late to have a chance to fight from behind breastworks. A small force of Infantry, some Cavalry, and the Artillery had no trouble in keeping the Rebels out. Reinforcements from above and below enabled our men to assume the offensive and at last accounts the Rebels were getting enough of it ten miles from the Cape. I have not heard how the battle terminated. I think the Rebels have had poor success this time.

We have been longer in this place than we expected to be, still it is something new bushwhacking in Ill. The country near the river is very hilly and the river bottoms heavily timbered. There are some fine farms on the bottoms, the land is said to be the best in the state. The country is full of deserters and Secesh. We have arrested a good many of both kinds. We found 15 barrels of whiskey and a quantity of powder near the Cape this trip on the premises of a dis-

²¹ Brigadier General John S. Marmaduke, of the Confederate Army, led a raid into Central Missouri in the spring of 1863.

²² Probably Cape Girardeau was the place meant.

loyal citizen and confiscated the same. I think if we stay here long whiskey will be scarce as it is mostly owned by Copperheads and we spill it if we can [not] bring it in to the Quartermaster. I have seen four barrels spilled and not a man wish to drink any. Beer is the universal drink in the 14th now and there is seldom any drunkenness. We must respect private property here in Ill. though if they did not board [us] we would not be so honest.

It seems the Rebels are coming into us at all points just now. I am glad of it as it is easier to fight them up this way than to hunt them in Arks. I think it is useless to hope for the restoration of the Union as it was or in any way, still I think it is best to go ahead and fight the Rebels until there is some show for peace. I don't think that time will be very soon. There seems to be as much fight in the South as ever though they are said to be hard up. Well I must finish and go and eat supper at —— well I guess they will have something good to eat and I will spend the evening with the girls. The men are so disloyal they cannot stay at home so we must tend to their women folks as much as possible in their absence.

I have not seen Frank or John R. Felter for a week. I guess they are all right. I expect to ride forty or fifty miles tomorrow. As we have borrowed horses we put them through. We mean to visit some adjoining counties before going to Cairo. I think it will not be necessary for me to write from here again. I would not have written now if we had not the prospect of being so busy. I may not write for some days.

Jonesboro Courthouse, Union Co., Ill.

Dear Father:

May 6th [1863]

It is some time since I have had any letters from you but I suppose you are very busy at this time. It is not so with

me so I can afford to send more letters than I get. James has been very prompt about answering my letters for the last while for which I feel very grateful. Our letters go to Cairo to the Regiment and then are sent here as opportunity offers. We generally send a squad of prisoners to Cairo every few days and those that take the prisoners down bring the mail and such things as we need.

We have extended our researches into the neighbouring counties and are doing a good business among Copperheads & deserters. We go in small parties of six or eight and generally find our prisoners in the night when they don't expect us. I think our operations will have a good effect on the traitors in this part of the State. A good many deserters after living in the woods until they got tired of it come and give themselves up. The Copperheads are very quiet here now. I think they are the best neighbours we have ever had. We have had one public dinner and a ball and next Tuesday is appointed for another of the same. I suppose there are some of the people that treat us well because they like us but the majority do it because they fear us. They know they are guilty and they think by using us well to gain our good will and make us believe they are good Union men. Of course we will accept their hospitality but if anything is found out on any of them that will send them to prison they must go after all their kindness to us.

Some that we have arrested have been sentenced to six months imprisonment and 500 dollars fine for harboring deserters, hurrahing for Jeff Davis, and such like. I think that is paying for their whistle but it is no more than is necessary to cure them of their disease. There are only some six or eight Union men in this place. Still nothing can be laid to the charge of most of them. Perhaps after the lesson they are receiving is past those that have escaped this time will keep out of mischief hereafter.

It seems as though good fortune follows the 14th now as we could not find a better place than we are now in if we had our choice. The detachment that is here has the advantage of those in Cairo as our propensity for rambling is gratified and we are more at liberty but the whole Regiment is very well off, and the General in command at Cairo has spoken highly of us on several occasions. He is well pleased with our success up here and I see our doings here have been mentioned in the Chicago papers. To be sure this is unimportant business that we are engaged in but it is right for us to do well what we find to do.

They are so strict now at Cairo that one of the boys was sent to the guardhouse for wearing a white hat on dress parade. It is easy enough to conform to the rules in dress and everything else and while we stay at Cairo where the General is we must do it. For my part I like to see everything go off in a soldierlike manner. There are some soldiers from the Army of the Miss. at home here on thirty days furlough. There will be two from each Co. of our Regiment furloughed this week. As soon as they return others will go. I think my turn will come in time to be home about the first of July, if we stay in Cairo that long which is very probable. I must finish as I have nothing more to mention.

[Jonesboro Courthouse]

May 7th

Dear Brother West:

I must pen a few lines in answer to yours so you will excuse my doing so on this sheet. I have nothing particular to write only that I wish you would write oftener. I am always interested in hearing from you boys, how your business prospers &c. Well I will try and write something that would interest you. As you are interested in hunting I will

mention that we have some sport after wild turkeys. There are plenty of them in the woods round here. This is not the proper time to kill them but we don't mind that. It is not easy to kill small game with an Enfield rifle but some of the best marksmen do very well. The best shot I ever saw was on the River. One of the boys killed a gull over half a mile [away]. As we were going along the road one day we saw a flock of buzzards, some eight or ten on a tree about three-fourths of a mile distant. There were twenty of us and the Capt. gave us permission to shoot at them. We gave them a volley all together and killed three at that distance so you see our guns carry a long distance. There are plenty of fish in the creeks round here, mostly catfish. Down at Cairo the boys catch some very large ones. We catch them with hook and line. I think if Mr. Quin were here he would enjoy himself. Now West write again and I will write you a longer letter.

Cairo, May 19th, 1863

Dear Brother:

I received your letter of May 14th this morning and send a few lines in reply though there is nothing new at present. I was sorry to hear of the sudden death of your brother-in-law and of the continued sickness of Ward.²³ I know a little from experience how it goes to be sick in the Army and can understand how he is situated. If he had six months good health so as to get somewhat at home in the Army it would not be so bad. I am happy to state that the health of the 14th was never better than at present. If Ward could get to some of the hospitals up this way or at Memphis he would get the best attention possible.

I think the field hospitals must be in good shape judging by the stores that are taken down the river. There are im-

²³ This was Ward Wilbur, a brother of Mrs. James Wilson. He was discharged because of illness in August, 1863.

mense quantities of ice shipped from Canada to Cairo on the cars and from here to Vicksburg in barges. All kinds of hospital stores are abundant. Still the best of care cannot save all. We have as recruit in Co. G one of the Doo's²⁴ from Crystal. He received a letter from home this morning informing him of the death of his brother in Co. E, 24th Iowa. The new regiments have had more sickness last winter and this spring than the old but after they get used to the climate they will not be so much sick.

I had hoped to see the Tama Co. boys in the 10th, 24th, and 28th Iowa in Grant's Army this summer but since we are scattered in southern Ill. it is not likely that we will see them. The Paymaster is here paying the 14th. I will send what I can spare by letter as usual. I guess it is best to send it in two letters as if one should get lost the other might not. There is only two months wages due this time. If I should get furloughed before another payday I may be short of cash but I can make it some way. It seems to be a slow business getting a furlough. They have been more than two months trying to furlough the first squad and they have not gone home yet. It puts me in mind of the Circumlocution Office that is mentioned in some novel.²⁵ I will be in the second squad but I don't know when that may be. I don't expect to be home but once until my time is up so it don't matter for a month or two. It seems after all the good and bad news from Hooker's Army that another defeat is added to the former ones in the east, but still I think the time is coming that will see the Grand Army of the Potomac victorious over those that have so often driven them from the field. I must finish for the present with best wishes to yourself and Esther I remain, your affect. Brother

I enclose fifteen and will send ten or fifteen the next time.

²⁴ This was apparently John Dew. His brother was Andrew J. Dew.

²⁵ Peter Wilson had evidently read *Little Dorrit*, by Charles Dickens.

Cairo, Ill., May 23d [1863]

Dear Sister Flora:

I have just received your letter and proceed to reply though I have nothing particular to communicate. In the first place I will mention that it is somewhat uncertain what time I may come home. I may be home at the first of July and I may not be home for three months. My furlough is due about the first of July but if some of the boys are sick I will let them go in my place, as it don't make much difference. I like Cairo first rate now and if it was not for seeing father and mother I would not come home this summer. I had a letter from Allan Sloss a few days ago. He gave me James Solls's address and promised to come and see me as he went to Chicago this summer. If I had known of his being in Memphis I would have called on him when we were in Memphis. Allan has heard of the weddings on the Creek and thinks I will be the next, judging from what he heard while up there. I think he is mistaken for once but time will show. I think being away from the girls so long will insure my being an old bach.

