

George Oscar French (1844-1865)
Civil War Letters – 1863, part 1
Transcribed by Dawn Hance; typed by Joann Nichols; edited by Paul Zeller

Fort Mass., Wednesday morning Dec 7th 63 [January 7]

Friends at home

Yours dated New Years night was recd last night & I hasten to reply this morning, if you have not recd a letter from me since Dec 18 you cannot have got my last. A select few 15 of us from Co. C. were just foolish enough to get up an Oyster Supper at McChesneys out on the turnpike New Years night. I was the only representative of No. 6. we had a first rate supper & good time. it will cost me \$1. you say you have sent & paid for me \$20.96. My State pay from Sept 1st to Jan 1st is 28 Dols. my washing costs 50 cts per month, & I would like to get a bottle of Drakes Plantation Bitters cost \$1.00

I do not throw away any money nor spend foolishly but a Sergt. must make a good show on inspection etc. I never took half as much pains with my clothing. I should like 3 or 4 Dollars, & a few stamps. My health is good but my fingers are so cold this morning that I cant write for Shucks.

Our guards have been doubled & our pickets are to be more than doubled to night. I am glad that Will is doing so well at school. let him go & all summer if he wants to. I would like to see you & Ase. Thornton come down to Brightwood but suppose it is out of the question with you. Smid can skate—eh? Bully for him. You speak of the warmth of dickeys pen, it is a better roof I presume than I sleep under every night. While on guard the other night, with the rain coming down in torrents through the roof of the old guardhouse “I thought of Fathers hogpen” & wished that I had half as good a place to sleep in, it is a wonder how I ever got up as well as I am considering how I have been exposed. I have written to Aunt Ell & Aunt Mary have not recd answer from either yet in fact it is hardly time. I cant think of anything to write. There is one thing. The Army is discouraged & don’t like to be sacrificed for nothing. The prevailing opinion seems to be that Abolitionism is played out & a soldier curses alike an Abolitionist or a Secesh. the weather has been very nice & warm but is growing cooler some. I heard that Sam Brainard had got home . . . deserted—how is it. Are you going to send any thing in Harr [Harrington?] box. I suppose that Bill is going to have a box sent, at any rate I would not send much for it don’t pay Express charges & all

Yours Oscar
Battery C, 1st Vt. Artillery
Washington D.C.

Saturday March 7th [1863]

Father, Mother & all

Your very welcome letter was rec'd Thursday night but I was too sick to read more than half of it then. Yesterday I was better & today I am better still. I have had a hard cough for 3 or 4 weeks & my lungs are weak & out of kilter with so much coughing. If I did not expect to be paid before I hear from home I should ask for money but I will try to get along till pay day. Bill got that \$10. I would like to see some Vermont snow frosty & some that would squeak under foot. I have seen no such this winter seems you are having great times about the bounty money. Well the almighty dollar does look big in some peoples eyes: but how much more than 85 would Mark Hawkins give than come out here & sleep where he could & eat what he could catch: or the Armstrong boys \$125 would not tempt Eg or any of them to soil their fingers with a musket.

I think it would do them good & stop some of their abolition twaddle But let things go & I do not try to see the end nor attempt to say how all this will turn out I wrote to Fay Miller along time ago, but he don't seem to condescend an answer, just as well Exactly. Barker & Ase's wife gone up. Well next I hear suppose will be Ase & Barker's wife ditto. Fools aint all dead. Do you get any of those papers I send? I have drawn a pair of pants since we came out no shoes nor outer clothing except cap. Have drawn a pair of dark colored woolen shirts You see I have made a botch in writing this swapped pages.

I can't think of anything more to write. hope I shall feel better in a few days. There is a great deal of sickness in camp now a days warm weather approaches & we shall have a great sick list I expect. By the way my pass to the city has blown over just as well, for I would not be able to go today.

From Oscar

Thursday April 3d [1863]

Folks at home

I have just finished reading yours of the 29 Mar & I am glad to say it found me feeling better than I have for four weeks. The first duty I have done since I was sick. Was to go to Fort Slocum yesterday with a squad of 20 men for fatigue & to day have drilled 2 hours. I might have played off for a week longer if I had a mind to: but I thought I was able to do duty & so I went on. It was a very warm day to day & hard work drilling. I did not know as Frank owed you anything. What is it for? I think he will play out in a few years. Charlie Bliss has come back after cruising on the Chesapeake Bay claiming protection of Abe's proclamation. [Pvt. Charles F. Bliss, Co. C, 11th Vermont, deserted January 31, 1863, and returned March 30, 1863. He apparently escaped punishment by coming back under a presidential proclamation of amnesty for deserters] nothing was done to him. Not even arrested. By the way I sent a friend of mine to the guard house this morning: very much against my will, but a fellow must do his duty if it is disagreeable. Don't mention it: you may hear more about it sometime. We saw Woodward [illegible] Co. C, 10th Vt. [Pvt. Robert A. Woodward of Middletown, Vt.] I am glad to hear that Ella is so tough. I was afraid that hog meat had sown the seeds of consumption in her system: she looked so pale last summer when I came away from home. I want her picture & some [illegible] if you can get them. I would like some papers & envelopes that you sent me is most gone & anything else that you think a fellow would like & that wont cost much to get up. I did not know anything about Bill's going to have a box. We are daily expecting marching orders. This is no humbug or camp story & I would not wonder if we did not stay here two more weeks. I guess Em has forgotten her big uncle. Tell Bill he must answer the letter I wrote him when he was at Middlebury for I cant think of enough to write to all of the folks. Our orderly has not been changed. Payday is just as far off as ever. They are having a great fight at Drainsville where the first Cavalry is encamped.

