

1995

"Your Most Obedient Son": The Civil War Letters of William Tell Cobb

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"YOUR MOST OBEDIENT SON"
THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF WILLIAM TELL COBB

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Michael P. Ludwick

1995

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Approved, May 1995

Boyd Coyner
Boyd Coyner

Carol Sheriff
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Scott Nelson
Scott Nelson

To my wonderful wife, Suzy, with whom it seems I have never been without and, God willing, never will

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Lastly, the author wishes to express his eternal gratitude to his parents who gave him the opportunity to receive an excellent education; and to his wife who unfailingly believes in him even when he does not believe in himself.

PREFACE

William Tell Cobb was a common soldier of the Civil War. He shared many of the same experiences that his fellow Union soldiers described in their diaries, letters, and memoirs. Somewhat unusual, though, was Cobb's perspective as a common soldier in various ranks in three different areas of service. He served as a private in the Twentieth Pennsylvania Infantry; an orderly (or first) sergeant, private, and second sergeant in the Fifth New Jersey Infantry; a private in the Second U.S. Cavalry; and finally he served as an ordinary seaman in the U.S. Navy. In his letters home during his years of service, Cobb related his experiences in camp, in battles, on picket duty, on provost guard, and on-board ship. His letters help us better understand the hearts and minds of Civil War soldiers who similarly encountered camaraderie, loneliness, humor, deprivation, idealism, illness, and the horrors of war.¹

The letters presented here are those Cobb sent to his father throughout the war. During the war he also corresponded with other family and friends, but none of these letters appear to have survived. None, that is, except one letter: a very candid letter Cobb wrote to his older brother, Edwin, which Cobb mistakenly sent to his father. The candor of this letter implies that Cobb might have been selective as to what information

¹The Cobb Collection, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. The Collection includes sixty-one Civil War Letters of William Tell Cobb, three letters from Edwin Cobb, one from George Cobb, and two from a Charles Bradway to Samuel Cobb. The Collection also contains a photo of William, William's copy of *The Soldier's Guide: A Complete Manual and Drill Book for the Use of Volunteers, Militia, and the Home Guard*, (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson and Bros., 1861), and two receipts--one from the Adams Express Company, the other from Harden's Express--for items William sent home during the war. The letters in this collection will be referred to subsequently as "Cobb" and, for this paper, will denote William Cobb's letters to his father unless otherwise noted.

was suitable for the folks back home from the "most obedient son"--a phrase he often used to end his letters. With this in mind, the reader should recognize that these letters may not provide a complete understanding of William Tell Cobb; nevertheless, they help to provide insights into the struggles he faced and those faced by common Civil War soldiers.

LIST OF MAPS, PICTURES, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND PHOTOS

All illustrative material can be found in a special section that follows PART III.

A list describing and documenting the material is located there.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the Civil War letters of William Tell Cobb in order to understand his experience as a common soldier. Background material is provided to add context to his comments so that we may better understand him and be able to compare him with his fellow Union soldiers and Confederate counterparts.

"YOUR MOST OBEDIENT SON"

THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF WILLIAM TELL COBB

Once in Mauricetown, William continued to attend school and church. The Mauricetown Academy at the corner of Stable and High Streets served the family's educational needs, while the M.E. Church on Second Street served their religious ones. Samuel, who would later found the Sunday School, not only instructed William on matters of religion, but he also passed on to him his skills as a carpenter. William used these skills to get a job at the shipyard in town as a ship joiner, building vessels that would carry men into the Atlantic.²

Less than a month after turning twenty, William married Emma Harris on March 10, 1860. The couple lived with her parents in Haleyville, a small town two miles west of Mauricetown.³ A little over a year later, Federal troops surrendered Fort Sumter and President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 militia to put down the rebellion. Cobb enlisted soon after and thus began his four-year odyssey as a Union soldier.

* * * * *

Upon receiving the letter William had written on his birthday, his father--forty-seven at the time--may have shared it with the rest of the family. William's five younger

(New York, 1844), 14; Dr. John and Diane Smith, *A History of Mauricetown: A Sea Captain's Village* (John and Diane Smith, 1985), 15; U.S. Census, 1850, Population Schedule, New Jersey, Cumberland County, Downe Township, National Archives. U.S. Census records cited are population schedules unless otherwise noted.

²Cobb, December 15, 1863, and September 29, 1863; Smith, 34; Author unknown, *A History of Mauricetown, N.J.*, (Mauricetown Historical Society, n.d.), 2, 8; U.S. Census, 1860 and 1870, New Jersey, Cumberland County.

³H. Stanley Craig, compiler, *Cumberland County (New Jersey) Marriages* (Merchantville, NJ, n.d.), Book B, 118; U.S. Census, 1860, New Jersey, Cumberland County.

brothers and sisters--George, age twelve; Almira Linda Bacon, ten; Anna, eight; Fremont, five; and one-year-old Dewitt Clinton--accompanied by their forty-four-year-old mother, perhaps gathered around to hear the latest word from the second oldest sibling. In his letter, William sent his love to the entire Cobb family, but especially to his mother and also to Edwin and Edwin's wife, Caroline Collins--nicknamed "Call" or "Coll"--whom Edwin had married in 1858.⁴

Within a few days of William's letter the family would also hear from Edwin, now a first lieutenant on the schooner *C.W. Holmes*. On the day before his twenty-fourth birthday, Edwin would give an eyewitness account of the naval battle on the waters of Hampton Roads, Virginia, between the ironclads U.S.S. *Monitor* and C.S.S. *Virginia* (formerly the U.S.S. *Merrimac*).⁵ These letters home surely helped both sons maintain their connections to the family despite the distance and danger.

While William's letters served to keep folks at home abreast of his recent activities, they also reveal a great deal about himself. His letters indicate that he received a rudimentary education that prepared him well enough for carpentry work and the military duties that faced him. Northern soldiers were better educated, in general, than their Confederate counterparts due to the prevalence of free public schools in the North, but Cobb hardly ranked among the well educated.⁶ He consistently misspelled some

⁴Cobb Family Records.

⁵Cobb Family Records; Cobb, Letter from Edwin Cobb to Samuel Cobb, March 20, 1862.

⁶James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982), 24; Philip Katchner, *The Civil War Sourcebook* (New York, 1992), 102; Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis and New York, 1951, 1952), 358; Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York, 1988), 40.

Most of the analysis of Cobb's letters is derived from comparisons with Wiley; Mitchell; Gerald

simple words and relied on phonetics for other spellings, and his grammar was by no means perfect. Even so, he could spell many seemingly difficult words correctly and was able to articulate himself well enough for his father.

Since most Union soldiers were literate, it is not surprising that during the long periods between campaigns, soldiers took to reading as their main diversion. Cobb enjoyed reading books and newspapers and on several occasions he asked his father to send him some books, commenting on those he was reading. A familiarity with the classics tended to set a soldier apart from the average Billy Yank. Cobb, showing his limitations, humbly conceded that "Homers Illiade is too much for me."⁷

Cobb especially enjoyed reading newspapers, and when he had no money to buy them or if they were not available, he expressed his disappointment. When on the lower Potomac River in February 1862, Cobb happily reported that a great many newspapers were available, but voiced his preference for the news from home. He thanked his father many times for sending him a Cumberland County paper, the *West Jersey Pioneer*, sometimes requesting that his father have the editor, James B. Ferguson, forward the paper to new locations as he moved. The paper, published out of Bridgeton, NJ, had been in circulation since 1851. At the beginning of the war a yearly subscription cost one dollar; by 1865 the price had doubled.

The *Pioneer* ran articles informing the people back home about "their boys" and current events from theaters of war, often with articles written by soldiers themselves.

Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York, 1987); and James Robertson, *Soldiers of the Blue and Gray* (Columbia, SC, 1988).

⁷Wiley, 152-157, 305; Robertson, 82; Cobb, June 6, 1864.

Cobb must have believed in the veracity of newspaper reports to have written, "Father you can tell more about where to write to than I can tell you for you take the papers and you can tell best for wee move so often that I cannot tell."⁸ Sometimes information soldiers provided was too good. One soldier feared the movements of the army would be exposed because someone wanted to be the first one to report the "thrilling news."⁹ Unfortunately Cobb did not address certain matters because he knew his family had already read about them in the papers. The fact that Cobb made these omissions reflects a level of sophistication on the part of his family, as opposed to families of his fellow soldiers from more rustic areas who did not or could not read newspapers.¹⁰

Cobb also distinguished himself by mentioning that he was reading items on religion and morality such as Cotton Mather's, *The Way to Prosper[ity]*, something seen only rarely among the writings of Union men.¹¹ In his infantry days he made remarks about saying prayers or having prayer meetings every night in camp with his company. Alfred Bellard--a fellow member of the Fifth New Jersey (though in Company C) and like Cobb in that he was a former carpenter's apprentice--wrote in his memoirs about the various amusements going on in different companies and confirmed Cobb's remarks. Probably referring to Cobb's Company F, Bellard observed that one of the companies

⁸Cobb, June 11, 1861.

⁹*West Jersey Pioneer*, March 22, 1862, 2. Subsequently referred to as *Pioneer*.

¹⁰Wiley, 184.

¹¹Wiley, 273; Cotton Mather, *The Way to Prosperity* (Boston: 1690).

"held a camp meeting every eve, the chaplain presiding and quite a revival was in progress when we were ordered to move."¹²

Cobb demonstrated his religiosity in various ways. Early on in the war, he and his comrades with whom he shared a tent allowed no swearing. Claiming not to use alcohol, Cobb condemned inebriated men unable to keep up with their regiments and proudly stated that "there was not One man of our Regiment that got drunk on the way so that they had to stop on the road."¹³ When acting as provost guard, one of his duties was to make sure that sutlers--civilian merchants who followed the armies--did not sell alcohol to the soldiers. He said that, unlike most men, he would not take a bottle or two and let the sutler go.

Soldiers like Cobb seem to be have been troubled, especially early in the war, by the contradiction between their image of themselves as virtuous, volunteer patriots, and the reality of fellow soldiers swearing, drinking, gambling, and doing other less than honorable things. As the war wore on, most men, who at the start of the war had censured others for their immoral or ungodly ways, tended to mellow gradually in their criticism. In light of the fact that he spoke little, if at all, about the poor behavior of the men after 1861, Cobb's opinions seemed to have tempered as well.¹⁴

Despite Cobb's feelings about religion, his moral standard was somewhat tainted by his ambition. In his first letter home he stated his desire to come home from the war

¹²David Herbert Donald, ed., *Gone for a Soldier: The Civil War Memoirs of Private Alfred Bellard*, (Boston, 1975), 17.

¹³Cobb, June 11, 1861.

¹⁴Mitchell, 73; Wiley, 28, 248-254.

an officer, and throughout his service went to great lengths--including bribery--in an attempt to gain a commission. Perhaps Cobb's competition with his officer-brother Edwin was the driving force behind his desire for advancement.

With his duties as Orderly Sergeant taking up too much of his time, Cobb resigned his position in March 1862 in order "to study"; that is, to learn what it took to be a commissioned officer.¹⁵ He applied for a commission with the Tenth New Jersey Volunteers and asked his father to help him by getting any influential friends he might have to help his cause.

The commission never materialized, but Cobb tried again in July when he heard that new regiments were being formed in New Jersey. Again, he hoped his father could have some influential person intercede for him. He advised his father, seemingly in accordance with his moral code, "if it...[costs] money and you think that there is any...[chance] for me let it go and I will pay you all back that it costs you."¹⁶ In February 1863, Cobb tried to get a commission in the cavalry regiment he had joined recently and even went so far as to say that if his district's congressman, Republican John T. Nixon, could get him one he would "pay him well for it!"¹⁷ He was ultimately unsuccessful in these attempts, but his ambition supplies us with at least one reason why he was attracted to military service.

¹⁵According to Union veteran John Billings, soldiers would study military tactics, 1) at the request of superior officers, 2) to earn themselves a promotion, and 3) to pass a competitive examination in order to obtain a furlough (i.e., a temporary trip home). John D. Billings, *Hard Tack and Coffee* (Glendale, NY: Benchmark Publishing Corp., 1970), 89.

¹⁶Cobb, July 20, 1862.

¹⁷Cobb, February 6, 1863.

Cobb, like most soldiers, offered little insight as to what led him to volunteer.¹⁸ If he joined to free the slaves, and very few Union soldiers did, he made no mention of it in these letters.¹⁹ In fact, Cobb is unusual in that he did not spare one word about blacks or slavery at all. Alfred Bellard, Cobb's regimental colleague, cited several occasions of contact with blacks.²⁰ Surely Cobb had similar experiences but did not mention them, at least to his father. To Cobb's credit when in some instances Bellard made derogatory comments about blacks, Cobb made none at all. Neither Cobb nor Bellard commented on the Emancipation Proclamation. Cobb certainly saw himself as a religious man, but no letters indicate a hostility toward slavery might have followed from his religious convictions.

Perhaps one of the main reasons Cobb joined the army was to get away from his wife, Emma. In a revealing letter home in November 1861, Cobb begged his father to do what he could to get him a divorce. Divorce would be unnecessary, however, because when he was at Harrison's Landing, Virginia, in July 1862, he learned from his father that Emma had died. In response, Cobb asked his father for the particulars of her death--she had died of "consumption" (tuberculosis)--and said only, "I have nothing to Say conserning her at present but I hope that She is better off where She is than befor She

¹⁸Wiley, 39.

¹⁹Wiley, 40-4, 109; Mitchell, 126-7; Robertson, 10-11. Sifting through mountains of letters written by the rank and file, Wiley polled soldiers on their views concerning slavery. He found that about one soldier in ten had any interest at all in emancipation. Most accepted emancipation only as a war measure, not out of any concern for the slaves themselves.

²⁰Donald, 15, 17, 23, 42, 56-57, 151-152.

died."²¹ Whatever Cobb meant by that statement, the death of his wife of two years and three months did not seem to affect him greatly. He may not have been interested in ending slavery but he was definitely interested in emancipating himself from Emma.

Cobb, like most soldiers, probably joined Union forces for several reasons which may have included ambition and freedom from a stifling home life, but Cobb also expressed a sense of devotion to the Union and duty to preserve it and the system of government it represented.²² In 1863 Cobb confessed his dedication:

I would like to be at home once more to stay but not to stay until the war is over for there is use for me out here at present and it requires the help of every true American Citizen that you know as well as I can tell you...²³

Serving in the army also served to satisfy his feeling of manhood. In July 1862, Cobb commented proudly that he was the only volunteer from Mauricetown and vicinity, and later said after receiving a list of new volunteers, "I think it is time that some of our mauricetown (Cowards) is turned into Soldiers."²⁴ Cobb certainly saw service in the army as a duty and a measure of manhood, the reason he enlisted and continued to fight being so self-evident that it required no explanation.

Although serving in the infantry, cavalry, and navy, gave Cobb views of the war from different vantage points, most of what he did was typical of the branch in which he

²¹Return of Deaths, Emma Cobb, Volume H (New Jersey State Archives), 750; Cobb, July 29, 1862.

²²Wiley, 44; Mitchell, 11; Robertson, 10; Linderman, 16.

²³Cobb, March 27, 1863.

