

The Life of a Civil War Solider

Teacher Introduction:

The Civil War was a personal war that often split families between the Union and the Confederacy, especially in the **Border States**. In some instances, towns could be divided by their allegiances and in some extreme circumstances families themselves could fight brother against brother in the war of the states. This personal connection permeated every aspect of the normal life of the Civil War Solider. Their 'enemy' was once their countryman and this is a reality that cannot be forgotten or its impact diminished. Though each side often felt strongly about their cause and their rights, a Civil War will always be a traumatic struggle that either turns into revolution or ends in eventual reconciliation.

Though volunteerism was high during the Civil War, both sides had to employ the draft to increase their numbers - the Confederacy in 1862 and the Union in 1863. Thus the common soldiers fighting this war were from a variety of different backgrounds and ranged from the passionate fighter to the reluctant draftee. Both sides were also kinsmen and Billy Reb and Johnny Yank (as they were generically known) shared many similarities. Their main differences stem from their available supplies which were largely influenced by the economies of the North and South before the war broke out. The north, known for manufacturing, would end up dominating the south which was rich in agriculture and little else. These differences would influence the lifestyle and moral of troops on each side of the conflict, especially as the war dragged on.

This lesson strives to show the similarities and differences that made up the reality of the common solider in blue or gray. The Civil War is known for its battles, but what happened off the pitch (or the field, hill, forest, etc.) played into the outcome of these battles. The majority of the time in a soldiers' life was made up of being in camp, drilling, and marching. This lesson explores the everyday existence of the solider.

A Teacher's Note on Common Supplies and Activities:

This lesson seeks to highlight common activities that soldiers often engaged in. Camp life was a life known for its boredom— and the daily life was usually spent in drilling, marching, eating, and sleeping. The excitement of battle was not an everyday occurrence, especially in the winter months, when soldiers would find themselves in more permanent winter lodgings. For many, camp life was defined by want – by the lack of food, proper clothing, medicine, and shelter, especially as the war dragged on. Please emphasize these points to your students as you conduct the lesson.

Georgia State Social Studies Standards

Grade 4: **SS4H5** Explain the causes, major events, and consequences of the Civil War

Grade 8: **SS8H5** Analyze the impact of the Civil War on Georgia.

Grade 6-8: **L6-8RHSS1**: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Grade 6-8: **L6-8RHSS2**: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Grade 9-10: **L9-10RHSS1** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

Grade 9-10: **L9-10RHSS2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Grade 11-12: **L11-12RHSS1** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

Grade 11-12: **L11-12RHSS2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Lesson Objectives

- Analyze what life would be like if the student was a soldier during this conflict. This includes daily duties and pastimes.
- Connect how the outside world and soldier interacted.
- Analyze primary and secondary documents from the Civil War.

Lesson Duration – One class period or one hour. *This can be modified to fit your class period length or divided across class periods or days.*

Lesson

Begin the lesson by summarizing the information related in the teacher introduction above. Salient points to stress are that the daily life of a soldier was not usually spent in a battle, but marching to, preparing for, and waiting on those more exciting moments.

1. Many soldiers served with people from their hometown and were familiar with their fellow soldiers before the war broke out. **Regiments**, for soldiers, functioned as their families during the war. These were people they would march with, eat with, and spend the long and cold winter months with. Unit cohesion and loyalty was a major aspect of a successful battle. One of the daily activities, if the regiment wasn't on the move, was to drill with the group or to practice the mechanics of war. Mechanics like marching together, loading weapons, and battle tactics running smoothly were crucial to success during a battle. Many regiments had their own banners and practiced regimental pride.
 - A. Divide your students into regiments – there will be five students per regiment (feel free to amend this depending on the size of your class). They will be in their regiments and participate in the activities outlined in this lesson as this cohesive group for the rest of the lesson. Have the students in each regiment create a regimental flag – something that will allow them to identify themselves from the other regiments formed in class.

This should be a small flag – that fits on a sheet of 8 x 11 cardstock or construction paper provided in the trunk. Students can use the colored pencils and markers provided or any other resources the classroom might have on hand to create their flag. Students should be given 10 minutes to complete this task. To inspire students please show them the print outs provided of period regimental flags. Encourage each group to put symbols on their flag that represent them: initials, hometowns, sports mascots are all examples of things that could be used.

At the end of about 10 minutes, the students of each regiment should explain to the other groups the symbolism on their flag.

2. One thing that both Confederate and Union troops experienced was camp life. The resources available in camp for adequate shelter and nutrition truly determine the quality of life experienced by each individual soldier. This exercise is designed to let students, still clustered in their regiments, explore different aspects of camp life. After exploration takes place in their regiments, students will present their findings through the text, pictures, and letters provided to the class.

Each regiment should master the aspect of camp life in their small group and then teach the class about each aspect in turn. This activity should take 20 minutes for group

discussion and exploration and then 15 minutes for presentation to the rest of the class. Eight packets are provided for students to explore – more than the amount of students present in your class (if each regiment has five students). Feel free to choose the packets you wish each group to present on, if you'd like the additional subjects could be assigned as homework. The subjects are: food, pastimes, shelter, marching and drilling, sutler, family support, camp followers, and surgeon. Your packet contains all of the subjects with explanations of pictures and letters in bold for easy analysis as you discuss each section with your students.

Group A: Food Stuff and the Common Soldier Introduction:

The North and the South approached food distribution and preparation differently. Northern states tried to employ a central food distribution approach where food would be provided for all soldiers regardless of the state they originated from. Southern states were much more independent by nature and could come together on a central supply facility. At the beginning of the war, Confederate troops survived through foraging off the land. This proved to be difficult – large plantations focused their cultivation efforts on cash crops like tobacco and cotton and not on foodstuff (Daily life, 116). Confederate troops were consistently not as well fed or supplied as their Union counterparts (Daily Life, 120).

Both sides also approached camp preparation of food differently as well. Southern troops formed messes of roughly 10 men who would pool their rations and take turns carrying their heavy cooking equipment. If one member of the mess was killed, a new man could be admitted to a particular mess to fill his place (Daily Life, 116). In the beginning of the war, Union troops would often approach food preparation as a cook, or a team of cooks making food for the company. These cooks would not necessarily be trained or experienced at all, but they strove to make food for the entire company. This model deteriorated as the war went on until individual soldiers or small groups of soldiers cooked in a way that resembled the southern model (Daily Life, 117).

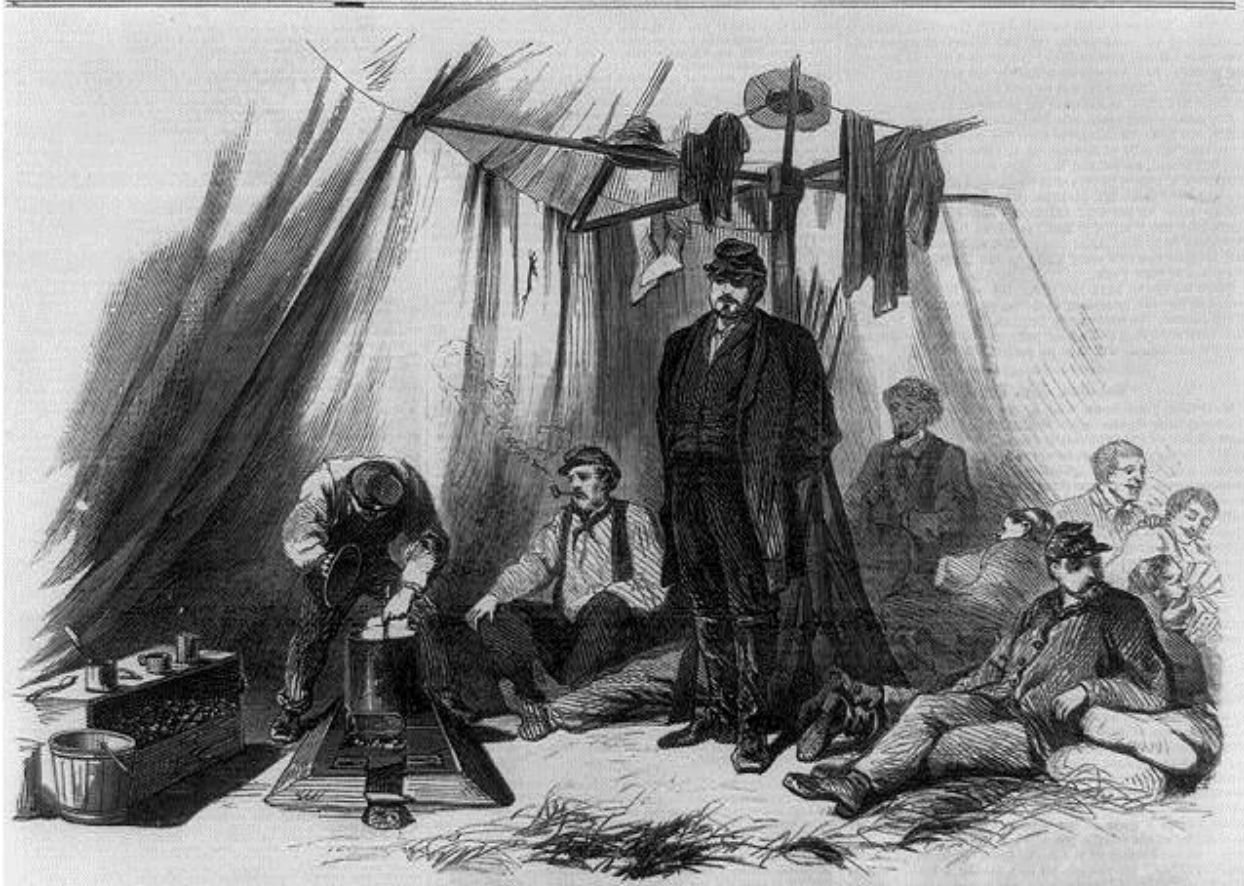
Common foodstuff that could find its way into Confederate and Union camps might consist of : hardtack, coffee, sugar, soft bread, flour, rice, cornmeal, dried peas, dried beans, desiccated veggies or dried fruits, fresh or dried potatoes, salt port or bacon or ham, pickled beef, fresh meat, and occasionally onions, molasses, salt, pepper, and vinegar (118). While this would seem to be an abundant list to make a variety menu of healthy and nutritious dishes from, having all these ingredients at hand never really happened. Time of year, faulty supply lines, and the fact that soldiers were on the move made getting these goods to hungry soldiers a logistical nightmare. One soldier complained that “sometimes there was an abundant issue of bread, and no meat; then meat in quantity, and no flour or meal; sugar in abundance, and no coffee to be had for love or money.” (McCarthy, Carlton. Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865, 55 from page 115 in Daily Life in the Civil War) If an “army marches on its stomach,” as the famous phrase goes, then many armies were in trouble. Rations were an incredibly important aspect of daily life in the Civil War.

Group A: Objects, Pictures, and letters for Analysis:

- 1: “Scene in Camp Life in Mess no. of the 13 Illinois Volunteers”
- 2: “War Views”
- 3: “Unidentified Union Soldier sitting on the floor and eating”

4: Jas. B. McCutchan Letter

5: Shortages Letter



SCENE IN CAMP LIFE—MESS NO. OF THE 13TH ILLINOIS VOLUNTEERS, IN THEIR CAMP BEFORE CORNITH, MISS.—FROM A SKETCH BY OUR SENIOR ARTIST, HENRI LOVIE.

THE REBEL RAID OF STEWART'S CAVALRY TOWARDS THE WHITE HOUSE.