If I keep my health I will stay with Uncle Samuel as long as we can agree and he needs soldiers. Perhaps when my time is up I may feel like coming home for good, still I have no idea that I will be satisfied to stay. I hardly know anything more to write. I think you might write a little oftener and longer letters. I have dropped a number of my correspondents from my list partly because I did not care much for their letters and partly because I did not get answers to half the letters I sent them. D. Galt is the most punctual correspondent I have outside of home. He is the first to give me the details of any important event.

There is a good number of churches in Cairo. I attended the Episcopal last Sabbath. I think once will do me for that kind of mummery. We generally attend the Presby-

terian, sometimes the Methodist. As a matter of course the theater is largely attended every night in the week. I have seen Uncle Tom's Cabin acted. I think it is the best subject they could get and they do better than in St. Louis. I generally go to the theater twice per week as I am on guard that often and the guards can go where they please. We generally have some fun on patrol guard as we have to visit all places of amusement to see if any disorder is going on. There are so many gunboat soldiers, steamboatmen, &c in Cairo it takes a few guards to keep order. With love to all I remain your brother,

Cairo, Ill., June 8th, 1863

Dear Father:

It is some time since I have written to you but as I had nothing of consequence to write I must be excused. It is little different yet, but I will send a few lines anyway. Up to this time we have had excellent health in Cairo and as long as that is the case we will enjoy ourselves. The weather has not been very hot yet for longer than a few days at a time. Within the last few days the Army from Mo. and Burnside's old command has passed enroute for Vicksburg. It looks as though there are to be extensive operations down the River. I think there is no likelihood of the 14th being there. It was almost certain we would go last week but now it is the reverse.

I see the Tama Co. companies at Vicksburg have suffered pretty severely in the late battles. Some boys that I was acquainted with have been killed. I saw some of my Long Grove friends in the 20th the other day, as they stopped a few hours at Cairo. The 20th was at Benton Barracks last fall while we were there. Since then they have been marching through Mo. and Arkansas. They were in the battle of Prairie Grove. The Army of the Frontier has done more

hard marching than any other in the service. They are now on the way to Vicksburg. The men look well and are willing to join the Army of the Miss. and quit bushwhacking in Missouri. Now that we have nothing but State Militia in Mo. it is likely there will be an invasion from Arkansas and as we are not far off we may be sent to that State before long. But I need not speculate on the subject.

I had a letter from Uncle David²⁶ a few days ago. His folks were well as usual and crops looked unusually well. He is coming up this fall to see you. Perhaps I may come at the same time. I cannot come before August now and perhaps not then. I have nothing more to write.

Fort Halleck, Columbus, Ky.

June 18th, 1863

Dear Brother:

We left Cairo rather suddenly a day or two ago. The troops had mostly left this place and gone to Vicksburg. The enemy, knowing how it is, are said to be preparing to attack this place. Five companies of the 14th have been spared from Cairo to reinforce the few that were here. There are about 1500 men here and the place is so strong we can hold it against 5000 or more. We don't expect such good luck as to be attacked here. There is plenty of heavy artillery and a couple of gunboats to keep them from getting into the town so let them come. They will find us ready. Fort Halleck is situated on the bluff above the town. The bluff is very high and the view up and down the River is splendid. It was called Fort Beauregard when in Rebel hands.

There is a Coloured Regiment in the other fort at the lower part of town. We will have a high time in case we are attacked, but the belief is now that they will not come. They

²⁶ This was, apparently, David McCosh, a brother of Peter Wilson's mother.

were 25 miles from here yesterday and I don't know whether they are coming on or not. We have pickets out five miles and scouts beyond. It is all right to keep on the lookout. The first two boys that went home on furlough will be back today. The next two will start as soon as it is quiet. I will not promise any more about coming home.

It seems the Rebels are putting their threat of invasion into practice in the East.²⁷ Perhaps if they burn a few of the large cities it may wake up that part of the country. They have plenty of men and if they don't choose to meet the enemy half way I hope the Secesh will learn them something of how an invading army destroys where they go. Price and Marmaduke have tried to get to St. Louis several times and have never been able though. There were not many soldiers in their way. If Hooker cannot take care of his part of the frontier I don't know what his Army is good for but it is not for me to have an opinion in such matters. I have no doubt but you at home take more interest in the progress of events than we soldiers. If we knew for certain that tomorrow we would be in battle we would sleep as sound tonight. We don't know what changes an hour may bring and we have learned to take every change with indifference.

The rain has been falling fast all day and all our mess are on picket but Frank and myself. We have been fixing hammocks sailor fashion in the tent. If you could step in and see us and how nicely we have fixed up you would be surprised.

I need not write any more now. There is no telling how long we may be here. The Headquarters of the Regt. is at Cairo. This detachment is commanded by Capt. Crane.²⁸

²⁷ General Robert E. Lee had started north on the campaign which was stopped at Gettysburg.

²⁸ Captain LeRoy A. Crane was at this time Captain of Company H of the Fourteenth Iowa.

The most of our officers are here on Courts Martial. Give my love to all.

Fort Halleck, Columbus, Ky., June 27th, '63

Dear Brother:

Your letter of June 20th arrived this morning. I was glad to hear of your continued prosperity and of the welfare of all our friends. I have no doubt but you find yourself very busy. I am happy to state that since we came here we also have been busy though there has been no particular reason for so much vigilance. The Rebels are between here and Memphis but we have no reason to suppose they are in force sufficient to trouble us much. They have fired on the boats with Light Artillery and they threaten to stop boats from running. The boats that went down yesterday had a gunboat in company.

We go out on picket about two miles and scout nearly every day from ten to thirty miles. The Cavalry do most of the scouting. Since we came here no considerable force has been nearer than thirty miles. They don't run the cars regularly to Jackson, Tenn., now. When they go they take a strong guard. There are plenty of orchards out on our picket line and apples are ripe here now. We enjoy ourselves better while on duty than when we have nothing to do. For my part I like to ramble round the country much better than loafing in the city. I think we have done with doing guard duty in cities now. If we stay here this summer our business will be to keep the Rebels quiet in this part of Ky. There are some three thousand men at this post. Some of them are drafted men. Their nine months is almost up, when I suppose they will be mustered out.

The remains of the 128th Ill. is temporarily attached to the 14th. They have only about 150 men. Their commissioned officers have been mustered out. Desertion is the

cause of their being so much reduced. We have a pretty large Regt. now, more so than when we left the State. I will mention that Col. Shaw owns 80 acres of prairie south of Sprole's place. Sprole knows the lines or E. Stokes could show you the land. You might look at it sometime when you are over that way. It can be bought cheap, a trifle more than the original cost perhaps. It is not best for me to buy land until I come home but there might be some advantage in this. It can do no harm to find how it is. I could pay for it in a year at any rate if I don't come home and the prospect now is that I won't. Furloughs are not given now in this Division owing to the threatening attitude of the Rebels.

D. Connel has written to B. F. Thomas that he is a candidate for State Senator. I need not express my opinion as I am not much of a politician. If the Republican Party is for him he will be apt to be elected. We will be mustered for pay in a few days. Please mention in your next whether you received two letters with 15 dollars in each from Cairo. I think of nothing else at present.

Dear Brother Andrew:

I received your letter last night and thank you very much for writing. I can stand almost anything better than to be disappointed in getting letters from home. You boys must have busy times to get your work done this season, but you will get through some way. You must have had good hay weather this season to have put up so much yourself. The little stumpy fields in this part of the country look something like Conn.²⁹ They have no reaping machines here, but Niggers and most of them belong now to the Coloured Regt. here in Columbus. They raise good corn here and

²⁹ The Wilson family had lived for a time in Connecticut before moving to Iowa.

good hay but the country is rough, the timber heavy. If you had some of their timber and orchards it would be a fine thing. I think plenty of apples is the best thing to keep healthy in the summer. Perhaps they may be plenty in Iowa some time. They have plenty at Uncle David's now. So much horse trading has been done since I came away I don't know what kind of horses you have now. If you had some of their big Ky. mules you could make things gingle.

I would like very much to see our cousins just come from Scotland. Perhaps I may by and by. I need not tell you boys to be kind to them and make them feel as much at home as possible. I guess they will soon learn to like Iowa. Now Andrew if you will write about once in two weeks, John and West also, I think among you you might do it. I will always answer. It would improve your style of writing and I would be your debtor. I have not many correspondents but those at home and you know it is sometimes a good while between letters. If we had more to do we would not care so much about letters, but I am happy to say we have plenty of time to do anything we please. I have forgotten whether I answered West's letter. I think not so I will do it soon.

Columbus, Ky., July 1st, 1863

Dear Father:

Once more I send a few lines to let you know that we are in good health and like we always have done enjoying ourselves. Our duty here is something like it was at Cairo, only there are more men here and more to do. There are men enough to make a Brigade but each Regt. is commanded by its own Col. I suppose none of us is permanently established here. Col. Shaw will have command of the post as soon as he is relieved from court martial duty that he is on at present. He is the oldest Col. at this place and perhaps he may be a Brigadier before long. We are on guard about

twice a week, the rest of the time is mostly at our disposal with the exception of a few hours drill each day.

