

CIVIL WAR LETTERS. of B.F. Wright

Camp Lincoln Keokuk, Sept. 4.

Dear and well beloved wife and children,

My health is good and I have not had any of the direar, and I think it is occasioned by eating too much fruit. I feel as happy as ever with the exception of my dear family, but I feel as tho if I should fall in battle you could do better without me with the government. With me, my dear wife, remember that the spirit of the French and Indian War, '76, and that of 1812 still runs in ... (unreadable) and tell our mother that her son never will be shot in the back....and tell Adeline (?) as I think from the writing that she was the one that wrote to me----that her pa never will be shot in the back.

The 17 (?) regiment yesterday, amid the shouts and cheers of thousands, and we hope soon to follow them The sooner the better. We will soon have to parade, which will cut my letter short. My dear wife I have sent you \$10 by the hand of brother Beayes (?) I want you to fix the family right in regards of the taxes or anything else. Get at least 150 shocks of corn out up. You ought to get it out for 3 cents per shock, but had better give more than not get it out. If Oshin does not fix the roof soon get Rolin or Flecher to attend to it, and let the one you hit upon take the (bank, hook, bark?) and if any one attempts to injure you in any particular as I can punish the moanest at any time, if I should not have the money in my pocket, Uncle Sam's receipts are good. Don't be imposed upon by traitors for I hope soon to be fighting for the old flag. And rather than she should be trailed in the dust, may I lay my poor frail body a sacrifice on the field of battle, and I hope that I shall have the prayers of all good friends that if I should chance to fall in battle that I be gathered home to the sacred realms. When we hear of the disaster of our tribes the only cry is "Lead us to battle." We had a very patriotic sermon from the Reverand Hayes night before last.

.....I will send you more when I get my months pay, that tho I expect I shall be paid away when the soldiers red that the little wich was...tomorrow for the soldiers the cried Three cheers for the little patriot.

B. F. Wright to his wife and his children

Camp Lincoln Oct. 17, 1862.

Dear wife and children,

My health is improving as fast as can be expected. I am well enough to walk to camp  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and also about town. I think that by next week I will be well enough to go to the regiment. I asked for a discharge from the hospital but he informed me that he would be apt to know when I was able to go to my regiment.

I attended the Congregational Church again last Sabath. Our Colonel Abott and our surgeon chief Tailor and their wives they are adherante to that church. And I must say that they have the best music I ever heard. They have a splendid melodeon vocal music that cant be beat. You can hear every word as nistinct as the they were reading it united. The Sabath school quire is beautiful. They have their quarterly concert



Civil War Letters (Cont.)

I attended one last Tuesday evening, it was splendid.

I was glad to hear of your good luck in the corn matter, and you will tell those kind neighbors to please to accept my hearty and sincere thanks for their patriotic movements, for they can serve their country at home as well as in the army, and that if Providence could so order it that I should so chance to meet the rebel foe by assisting grace of God I hope to prove myself worthy of being a soldier of the old flag and of the confidence that my friends seem to have placed in me.

Tell Brother Kenedy that I still thirst for rebel blood to wipe out the stains and miseries of this infernal war, and I begin to think more strongly that it must be a war of extermination, that they must be baptised by imersion in the gulf, and my the Lord speed the hours when they shall take the last leap and take the last look at the land of liberty they have cursed by their footsteps. I begin to believe that it is a sin to pay for them in any other way than that they may be swept from the land by the beasom (?) of destruction.

Just come here and see the hundreds that are crippled for life, constitutions broken forever, and all for the accursed institution of slavery, if institution it may be called. One hundred and fifty poor soldiers sick and diseased for life, brot up the river and put in our hospitals last Monday. This is almost a daily occurance; and to hear the poor fellows bless God that they have got to the Keokuk hospital is enough to move a stone to tears if they have any to shed, and make the very stones cry out for Keokuk vengeance on the...institution of slavery. I had the honor of being appointed by the chaplin of our hospital to be one of the number to go and distribute some religious tracts, books, and papers among them, siezed on them with an eager apetite and I considered that many of them, if they had not already been taught the straight and narrow path needed to have their feet placed therein, for I think their stay on earth is short. But my strength admonishes me to no more upon this subject at this time to write to Brother Kenedy yet it will perhaps suffice at present to let let him read this. I shall endeavor to write to him as soon as time and strength permits. Perhaps you will have to help him to read it for I know it is badly written.