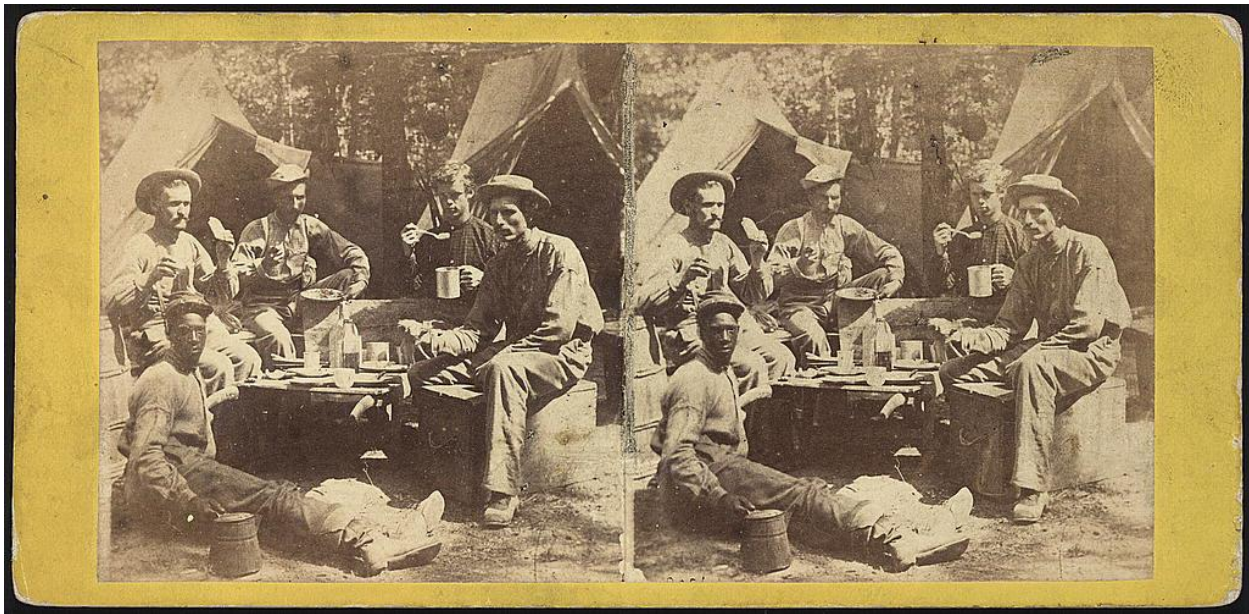
"To give the rebel his due," it must be confessed, that one of the most daring things the Confederates have done is the raid of Stewart's cavalry towards the White House, on the night of the 18th of June. Their course was East to Old Church, where they

had a skirmish with a squadron of the 5th United States cavalry, who gallantly cut their way through the greatly superior numbers of the enemy, killing a rebel Captain. This our Artist has illustrated. The rebels then proceeded to Gaylick's Landing on the Pamunkey river, and only four miles from the White House. From thence to Tamm-stall's Station; then to Baltimore Cross Roads, near New Kent Court House, on their way to Richmond, which they reached by

crossing the Chickahomony, between Bottom Ridge and James River. Our Artist, who had a narrow escape of being captured on that occasion, has sent us some sketches, illustrating an adventure which resembles more a border story of the times of Robin Hood than the days of Benedict and Nicholas Biddle. Doubtless undertaken for reconnoitring objects, with true rebel malignity they received in favor of the side with as much murder as they could safely

A1. "Scene in Camp Life in Mess no. of the 13th Illinois Volunteers in their camp before Cornith, Miss" by Henri Lovie. This appeared in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper on July 10, 1862.

This scene shows a makeshift kitchen with one man preparing food and the others waiting on its completion. This was probably a typical mess set up – with one or two men assigned to cook a certain meal on any given night. Besides the pot and a few cups and utensils, there is little else in the way of cooking implements. In general, soldiers did not carry large amounts of heavy kitchen equipment with them.



A2. “War Views” stereograph card showing five Union soldiers in the Army of the Potomac

This stereograph card shows four men and one African American sitting around their makeshift table. Students should note that many things they use in the meal have multiple uses or were originally meant for other purposes. The “table” looks like a wagon or cart and their “chairs” are boxes and barrels. Though it looks like there are plates and some utensils, one of the men is clearly using his cup as a bowl. The African American man present in the card sits on the ground, which denotes his inferior social status. He is probably acting as a servant or helper to this group of diners. He holds a pot as if he is merely there to refill their drinks and is the only member of the group not actively eating. Some African American soldiers were employed to be the helpers of Union soldiers – thereby continuing their pre-war status as servants to the white race.



A3. Unidentified Union Soldier sitting in the floor and eating.

This unidentified Union soldier is shown with his pack to the viewer's right with his cup perched on top of it and a plate with an apple situated on his crossed legs. He uses a knife and fork to eat the apple on the plate. This man is photographed in a studio, meaning that he paid money to get this picture taken of himself eating. This is a staged photograph that shows some of his most important supplies during the war. One may wonder why he chose to be depicted this way, but it shows the importance of these objects to this soldier. Students should recognize these objects, emphasize that the soldier might not have much more than these objects to turn his raw rations (yeast, flour, sugar, etc) into meals.

A4.

Miss Kate McCutchan
Camp Zollicoffer
20 Feb. 1862

Dear Cousin

..... Well I will tell you what I have been doing this evening, have been helping to make an eggnog. George Baylor and myself went out this morning and got some milk and eggs. We are going to have some company tonight and have a sing. We have invited some of the Marion Riflemen from Winchester. They are the best singers I ever heard. We expect to have some instrumental music too, but you must not think that we expect to get tipsy. we don't do such things in our mess. We had a big eggnog the evening after we moved into our cabin and had a heap of fun.

.....we are living finely here now, get plenty to eat and of a good quality. can fix it up a great deal better in our cabin than when we were in our tents we have yeast and bake raised bread, have warm rolls for breakfast every morning, we have our mess laid off in (twos) and have regular cooking days. there is 14 of us so cook day does not come but once a week, get plenty of coffee and sugar, can get some molasses, have to buy them, they are furnished for the officers at 20 cents per (goll), we are having a grand time here, if never had no harder times than we have here we would get along very well, but this is not always the case, I expect we will have some hard fighting to do the next term, and I expect we will all be into it... well it is getting too dark to so will stop for the present, step in and have some eggnog with us. 21st (Feb. 1862) I did not have time to finish my letter in time for the mail today but will endeavor to start it in, in the morning. We had a nice time last night some came that were not invited consequently were too much crowded, someone I did not say who got one of the performers out and gave him a little too much to drink which spoiled it some.

Jas. B. McCutchan

J.R. is well and all the rest of the boys.

to Miss kate McCutchan, Timberridge, Rockbridge Co., Va. McCutchan

Important takeaways: This is a letter that stresses the good time that could be had even during war time. He does say that he knows that food will not always be plentiful, but is making the best of a good time. The writer talks about how their mess works and the

importance of good rations and troop morale. This letter should emphasize the fact that soldiers are cooking their own food while they're marching and fighting. Its hard to imagine asking modern soldiers to live like this today.

A5.

Kate Greenbrier County, VA.

March 21, 1864

Dear Kate;

I am determined that you shall not quarrel with me the next time I see you for not writing to you; though I am sure I have written several letters that you do not get, but I am determined to comply with your wishes, while there is paper ink or pencils in the Confederacy - It is almost night; I have been busy to day - on review drilling & c. I just finished my dinner of bean soup & biscuit.

Gen. Breckenridge is here & I think if our rations get much less, Gen. Starvation will be here also or Gen. "Skidaddle" to a quarter where there is more to eat. - Gran. & myself got here safely, but had a tiresome ride over bad roads.

I got a letter from you when I returned, & also one from Lydia & one from Cousin Mallie.

I'm getting awfully tired of this camp, I despise this inactivity. I am tired of the war - I want to fight it out, & the sooner we begin this spring the better.

We had a grand sight here last night. The mountains around us were literally mountains of fire. It burned all round our cabins & what do you think we did - we just let it burn - I have to reduce myself to half a sheet as paper is scarce just at this time. We can buy nothing here now - nor can we, I suppose until the new money is issued - give my best love to all and write soon, assured that I will do the same.

Yours affectionately,

J. R. McCutchan

This letter is also included in Group B's packet of letters because it mentions common pastimes for soldiers. This soldier writes of being cooped up in camp all winter and the inactivity is driving him to distraction. Instead of waiting in camp each day, he'd rather be fighting than inactive. In addition to the boredom and frustration this soldier feels, students should realize that writing letters is a major pastime for many soldiers. The presence of mail to and from their families truly kept the moral up of so many soldiers.

Group B: Solider Pastimes Introduction:

Soldiers spent most of their time living in camp. Though a day in camp was divided into food preparation, drilling, sentry duty, and other daily tasks, there was still downtime that had to be filled with something. Many men spent their free time writing letters home, journal writing, sketching, and reading (Daily Life, 146). Prior to the war a plethora of popular reading materials became available to a wider audience – including daily and weekly newspapers as well as dime novels (Everyday life during the Civil War, 98-99). Therefore the common man could now peruse a variety of stories for much less than he could before this literary revolution. Other common pastimes for soldiers included foraging, gambling, sleeping, talking with their fellow solider, and playing games like cards, checkers and dominos. Soldiers did not carry these game boards around with them but would often draw out games on the underside of their gum blanket or tent – something they would carry anyway. Game pieces could be whittled out of wood or soldiers could appropriate rocks or something similar as their game pieces. Unorthodox pastimes like snowball fights, chasing greased pigs, and singing were all popular activities (Daily Life, 146-147).

Group B: Objects, Pictures, and letters:

- 1: "Camp Winfield Scott in Yorktown, Va"
- 2: "Two Unidentified Union Soliders"
- 3: "Petersburg, Virginia. Cock Fighting at Gen. Orlando B. Willcox's Headquarters"
- 4: J.R. McCutchan Letter
- 5: R. Henry Campbell Letter



B1. Camp Winfield Scott in Yorktown, Va., vicinity. The Duke de Chartres, Comte de Paris, Prince de Joinville, and friends playing dominoes at a mess table.

The men pictured are seated at a makeshift table playing dominos before an open tent. The presence of dominos illustrates the fact that these men had some time to kill in camp. Comradery that this activity would bring would be an important part of the bonding process between soldiers. The presence of this game, that at least one of these soldiers would have to carry around, also shows its importance as a way to pass the time while waiting in camp.

When the Civil War began François-Ferdinand-Philippe-Louis-Marie d'Orléans, prince de Joinville and his brother traveled to the United States to support the Union. On September 24, 1861 Chartes was commissioned a captain in the United States Army. He served as

assistant adjutant general on the staff of the commander of the Army of the Potomac, Major General George B. McClellan. He resigned from army life on July 15, 1862. Students do not need to know this history, other than the fact that foreign royals were interested in the fight between the states and came to America to fight.



B2. Two unidentified soldiers, one in Union uniform sitting on the ground whittling.

This shot of two unidentified soldiers is a rare glimpse of a candid snapshot of daily camp life. These soldiers sit relaxing against a tree whittling something out of wood. For this activity all they would need would be their pocket knives – an object that would have been carried everywhere anyway.



B3. Petersburg, Virginia. Cock fighting at Gen. Orlando B. Willcox's headquarters

This photograph shows a cock fight at the headquarters of General Wilcox. Two roosters are poised to fight for the pleasure of the on lookers. Supposedly, the men would have made bets on the outcome of the match. This was a cheap and easy form of entertainment for the soldiers while they wiled away time in camp. This is also a luxurious pastime – it requires the use of livestock which probably means that these men are not in want of food. Cockfights are not always to the death, but the loosing rooster would probably be consumed after the fight. This scene also shows their camp set up – the tents are covered in greenery that would give some protection from the snow that blankets the roof of the tents. This is a winter camp and the men were probably here for a longer stretch than a summer camp set up. Also note that the African Americans present are acting to facilitate the match, meaning that perhaps they were servants in this camp.

B4.

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I am determined that you shall not quarrel with me the next time I see you for not writing to you; though I am sure I have written several letters that you do not get, but I am determined to comply with your wishes, while there is paper ink or pencils in the Confederacy - It is almost night; I have been busy to day - on review drilling & c. I just finished my dinner of bean soup & biscuit.

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Yours affectionately,

J. R. McCutchan

This letter is also included in Group A's packet of letters because it mentions the lack of rations for soldiers. This soldier writes of being cooped up in camp all winter and the inactivity is driving him to distraction. Instead of waiting in camp each day, he'd rather be fighting. In addition to the boredom and frustration this soldier feels, students should realize that writing letters is a major pastime for many soldiers. The presence of mail to and from their families truly kept the moral up of so many soldiers.

B5.