The weather has been pretty warm with heavy rains nearly every day. We may thank our stars that we have no marching to do. Yesterday we went out about a mile to be reviewed by the General. Before we finished a heavy shower came on us and there were at least two thousand of us came back drenched to the skin. I think it can rain in this State at the shortest notice. The only consolation we had was to see the officers get their nice uniforms wet.

It must be raining up the river. The river is rising rapidly. What little crops I have seen here look well. There is a fine corn field over the river where the Battle of Belmont was fought. The soil is good in this part of Ky. but the timber is very heavy and like other parts of the South they have been farming among the trees. The most of the farms are deserted and left to ruin. There are some splendid orchards a few miles from camp and we begin to use the apples now.

There is plenty of game in the woods and plenty of hogs, but pork is not much in favor with us. We had a box of dried peaches, apples, and a quantity of butter sent from Ind. We got it cheap and have not found it worth while to forage any for some time. We sold our fishing boat and lines before we left Cairo and we don't know that we will be here long enough to pay us for getting another.

July 4

We are just returned from our picnic and I will give an idea of how it went off. The ground was fixed up in good style for having a good time, a large floor was made for dancing, ropes were fixed for tight rope performers, all kinds of folks from the General to the contraband were there. Well there were some good speeches made, plenty of

music from the bands, and some songs sung. Then we were dismissed for dinner, ah there's the rub. We had marched three miles in the hot sun, listened to the speakers, and then there was nothing to eat except by paying for it, ten cents per glass for lemonade and other things in proportion. You may guess we were not in the best of humor. There was plenty to eat and drink on the ground, but it was not for nothing. The citizens of Columbus make plenty of money from the soldiers to enable them to give us a free dinner. Instead of that they took advantage of the occasion to make some more out of us.

Well there was but one opinion among us, to pitch in and clean out every stall on the ground. The officer in command saw that things began to look squally, he mounted the stand and called "Attention". We know so well what that means that he had attention immediately. He then told us that no doubt we had come there with the intention of eating two or three oxen &c but there was not even a fatted calf, nary chicken nor anything else, so we would go home and eat hard tack and pork as usual and invite our entertainers to come and eat with us.

We gave three cheers for dinner at camp and fell into line and started leaving, those that had intended to sell us something to eat looking rather wistful. If the Col. had not marched us off when he did we would have made a clean sweep of the place. There was plenty of beer, whiskey, wine, &c. and we had both the will and the power to take it. The Col. touched us on the only weak place we had when he told us we will show them that western men are too well disciplined to raise a row even when we have been provoked.

There is some trouble over in Tenn. and perhaps we may be sent out to Jackson before long. It is said the Rebs are conscripting out that way. Most likely we will go and see

how they prosper. I am only guessing at it but I hope we may run around and if there are such things going on have something to say on the matter. I will finish this scribble. I think some of the folks might write as often as once per week. I get very few letters now and the longer the fewer.

Columbus, Ky., July 10th, 1863

Dear Brothers John, West, & Andrew:

I am going to tell you the kind of times we had when the news came that Vicksburg was taken. We had a general permit to go to town and enjoy ourselves. Since the 4th the boys have only been waiting a good opportunity to take vengeance on the Secesh of Columbus and by common consent now was the time. General Asboth issued an order for all loyal men to illuminate their houses in the evening. Some of the saloon keepers did not comply, saying they did not care about Vicksburg's being taken. There were perhaps two thousand soldiers in town and this was a good case to begin with. They rushed in and smashed everything to pieces, drinking all the liquors, taking tobacco, cigars, &c, and making short work with it. Every saloon in town was visited and they had to shell out what was called for on pain of losing all. Soon half of the crowd was drunk, officers as bad as the men, considerable fighting going on.

General A. was said to have made good use of an empty whiskey bottle in a row with one of the boys. He was in citizen's clothes, having a jolly time with the others. About midnight most of the men returned to camp.

The next morning strange to tell nearly every tent had something in it that was not the previous day. Some had liquors, some tobacco, some dry goods, some furniture. One had a large quantity of snuff, enough to keep Uncle McDowall in snuff for five years. Every thing that could be carried away was brought to camp. If they had given

us something to eat on the Fourth nothing of the kind would have happened. Nothing of the kind has happened since. We were out at Rolla last winter. If we get on another spree when Richmond is taken I think Columbus will be reduced to the ranks. Nearly all the business of Columbus is supported by the soldiers and they pay two prices for everything. It is no more than right that they confiscate a little sometimes.

It has a bad effect on a Regiment, such plundering, and I hope it may not happen any more. Now boys you will please each of you to write. Let me know how all your affairs, agricultural, nonsensical, &c, are. John R. Felter and Frank get six letters from home to my one and I write almost or quite as many as they.

Columbus, Ky., July 11th, 1863

Dear Father:

I received your letter last night with one from Uncle Andrew and was glad to hear from you. I would write oftener to you but when I write to James you can see the letters so it is not worth while to write to you both in one week. I hope Uncle Dodd's folks will soon be well and at home in Iowa. I would like to see them, but for the present there is not much likelihood of my being home very soon. There is generally a big scare here once per week. The Rebs. are reported coming this way now and are said to be within a few miles of this place. We were under arms all night last night.

I will just mention that we of the 14th don't believe they will do us the favor of attacking us. If they do they will get whipped the worst kind. They have been too strong for our scouting parties but it don't follow that they will commit suicide by running against the guns of Fort Halleck. They would place us under lasting obligations if they come on and pitch in.

Now that Vicksburg is taken Port Hudson must soon follow. General Herron is going to Texas with the old Army of the Frontier. He wrote to Col. Shaw that if he chose to go along he might. I don't know how the Col. will decide. If he pleased us he would go to Texas. Col. Shaw can keep his Regiment pretty near where he chooses. I think he will stay where he is for the present. He knows how to logroll as well as the next one and he knows where we are best off. I think Col. Shaw has more respect for his men than any officer from the State and he cares nothing for his superior officers. If they don't please him he has a very plain way of speaking his mind. I think we have more reason to hope now for the end of the war than we ever had before. If Lee don't manage to take his Army back to Virginia their case seems hopeless. I think Lee will get back but he must have made a poor spec[tacle] in Penn. this time. I will write to Grandfather soon. I think Uncle Andrew don't understand it when he says we must have some other government before we have peace. He says the sympathy of the Scotch is with the South. That seems strange but our recent victories will shut up intervention for a time, so it don't matter. I think jealousy and a wish to see our country go to pieces has something to do with the sympathy for the South. Well I sincerely hope that the time is near when the restoration of the Union is no longer doubtful. I have written some to the boys so for this time I will finish.

Columbus, Ky., July 20th, '63

Dear Sister Jane:

I received your letter last night. I did not know you had gone home so I wrote to Grinnell last week. I have written twice since I got any letters from you. As soon as I get a letter I answer it forthwith if practicable. I generally

write two letters for every one I get, but no matter. I hope you may like harvesting. If it was possible I would come and help. There is no doubt but considerable inconvenience is experienced in Iowa on account of so many being away but they know comparatively nothing compared with any of the Southern States or in any part of the North where the raids have been made.

One of Co. G died yesterday. His brother belonging to the 24th died last week. Their name was Dykman.³⁰ Their folks live on Salt Creek. There has been no deaths in the old soldiers of the 14th since Nov. until now. Some of the recruits have died. We buried him with military honors. He died very suddenly, though his health had been poor for some time.

There seems to be a general feeling of security here now among the citizens. Sometimes squads of the enemy come within a few miles, but for the last few days everything has been quiet. There is little to write. We went out a few miles today after blackberries and apples and though it was very warm we brought in enough to last some days. Some of the boys make very good pies, dumplings, &c. Ky. is a good fruit country. Every farm is well supplied with all kinds of fruit trees.

I should write to West but you must let him read this and I will write to him before long. I hope he may get well as soon as possible. I hope his trouble may not be serious. It is rather hard for Uncle Dodd's folks to be sick in their new place, but the folks around will do their best to make them like Iowa. I think the prospect of the war coming to an end was never so bright. A few more victories will finish the Southern Confederacy. I hope the time is not far distant when we can leave the land of Dixie forever. Perhaps

³⁰ Edgar Dykeman was in Company G. His brother, Simon Dykeman, died in St. Louis.

things may take a turn in favor of the South again but if they don't soon they cannot hope to fight to any purpose much longer. Uncle David's folks and some of the Brownlee girls are coming up this fall. I hope they may have a pleasant visit, as they take pains to use me well when I go there. I may have something to write next time, for the present good bye.

Columbus, Ky., July 23d, 1863

Dear Sister Flora:

It is time for me to get a letter from you, but I don't expect it knowing how slow you all are about writing. Perhaps I don't write as often as I ought, but staying so long in one place gives us nothing to write. Everything is quiet here, so quiet as to make it uninteresting. Our regular turn of guard once or twice per week and a few hours drill every day is all our duty. We go out a few miles for fruit and vegetables two or three times per week. Peaches are pretty plenty and just beginning to be ripe. Apples are very plenty and have been ripe for some time. Blackberries are very plenty everywhere. All kinds of vegetables are very dear, but we find a way to get enough. The most of our time we have nothing to do and it comes very good this warm weather.