²⁴Cobb, July 20, 1862, and September 14, 1862.

served. As a private in the Twentieth Pennsylvania Infantry, he described in his very first letter home the time-honored routine of squad, company, and regimental drill. Cobb thought these initial days "very easy times."²⁵ Things would change for him, however, when as Orderly Sergeant of the Fifth New Jersey Infantry he was forced to drill the regiment in place of either a sick, absent, or unwilling captain and second lieutenant. Set up in good tents at Rum Point Landing, Maryland, Cobb welcomed the snows of February 1862 which prevented drill. For Cobb, like most soldiers, drilling became something to be avoided.²⁶

Something that Cobb rarely avoided was food. Most Union soldiers were fed quite well in terms of quantity, if not quality, especially in relation to Confederate rations. Cobb related one instance in which the salt pork rations were so fatty that some of the men had buried an entire barrel of meat rather than eat it. Later in the war, though, soldiers could not afford to be so selective. Most soldiers relied on the issue of hardtack, coffee, and salt pork, occasionally supplementing their diet with food sent from home or purchased from sutlers. Nearly every regiment had experienced times when no food was available, but usually in the Eastern armies such conditions did not last for more than a few days.²⁷

Even without money a soldier could get some good food by foraging, as Cobb did when with the infantry and the Second U.S. Cavalry. Unlike most Northern soldiers who

²⁵Compare Cobb, June 2, 1861, with Wiley, 45-47, and Robertson, 47-48.

²⁶Wiley, 53-54.

²⁷Wiley, 225.

traveled through the South, Cobb found the landscape fairly pleasant.²⁸ He complained, as did many, about the seemingly bottomless mud bogs, heat, and bugs that most soldiers on the Eastern Shore and Virginia Tidewater complained about; but he also spoke approvingly about his experiences gallivanting about the Virginia countryside, stuffing himself with fresh milk and cherries.

When in the cavalry Cobb gave accounts of his time on picket duty, feeling out the enemy's position or even fraternizing with the enemy. He also described his duties with the Provost Guard, such as returning stragglers to their units. Having served in the infantry, he found cavalry battles to be considerably less intense than those he fought as an infantryman. Surprisingly, in all his time in the infantry and in the cavalry, Cobb rarely mentioned contact with white southern civilians, unlike Alfred Bellard who told of many such encounters in his memoirs.²⁹ His omissions will disappoint those interested in a Union soldier's thoughts on southern people.

Though Cobb rarely mentioned southern civilians, he did discuss his counterparts in the Confederate army, and during the course of his service, his views toward the Confederates he faced underwent changes. In his third letter home, Cobb insisted on calling the Confederates "sesecionest" and emphasized their weakness in battle. As time went on, though, his language tempered somewhat as he talked about "the rebbels," soon to be familiarized as "rebs." When discussing the battle of Fair Oaks, however, he switched back to calling the enemy "sesesh." In later letters the term "sesecionest" was

²⁸Mitchell, 94-96; Wiley, 96-98.

²⁹Donald, 20, 21, 23, 34, 74, 103, 153-157.

gone completely, and "rebs" often became "Johney Rebs". By the end of the letters he was calling the enemy "Johneys" and "rebs". This seems to indicate that as the years wore on, the Confederates became more human and personal to Cobb than they were at the beginning of his service. Nevertheless, when describing battle he tended to revert back to a sort of dehumanizing rhetoric.

In order for men to kill other men some dehumanization, some distancing of self from the enemy, must occur. Early in the war, entering unusual places, fighting against people not known or understood, dehumanization was easiest. Though Cobb rarely gave the Confederates credit in battle, he must have developed a greater respect for the men in gray and their fighting ability as they continually turned back the Army of the Potomac from 1861 until late in the war.

Cobb probably sympathized even more with the Rebels after having had greater personal contact with them when out on picket duty. In 1864 Cobb described trading with the Johnnies, talking to them about politics, war matters, and women "as friendly as if there was nothing the matter at all."³⁰ Moreover, when describing the attack on Fort Fisher, Cobb was pleased to note that the Rebs thought the sailors' charge a brave and gallant one. If he had had no respect for the enemy, the opinion of the soldiers would have mattered little to him.

Interestingly, Cobb wrote in detail about fraternizing with the enemy to his brother Edwin, not to his father. As revealing as this letter is, one can only imagine how much more interesting it would be to see all Cobb's letters to his brother. Cobb did write

³⁰Cobb, Letter from William Cobb to Edwin Cobb, March 31, 1864.

very openly to his father about other important and somewhat sensitive matters, asking his father's help in obtaining a commission and a divorce. But, for whatever reason, Cobb mentioned talking with Confederates in only one letter to his father and never in great detail.

As Cobb's ideas about the enemy were evolving throughout the war, so were his attitudes about war itself. In September 1861 Cobb told of a man who in a "deranged" state shot himself: "wee beauried him on yasterday morning it is something that I have never done before and never want to do again."³¹ His sensibilities must have been shocked when over nine months later, after the battle of Fair Oaks, he witnessed the burial of hundreds of men--"the most horrible sight that I ever saw..."³². Even so, he repeatedly said that he wanted to "get at the enemy" or "have some fun" shooting rebels.

Cobb typified the psychological strain experienced by soldiers on both sides: on the one hand, they respected the enemy; on the other, they were expected to kill them, and did so, and often rejoiced in it.³³ In order to remain sane and perform under extremely dangerous circumstances, a soldier had to be "hardened" to a degree; Cobb adapted in this way, too. Even so, he seems not to have hardened too much for in his description of the attack on Fort Fisher in 1865 he told how quickly men fell all around him with much the same sense of horror that characterized his earliest letters.

³¹Cobb, September 7, 1861.

³²Cobb, June 9, 1862.

³³Linderman, 3; Mitchell, 79.

One thing that did not change throughout the letters was Cobb's desire to have more contact with people from home. He, like most soldiers, constantly asked for more letters and at times seemed upset and even angry that he did not hear from his family more often.³⁴ Angered when his father suggested that Cobb had forgotten about home, he retorted, "although I am in the army I think of home every hour in the day and it is my last thought at night."³⁵

Not only did he want more letters, but he also wanted to see people from home. When transferred to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, after joining the cavalry, Cobb wanted very much for his parents to come and see him, and fortunately for him they were able to make the trip. No doubt Cobb had a very strong attachment to home, but he deeply felt that his duty was to stay and fight, and with a strong will, he claimed, he would get along fine.

Often when Cobb asked for letters from home, he also asked for money. Having money allowed men to purchase from sutlers food, some equipment, and other small items, rather than be content with army issue. Cobb often did not have money because he either had not been paid--he saw no paymaster for a year after being paid in July 1862--or he had sent most of it to his parents who were experiencing financial hardships of their own. On a few occasions he was forced to send mail without stamps marking them, "soldier's letter," as did many soldiers. Letters so marked would reach their destination despite the lack of postage.³⁶

³⁴Wiley, 189-90.

³⁵Cobb, March 27, 1863.

³⁶Billings, 63-64.

Since he had little money, Cobb often requested that his parents send him boxes with things from home: food of all kinds, tobacco, books, anything he either could not afford or was unavailable in camp. Luckily for him, men generally shared the contents of their boxes. But at times Cobb seemed less concerned about the contents of the boxes than the fact that his family had, or had not, sent him one.³⁷

Perhaps part of the reason Cobb did not receive as many packages as he would have liked was that his family, like many families during the war, ran into some difficult financial times.³⁸ His father had not been able to find much work because during the war few had money to pay someone to build a house. Times were so desperate that soon after Cobb sent money home he would write home and ask his father to send *him* some money. When pay was late and he was unable to help his family, or himself, his letters were noticeably somber and even depressing.

Knowing the family's financial woes may partially explain why Cobb decided to remain in service to the Union rather than finish out his three-year term in the army, which would have ended in August 1864. Knowing there was little work at home, he may have thought that the best way to make money for the family was to stay in the service. His brother George went to sea with Edwin in late 1864 with the intention, it seems, of helping out the family as well. To what extent Cobb stayed in the service out of duty to country or duty to family, he did not say; whatever the motivation, it helped him persevere.

³⁷Francis A. Lord, *They Fought for the Union* (Harrisburg, PA, 1960), 240.

³⁸Mitchell, 67.

Instead of finishing out his service with the cavalry, however, Cobb transferred to the U.S. Navy in April 1864-- perhaps in an attempt to distance himself from danger. He had been wounded on July 9, 1863, in skirmishes around Boonsboro, Maryland, that followed the battle of Gettysburg. After recuperating and returning to his regiment, he continued his picket duties, reconnoitering for several days at a time, often in dangerous territory. So when a General Order was issued in March 1864 allowing transfers to the navy, he applied for a transfer and--based on his work as a ship joiner, presumably--his application was accepted.³⁹

After having served in the army for nearly three years, Cobb found life on board ship quite a relief. Many former landmen joined the navy, making up two-thirds of the sailors in blue. Cobb, and others, found the regular sleeping arrangements acceptable, and he never complained about the monotony that ship duty generally entailed. The boredom was broken occasionally when ships were called on to bombard forts or chase Confederate ships trying to break the Union blockade.⁴⁰

During his naval service, Cobb had hoped to acquire some of the "prize money" that was awarded to ships which captured blockade runners. He may have heard about one ship that intercepted a runner with a load of cotton. The captain of the ship received \$20,000 in prize money for his catch, which was then distributed to the men all the way

³⁹Robert M. Browning, *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron During the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 206, f.n. 23.

⁴⁰Francis Trevelyan Miller, ed. in chief, *The Photographic History of the Civil War* (10 volumes, New York, 1957), vol. 6, 280-282; Cobb, May 24, 1864.

down to the cabin boys.⁴¹ Cobb never mentioned receiving any prize money, nor did he provide much detail about his duties as a seaman.

If, in fact, Cobb was trying to avoid danger by going to sea, he was not entirely successful. In January 1865, he was chosen to join two-thousand fellow sailors and marines for an assault on Fort Fisher, North Carolina. The naval column was repulsed, but accompanying army forces took the fort. Cobb survived the attack and saw the end of the war three months later.

⁴¹Miller, 284.

EDITORIAL POLICY

In editing the letters, Cobb's grammatical constructions, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have been preserved as much as possible. Editorial additions to the letters are indicated with brackets []. When some explanation or interpretation of a word or words is necessary, comments will be italicized within brackets. Any uncertain or confusing elements will be denoted with [?]. When Cobb accidentally writes the same word twice, or makes seemingly nonsensical statements, they will be denoted with [*sic*].

Cobb generally wrote in complete sentences but punctuated erratically and rarely capitalized the first letter of his sentences. Even so, the beginnings and endings of his sentences are clear most of the time from the context. Instead of inserting punctuation where it did not exist, spaces have been inserted to indicate punctuation. In practice this means that the end of a sentence is usually followed with three spaces (representing one space for the period and two others for the spaces following a period.)

When Cobb used punctuation he tended to use commas and periods sporadically and interchangeably. His punctuation has been retained but edited depending on the context. If he used a comma at the end of a sentence two spaces were added after the comma as if it were a period. By the same token, if he used periods to separate items in a series, only one space was inserted after the period as if it were a comma. If no punctuation was used when Cobb wrote items in series, two spaces were inserted to separate words. Spaces have not been inserted everywhere pauses could exist, only where they seem to clarify meaning.

Cobb used other symbols throughout his letters also. One resembled an elongated equal sign "====" which represented either an abbreviation, a hyphen connecting word parts from one line of text to the next, or--when written underneath letters--superscript. Abbreviations have been preserved, word parts linked from one sentence to the next have been put together, and superscripted items have been superscripted in the text. Other marks made occasionally are quotation marks and apostrophes; these marks were written at the base of words so they look like commas, rather than at the top of words as is done today. These and other extraneous symbols have been preserved as best as could be translated from manuscript to typescript.

Cobb's phonetic spellings and misspellings have been retained also. Cobb had a way of separating parts of words we would generally put together. For example, he often separated words that begin with an "a": "along" and "again" became "a long" and "a gain." He did the same thing with other words such as "some times," "your self," "after noon," and so on. Occasionally, though, he would put the word parts together. And just as he separated some words, he ran other words together. "No more," for example, was generally written as one word, "nomore," but not always. Whatever the instance, Cobb's words have been transcribed (as best as they could be determined) as he wrote them.

The challenge of capitalization was handled in a similar fashion. While Cobb rarely capitalized words at the beginning of sentences, he often used capital letters within sentences. Most of his capital letters are clearly distinct from his lower case letters and have been preserved, but two letters, "M" and "S", caused difficulty. Cobb very clearly had formal script versions of these capital letters but rarely used them. He used less

formal looking script "M"s and "S"s that were essentially enlarged versions of the lower case letters, but in many cases it is hard to discriminate between upper or lower case letters. In these cases of uncertainty, the editor has used his best judgment, comparing the letters in question with the relative size of other letters.

The editor was greatly assisted by the previous work of Ralph Paress of Williamsburg, Virginia. Mr. Paress, who sold the Cobb Collection to the College of William & Mary, had gone through the letters himself and had prepared a transcript of the letters with errors corrected. The transcript presented here is based on Mr. Paress's corrected transcript but was changed to reflect more closely Cobb's actual spellings, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar, or lack thereof. Without Mr. Paress's transcript, however, many words and phrases would still be mysteries.

Cobb's last letter, dated July 30, 1865, is not in the Cobb Collection. Apparently, Mr. Paress had the original letter at some point and prepared a transcript--with Cobb's errors corrected--but the letter was subsequently lost. Mr. Paress's transcript was "deconstructed"--with the errors Cobb probably would have made reintroduced--so that the letter would more closely approximate the original.

* * * * *

What follows are the letters of William Tell Cobb. In order to avoid extensive annotation, the letters have been divided into sections with brief introductions preceding each section. These short introductions provide the background for each section of

letters, describing the military context in greater detail than was done in the main introduction. Rather than being intrusive or disruptive, it is hoped that these introductions will place Cobb's comments in context so that readers may better understand and appreciate the letters, Cobb himself, and Civil War soldiers in general.

PART I: "WEE SEE VARY EASY TIMES AT PRESANT": ACTIVITIES IN WESTERN VIRGINIA, APRIL-JULY 1861

In a building that later became a post office on Fifth and Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia, William Tell Cobb enlisted with the Twentieth Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry regiment for three months. After two days of recruiting, April 26 and 27, 1861, the ranks were full. For the next two days men continued to arrive at the recruiting office; more than six-hundred eager men were turned away.¹

Mexican War veterans, most notably William T. Grey who had been a captain under General Winfield Scott, organized the regiment. Following the Mexican War, soldiers who had served under Scott formed the "Scott Legion," and the Legion functioned primarily as a social organization. Thirty-one of the thirty-seven officers elected in the Twentieth were members of the Legion and, not surprisingly, they took the name of their social organization as the unofficial name of the regiment. Grey was elected to serve as the regimental colonel.²

Private Cobb remained in Philadelphia for the next two weeks after enlisting, drilling with his regiment. In the Third Brigade of the First Division of Pennsylvania Volunteers, Cobb and fellow soldiers marched in dress parades and drilled on the state house lawn under the command of Brigadier General Alpheus S. Williams. Brevet Major General George Cadwalader who commanded the division was sent to Baltimore in mid-

¹Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-1865*, (3 vols., Harrisburg, PA, 1869-71), vol. 1, 185.

