

Zenas H. Bliss, of Calais, Vermont, enlisted as a private on June 24, 1862 in the 9th Vermont Infantry Regiment, Co. I. He was promoted to 5th Sergeant at Chicago in January 1863, to 4th Sergeant at Yorktown in June, 1863 and to 3rd Sergeant at Newport Barracks, North Carolina, in November, 1863. In August 1864, he passed General Casey's board, and was commissioned Captain of Co. K, 28th U.S. Colored Troops. He was mustered at Poplar Grove Church, September 18, 1864, and served with that regiment until discharged in January 1866 at Indianapolis, Indiana. He was present in action at Winchester, Harper's Ferry, Suffolk, Virginia, Newport Barracks, North Carolina, and the capture of Richmond. In June 1865, he was ordered to the Texas frontier with the 25th Army Corps, and was on duty with Russel's brigade at Corpus Christi.

This collection includes correspondence between Zenas H. Bliss, Harry A. Morse, and John W. Martin, of Calais, Vermont, during the Civil War. Most of the letters are written by Bliss, who served with the 9th Vermont Infantry Regiment, and the 28th U.S. Colored Troops. He writes of camp life and the passage of regiments past his post at Fort Tyler. After the surrender of the 9th Vermont, he writes of his time in Chicago. His final three letters are written from Virginia and describe the movements of the 9th Regiment and the health of Calais men. As well, he writes to discourage Harry from enlisting until he is older.

There is one letter written by John W. Martin to Harry A. Morse, dated February 4, 1863, in which he describes the health of the Calais boys and relates an incident in which a member of his company was wounded in the hand by his rifle misfiring.

Letter 1

Fort Lincoln Sept 26th [1862]

Dear friend knowing that you air ancious to hear from me I now endeavor to write you a few lines to let you know that I am well and tough yet and enjoying myself first tare. we air encamped within a few rods of Camp Lincoln about five miles from Washington Sitey. there is half a dozen forts rite in site of hear. we have bin to work since we have bin hear digging rifle pits stringing them along from one fort to the other. in the hole we have dug would amount to about five miles in length. Fort Thy. Sept. 28 Dear Hary the orders came for us to fall in and I had to stop writing till now. We had orders to pack, march and take our tents down. the is all broke up now and plased round into 7 different forts. Our company is plased at Fort Thyer it is right on a hill within a few rods of the railroad whare all the troops pass to go to Washington. thar is a regiment passing most all the time. to day thear was a regiment from Jersey and 6 hundred men from vermont to fill up the old Brigade all in one string of cars. they stoped down hear waiting for another train to come along and we had a chance to see them. I see James Hargen among them and sevrll others that I know. you can not think how they rush in hear a regiment once in about two owers all day long and day after day. they think we shal stay hear now till another spring but we dont know. when the orders come to march we start and we never know whare we are going till we get thare. thar is a comperney of a Pencilvaney Regiment hear with us and a joley set of good Boys they air two. you beter think as long as we stay hear we shal

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From the collections of Vermont Historical Society, Barre, VT 05641-4209

have a bulley good time. Thar is vermonters hear most every day to see us and it seams rearley Like home hear and fact I should not think thear was meny folks left to home by the looks out hear. I wish you could see the farmers hear thear is thousands of ackers hear with nothing but weads on it and all trampled over with troops. Macclelands army and Pope passed hear the day we came into to washington but we did not get up hear soon enough to see them. I would not hesertated to give my old hat to seen them but perhaps I shall have a chance to see them yet. I hope I shall at eny rate. I dont know as I can think of aney more to write this time as the batles they have had out this way we dont know any more about them you do. you have the papers to read as well as us. we have a daley paper twice a day hear and you get them up thear bout as soon as we do. when they was a firing we could hear the guns rumble. that was all we knew bout it till we got the papers. I spose you have got your falls work dun up thear. I want you shouls write what you air doing and all the knews and who is going to keep school and all about the folks up thear and not let the school teacher hug the girls this winter. tell your mother that when the nights get a little longer I am coming down and have a game of ucre and I guss I will come down and take super with you to night if I hear the bell ring. good by for this time. give my love to all inquiring.