Letter, 1861 May 4
Rockbridge Rifles (27th Virginia Infantry, Company H)
Harper's Ferry
May 4/1861

I write this morning to let you know how we all are. We are all in tolerable good health except Mr. Webb and Tanquary. They both expect to go home shortly. We have a good deal of duty to attend to. We go to Reveille at 5 o'clock a.m., squad drill at 5½ o'clock, surgeons call at 6½ o'clock, at 7 we have breakfast, at 8 first call for guard mounting, at 8½ second call for guard mounting, orderly hours 9 until ten, squad drill 10½ to 11½, Battalion drill 11½ to 12½ dinner 1, squad drill again 2½ to 3½, dress parade at 6, retreat at sundown, supper at 7, tattoo at 9½, taps at 10. Besides this we have to walk guard. I have not drank a drop of whisky or brandy since I left and I do not intend to do so until I get back. I think that I can do as well without it as with it. Col. Jackson has forbid the Liquor Dealers to sell to the soldiers, but they still get it on the sly. I believe that there is less whisky drank in our company than in any other company here...

Every evening we have singing after supper. James Campbell, John and Sam Charlton lead, they generally commence with "Do they miss me at home," then they sing two or three hymns and finish up with "They miss me at home." We are divided off into messes; each corporal and sergeant has charge of a mess. I have nine in my mess--myself, McCown, Kelly T., Kelly J., McMarra, Mullen, Lynch, Ashery McClure, and Charley Rollins. I appoint one man every day to cook for the rest. I have to go and get the provisions three times a day from the Quartermaster. I wish you would send me some paper collars if you can get them. They are better than the Linen collars. I can wear one of them a week and then you do not have the trouble of washing.

Give my love to all and tell some of my friends to write to me. You do not know how eagerly we await the coming of the mail, and how disappointed we are if we do not get a letter. No more at present from your affectionate son,

R. Henry Campbell.

This letter details the daily schedule for this soldier's regiment. In camp, this squad is kept on a tight schedule with drilling, inspection, and parading. These formalities are a perfect way for commanders of men to make sure that mischief does not happen in camp. Soldiers would be so occupied with this schedule that they would not have much time for any hijinks. Campbell does mention that after supper they sing to pass the time. This is a wonderful

letter that truly gives you great insight into the inner workings of this particular camp. While many camps would have a schedule somewhat like this, it's important to keep in mind that other camps might operate differently.

Group C: Shelter Introduction:

During the campaign season, which usually lasted from late spring into early winter, troops would be on constant move and thus would sleep beneath easily movable canvas tents. These tents would be easily assembled and disassembled to accommodate the shifting front lines. The science of encamping an army is called **castramentation** and usually each camp would have an officer that specialized in the art of castramentation who would arrange the regimental quarters. (*Daily Life in Civil War America*, 133). These officers, with varying success would try to keep regiments together and create what was essentially a small town in a matter of hours.

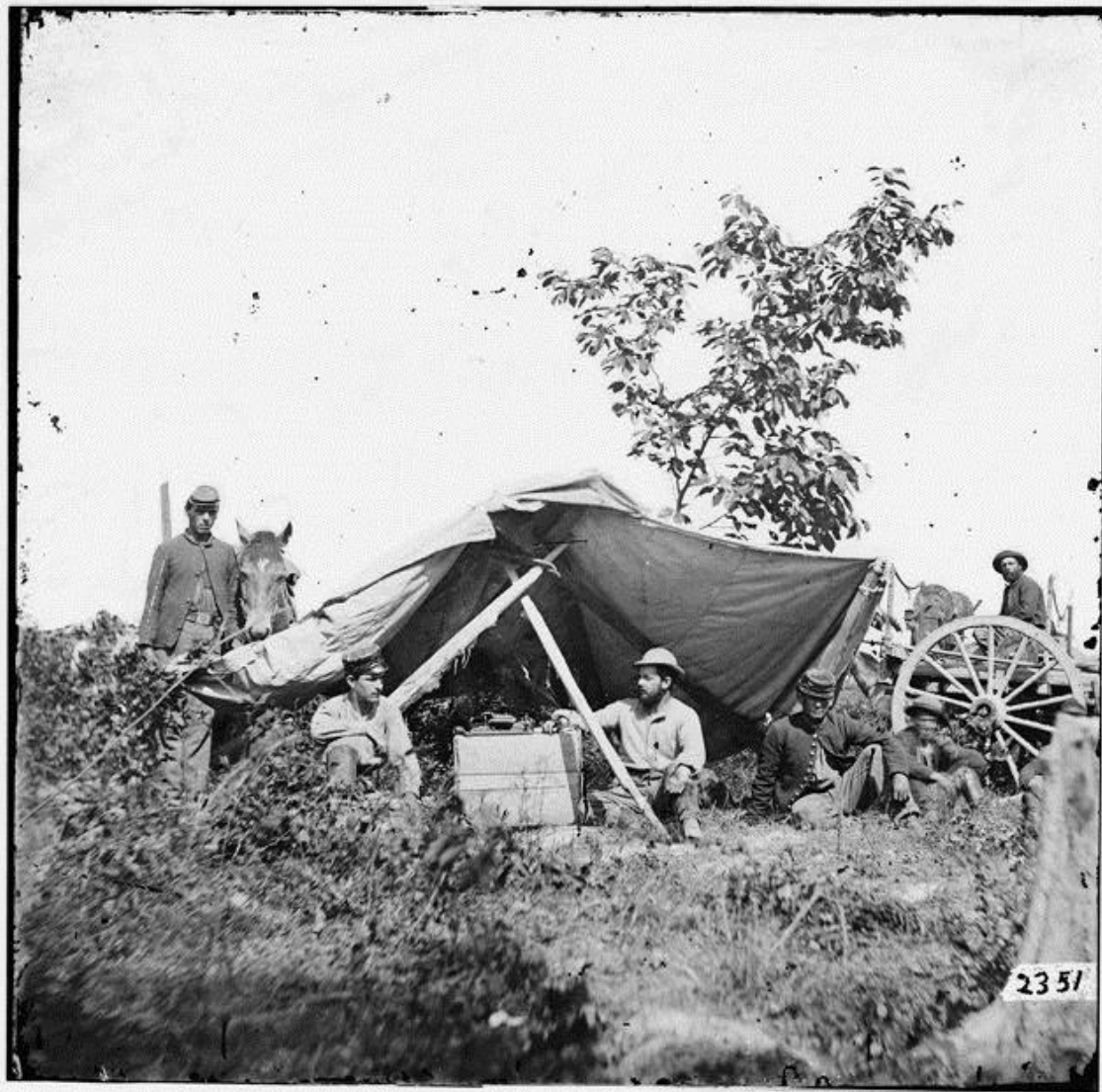
A common tent during the Civil War was the “A” or wedge tent which consisted of one piece of canvas stretched over a metal bar. These tents were usually six or seven feet long, and could be occupied by up to six men (*Daily Life in Civil War America*, 137). Often natural modifications could be made to increase comfort. Canopies of leaves and branches could be placed over tents to keep the sun off; a floor of logs or boards could be added to tents to keep its occupants off the ground. Remember that whatever shelter the soldier used, he had to carry it to his next location. Often soldiers abandoned bulky tents and slept wrapped in their rubber blankets. The southern soldier notoriously lacked much of the supplies their northern brothers enjoyed. Many southerners slept spooning fashion with an oilcloth underneath the two men and their blankets piled atop (*Daily Life in Civil War America*, 138-139).

Winter quarters were more permanent quarters usually designed to accommodate more men than a simple canvas tent would. For example, quarters for roughly sixteen men would be constructed from logs or wooden planks in a one-room layout. The walls would be insulated with mud and usually a fireplace of sorts was constructed along one wall. On the inside walls, wood bunks, meant to accommodate two men, were padded with straw-filled canvas sacks. Soldiers were expected to build these shelters themselves (*Daily Life in Civil War America*, 134).

Not all soldiers were lucky enough to be able to construct winter dwellings and many men, especially in the south slept under canvas all year long.

Group C: Objects, Pictures, and Letters

- 1: Wilcox's Landing, Va., vicinity of Charles City Court House. Field telegraph station
- 2: “Unidentified soldier in Union cavalry Uniform”
- 3: “Winter Quarters in Camp”
- 4: S.B. Thrall Letter
- 5: George P. Kersh Letter
- 6: Adam W. Kersh Letter



C1. Wilcox's Landing, Va., vicinity of Charles City Court House. Field telegraph station

Setting up makeshift shelter, either for sleeping or for other tasks was an important part of life during the Civil War. This shelter is obviously a temporary one that could be erected in a matter of minutes to provide relief from the elements so important tasks like telegraphing information could be completed. This shelter, as vulnerable as it seems, might be better than some would have during the war.



C2. Unidentified soldier in Union cavalry uniform, on horse, with cavalry saber, in front of encampment with winter chimneys.

This hand-colored tintype shows an unidentified Union soldier on a horse in front of a winter encampment. Students should notice that these dwellings, which include chimneys, feel much more permanent than camps that use only tents. This group of soldiers expected to be camped in this place for a long time and made efforts to make their quarters as comfortable as they could. While this camp would still lack the comforts of home, it would be much warmer and satisfying than a canvas tent would be.



C3. *Winter-Quarters in Camp—The Inside of a Hut, 1863, by Winslow Homer*

This print was published in *Harper's Weekly* on January 24, 1864. Homer depicts a group of men crowded together and engaged in a variety of activities from keeping warm in front of the fireplace to having a heated discussion with friends. Though these soldiers are in a more permanent encampment for winter, they are still not enjoying the comforts of home. Men sleep on the floor with only their clothes for bedding. There is a loft covered in hay, which would probably provide a more comfortable bunking spot. This is still not the comfortable existence many of these men would have known at home.

C4.

October 19, 1862

Dear Wife,

...We have been in this camp a week last night. It is a very pleasant place, rolling ground in the green oak woods, shady and pleasant, in day time, free from dust. Put tents up, ground cleared nicely and pleasantly situated, have enjoyed it. I have my tent near the hospital tents, as more convenient for me, though the proper place for it is in line with those of the field and staff officers. The Colonel told me to have my tent moved into its proper place but I have not done so, and he has said nothing about it since. I have a very nice little tent, carpeted with old bags that had grain in. My cot on one side with sheets, pillow and blankets, fixed up as nice and clean as you please. An empty barrel stands at the head of my cot on which are books, candle, matches, water and etc., makes a very useful if not ornamental stand. A rope stretches across the top of my tent on which hang any coats, towels, etc. My mirror hangs at the head of my bed, fastened by a loop of thread, into the side of my tent, on the opposite side from my bed, two stakes are driven into the ground, a board nailed on an I have another stand, a box with papers and then my hand trunk on some boards to keep it off the ground...

The days here during the past week have been as pleasant as possible, warm, not hot or oppressive, the nights however are cold. I use almost as much coverings as I do in the winter. I have two blankets or rather one army blanket cut in two blankets and must get me another double blanket. I have a large blue army overcoat which I wear in the early morn and at evening and lay over my bed at night. I sleep comfortable though the majority of men and officers complain that they do not about 3 or 4 o'clock a.m. it becomes very cold and I would certainly expect, were I in Iowa, and felt the cold so much, to find the Cemoine frozen and the boys skating. Here there is no sign of frost, the leaves on the trees are green, just beginning to change in places to brown and yellow...

This rough life has a singular charm and fascination, though I shall not express my own opinions until I have passed into the wet, muddy winter and thus have seen all the elephant. For the short time I have been in, I have seen a very large part, have had a varied experience, have marched day and night, by bright sunlight, moonlight, starlight, heat and dust, in rain and mud, in darkness seemingly palpable and impenetrable. Have heard the booming cannon, bursting shell, whistling balls, the incessant deep sounding roll of musketry, each separately, and again all combined in one indescribable commingling, deafening sound, the falling branches, crashing trees, around me the dead, the dying, the wounded, the cowards leaving the ranks, flying past me, seeking safety, officers and men cheering each other on.

The dead on the field after the battle, digging of graves, the pursuit of a fleeing army, road filled with wagons broken and burning, tents, blankets, baggage of every description, yet I have not yet seen it all or have not seen and experienced it long enough to yet express a fixed and permanent opinion as to how I like it. I can only say that so far as I have got, taking it all in all, I am surprised to find that there is something about it that I like. I may continue to do so, but I am much better satisfied here, mingling with and taking part in the strife then I have been before since the commencement of the war.

There is work, there is excitement, you are constantly on the quiver for what comes next, the pulse is quickened, the brain is cleared of cobwebs, that have accumulated in the hum-drum, quiet life of years past, yet I would prefer never to see another battle. I did not at any time think of getting hurt myself, or did not feel any fear, how it would be were I in the front ranks, I cannot say, and I have no desire ever to be there...