²*Idem.*

May to help maintain order amidst the violence following the attack on the Sixth Massachusetts in April by southern sympathizers. The Twentieth stayed behind because it was not yet properly clothed or equipped. In fact, many of the arms given to the men initially were found to be unfit for service, potentially more dangerous to the user than to the enemy.³

About the same time the regiment received new rifled muskets it moved to Suffolk Park, an area about six miles outside of Philadelphia, where it continued to drill and practice the manual of arms. Eventually the men were outfitted with high quality uniforms at the behest of Major General Robert Patterson. Patterson, a veteran of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, had been appointed head of the Department of Pennsylvania that included Pennsylvania, Delaware, and most of Maryland east of Bladensburg. By June 3, Patterson and most of his army, including the Twentieth, had arrived in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.⁴

Leaving Chambersburg on June 8, 1861, the army travelled southward until it reached Williamsport, Maryland, on the Potomac River. The army remained at Williamsport until July 2 when it crossed the river and moved on towards Martinsburg, Virginia (now West Virginia). Halfway to Martinsburg, the Federals skirmished with Confederates at Falling Waters, and Cobb related the effects of this skirmish. As the

³Bates, 185-186; Mark M. Boatner, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York, 1959), 926-927; *War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (30 vols. and index and atlas, Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), series I, volume 2, 626, 640. Denoted subsequently as *O.R.*

⁴Bates, 185-186; Boatner, 623; *O.R.*, I, 2, 611.

army moved through Martinsburg, and continued on towards Winchester, Union pickets exchanged fire with Confederate cavalry at Bunker Hill on July 15.⁵

The Federals then turned eastward towards Charlestown (now West Virginia) and the Twentieth was ordered to protect the army's main column. The army, 18,000 strong, fearing an attack by Brigadier General Joseph E. Johnston's 9,000 Confederates, moved further eastward seizing Keyes' Ferry instead of engaging the Confederate forces to the south. On July 19, Johnston, screened by cavalry under then-Captain of the Confederate States Cavalry, James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart, set his army in motion across the Shenandoah River.⁶

The Confederates travelled through Ashby's Gap to Piedmont, Virginia, where they took the railroad cars to Manassas to meet the hero of Fort Sumter, Brigadier General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, for a joint attack on Brigadier General Irwin McDowell's Army of the Potomac advancing from Washington. Because Patterson did not engage Johnston, Johnston was able to reinforce Beauregard and the Confederates fought the First Battle of Bull Run on June 21 with superior numbers, 32,000 to McDowell's 28,000. The battle turned into a rout of the Union army, and on June 27 Patterson was relieved of command, replaced by Major General Nathaniel Banks.⁷

Despite the Union defeat, the inhabitants of Mauricetown, New Jersey, turned out at 8 p.m. at the M.E. Church for a Fourth of July celebration. The *Pioneer* deduced from

⁵Thomas Yoseloff, *Campaigns of the Civil War*, (9 vols., New York, 1963), vol. 1, 162; Robert E. Denney, *The Civil War Years: A Day-by-Day Chronicle of the Life of a Nation* (New York, 1992), 57.

⁶Boatner, 812; Katchner, 15-16.

⁷Boatner, 812; Katchner, 15-16; *O.R.*, I, 2, 171.

the celebration that "it is now a settled fact that not a traitor breathes in Mauricetown; or at least none dare breathe secession sentiment."⁸

On July 24 as Patterson's army sat idle, the Twentieth along with many other three-month-regiments were ordered back to Philadelphia, their terms of service having expired.⁹ Cobb had seen his first glimpses of war in these months; because he reenlisted when he returned home, he would soon see much more of war than he had ever wished to see.

⁸*Pioneer*, July 13, 1861, 2.

⁹Bates, 186.

CORRESPONDENCE JUNE 2-JULY 18, 1861

Camp Gray June 2nd 1861

Dear Father

As I have not written for several weeks I have a few moments to spare and will use [them] in giving you an account of a Soldier's life. We arrived here last [Thur?]sday morning. To Chambersburg on Wednesday night at halfpast 11 in the Cars. The next day we came out here. We left Philadelphia at 11 Oclo[ck] on Wednesday and 11 O'clock at night we arrived here and at daybreak we turned out and went to the Town of Chambersburg which was about three quarters of a mile distant and after remaining there for three or four hours we came out here and pitched our tents and we are here still but we expect to leave here soon. There is about 12000 troops here at present and expect several Regiments more in a few days. When we leave here we expect to march to Harpers Ferry which will be some time this week. We may have some hard fighting to do but I think not. We are now within 11 miles of the Enemy and we are ready to meet them any day. We see very easy times at present. Drill three times a day. In the morning the first thing thing [*sic*] is to get up at the beat of Reveille which is at daybreak and then answer to Rollcall. At half past five have squad drill which lasts one hour. At 7 o'clock have breakfast at 9 O'clock we have Company drill which lasts one hour and at 4 O'clock we have Regimental drill which lasts some times twenty minutes and some times 2 hours and at 9 1/2 O'clock tattoo beats and then every man must be in his tent. Lites must

bee out and all must bee quiet. Such are the roetee[n] [routines] of the Camp Wee have
plainty of Compane[y] here. there is 10 Companey[s] in the regiment and 77 men includeing
Captain and Lieuts and Privets. and each Compane[y] is divided in to messes six men in a
mess and the men in the mess that I am in with is as nice a set a men as I ever saw wee
have prayer evry night befor wee lay down to sleep and wee allow no swareing in our
tent. Father I have charge of the Carpenters tools and do most of the Carpenter work and
I have plainty to do. I expect to stay as long as the war lasts if that is six years I tell you
I feel like fiting. Father wee have the old Flag that the Scot Legion had in Mexico I
wish that you cold see the bulet holes in it. I belive the Orders now is to leave on
thursday morning for Harpers Ferry and I want you to take the papers to here the news
and when you here of the Legion doing aney [thing] grate you must remember me for the
orders is now that wee are to be the advance guard and the other Regments dont Like it
for it is an houner to be such. Father if this war last three years and I live I shall Come
home an Officer of some kind I now have the good will of all the officers and men and
that I shal try to keep I am weel [well] and fat as a pig and hope you are all the same.
Ed¹⁰ give me some money in town to get my picture takeing but I had no time to spare
and did not getit taken and I was vary sory to[o] but if I get back I shall getit takeing. I
wish you to send this to Ed as I have no more paper and Cannot get aney with out a grate
deal of trouble I shall half to stop writing for it is vary damp and raning and the tent is
thin wich makes it very dis agreeable I will writ as soon as I get more paper. Read this

¹⁰Cobb's older brother, Edwin.

to mother and the whole family and dont forget to send it to Ed nomore at presant give
my love to mother and all the rest of the Cobb family and all inquiring friends.

from your most affectionate Son

William T. Cobb

To Direct your letter

Mr. William T. Cobb

Camp Gray

in care of Cap Geo^s W. Dodd

Companey I

Scott Legion

Camp Mereidan June 11th 1861

Dear Father

As I have a few moments to spare I take the Plasure in writing Afew lines to you.
I recived your letter on sunday morning at day brake and was much supprised to here
from you and was vary much pleased for I have not herd from home since I left the City.
you must not think hard of me because I did not write before because I had no chaunce to
write. I will tell you about our journey from Camp Gray untill wee arrive here. Wee

herd on last Friday that wee was to leave the Camp on Saturday on Saturday morning wee recived orders to have evry thing packed up rady for a moments notice and waiteted [awaited] orders untill three O ck in the after noon when the Aid-de-Camp brought orders to march [we] struck the tents put our knapsacks on and started wee had a very warm time of it we arrived here about 6 o ck PM and was to glad to stop the distance wich wee march was about 8 miles there was a regment came out here in the fore noon and there was some of them laying along the road drunk some of them lay in mudpuddles some lay on stone piles and such ahard set of human beings I never saw but I am prowed to say that there was not One man of our Regment that got drunk on the way so that they had to stop on the road. wee have the best reccommendation of aney regment in this secision it is considderd by evry body in the neighbourhood that wee are the best regment that has come along this way. Wee are encamped in alarge Clover field about 200 yards from the railroad this morning about 8 1/2 Ock there was a regment of Cavalry with there Brass Cannon and there was about 1000 men there horses was in the cars and ahapyer set of men i never saw they whare the Rhode Island Cavalry they have gon to Hagerstown and I think that in a few days wee will have some fiting to do in a few days for the Enimies picket guard is within 12 miles of us and I think that wee will moove from here in a few days. Wee are within amile of atown Called Greencastle I have not bin to the town yet for I would rather drill than to run to the town. Father you can tell more about where to write to than I can tell you for you take the papers and you can tell best for wee move so often that I cannot tell. but you must always put Scot Legion. Care of Capn Todd Companey I. The wather is vary warm here at presant and

it makes some of the Boys sweat. wee have had vary poor grub but they say that they are agoing to give us better grub but I dont know if you could let me have a dollar or two to by Eggs and such like with fore [*for*] there is plenty of them here Eggs is 7^{cts} a dozen. butter is 10^{cts} lb milk is 3^{cts} quart.¹¹ and so things is here and a dollar will make a wide differance to afellows liveing wee get salt Pork so fat that wee cannot eat it and hard bread. Coffee for breakfast and Supper. Some of the Companey's took a barl of pork and beauried [*buried*] it in the woods it was so bad that they would not have it Some of then [*them*] has bin com plaining about the grub quit a considerable [bit] and I feel as if I could eat something good with out much trouble. I will write soon [again?] I am well and as fat as a pig off of such liveing as wee get here. if you have not the money to spare I shall have to do without it but it would bee very exceptible. give my love to mother and all the rest of the Cobb family you must write as soon as you can no more at presant.

from your affectionate Son

William T Cobb

NB you tell Zeakele Wills¹² how to direct his letters to me

W.T.C.

¹¹Cobb could purchase these items for less than could his family. At that time in Cumberland County, butter was twelve cents a pound; eggs, ten cents a dozen. *Pioneer*, June 8, 1861.

¹²Zeakele (Ezekiel?) Wills was an old friend who, according to Cobb, had joined the Seventeenth New Jersey Infantry. When that regiment failed to complete organization, Wills joined the Twenty-fourth New Jersey in September 1862. No evidence could be found, however, to corroborate Wills' service. Cobb, September 29, 1862, April 29, 1863; Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (3 vols., New York, 1959), vol. 1, 178-179.

Charlstown V.a. July 18th 1861

Dear Father

I recived your letter of the 13th day befor yasterday and was much pleased to here from home onst more for it has bin some time since I herd from home the last letter that I recived from Mauricetown I received from George¹³ and [?] and that was dated on the 28th of June I thought that you had forgotten that you had a son in the arney for it is the first letter that I recived from you since I [belive?] about the first of June. but this letter that you sent me last done me more good than aney that I ever had from home. I was glad that you directted your letter as you did for it is a hard matter for solders to get letters for they stop on the way and never reach us but the directtions that you put on your letter could not help reach me. it was a little pice of poetry wich all hands took n[o]tice of and said that it was pretty good. Wee left Willamsport on the 2nd of this month and waidded acrost the Potomic it was a bout 2 feet deep and wee crost with [out] aney trouble and then proseeded to wards Martensburg a dis tance of about 16 miles wee marched 9 miles on that day and encamped for the night our encampment was whare the sesecionest [*secessionists*] had encamped that our division had the skirmish with they had left that very morning. perhaps you would like to here something about the scene that was on the field when wee come up I suppose you have

¹³Cobb's younger brother.

red an account of it in the papers but the scene in the field you have not, the first that we saw was a barn and blacksmith shop on fire that had bin set on fire by the first shell that Cap Doubleday¹⁴ had thrown at the Rebels they burning to ashes and when the shell bursted a pice of it hit the roof of a house that stood a bout 50 yards off and knocked the sh[i]ngles off at a grate rate the next sight was a sesessionest in a house that had his legs broken the next was a sesesciones with his arm shot off and the doctor was doing it up he was under a little apple tree on one side of the road and wee saw several of them a long the road that had bin shot by our musketry some had there knees hurt so that could not get along and had to stop and bee taken by us the hardest sight that I saw amongst the whole was one of the sesesionest he had his head shot off by a cannon ball and he layed right along the woods ther was several more of the ded and woounded that wee saw but it will take so much time to tell the whole story a bout them but the ded ones that was left on the road was beauried and the woounded was taken care of. the road was pretty well stained up with blood wich showed that there had bin some woork going on it was not a fair standing fight but it was a runing fight and that flying Artilary of ours done the work up brown for us. if you had bin with us you would have laughed to see how they tore the fences down to get clear of us the fences was torn down for 5 miles they retreated in a vary disorderly manner I will close [writing?] about skirmish for you have herd the particulars before. the next morning after wee encamped 9 miles from Williamsport wee proseeded to martensburg and encamped ther for two weecks and

¹⁴Abner Doubleday. Captain of Company E, First U.S. Artillery. Doubleday had aimed the gun that fired the first federal response to Confederate fire at Fort Sumter. He later rose to the rank of Brigadier General commanding the Third Division, First Corps of the Army of the Potomac. Boatner, 244.

then proseeded to Bunkerhill whare wee stayed at night and the next day untill yasterday morning at 2 o clock and wee left ther for here a distance of about 16 miles and wee are here now and all right too Boot. feel in good spirits hoping that wee will have a fight pretty soon. wee are within 8 miles of Harpers ferry and the field that John Brown was hung in is the next field to the one that wee are encamped in now. I shal have to close up pretty soon for I am getting tired of writing for wee dont have no writeing desk to write on here. I have wrote this letter on my knee wich is vary tiresome. give my love to mother and Ed, Call¹⁵ and keep a good shair yourself. you must not for get to write assoon as you get this no more at present. tell Zeak & Scorp¹⁶ to write and tell them how to direct it. no more on account of room

from your most dutiful Son

William T. Cobb

[Written on a separate scrap]

Direct your letter to the 20 regment 3 Bragade in Care of Cap G.W. Todd Com F Scott Legion dont but *[put]* aney town on it or there will bee *[9?]* cts more to pay when it arrives here. dont fore get to write and tell Zeak and Scorp to bee shure and write with out delay no more

W.T.C.

¹⁵Edwin's wife, Caroline Collins, nicknamed "Call" or "Coll."

¹⁶An unidentified friend of Cobb's from home.

PART II: "IT IS FINE MAUSEIC [*MUSIC*] TO HERE THE WHISZING BALLS
COMEING THROUGH THE AIR": GUARDING THE CAPITAL AND
THE LOWER POTOMAC, JULY 1861-MARCH 1862

After serving with Twentieth for three months, Cobb returned to New Jersey where in August 1862 he enlisted with a company organized in the county adjacent and to the west of Cumberland, Salem County. These recruits, according to the *Pioneer*, "are a robust body of men, inured to labor, and well calculated to endure the hardships of soldier life." Cobb and his fellow soldiers left Salem on August 21, 1861, and arrived in Trenton the next day. In Trenton, Cobb was mustered in as the First Sergeant of Company F in the Fifth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry. Cobb would receive twenty dollars a month from the U.S. Government and four from the state.¹⁷¹⁸

After being fully organized and outfitted near Trenton at Camp Olden, all 861 men left the state on August 29 bound for Washington, D.C., including Roswell H. Reynolds, captain of Company F, and the commander of the regiment, Colonel Samuel H. Starr. Starr, a veteran of the Mexican War and captain of the Second U.S. Dragoons, was assigned command of the Fifth after Governor Olden wrote to Lincoln urging that regular army officers were needed to lead citizen soldiers. Called "Old Grizzly" because of his violent temper and gruff manner, Starr managed to lead his troops despite his

¹⁷*Pioneer*, August 24, 1861, 2.