From
J. W. Martin

write soone as you get this

[John W. Martin from Calais, Vt. The 21-year-old farmer enlisted in Co. I, 11th Vermont Infantry Regiment on August 13, 1862. He was promoted to corporal on December 26, 1863]

Letter 2

Fort Thyar Oct 3 [1862]

Dear Hary

I received your letter last night and now I hasten to respond to it to let you know [sentence in fold and illegible] enjoying life first best. I was glad to hear from you and that you was going to school. you must study and learn all you can and not kiss the girls. I wrote you a letter a few days ago and I presume you got it as soon as I did yours. I should wrote before but I had but little time to write then. we have got our rifle pits dun and we have more lasure time now. our Regiment is divided into seven diferent parts and placed to the forts. our Company is placed at fort Thyar. I beleave I wrote about it in the other letter if I aint mistaken. thear was fifteen thousand men past hear yesterday to reenforce some of our armes. day before thear was 10 thousand past hear and whare all the men came from I cannot think. they air going past hear every day and I began to think thear is know endto them but more the beter. we like to see them. it loks as if this cursed rebellion could not last always. our Colonel bate [bet] a months pay with Capt. Reice that we should be at home in three months but I shal beleave it when I see it and not til then. at any rate I should like to put my months pay against his that we should not. if I can get home in a year from now and have the war over with with it will be as soone as I expect. this

four noon we Boys have bin a riging our tents up a little and you beter beleave we have got some fine little Houses to live in. we got a lot of poles and lade them up log house fashion about five feet high and then put our tents right a top of it so it makes quite a room. then we took some small poles and laide them close to gether about two feet from the ground then cut some seder bows and laid on them then put our blankets on them and it makes quite a bed to slep on. our living hear is also good. for Breakfast we have bred and meat. for diner we have meat and bred. for supper we have coffee bred and meat only [off page] I dont know as I have got any more to write. tell your Mother that I should liked a piece of her pork pie pretty well. tell hur next time she has any to let me know and I will come down. give my love to Emma and your parent mam and my aunt mam and my aunt and al of the folks up thear. you must write as soone as you can for I like to hear from the folks often.

from

John W. martin the world over

Letter 3

Camp Tyler

Chicago Ills. Oct 9th 62

Friend harry

This is the first good chance I have had to write since I came into the service. I have got a good table to write on now. We are encamped upon the Chicago Fair Grounds and have good barracks to stay in. The worst trouble with our camping ground is if it only rains half an hour the mud is shoe deep but there is no rebels here so we do not have much guard duty to perform in fact we dont have enough to do to keep us in good health I fear. Although we have not very many sick ones.

We have had pretty hard times since we left Vt., but I presume the papers have kept you well informed. The prospect is we shall not see any more such times very soon. We are all prisoners of war now, and for myself I am not over anxious about ever being in another battle. The rebels shoot buckshot considerable which is not at all pleasant, but were I to face them again I could do it without flinching. The reason of our being taken at Harper's Ferry is because Col. Miles was an old traitor. He said before he died that he sold us for \$11,000. That would amount to a little less than a \$1.00 per head. Wont that rather cheap, but it gave us an opportunity to see an army of 100,000 men with Gens. Jackson, two Hills, Longstreet and Lee in command. These Gens. were no better dressed than the privates and rode no better horses. The soldiers were all worn out ragged dirty lousy and half starved.

They said they were constantly kept on the march and had been for the last 2 months. It did not seem possible for them to hold out much longer.

The great question among us now is what is going to be done with us. It is the general belief that we are soon to get to old Vt. I hope that is the case for we can earn more and benefit government more at home than here. If we do go home I'll come and tell you all about the good

times we have had since we came into the service. I'll come and teach the school this winter if I get home in time and we probably shall.

Write again soon and have a hope that we may either be exchanged or sent home soon.

Respectfully Yours

Zenas

Z. H. Bliss
Co. I 9th Reg. Vt. Vols.
Chicago
Ill.

Harry Morse
Calais

Zenas

Letter 4

Camp Douglas
Chicago Ill. January 15th 1863
Dear Friend Harry

The bloody Ninth is exchanged at last and soon will be marching along toward Dixies land.

We were exchanged the 10th but have not received marching orders yet, and where we are to go is not known. There are all sorts of rumors afloat. Some seem to think we shall go down the Mississippi, some to Kentucky. Others to Washington from there across the river into Va. where the other Vt. boys are, but I should as soon think that we may be landed some where on the coast of North Carolina. I dont want to travel the same road that we have once, but want to see some new places.

Gen. White was here yesterday and looked us over, and made us a very complimentary speech. I guess he wants us in his brigade, but I hope we shall not be, for the western troops are mighty fellows to shirk.