Later evening.

The boys are having a cotillion: shavin right down the middle tonight. I suppose that Sam will be or was in that fight. Bill has been to the [illegible] (with two other men) with a prisoner that the pickets brought in to day. Well I have drilled 3 ½ hours to day. 1 ½ since writing the first part of this. I am tired some.

Good night all,

Oscar

[Included in this letter is another letter written in pencil written very light. So light that some parts are unreadable. It is not addressed, dated or signed]

8 o'clock [illegible] no box tonight. The wind blows from the north cold & strong. If we don't get our pay [illegible]. We sleep in our tents about 10 rods from the fort. Cos. C & D at this place. We are going to stockade our tents 5 feet high with boards & it will cost 2.50 Or \$3 a piece to stockade & get a stove etc. As it is we are very uncomfortable in these tents. I got a letter from Uncle John yesterday & from Hen Armstrong [illegible] today. Roll call time. Good night.

[also included in this letter is a small photograph of an unidentified soldier]

Bomb Proof Ft. Mass.
Sunday night [April] 13 [1863]

Folks at home

The long expected orders have arrived. We are to leave here tomorrow morning at daylight. Where no one knows. Our camp is in the greatest bustle of [] you ever saw. Our boys hailed the order with deafening cheers for the front. As you will see I am on guard today. I have a happy family of thirteen prisoners. I am well. Orderly Meeker is a 2 Lieutenant. [First Sergeant William V. Meeker was promoted to second lieutenant in Co. C March 29, 1863] Our co. as you will see is in a great hurry to fight. Frank Kilbourn {illegible} boy is given up by the surgeon for dead: no hope for him. Diphtheria. [Pvt. Frank Kilborn, from Poultney, Vt., Co. C died April 13, 1863] Excuse the look of this sheet. Bill & Tim are well. I recd. the \$4 all right.

Good night

More when I get time.

Oscar

Fort Mass. D. C. April
Thursday 23rd [1863]

Friends at Home

Yours of April 12th was recd. & I have just finished reading yours of last Sabbath. I have not written since on guard 11 days ago. Let me now tell you what adventures the 11th has met with since I wrote you last. After lying with everything packed for a week we at last recd. orders to move at 12 p. m. Sunday last & and by Monday 10 A. M. on the road. Of course it would no be military unless we went twice as far as there was any need of. It rained a little most of the way & in some places the mud was over ankle. I was glad that I had boots on. Well after marching 8 miles to go four we arrived about 3 P. M. at Clifton Barracks on Kalarami Heights overlooking Georgetown, Md. & a fine view of the Potomac covered with sail & steam vessels. We filed onto the parade ground & the whole Regt. Stacked arms & unslung knapsacks & eat our supper in the rain. We stayed there two days & yesterday while on battalion drill we recd. orders to march but the boys were sorry to hear we were going back to our old quarters. Well here we are & here I am writing on the same old seat on which I have written so many letters. I recd. a letter from Cousin Byron last night. They were under orders to march to Poolsville, Md. Saturday before marching we had Artillery practice in the fort. Gun No. 15 fired two shots one solid & one spherical case both splind shots. Some 20 shot & shell in all were fired & all of our Field Officers were present. Col. Nichols of the 14th [Vermont Infantry] & officers from the 112th Pa. (2nd Arty) & 113th N. Y. (7th Arty). Billy Meeker is promoted to 2nd Lieut. & Sergt. Sherman is orderly. [Sgt. Merritt H. Sherman from Clarendon, Vt.] Corpl. Macomber is promoted to Sgt. which brings me No. 4. [Sgt. John H. Macomber from Fairhaven, Vt.] Nichols is home recruiting a new company. [Sgt. Henry J. Nichols from Sudbury, Vt.] he will be lieut. & I shall have a better chance for promotion. but it is a favoritism in the Army. We will be mustered the 29th for six months pay & I wish we might get it. If Bill's box don't come before this get home I wish you would send me a good big towel with my initials sewed in the corner. the boys have stolen my other ones & Bill & I have "captured" two more. Our Regt. Was highly complimented in the city. one of the 2nd D. C. Vols. said we were a Regiment of giants. Everywhere we are praised & we are always proud to say that we belong to the 11th Vt. I will not attempt to discuss politics nor the "Situation." One thing I will say & that is that my grit is as good as when I left home & if I can have my health will be as content to endure as much as any man for the Success of the good *Cause*. When the colors were brought out by the guard on drill parade night before last they were greeted with deafening cheers. the boys grit is good yet. That fellow I sent to the guard house for disobedience of orders. any order given by a Sergt. Not in conflict with Regulations & not obeyed the Sergt. Has but to say to a Corporal take him to the guard house & up he goes. I want Ems & Ellas picture & I will pay for them.