¹⁸*Pioneer*, August 24, 1861, 2, and June 4, 1864.

Indian pony's tendency to turn its tail to the enemy when under fire. Since the pony did not run, only turned, Starr tolerated the idiosyncrasy.¹⁹

On the way to Washington, the soldiers made a brief stop in Philadelphia where the residents warmly greeted them. In Baltimore the reception was much cooler and the men feared they would be attacked as the Sixth Massachusetts regiment had been back in April. After arriving at the nation's capital on August 30, the regiment would train under the newly assigned commander of the Army of the Potomac, fresh from successes in western Virginia, Major General George Brinton McClellan.²⁰

While in Washington at Camp Burlington, Cobb received several gifts from the people back home. The following article from the *Pioneer* included a letter of appreciation, evidently heavily edited, from Cobb:

When the first call for volunteers to defend their country's rights was heard, among hosts of others who responded, and said, "Here am I," William T. Cobb, son of Samuel Cobb, Esq., of Mauricetown, stood forth, and enrolling his name with a Pennsylvania regiment served for three months with those gallant men, many of whom fell martyrs to the country of their nativity or adoption. At the expiration of his term of enlistment Mr. Cobb returned to visit his friends, but immediately re-enlisted in company F., Fifth New Jersey Regiment, and was promoted for meritorious conduct and military knowledge to Orderly Sergeant in said company, and hastened to encamp with his regiment to Trenton. The citizens of Mauricetown, by voluntary contribution, procured a beautiful sword, sash and belt, which were sent by Adams' Express to Washington. The following letter speaks for itself:

¹⁹William Stryker, *Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Civil War, 1861-1865*, (2 vols., Trenton, NJ, 1876), vol. 1, 228; Donald, 81-82, 297-298; Edward G. Longacre, *The Cavalry at Gettysburg* (Rutherford, 1986), 92; *O.R.*, III, 1, 451-452.

²⁰Stryker, 228; Donald, 11-17.

Camp Burlington, Near Washington, D.C., Sept 15.

To My Friends:

Your kind and very appropriate gifts came to hand yesterday by Adams' Express, and I can assure you I feel proud of the honor conferred upon me. They are the promptings of kind hearts, and are bestowed upon an humble individual as a mark of your kindness and liberality, and will by me be always cherished as a bright spot in memory. When I shall be miles separated, I shall cherish in my heart of hearts the kind and fond remembrance of friends at home. May no cloud e'er darken the sun of your prosperity, but may the rainbow-tinted future shine more brightly than you can or ever did anticipate; and I will bravely battle to keep the ravages of a ruthless, heartless, disgraced and perjured foe from your homes. The sword shall only be drawn in defence of our once glorious Union, and shall never be sheathed in its scabbard in dishonor. No! I will manfully resist the advances of a disloyal foe, and strike a manly blow for "The Union, the Constitution, and the Laws;" and as each day passes, and as I take these tokens of kind remembrance in my hands, I shall fondly think of the donors as my loyal friends, feeling certain they will rejoice in the advancement of our cause; and when the storm of war is over, and the country has settled down to its former peace, tranquility and prosperity, I will return to the scenes of my boyhood, (should I live) and shake you cordially by the hand, and bid you God speed.--Until then, may you be happy; may the sun of prosperity shine upon your every undertaking, and may you all reap the reward your earnest seeking and philanthropy so richly merit.

From your honored friend,
William T. Cobb, O.S.²¹

On September 22, with sword and sash, Cobb and his men moved into Alexandria, an important part of the chain of forts that McClellan had placed around the capital to defend against possible Confederate attacks. Having served most of its time in Alexandria as military police enforcing curfews, arresting soldiers without passes, and generally maintaining order, the regiment returned to Washington on October 18.²²

²¹*Pioneer*, September 28, 1861, 2.

²²Donald, 18-24.

Upon its return, the regiment was grouped with the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth New Jersey (thence known as the Second Jersey Brigade) and placed under the command of Brigadier General Silas Casey for further training. These regiments, save a few men who remained to guard the camp, left camp on Meridian Hill on November 3 to march to Port Tobacco, Maryland, south of Washington. Their orders were to prevent southerners from crossing the Potomac to interfere with elections being held there. After their duties were done, they returned to Washington.²³

In December, McClellan sent the brigade to the lower Potomac to oppose the Confederate batteries constructed along the river blocking access to Washington. The brigade sailed down the Potomac to Indian Head, Maryland, and disembarked. A muddy ten-mile march over several days brought them to Rum Point Landing, opposite the Confederate guns across the river at Cockpit Point, Virginia. Upon reaching their destination, the brigade was incorporated into Brigadier General Joseph Hooker's Division as the Third Brigade.²⁴

Hooker had been on the lower Potomac since the previous October. He had proposed to McClellan a plan to cross the river and take some unguarded high ground to shell the Confederate batteries. McClellan rejected Hooker's ambitious plan and did little to move the rebels from their positions. Instead McClellan had been developing a plan to send the army to Annapolis, sail men southward to a small Virginia tobacco port, Urbanna, and then march to Richmond.

²³Donald, 24-26; Boatner, 131.

²⁴Donald, 34; Stryker, 228.

From December to early March, soldiers built corduroy roads to make the muddy roads passable and alternated guarding posts along the river bank, conversing with the enemy in the process.²⁵ While working on such a road Cobb sprained his ankle, and he was listed as "sick in quarters" during January and February.²⁶

A month later, as the naval contest between the ironclads C.S.S. *Virginia* and U.S.S. *Monitor* unfolded on March 9, McClellan learned that the Confederates had retreated southward. Having recovered, Cobb joined the army as it crossed the lower Potomac on March 10 to take the batteries abandoned by the Confederates.²⁷

Shortly before crossing the Potomac, Cobb had resigned his position as First Sergeant, as he said "to study." Thus, when the Army of the Potomac embarked for the Virginia Peninsula, it was as a private that Cobb would participate in the upcoming campaign.²⁸

²⁵Donald, 34-35.

²⁶Fifth New Jersey Infantry, Muster Rolls, National Archives. Cobb's Declaration for Original Invalid Pension (August 30, 1879) also mentioned that he lacerated his back muscles carrying a log, and broke a bone in his left foot during this time. Pension Records, William Tell Cobb, National Archives.

²⁷Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War* (3 vols., New York, 1950), vol. 1, 142-143; Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York, 1992), 8-11, 15-17.

²⁸Fifth New Jersey Infantry, Muster Rolls, National Archives.

CORRESPONDENCE, SEPTEMBER 7, 1861-MARCH 23, 1862

Camp berlington [*Burlington*] Sep 7th 1861

Der Father

I recived your letter yaster day after noon and was gl[a]d to here from you and the folks, that you was all well but i was vary sorry to here that you had no work but never mind that for if you cant get aney work you will have to try to do the best you can. my intentions [intensions] are to help you all I can if wee get our pay when two months is up I want to send you my wages, or at least a grateter part of it I m[a]y keep some of it to use my self but I will try to get a long with as little as posible so that you can have the more, this is the principal that I want to work to help you as much as posible, and so when I get aney money I shal try to get a good shair to you. you mentioned in you letter that Ed had bought me a [s]word and sash and that you would send it to me I wish you would send it by Adams Express send it to, 5th Regment Companey F in care of Capt R.S. Reynolds NJ Vol- and if you chose you may put D.C. on it, and let me know the names of the subscribers that bought the sword and sash I have not recived them yet but I send my compliments to them if I had 10 dollars I could have bought a splended sword here in washington. I am well at presant and hope these few lines will find you the same give my love to all the Cobb family and all in quiring friends and keep a good shair your self tell Coll to let Ed know a bout how I am getting a long nomore on this sheet.

W.T.C. O.S.

Continuation

well father I will continue my story, I cannot tell you any thing new at present. I have not bin down in to the Capitol yet but I expect to go on monday and then I will write and let you know some thing about what I see, I keep close to camp to attend to my duty I have not bin out of the Camp except to drill the men wick I have to do every morning before breakfast and from 9 Ock until 10 and then again in the after noon our officers has not drilled the men but onst since wee came out here I have it to do my self, the men thinks that I have bin to West Point or some other plac to learn military tactics I do the drilling in such good order is what makes them think so. wee have a vary nice Company there is two from Millville and the rest is from Salem Allowaystown and Pottstown²⁹ and I a lone am from Mauricetown, Wee have prayer meeting in the Camp every night there is several members of Church in our Camp and they see happy times here you had better believe if you was here you would think so any how. The Flying Artillary has bin practising and they have botheard [*bothered*] me a grate deal in writeing it is vary nigh time to go on batalien drill and I must stop writeing. Wee lost one of our men the other day he was taken sick and sent to the hospitel and he had a revolve-er with him and after he was taken to the hospitel he was taken with the feever and that deranged him so that he got up the other morning a bout three Ock and shot his self through the hed wick killed him instantly and wee beauried him on yasterday morning it is something that I never done before and never want to do again. You must write as soon as you get this letter you may send as maney postage stamps as you pleas I donot

²⁹These towns are located in Cumberland and Salem counties. Allowaystown is now Alloway. Pottstown could not be located.

care how maney that is. I guess I will stop writeing at present and write a gain soon.
dout for get the sword nomore at presant .

from your affectionate Son

William T. Cobb O.S.== To == S. Cobb

Camp near Alaxandrew Oct 3rd 1861

Dear Father

I just recieved your letter and was vary glad to here from home, but I do not like to here of such hard times with you at presant as winter is comeing perhaps it will bee a vary hard one with you and you had better rase all that you can on the plas, and when I get paid I will send you some money and I think betwen the two of us wee can keep the family eaven if you dont get aney work, but you must not get dis courraged at hard times for they are all over the States at presant, I dont think wee will get aney money for a month yet for pay day dont come not befor November the first and you must try to make out untill then for I cant get aney money to send you befor that time when I get it you shal have some and the biggest shair of [it] too I wish you would send Zeak and Scorp on here to keep companey with me, wee have plainty of Companey but it is not like old friends I would [like] to have them to come and join our Companey vary well if they will, I write to them to come but I have not herd from them since, I wrote another letter

to them last week but have not recieved an answer yet I shall look for one to morrow morning in the mail, if you see them tell them to write to me as soon as they can and tell them how to direct there letter. Our men has gon in to the City to Clear up the house that wee are a going to quarter in this winter it is in the house in wich Col Ellsworth was shot in³⁰ I was in there the other day and got a piece of the plastering that Col Ellsworth fell a gainst when he was shot it hoas [*has*] got some blood on it yet I will send you some of the pices and you can see it for your self you can tell the side that was out by the blood on it, I recived last weeks paper the next day after I wrote my other letter and I expect that I will get this one that you sent me this week at least I hope I will recive it for I would like to see that artical that you mentioned in your letter, I would like to get one evry week if you can send it to me for then I get the County news and I would rather get them than Philadelphia news. Wee have got our Chaplin and who do you think it is Rev, Mr Soverign³¹ if I have spelld his name right the one that was pesideing [*presiding*] elder and used to preach at Mauricetown he is here at presant and is a going to bee with us

³⁰On May 24, 1861, twenty-four-year-old Colonel Ephraim Elmer Ellsworth was shot in the Marshall House--a hotel on King Street in Alexandria--by the hotel's proprietor, James T. Jackson, for removing a Confederate flag from atop the three-story building. Ellsworth immediately became a martyr to the Union cause, and his death--among one of the first in the war--heightened war sentiment in the North. The *Pioneer* said of him:

Ellsworth, living, is a noble, brave, and dashing officer of twenty-seven [*sic*]; Ellsworth, dead, has a thousand devoted imitators; and not until the whole race of Northern free-men have been exterminated, will the spirit that prompted him cease to prompt and govern others. (*Pioneer*, June 1, 1861.)

Following Ellsworth's death, soldiers and other residents took souvenirs from the building, and Cobb was no exception. Denney, 46; Yoseloff, 112-114; Boatner, 263-264.

³¹Thomas Sovereign, the Fifth New Jersey's regimental chaplain. Sovereign remained with the regiment for the entire three years, mustering out with those men desiring not to reenlist after their terms of service had expired. Stryker, 228.

untill wee go home he preached last sunday morning for us, the men has come back from the City and told me that they had picked out a nice little room for me in the house that I told you off befor. ther was three of our pickets shot at last night by the rebbel picket they hit two of them and hurt them but not daingerously one of them was hit in the arm but the ball did not hit the bone, the other one had a revolveer in his brest pocket and the ball hit the Revolveer and split it all to pices and the ball turned of and hit him in the fleshey part of his arm wich did not much damage, the pickets is fire ing on one another yaster and to day at a grate rate, there was a grate fireing kept up this morning between the rebbel an our pickets you would have laugh if you had bin here the other day to see our fellows trive [*drive*] the rebbel pickets a way and take their tents hay wood wagines and evry thing that they wanted. Some would bee a fiteing while others would Cart off the spoiles it was a grate piece of fun for our boys I can here the Cannon roreing all around me but I cant tell wather there is a fight or not at pre[s]ant but may bee I will bee able to let you know in my next it is time fore me to come to a close for I dont want to write but this one sheet full for the postage will bee so high and as I have no money and no stamps I dont want to pay but 3^{cts} at a time and write oftener when I get some money I will write more than I have for a while past you may depend on that. I will bring my letter to a close by tell ing you that I get a plenty to eat and more than I can eat the men tells me that I am getting as fat as a pig nomore at presant give my love to all in quireing friends mother, Call, and all the Children and keep a good shair your self (tell

Call to write to Ed and tell him to write to me as soon as he can) nomore at presant

from your obedient and affectionate Son

William T. Cobb O.S.

To

Samuel Cobb of Mauricetown

Camp on Maridian Hill near Washington Nov 2nd 1861

Dear Father

I have a few moments to spare and a few they are for it is va[r]y nigh tattoo time. wee have just recieved orders to make rady to march to morrow morning at 6 Ock and I have vary little time to write to you but I thought I would write a few lines to you. wee are makeing all preperations to leave in the morning wee are to march down the river whare our destination is wee do not know but I expect it is some whares a bout Acqua Crick [Aquia Creek]. wee are to leave our tents behind and wee are to take 8 days rations with us 2 of wich is to be in our haversacks. wee are to leave our knapsacks behind also, it is a forse march and I expect wee will have a fight with in a few days and that is what wee want the Boys is all of a glee and are glad to think that wee are to have a fight pretty soon I will be glad when the time comes for it for I think that it is time that wee began to do something of that kind, it is stated that it is 40 miles to the place whare wee

have to march to and wee have a bout 2 1/2 days to march there in,³² I will begin on some thing else now you wanted to know what I was a going to do wi[t]h my money. I prommised to give it to you and I expect to do so as soon as I get it wee expected to get it the first of this month but wee did not but wee will get it soo when I send it in a letter that will be marked soldiers letter, when Ed wrote to me for money I told him to see you and if you was willing I would try to let him have some but I see by your letter that you want it yourself and you shal have it if I can git it to you I will send some to Ed to get me some stamps with you must write soon direct as you did befor give my love to mother Call and Ed and all the rest of the Children and keep a good shair your self. write soon and tell Ed to write soon also nomore at presant

from your affectionate Son

William T. Cobb O.S. of Co= F.

5th N.J. Vol.