There is a good deal of chess playing in Co. G now. John and Frank are both very good players. I don't know whether you ever saw the game. It is the best I ever saw. Of course we must introduce it at some future time among the folks at home. I don't think there will be any more furloughs given in the 14th. There has not been any for the last month, so I don't expect to be home until our time is expired or the war ended. I think the prospect for a successful termination of the war is getting no longer doubtful. There is no doubt but the South will fight until they

cannot raise another Regt. but their efforts must be in vain. Their case is getting no better very fast as the record of events in the last month will show.

Another of Co. G's boys died a few days ago. With that exception the health of the Co. is very good. Our duty is regular and not hard enough to hurt our health. I guess they must be very busy at home this harvest. West being unwell will make it more so. One thing they ought to be glad of is that they don't happen to live in the part of the country overrun with opposing Armies.

The folks in Iowa will never know anything about the miseries an invading Army brings on the inhabitants of the country they occupy. I hope the draft will not fail to bring out some of our neighbours that think more of their interests than of their country. Now is the time to increase our Army when we are getting so much advantage over the Rebels. If the whole power of the North was given to the prosecution of the war, six months would end it. I don't think the men drafted this time will have long to serve if they go into it with a will. So it is no great calamity to be drafted at this time. I have nothing more to write.

Columbus, Ky., August 1st, 1863

Dear Brother and Sister:

The mail came in last night bringing letters for John and Frank but none for me. Such is often the case. I suppose the reason is one is a married man, the other expects to be, so their letters come as regular as the day of the week. I must admit that in that they have the advantage. It is very pleasant to hear from home regularly, though I don't care as much about it as formerly. Time will get us used to most anything.

I may report all quiet in our department, nothing more exciting than drumming a deserter through camp before he

goes to serve his time out in the Military Prison at Alton, Ill. They begin to punish desertion pretty severe now. If they had done so sooner it would have been better. They must come down pretty severe to keep the drafted men from deserting. I wonder who of the Wolf Creek men will have the honor of carrying a musket. I see in the papers the Regts. on the Potomac are to be filled with drafted men. I hope they may do the same in the West. Let the men choose the Regt. they will serve in and it will make them useful right away and make them more satisfied.

We have been paid two months' wages. I would rather have waited another month and received four months' wages and pay for clothing that I did not get. I send ten in this, the next time I write I will send more. For the present I will not make any arrangement with Col. Shaw about his land. I think 120 dollars cash would buy it but as I have not the cash I can't do it and I guess it is not worth while to buy it on time. Money will buy land some other time, perhaps not so cheap but no matter. The troops that left this place to assist in the reduction of Vicksburg have returned. I don't know whether any of them will stay here. I hope we may go next time. We have had good times here this summer but I would like to go somewhere else, now it is quiet. Likely we may stay here all the fall though there is nothing certain in the Army. Don't you think things begin to look like a war with England or France or both. I think in a short time we will be able to defy them. If my time was up today and either England or France recognizes and helps the South I will enlist again.

Esther will please write this time.

Columbus, Ky., August 3d, 1863

Dear Parents:

I have been putting off writing till I would get a letter

from home. I got one from Andrew last night or rather this morning as I was out on picket yesterday and did not come in till ten o'clock this morning. I think I killed ten thousand mosquitoes last night. They are more trouble than the Rebs. They are not bad in camp but out in the woods they are as the sands of the seashore.

It seems you have had busy times to get your harvesting done this season. The measles is something that everyone ought to have while they are young so it is well to be through with them. To have the measles in the Army is as bad as anything, particularly for men rather old. I hope by the time the next letter comes you may all be well again. There is not much sickness here though among the new companies there is some. There are some of the boys that never have nor never will get entirely over the diseases contracted while in prison. I have not been sick an hour since I was home. I have not even had a cold though we sleep in the open air, sometimes every other night. This is election day in Ky. and there have been squads of soldiers sent to the different points of this district to keep order. I presume they will elect a Secesh in this county as the most of the people belong to that persuasion.

There are some Union men round here. I will mention an incident that happened at the Provost Marshal's the other day to show you how it is in Dixie. Two men living not ten miles from Columbus and on adjoining farms, the one Secesh the other for the Union, both leading men in the county, both men of great strength and pluck, mortal enemies of course. At a political meeting a short time ago the Union man made a speech and as usual was opposed by the Secesh. The Union man was, it seems, too much for him so Secesh threatened to kill him. The parties next met on the porch in front of the Provost Marshal's. Secesh says very blandly how are you, Union man answers with a smasher in

the face that knocked his opponent down. Then the fight commenced in earnest. The Provost Marshal and his peace-makers kept out of the way until Secesh was used up sufficiently then came and stopped the fight. When it was over Secesh was so badly beaten his folks would not know him and could get no redress. The Union man was presented with a revolver and encouraged in well doing. I will finish by writing a few lines to Andrew.

Columbus, Ky., Aug. 19th, '63

Dear Uncle and Aunt:³¹

Though I don't remember much about you, as it is so long since I have seen you, still I hope the time is not far distant when we may become better acquainted. Your experience in Iowa must be rather melancholy, owing to the sickness and sad bereavement in your family. May He that giveth and taketh away be your consolation in your time of trouble. It has never been my lot to lose any very near relative but the time will come for us all to go to another world. It matters little if we are ready how soon. Here in the Army we are often reminded of the uncertainty of life and the certainty of death.

If half of us come home when the war is over it will be better than I expect. But I need not continue on the dark side of the picture. If the cause of justice and liberty triumphs over that of slavery & wrong, those that die have not died in vain. I presume you have not thought much about the merits of the war or rather you may doubt whether it is right for us to go on at the rate we have, sacrificing so much life, but I take it for granted you would like to see America as it was before the war commenced, with the exception of slavery. I think the time is coming when that will be the

³¹ This letter was apparently written to Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Dodd who had come to Iowa from Scotland after Peter Wilson enlisted.

case. For my part I want to see the war go on until we are completely successful.

The fall campaign will perhaps decide the long struggle. If we have as good success as we have had this summer it certainly will. I don't know when I will come home but I think some time before winter. As there have been a good many changes since I was home I am quite curious to see the place. Of course I should mention the folks before the place as I am most anxious to see them. I shall be happy to see my new friends from Scotland as the more of them come the more it is like home. We soldiers see a good many places and a great deal of the country but I have not seen anything down this way to compare with Tama Co., Iowa.

Columbus, Ky., Aug. 20th, 1863

Dear Brother West:

I hear you have been quite unwell for some time and not making much progress towards getting well. There is one thing in your favor, you are where you can be taken care of. That is an important item. Perhaps one-half of the men that are sick in the Army get very indifferent attention, many of them that die would have lived if they had had any care. I hope to hear of your getting better soon. I have had the ague but I am as well as ever now. The ague is very plenty just now. It comes all at once. Such a time I never saw.

The Dr. don't excuse a man from duty if he is shaking but he can cure the ague in a short time. Our Dr. is a hard old sinner. He would put a man on duty if he was three-fourths dead. He once sent one of our Co. to load some commissary wagons in the forenoon. The man had been very unwell for some time previous and died in the evening of the same day so you see the ague is not much with such a man. I am lucky in not being much in his power. A Dr. has

much power in the Army. If he says a man is fit for duty his decision cannot be appealed from. He has much power for evil if he sees fit to use it. I think we have a good Dr. in serious cases but he is too severe if there is not much the matter.

I must write of something else now so for want of something better I will tell you about the kind of folks that live in this part of Old Kaintuck. I have been to most of the houses in the vicinity of the picket line, sometimes five or six miles out. The farms are generally small something like Connecticut. When you are on one farm and look around you would think it was the only clearing in the country. The thick tall trees shut up the place and make it look isolated and lonesome. A good orchard, a cornfield, garden, a patch of a few acres of tobacco, sometimes a few acres of cotton, a log house generally of inferior quality the chinking out in summer to let the air circulate, two or three cows, ditto oxen or mules, with a yoke made after the pattern of the last century, and the harness for the mules one-half chain the other old ropes. The wagons are like the one Mr. Nungesser brought to Iowa.

The men and boys dress either in butternut or common tent cloth. The women smoke, quite often make corn dodger without salt and solid enough for cheese. The men wear long hair and are generally a rough, hoosier,³² sickly, lazy, and mostly drunken set. There are of course exceptions to all this, but I mention the common farmers that work for their living like we do in Iowa. Every farmer keeps a lot of hounds or curs of some kind. When you go up to the house you would think there was a general invitation to all the dogs in the country and they were there to have a general barking when any one came. Now West I hope you

³² This word has not been found. Possibly the term meant was "hoosier" meaning "uncouth".

may feel well enough to write by the time you get this scribble.