You must not get the blues any about me, or about yourself. You will come out all well enough, I am convinced, and as for me, I shall do well and take care of myself. I believe the most important thing for a soldier is ability to digest any food, in reasonable quantities that fortune affords him. I can do that to perfection and by the aid of Quinine, I expect to remain well. You know Quinine is my hobby. When sleeping out on the ground I took a pill night and morn as prophylactic. Kiss Nellie and Frank and write often.

Your affectionate husband,

S. B. Thrall, 13th Iowa

This long and insightful letter details in minute arrangement this soldier's camp set-up. He is comfortably situated and seems to have all of the rations and equipment he needs for now. He seems to know that this might change by the fact that he states that he can't properly judge camp life until he's been there a bit longer.

C5.

In camp near Corinth, Mississippi
Sunday, October 26, 1862

Dear Wife,

Last Sunday I wrote to you. I was then sitting in my tent in my shirt sleeves, enjoying myself hugely. Now to speak of the "Sunday South" seems a "goak" as Artemis Ward has it. I am now in my tent, my huge Cavalry overcoat on, buttoned up tight, its large cape enveloping my shoulders, my tent pegged tightly down, the flaps tied closely, to exclude as possible the wintry blasts and with all I set here shivering and writing. Yesterday morn, about 4 a.m., there was as sudden a change as we ever had in Iowa or Ohio. I awoke nearly froze, pulled the bedclothes over me, piled all my clothes, but in vain. I had to get up and go to a fire, where I found most all of the Regiment, at various fires, routed out before me, a cold damp wind and we expected a rain. In the afternoon I had my horse saddled and went down to town with an ambulance to get blankets and other hospital supplies for our sick. I had six in hospital.

I saw a pile of old tin, I had them throw a lot of it in the ambulance and today I have men at work building a heating apparatus in the hospital tent. About 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon it commenced snowing and in a short time the ground was covered. The snow blowing in my face as I rode about, a cold wind, and it really animated me and my horse. My horse seemed surprised, he did not like to face the blast, but as I gently insinuated my spurs in his side he sprang forward, snorting and kicking and then really seemed to like it. It snowed for several hours, and was laying upon the ground over 1/2 inch deep. The men say over an inch.

We eat under the top of a tent, what is called a fly, has no sides, simply the top, at supper the snow would cover our plates and our food. We did not have to wait long for our tea to cool. At 7 o'clock I took a large pan of coals into my tent, fixed my bed, warmed my feet and tumbled in, as did everybody else. I slept comfortably, very few others did. Water in barrels froze a 1/2 inch thick. I have acquired a habit of early to bed and early to rise. I have always been healthy and expect to become wealthy and wise. Such weather for Mississippi and in October, the boys huddled around the fires renewed their song "Oh, aint you glad you joined the army" etc. I have not got tired of it and really like it.

George P. Kersh Camp Bunkershill, Frederick County, VA

C6.

October 14, 1862

Dear Brother

I take this opportunity to write you a few lines to let you know that I am well and hope these few lines may find you enjoying the same blessing...We are still in the same old camp that they were when I arrived here. I dont know when we will leave here. we may soon and we may not...We have no tents now. some have little Yankee tents. The officers all have tents. We build little shanties and cover them with Oil cloth cedar and brush. We are Camped in the Woods. we have plenty of wood. water is little unhandy about half a mile to carry. We have troops Camped all along from here to Winchester and below us a good piece. We get plenty to eat such as it is Bull Beef and bread. Some of the boys are barefooted in our regiment now and their cloths are very dirty and ragged Marching so much. Which makes the confederates very bad. two of our company was wounded in the last fight at Maryland Clint Walker and William Stover not seriously. When I arrived here I found more of the Augusta Reliefs then I expected. we have about forty in our company fit for duty now...

As I have nothing worth writing about I will close. Old Jacob Sheets and Phil sheets are ready to leave and I want to send my letter with them.

I want you to write to me. direct your letter as you did before except Harman instead of Baldwin.

Yours Respectfully

Adam W Kersh

This letter details supplies deficits this soldier felt as the cold weather set in. They have been in this camp for a while and have not made more provisions for sleeping arrangements. Kersh does not have a tent – the few that are in camp were stolen from Union soldiers. This was a common practice, especially as the war went on and supplies got slim.

Group D: Marching Introduction:

Travel during the Civil War took place through railways, waterways, roadways, and over open country. Roadways were often the only way for soldiers to move, especially when that movement took place in the south. Southern roads were particularly poor compared to their northern counterparts. Many roads were narrow, rutted by weather conditions, and wagon wheels. Armies could lose weeks at a time on a road if it was in a bad condition. Often some of the worst spots on roads were patched with tree branches and planks – these roads were called **Corduroy Roads**. This prevented wagons from sinking into roadways but made marching even more difficult (Daily Life in Civil War America, 158-159).

When road conditions were better, soldiers could face marches of twenty to thirty miles in one day. They would carry everything with them they would need - including sleeping supplies, weapon, and foodstuff.

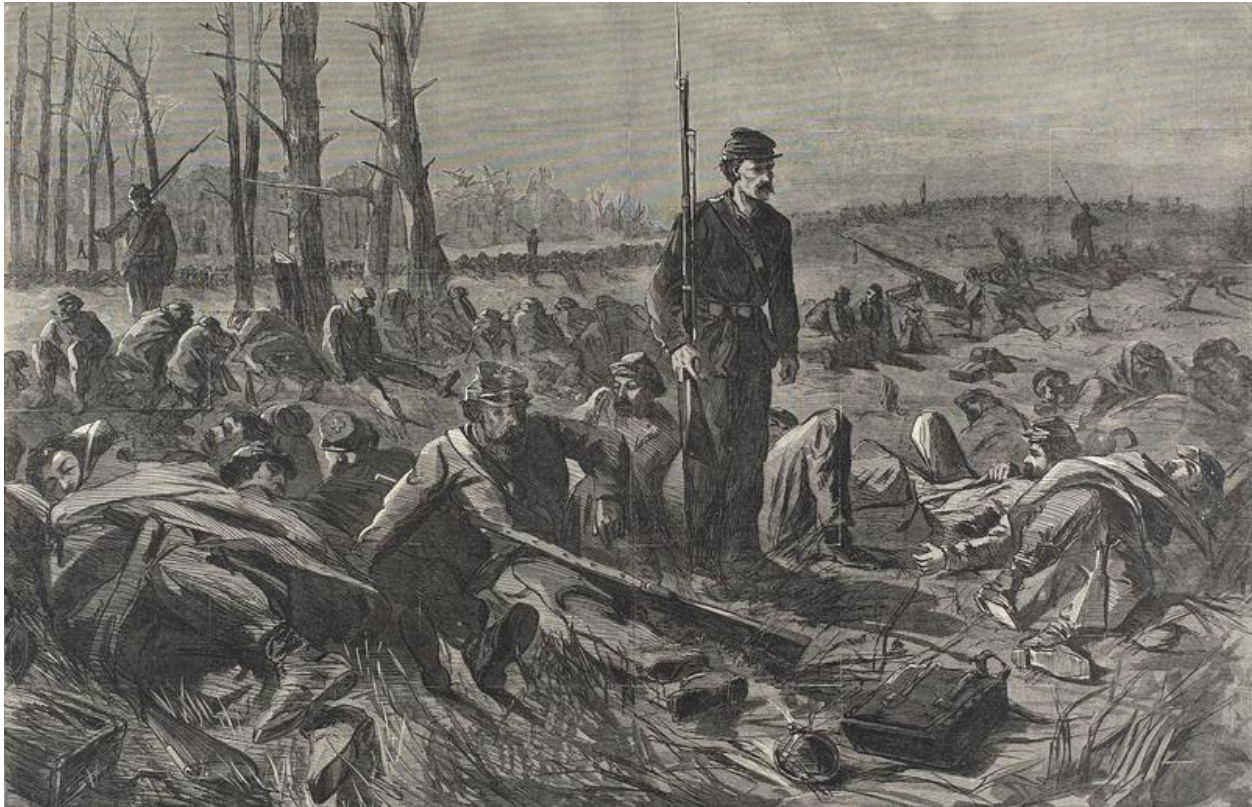
Group D: Objects, Pictures, and Letters:

- 1: "Unidentified soldier in Confederate Uniform of Company E."
- 2: "Army of the Potomac, Sleeping on their arms"
- 3: "Richmond, Va. Wagon train of Military Telegraph Corps"
- 4: John Miller Letter
- 5: Seneca B. Thrall Letter



D1. Unidentified soldier in Confederate uniform of Company E, "Lynchburg Rifles," 11th Virginia Infantry Volunteers holding 1841 "Mississippi" rifle, Sheffield-type Bowie knife, canteen, box knapsack, blanket roll, and cartridge box

This ambrotype shows a Confederate soldier with all his gear. This picture was snapped in a studio and is a posed piece probably taken to be a memento to his family. If this soldier was on a march, this is what he'd look like – marching with everything he needed on his back holding his weapon as he went.



D2. “Army of the Potomac, sleeping on their arms,” by Winslow Homer for *Harper’s Weekly*, 1864.

“Sleeping on their arms” refers to a short stop soldiers on a march would make where they were not permitted to set up a camp, but just allowed a brief rest. The uncomfortable nature of resting this way is emphasized by the restless nature of the figures sketched. Sentries stand amidst the men watching for anything that might be amiss. Later in the war, General Grant made “sleeping on their arms” part of his strategy. His forces did not stop to rest after fights; he would continually move his troops to wear down the Confederate forces. This strategy helped lead to the fall of Richmond.



D3. Richmond, Va. Wagon train of Military Telegraph Corps

This picture gives a good example of what a wagon train would look like during the Civil War. Covered wagons would be the main transport for foodstuff, the wounded, and heavier equipment that could not be carried by horses and people alone. Trains like this were slow moving and could often be help up by poor road conditions or wagon repairs.

D4.

Nashville, Tenn

Dec 4th, 1864

Dear Father,

I have not written to you since I was at Chattanooga but we have been run about so that I have scarecly had time...We had a pretty hard time for a few days. We were at Columbia about 8 or 10 days. At the time the rebels advanced on that place. Our regt was laying on Duck River guarding the fords. Six companies under Col. McQuiston were at Williamsport and 4 companies 'B' 'C' and G and our company under Col. Walter were at Gordon's ferry 4 miles farther down the regt., while the 91st Ind. Was at a point farther down the river. When our army fell back to Franklin, we were cut off from it. The army evacuated Columbia in the morning and we did not receive notice of it till 12 o'clock that night, we immediately started. We marched till day light when we halted about 30 minutes for breakfast and then resumed the march, we marched all day and in the evening found we were cut off from our army and in the rear of Hood's army.

We marched around the rear of the rebels, passing within 2 miles of their camp fires and stopped past his flank. All this time they were fighting hard at Franklin, had they not been we could not possibly have escaped. About 10 o'clock that night we reached the Big Harper river and were safe. We marched 47 miles that day. The next day we came to Nashville. It was reported and believed here that we were captured. I suppose you have read at home that we were. That day I had more expectations of being in some southern prison by this time.

We are laying in the trenches here expecting an attack at any moment. We have got to fight here and fight hard. I hope they will at any rate, for I would fight them here than any place else. We have got to fight them sometime and I would just as [get] to it now as any other time, and rather do it here than any where else.

They are fighting on our right today, I do not know how the fight is going. I am as well and stout as ever and expect to remain so. Newt & Billy Matkin & Tom Anderson are all well. You need not look for me home this winter, as I have not the least idea of being able to get a furlough, as long as the fighting continues. [This is where the letter ends. It was written by John Miller, a Union Soldier.]

In this letter the writer talks about an intense march that was made in order to meet the other part of the Union army and fight the rebels in Nashville, Tennessee. Students should note that this solider states that his group marched close to fifty miles in one day, all on foot.

Civil War soldiers endured hardships that soldiers today do not have to dream about. Transportation today is provided for our soldiers – we would also assure that they had the supplies they needed. There is no guarantee that the men that made this all night and all day march had proper shoes, they carried everything on their backs – including their food, and had to make camp in a rural place without running water, bathroom facilities, shelter, or a kitchen to welcome them when they arrived. They are also expected to fight soon after this exhausting march. Marching long distances was a reality of everyday life for the average soldier.

D5.

In camp near Corinth, Miss
Sunday eve, October 12, 1862

Dear Wife,

We are back again once more to Corinth. Marched back in two days, Friday and Saturday...