³²Cobb would soon learn that he had underestimated the march. The men ended up covering sixty-three miles in three days. Donald, 24-26.

Camp on the lower Potomic Nov 10th 1861

Dear Father

I recieved Georges letter last nigth and was glad to her that you was all well at presant, but I did not like it when I heard that [the] Harrisses³³ is a going to get my States money. I sent a letter to Isiic Mulford and told him to give it to Mother and no one else. I dont know what he means by sending you such an order as he did in demanding the 18 dollars of you that mother drewd from the State, if that wont do I want you to write and let me know whare to write to, and if you can do aney thing with it in writing to aney one (whoever has charge of the dilivering of the money) and tell them to send it to mother.³⁴ Father I wish you would send a word to John T Nixson and try to get me a divorse if you can you relate the circumstance to him, I am willing to give most aney a mount of money to get a divorse from her and I want you to do your utmost to get me one, and set to work right off and if you can get me one I will pay you well for it if you will get me one I will give you 100 dollars and if that is not enough I will give you more, and if the

³³Cobb's in-laws, by marriage to Emma Harris.

³⁴According to the company muster roll, Cobb indicated he was single and that he had a widowed mother dependent on him. In light of his distaste for his wife, Emma (who did not die until July 1862), presumably he lied so that she would not get the additional \$6 per month "state money" given to families of married men. If single men had widowed mothers, the money would go to their mothers; thus, it seems that Cobb claimed his mother was a widow and dependent on him so that she would receive the money instead. The ruse appears to have lasted only three months before David P. Elmer, Esq., in Bridgeton, the man handling the state money, stopped the payments. Fifth Regiment, Company F, New Jersey Volunteers, Muster Roll, August 22, 1861, New Jersey State Archives.

case may be so as to need my presence, I will not be able to get home before the middle of February or 1st of March but if you can do any thing at present go ahead and do it the sooner the better. if you send me any thing on Christmas, send me all of them likenesses that I had tell Zeak and Scorp to give you their likeness and but [put] all the things in a box and send by Adams express, and I will get them tell mother to go to Mrs Wills and tell her to send me a mince pie and as many other eatables as she has a mind to, dont forget to put my two shirts in the box that you send to my [me], I am well and as fat as a pig I have gained 10 pounds since I left home, if you write to Ed tell him that I am well and hope he is the same, give my love to mother and all of the Children and in fact all inquiring friends no more at present,

from your most Dutiful Son

William T Cobb

Direct as before

N.B. we are down the Potomac opposite the rebel Battery and every vessel that passes they get shelled from the battery last night they was throwing shells at a vessel which lasted for an hour but they did not hit her for there shells bursted up in the air and did not strike the vessel our vessels that lay about the battery throwed some shells over the river and drove some of the rebels off and then set fire to there buildings we are encamped on the bank of the river where we can see all the rebels movements, our

Camp is in the woods and they cannot see us from the other side we can go down a long shore and talk with the rebbels very easy)write soon(W.T.C. O.S.

Camp on Maridian Hill Nov 23rd 1861

Dear Father

As I have a few lasure moments I take the oppertunity of of [*sic*] writeing you a few lines as I have not written to you for some time before I recived Georges letter [to]day and was glad to here from hime he wrote a vary reasonable letter, I have not recieved aney letter from you for some time and wish you would write me a letter or give George material to do it with for I dont recieve aney more letters from home and I think it is vary strange that I dont recieve aney more letters from home. Wee recieved two monthes pay yasterday I encloseds 25 dollars in an envelope and gave it to Mrs Reynolds she is here and is going to start for Bridgeton on Monday I sealed the letter and put a stamp on it for her to put in the Post Office at Bridgetown so that it will go home safe you will find some of the Trasure [*Treasury*] notes you can use them as you pleas but if you can I would like for you to save one so that if I would need aney before wee get paid off a gain you could send me a little but I think that I have enough to last me untill then you need not put your selfe out of the way in the least if you need to use it for I can do with out it for wee will get Paid off next month and I can make out untill then. I would like for you to get my over Coat from Town and ware it for you may have it if you will get it. I dont

know when will moove South but I hope it will be some time soon. Give my love to
mother and to the C[h]ildren Call and yourself and to all in quireing friends, write soon.
direct to Maridian Hill nomore at presant

from your most obediant and affectionate Son

William .T. Cobb, O.S.

Co F 5th N.J.V.

I in close my dagarotype for the familey. put it in a case go to E. Hinsons and get one

Camp on Lower Potomic Dec 23rd 1861

Dear Father

I recieved your letter last Wensday and was glad to here from you and all of the
folks at home, you told me that you would like to know what my buisness is I will give
you an account of it, The first thing in the morning it [*is*] to get up at the first call for
revellee the next thing is wash and then when revellee beets is to Call the roll after wich
I have to make out the morning report and take it in to the Adjtiants office (this report
goes in to Washington evry day so that by 12 Ock [P.]M. the General can tell how maney
men there is for duty and how maney sick how maney died in the last 24 hours this is
the whole arney of the Potomic this is the way that they know a bout the Condition of

the men) the next is to take the sick up to the hospital and after I come from there I then attend guard mount wich mounts at 8 Ock befor I take the guards out on paraid ground I have to in spect them, that is to examine there guns arnes equipments Clothes &co>, then march them out on Paraid ground, after guard mount Comes Company drill wich I for the last Week have bin Commander of, for our Capt & Liut. is Sick and it gives me a good deal more work to do, wee drill 2 hours and then Come in and when the Company is dismisst I have to at tend Orderly Call at 12 M. this Call is for the Orderlys to write off Orders, but wee have a Cleark to write them for us at presant for wee have no time to write them ourselves for some times the orders each day covers 8 and 10 Pages of the Largest Sized Books and I dont get time to write them my selfe, the next thing is dinner Call at 1 Ock. P.M. I then have untill 2 Ock to write or aney thing that I see fit to do at 2 Ock wee have to go on battalion drill wich last untill 4 Ock wee then rest 15 minutes and then dress Paraid comes next wich lasts some times 45 minutes and sometimes 1 1/2 hours when the Paraid is dis mist wee take the Companey in to quarters and by that time it is dark or vary nigh it, at 5 1/2 Ock is Sergents Call for sergents to resite this lasts one hour wich makes it 6 1/2 when I get Clear at 7 Ock I have my detail to make out for guard the next day at tattoo I have the roll to Call wich is at 9 Ock and then wee have a half hour to fix our Beds when the taps com[es] [is] when all lights must bee put out I will now give you a little of some thing else, the rebbels keeps firing at our vessels as they pass there battery wee can see them when they fire and can see there shots strike in the water there has not a shot hit a vessel since wee come here wee are rite opposite to there Battery they throwed a shell over in to the camp the other day but

it did not burst we have it yet it is a procusion [*percussion*] shell throwen from a 10
inch gun we can see there Camp fires at night vary plain, dont for get my Christmas
Presant or Newyears Present, I dont know as I can send you a new years Present for
Payday wont come not untill then and that will bee too late to send a newyears Present
But I can send it afterwards, give my love to mother and all of the Children. Call. Ed and
yourself in to the Bargaen nomore at pre[s]ant

from your obediant Son

William. T. Cobb

write as soon as posible direct as befor

Arney on the Lower Potomic Jany 4th 1862

Dear Father

I recieved the Christmas dinner the day befor New years and it was vary
exceptitable as you may judge a bout an hour befor I recieved your box I recieved a box
from uncle Richard Willson from Bordentown it contained some mince pies and 2 cans
of tomattoes 1 roast fowel some dozin apples with more doughnoughs than I could eat. I
was vary glad to have boath boxes for it did not onley serve for my self but for the whole
tent I cooked one of them Chickines on new years day and had a fine feast off of him

and I had the other one yasterday they didnt go vary bad out here and them pies didnt go vary bad not mentioning th[e] Cakes preserves apples &co, I hardley know what to write at presant and I will close by telling you that if you recieve a letter with soldiers letter on it after pay day for when I send money I will put that on for it will bee more apt to go than with a s[t]amp, give my love to the whole family (write soon) tell mother that I will attend to that state money and if she has not recieved aney of it since Elmer stoped it I wrote to him and told him how the circumstances was and I would likee to know how it is getting a long nomore at presant

from your most dutiful Son

William T. Cobb

N.B. Direct as befor

Camp on Lower Potomic Jany 15th 1861 [1862]

Dear Father

As I have not recieved aney letters for nearly a month I am all most out of patiance I think it is little as aney of you can do to write to me once in a grate while I like to here from home once in a while, for if I can not bee there I like to here from home at aney rate. Wee have a very stormey day of it here to day it snowed her last night and

it is now turned to a rain wich makes it vary disagreeable out of doors but as wee have good tents and have little to do out of doors it makes no differance to us about the wather, Last Sunday wee was seting in our tents and our attention was attractted by a grate firing of Cannon and wee went down to the hill (wich is in the rear of our Camp,) to see see what the fraceous [*fracas*] was and when wee got there the rebel began to fire at us the first shell fell short about one hundred yards the next one come right over whare I was sieting and by the looks of it it was a bout 25 feet above my head and it went on and struck and bursted a bout 30 yard in the rear of whare I was setting but it did not hurt aney one they then let fly with another shell but that one went a bout five hundred yards in our rear it went over our heads it bursted and did not hurt aney body and wee stood our ground for wee wanted to see the fun like all other Jerseyman and so wee waived our hats at them and give them three cheers for such bad shots and they got out of patiance at us and did not fire aney more at us and wee had a happy time wee have several pises of the shells to look at, it is fine mauseic [*music*] to here the whiszing balls comeing through the air wee can here the report of the Cannon befor wee Can hear the ball or shell Coming and wee Can here the ball time enough to get out of the way, I expect that wee will be paid off pretty soon, you must write as soon as you get this and I will answer it, give my love to Mother and all of the Cobb family nomore at presant Direct to Co (F) 5th N.J.V. Armeiy on lower Potomic

from your most Dutiful Son

W^m .T. Cobb. O.S.

Camp on Lower Potomac Feb^{ry} 5th 1862

Dear Father

I recieved your Letter day befor yasterday and was glad to here from home, you said that you had recieved the money (or as good as the money) that I sent you and I am glad to here that you have. I will tell you why I did not send you aney more in the first place I bought a watch wich I vary much needded and I bought a pair of boots that cost 6\$ and several other articals that I needded vary much but perhaps I will bee able to send more the next time that I get paid off, I would have written befor but wee went on picket on monday and I had no chaunce to write befor I went on Picket with the Companey for wee had no 2nd Liut nor Capt with us Conciqintly I had to act 2nd Liut and go a long with the rest and a bad time wee had of it too it is the first time that I have bin on guard since I was out in the three month service and it wend rather tough with me for wee had a bout 5 miles to go and it snowed so hard that wee could hardly get a long and it snowed all night long and such a happy time as I had runing up and down the shore, falling in ditches over logs I never befor experianced, the reason why I had so much runing to do was on account of a prisinor that wee had taken for haveing Liquer to Sell to the Soldiers and wee caught the old fellow at it and I had to go to take the orders and read them to him Station guards over him and several other things to[o] tigious [*tedious*] to mention, and wee are makeing arod [*a road*] from our Camp down to Run point (the place of landing)

it is made of Logs 16 feet Long laid cross ways of the road the whole Bragade is at work
makeing the rodd, the rebels is over the river playing a way with their big guns but dont
hurt aney boddy, the rods is so bad that the teams can hardiley getalong to day I saw a
team with 6 horses to it with 6 barles of Pork in it and they come to a place in the road
that the horses went down in the mud so far that they was in tirely covered with the mud
all expect there heads they was so far down that there backs was below the level of the
ground such is the condition of the roads down here, I here in clowes 2 dollars for you
to send me that a mount in Postage Stamps for wee can not get aney down here, send
them as soon as you get this letter, give my love to mother and all of the rest of the Cobb
familey nomore at presant

from your most obediant Son

W^m T Cobb

[written on the first page of the letter along the right margin]

I will write Soon again

Camp on Lower Potomac Feb 23rd 1862

Dear Father

As it is my birthday I take the plasure in writeing you a few lines. I recieved yours of 18th inst, and was much pleased in hearing from home you give me a discription of the Late Battels³⁵ but I expect wee herd of it as soon as you did wee get the newes evry day and so you may judge wather wee get the news or not wee have the Philadelphia Inquirer, New York Tribune, Baltimore Clipper, Washngton Starr, Trenton Gazette & Republican and soveral other news papers wee have the news here as soon [as] you get them at home if not a little sooner. Wee herd a grate Cannonadeing yasterday over the river I believe there was a battle from what I hear. wee wiped [whipped] the Rebels and took 900 prisoners this happened a bout 3 miles a bove us on the opposite side of the river wee could see the smoke but could not get there wee expect to cross the river as Soon as the wather permits it has bin so muddy that wee could not moove wee got our field pieces day befor yasterday and was glad to see them come wee have some Twelve or 14 big Scowes each of wich will hold a Regiment the Scowes is for us to cross the River in. the rebels has not fired at us for nearley a week

³⁵In the western theater, Confederate forces in Tennessee surrendered Fort Donelson to Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant on February 16, 1862. Nearby Fort Henry had fallen nine days earlier. In the east, the Federal Navy had taken Roanoke Island, NC, opening the way to Norfolk from the south. Confederates evacuated Norfolk three months later. Denney, 122, 123, 129; *Civil War Naval Chronology*, Navy Department (Washington, 1971), II-20.

wich is a great curiosity to us I dont know the reason without they have run out of amunition. I would like for you to make me a box I want it to be 17ⁱⁿ Long 14ⁱⁿ wide 12ⁱⁿ deep and a lid with hinges, and a small clasp on it with a padlock you can put th[e] Lock and key in side and put a screw or two in the front to hold the lid down untill I get it and I wish you would send me Dr Lardners Works³⁶ with [a] Coppy of a Work (I cannot tell you the name of it) but I will tell you whare you can find one like the one I want go to the school house and inquire for one of the Books that has Geomatay Triganomitay and Surveying in [it] and you will find it and Mr Jarman will tell you whare you can get one if you will send them to me I will pay you for them when wee get paid. and you may send as maney etibles as you can get in the box after the books you may think it vary queer that I want such books out here but Father I find that I am not to be grined at by evry one, I have a vary inteligant man in the tent with me he has bin a [s]Chool teacher for several years and I can beat him on a grate maney que[s]tions as it is and if I had the books what I dont know and he des he will learn me and I cannot do much without Book, I have one book her[e] I expect you have read it and that is Polloks Course of Time³⁷ it is a handsome book and I read it quite a gratedeal. I am vary well at presant and hope these few lines will find you the same, I would like to have the books as soon as you can send them, I have a box of mathuematical instruments now. no more

³⁶Dionysius Lardner, 1793-1859. Cobb may be refering to a two-volume set entitled, *The First Six Books of the Elements of Euclid with a Commentary and Geometrical Exercises*. Besides mathematics, Lardner wrote many books on such topics as mechanics, optics, electricity, and steam engines.