Oscar

[Enclosed in this letter is an undated letter from Oscar French to brother Wilbur]

Dear Brother Wilbur

I was very glad to find a letter from you in one from home today, but from the tone of your letter I should think you were down hearted or had the blues. How will I advise not to indulge in gloomy thoughts or look on the dark side of things as you will thereby lose much of your youthful vivacity of spirit & all to no purpose. Be pleasant & when you think everybody is down on you or that you have a hard time in the world just take down the old fiddle & “drive away dull cares.” You say you have no one to look to for advice. Look to Father & Mother. Their advice would be worth a thousand times more than mine. You say you have altered a great deal so have I some & my position is very much so. There is considerable responsibility resting on me now & I have to be very circumspect in my conduct. Very much more so than if I were a private. You see in the Artillery drill I have the command of 20 men & am responsible for their drill & etc., etc. but I take pride in drilling the boys, which by the means of study I am competent to do & I think it is very much easier than to heave on the heavy carriages or “point” at the traverse circle. I wish you had gone to school this summer, but as it is just as it is. You must have off next fall & go to the Sem all winter. If I had known or appreciated the value of education when I was young or when I had the opportunity to attend school it would have been much better for me now. I am glad to hear you express the determination to be a man & the best way to attain your object is to be a gentleman in every word & active & improve every opportunity for self culture. Be steady, industrious & temperate. Save the pennies. They will come slow at first, but once got \$1.00 & you will then be encouraged to add to it. There is no use in talking. Your conscience & your good common sense will be a sufficient guide for you & if you push steadily on you will in a few years be far more respected than those same people who now “kick & dispise” you because of your poor coat. Jim is going to get Bill write some for him & put in this. He sees the want of knowledge & begins to see how he has thrown away his early advantages.

It is most dark & I must close. I think I have done pretty well this time.

From Brother
Oscar

Fort Mays
April 23rd
A. D. 1863

Cousin Will

I now seat myself to pen a few lines to you. As it rains to day and there is nothing going on and if there was I have a sore hand cannot do much mischief. Well Will we did not stay away from home long. I suppose Oscar has written about it. the day after we arrived. Bill and one F. D. Smith left camp in the morning and were not seen by us till night. [Pvt. Franklin D. Smith, Co. C, 11th Vermont, from Benson, Vt.] I guess he visited the city. He told about the big white house and capital. I guess he went through the principal streets and some alleys. he has been to the city a number of times. he is well. he is well acquainted you bet. you that if Bill is where the most music is he is not afraid of the patrol or any other thing else. he met the captain in the city. I visited the city last Saturday but had a pass and a fine time. I must close. Write soon. Tim Barber

Fort Mass Apr 30th [1863]

Folks at home

Yours of the 26th I just recd. I get them every Thursday when you write Sunday. We were paid off last Sunday & have been to Headquarters to day & were mustered for two months more & here is how I stand

Recd	Paid
20.00	
for five mos washing	2.50
for five mos trade at Sutlers	8.00
from Nov to March	
for one Bottle Plantation bitters	1.00
for one Bottle Cough medicine (Downs)	.25
sending home Frank Kilbourn	.50
Sundries (milk, butter, eggs &c	<u>2.75</u>
Total	15.00
Cash in hand. I have	\$5.00
There is due me good debts	3.50
Doubtful but I think good	1.00

I shall take no more orders on the Sutler it is a shave shop. butter 35 cts & cheese 20 &c right along I still keep my watch, for which I have been offered \$20, it is just as good a timer as there is in the Regt (You will draw U.S. pay \$48 with 7 State the first May makes \$55.00. You spoke about borrowing some this spring . the whole of it is at your disposal) & as sister Al is quite a big girl she will want clothes this summer take some & rig her up in good shape. I don't think much of lending that 30 as you spoke of for W. has told me a good many times, the old man had over \$200 of his money. Wait till Uncle C. tells Bill he cant have 30. & see the wool fly. Bill paid a high price for his watch no better than mine & only cost \$15 when it was new, but is a good watch. I think that Bill has spent his money pretty freely out here, but don't say a word as it will come right back & it is none of my business. Tim has written for money two or three times & his folks do not even answer his letters. The boys are shoving the cards now adays & the shin plasters go & come across the board with eager grasp. I got a line from Sam & Aunt Ell this week all well Tom, U, is not at the Rip Raps [military prison in Hampton Roads, Va.]. he is down in the old Capitol. I should think it would take some of the strut out of him. We had more Artillery practice last Saturday. threw some 10 inch shells over two miles – how they did scoot up into the sky visible all the while. they weigh with only a blowing charge 100 pounds. You have probably got a line from me before now, as I wrote a week ago today. My health is good, better than at any time since coming out here. that warm weather that is now upon us, is stopping my cough & I feel stout & hearty & after being on guard 24 hours. I shoulder a knapsack at 10 A.M. & have marched 1½ miles & back, besides 1 hours battalion drill (with Knap) & back again at 4 P.M. with no other effect than make my hand tremble a little. I begin to have some hopes of being tough again. You say the folks inquire about me & well I am glad of it. I know my duty & intend to