I have been fairly initiated in the art of war; here three weeks, on the march all the time and in a battle of two days. Marched night and day, heat, suffocating clouds of dust, rain and mud, bright moonlight, beautiful nights, and dark, rain miserable. Friday noon it commenced raining, rained hard all the afternoon and drizzled all night and we marched on till 9:00 o'clock pm. I could not see the horse ahead of me or the man trudging along at my side in rain and mud. We camped on the banks of the Hatchee river, no tents, low bottom land, we soldiers wet and miserable, our trains behind, nothing to eat, and did not expect them to come in, but they did. The soldiers built large fires, dried themselves, got their supper and went singing, "Ho boys, ho; aint you glad you joined the army, ho boys ho, etc." Slept on the ground on their oil cloth blankets, called up at 3 1/2 o'clock am, and onward march. I put two sick men in the ambulance and fastened the seat up above them and I sat up in the ambulance out of the rain, gum coat on and dry. I have been fairly initiated. The men say they have had a harder time during the past month than ever before.

I never felt any better, have an appetite like an Anaconda, have felt some times as though I could swallow a hog whole; but when it really came to the scratch I was satisfied with a piece of side meat (sow belly the boys call it), one or two quarts of coffee and some crackers, and without any joking it tasted fine, when you are hungry, and I have relished such a meal as I ever did any place. Tonight I am in my own tent, things fixed up and quite homelike.

Friday noon as we were marching along, I heard a familiar voice call, "Helloa, Stick-In-The-Mud, how are you?" There was Homer Thrall with Mat Wolcott of Granville. We were marching past the encampment of Gen Davies Division of the army and they were about to start toward Corinth. I could only stop a moment then or among the multiplicity of regiments lose my own. As it was, the 13th was a mile ahead and just stopping for dinner when I overtook them, so I rode back and Homer came on with me and took dinner with me that day. We had sweet potatoes, coffee, crackers and molasses; a first-rate dinner. Homer looks well though brown and thinner than he used to be. He looked as dirty and hard as any "paddy whack" and he told me that if he was half as dirty as I was he would be ashamed of himself. He is now Lt. Colonel of the 22 Ohio, the Regt. formerly the 13th Missouri, and is said to be a No. 1 officer.

No closing to this letter. Seneca B. Thrall – he enlisted on August 19, 1862 and was commissioned into the field and staff of 13th Iowa Infantry as an Assistant Surgeon.

This soldier details the business of war – he’s been marching all the time and fighting for only a few days since he joined up. He describes the hardships of marching and sleeping in all weather conditions. When camp was made the men had to sleep in nothing but what they carried with them. Food wagons were often slower than the company that marched. Wagons could get stuck in difficult road conditions and there was no guarantee that food would make it to the men when they stopped that evening. He also details food on the road and a typical soldier’s rations in this letter.

Group E: Drilling Introduction:

Drilling was a major part of the daily routine for the Civil War Soldier. Drilling taught men discipline and fostered unit cohesion. While drilling they learned the basics of moving as a unit, the most effective way to load and fire their weapons, and how to address the enemy. These skills were literally drilled into them and this was meant to give them the confidence during battle to face the enemy without faltering. Drilling also gave structure to camp life, providing soldiers with constructive and tiring exercise to keep them occupied during the day.

Group E: Objects, Pictures, and Letters:

- 1: "Officers on horseback watching infantry drills"
- 2: "Battery at Drill"
- 3: R. Henry Campbell Letter
- 4: Gatewood Letter



E1. Officers on horseback watching infantry drills in distance, Alfred R. Waud.

Drilling was a part of everyday life for every soldier. In addition to learning skills needed to keep them alive and win battles, drilling was a bonding activity, it also occupied soldiers who instead of drilling might get up to trouble in camp.



E2. Battery at Drill, Ringgold, Georgia.

This photograph shows a company in the middle of a drill. Drilling was essential to make sure the army functioned together smoothly in a real-life battle situation.

E3.

Harper's Ferry May 4/1861

Dear Mother

I write this morning to let you know how we all are. We are all in tolerable good health except Mr. Webb and Tanquary. They both expect to go home shortly. We have a good deal of duty to attend to. We go to Reveille at 5 o'clock a.m., squad drill at 5½ o'clock, surgeons call at 6½ o'clock, at 7 we have breakfast, at 8 first call for guard mounting, at 8½ second call for guard mounting, orderly hours 9 until ten, squad drill 10½ to 11½, Battalion drill 11½ to 12½ dinner 1, squad drill again 2½ to 3½, dress parade at 6, retreat at sundown, supper at 7, tattoo at 9½, taps at 10. Besides this we have to walk guard. I have not drank a drop of whisky or brandy since I left and I do not intend to do so until I get back. I think that I can do as well without it as with it. Col. Jackson has forbid the Liquor Dealers to sell to the soldiers, but they still get it on the sly. I believe that there is less whisky drank in our company than in any other company here. Tell father that John Donald has not drank a drop of liquor since he left and I do not think that he will. He was the same dry wit that he had about him when at home. He sends his best respects to our family, also to Mr. Jacob Smith. Every evening we have singing after supper. James Campbell, John and Sam Charlton lead, they generally commence with "Do they miss me at home," then they sing two or three hymns and finish up with "They miss me at home." We are divided off into messes; each corporal and sergeant has charge of a mess. I have nine in my mess--myself, McCown, Kelly T., Kelly J., McMarra, Mullen, Lynch, Ashery McClure, and Charley Rollins. I appoint one man every day to cook for the rest. I have to go and get the provisions three times a day from the Quartermaster. I wish you would send me some paper collars if you can get them. They are better than the Linen collars. I can wear one of them a week and then you do not have the trouble of washing. Give my love to all and tell some of my friends to write to me. You do not know how eagerly we await the coming of the mail, and how disappointed we are if we do not get a letter.

No more at present from your affectionate son,

R. Henry Campbell.

Campbell discusses his daily schedule, which includes quite a few hours' worth of drilling and parading. It's obvious that this large amount of drilling would not only hone battle skills but also was meant to keep soldiers out of trouble. Campbell writes how he has not had a "drop of whiskey" since he began his army life and that this has also affected his friends. All of the physical activity served the purpose, among other things, of keeping men from turning to drink out of boredom. This letter is also featured in

E4.

A Cadet Life & Civil War Collection

from the VMI Archives Andrew C. L. Gatewood Papers Letter, August 25, 1860.

Manuscript #068 Virginia Military Institute August 25, 1860

Dear Ma & Pa

I received your letters yesterday by cousin Warwick & was very glad to hear from you both & to hear that all were well. I have not got much news to write about but to let you know that I am well & hearty. I believe that I have fattened five or six pounds since I came over here. We have to take so much exercise it agrees with me first rate. We have to get up every morning a 5 oclock, go to squad drill at 5 1/2, drill an hour, come back, go to breakfast at seven, & then we go to squad drill again at nine, drill until ten, come back & study until twelve, & then go to recitation, go to dinner at 1 oclock, study until four, go to recitation, & then go to squad drill again at five, drill until six, come back & go to dress parade half past six, go to supper at 7 oclock & then we go to bed at ten. You can see we have not got much time to spare--I tell you it keeps me busy as a bee. I have my pants & fatigue jackets & I believe my coat is done but I don't want it until I go in barracks. I am going to buy a second handed coat. It will save my new one very much indeed. I can get one for 4 or 5\$ not worn much...We will all move in barracks on Friday next. I have gotten used to living in Camp & like it very well now. Six of us sleep on a tent floor seven feet square & keep two trunks in besides. Each one takes a plank...They are very strict here in every thing. I have been on Guard twice since I've been here & will be on tomorrow again. Tomorrow we have to walk 8 1/2 hours, 4 in day & 4 at night. There are about 120 new cadets here now and about 30 or 40 to come yet, which will make in all nearly 300...Give love all Uncle Henry's family & Aunt Carries, also & Aunt Sarah. Give my Respects to Mr. Coffee, Slater, Bonner, Vance. Tell Mr. Coffee he must write to me. I would not have time to write this letter if it was not Sunday evening. Give my love to all. Write soon, be sure & do it. I wrote to sister Mary the others--But have never heard from he yet.

From your son

A.C.L. Gatewood

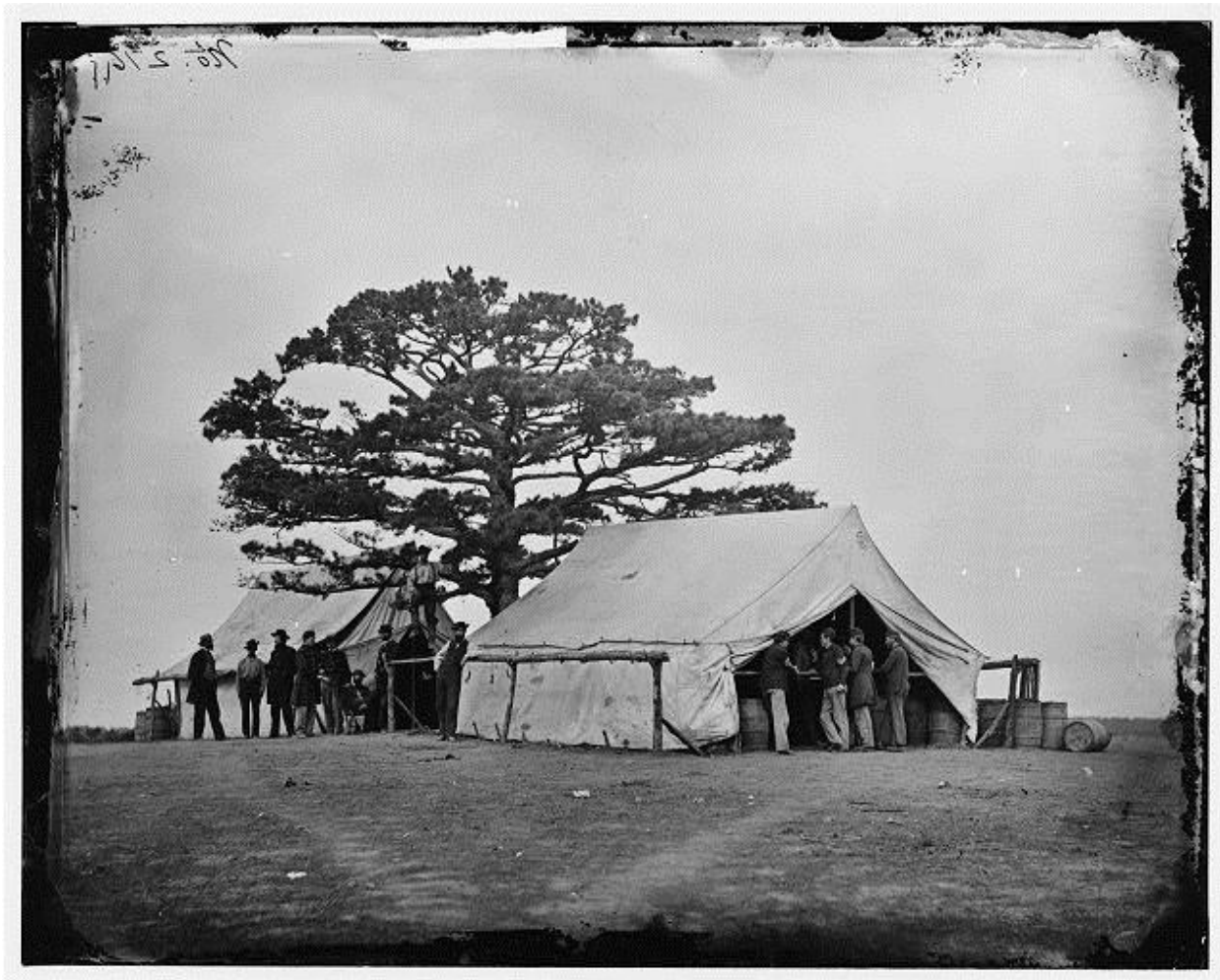
This letter, like the previous one, details the strenuous schedule that could be put in place to make sure that soldiers were well trained and not bored in camp. This letter dates before the beginning of the war and is from a soldier who is actually a student at the Virginia Military Institute. He mentions studying, something that an encamped civil war soldier would not have to deal with. Gatewood would go on to fight in the Civil War in the Confederacy. He served as a drillmaster to new Confederate recruits.