³⁷Rev. Robert Pollack, *The Course of Time* (New York, 1828). Pollack began writing this ten-book spiritual poem in his late teens after entering the University of Glasgow in 1815. He later became a reverend, but died before reaching thirty.

at present Direct to Co F 5th N.J.V army on Lower Potomac, give my love to Mother,

Call Edd and all of the rest of the Cobb family nomore at present

from your most dutiful Son

William .T. Cobb. O.S.

write soon

Camp on Lower Potomac Feb^y 25th 1862

Dear Father

I recieved your letter day befor yasterday and was glad to here from home I [recieved] the Post Stamps and was glad to get them for now I can write when ever I get a chaunce I have a good chaunce to write now for I have nothing else to do for I have got a sprained ancle wich I got when I was at work on the road by a log rolling on it it is getting better now and it will bee so that I can go on duty in the corse of a day or two it is so that I can go around a little but it will be well enough to go on duty to morrow, wee had a little snow here last night but there is not much of it yet but it keeps snowing all the time and I dont know how deep it will bee befor it stops and care less for wee have good tents to put up in and while the snow is on the ground wee will have no drilling to do, our Captain Come back yasterday and wee was all glad to See him for he has bin gon

home 6 weekes and had bin sick ever since he went home but he is a grate deal better now, I would like to come home and stay there for two or three days and then come back again for I like a soldiers life so well that I think that I will bee a soldier after this war is over providing I live to see it out, the rebels keeps fireing at us but do no damage to us, I dont know when wee will leave here for the ground is so muddy that wee can hardly walk a long the roads it is under stood that wee will moov as soon as the ground gets settled so that the teams will be able to getalong and wee dont know how soon that will come but I hope it will bee pretty soon the Rebels keeps their f[l]ag (or rag wich ever you may term it) a flying on there battaries I think that they will have it to pull down some of these days or wee will pull it down for them, I cant tell when I will get to come home but I dont think not much befor the war ends for there is no furloughs granted now. Perhaps you would like to know who that writer is that writs for the Pioneer it is John Horten³⁸ he is one of the player in our brass band he is Lydia Ann Blues brother. I am well acquainted with him, I have no more newes to send you at presant, give my love to Mother and all of the rest of the Cobb familey Call and all the rest nomore at presant

³⁸John S. Horton of Bricksboro, NJ, a member of the Fifth's regimental band, enrolled at Millville, New Jersey, and was mustered in at Trenton on October 11, 1861. In one of his letters to the *Pioneer*, Horton spoke out against the whipping of soldiers as punishment. He also recommended reducing chaplains' pay in half and disbanding the regimental bands so that the savings could be "added to the pay of the private soldier." Soldiers, he claimed, "can do without music which will neither clothe their wives nor children at home...." Unfortunately, Horton contracted typhoid and died in a Washington, D.C. hospital on May 26, 1862, at the age of 26.

The law authorizing bands to be attached to regiments was, in fact, repealed on July 29, 1862, and the Fifth's band was mustered out on August 9, 1862. Stryker, 229; *Pioneer*, March 8, 1862, 2; *Pioneer*, June 14, 1862, 2. John S. Horten, Military Records, National Archives.

Direct as befor and it will be correct

from your most obediant Son

W^m T Cobb

N.B. Write soon

Camp on lower Potomac March 6th 1862

Dear Father

I recieved your letter a few days a go and was glad to here from home, You said that Ed was going down to fordress [*Fortress*] Monroe I would like to see him and all of the rest of the Cobb family I sent a letter home some time a go requesting you to send me some things wich I should vary much like to have for I have resined my office as Orderly Sergent so that I would have a chaunce to studdy more, I resined day befor yasterday and the Captn wanted me to take another office but I would not take it and he wanted to know the reason why I would not take it and I told him that I wanted to studdy and iff I had the office I would have no chaunce, I dond know wather they will forse me to take it or not but I dont want it, I have a Bugle now and I expect that I will be Buglar for the Companey wich is an easey birth, I would like to have them Books as soon as you can send them for I want to get to work to learn some thing. The Companey is vary much opposed to my resineing they say that they will never get another man to be O.

Sergent that will be as I was and they told Capt Renolds that if wee ever got in to an ingagement that they wanted him to let me have charge of the Company for they didnt think him or aney other officer Capeable of haveing charge of a Company in Battle. and they told him that I was the best man in the Company, Captn did not like it but he said that he could not denigh it, this is the reputation that I have in this Company and not only this Company but all others in this Regiment, Father you might bee surprised if I tell you that several of the Commisioned officers come to me for in formation wich I always give them an answer and a correct one at that you may think [it] is strange of my resineing but I have something in my head that if I can Carry it out will proove to bee of more service to me than Orderly Sergent ship, dont fail to send me the Books that I sent for. the rebbels keeps firing on our side of the river but do no damage I have no more news to send at presant give my love to Mother and all of the rest of the Cobb family Ed in to the bargan I forgot to tell you one thing and that is. I got a letter from, John Tibbels³⁹ he is in the 4 Regiment N.J. Vols he sends his love to all of the people of

³⁹At the age of 18, John C. Tibbles was mustered into the Fourth New Jersey, Company F, August 15, 1861, in Trenton. For reasons unknown, he was twice sentenced by regimental court martial to forfeit his pay: \$500 on April 26, 1862, and \$300 on April 28. A few months later on June 27, 1862, during the Seven Days battles, he was wounded and captured, although other records indicate he deserted. He spent time in hospital after being paroled on August 3 and exchanged on August 16.

On August 27, 1862 at the Second Battle of Bull Run, Tibbles was captured again, but was paroled on the same day. It appears that in November he was sent to Washington and then on to Annapolis, Maryland. Tibbles deserted while in Annapolis at Camp Parole on April 10, 1863. John C. Tibbles, Military Records, National Archives; Stryker, 209.

Mauricetown No more at present

from your most obedient Son

W^m .T. Cobb

Co (F) 5th N.J.V.

armey on lower Potomac

Camp on Lower Potomac March 14th 1862

Dear Father

I received your letter yasterday and was glad to here from home you may well believe that for I cannot see aney boddy from home, perhaps you would like to know how wee are a getting a long, well the Rebels has left there Batteries for us to take Charge of they left two or three days a go and retreated back to Fredricksburg or Richmond, well (to resume the story) the day that they left they fired the Steemer page and two or three schooner and then left in a grate hurry the next day wee went over the River and took Charge of there Batteries wich wee now hold, I wish you had bin here with us to see the Camp of the Rebbels they left there guns 5 on the upper Battery and 6 on the lower Battery there was one of the largest guns on the Battery had bursted and by the appearance of things it has done a considerable damage the remaining four guns was there some of them had there Carrages cut up and evry thing indicated a stampeede

there wagons was cut down and when wee went over there wee found pans of all sizes
skillets pots and a full Chest of Carpenters tools and and a full set of Blacksmiths tools
and varous parts of Clothing and a mong the rest wee found a trunk with a new suit of
officers uniform and a mong all the clothing wee could find none that would fit me they
was all too small it appears that there has bin Boys over there in the place of men, wee
found about \$30000 worth of shot & Shell you may think that a good sum but wee
found them in trenches some of them had the caps taken of[f] and filled with water but
that did not hurt them wee also found a large number of Canister and grape in holes a
bout 3 feet wid and 8 Long it kept the whole Regiment all day to carry the amunition to
the Barges I dont recolect of ever having so much fun as wee had that day wee
ransacked the shanties and found many things such as books papers old letters knives
and various other articals too tigious [*tedious*] to mention, well wee have not left our Old
Camp yet but I expect that wee will leave pretty soon, I have improved on learning to
play the Calls on Bugle wich the Company is vary much pleased with it to think that I
am to bee bugler of the Company I see vary easy times for the last three weeks I only
practice on my bugle. well if you see fit to send me the Scientific Classbooks you can do
so but I want Books of some discription I would rather have Larnders works than aney
onther works that you have but dont for get the other book, Direct to Co (F) 5th
Regiment N.J. Vol. Armeý on Lower Potomac, be carefull to make the N.J.V in full for
a grate maney is made so nigh like a y that they go to N.Y.V in sted of us give my love
to mother. Call. Ed and all of the Cobb family and your self included, you must excuse

bad writein for I have onley a bout 6 in by 8 in to set and write in with a man on each side of me and bother me like time, nomere write soon

from your most obediant Son

William .T. Cobb

Camp on Lower Potomac March 18th 1862

Dear Father

I wish you to send me word who the senitor is from our District, for I have a prodgeic [*project*] in view wich I want an answer Directly for I am in a grate hurry, write immeadeately

from your most obideant son

William T Cobb

the mail is rady to leave and I Cant write no more

Camp on Lower Potomac March 23rd 1862

Dear Father

I recieved Georges letter a few moments ago and he said that you wanted me to let you know how to direct that box I think that you had better keep it until I send for it for we expect to march every moment and I would rather you would keep it as you have the Books ready for me I wish you would keep them for me and let no one else have them and when I want them I will send for them, I have just put up a box which if you get it you will find several articles in it if you want to use any of them you can but don't give any of them away I sent it so that you will have to pay the freight on it so that it would be sure to go, when I finish this letter I am going to write to Adams Express Co at Washington and tell them that if they receive a box with my address on it to return it to you and I will give them the directions which if you have sent it it will not be lost, I don't know when we will be paid off but I hope it will be pretty soon, I wanted to know who the senator from our County is not the one in Washington perhaps you would like to know what business I have with him well I will tell you I have made an application for a Commission to go in the 10th Regiment of N.J.Vs and if you have any influential friends there I wish you to get them to help me all they can I sent the application [to] Sheppard from Mauricetown township I have not heard from him yet for he has not had time to write, Capt Reynolds give me a recommendation to the Governor, I don't know how I

will make out yet but I hope I will succeed in getting one, I am well at present and hope that these few lines will find you the same, when you write let me know who gets my state pay for I would like to know, give my love to mother and the whole family your self included no more at present

from your most obedient son

W^m.T. Cobb

[written in margin]

Direct as before

PART III: "THE MOST HORRIBLE SIGHT I EVER SAW": THE PENINSULA CAMPAIGN, MARCH-AUGUST 1862

With the Confederates heading southward, McClellan feared that a landing at Urbanna would be dangerous. Since the C.S.S. *Virginia* still stalked the James River and Confederate batteries at Yorktown protected the York River, McClellan began to send his army to Fort Monroe located at the tip of the Peninsula in March 1862.

The Fifth left the lower Potomac on April 5 and arrived at Fort Monroe four days later. The men marched up the Peninsula to meet the rest of their division, now part of the Third Corps under Brigadier General (soon to be Major General) Samuel Peter Heintzelman, moving toward Yorktown.⁴⁰ Confederate theatrics performed by the men under Major General John B. Magruder convinced McClellan that Yorktown could only be taken by a siege. On March 3, two days before Little Mac planned to take the town, Joseph E. Johnston's men had evacuated Yorktown and marched west.⁴¹

The next day the Union army advanced to Williamsburg and engaged the Confederates on the morning of May 5. Cobb and his regiment were placed on the left of the Union line in front of rebel earthworks--touted as Fort Magruder--in order to support the First U.S. Artillery, Battery H, led by Major Charles Wainwright. When the Confederates began to shoot down horses and men as the battery took its position, the artillerymen fled the scene. Wainwright, after shooting down some of his own men,

⁴⁰Donald, 49-52; Sears, 28-29.

⁴¹Sears, 35-39, 59-60.

appealed to the men in a New York battery he had commanded previously to take the position left by the regulars; the pieces were soon remanned.⁴²

The Fifth maintained its position in the face of artillery fire from the fort and other earthworks on its flank. But when Brigadier General Richard Anderson's Confederates broke through on Hooker's left, the Rebels took control of the abandoned artillery and turned the pieces on the Union soldiers dropping back.⁴³

In an attempt to rally the troops, Heintzelman ordered the regimental bands to strike up some music. While the music may have lifted some spirits, it was Brigadier General Philip Kearney's reinforcements that brought relief to the Hooker's weary division. Once Kearney's men arrived the Fifth regrouped and returned to the front.⁴⁴ At the end of the day, nine men of the Fifth were killed, sixty-seven wounded, and twenty-seven were missing, although the Fifth suffered fewer casualties than the other regiments in the brigade. The next day the men began burying the dead.⁴⁵

After the Battle of Williamsburg, the Army of the Potomac continued moving up the Peninsula toward Richmond. McClellan spent the next few weeks setting up his new base at White House on the Pamunkey River in order to link up with McDowell's troops marching south from Fredericksburg. But Major General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's campaign in the Shenandoah Valley convinced Lincoln to withhold

⁴²Sears, 62.

⁴³John Young Foster, *New Jersey and the Rebellion* (Newark, NJ, 1868), 130-135; Sears, 71-75.

⁴⁴Sears, 75-78; Carol Ann Kettenburg, "The Battle of Williamsburg," M.A. Thesis, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, 64-68.

⁴⁵William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861-1865* (Albany, N.Y., 1889), 245-249; Foster, 136.

McDowell's troops from McClellan and send them to the valley to reinforce General Banks.⁴⁶

By May 22, the Fifth occupied Poplar Hill, fourteen miles east of Richmond. At this point Brigadier General Erasmus D. Keyes' Fourth Corps and Heintzelman's Third Corps were positioned south of Chickahominy River, separated from the rest of the army north of the river. Johnston planned to attack these separated corps, setting his plan in motion on May 31. The Confederate attack by Major General Daniel Harvey Hill and Brigadier General William Henry Chase Whiting pushed the two Union corps back a few miles until Brigadier General Silas Casey's division retreated to the crossroads of Nine Mile Road and the Williamsburg Road known as Seven Pines. In the afternoon, Heintzelman's Corps moved eastward and by nightfall had linked with Brigadier General Israel B. Richardson and Brigadier General John Sedgwick's Second Corps divisions. The next day, D.H. Hill's attempt to flank the Union left failed as Hooker's men held their ground, firing on rebels lurking in the woods. Hooker himself led the charge of the Fifth and Sixth regiments that helped spurn the Confederate attack. Sixty men of the Fifth were killed or wounded on this day of fighting.⁴⁷

One of the men wounded at Seven Pines (Fair Oaks) was Captain Reynolds. The *Pioneer* reported that a "Minnie rifle ball entered and passed through his thigh, striking the bone and glancing off." Also mentioned in the same article was

⁴⁶Sears, 103-110.

⁴⁷Sears, 117-145; Donald, 71-73, 79-82; Fox, 1363-1364.

Wm. S. Cobb of Mauricetown...[who is] a superior marksman, and loaded and fired in such rapid succession that before one rebel was done kicking he brought down another. It is said by those who witnessed it, that he killed five rebels, on one of whom was a gold watch, which he took possession of.⁴⁸

Seeing that the only other William Cobb listed in any New Jersey infantry regiment was mustered in September 1862, "Wm. S. Cobb" must have been our own William T. No letter of Cobb's, however, confirms such a story.

As the armies regrouped during the three weeks after the battle, General Jeb Stuart's cavalry rode around McClellan's army which was moving south of the Chickahominy. On June 25, Heintzelman's corps moved forward to Oak Grove in order to set up a larger offensive planned further northward to take the high ground at Old Tavern. Though Hooker's division was out in front, Cobb's Jersey Brigade was held in reserve because of its weak condition from the previous battles.⁴⁹ The Seven Days battles in front of Richmond were about to begin.

General Robert E. Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia after Johnston's wounding at Seven Pines. On June 26, Lee attacked Brigadier General Fitz-John Porter's Fifth Corps still north of the Chickahominy. Porter and the rest of the army began its retreat to the James River. Cobb's regiment participated little in the battles that followed at Gaines Mill (June 27), Savage's Station (June 29), Glendale (June 30), and Malvern Hill (July 1), but helped to cover the army's retreat as it headed for its new base at Harrison's Landing. While at the landing, Cobb was promoted to Sergeant. Cobb and

⁴⁸*Pioneer*, June 7, 1862, 2.