I again say that you must not work so hard. That was all that made Francis sick. It troubles me very much. I shall send you money the middle of next month at the furtherist, likely as much as you will need until another payday. So hire and buy you a lot of wheat or flour, right off perhaps. It would be best to (buy) wheat so as to have the gran. Do whichever way you think best. Our arms and equipment have arrived. It is a fact that our stay here is short, but direct as before.

B. F. Wright to his dear wife and children.

Benton barocks, Oct. 27/62.

Dear wife and children:

I left the hospital last Tuesday. My health is as good as it ever was only I am somewhat weak, but I am gaining strength fast. Our orders was to march Friday morning at 3 o'clock. By 7 every man in camp had his duds packed and ready to shoulder and lo and behold no boat came but on Saturday morning about daylight we were ordered to be ready by



Civil War Letters (Cont.)

7 oclock for the boat was laying at the dock, and about 10 oclock we got under way and marched down though main street amid cheers on either side and was marched aboard the John Warner and be assured as had to stow in like a pack of hogs agoing to market. We got under way at 12 oclock. On Sunday morning at 10 oclock we landed in St. Lewis marched up thru town and out to the barracks a distanse of about 5 miles, and splendid barocks to it is. The barock that we sleep in is tighter and warmer than either room of the house you live in, and a good stove in it. Back of it about 15 feet is a row of cook houses that are nice and tite with a brick furnace about 8 feet long filled with holes on the top like a stove to cook on. Three rows of tables each kitchen will accomodate 100 man to dine at once. This is some of Fremonts aleged extravagance. We expect to leave here the last of this weak for Helena, from thense we know not where.

I forgot to say as we marched through town we could tell the union people by the waving of handkerchiefs and banners. At one point the walk was lined with boys and girls from Phebe's age and downwards with little banners waving and some of them ejudicating the glories Iowa 30. When we arrived in the batrack they said that it was the best regiment that had been in the barrack. The snow fell here last Friday night three inches deep. Oct. 28. The first person that I met in the camp that I knew was Charles Johes. As we had no rations left out that day I took dinner and supper with him.

I found that I was going to spoil the Bible and so I bought a Testiment.

I had no trase chain. It was a piece of a log chain and a stay chain. I thought that they were took home. Tell Oshin that the boot will be on the other leg. The irons of our wagon is worth more than his wagon. I can get a new wood work for \$15 and then you have a new wagon. I dont know what trees youn want cut. The saw logs are cut. They only want hauling. Two white oak trees are in the northwest corner of one large red oak in the first holes from the west end another red oak on the top of the runnear the east end. It has been cut down some time. Hier more and there wont be so many of you sick. They will have to wait until after hog selling time and we expect to be paid in a few days. If we are we shant get more than a month and a half's pay. I get \$14 a month pay. Tell Phebe that it would be doubtful of my ever seeing them. Everything is overhauled by the high officers before we see them and the dainties mostly eaten by them. Send things to your friends in the hospital and 10 to one if they ever see a bite of it. What isnt eaten by the doctors is divided through all the hospitals. I thought the money that I would spend acoming home would do you more good than for me to come home two or three days. The money was given to esquire Cumpton before we left Washington, which Lieutenant Smith will soon testify to here in a letter.

Keep the tobacco until I come home unless you can get 50 cents a pound for it.



Camp Helena Nov. 30, 1862.

My dear wife and children:

My health is good and am in hopes yours is. From the letter I received from you today in answer to the one I wrote from Memphis. I have received 4 or 5 letters since I arrived here with the one that I got today. I got one from brother Kenedy in the same mail. Tell Brother Kenedy that the profanity of camp is to outragus for a man raised in Maryland (?) to be tempted by it, but the sound of it becomes disgusting to a man of refined principles. I was very glad to receive a letter from him. I had sent one to him about a week before I got his. I hope he will not stop at that. The members of our tent are all steady men. George Foulter is the youngest.

We split punchinand set on end 11 feet long around a frame of poles pind together four square, to which we spiked the top of our pinchin, slanting the bottoms out so that we have as much again room as the other tents, and a nice fireplace that dont smoke one bit only out of the top of the chimney. A list of the names: B. F. Wright, Wm. Painter, Marshall Guyham, Enus Holson, George Foulter, David Kendal.

Tell Mother that she has got a grand daughter that is a good wrighter, that she has squaled many a time and it as a hard case if she cant pen for her a letter once a while.