do it - & keep out of bad scrapes. & I flatter myself that the officers have a good opinion of me as I am given the preference a great many times. 9 mos the 6th of May since I enlisted. I am all out of stamps please send fifty cts worth in your next.

Oscar

Fort Stevens DC. May 4 [1863]

Father. Yours of the 10th is before me & I should indeed be disappointed if I did not hear from home every Thursday. I have not much to write. The daily routine of camp life does not afford me much chance for excitement or news. There has been considerable many soldiers here this week from the front slightly wounded & are able to come out here from the hospital in this vicinity. I learn that Sergt. J. Benedict is slightly wounded in the leg. I am sorry to know you put [illegible] in that copperhead sheet the "Herald." Your courage and confidence is not so good. Some soldiers who have been out here two years. Chan says he wont send the 40. Well Bill will withdraw his allotment. Every cent of it if he don't & what better off will he be? I spoke to Bill about loaning him \$23 to pay for the watch & his only answer was an ominous "harrumph." I could see that he did not think much of the project & so said no more about it. Jim gets a letter to night from home but as he is at Fort Slocum I don't know what is in it. I wrote to Uncle John about some shoes & sent you a paper the same night. I expect the shoes will cost about \$3.50 or \$4. I want them light for summer. These boots are good as new but under this horrid sun my feet are scalded now. More than they ever were in Vermont. I have got to have something very light. You will have to send them by themselves wrapped in strong paper & they will come all right. Take a receipt for them & send it to me so that I can present it at the express office. I want Ella's picture anyway. I should like the rest of the folks but it would cost so much & then I have no real good place to keep them. 10 months ago to day Co. C went to Brattleboro. Quite a spell ago. After defraying expenses for Chas etc. let Willard have the rest or do as you like with it & I will be satisfied. As you say, there will be a row if Chas don't send the \$40. I write for Tim to day & he sends some pictures. Very good ones too I think. It is too bad for Tim's money to be used up so. You would think so to hear him talk that he was worth 100,000 or such a matter. As you say so we go all hands around. I was very glad of the stamps which I acknowledge [illegible] 57 cents worth. My health is first rate. The weather begins to be hot in the full sense of the word. As hot as any August day in Vermont. The thermometer it read 80° in the shade day before yesterday. Jerry Callayhan has been discharged from the hospital where he was sick & under arrest at the time. He was a miserable fellow & had worn a ball & chain for two months. [Pvt. Jeremiah Callaghan from Fairhaven. He deserted May 10, 1863.] Nichols two recruits [Corp. Henry J. Nichols from Sudbury, Vt.] & Dave Tillman, Co. D has got 23. Cant think of any more to write this time. From Oscar.

Fort Stevens May 7th [1863]

Dear Father

Yours of may 3rd is before me. I am enjoying excellent health. More like myself once more. I got a line from Aunts Ell & Mary & Mose Knapp. Mose is "Played out" with life & is boiling mad as ever he can be & growing madder every moment. Bill got a letter from home to day, wherein Chase tells him just the money sent him since coming out, I wish you would let me know how much you have sent & pd for me. I mean to try & save more this summer if my health is good can succeed. I don't think much of letting W have that \$30. & what you don't use I would have in the bank if you can do no better with it. Old Bach Wood is running around with the girls in great shape & those softies Chandler & who dare not enlist are going to be "[illegible]" tin peddlers quite romantic to be sure. Send along the girls picture & if Ella cant rug up take some of those dimes & fix her. I must have her picture at any rate. Yes we had quite a move & felt proud to march with those giants the 11th & if Ben't offered Ella #30. in earnest for Dicky I think she had better take it. Hooker is giving the rebs fits. Stonewall's Army is annihilated. Up to last night there were 11,000 prisoners brought into the city. Clifton Barracks where we were is full of them. They are hard looking customers. Dressed in every style with long shaggy beards & hair & sun burnt faces. There are a great many boys among them. Some say they were well fed & others contrary. I hope they are whipped out good & only am sorry that we were not over there to see the game go on. Confidence among the soldiers could not be better than it is now. When Bill finished reading his letter I asked him if he was going to countermand orders & he said no. You see he has written for forty dollars. Sam says I am the best looking & etc. I pity the rest don't you? All gas the whole of it. Cousin Alice says she is going to teach this summer. Mose Wood is going to be promoted. I guess appearances look like it now. Sergt. Macomber from Fair Haven is home recruiting. You must keep track of him & report once a week to these Headquarters. He is a real nice fellow & I wish him luck. I shall send a paper with this. Another one of our boys has deserted. Gibbs from Canada [Pvt. William Gibbs deserted April 29, 1863] & Fon Moulton while under sentence of "three years hard labor at the Rip Raps & to forfeit all pay for the period" deserted from under guard while we were at Clifton Barracks. [Pvt. Charles A. Moulton from Poultney deserted April 23, 1863. He was pardoned under presidential proclamation and returned November 15, 1863., and returned to duty.] I cant think of much to write only we have had two days of rain & quite chilly. The peach orchards were in full bloom two weeks ago. We will capture some of them this fall. Nine months last night since I enlisted.