Group F: Sutler Introduction:

Sutlers were civilians who set up a temporary store within an army encampment to sell foodstuff, luxury items, clothing, and supplies. Sometimes sutlers would even move with the army as it marched to its next location. Sutlers shops often charged higher prices than what someone could expect to pay at a general store in their hometown – but the high cost of having to be constantly on the move and the hassle of transporting goods to remote locations often justified this cost. The Sutler truly provided a necessary service and soldiers with money to spare often spent time perusing the sutler's goods. The Sutler was more often found to be a fixture of Union encampments, a pared down version of the Sutler could be found in confederate camps. This could take the form of a slave selling pies or cider on the side of the road or civilian selling things they made out of their own kitchen (*Daily Life in Civil War America*, 120).

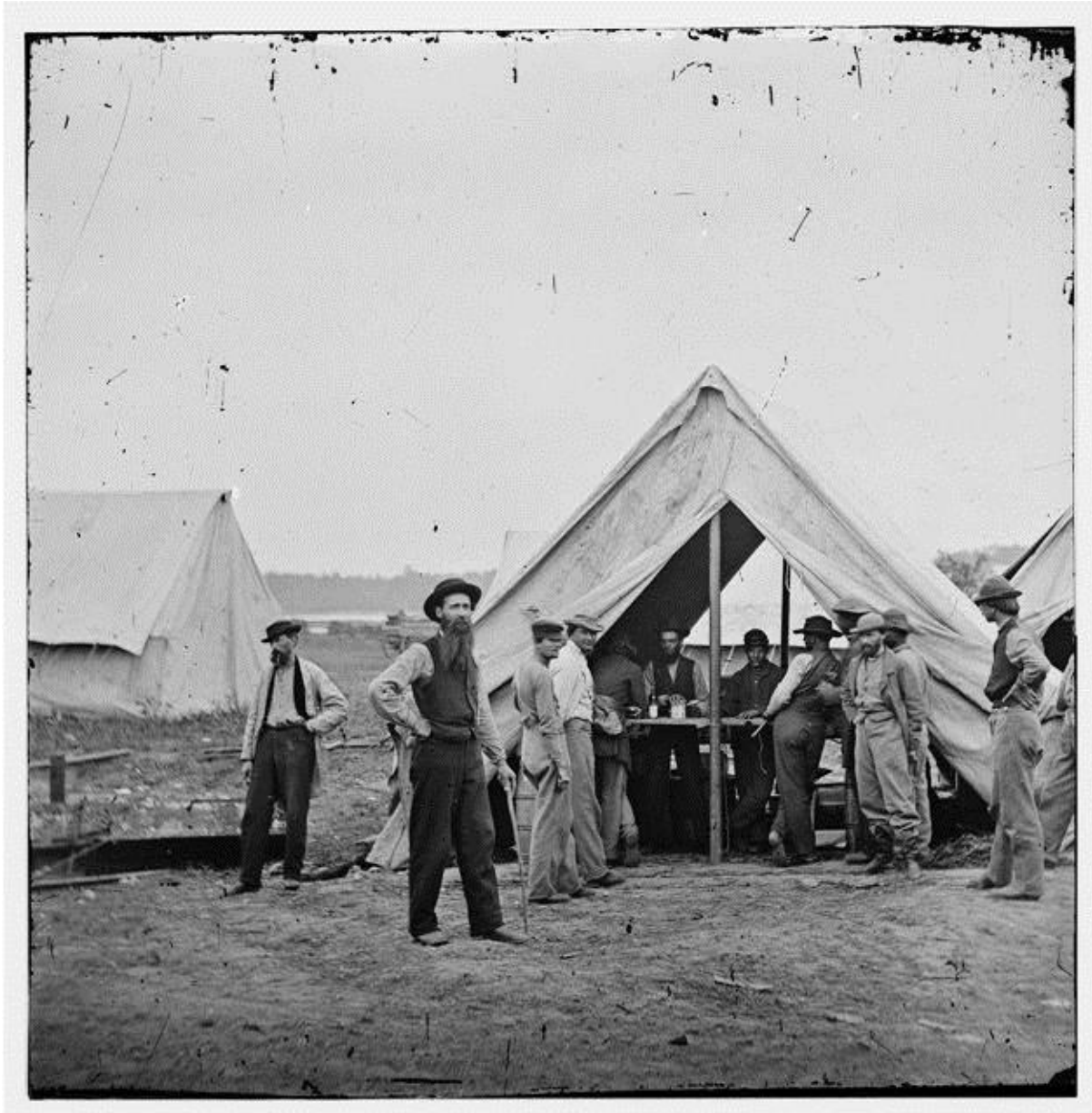
Group F: Objects, Pictures, and Letters:

- 1: "Beaeton, Va. Sutler's tent at Army of the Potomac Headquarters"
- 2: "Petersburg, Va. Sutler's tent, 2d Division, 9th corps."
- 3: "Thanksgiving in camp"
- 4: John R. Miller Letter
- 5: Forrest Letter



F1. Bealeton, Va. Sutler's tent at Army of the Potomac headquarters

This sutler's tent is a large one and probably had goods for sale in the majority of the tent. The observe can see that the four men at the mouth of the tent stand in front of a rail or board that would block them from shopping for the goods themselves. They would be waited on by the proprietor of the shop one at a time. There is a large tent behind the main tent; this could perhaps be an extension of the Sutler's tent or his living quarters.



F2. Petersburg, Va. Sutler's tent, 2d Division, 9th Corps

This picture is an up-close view of the Sutler's tent. This tent looks like a smaller version and shows more of a bar set-up. Sutler's could sell a variety of goods, including alcohol. The Sutler's tent would be a natural gathering place for soldiers.



F3. *Thanksgiving in Camp*, 1862, by Winslow Homer

This illustration of Thanksgiving at camp shows soldiers crowded around the Sutler's tent to perhaps buy some delicacies their rations probably didn't include. Additional signs on the Sutler's tent advertise that they have pies, cider, and also sell herrings. Though these delicacies were better than their regular fare, from the faces of the soldiers in the illustration they are not too excited by it. The soldier in the front left holds a herring in a dejected manner.

F4.

Camp near Chattanooga
Nov 7th, 1864

Dear Father,

I have not heard from home for so long a time that I am getting anxious to hear. I wrote to you several times while at Decatur but as I have received no answers to my letters I suppose you did not get them.

We left Decatur, GA on the 4th of Oct. Since then we have marched about 350 miles through GA and Alabama. We lay at Gatesville & Cedar Bluff, Ala about a week. We did some very hard marching. The day we left Cedar Bluff we marched about 27 miles, the 2nd day the regt marched about 20 miles, but I was out foraging that day and with 5 or 6 others camped about 5 miles from the regt, and did not catch up with the regt till about 10 o'clock on the night of the 3rd days march, but I had plenty of forage in the shape of fresh pork, potatoes, honey, molasses. The 3rd day the regt marched about 23 miles while I marched about 28 miles. We reached this place (Chattanooga) on the 4th of this month, just one month from the day we left Decatur. We will probably have to march from here to Nashville.

I do not like the idea of having to march through by any means, but I did it once and I guess I can do it again. All the rest of our Corps has transportation by R.R. Our Brigade has to go through with the train, Col. Strickland (commanding our brigade) has sent a dispatch to Schofield asking of transportation, I hope he will succeed. We are now waiting for orders.

I would like to go home this winter, but I do not expect to, though if we get stationed any place this winter, I may get to go. It has rained nearly all the time since we left Resaca. It rained very hard last night. Today is a gloomy and dismal one. Newt Matkin & Billy Matkin & all the boys are well and hearty. My own health is splendid. We will probably be paid off when we get to Nashville.

Everything is very high here. I paid \$1.50 for a small coffee pot, and a \$1.25 for a frying pan, 75 cents a pound for butter, 60 cents a pound for cheese, and \$2.00 a half can for oysters, apples 25 cts a dozen, tobacco in proportion.

Give my love to all the family and friends, write soon.

Your affec' son,

John R. Miller

(direct to Nashville)

Miller discusses the hardships of marching such long distances. At the end of the letter he states the high prices of things sold in the area. The goods he mentions would probably not be found in his rations and it was only through specialty dealers like the sutler that he would be able to obtain these goods.

F5.

Camp Griffin

Jan 6th 1862

Dear Parents

I received your kind letter night before last and was very glad to hear from you and to hear that you were well and enjoying good health as this leaves me in at the present. it is pretty cold here this morning it snowed last night about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch that is the first time it has snowed a mite this Winter it looked kinda natural I tell you...I am in General Smiths Division there is I believe 8 brigades in this Division I am in General Brooks brigade our General is a perfect brick he is a Good fellow I tell you he awful cross sometimes but he has to be I do not blame him a [word missing] Our Regiment has the praise of being the best in the brigade I want to let you know we have to pay for things here butter is 35 cents a pound and very poor at that the small papers of tobacco that you have to pay 3 cents for is 6 cents here what do you think of that Father[?] I bought me a pair of boots the other day and what do you think I had to pay for them[?] I had to pay the small sum of \$6 $\frac{1}{2}$ what do you think of that too[?] every thing is up according but I must stop for this time I have to go on picket guard to morrow morning...

This from your son

Forrest

Forrest describes the cost of luxuries the army did not provide. Soldiers would often have family members send them packages from home full of these luxuries, but if these goods could not be had from home the sutler was an excellent alternative. Sutlers were private individuals and the cost of their goods would vary from sutler to sutler, it would depend on the remoteness of the location and the trouble of getting the goods into camp. Forrest describes how expensive the things he purchased are. These are things that soldiers today would never have to purchase on their own (with the exception of the tobacco papers.) Its important to keep in mind that these letters use the spelling and grammar the soldier originally employed. Varying levels of education and literacy contribute to different writing abilities in soldiers.

Group H: Importance of Family Support Introduction:

Family support made the difference in troop morale. Not only would families serve as a lifeline of supplies for many soldiers – sending of boxes of food and clothing but they also gave the soldiers something to fight for. Clothing, weapon, horses, all provided by families would take great personal sacrifice to accumulate, especially as the war dragged on and supplies ran short. Writing letters to family members also proved to be an important pastime for many soldiers who depended on the news they received from home. This support ran both ways, money and advice on family matters was often sent home. Many soldiers continued to dictate planting cycles and family financial decisions from afar.

In turn, though their loved one may be off fighting, for many he still directed the family fortunes from afar. Civil War letters are full of husbands and wives discussing home improvements, what crops to plant, and other important aspects of business. This constant interaction with the outside world must have given the soldier the feeling that he was still an integral part of home life.

Group H: Objects, Pictures, and Letters:

- 1: “Civil War letter address to Mrs. Nancy McCoy in Perry County, Pennsylvania”
- 2: “Tent life of the 31st Pennsylvania Regiment”
- 3: “Portrait photographs of Mrs. John A. Logan and Dollie Logan”
- 4: Jed. Hotchkiss letter
- 5: Forrest Letter



H1. Civil War letter address to Mrs. Nancy McCoy in Perry County, Pennsylvania from Private Isaac McCoy. This was sent on February 2, 1863 and bears a 3 cent stamp.

For most, letters were the only source of communication during the Civil War period. Receiving letters from home made a huge difference in the moral of troops. Mail communication was not always possible due to deteriorating infrastructure as the war progressed. The importance of this letter is felt in the carefully illustrated envelope – which shows a soldier with his home in the background. His sweetheart embraces him before he leaves for war. This letter is the only physical thing that unites them while he is off fighting. The support of families was paramount during the war.



H2. Tent life of the 31st Pennsylvania Regiment

Some families traveled with their loved one and participated in camp life. These families would probably live like the one pictured in this stereograph card above. The soldier whose family followed him to camp, would experience more of the comforts of home with a helpmate to see to his food, mend his clothing, and provide him with companionship. This family is literally spilling out of their tent – one can see an iron on the ground, pots, pans, and kettles along with other domestic tools that the soldier would not normally carry with him in his pack.



H3. Portrait photographs of Mrs. John A. Logan and Dollie Logan

The Civil War was the first war in which photographs played a major role. The first photograph was taken in 1837 and by the 1860s; it was a technology much more open to the

masses. Studios popped up in every major city in which people could get their photos taken. During the Civil War families were often separated by the conflict and it was extremely common for soldiers and their loved ones to get their photos taken. These photos were often framed to protect them – this careful framing also shows that though photography had become more common by this period, it was still a precious gift to give. This photographic set states on its cover that it was carried during the Civil War by Gen. John A. Logan. Having his family member’s likeness in his pocket and their letters on his person must have provided him with comfort and have been a morale boost.