I was so near sick when at home that I found it impossible to come and see you, but never mind I shall come again sometime if I live. I cannot write much mote for I have about as much as I can do all the time & have written this at such Rail Road speed I guess it will be impossible to read this. So good by. if you write soon direct to Chicago if nothing happens I shall get it. I hope you are having a good school this winter. Write me all the news. Adieu

Z. H. Bliss

John H. Morse

Letter 5

Fort Mass. Feb. 14 [1863]

Friend Hary

Your letter was received a few days ago with pleasure and now I will try and write you a few lines to let you know that I am well. Silas is sick with the measles. he has bin unwell for a number of days. last night was hard sick. to day his measles air all out nice and he feals better and I think he will come out strate if he dont get cold. William is a good. Martin he has had the [measles] got over them. he had them very light. there is a good many sick now with the measles and thear is two in our regiment that have got the small pox and if we have that I guesswe shall see a sickness of us. the old surgeon is vaxinating the boys now as fast as he can. the boys dont have so much fertiag [fatigue] work to do now as they did a weak or two ago. they air driling now when they aint doing guard duty. they hafta go on picket every other day now. I have not done any for a fortnight. now I am detailed for a cook now for a couple of months so I do not have anny guard duty to do now thear was one of our Company got his hand all shot to pieces last night while doing picket duty he was on his post thear was a man going to run by him and he ordered him to halt so he started and turned round to run back and would not stop to pass so he fired at him but did not hit him and he went to ram another cartridge down and the ball & ramrod went through his hand it broke it up badly. his name was eddy from Marshfield [Pvt. Tisdale Eddy of Co. I, 11th Vermont. He lost the use of his right hand and was transferred to the Invalid Corps on December 24, 1863]. I do not think of much news to write this time so I shall hafta close for this time. give my best respects to your Father Mother and my love to you.

From your friend

John W. Martin

Fair you well for this time

write soon

Letter 6

Camp Douglas

Chicago Ill. March 8th 1863

Friend Harry

I have been little neglectful in answering your letter, but never mind better late than never as the old maxim says. My health is very good yet. I don't have so much as a cold this winter. I suppose you are resting now so as to make a lot of sugar. I would like to come & help eat it with you, but I don't expect to. We get along with our secesh finely. About one hundred have taken the oath of allegiance & many more will I presume before summer, if they are not wxchanged & sent south again. They do not die so fast as they did and appear to be very well contented to stay. We are expecting some more soon. When do you suppose we shall come home? I am afraidnot much before our time is out, aint you.

Transcriptions by Paul Zeller

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James is alright I believe. We lost a fine man from our Co. yesterday. Melvin V. Burnham [Burnham, from Calais, Vt., died on March 11, 1863] died about 2 o'clock of congestion of the brain [an accumulation of blood in the cerebral vessels]. He was sick only a very few days, but did not have his senses at all. All those we have lost by death from the Co. were the healthiest men we had. None have died. Eight have deserted. Thirteen have been discharged & one has resigned making a total loss of thirty one out of eighty-three. We have absent sick nine & one sick in Quarters and three privates on extra duty, one Sergt. leaving for duty, three Commissioned & 11 Noncommissioned officers & 37 Privates. But I have gabbed enough. So good By.

Write again when you get time.

Z. H. Bliss
Co. I, 9th Regt. Vt. Vols.
Chicago
Ill.

Harry A. Morse
Give my respects to Father & Mother.

Letter 7

Camp Douglas
Chicago Ill. March 24th [1863]

To Dear Friend Hary

Good morning Harry? How are you prospering through the long cold month of March way east in old Vt. Every thing goes lovely here & the Goose hangs high and now I must tell you about that Goose, how it comes to hang high. You see I got a pass yesterday until twelve o'clock midnight & so took my gun & a dozen catridges in my box & started for Shaggy Pond about four miles distance for a good hunt and plenty fun I had to. There were a good lot of ducks on the pond. I shot four & two rabbits & some prairie chickens. This occupied most of my time until dark nearly. I had a boat ride to get the ducks then started for camp. I had proceeded about a mile when I came to a small house & saw a fine lot of Geese. Ah ha thinks I. Tell myself I must have Goose. I managed to entice them a goodly distance from house then drew bead on a good fat one & fired. The "Minnie" passed through the air and in its passage nearly severed her head from her body. I then took a double quick for the foul and well I did for after I had gone a short distance I could hear the Lady that owned the unfortunate Goose calling me loudly but I was under too good headway to stop easily and so kept on my way rejoicing. The Goose is nicely dressed & will be baked for Dinner tomorrow. One of the Sergeants has gone to the city now after the fixings for the feast. A pair of prairie "chicks" are now in the pot for dinner today. The other game I got I have distributed among the boys. Tomorrow afternoon I am going to the lake & get

a nice meal of perch. They are very plenty here & much larger than those you get in the pond. We are going to get some pay this week or next they tell us but I don't believe it. But we are going to leave Camp Douglas in about four weeks, not for the South, but to the other side of the city about fourteen miles from here to the Northwest. We are now to the south of it. There is a river near the place. It is much higher ground & will be a much better place. They are going to throw up this camp. The lease of it runs out & Government doesn't feel able to pay so much as is required for the use of this. It will be further from the city so there will not be so good a chance for the Rebs to hide when they get out as now. How many have escaped I do not know, about 20 I presume, most of them have been again. A great many have taken the oath of allegiance & been liberated. I guess there is very little danger of our regiment going to Dixie before June certain & I guess not then if the prisoners are not exchanged.