Love to all

From Oscar

Old Fort May 20th 63

Father

It is the close of a very warm day. I have been on fatigue with the boys to day & am quite tired, but my health continues good. We are having very warm weather down here, such as we have in Vt. in August. I have little or no news to write. one of our boys that deserted & went to Canada has written back to one of the boys from C. West, & sending his best regards to Capt. Walker &c. Hen Steele is in our camp every few days he is clerk down in Union Mills, Va. There is great talk of the 11th going home June 1st on the ground that we are 9 mos men & some pretend to say that we are registered so in Washington, but I cant see it in that light & have offered to bet my watch again 1-20 that we shant go home June 1st. I am very sorry that there is any talk about poor Frank. there is not a boy in the company that regrets the paltry sum paid for sending home the remains of a comrade, on the contrary many of the boys offered to pay 5 & 10 if necessary & I would pay the last cent for such a purpose, but in no case was over 50 cts taken & all the boys paid that like men & we have agreed to send home every boy that dies in the comp'y while we are out here. Majr [Myron Wood of West Haven, Vt.] Wood (Corpl) did not pay but 50 cts [This is in regards to sending the body of Frank Kilbourn, from Poultney, Vt., home who died April 13, 1863] I am sorry I mentioned anything about it. They say that we shall quite fatigue work & commence drill in a few days. You ask how Will Alford gets along. [Pvt. William A. Alford from Poultney, Vt.] Well I don't wish to write anything home: but it is impossible for him to stand at "attention" as it is for a frog to put men through "squad drill" he never made a soldier like motion in his life. The towels &c arrived Saturday night all safe & sound. I got all that you said was sent. Em appears to be very scrupulous about sending me her picture or even putting in a word when you write. her terrible anxiety for me is: or seems to be: "played out" Such is generally the case with those who make a big fuss when a soldier leaves his home their torrent of grief: dries up as soon as it burst forth. – "Time: the tomb Builder" shows us things in their true light. & our mushroom friends of today, are our despised enemies of tomorrow: the mask is thrown off & we see them in their natural style & we are benefited by the sad experience. Such was the case with Hen Armstrong & F. Miller. When I came away. "Oh I must write." I did write: & a scornful silence is all I have got for my pains henceforth they are my enemies. I would see them die for a drink of water before they should get a drink from my canteen. Enough of this –

I recd the acct & I am satisfied. the \$8.50 I beg you will accept from me & not pay it - & if you or the children want anything that money will get I shall consider it a favor if you use mine when you draw it – I am out of money & wish you would send me \$2.00 the next time you write & after that 1.00 a week. I may never come home & I am bound to have some of comforts of life as long as I do stop. this will just make the \$5 a month as intended. Sister Alice must not be offended. I love my brothers & sisters alike & never thought of such things as you mention.

Fort Stevens D.C.

May 31 [1863]

Folks at home

I have finally found time to answer yours of 24 which came to hand Friday. I am enjoying the best of health & we have been very busy for two days past. Friday the pay rolls came in for the mo. & were signed in the P.M. Yesterday was a very busy day with us. We went to Slocum for pay & cleaned out the bomb proof & moved into it then we built a table the whole length of our Barracks & had our regular drill & dress parade besides & last night at half past 12 the bugle sounded "to arms" I don't like to brag but I got dressed &c before the Orderly was awake & was the first Co. C man at his post. I rushed to No 15 but not a man of 4th Platoon was there. I went back to the bomb proof & sung out "No 15 gun every man at his post". & done it cool & flatter myself that in case of real danger I would be on hand. We drilled about ½ hour on the double quick & retired. as a general thing the boys were on hand in good time only our Co is in the Fort. to stay one month & to be relieved by other cos in turn. I recd \$10.00 & shall enclose \$5.00 to you. You will draw \$24.00 State pay \$7 makes with this \$36.00. You can probably salt \$30 this time after paying for shoes. I owe nothing here & have money enough to last a while. You can omit sending the \$1 (weekly) till I let you know when I am out. I recd the \$2.00 in yours of the 24th. I got a letter from Will & answered it, sending to E. Poultney. I got a letter from Sam he says Batchelder in Rutland wants 5 or 6 carpenters. 10 mos the 6th of June since I enlisted you see I count the time. Some of the 2nd Vermont boys were here this week. Lon Hodges & Dad[?] Trainer. [Pvt. Alonzo D. Hodges from Rutland, Vt., Co, B, 2nd Vermont Infantry. Pvt. Lawrence Trainor from Castleton, Vt., Co. B, 2nd Vermont Infantry] I must have Ellas picture at what ever cost & I should like Frank's in the same card. Yes, I am down on the copperheads whether North or South. Mark it wherever you will there is no party among soldiers 9 months of service shows me how the "goose" hangs & what little proslavery sentiments I ever possessed away from entirety. It is useless for gentlemen of the G.C. to prate about radicalism: usurpation: illegal arrests: abuse of power &c & the thousand sneaking pretences that secesh in the North tries to choak its damned principles. Soldiers don't see it in that light.