⁴⁹Sears, 183; Donald, 87-89.

his regiment would remain at Harrison's until August 15 when it would be called northward to protect the capital from Stonewall Jackson.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Donald, 99.

CORRESPONDENCE, MAY 22-AUGUST 9, 1862

Camp in Verginia Some whares out of Latitude and Longitude

May 22nd 1862

Der Father

I recieved your letter yasterday and was glad to hear from you and all of the rest of the folks at home the reason why I write with a pencil is because there is no ink to be found to write with, you may think that the heading of this letter is [a] queer one but it is as good as the place in wich I am a writeing it allthough it is a vary nice Country down here but there is no town short of Williamsburg and that is a bout 45 miles East of us and Richmond is a bout 30 miles they say but I dont think it is for wee are within 8 miles of the outer works at Richmond, some say that Genrl Hooker has bin trying to get us on the advance agane but Genrl Mclellen told him that wee had proved our selves and he wanted some of the rest to do the same. I saw some of the papers that had the account of our late fight and it did not give us the credit that wee diserved General Hooker says that wee shall have it at aney rate I believe wee will get it it was reported that Sumner done so much I will tell you what they done they charged on a battery that had bin left by the Rebels the guns was spiked and that is what they got their prais from⁵¹ if wee

⁵¹Contrary to Cobb's letter, Brigadier General Edwin V. Sumner was, in fact, not highly praised for his conduct on the field. Troops temporarily under Sumner's aegis, Brigadier General Winfield Scott Hancock's men, were highly praised for charging Jubal Early's retreating Confederates. Hooker and Kearney were upset that while their divisions had taken the brunt of the casualties--Hooker's division claimed seventy percent of the Union casualties--McClellan had commended only Hancock in his initial reports. Donald, 70; Sears, 83-84.

had bin Pennsylvani]a boys they would never have stoped telling a bout our galiant
victory, wee weent into the field at 8 Ock in the morning and after beeing there about an
hour wee (our Company and Company A) was sent to support a battery it was one of the
Regular U.States Battery and after wee had bin there about 2 hours the Rebiles come
pretty sharp on to us and wee had some funn you may guess well I suppose you know
how Regulars get the prias as a general thing well when the Rebels come on to us so
sharp the Regulars left there guns and run and left us volunteers to take care of ,,it,, wich
wee did you may believe wee brought it out all right I saw the Major of the Battery Cut
down four or five of his men for leaving there guns. I guess I will stop writeing at
presant give this to Ed when you get done reading it I will write soon again I recieved
Eds letter give my love to Mother Call and in fact to all hands,

Direct as befor no more write soon

from your dutiful son

W^m .T. Cobb

Camp near Fair Oaks or on the Battle field of Fair oaks

June 9th 1862

Der Father

You must excuse me for not writeing befor for I have not had aney chance, I
have not bin vary well for two or three days but I feel a little better now, I do duty and so

you can judge a bout how bad I am, well I suppose you would like to know something about our late Battle⁵² well I will begin in these wise, on Saturday afternoon about 2 Ock wee was ordered out under light marching orders wee fell in line as soon as practical and was marched quick time a bout 5 miles when wee stoped in a piece of woods wee lay there untill Sunday morning about 8 Ock when wee herd the Ball open (this term is used among Soldiers when an ingagement Commences) no sooner did wee here the Roring of the guns than wee fell in as soon as Could bee and then our Companey was ordered out as Skirmishers to go 100 pases on a head of the Regiment wich wee did in Double quick time, wee could here the fireing all of the time well wee Crost over a large Oat field and then entered a woods wee had not gon in the woods maney pases befor wee was saluted with a plainty of Buck and Ball whizing a round us the first shot that they fired they woonded our Captain and our Adj General but that did not stop us for wee returned the fire as fast as wee could load and fire wee kept it up for 2 hours in this maner in wich time they woonded 10 of our Companey not includeing our Captⁿ but wee did not loos a a man after wee was out there about 2 hours wee was releaved as skirmishers and wee went to our Regiment wich was to the right of us, wee then went in to it again and was in a bout 2 hours more when wee was releaved by other Regiments wee was in the fight about 4 hours in wich time wee drove the Rebels acrost a strip of woods about as wide as our (lot or [?]) is long wee drove them that distance in 4 hours in wich time several sesesh fell befor the Jersey boys Rifles, Father I will not enter in to aney details Conserving the horrors of a battle field 3 days after a heavy fight, I will give

⁵²Seven Pines (Fair Oaks), May 31-June 1, 1862.

you a slight Ideal of one but will not give a full discription at presant wee fought over there ded and woonded all of that day and that was no small quantity of them, on Monday wee mooved up on to the Battle field there they lay in piles I saw in one place a bout a rod squair there was 27 ded sesesh and other places under simler sircum stances and the fields woods Raveens and Bushes are covard with ded sesesh it is the most horrible sight that I ever saw and then the smell it is awfull wee have buried 600 of them all rady and there is plainty more to bury yet Detail after [detail] is sent out to Bury them for the smell is a getting wors I believe up to this wee have bin engaged in this buisness but thank fortune it is done now but wee do not know how soon it will be to do a gain for wee have not had our equipments since the fight and wee dont know what minute wee will be into it a gain wee are within a mile of the Rebels now and would like to get another Chaunce at them as soon as wee get rested a little wee are all most worn out for wee have had some pretty hard work to do and wee Jersey Boys did it to [too] I will give you a history when I get hom about the fights that I have bin in provideing Providance spares me to get home, General Mclellen give us a speech after wee come out of the fight he appeared to be vary well pleased with the Jersey Boys and he give us a grate deal of prais he doted on our fightig and said that wee could not bee beat, wee expect to get Paid off in a few days and I am a going to send all the money that I can spair I will send home, I did not Recieve a cratch in the fight but I got stung pretty hard a ball skiped acrst my back as I was laying behind a tree it struck me hard enough to make a litle blister as it skiped by me it felt like some pins a sticking in my back I felt it when it hit me but it did not go through me nor through my Coat and the harm that it

don was small, give my love to Mother and Ed. Call and all the rest of the Cobb family
your self included write soon as you get this and if Ed is at home tell him to write to me

Direct as befor nomore at presant

from your most obediant son

W^m .T. Cobb

5 miles to Richmond from here

Camp near Harrison Landing July 12th 1862

Dear Father

As I have a few moments to spare I use them in writeing to you, I recieved Ed,s
letter of the 6th and was much pleased to here from home once more I thought as I had
time I would write you a few lines, wee are encamped in the woods and it is as
handsome a place as I ever saw the trees ar vary large ones and make a good shade for
us and under foot the ground is covard with evergreen it is a splended piece of Country
here where wee are there is a large mill not far from our Camp and wee can go in the
pond two or three times a day to bathe, it is rumered that wee will stay here untill
September and I hope it is so for wee are all worn out with fatigue and wee want some
rest befor wee go aney further wee have seen pretty hard service for a bout two weeks

past. wee have a new line of battle formed since wee come down here wee have batteries and rifle pits throwen up alrady wee are fixed now so that the whole of the south might come and they would not bee to us no more than a flee bite for our rifle pits are fixed so that our mens heds will be out of danger and the rebels cant see us and wee can see them as they come over the fallen timber in front of our works if they tackkle on to us they may calculate on Skeydaddleing out or the[y] will get the worst of it that is certain, wee have not seen aney Rebels for a week or more and if wee do Stay here it is likely that wee will not fore Some time, Father I wish you would send me that little red Bible that I had when I was down south I believe Grand Father give it to you you could send it by mail by leaving one end open so it could be seen and I would like for you to send me a litle money if you could Spair it, it is vary nigh payday and I would not ask it of you but I am not vary well at presant and if I had a little money I could buy some thing to eat our grub here is vary poor for a sick man if you send aney money to me send it as soon as you can, if you pleas, when you recieve that 20\$ that I sent to you write and let me know, when you write give me all of the news about home I wish you would send me the Pioner evry week if you can for I want to know the news about home the mail leaves now and I must Close give my love to mother and all of the Children Ed & Call and your self included nomore at present write soon

from your most dutiful son

W^m .T. Cobb

Camp near Harrison's Landing July 20th 62

Der Father

I have a few more moments to spare and I occupy them in writing a few lines to you, it has not bin but a few days since I wrote to you but as I have the opportunity I will use it I here that the State authorities is a Draughting men to Come out here and help us if that be the case I would like to get a Commition in one of the new Regiments and if you can get some influential person to enter ceede for me I would bee vary glad if you would I wish you would go to work at once and if you can get it through I will pay you well for it if you under take to get one for me you can give the Govinor a small account of my Soldiery conduct and about my beeing the only volunteer from Mauricetown and vacinity, and perhaps I could get some men to go with me from our Township if I could get a Commission I think I could rais thirty or Forty men and if I could I would bee all right, I wish you to go or get Sombdy to work for me as soon as posible if it sosts [costs] money and you think that there is aney Site [chance] for me let it go and I will pay you all back that it costs you. wee are doing pretty well at presant I am getting better than I was if wee Stay here much longer I think that wee will get so lazey that wee can hardley get out of our tents to get our grub but wee dont know how long it will last wee are a going on picket to morrow morning wee Start at 7 Ock and stay out 24 hours there is nothing of note at presant in the arney of the Potomac all is still and most

exceedngly quiet the Rebs is not within 10 or 20 miles of us at presant I must close
pretty Soon for the Drums is beeting for tattoo and I must Stop writeing at presant, give
my love to mother. Ed. Call. George. Linn. Anna. Fremont. Clint. and in fact to all
inquireing friends write Soon and let me know what you think of the preposition no
more at presant

from your most Obediant Son

William .T. Cobb

*[The following notes and undated letter accompanied sketches of Harrison's Landing
probably drawn in July 1862. To see the sketches, find them in the Special Section
following PART III]*

From Redoubt No=1 to No=4 is 2 miles around you may judge a little from that of our
position my paper beeing so small I had not Room enough to show you the whole length
of our lines that is as far as the Mill pond wich is about 1/2 mile from No=4 Redoubt I
will take a Diagram of it some other time, there is to be small 12 pound guns mounted all
along the rifle pits, wee have some of the Witworth guns⁵³ here with us, and wee allso
have some new guns they are Rockett guns they ar[e] about 14 feet long and when they
fire them off there is no report from them.

⁵³A Whitworth gun was a rifled cannon that fired mostly six or twelve pound solid shot from its hexagonal bore. Boatner, 917.

Explanations -

The marks 10in H is for 10 inch Howitzers

" " M is for magazines

" 32., 20., 6., 12., is for guns carrying that weight shot.

The banks of the Redoubts is 6 ft wide on top and about 8 feet at the bottom the Ditches is 8 and 10 ft wide and from 6 to 8ft deep. on the side wich wee stand is logs placed on top of one another and dirt throwen against on the out side these Rifle pits is 4 ft 9 in high and is 2 ft wide on top and 6 feet wide on the bottom.

Dear Father

I would like to have a box with some thing to Eat in it if it would not cost to[o] much trouble I find that boxes des [*sic*] does come here and as our grub is vary poor and I am not vary well I would like to have something from home wee are looking for the pay master evry day. I just recieved your letter and was glad to her[e] from home I wrote to you the other day wich letter I p[r]esume you have recieved by this time. I am glad that you recieved that money. wee have pretty easey times here at presant and if you keep me in stamps I will try and give you what news I know give my love to Mother and all the rest of the Cobb family no more at present

from your most obediant Son

William T Cobb

Camp near Harrison's Landing July 29th 1862

Dear Father

I received your letters the one with the money in I received 3 days ago and was very well pleased to get some money for if we have money we can get a long pretty well but if we have no money it goes pretty tough with us I will tell you how I disposed of the money first I bought 5 papers of Smoking tobacco for 50^{cts}, Second 15^{cts} for Razors, third 12 cakes for 25^{cts}, 25^{cts} for paper and Envelopes, 10^{cts} for a Philadelphia Inquirer, for biscuit 25^{cts} for 5 onions 15^{cts} for Razors 15^{cts}, and the Remainder for Small articles. Your Last letter I received day before yesterday in which you stated the death of Emma Cobb I have nothing to say concerning her at present but I hope that she is better off where she is than before she died, if you here the particulars of her death write and let me know, you stated in your last letter that you were going to send me a box if you do I would like for you to send me some more money for I will have to pay the freight on it as soon as it gets here our quartermaster is at the Landing every day to get all of the boxes that come for our Regiment and I think that I will get it if you have not sent it yet you may direct it the same as you do the letters that you send me with the additional (to be landed at Harrison's Landing VA) and think I will get it at least I hope so, you said that I would receive but two dollars from the State all other

Single men gets 4 dollars per month and why should I not get 4 as well as the rest⁵⁴ perhaps it wants some boddy to see to it and if it does I wish you would I would like for mother to draw my State pay if She can I wish you would write and let me know a bout it, I have bin permoted to a Sergent for my military knowledge and good behaveour in battle I am Second Sergent now and I dont want to be 1st or Orderly Sergent aney more for I serveed 6 monthes at that and I dont like it I get 17 dollars per month now and no work to do of aney a mount and when I was Orderly I had too much and onley got 20 dollars per month, I see pretty easey times now, tell John that I would like to bee down home to go down the river to East point⁵⁵ with him and Show him some of the Lower part of Jersey, give my love to all hands aunt Mary, aunt Charlott, Almira and to both Johns⁵⁶, mother and Ed. Call and in fact to all in quireing friends, I dont know how soon payday will bee a long but I think pretty soon, nothing exciteing going on at presant nomore at presant write soon

from your most dutiful Son

William .T. Cobb

⁵⁴Single men had been receiving four dollars in state pay since August 1861. New recruits enlisting in August 1862 without families or widowed mothers received only two dollars a month. Some confusion must have taken place following Emma's death and presumably the problem was resolved as Cobb did not mention it again. *Pioneer*, August 24, 1861, 2; and August 9, 1862, 2.

⁵⁵Located at the mouth of the Maurice River cove.

⁵⁶Cobb was probably referring to his mother's sister, Mary, and perhaps her husband John was one of the Johns. Almira was Cobb's sister, eleven years his junior.

[written around the margin of the second page]

Send me some post Stamps if you pleas. for they are not to be had down here for love or money

[written at the top of page four]

(I recieved the bible befor I recieved the first letter, I was vary well pleased with it,

Camp near Harrisons Landing Aug 9th [1862]

Der Father

I Send in charge of (Mr Edward. C. Collines⁵⁷ of our band wich is discharged to day) my Sword. Sash. and would like to send my watch but I have no other to use, Mr Collines is a vary nice man and a member of the M.E. Church at Bridgeton and if he comes down to our house he will give you the news of our traviles, you must take good care of my things I have not much time to write

from your most obediant Son

W. T. Cobb

⁵⁷Edward C. Collins of Bridgeton, NJ, was forty-three when he was mustered out of the Fifth's regimental band. Stryker, 229; Edwin [sic] C. Collins, Military Records, National Archives.