Hiram Hall and James Martin are both well. Hiram is a carpenter & James is on guard. We have been having a long rain storm but it has all cleared away now. There has been two heavy thunder showers, one Saturday & one Sunday. There is no frost in the ground now & as soon as it dries off a little the farmers will commence their Spring's work and each day now is warm enough so that a man does not suffer in his shirt sleeves. We do not have any fire amount no day unless it is raining.

But I have lengthened with my ribble rabble & will bid you good by.

Write again & oblige

Your Friend

Zenas Bliss

Harry A. Morse

Calas

Vermont

Letter 8

Suffolk Va. May 28th 1863

Dear Friend Harry

Would you like to hear from me again before you write me an answer to my last? I have waited some time. I make my mind that the letter must have been mislaid or miscarried or I should have heard from you ere this. We are enjoying life very well now But expect to leave here soon. We are all ready now waiting for the word to go. Where we shall land we have not the remotest idea. I think we shall go to the Potomac Army, but I hope not. I should much rather go with Grant he seems to do something while the other make Grand retreats. My health is excellent. I am now with the Brigade Quarter Master. Whether I shall go with the Regiment or not I can [not] tell, But I can't write more now so good By.

Give my love to your Father & Mother and all Friends & oblige
Direct to Washington

Zenas Bliss

Letter 9

Fort Yorktown Va. July 11th 1863

Dear Friend Harry

A very long time has passed since I last wrote you so I will Hastely address a few lines to you now. My health is very good. I hope you are enjoying the same great Blessing which many are deprived of.

After leaving Suffolk we came to this place & remained about one week & a half then went up to White House from there then back to West Point at the juncture of the Matapona & Pamouky Rivers, which together form the York River. We came from West Point back to Yorktown last Wednesday & now we are inside the fort & expect we shall stay here a long time that is the prospect now. The men are all very well. Don Jacobs of our company is the only one in the hospital here [Pvt. Don L. Jacobs a musician in Co. I. He did not recover his health and was transferred to the Invalid Corps on July 1, 1864]. The Surgeon says he will have a run of the fever, but not severely.

I am hoping now that it will not be necessary to keep the Ninth in the service longer than fall for it seems to me that the Rebellion must have received its death blow in the fall of Vicksburg and now it seems probable that the Potomac Army will be quite successful in annihilating Gen. Lee's whole Army. If they do I can not see much more to be done. Give my respects to all inquiring friends. Write soon
& oblige Your friend Z. Bliss

Letter 10

Fort Stevens D. C.

Jan. 6th 1864

Dear Friend

I have a few lasure moments I will improve in writing you a few lines to let you know I am well and all rite. so air all the Calais Boys fealing well. the new recruts some of them air having the measles now but none that you would be likely to know that has come down with them yet all of our company had them last winter that had not had them before but we have over 60 new recruts in our camp and how many of them has had the measles I dont know but I hope most of them have. we have got a full Battery now. a hundred and forty five men and most of the other Companys in the Regiment air full. we hafto drill most of the time now when it is not two bad weather. it has bin very nise weather hear most of the time. it commenced snowing last Monday and snowed most all day. the snow is but four inches deep. the first snow we have seen this winter. it is rather cold hear to day but it cant last long as soone as it clears of it will be warm enough when the sun shines.

I received your kind letter some time a go and was very glad to hear you were well and trust theas lines will find you remaining the same. I believe you sed if the war did not end with in a year you should be out hear. I should like to see you very mutch and admire your spunk but I were want to to see you out hear. Harry as a soldier till you air as mutch as seventeen years old

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for it is a place that they can not favor a boy mutch and if a fellow is not pretty tough they will have him on a stretcher carting him of to the hospetall but I rather think or hope by another year they will have the rebs used uo so they will not nead any more men. I have not time to write mutch more this time so I will close with my best respects to Harry.

J. W. M.

give my respects to your Father & Mother and all my Friends and write again soone & oblige
yours

Friend Johnnie