The N.Y. Herald is not their tactics. You cant stuff secesh down the necks of Uncle Sams blue coats no matter in what form. I have seen men who had lost both legs in the service of their country in this war take on a terrible frown: at the mention of Vallandigham & swear by everything big & small that they would like to tear his heart out. As for myself I breathed the principle of Freedom in the pure air of the Green Mountain State & I cannot go any of the Heralds stuff & I hope when the 11th goes home that Col. Jim will order the Herald office torn down & I bet you twould "go up" quicker than you could say Jack Robinson.

Enough of this
Bill & Tim are well
From Oscar

Fort Stevens D.C.

June 5th [1863]

Father

Yours of the 1st was recd last night & found me well & enjoying myself first rate. We have just been having target practice: & No 15 made the two shots & we only fired 2 & this under the supervision of your graceless son. I tell you what it is .. I am considered only inferior to the cap & Orderly on Artillery for a week past we have had our regular midnight alarms & I have not suffered a man in bat. C to get the start of me. About that horse: I was exonerated from all blame by the investigating committee Capts Hunsdon (Bat B) & Walker & Lieut Goodrich & I was not out on duty . but have come off guard & went down to discharge one piece (26 men I drew them to the front in one rank there dressed & fire by Company: ready, aim, fire & the horse dropped with an ounce & half ball through his heart. You talk about discipline: there was no lack of discipline: the men were respectful & done as ordered by myself . the truth is the horse was pretty near the line of fire to the target & suffered for his boldness. I do not care anything about it as I am all right & in fact I have not been reprimanded once since I have been in the service – by the way, there is every prospect of our leaving here soon. An order was read on dress parade the other night to the effect that all women [and] wives of enlisted men must leave camp, & if we do move I shall box up some of my blankets & extra clothing. Five companies of the 2nd Mass. Cav. Came here on Monday & camped about forty rods south of the fort. I sold my old pen for \$1.00 only cost me .75 & bought this for \$1.75 this ink is thick & poor. I got the Express bill but have seen nothing of the box, such things are brought to Headqtrs by the brigade teams & we bring them from there. You are mistaken in your idea of fatigue duty, fatigue duty is duty other than military. such as hoeing corn for instance & digging rifle pits. I think Ab has done more such duty than Bill & both for the past 10 mos . the report here is that Jerry Callighan is in Rutland Jail is it so? We were reviewed the other day by Brig Gen Barry inspector Genl of Artillery. he complimented the Regt very highly. I wish you could be here this P.M. & see Batts B D & I fire at the target, with 10 & 30 pdr Rifle Ps 24 pdr guns 10 inch coehammer & howitzers—

Two oclock, quit at eight to see the other cos fire. They have just finished firing about 40 shot & shells. You have probably got the \$5 before now. I don't mean to use up \$1 per month & am glad that you did not send the \$1 this week I will let you know when I want more . seems to me if the strings were short you could have got some of Valiquette. So much – Oc

For Stevens D C

June 15 [1863]

Friends at home

I got no word from you last week .. but I got a line from Em which I answered I also got a letter from Byron [Morgan] to day. The 10th had a skirmish with Mosbys Cav. the other day. The 2nd Mass. Cav. five Cos. Of which are camped here went out on a scout to Leesburg Pa via Poolsville & returned via Long Bridge after riding 300 miles in four days with only three feeds in the time. I tell you their horses looked hard Saturday night when they got back. There is great excitement around here in regard to Lees advance into Maryland. It is reported that he has taken Harpers Ferry & is going right on into Pennsy'a It is very evident the Rebs must make some bold push to recover their desperate fortunes before long . & It is evident that they are going to take advantage of the weakening of our forces by the going home of two yrs & 9 mos men & invade us on our own soil. Our Captain said today that we should probably have a chance to fight in a few weeks & he said there was going to be a special order issued to the effect that all women must leave the camp in three days. All this looks like work. We get our 5½ hours Art. Drill every day. We are drilled in light Art with 10 pdr Parrotts. & the Mechanical Maneuvers with heavy guns &c such as Limbering up. Shifting guns from the firing to the traveling bed. [illegible] "rolling" mounting & dismounting heavy guns Mortars &c Last Friday we had more firing at targets The Colonel said Sargent French what is the time of flight & how would you cut the fuse of a sph: case [spherical case, a type of shell] for that target (1450 2/ds) I said "four seconds." Load your gun with sph case said he. I loaded & cut the fuse to suit myself. Majr Wood was gunner & we lived. The shell burst the instant it struck directly in the centre of the target ., The best shot ever fired at that target. Of cours I feel proud of this shot. I shall probably hear from you one week from Thursday & the next time you write please put in \$2.00 as I am out of stamps &c & shall send this "Soldiers Letter." It is time for dress parade & I must close.

