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'My Dear Wife'

A Soldier's Letters

Written by Philip H. Goode
and transcribed by Edward W. Vollertsen

A week after Shiloh

Pittsburg Landing, Saturday, April 12, 1862

My Dear wife

. . . I don't expect to get [this letter] finished for several days because it is a long painful effort for me to write. . . . Our boat arrived at Pittsburg Landing Sunday, April 6 at 4:30 A.M. I got up early and finished a letter to you and packed my trunk, ready to leave the boat. I couldn't see any signs of leaving so I took my writing materials and was about to begin another letter to you when Major Belknap told me the enemy had attacked us and we were ordered onto the field. I tell you the truth, dear, there was no alarm so far as I was concerned, I was glad of it. It was the opportunity we had long wished for. I took off my uniform coat and put on a blouse top, ripped the bugle off my cap, filled my canteen with water, put a few crackers in my pocket (I had no breakfast), fastened up my trunk and was ready. Captain Blackmar was acting officer of the day and it was thought that he would not go out so I called the Company in line, examined their guns and gave them cartridges. A great many were sick. We only had about 48 out. I told them what we had to do and what I would expect of them. About this time the Captain came and took command. We marched up on the hill and halted and drew up the Regiment in line of battle, the colonel, Lt. Colonel and Major rode along and talked to the boys. With few expectations the boys were cheerful and full of spirits. Deransel was on duty at the boat and did not go out in the morning. Van did not go out at all.

We were left on the hill an hour waiting orders. We could hear the reports of volleys of musketry following each other in quick succession and the heavy booming of cannons. The wounded were brought past us by loads, some horribly mangled. At sight of these, some of the boys' nerves quivered a little but most of them stood firm.

At last the word came "right-face; forward march" and the column moved forward with firm tread, hope and determination marked on every face.



COURTESY EDWARD W. VOLLERTSEN

Margaret "Maggie" Goode, years later.

Would you know, Maggie, what I thought of? I thought of you, I had always intended to have a letter written to you, to be sent in case I was killed but it was so unexpected I did not get it done. I went to the Captain, told him if I fell to write to you, but before I could finish my feelings were too strong, my voice gave way and I rushed back to place at the side of the camp. Maggie was it unmanly? I could not help it when I thought of my wife and little ones I might never see again, but I was resolved to do my duty. On the road out (it was 3 miles) Colonel Dewy rode along the lines, shaking hands with most of the officers and a great many men. He came to me, offered his hand, "God Bless you, Phil." Maggie, from that moment I loved him. He proved himself a man in the hour of trial and is the only field officer that is worthy to hold his position. We were deceived in men before. We know them now. When I got to the field there was no discipline at all. Colonel Reid first confused the boys by giving wrong orders. He once gave an order when he wanted the men to face the enemy and fire so that it brought in line with their backs to the foe and right under a galling fire. It was not their fault they obeyed his orders. As soon as the proper command was given they faced right and fired without flinching. This was the command we got all the way through when we got in it. The Colonel would say fire, we would give the command to the company and they took deliberate aim and blazed away like good fellows and then he would say stop firing, as you are shooting our own men. This was not the case, but it confused the men. My private opinion is he didn't know which end was up and I hope the next battle we go into he may be too sick to go out. The last hour we were out I never saw a field officer. Each company acted independently. Captain Blackmar was wounded and taken away. I was hurt so I could not use a

weapon, but at the time I did not suffer any pain. We were under a heavy front and flank fire from musketry, grape, round shot and shell. The ball whizzed past us and tore the trees almost around. A shell burst on an encampment just in the rear of us and set the tents on fire, they blazed up furiously. Men were falling on every side two or three at a time. Three of our own company were already dead and many wounded.

Two of our Regiments over on the right had given way, most of our own Regiment had gone. Should we stay there? I looked around, saw Major off at a distance and called to him, Major, what shall I do? He replied, "I don't know." I felt like shooting him off his horse. He was taking care of Major Belknap. I turned to the boys and said, "Boys, give way but don't run." Retreated to a ravine about 100 yards back and halted, but our company had been much scattered in the action and many were disabled. The rest of the Regiment had gone and for me to go back with the little handful would have been to sacrifice them. I would not do it.

When we first got in the bullet range I was scared but I don't think anybody could tell it for I would not allow myself to dodge. I soon got over it and I don't think I ever felt cooler in my life than on the bloody battlefield of Pittsburg. . . . The ball broke my finger in two places so the shattered bone stuck out through the skin, then the bullet passed into my hand. I did not get it dressed for 24 hours. . . .

. . . Monday morning my finger was amputated. But Maggie I can't write much more. I have been two days writing this. We gained the day. You will hear all through the papers General Halleck is here, made a speech last night. He says if as much is done in the next forty days as have been done in the last 20 then we will all be home in 60 days. We may have another fight here or may push on to Memphis if the Rebels retreat. Keep up your spirits, dear wife, it can't last long. . . . Oh, will I have so much to tell you when I come home. Leave the minds of those who think we won't get paid for we have now been in service, but when the pay will come I don't know. I think early in May. Kiss the little ones for me. . . . Your loving husband.

Coming home

Sat., May 24, 1862

Dearest Maggie

. . . My resignation is accepted. I expect to start home in a few days. I am trying to get my pay. Should a battle begin before I leave I shall stay and

see it through though I do not expect it. . . . I feel somewhat disappointed for I have always looked forward to the time when I might come home with the company. I feel as if my military career is ending rather ungloriously but I cannot yet get the consent of my mind to leave you longer in your dependent and friendless situation. My health is very poor. . . . I am quite unwell now, took a dose [of] calomet yesterday and last night . . . a dose of oil. I hope that the trip home with change of air and better diet may improve my health. Deransel is getting rugged and in fine spirits. My leaving does not seem to trouble him at all. Wats is still lame, I'm afraid always will be but otherwise in good health. . . . Goodbye. Phil

Reenlisted and waiting

Head Quarters 4th Iowa Battery

Thibodaux, La., Dec. 24th, 1864

My darling Wife

. . . Eight years ago at this time you and I dear were sitting by a big log fire at your father's house. We were spending our first evening as husband and wife. How well I remember every incident of that day. . . . When eating breakfast I thought this time eight years since I was in a sleigh going to meet my bride. About 9 o'clock I arrived and how well, dearest, I remember my feelings when I first saw you attired in your bridal dress. . . . In our conversations what air castles we built and what fond dreams of the future we entertained. But tis for none of us to read the future and this is fortunate. . . . Of those who were with us in the evening a Dear Brother, Deransel, fills the honored grave of a gallant soldier. . . . Mat and Fanny, one at that time a young lady and the other a child, are both widows. . . . Today I took my flute and played "do they miss me at home?" "Sweet Home" and "when this cruel war is over." They made me feel sad and I wound up with "Bonnie Blue Flag," The Marseilles and "We'll rally round the flag" to raise my patriotic ardor a little. . . .

. . . I expect tonight the little stockings, four in number are hung in conspicuous places where Santa Claus cannot fail to see them.

. . . Now darling, cheer up your lonely heart. Rest assured that your husband's love and anxious thoughts constantly hover about you. Kiss all our little ones for me and tell them their Christmas gifts as well as one for Ma will be forthcoming between this and spring. Good night Dearest, pleasant dreams. Affectionately Phil □