H4.

Wednesday, Jan. 21st 1863

Camp at Moss Neck, Caroline Co. Va.

My Ever Dear One:

Your excellent letter of a late date came to me in good time and I should have answered it before now & must beg pardon for waiting so long & hope you will not "go and do likewise"

I ate the last of the catchup today, on a snack of bread & butter, when very hungry & weary and o! how good -- the butter is not half gone yet, we have some pickles left, but they go tolerably fast -- , we are particularly fond of them, especially the cabbage, I never thought it half as good before, then the corn, berries, hominy, & dried fruit are almost intact, not a fourth of them gone & I may say the some of the corn meal and biscuits, of course the apples did not last long. Every one that eats with us praises the good estate of our larder, and "my wife" often comes in for the credit due her for the comforts that make this barbarous, or at least half civilized way of living at all endurable, I do not know how I could stand it but for the nourishing palatable food I get...

I am sorry Nelly has been so poorly and hope she is entirely recovered. I fear the warm stove room may help to make the children so liable to throat diseaes, but hope not. You have so many wearisome nights with the sick children, I am so sorry I may not be there to relieve you, I often think of it on my pallet on the ground and wonder if you are enjoying rest or being worn down by the care of our children -- but it will not be so always, and we must pray our merciful Heavenly Father that these days may be shortened and that neither we nor our offspring may see any more of the like -- we must nobly endure and suffer, for the boon we seek is a priceless one, but O how much it costs...

Write to me often my Darling One, for the mails have to be depended on now our line of courriers is stopped Put on the letters to Guinea's station P.O. in addition to what You usually do. I shall be quite sure to come home before the sale so as to be there and we will keep what we want and I will arrange for garden, pigs &c. I have got William hired, expect him here now every day, got him very low -- and in the Spring I will hire Allen out to some farmer & send William to you and he can make garden & do anything you want done -- I will send you some money if I have a chance. Be of good cheer my love and may you and our nestlings be in God's holy keeping and be abundantly blessed in all things is the constant prayer of your absent husband

Jed. Hotchkiss

Make us some more pickles if you can--Harman says we shall have some beans from his house.

Hotchkiss writes to his wife about the excellent food she sent him. He and his fellow soldiers have been enjoying a large variety of pickled goods, ketchup, and other delicacies sent to Hotchkiss by his wife. He mentions that without this supplement to his diet he would be pretty poorly off. He also says that he knows how difficult things must be at home with only her to care for their children. He truly appreciates his wife; her constant sending him things keeps them connected. He realizes he has hardships as a soldier but that she does as well. He ends his letter with entreating his wife to continue to write to him. He assures her that he'll be home soon and that he will help with some things around the home when he does return home. Hotchkiss's letter shows the important place families had in their daily life of the soldier through correspondence and gifts of food and clothing they might send. Soldiers who fought on their home soil (as all soldiers did during the Civil War) often fought with divided hearts - their heart in their cause, but also worried about their families back home.

H5.

Camp Griffin
Dec 29th 1861

Dear Parents

I received your letter night before last and your likenesses with it I was very glad to hear from you and to hear that you were well I was very glad to get your likeness too I tell you you say that that one I sent you is fading away I will send you another one just as soon as I can get some money to get it taken you say that you will try and send me some things I wish that you would it will be received with great pleasure I assure you if you do send some things I wish you would have aunt Betsy put in some butter and a little cheese if she will be so good and I think she will you can put them into a box and send it by express I wish that you would find out what regiment alonzo belongs to and let me know also where he is situated I will go and see him if it costs me \$10 I want to tell you something private every morning after breakfast the company is formed and marched to the sink to do our business I think that is pretty large dont you[?] I guess lorenzo Russell is here in the 6th Regiment I see him about every day he sends his Respects to you Father I wish you would send me a paper once in a while does it snow any in Crown Point[?] we have not had a mite of snow yet here but it is a awful cold there is another thing I want you to send me if you can that is a pair of Gloves but I cant think of any more this time to write so good bye for this time

From your Affectionate

Son Forrest

Direct your letters where you Always do

Forrest Little

Company F 5th VT Volunteers

Camp Griffin 1861

Forrest's letter to his parents shows just how important home support is for his morale and well-being. The family has exchanged photos and regularly sends him food and clothing to amend what he does not receive in his rations. Notice that he does not discuss any epic battles, marches, or drills he's participated in. His main concerns are food, clothing, and the whereabouts of a friend. The Civil War was often not about the hot-blooded moments, but more time was spent in attending to camp life and caring for what was going on back home.

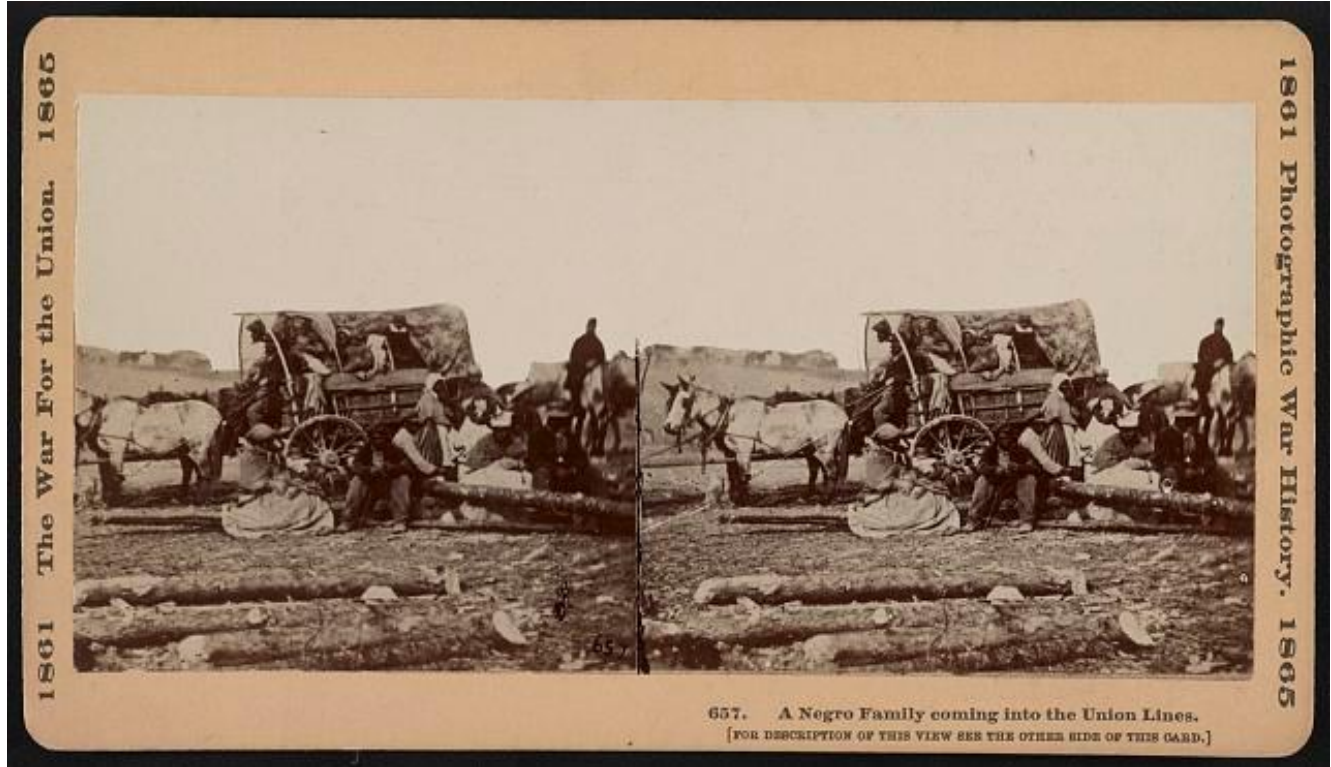
Group F: Camp Followers Introduction:

As the Union army moved through the south many former slaves left their plantation homes to seek freedom and opportunity elsewhere. Often many of these former slaves did not know where to go and they were left adrift in a hostile land. Many of these people followed and sought refuge in the Union army. These escaped slaves were often called contraband. The Union command reacted to contraband in different ways. Having potentially hundreds of civilian men, women, and children following an army could lead to huge problems in moving them, feeding them, and protecting them. More than 100 camps were set up throughout the south for escaped slaves to congregate; all of these camps were under union control.

Many blacks living in the north and escaped slaves joined the Union forces. As many as 179,000 blacks enlisted in the U.S. Army. These soldiers were paid less than their white counterparts and often did not see battle – they were sent to do more menial tasks. There were exceptions to this rule, but the majority of black forces faced these problems. When they did see action, black combat groups had about a 35% higher mortality rate, twice as many succumbed to disease, and less than 100 of them became officers (Everyday life during the Civil War, 120-121). Despite these tough statistics, many free black and former slaves served with distinction during the Civil War.

Group F: Objects, Pictures, and Letters:

- 1: "A Negro Family Coming into the Union Lines"
- 2: *Contraband on Cairo Levee*.
- 3: "What do I want John Henry"
- 4: Barnitz letter



F1. "A Negro Family Coming into the Union Lines"

This stereograph card shows an African-American family coming into the Union lines. One can assume that this group is made up of newly freed slaves who hope to find some safety behind Union lines. They carry with them all of their worldly possessions and ride in a tattered wagon hoping to make it to the relative safety of the Union lines. The wagon is packed full of people and these faces represent the hundreds of thousands of slaves who were freed each day during the war.



F2. *Contraband on Cairo Levee*, Sophie Wessel, ca. 1963, DuSable Museum of African American History.

This painting, though executed in 1963, shows contraband, or the term used by the Union army to describe runaway slaves who came under the Union army's control, relaxing on the shore waiting on a ship. This painting specifically focuses on groups of contraband that were transported by the Union army from the South to Cairo, Illinois – a town that held one of the largest contraband camps. The steamboat in the background was hired to take these people up river to the camp.



F3. "What do I want John Henry?" Alexander Gardner, ca. 1862.

This titled albumen print depicts a Union officer and his contraband servant John Henry. Able-bodied former slaves often served in the Union army as servants, laborers, cooks, and guides. Though there were fighting regiments of blacks, like the 54th, it was also their experience to serve as servants in the largely white army. Though African Americans fought in the war and dealt with the same hardships as their white counterparts, they often faced discrimination and prejudices their white counterparts could never dream of.

F4.

Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph NEWBERN, N.C.

March 27, 1863

Like the tocsin peal of victory the news of the resurrection of Northern patriotism broke upon us a few days ago; and oh! the enthusiasm that burst out in every camp! Every face beamed with gladness, every heart was lightened of its despairing burden. No victory however great and splendid, even to the taking of Richmond, could have occasioned such universal joy and mutual good feeling among the patriotic soldiers...Let the fires of liberty be kindled, be kept steadily burning; let that patriotic association, the Union League, be established in every city, town and township throughout the North, gathering together men of every name and party, where sentiments fresh from the fountains of truth and loyalty may be interchanged, and where, like Marius, true men may pledge themselves upon the altars to freedom, and swear to live or die for their country. Then may the traitor demons plot, and howl, and lie, and hiss, as they see their hopes of agrarianism, dissolution and anarchy scattered to the winds; the army of the Union increased, inspirited, jubilant will march on from victory to victory, crush the last stronghold of rebellion and show to the world that a republic has within itself a self-sustaining power -- that princes were not born to rule, and nations only to obey...

There are about 8,000 contrabands here, working on the railroad, cutting wood, and raising a regiment of volunteers. Philanthropists from the North have opened schools for the instruction of the youth, and the avidity and ease with which they study and learn, is truly surprising; how their eyes glitter with every new discovery, with what satisfaction they enter the school room, how attentive, as if they feared some beautiful would escape their notice; it humbles one to see the efforts these youth put forth to attain knowledge, and it is a grand omen for the amelioration of the race. As soldiers they evince the same traits attentive, active, quick to learn, ambitious, and, above all, courageous; and I will guarantee when put in the field, they will surprise even the cowardly copperheads, whose superiors they are, in everything constituting manliness, worthiness and honor! The Union is safe! The rebellion will be crushed in six months, and these unchained people, fierce under the stings of recent goads, will dash down before the nabobs, who have kept them in eternal bondage, ignorance and degradation, for their own gratification, to administer to their own selfish wants. What a fearful retribution will be visited upon these traitors, who, like Satan, dissatisfied with prosperity, with a government the most benignant ever known, with civil immunities and privileges, unknown to other nations, and with an enslaved race to produce the necessities of life, to jump at their bidding, to fan them while they slept, and tremble when they woke -- who thus favored, thus pampered, attempted at one fell blow to dash down their government, and establish one exclusive as China, proscriptive as Spain, with nigger heads and hearts for foundation, pillar, and dome.