Another grand expedition started from here last Thursday. They went down the river 15 miles and landed in Misipa for the purpose of tearing up the railroads before Brise, and cut off his retreat. We heard from them last night. They are, or were, within 10 miles of the first track. The next is 20 miles further. Both tracks are torn up before this time. The force sent for that purpose amounts to 30,000 men and about 80 cannon, and I expect that some of them will see the different tale and all before they got back. Osker is in the expedition. They are following him with a strong force from Corinth. I dont see how he can escape so great a damnation. We have deserters coming in from Prise's army daily. From their reports he considers himself in rather hard sledding, but we see to it that they dont go back. They are put in jail and Yarded. The river is raising so fast that by the middle of next Dec. we can pay a visit to Vixburg, and then the Mississippi is open from one end to the other.

The letter that them stamps were in I suppose was aboard of the boat that got blowed up for the letters that was in that mail was all wet and I had to tear the letter some to save the stamps. for they were stuck fast. I got quite a lot before I left Keokuk but they are getting short there are so many. But I have quit lending. I think I have got enough to last until I get our money, and then I shall send for some. They ask 5 cents for them here a piece, and hard to get at that.



Civil War Letters (Cont.)

I want you to have your wood cut stove length and have it corded up by the house. I have wrote to you in every letter to buy corn. You ought to have 150 bushels after you get the hogs faten. I expect that we shall have money soon. The quartermaster told me last night that the paymaster was on his way here. Tell David that I am very much obliged to him for his lengthy letter. Tell Adely or Phebe that I expect to come home in the spring to help them crack their butternuts, and how we will slather them. I would say to my dear wife that she mustn't get the hipoe and put the dark side out for you dont know how soon I shall be at home, and then what a good time we will have....Think of the good times that are coming and not the hardones. Floren was here today and read your letter. Give my respects to all especially father and mother.

B. F. Wright to his dear wife and children.

(Punchin should be "puncheon" meaning a log flattened on one side)

Camp Helena Dec. the 6, 1862.

Dear wife and children:

My health is yet good. Florin was here this morning and read Gineva's letter of the 6th of Nov. that I received yesterday. This the fourth letter that I have written since I arrived in Helena. It is just one month today since we arrived here and I wrote one in two or three days after I arrived here. Wentworth is getting better. Panter has been sick but is getting better. The general health of the regiment is good. We have 864 fit for duty. T. Atwood can tell you whether that is good health in a regiment or not.

Our getup of shanty and fireplace is to be the best in the regiment. They are all patterning after it. We heard here that Richmond was taken. We hope that it is true but we are afraid that it is not. But one thing is true, that the rebels are leaving Prise as fast as they can get away. They are coming in daily and taking the oath I think more to save their property than their love of country, but yet it shows the distrust in the success of the cause in which they are ingaged. Thursday three steame went down the river loaded with rebel prisoners to be exchanged. The land along the river in this country is low and flat and tolberably fertile, but as you get back it is nobs and canebrakes which is miery. Thursday rain, Friday now that melted as it fell, today pleasant.

Dec. 7. Today pleasant. The expedition has returned today. One man was killed out of the 28, and 8 wounded rebels 30 killed 50 prisoners and 7 of ours prisoners. I will leave a blank until I find the number of prisoners taken. They brought off as trophies of their expedition several mules and also nigers. The object in carrying off their nigers is to



waaken them, for we have no use for the thick lipped flat fotted race, for they are as contrary as a mule. But each of them fetched with them a good mule which we think more of than we do of a negro. When Lieutenant Toram formed them in line of batel in front of the tents and dismissed them for he had the command of our regiment in the expedition) some one called out for three cheers for Colonel Torensand the surrounding country rang with their shouts. Our company have all returned. Oaker is well. With fire and sword they spread ruin and devastation as they went. We think that is the way to conquer the rebels. We think here that they will lay down their arms before the first of January. They marched 75 miles to Oackland, broke open the store, took what they wanted, and left that with the balance of the town in flames. When they took the back track they went one that they were on a retreat. But one thing is certain that they made good time acoming back, and that Prise was not far from them with his mane forveis another fact, for they learnt from the prisoners and the darkies that the cavelry that they met with was the Texan rangers, Prises main cavelry and no help at hand a retreat would be advisable. But they accomplished more than they were sent to accomplish. They were not ordered to fetch back any nigers or mules. But I am informed this afternoon that they brought back about 900 nigers and 400 mules and all the tobacco that they could carry. Tobacco sells cheaper now in camp than it does in Iowa, but it will not last long.

I expect that the mail is longer in going up the river than down, and while the river was down it took a steamer about 2 weeks to come from Keokuk down here. If they pay us off before the last of this month we shant get but 2 months pay for we cant muster pay again until the last day of the month. For, we can only muster for pay once in 2 months, and there is no danger of their paying us more than they are obliged to.