Columbus, Ky., Sept. 1st, '63

Dear Parents:

I take this opportunity of sending a few lines to let you know how we prosper down this way. The most attentive visitor we have at this time is the ague. At least one-third of the men in camp has it at times. I happen to be among the number myself. I was in hopes it would not come back on me but in that I was mistaken. I have broken it up the second time and mean to keep it off if there is any virtue in dogwood bark, Peruvian bark, and Old Rye Whiskey. That is the kind of Bitters the Dr. gives us.

I cannot account for so much ague here. The place looks healthy, the ground is high, the water we use mostly from the River and River men say it is as healthy as any water in the U. S. I think being out in the night³³ so much has something to do with it but whatever may be the cause there is plenty of it. I think a short time will bring cool weather and good health. The weather has been quite cool for the last few days. One of the boys that was up to Chicago with prisoners says they have frost up that way. I presume you have the same in Iowa. Rather early for frost, but nothing is surprising in Iowa, it can freeze there most any time.

The newspapers tell us of the fall of Sumter and Wagner. Charlestown must follow sooner or later. Also Jeff Davis has called out 500,000 Niggers. Who would have thought it? They must be changing their opinions in Dixie pretty fast to think the chivalry would be brought so low as to fight their battles with Niggers. I think between us the Nigger will get his freedom. I am not prepared to give an opinion

³³ Peter Wilson, like others of his time, saw no connection between the thousands of mosquitoes and the epidemic of malaria.

as to the result of Jeff's new policy. I will venture that it is too late now. If he had done so in the first place he would have made it win. I think before he gets his armies in shape we will have pushed farther into the South and what we get we can keep.

Yesterday being the last of the month, we had review. Besides the white Regts. out there was one colored Regt. I must say they both looked well and marched well. A review is conducted something after the following manner. In the first place the troops are formed in line with open ranks. Then the reviewing officers ride along in front, the band of each Regt. plays a short strain as they pass. They ride round the left and along behind to where they started, then take their station opposite the center and some distance in front. The ranks are then closed, wheel by company and pass in review. If a company of 100 men can keep a good line and keep step it looks well. Our Niggers did splendid, considering the short time they have been in training but for the present I must close. I will write more next time.

Columbus, Ky., Sept. 5th, 1863

Dear David:

I take this opportunity of penning a few lines to let you know how we prosper down this way. In the first place I will mention that Frank and I were expecting to have started home today, but just when our furloughs were to be sent in, furloughing has been stopped. Nothing but sick furloughs are given at present. John R. Felter started home this morning. His health has not been good for some time and we hope a month at home may help him. Perhaps Frank and I may have a chance by and by, but there is no certainty of it. If I cannot come before cold weather I will not come in the winter and it is not worth while to come next

summer. You may look for us in fourteen months at farthest.

You will likely see John about the time this reaches you. From him you can get all the news that happened up to the time he left but though he has not been gone a day we have seen the execution of three American citizens of African descent. They belonged to the party that murdered a family of whites at Compromise Landing near Island No. 10. Six more will be executed next week, so you see there is to be considerable performing on the tight rope yet before justice is done.

There was a large crowd of soldiers and citizens, women and children present. A hollow square was formed round the scaffold and after waiting a short time the prisoners, escorted by a Co. of Regulars and the band playing the Dead March, arrived at the scaffold. The prisoners mounted the ladder with a firm step and took their places, the ropes dangling at their heads. Fifteen minutes of religious exercises by a colored preacher and they were ready. The ropes were put round their necks, they shook hands, then the caps was pulled over their faces, the drop fell, and they were dangling between Heaven and Earth. One died instantly, the next struggled a few minutes, the last about 15 minutes. One was a small man, the other two were upwards of 200 lbs. They died game. It is said their officer told them to commit the murder but I don't know how it is. The spectators looked on like as if so many cattle were being killed and rough jokes were passed on all sides. But I must change the subject and tell you about something more civil than hanging darkies.

One of the boys found a bee tree in the woods the other day and we made up our minds to have some honey forthwith. So the same evening we started well supplied with axes and a good supply of something to take. We arrived

at the tree just at dark and built fires to see to cut the tree. It was a large poplar four feet in diameter. We were not long in bringing it down, when we proceeded to chop open where the bees were. This was not so nice as the bees would sting and buzz at a furious rate. Finally we got to where the honey should have been but it was mostly comb. We got about fifteen pounds of honey. There are plenty of bees in the woods if we had time to hunt them. It is too early in the season to get much honey. There has been so much ague among us for a few weeks that we have had no drill, so we are having pretty good times as far as work goes. We have a regimental library now and preaching every Sabbath. There are some histories &c in the library. It helps to pass the time agreeably. This part of Ky. is as quiet now as Tama County, Iowa. The same precautions are taken to keep in readiness for the enemy as if there was one in the vicinity. There are some negro troops here that are already well drilled. They go through the maneuvers on battalion drill in a style that no troops need be ashamed of. There is one reason why they learn so quick, they will obey orders and give their attention to what they are doing much better than we will. They are used to being ordered round, we are not nor never will be. We obey our officers because we know there must be discipline but as a general thing we don't hold them much in awe.

The discipline in the negro Regts. too is very strict and they have a funny way of punishing offenders. They have a large pole laid up on crotches and every morning a number of darkies are taking a ride on the pole. The offenses generally consist of running the guard, being absent from roll call, &c. The court martial is still in operation here. Some time ago the remains of the 128 Ill. was temporarily attached to the 14th. They deserted almost to a man. Most of them have been retaken and sentenced to work out their

time under guard at Memphis. The deserters are generally sentenced to finish their time at hard labor and their pay is all stopped. The way of the transgressor is hard in military life.

I suppose the draft is postponed in Iowa once more. I wish they would give us a chance to recruit some way. We have only some thirty men in our Co. If we should be sent to the field we would amount to but little. Politics run high here. If Tuttle³⁴ had come out Independent he would have had a good chance for the soldiers' vote. As it is nothing but those that have been Democrats without the possibility of change will vote for him. I presume he is just as good as Stone³⁵ but being in bad company is what we don't like. Now David you must excuse the want of news in my letter, as there is nothing going on here. Please write soon and let me know how matters and things are about Buckingham. Give my respects to all the folks.

Columbus, Ky., Oct. 31st, 1863

Dear Parents:

I take this opportunity of informing you of my welfare. There is little else to mention. We have not left Columbus yet nor are there any signs of it. We have fixed up our tents so as to keep comfortable while here and on the whole are doing very well.

I was on prison guard yesterday and as there are some queer chaps in prison sometimes I will give you some incidents that came under my notice last night. There are about 100 Secesh prisoners in the guardhouse at present, besides half as many Union soldiers, citizens, Negroes, &c. About nine o'clock in the evening two butternut chaps were

³⁴ James M. Tuttle was the Democratic candidate for the office of Governor of Iowa at the 1863 election.

³⁵ William M. Stone, the Republican candidate, was elected.

added to the number and soon another, all three pretty drunk, that being the cause of their incarceration. When a new one gets into the guardhouse he hears nothing but taunts on all sides. If he is spunky it comes to blows right away. The first two that got in last night had a serious time of it as they would not put up with the insults that were offered and got sundry knocks and bruises into the bargain. No. 3 came in like as if he was at home. He answered all comers in such a witty good-humored way we saw there was fun ahead. After introducing himself as an uncompromising Rebel and being congratulated on finding good winter quarters he proceeded to take a seat and came down to the tune of 250 lbs. on a man sleeping on the bench by the stove. The sleeper waked up swearing loudly. He's only a Copperhead says one, a Copperhead says the big man. Where are you from, you durned reptile, get up and give me a seat and let us have a chat.

Q. How do you like Governor Yates?³⁶

Ans. I don't like his politics.

Q. How do you like Old Abe?

Ans. They say he made good rails.

Q. Do you know if military law can divorce a man from his wife?

The general opinion was that it should, as a man in military prison was cut off from all society. The big man says if he can get a divorce by staying in prison six months he will be content. So Mr. Copperhead, you're from Ill. Durn you. Hope they'll hang you. I'm a Reb out on the square, you are a half Reb half anything and too much of a coward to fight for either party &c &c.

Thus poor Copperhead is abused even by drunken Rebs. Citizens are charged 5 dollars for a night in Uncle Sam's Hotel, if nothing more than drunk and disorderly is the

³⁶ Richard Yates, Governor of Illinois.

charge. There are some getting in and some getting out every day. One of Co. G got in since I was home³⁷ and has been sentenced to three months hard labor and imprisonment, charges sleeping on post.

The health of the men is good now. Co. G has not a man on the sick list. There are only three or four in the hospital. John R. Felter is improving and if nothing unfavorable happens he may have good health now. This is muster day. There is four months pay due me now. One of our boys has bought Col. Shaw's 80 for 150 dollars to be paid in installments of ten dollars per month. I think he has a good bargain. I would have taken it myself if it had not been inconvenient to go so far to improve it. If we pay more nearer home the advantages in being near it will more than overbalance. I have not got any letters since I was home, please write soon.

