

On the morning of September 9, the regiments of the Vermont Brigade were drawn up ostensibly to witness the execution of William Scott. The firing squad took its position, the prisoner was brought forth, the death sentence read, and then, a pardon was issued to the prisoner. Just eight months later, on April 16, 1862, William Scott was mortally wounded at Warwick Creek midway between Lee's Mill and Wynn's Mill, Virginia.

William Scott was born in Groton, Vermont, in 1839 or 1840. Today, there is a marker at the site of the Scott homestead, which is located on the road (now Route 302) between Barre and Wells River. Seventy-nine Groton men enlisted in the Union Army; 29, including William Scott and two of his brothers, died in service. William Scott's story is a classic example of how history is often rewritten. His plight was a closely followed human interest drama, reported by numerous newspapers. The event created such high interest that the story of the "Sleeping Sentinel" was printed in raised letters for the blind, a copy of which is currently in the Society's collection. As details of the story were embellished, the truth became more difficult to determine. In later years, many challenged that idea that Lincoln had pardoned Scott. However, in 1997, the original court-martial and pardon documents were discovered and authenticated. William Scott had indeed been pardoned by President Lincoln at the request of the enlisted man's regiment.

These letters written by William Scott are in the collection of the Vermont Historical Society (MS 973.732 Sc86).

Letter 1

Camp Grffen, October 13, 1861

Absent friend I received your letter from you and robe and was glad to hear that you and the rest what is left was well & I think the time that we was looking out for our one soldier's welfare time is but short at the longest we are certain time is like a thief which come in the night when we think not I heard that Edwin darling was dead and Burnham dead to Charles Emory got a letter which told us the news but may God be with the widows and the widows by the hand of God helping me so as I shall win day out rid the storms of affliction and land our soldier on the other side of Jordan and land our weary soldier home to rest where there will be no death there where we shall have it all peace and harmony there it stands our in hand to be ready for death at any time for in such an our you think not the sun of man cometh to destroy the earth this is about the matter tell Daniel and John folks that I am well and hope they be well Nancy rit and I will I would like to have her rit tell Plumers folks that I send my best love to them and the of rest of them round there tell pages folks that the boy is all well now tell Elin that rake hay with her I can't rit much more now direct your letter to Washington D C Camp Griffin third Vermont volunteers messengers this from your friend Wm Scott to Peter Welch

Letter 2

Headquarters [5th] Regt.

Co. K

Camp Griffin Nov. 29 1861

Absent but not forguton frend it is with the grates of plasur that I set dow to let you now that I gut your leter in Levs the other nit and was glad to her from you and the rest of the folks thar and geler to to her that she had gut so that she could spel a litle you aske her if she dose help sam to tend the mill now the boyes is all fuly wel her now the wether is vry cold her now the ground has ben whit her now we went on a revew the other day it was a fine sit to se tham thar intfry and artily to and Cavlry thar was about ninty thousan thar they sad it was a fine sit to se tham the next day we went out on A forgen Party we went about nine miles each day it draged us out puty wel now thar hant much nuse her now all the nuse is to cep a stiff uper lip tel nancy that she must not forget the folks out her Jane I should like to be thar this winter to have a pot pie this is all that I can think of now s you must excus me rit as son as you get this this is from your frend Wm Scott to Peter Welch

Letter 3

Camp Griffin Va.

Janary 17/62

Absent but not forguton frend it is with the grates of plasur that i set down to rit a few lines to you to let you now that I am wel at present and hop that thes few lines will find you the same I take this present opotunty to rit to you thes few lines to you for i hant had eny leter from you for som time and I wanted to her from you and I thought I would rite a few lines and se if you would rite and let me now what you ar about this winter thar hant nothing new her now but we have had about 8 inches of snow her this time and it hant all gon yet it is vry muddy her now and it ranes her evry wonce in a litel while and that cepes it so rite a long so i don't think of much to rite but give my love to all inqiren freds thar has ben a number of new recuts com out her that i now Charles Gones and Gardner are tel rubes folk to rit if thay can get time i hant hed eny leter from tham or you for som time tel mr plumers folk that i send my love to tham tel elen that i herd from her for som time nor eny of the nabors so you must excuse me for not riting eny leter for it is bad Plase to rit her so rite as son as you get this so gad by this is from your best frend in va Wm Scott

Letter 4

Camp Griffin Va

Mar 1/62

Dear cusion it is with the grats of plasur that i set down to rit a few lines to let you now that i am puty wel at present and hop thes few lines will reach you the sam i rsevd your vry welcom letr

last nit i was glad to her from you and the nabors to thar hant nothing new that I can rit but i hop
thes few lines reach all ingoing good helth our regtment is puty helthey now lev and tink is wel
now tel be that he must cap up[---]od surize for we ar agoing to conkr the rebs bymby and com
hom you tel morris that he musent be to hard on the gurles but be enuf for tham but i should
think that he was rather hard up to haf to go with that shang hiy of Sim Pages but evry won for
thar on noson i cant think of much mor to rit but tel be that if he is aminter be carful with my dog
he may hav him to run a litl but i want him to be vry carful of him I cant rit eny mor in this letr
so i must bid you good by this is from your friend Wm Scott