Love to all,

From Oscar

Tuesday June 23d 1863

Folks at home

I have got just 20" to write this letter before dress parade & consequently will be a short one. I got a letter from Will last week & answered it. I also got one last Friday. I forgot to mention that I got the box the 9th about a week from the time it left home the shoes are a first rate fit I have been rather out of sorts for few days past but am feeling first rate now. have been to some expense & have got another work on Artillery \$1.00 am in debt \$5.00 which I wish you would send me the first opportunity. This may look rather big to you. But as the papers say It is a military necessity. By the way do you get any of the papers that I send you? I have been to the city since I wrote you got a pass for 5 hours, & in that time went all over the Capitol. Post Office & Patent Office & wrote my name in the book of visitors at the Patent Office from Castleton Vermont 1st Arty. There is enough in the Pat. O. to occupy ten years of a mans lifetime. Among other things the coat, pants & vest that Gen. Washington wore when he resigned his commission. Japanese & Morveeo Egypt curiosities & documents & treaties with all nations of the Earth together with about ten million Patents, from a clothes pin up to the most complicated models of machinery ever thought of and in the Capitol, paintings & statues &c. I had not been there since the night we came to W. & then did not go in & as I stood there beneath the Rotunda I tell you I felt big & said to myself Let the Rebs keep out of here while I live. A man that can look on Washington's relics & have a disloyal thought had ought to be hung & quartered. I could not. At any rate - & when I stood in the Senate & thought how Vallandigham had profaned the place, I was quite angry, by the way, not [sic] living can exceed the splendor of the Senate Chamber – It is a big thing, marble & gold. Well I must close this requisition will make \$7.00. Good night

This from Oscar

[Bottom of a page to unknown letter, possibly 5 July 1863. Oscar E. Wells, Wallingford, died of disease 30 June 1863.]

One of our boys died with small pox in the Genl Hospil

O.E. Wells from Wallingford. He leaves a young wife & child He was a good soldier & we shall miss him.

Sunday July 5th P.M. 1863]

Dear Mother,

I have just come in from the front & somewhat tired of course. A week ago today there was great excitement around here. Mosby's Cavalry captured a train of 150 negroes out on the pike from Tenlytown. most of the wagons were burned & we could easily see the smoke from here. In the P.M. this Post was reinforced by 1500 cavalry & 1000 Infantry. The Rebel Cavalry were seen in Silver Spring only three miles from here & of course in easy range of our guns but in a hollow & out of sight. Sunday night I went on picket with 20 men "& posted some of them 1½ mile beyond Silver Spring" in an old church. Last night our advance pickets (Cav.) were driven in & fired into by a mounted force but on returning with reinforcements, nary Reb could be seen. Nights we sleep on the gun decks with equipments on & to play the boys are at work like good fellows. since this last scrape we get no rest of consequence by the movement of the armies. Our line of works is on the extreme front & we see more of the pomp & circumstance of War. The old Vermont Brigade passed only a few miles from here by Fort Alexandria & could easily have went & seen them if I had known it. I traded my watch off for a Remington six shooter & \$2.50. Retail price \$30. a bran new one carrying a ball the size of Colts Navy. I felt a little safer last night going the rounds with that chap on my belt. I got it cheap don't know whether I will buy another watch or not. I got the \$5 all right. I sent it home, thinking I would try & save it, but there is no use trying to save too much for it wont work. I got a letter from Em & shall answer it soon. Report is that our folks have nearly annihilated Lees Army. At any rate there has been almost incessant cannonading for three days past. Some big fourth of July guns. All the debris of war begins to accumulate this way struggling soldiers, sick and footsore mules, horses, niggers &c &c. Friday Gen. Woodburys pontoon train passed here for the city. It took over two hours for it to pass. The same bridges over which the Vermont Regiment at Fredksburg last winter. I don't hear from Byron. I guess the 10th is getting its rations nowadays. I got a letter from Father. Eleven months in the service tomorrow.