Columbus, Ky., Nov. 12th, '63

Dear Parents:

I take the present opportunity of informing you of my welfare. There is nothing of much importance going on at present. We are busy building log cabins to live in this winter. I have been in the woods every day for some time and I find that work is not so intolerable as I thought it would be. However I don't mean to do much more till I quit soldiering.

For some time back there has been general license for all the boys to go and hunt on the River bottoms, the game is plenty, deer, turkeys, and small game in abundance, also hogs and cattle which belong to the farmers. But no matter who they belonged to there have been so many of them killed that hunting is forbidden altogether. That is gener-

³⁷ This suggests that Peter Wilson finally got a furlough and was home some time between September 5th and October 31st.

ally the way it goes. The boys get to killing private property, then they must quit hunting till the offense is forgotten. Perhaps in a month there will be as much liberty as ever.

I had a letter from Uncle David. He has offered his farm for sale and he says there are some of his neighbours in the notion of moving to Tama. I guess if they get Sec. 17 there is no doubt but they will come. Aunt is as much in favor of it as Uncle.

I think if James can get a reasonable bargain he should buy 160 acres from the man that owns the land south of his place. I can pay for 80 acres before my time is up, so there is not much doubt but we can pay for it.

It is nearly a month since I left home and no letters yet. I will expect one soon. There is little to write from here but I will write once in two weeks to you and the same to James so you will hear from me every week. I have written to Cairngaan since I came back. I will write to Pinmore some time soon. Give my respects to Uncle Dodd's folks. Excuse my short letter.

Columbus, Ky., Nov. 23d, 1863

Dear Parents:

I take the present opportunity of letting you know that all is well with us as usual. We have moved into our cabins and fixed up in good order for winter weather. Our cabins have not cost the government much as the roof is made of shingles of our own making, most of the floors are made of boards taken from deserted buildings about town, windows from the same place, stoves ditto. We have plenty of room. There are nine of us in 16 x 16 square. We like our prospects for passing the winter first rate. The only war news from here is the capture of fifty-five Rebels by a party of our Cav.

The Rebs. were just from Miss. They came to operate along the River, burn steamboats, &c. They came within five miles of this place when our Cav. got after them and gobbled the most of them, killing some ten or twelve. None of our boys was hurt.

The prisoners are here in the guardhouse. Some of them are glad of their capture, but most of them are regular cut-throat Bushwhackers. Not long ago the Rebels captured L. Anderson, the Congressman just elected from this district. Our forces took some of his neighbours and kept them as hostages for his safety. They have effected his exchange so he can take his seat instead of lying in some Southern prison. General Smith is very successful in keeping order in his department by his stringent measures of holding citizens responsible for any mischief done in their neighborhood. Some time ago a bridge was burned on the road between here and Union City. As the citizens took no pains to put out the fire he made them build the bridge as good as it was. The recent order from Gen. Hurlbut³⁸ pressing all the citizens of Memphis and throughout the department into the service is very popular among the soldiers.

Private Peter Fingle a member of our Co. is condemned to be shot next Dec. for cowardice at the Battle of Shiloh and desertion from the service June, 1862. There are measures being taken to have him reprieved and the sentence mitigated. His sentence is according to military law but he is the first Iowa soldier that has been sentenced to death for that offense. I hope he may be reprieved as it is hard to see an old comrade shot, though he is a worthless fellow.

If James has not sent the box hurry him up, as John's butter will soon be gone. The Paymaster is here and will pay us this week. I will have considerable to spare this time. I hope to hear from home soon. You might all immi-

³⁸ General Stephen A. Hurlbut, commander of Union forces around Memphis.

grate to California and get there before I heard of your going. Don't forget me altogether. This leaves us in good health. Hoping you enjoy the same blessing, I remain your affectionate son.

Columbus, Ky., Nov. 24th, '63

Dear Brother:

I received the box this morning all right. Frank also got a box of chickens, butter, pickles, eggs, &c. There are nine of us in a mess and the program is for each one to get something from home as long as we stay at this post. So we will live this winter. I think the Q. M. has been making a speculation of our rations, or we have got more appetite than formerly, as we have been scant of bread and groceries for some time. But if there is any cheating it will be found out pretty soon. We have generally had something to sell, but now we buy. However there is no danger of our going hungry as we have learned how to help ourselves when there is any need.

Our comrade that is under sentence of death has been reprieved one month. It will be the 4th of January now. The President will be petitioned to pardon him or mitigate the sentence. The effect of his sentence has done a great deal of good by way of restraining unruly men. They think military law is not to be trifled with where they put on the string as they do here. One of our boys that has spent most of his time in the guardhouse and has twice deserted is just returned to the Co. after being in prison all summer. Col. Shaw told him if he gets into the guardhouse any more he will have him shot. He means it. I forgot to send the likeness last time. I will try and not forget this time.

Mr. Wambaugh is still provost guard. He likes it very well and is in good health. I will give him some butter as I guess that is the instructions though I have not got any

letter in regard to it. We will have a Thanksgiving dinner as Frank and John have lots of chickens. It is almost too far to send such things as they can be had here at reasonable rates. I received a letter from father a short time ago. It was time as I began to think I was quite forgotten. I keep an account of how many letters I write and how many I receive. Since I was home I have written twenty and received five, so I am getting on nicely. Have you heard from the owner of Sec. 17? If so let me know how he proposes to sell or if at all.

There is some talk of enlisting in the Veteran Corps. Quite a number of the 14th will go in. For my part I will not until I finish my present term. The Colored Artillery offers more inducements than the Veteran Corps but I believe it is best to get out of the old first, then I can keep out if I choose.

I need not prolong my letter as news is scarce. With love to all I remain,

Columbus, Ky., Dec. 12th, [1863]

Dear Brother West:

Yours of Oct. 27 is just arrived so you see it has been mislaid somewhere a month or more. I should have answered it promptly if it had come direct but now that it is here I will send a few lines to let you know how we wave down this way. There has been considerable stir here for some time. There have been six or eight Regiments of eastern men passed through Columbus. They stayed a few days, just long enough to see what kind of chaps they were. There was a New York City Reg. mostly Dutch and Irish, fond of lager and whiskey, consequently fond of fighting among themselves and spreeing generally.

One Reg't. was from New Jersey. They belong to the Zuave [Zouave] persuasion. The only difference between

them and other soldiers is in dress. Being comically dressed they think they should be comic all through and as a general thing they are a harum scarum set. Then there was Penn. Cav., riding the poorest horses imaginable and if a Cav. Reg. has poor horses they make a poor appearance and I think they cannot hurt the enemy much. We think it is the intention to clean out the Rebs. in this part of the country and open this road to Corinth. Perhaps we may be sent out, but we hope to stay in our comfortable cabins till spring. The weather has not been much cold yet but it is rather rainy and disagreeable for camping now.

I don't think there is much chance for a fight out on the road as there cannot be much of a Rebel force out there. There are plenty of guerillas, however, and some of them are brought in every few days. We send them to Rock Island now. Some of our boys went up there this week with a lot that were captured last week.

It is hard to get on a trip of that kind as so many want to go. Well, West, there is nothing more only that we are all well and having very good times. Please write again. Perhaps your letter may come sooner next time. I need not write to Father this week as this will do for all. I will write a longer letter next time. I am on guard today and it is nearly time for my relief to go to duty.

Columbus, Ky., Dec. 19th, 1863

Dear Parents:

I have been writing to one and another pretty often lately but it is nearly a month since I have written to you, so I will send you a few lines this time though I have nothing of importance to mention. We have had some rough weather lately almost as bad as in Iowa. There is no snow but there was plenty of rain and now quite hard frost. The Regs. that were passing through had very uncomfortable times in their

little shelter tents. I think there is force enough gone out into Tenn. to clean out all the Rebels in this part of the country. The most of the troops that have gone out are Eastern men and perhaps they may get the worst of it. If the Army of the Potomac is like the Eastern men that are in this Division no wonder Richmond is not taken but they may do in this district as the Rebs. that they will find are of the guerilla mixed with conscript breed and don't make a very hard fight as a general thing.

There was some talk of putting the 14th in a Brigade with the Eastern men but I think it will not be done now as they have gone and we will likely stay in Columbus. I never want to have anything to do with such men as they are. They mostly came out for the large bounties paid in New York and Jersey and care little about anything else.

How is it about the draft in Tama? Will there be enough of volunteers to keep it off? It seems land is looking up as the owner of 17 wants \$3.50 for the unbroken and \$6.00 for the broken. I presume Uncle David has concluded to stay where he is. It is not likely land will get cheaper as the prospect for a peace is becoming brighter and no doubt Iowa will soon settle up when the war is over. It don't seem possible for the Rebs. to hold out more than till next summer. Don't you think the Abolitionists are having things as they want them now? They will soon pay negro soldiers the same as white and level things generally. There are some furious debates between the Dem. and Rep. about it. I see the white officers of the 2nd Tenn. Colored Art. are as much respected here as any other officers and put on as much style as Regulars.