Our regiment, the 158th, is in high, good spirits and health, though deploring the absence of our gallant Colonel D. B. McKibbin, who on the night of our search for the rebels, near White Oak

river, while riding through the forest, broke the fibula of his right ankle, his horse having gotten his foot into a port hole and fallen upon him.

Adieu.

WM. TELL BARNITZ

Group G: The Surgeon Introduction:

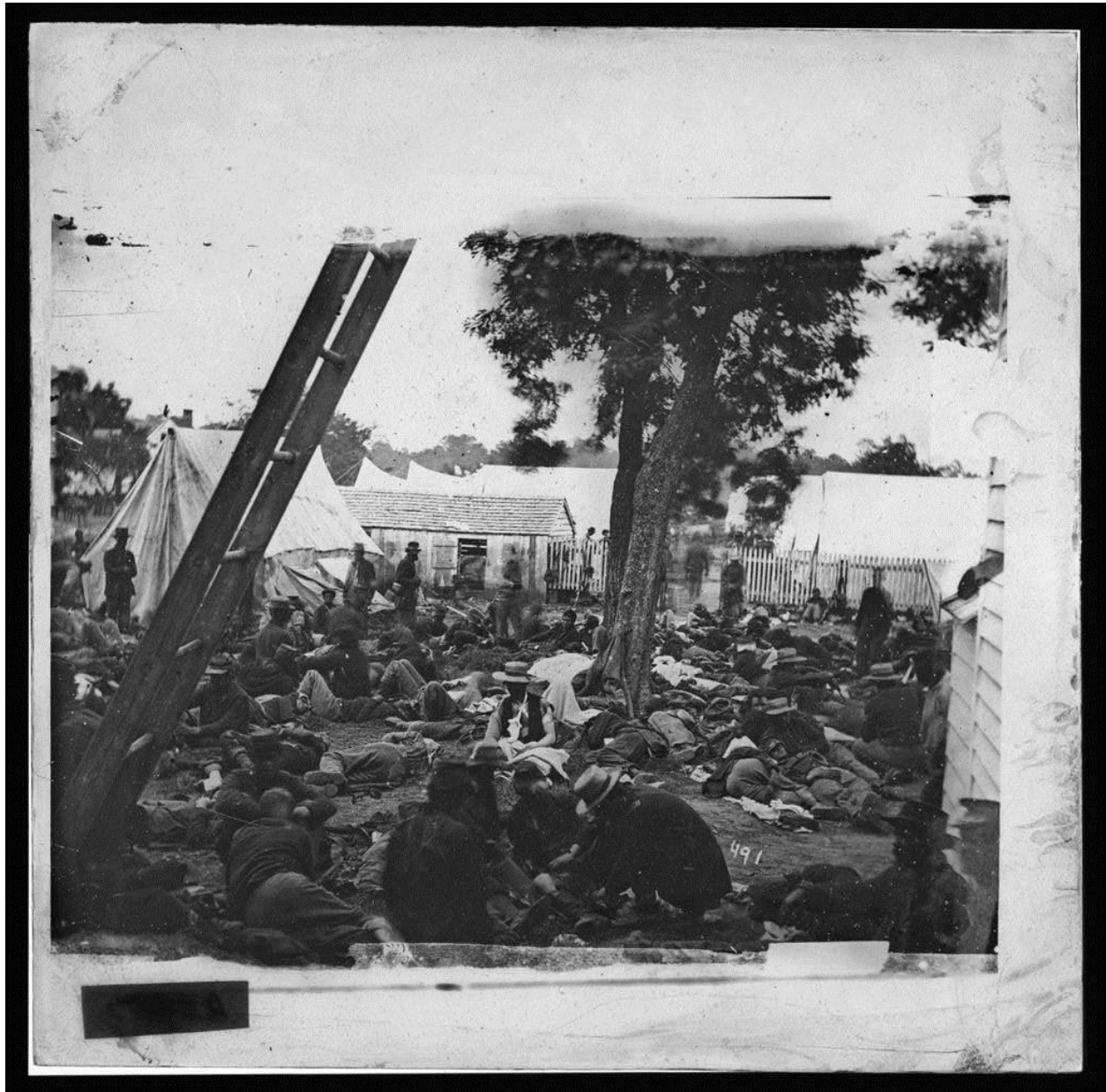
At the beginning of the Civil War, the Union started with 120 surgeons and assistant surgeons. This small number was aided during battle by musicians who often served as stretcher bearers (Daily Life in the Civil War America, 167). As the war went on a civilian corps was organized to assist surgeons, roughly 60,000 would serve in this corps – though few had any formal training. The South experienced an even grimmer scenario. At the start of the war they possessed roughly 30 trained surgeons, and often medical care was left to fellow soldiers or local civilians (Daily Life in Civil War America, 168).

At this time, there was no regulation or formal standard for the training of doctors and surgeons. Though some formal programs existed at schools like Yale and Princeton, these programs lasted one to two years and included little hands-on training. There was no medical licensing board at this time and no proof was required in order for someone to call themselves a doctor. Training for surgeons during the Civil War often consisted of three, thirteen-week semesters of medical school before the student was thrust onto the battle front (Everyday Life during the Civil War, 172). Therefore varying levels of expertise, knowledge, and care were to be expected.

Most of the casualties during the Civil War originated not from a man being killed in action, but from diseases that they caught from their wounds or in the hospitals themselves. Sanitation and proper medicine were often in short supply on a battlefield. In addition, doctors lacked modern ideas about germs and thus often the same equipment was used on multiple patients, spreading infection and contamination to new people. During the Civil War three out of four operations performed on soldiers by surgeons were amputations with the mortality rate for those who received an amputation within a day of receiving their wound was 25 percent (Everyday Life During the Civil War, 173-174). The presence of a surgeon, for all their faults by modern standards, was still better than no medical help at all.

Group G: Objects, Pictures, and Letters:

- 1: "Patients in Ward K of Armory Square Hospital, Washington D.C., August 1865."
- 2: "Amputation being performed in a hospital tent, Gettysburg, PA. July 1863."
- 3: "Patients in ward of Harewood Hospital with mosquito nets over beds, Washington D.C."
- 4: Joseph M. Elkins letter
- 5: Eli Landers Letter



G1. Patients in Ward K of Armory Square Hospital, Washington D.C., August 1865.

This chaotic mass of wounded men is actually designated “ward K” meaning that there are multiple wards just like this one. These men lie on the ground without any aspect of comfort in varying levels of distress. After a battle, chaotic, spur-of-the-moment hospitals like this one would pop up close the battlefield to receive freshly wounded war victims. Point out to

your students that there would be very few doctors and nurses to tend to these men. Often proper medication was not available for these men.



G2. Amputation being performed in a hospital tent, Gettysburg, PA. July 1863.

This picture shows a scene that happened all too often during the Civil War. If a soldier was wounded, often the best way to heal him on to health was amputation. This was often done without any sedatives, with the surgeon using the same knife and operating space for multiple patients. Medicine had not advanced yet to know anything about germ theory – thus sanitation was not utilized during the Civil War.



G3. Patients in ward of Harewood Hospital with mosquito nets over beds, Washington D.C.

This orderly ward is what one usually envisions when you think of hospitals from the nineteenth century. This is a more organized and permanent hospital set up than some of the previous depictions in this section. These men were likely treated right after whatever battle wounded them on the field and then transferred to this hospital later on. Notice that there is no privacy in this hospital, those nets are used to keep mosquitos and thus malaria at bay.

G4.

July 21, 1861

Camp Pickens

Dear Wife,

I take this opportunity of writing you these few lines to inform you that I am well at this present time and when these few lines come to hand they may find you enjoying the same health. We had another great battle Sunday, it commenced at 6 o'clock and ended at 6 o'clock, it was the hardest battle that was ever fought in America. They had 10 to our one--we conquered them, we lost about 800 in killed and wounded. The Yankees lost about 5,000 and we took 1,300 prisoners and 125 horses, baggage wagons and 64 pieces of cannon besides a great many things. I was not in the battle but could hear the report of the cannons which was in very plain view and we was in site of the battlefield, it was a sad and dreary day. I never had spent such a sabbath in my life before I have seen the horror of war. I had to stand sentinel [duty] at the hospital door were I could see all the wounded soldiers. I stood from Sunday 12 o'clock till Monday night. -- I had to be up all night to guard the wounded--it was the saddest thing I ever saw to hear the moans of the wounded and dying. I saw the surgeons operating on them, it made me shed tears to see how they suffered, some had to have both of their arms cut off and some their legs. I saw all the surgeons operations, it was a distressing sight to see them how they suffered--we like to got old Scott, [General Winfield Scott] they got his coat. We have completely routed them. I expect we will attack Washington City next. President (Jefferson) Davis] came here Sunday. He went out on the battlefield, he came round and looked at all the wounded soldiers and shed tears over them, he is pleasant and graceful in his manner --it seemed to put new vigor in his army to see him in their presence.

I have heard and read a good deal about war but I have seen the horror at last. I never want to look into another hospital if I can help myself again. I have nothing more to say about the war. If it should be the will of the almighty for me to go into battle -I trust to be in his care --he has the power to save. I will put my trust in him. I want you to write to me as soon as I can direct it in the care of Captain Williams and how are you getting along and if they have sent you provisions yet. I don't know when I can come up but I will come as soon as I can. I am always thinking of you and the children. I hope I will return to you all again. I want you to raise them right if I should not get back. Nothing more at present but remain your affectionate husband until death parts us.

Joseph M. Elkins

To: Sarah Elkins

Flint Hill, Virginia

Elkins describes the horrors of a field hospital after a great battle. He states that he's finally seen the "horrors of war" and he does not mean the shooting itself, but the terrible aftermath. He does mention that Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy visited the battlefield after the battle finished.

G5.

Saturday, March 15, 1862

SUFFOLK, VA

My Dear Mother,

I this morning take pleasure in writing you a few lines to let you know how we are getting on. As for myself I can't tell the truth and say that I am well but I think that it is the cold and being exposed to the weather and broke of my rest waiting on the rest of the sick. I am sorry to tell such news to you but I reckon I had better tell the truth. All of my mess is down sick but me. E.M. McDaniel has been very bad off for several days but I think he is some better this morning. W.N. Franklin had a hard chill this morning and is now bad off and also W.M. Mayfield had a chill this morning and is now very sick. W.W. has not come back from the hospital yet. He is in Williamsburg though I heard from him. He is improving so that takes all in my tent. There is a great deal of sickness in camp now but no more than I expected for we was the worst exposed of any set of men I ever saw but I hope that I will stay up to wait on the rest of them for they are not able to wait on each other but I fear that I will fail for I can hardly keep up now and have to be up and down all night. If I have to wait on them and drill too, I think that they ought to excuse me from all other duty but they will not do it but I will do the best I can for them but the best is bad enough for we are right where there is no accommodation to be found.

They are in the tent lying on the ground but that is soldiers fare anyhow. I cant write as I wish to for the poor boys is moaning with their pain so bitterly that it has confused my mind till I cant compose it but you need not to expect to derive much pleasure from this letter for there is no good news in it. We are expecting to leave here in a short time and if we do I don't know what in the world we will do with the sick for there is no hospital in Suffolk. But I reckon if we do leave they will be sent to Petersburg? You must try and do the best you can for there is no telling how long I will be separated from you but I know one thing. It will be just as long as the Enemy follows and persecutes us for it never shall be said that I returned home with the enemy pursuing in my tracks. It is now raining and a prospect for a wet spell and if there is one surely some of our sick will die. It looks hard that men should suffer so on account of the infamous Yankeys!

Goodby My Dear Mother.

In this letter the writer discusses how everyone in his mess is sick but him. Often the lack of hygiene and proper nutrition or exposure to the elements could cause men to become sick. Many men died not from battlefield injuries. As the only not sick person in his mess this

solider is taking it upon himself to wait on his friends. This impossible task makes the hardships of camp life that much more difficult to bear.