Write soon,

B. F. Wright.

First part of the letter missing.

overbearing hipocritical profesers up there who make long prayers in the corners of the street to be heard of men and they are so intolerable stingy that when they have to pay a dollar tax to make up this \$13 that they squeeze the eagle so that he hollers till it gives hime the diphtheria. Those people if they possess a soul at all, it is so insignificantly small that it could danse a French four for 48 hours on the point of a cambrick needle. The above remarks do not alude to those noble generous heared people that are ready to lay hold and build up the soldier in his effort to rid the country of this rebellion.

I told you in my last that a part of our regiment was out



on another expedition that they had returned with 400 mules 500 negroes, but it was 800 mules and 400 nigers which we consider of far greater value. The negroes are daily flocking to our encampment. Within the few weeks nearly a whole regiment of them have come in to the lower end of it and plead to be armed that they may be revenged. Our encampment isn't a potato patch, it is about five miles square over hills and hollers containing some 40,000 men. We are now very well fixed for winter. I wish you could just take a peak in to our tents 8 feet square, when it rains and see 6 men in it with their bunks cooking and eating. We have two houble bunks, two single above.

B. F. Wright to his dear wife and children.

Dec. 22, 1862.

Stephen Decater is the boat that we are aboard of ready to sail from Helena to Vicksburg as soon as the balance of the fleet is ready. Dear wife and children it is with the utmost satisfaction that I imbrace this opportunity to inform you that my health is good at present and I hope that you are all enjoying the same blessing. And so we receive them all from the Grand Master of the Grand Loge above, we should constantly have an eye single to his glory, remembering that whatever he doeth is according to the.....determinatecouncil of Him who doeth all things well.

This the best move that I have seen yet toward the close of the (war). The force aboard this fleet besides those below Vicksburg will amount to 130,000 men. The army in all will probably amount to 200,000 men. Floren did not come down yesterday nor this morning. He was out on picket Saturday but they came off yesterday morning. Why he did not come down I cannot tell, for I think it doubtful about the regiment coming together or going, as they have been put in another brigade and left here at Halene.

Last night we all lay to 20 miles below Halene as they do not chose to run in the night down this way and we carry some guns aboard a little larger than rifles or muskets. The scenery last night was beautifully sublime. The blue ethereal sky all bespangled with glittering orbs casting their reflection upon the face of the waters of this stupendous river which has been the bone of contention in the southwest during the whole war and has caused its beautiful waters more than once to be dyed with blood. But I think that contention must soon end, but we will I expect, have the whole distance from Vicksburg to Jackson to fight over as they say it is fortified all the way. But I think it is calculated for Grant to attack Jackson at the same time that we Vicksburg. If so I dont see how they can escape to great a damnation.



12 oclock. We are now at the mouth of the wh...river 95 miles below Helene. The Mississippi is full of boats loaded to the yards with soldiers. There is now 10 in sight. If they don't stop and wait for us I am afraid that the fun will be over before we get there.

3 oclock at Napoleon the mouth of the Arkansas river. Run on til after dark and lay to on the Mississippi side opposite Vanses (?) Landing. 50 more steamers lay to within sight. 24 moved off again about 12 o'clock. In these fleets all have to keep their places, no running, and it took until noon for it to come our turn to start.

The day is beautifully pleasant. It seems as the Almighty was smiling upon our expedition. The scenery to me is noble, no houses to be seen only once in a few miles a plantation with a barn and niger quarters forming a little town. Nothing to be seen but nigers.

(The rest of the letter is lost)

On board Stephen Decator again on retreat. January the 5, 1863.

Nothing transpired worthy of notice excepting the fighting season-----but I ought to have stated that the 30th was placed on the right of the...on Monday to support the charge and was under the enemie's fire all day but they were ordered to lay flat on their beles all day so there was nun of them killed and but five of them wounded.

On the night of the 31 a little after dark I hearsay that we had been on the field within a mile of the enemies fort all day and not a shot had been exchanged. As I was stating, a little after dark we were ordered into line of battle and marched on board the several steamers, the 4th and 30th Iowa both on board the Southwestern. Along in the night we were ordered to have on no coats but the blouse and carry nothing but the cartridge box, canteen, and gun, with strict orders to be ready to fix bayonets the moment the boat touched the shore and charge bayonet right off the boat. Two o'clock came but no orders; 4, and even daylight, and no orders; and Oh! my God shall it be handed down to future generations that the enlisted American soldiers of /62 and /63 would suffer themselves much longer to be duped by a set of drunken officers. We are now on our retreat up the Mississippi with the satisfaction that we have not lost a ship, only about 2000 men killed and taken prisoners. We commenced our retreat on New Year's night.