Oscar

Fort Stevens D.C. July 18th [1863]

Father

I got yours of the 12th yesterday. I have not much to write that will interest you I am well as usual & we have had most three weeks of constant rainy weather, some of the time raining as much as I never saw it at home. The days roll by “& I have served 11 mos & 12 days” you see I count them you speak about the pistol it has paid for itself already, for duing the campaign in Pa & Md I went on picket some 7 or 8 times & it was a comfort to have it on my belt going the rounds in the night. Some 2½ or three miles all alone. I asked the privilege of going out three nights in hopes to get a pop at them. We fired on some two nights, but don’t think we fetched the feller. Picketing is rare sport, for then is the time we get plenty of milk eggs &c don’t the chickens have to suffer? One night a darky brought us a fat hen, & turned round & brought a force of 20 mounted Rebs down on us, next day we caught the boy, (I mistrusted him the night before) put a rope round his neck “swung him up & got it out of him, he showed four cts. they give him to tell them.

I see you don’t ever mention the recent successes of our army—not even congratulate me on the splendid resistance that your political brethren in New York City. Your Fernando Wood & C.L.V. & Seymour men & a host of others some from here & Baltimore. I should think it would make you feel proud of the excellent way in which the teachings of your favorites “the N.Y. Herald & World” have been carried out. I tell you that it is a very pleasant thought for me & one that I delight to dwell upon to think if we were ordered to N.Y. & if my Father were there he would join the Rebels (Democrats) the very men that are my deadly enemies, for I cant see the difference if I were in your place I would throw all my allegiance to the Peace croakers, “alias” men who are down on the “Imbecile Gov” at Washington “alias” copperheads “alias” Vallandigham men, & be somebody, or in the words be an unconditional Union man like your scapegrace of a son for the Stars & Stripes shall wave & I am but one of millions who say, I Swear it & in all solemnity I say as long as there is a piece of me left that piece shall be devoted to the good cause. I never go back on a good thing.

I got a letter from Will the other day & shall answer it soon.

Respectfully,

Oscar

Sunday July 26th

Folks at Home,

Your last reached me Friday but for one reason or another I have not answered till now. We were paid off last Monday up to July 1st of my \$10 I was owing \$3 & have bought a watch since one that Jud Lewis brought out & a first rate one of course. [Corp. Judson A. Lewis of Poultney, Vt., Co. C, 11th Vermont] I did not have the ready in full & wish you to send me my entire State Pay the next time you draw. You may think I don't need both but I am none sorry that I have paid out so much money for these – for I tell you a pistol is the best friend a fellow can have in this country . my stamps are played out too & perhaps .50 cts from the 7 would be well laid out in stamps. Charles Bliss tried his hand at Deserting again after payday, but was arrested in the City today & brought here. [This was Bliss' second desertion attempt] I should not wonder if he was shot for he is a tough boy. The affairs of the company & myself are prospering. Billy is now commissioned our Capt & he & Lieut Meeker assured me that I should be promoted soon but I don't count on it much for there is many a slip between the cup & lip.

I might have written something in my last “that was offensive” if so, I beg pardon. I was hasty & you will never know what is to be between two fires.

All that is wanting to make a soldier happy & contented with his lot is to feel that he has the entire & undivided support of every man woman & child in the North, but for a man to think that he is liable to be shot by some lurking rebel in the streets of New York as well as in the forests of M^d or V^a is very unpleasant to say the least. I am glad to hear that Hen Armsg [probably Armstrong] is drafted but it will do no good for of course he will pay the \$300. the question in my mind is whether Uncle Chan will pay the \$300 & keep Ab. at home. I think he wont, but Bill thinks he will. Time will tell. Tim gets along very well for a man that does as much blowing as he does. he got a black eye last week from his blow

Oh hot. You people are perhaps thinking that it is hot weather in Vermont, but you are very much mistaken. You ought to be out here just one of these hot glaring days. Everything is wilted and shrunken & everything glares & lolls. The tough mules push along through clouds of dust & by reason of dust & sweat look like grey rats. With the mercury 105 & 108° in shade. The excitement attending on the Maryland & Pa campaign is fast dying away & our camp is relapsing into its usual dullness lively to a stranger but tedious to the boys who have lain six mos. in the same camp. I do not hear from Aunt Ell or May, though I have written Aunt Ell twice since she wrote me. Do you hear from Sam Dowling lately? Report is that he is wounded & in Hospital, if so I pity him, for I know something about such matters, & mother must not worry for me for I am not only well but tough as a bear the trouble is I don't do work enough for my health hardly, but just enough to give me an appetite. [Sgt. Samuel Dowling of Fair Haven, Vt., in Co. H, 1st Vermont Cavalry]

Speaking of Draft you say, I could have had 300. more today &c now I don't care about that, for if I have as good luck as Goodrich tells me I will in six months command over

\$100 per month but don't say anything till the time comes for I really don't expect it for there is so much gas in this thing but I beg of you not to let Will be bought to come down here on any considerations for I think too much of him ever to see a knapsack on his back I am on guard today & in a great hurry so excuse the appearance of this sheet