There are some Democrat soldiers very much opposed to Negro equality. Still they think they may as well grin and bear it. They sometimes cuss old Abe &c but there are four of our strong Democrats of Co. G reënlisted for three years.

It seemed at one time as if the 14th would go in as a Veteran Reg. That would require two-thirds of the men. Perhaps they may get that many but they have not yet. For my part I mean to finish my present term and then quit the business if I keep in my present way of thinking.

I see they agitate the question of giving us the same bounty as those that are enlisting now. I hope they may as we deserve it as much as the rest. There is nothing more worth writing so I will close.

Columbus, Ky., Dec. 28th, 1863

Dear Father:

I take this opportunity of sending a few lines to let you know that we are all well and putting in the time as agreeably as possible. We are having a wet time just now but our camp is on high ground so the mud is not bad only in town. Columbus, though not as low as Cairo, is on a flat piece of ground and in wet weather is muddy enough. Our camp is almost as high above Columbus as Balcaray was above the Fishhouse. If there was anything to look at the view would be good from the bluff but nothing only an occasional steamboat or gunboat disturbs the sameness of the prospect.

Negro sentinels walk their beat on the fortifications, which no one would have thought of a short time ago but now is looked upon as indifferently as if it had been so from the first. Everything goes on with as much regularity as in times of peace. The colored men do all the heavy work such as unloading boats and putting the goods on the train to be sent out to the Army at Union City. The darkies save us some hard work in that line besides taking care of the Fort. They could not be spared from here without the same number of troops of some kind taking their place.

You seem to have but a poor opinion of soldiering. There

is no mistake but the majority of soldiers are a hard set. It would be hard for you to imagine anything worse than they are. They have every temptation to do wrong and if a man has not firmness enough to keep from the excesses common to soldiers he will soon be as bad as the worst. If it were not that the Army is principally made up of such men I would like it much better. I have no serious intention of remaining any longer than my time is up, unless I can make it pay [something]. Sometimes I think if I come home I cannot stay but I can try. I know there are sometimes circumstances that make a man wish he never had enlisted, but there are trials and troubles other places besides the Army. There is one thing certain, the Army will either make a man better or worse morally speaking. There are men in Co. G that have reformed greatly in regard to drinking, swearing, &c. Others have become confirmed drunkards, thieves, &c. As you seem to wish it I will promise to come home if spared till my time is up unless something unlooked for comes up. I must answer Jane's letter so goodbye.

Columbus, Ky., Dec. 28th, 1863

Dear Sister Jane:

I have been a little slow in answering your letter, but there is so little to write it don't make much difference. Writing letters is dry work when one is situated as I am. If you were acquainted with this place as I am at home there would be more to tell but as that is not so you must make allowance for the dullness of my letters. There is little change in our duties or drill or anything else. Since we came to Columbus it has generally been light, two days per week is the average time on guard and an hour's battalion drill in the afternoon is about all we have to do. There is a good deal of time to read, write, or anything that

suits the fancy. I have read considerable ancient history this winter. I have tried to study grammar but something is sure to turn the attention from anything like study. It is impossible to keep long at any one thing, there is so much noise and bustle but there is always some in every family that won't learn. The fact is I don't like to study and never can hope to overcome the dislike I have to any kind of study, except Hardie's Tactics and Army Regulations. I don't like them but must study them so as not to be behind the times.

If I leave the Army in ten months it will not be necessary for me to get very well posted on military matters.

I suppose by this time you have a recruiting sergt. among you. We may look for some of our neighbours down here before long, if they don't put the draft farther away. It was a fortunate thing for Frank to get home so as his expenses are paid and he wanted to go very much. One of the boys got more butter from home today. We have quite a fund ahead now from the rations we sell. We are pretty economical in our household affairs and make the most of everything. We had a very fine Christmas dinner principally chickens. The boys went out a few miles one night on a chicken expedition and were mistaken for guerillas by the Cavalry. They had to take to the woods until the Cav. was gone. They came in with full hands but tired of being chased by our own Cav. I think it is not the first time mistakes of that kind have been made. Every thing is laid to guerillas no matter who does it. I must finish for this time so good bye.

Columbus, Ky., Jan. 12th, 1864

Dear Parents:

I take the present opportunity of letting you know how I get along. There is still the same report to make, all quiet

at Columbus. The snow is beginning to melt today. Kentuckians say they never saw so steady freezing weather so long as it has been this time. It was not very uncomfortable for us but the troops that are in tents must have suffered considerably. I suppose the 6th Division will leave this district in a month or so, at least so goes the report. If we stay a little longer the worst of the winter is past and we can get along anywhere in summer. But it is time enough to speculate about leaving. One of our guardhouse recruits that is a Secesh soldier enlisted from the guardhouse into our Army. There are a good many such in the 14th. Well last night one of them deserted and tried to steal a horse from the Cavalry pickets. There are three pickets at each post. The one on duty saw him slip up to the horses and fired at him. He turned to run but had not ran far before he fell. The picket shot him three times. Either shot would have killed him.

I got a letter from Frank Thomas last night. It is the only one from Buckingham for some time. I don't hear of Perry's recruits this time. I hope Perry may do their share without drafting. It seems recruiting is not quite useless yet in Iowa. It will be quite a difference to see so many in our Company. The 14th will be a mixture of Kentucky recruits, Iowa recruits, and Veterans. There won't be many discharged when the three years is expired if the bounty is still offered. There is nothing of importance to write so I will finish for this time.

On board the Steamboat Fanny
 Memphis, Tenn., Jan. 24th, 1864

Dear Parents:

I take this opportunity of letting you know that we are so far on our expedition. We have not learned our destination but the rumor is that we are going a visiting to Mobile. If so I presume we will join a large force down the River, but

I need not anticipate, time enough when we get there to see. Our Brigade came down on four boats and there was exciting times to see which boat would get to Memphis first. We started last and passed two of the boats on the first evening. We overtook the third in the morning and tried to pass but could not do it. The two boats ran within speaking distance for half a day and got in, in 20 hours from the time we started. It was the best time I have seen. And we enjoyed it very much. Our fleet is anchored out in the River to keep the men out of mischief. If we could go ashore here the citizens would suffer, so to keep the peace they keep us on the boats.

You need not expect to hear from me often now. I will try and send a few lines from N. Orleans.

Vicksburg, Miss., Jan. 29th, 1864

Dear Father:

I take the earliest opportunity after getting a peep at the places of interest to let you know that I am well. We left Columbus on the 21st and landed yesterday, the 28th. We had fine sunny weather and enjoyed the trip very much. I might make an attempt to describe the places along the River but the chance to write is so poor owing to the confusion of fixing to move the camp that I will pass over with a glance at one or two places.

There is very little to see along the River now. Most of the plantations are deserted and destroyed. Some places the rows of brick chimneys standing where the houses were burned are the only mark to guess at the size of the plantation. Helena is the only place of consequence between Memphis and Vicksburg. Like most of the River towns it is too low to be healthy. Colored soldiers seem to be the principal part of the population.

Vicksburg is the best location I have seen since we left

Columbus. It has the merit of being high and dry. It is very bluff where the fighting took place, so much so I don't see how they could hurt one another much. The Rebels had their holes to get into from the shells and no other kind of balls could touch them in their works. It is quite interesting to see the places of safety the people had fixed. I presume when traveling on the River becomes safe curiosity seekers will visit Vicksburg and find it the most interesting place on the River. There is an endless amount of fortifications. It is stronger now than it was when the Rebels held it. There has been a great amount of fortifying done since it came into our hands. There is one Iowa Brigade here besides ours. They have reënlisted in the Veterans, and mean to stick to Uncle Samuel to the end of Rebellion. There were eight Inft. Regt's., three Batteries, and four Cavalry Reg'ts. in this force that came down the River. The Inft. and Art. are here, the Cav. is coming by land. It is likely all the troops up that way are on the move. We don't know whether we go out to Jackson or farther down. We expect to stay here a week or two. The roads are dry now, rivers low, and perhaps we may move on immediately. The Reg't. is in good health and fine spirits. I mean to enjoy myself if I keep well through this campaign. I will write as often as convenient but you need not expect regularity in my letters.

Canton, Miss., Feb. 27, 1864

Dear Parents:

I take the earliest opportunity since we left Vicksburg of sending a few lines to let you know that I am well. We left Vicksburg and marched to Meridian, Miss., by way of Jackson, Brandon, Hillsboro, & Decatur. We tore up railroads at all points along the route, burned cotton and other Confederate property. We lived upon the country and have lived well. There is no enemy of consequence in this State.

I have been with the foraging party of our Brigade all the way and only in one skirmish and no one was hurt. We had some brisk skirmishing every day from Black River to Meridian. The Rebels retreated all the way before us and seldom had time to burn bridges, we kept so close to them.

I am writing by the camp fire and you must not expect a decent letter till I get time to write. I think we will come to the River in a few days. We have any number of darkies, mules, horses, &c. There is some party going to Big Black tomorrow and I take the chance to send this. We have had fine weather, good roads, and marched near three hundred miles and are in good trim, no sick nor none wounded. Some few of the Reg. have been taken prisoner but I must finish.