My dear wife and children it is very bad writing, for the wind is high and the river rough so that the boat rocks so bad that it is most imposible to form a letter. It would not be best to read that part of it about the officers before them that would let it come back to the army while I am in it, for it would not help me any to have the officers know it, but I had no reference to company officers.



Civil War Letters (Cont.)

Jan. 8. I should have stated that we have not been re-enforced by Banks or Grant but I believe if they had 1st the boys gone ahead they could have taken the fort if they had been properly supported. They 4 the Iowa supported by the 9 and the by the 30th had gained the hill and entered the rifle pit when they were ordered to retire. It seemed to me that they were afraid that they would take Vicksburg, but it is my opinion that there is comperwise now agoing on, and would to God that it might soon be consumated, for I am satisfied that we will never get a permanent peace by fighting and also that this is a war of speculation amongst the big bugs; and as for starving them out, they have raised more corn in the south this year than they have in the north. Tho it is not so sound. But much larger crops. They let the cotton go and used corn. Where we landed the Yazoo we camped in a field of 300 acres.

Keep us cooped on this old boat about 2 weeks longer and the whole regiment will be sick. I have not received a letter for three weeks. It was reported that a mail boat was burnt at the mouth of the White river by the Rebs since we went down. If so they must have been a (letter) aboard of it, if my dear family have not forgotten me. It is a satisfaction to hear them if I can't see them. It rained here Saturday and Sunday but since that the weather has been fine. I am sitting on the hurricane deck writing and feel very comfortable, the nights and mornings you want a great coat and mittens. When folke talk about my joining the Methodists, tell them I am daily getting stronger of the opinion that the Lord is omnipotent and make the rath of man topraise him. And when I view him in his purity I can't see how we can expect to be prospered underssuch officers and conduct. But if I live to get home I think I will come home a wiser and a better man. I knew but little of the infimy of war until this trip. I wonder that the Lord don't strike some of them dead for this blasphemus curse of life.

13. Evening of, 10 landed 4 miles below the fort at Arkansas post, marched all day around swamps and so forth, to get in the enemies. Just before night I gave out and was sent back to the boat. However, they effected the object that night. Next morning the 12 started to find my regiment got to the 2 rve (?) of rifle pits was stopped remained there until the fight commensed pretty brisk, went forward then to where our big siege guns were pointed, set on the bank of the river and saw the whole fight. Just before they surrendered we have several batteries and gunboats firing on them. The shells dropped into it like a hail storm, and the white flag soon went up.

Abbots Valley Miss. July 1st, 1863.

Mrs. B. F. Wright:

I promised to inform you as soon as I was officially informed of your husbands death, where he died, the cause of his death. Enclosed please find an inventory of effects. You are allowed a pension of \$8.00 per month from date of his







It has been very wet here until about the 15th of May. Since then we have had but very little rain. We fear we shall have it as much too dry as it has been too wet. The prospect for wheat in this country is good. We have about 6 acres. *It looks very well. We do not try to raise much wheat to sell. We think we can do better with a corn crop, and then wheat is a very uncertain crop of late years.*

Wait has sold his farm and moved to Rushilvern, Logan County. Father went with him. They moved in March. Wait has purchased a farm of 150 acres for \$3,000. I had a letter from him two weeks ago. They are all well and well pleased with the country. We are all well and so are all your old friends here.

The war news here is exciting now. There are 12 or 14 here volunteered for the army. They joined a company formed in Mount Vernon. The President of Gambrian College enlisted and is now a Col. of one of the Ohio regiments. Government has accepted of nine regiments from Ohio. The most exciting topic here now is the fear that England and France are going to interfere with our blockade of Southern ports. But I believe our government is able to subdue this southern treason, and punish the traitors, and give old John Bull a thorough going thrashing in the bargain, if necessary. And as for Louis Napoleon, I think he will have his own hands full in attending to the affairs of his own continent without attending to the affairs of ours.

What a noble man we have for governor! I think Governor Dennison the right man in the right place. It did my heart good when I heard he had pledged the whole force of Ohio if necessary for the protection of union men in western Virginia. Where the first important battle will be fought--whether at Richmond, or Harper's Ferry, or Washington--or at some point further west are some questions which I suppose are not yet determined.

I have room to write no more. We are all well and so are all of your old friends here. Write soon.

Benton R. Wright