You may hear from me soon and it may be some time but I am doing well and will write again as soon as possible. This is Confederate paper.

On board the Steamer W. L. Ewing
Grand Echo, Red River, La., April 4th, 1864

Dear Parents:

I don't know as you will know by all the above just where we are at present. If you look on the map you will see a place called Natchitoches. It is a few miles from this place on the old bed of a river now called Cane River. Well I may as well begin by saying that since the little affair at D. Rucy³⁹ nothing of importance has been done unless it is being done now. There has been some skirmishing for the last two days and this morning a force went up to engage the Rebels if they still wait. I know nothing of the prospect for a general battle up here but I think it is very unlikely.

³⁹ The Union forces had captured Fort DeRussey, Mississippi, on March 14, 1864.

Banks⁴⁰ is with us now and I presume we outnumber the Rebels too much to get them to give us battle. The probability is that as soon as Banks can safely spare our Div. we will join our Corps at Vicksburg or Memphis. Then rumor says we may go to the East or into Georgia, but time enough to go there when we finish this expedition. The 28th and 24th Iowa are in this Army, but I have seen none but A. Felter yet. I may see Col. Connel before we come down the River.

I like field service much better than I did garrison. We have marched part of the way on this trip and sailed the rest. We don't burn and destroy as on the Miss. raid but take only such things as we need to eat. This is the finest country I have seen in the South. The land is good and all the planters are or have been wealthy. There are some few Union men still in the country and I think there is some chance of restoring order to this country by keeping some gunboats along the River and letting those who will go ahead and raise cotton, sugar, &c. There are few men but will mind their own interest and certainly the Red River farmers can make money by coming under the protection of Uncle Sam.

I received a letter from James the 26th of last month, dated March 6th and have heard nothing later. There are few chances of sending mail and few of getting it. John Thomas has been down with fever for a few days but I think he is past the worst. The rest of us are in good health. I might go on and write a long letter but the deck hands are chopping rails below and jarring so I must finish. I will try and write again when there is another chance to send a letter.

⁴⁰ General Nathaniel P. Banks. There was much criticism of his handling of the expedition and he was soon afterwards replaced. Details of the capture of Peter Wilson are not given.

Texas, April 25th, 1864

Dear Parents:

I take this opportunity of informing you that I am a prisoner of war,⁴¹ in good health, well treated, and hoping to get out in due time. You need not write to me at present.

Your affect Son,

Peter Wilson.

List of prisoners of Co. G, 14th Iowa, taken at
Pleasant Hills, April 9th, 1864

Lieut. A. H. Hazlett	H. Brownell
Peter Wilson	C. Vimpeny
Joel Shopshire	Hiram Aurner Co. B
W. S. Townsend	[Meroni] Clark " "
D. C. Vail	John A. Kleber " D
George Loucks	Joseph Gillet " F
P. J. Cook	W. D. Goben " K
Wm. Nance	W. B. Gray " "

Please send a copy of this list to the Reg.

Jan. 10th⁴²

Tomorrow they start for our lines. Two months from this time I can hear from you if all goes well. Tell Frank I would write to him if I had paper and I want him to write and let me know how many of the old part of the Co. were discharged with him and how they spent the summer &c. I may not be here to get the letters but if I should not the loss is not great. You have concluded by this time that I

⁴¹ Peter Wilson was captured at the battle of Pleasant Hill, Louisiana, on April 9, 1864. How this letter was gotten out of the Confederate lines is not explained. It was written on a small piece of paper.

⁴² This letter has no place given and the year is omitted, but it appears to have been written in 1865 while Peter Wilson was still a prisoner of war in Texas. It was apparently written to his brother and business associate, James Wilson. From his instructions about secret writing it seems that this letter was uncensored.

won't get home in time to farm this summer. Perhaps I may get home by harvest time. You must be your own judge of how to manage with reference to my absence. If I get out this spring I will have four or five hundred in Greenbacks. If I must stay longer I will have more. If you buy land or anything else, whatever you do it will be all right as far as I am concerned.

When you write, if there is anything you wish to say that would not do to be seen by the Rebels, write with onion juice on the last page. It can be read by the fire and is invisible by daylight. Send me some spare paper so I can write again and do your secret writing on it. Let me know something of war matters if you think it can be done in the way I mention. They only publish such things as suits their fancy in the Texas papers. We don't know how Grant is progressing at Richmond, but we know that Sherman and Thomas have done well, also that Pap Price⁴³ came back from Mo. in a used up condition.

Give my respects to inquiring friends and love to Father, Mother, Brothers, and Sisters, and hoping to soon get on the soil that is not cursed by the presence of a Rebel, I remain your affect Brother

New Orleans, La., May 28th [1865]

Dear Father:

I take the first opportunity of informing you of my return to the land of the living, for I have been in all respects dead for the past 13 months. Well thank God it is past now and as I have seen the Confederacy go to pieces it is some satisfaction for my long imprisonment. It seems almost a dream that we are really out of Texas and the war over, but perhaps I will get used to it in a short time. We just got out of Texas in time as the Rebel authority is gone and we had

⁴³ The Confederate leader, Sterling Price.

some difficulty in getting rations on the way out. Everything is confusion up Red River. There is likely to be trouble among the Rebels if our forces don't go up soon and take charge.

It is astonishing to see the change that has taken place among the people in regard to the Union. It is the universal talk. We are glad that the thing is over and they generally express satisfaction that the Union is restored. I will not write much this time. Perhaps in a few days we will be on the way up the River. I will lose no time in coming home as soon as I get my discharge. We will likely remain a few days at Davenport, and you may write to me in care of D. McCosh, Long Grove &c. Tell James also to write. If we don't get away from here in a few days I will write again. Let me know Brother John's address and how he is getting on. I am in good health and hope to be fit for duty when I get home. With love to all I remain, your Affect Son,

Peter Wilson

Perry, June 12, 1865

Dear Brother:⁴⁴

It was with feelings of joy and thankfulness that we received your letter last mail. I cannot imagine the feelings that daily possessed you in your dreary confinement. Probably you cannot imagine our feelings while you were there. I wrote you several letters not expecting much you would ever get them, but hope induced me to try. Once I sent you ten dollars. Folks said it would be surely lost but I consid-

⁴⁴ This letter, written by James Wilson to Peter Wilson in reply to the letter announcing Peter's release from the Confederate prison, was included in the collection and is printed with the Peter Wilson letters because it gives briefly the conditions at home. Peter returned to take up work on his farm. In 1870 he married Miss Emma Lawson. Seven children were born of this marriage — John L., Mary W., Sheridan S., Andrew C., Nellie (Mrs. John Randolph Currens), Grace G., and Peter L. Peter Wilson died on April 23, 1887.

ered it my especial business to leave no stone unturned. Father and Mother have suffered a great deal on your account. Father especially bore suspense in silence. In fact your detention has been common talk in the neighborhood, "any word from Peter", "any word from Pete", any word from your brother &c &c was the continual question. The prayers of your friends, of our Minister, the desires of all your friends was that you might be spared to return and who can tell what effect the effectual fervent prayers of righteous man may have had at the source of all our blessings. But it is over and I hope that in some way it may work for your good.

There has been a great many changes since you left, a great many folks have come into the place. The face of the prairie has been considerably changed, new houses on some farms, new breaking, new fences, some that you were acquainted with are dead, though God has spared those who are near and dear to you. Grandfather Wilson and Grandmother McCosh are gone, several in this place, Mrs. Bywerth, George Shiner's wife, John Leffler. W. Hough has sold & gone to Kansas. D. D. Wartson has sold to a relation of Uncle McMillan's and bought the old Connell farm. Hiram Klingaman has sold to Pearson & left. A family of Stevensons have moved around Collins grove. A Mr. Wilson from Illinois has bought the land west of Uncle West's and is improving [it]. George Sloss & John Tenan talk of coming back to this place from Shell Rock. A Scotch family named Lawson have bought Fox's place and nearly all those mentioned have connected with the church. We have just had a very edifying communion season. Mr. Fulton from Cedar Rapids preached for us.

If you got my last letter you will have some idea of our financial affairs. I bought ten acres of timber from Jonas Wood. It is young and for future use. Then I bought forty

acres in Four Mile Grove, half pretty good timber. Then I bought a tract of timber from Uncle McMillan that will fence up all our land. The timber is all paid for. Last winter after a great deal of trouble and expense by finally going to Illinois I bought the quarter section south of our old eighty. I borrowed the money (800) to pay for it. I have got the house finished upstairs and down. Uncle Andrew and I bought a mowing machine and paid for it. I built a two-horse cultivator this spring on wheels so you can ride or walk. Have 20 head of cattle, 7 head horses, 36 head hogs, plenty of corn, and half last year's wheat. I am building the pasture fence. I told you I have Robert Dodd hired till harvest. Finally have just succeeded since you went to war in getting the place ready to pay well,

your Affectionate Brother James