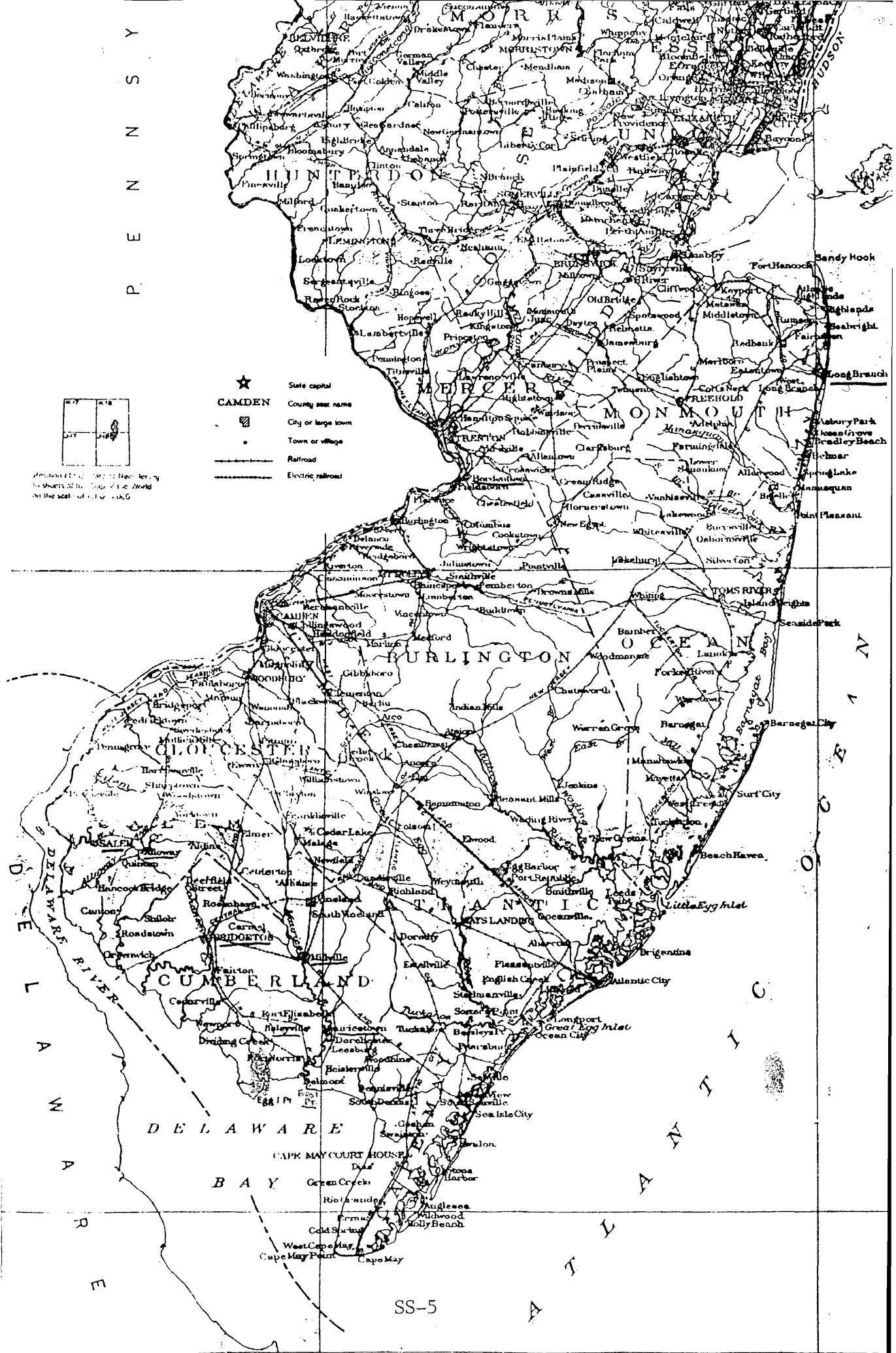
SPECIAL SECTION: MAPS, PICTURES, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND PHOTOS

	Page
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2. Map of New Jersey, 1913. (Ronald V. Jackson, and David Schaefermeyer, <i>New Jersey 1830 Census</i> , (Bountiful, UT: Accelerated Indexing System, Inc., 1974), n.p.)	SS-5
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6. Map of Washington, Alexandria, and Northern Virginia. (Major George B. Davis, <i>The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War</i> (New York: Fairfax Press, 1983) plate VIII, map 1.)	SS-9
7. Map of Virginia and Maryland, including the Lower Potomac and the Peninsula. (David Herbert Donald, ed., <i>Gone for a Soldier: The Civil War Memoirs of Private Alfred Bellard</i> , (Boston, 1975), front leaf.)	SS-10
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13. Jackson's Flank March prior to the Battle of Second Manassas, August 26, 1862. John J. Hennessey, *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas* (New York, 1993), 100. SS-16
14. Grover's Attack, Second Manassas, 3 p.m. August 30, 1862. (Hennessey, 250.) SS-17
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16. Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Vicinity. (Major George B. Davis, *The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War* (New York: Fairfax Press, 1983), plate XXII, map 5.) SS-19
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19. Fort Fisher, Naval and Military Attacks, January 1865. (Virgil C. Jones, *The Civil War at Sea* (3 vols., New York, 1962), vol. 3, 314. SS-22
20. Charleston and Vicinity. *Civil War Chronology*, Navy Department (Washington: 1971), V-35. SS-23
21. Mauricetown, 1876. (Cumberland County Historical Society, Greenwich, New Jersey.) SS-24
22. Home of the Cobb Family, Mauricetown, New Jersey. Shown in the picture: Margaret Cobb, standing at the gate; George Cobb, standing in front center; Almira, standing to far right; Fremont, sitting near the fence, left of Margaret. (Photo provided by Phyllis Williams, n.d.) SS-25
23. Home of Kathy and Bryan Alcox. The Cobb Home Restored. (Photo, Michael Ludwick, 1994.) SS-26
24. Mauricetown Historical Society. Former home of Ed Compton, built in 1864 by Samuel Cobb. (Photo, Michael Ludwick, 1994.) SS-26
25. Haleyville Methodist Church, built in 1864. (Photo, Michael Ludwick, 1994.) SS-27
26. Gravestones of Samuel and Margaret Cobb in Haleyville Church Cemetery. (Photo, Michael Ludwick, 1994.) SS-27

27. Mauricetown Methodist Church, built in 1880. Samuel Cobb established a Sunday School at this church which he helped design and build. (Photo, Michael Ludwick, 1994.) SS-28
28. Picture of Samuel Cobb located in the Mauricetown Church. Photo, Michael Ludwick, 1994. SS-28
29. John T. Nixon. (Issac Nichols, *Historic Days in Cumberland County, New Jersey* (Bridgeton, NJ: Naar & Sons, 1990, reprint of 1907 edition), n.p.) SS-29
30. Long Branch, New Jersey, 1872. (John T. Cunningham, *New Jersey: America's Main Road* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966) photo page 20.) SS-29





Location of the Delmarva Peninsula in the Eastern United States.

- ★ State capital
- CAMDEN County seat name
- ▣ City or large town
- Town or village
- Railroad
- Electric railroad

SS-5

Scale 500,000

Camp on Lower Potomac

Feb 2 1862

Dear :

As it is my birthday
day I take no measure in writing
you a few lines. I received yesterday
news and was much pleased in learning from
home you give me a description of the State
Rebels but I expect we will not get it
soon as you did we get the news every
day and we may judge we
get the news at our own home
I read in the Inquirer, New York Tribune,
Baltimore Clipper, Washington Star,
Trenton Gazette & Republican and several
other news papers we have the news
all as soon you get it here at home
if not a little sooner. We read a great
deal of news, and we are
ever I believe there was a battle
promised in our own papers as Rebels

2/23/62

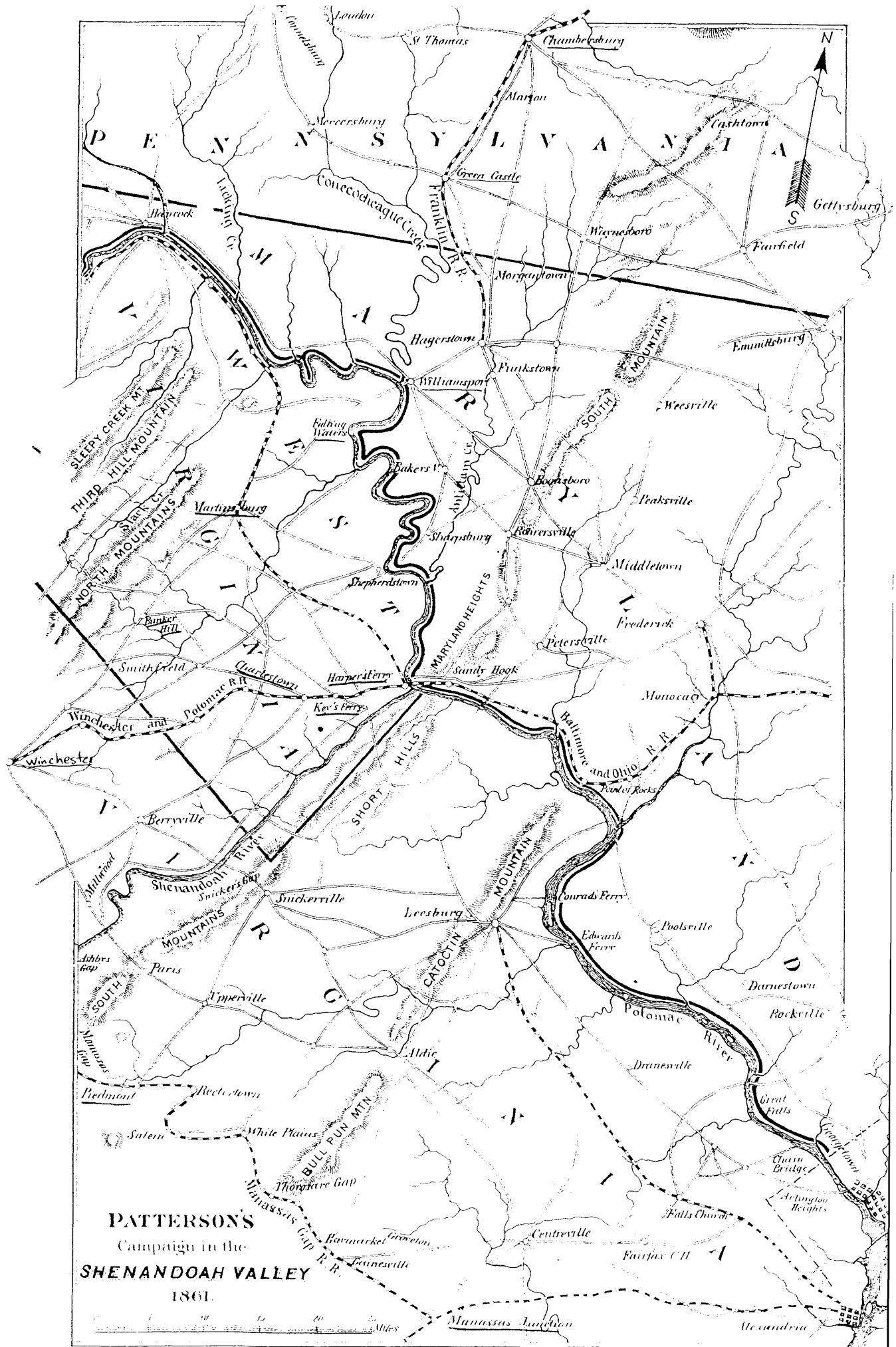


Mrs Samuel Cobb

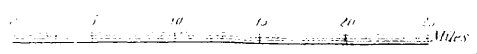
Maurice town

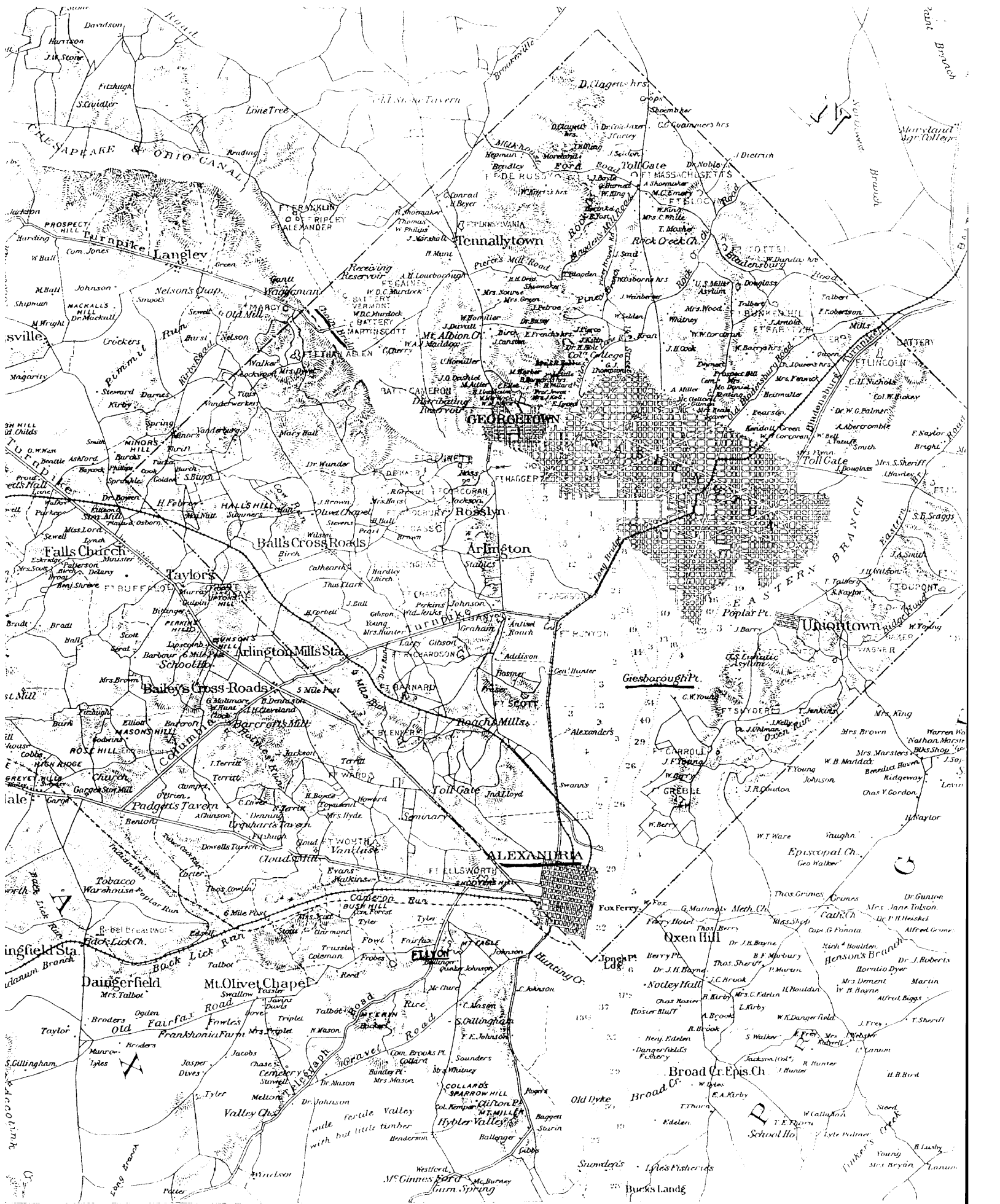
Cumberland Co

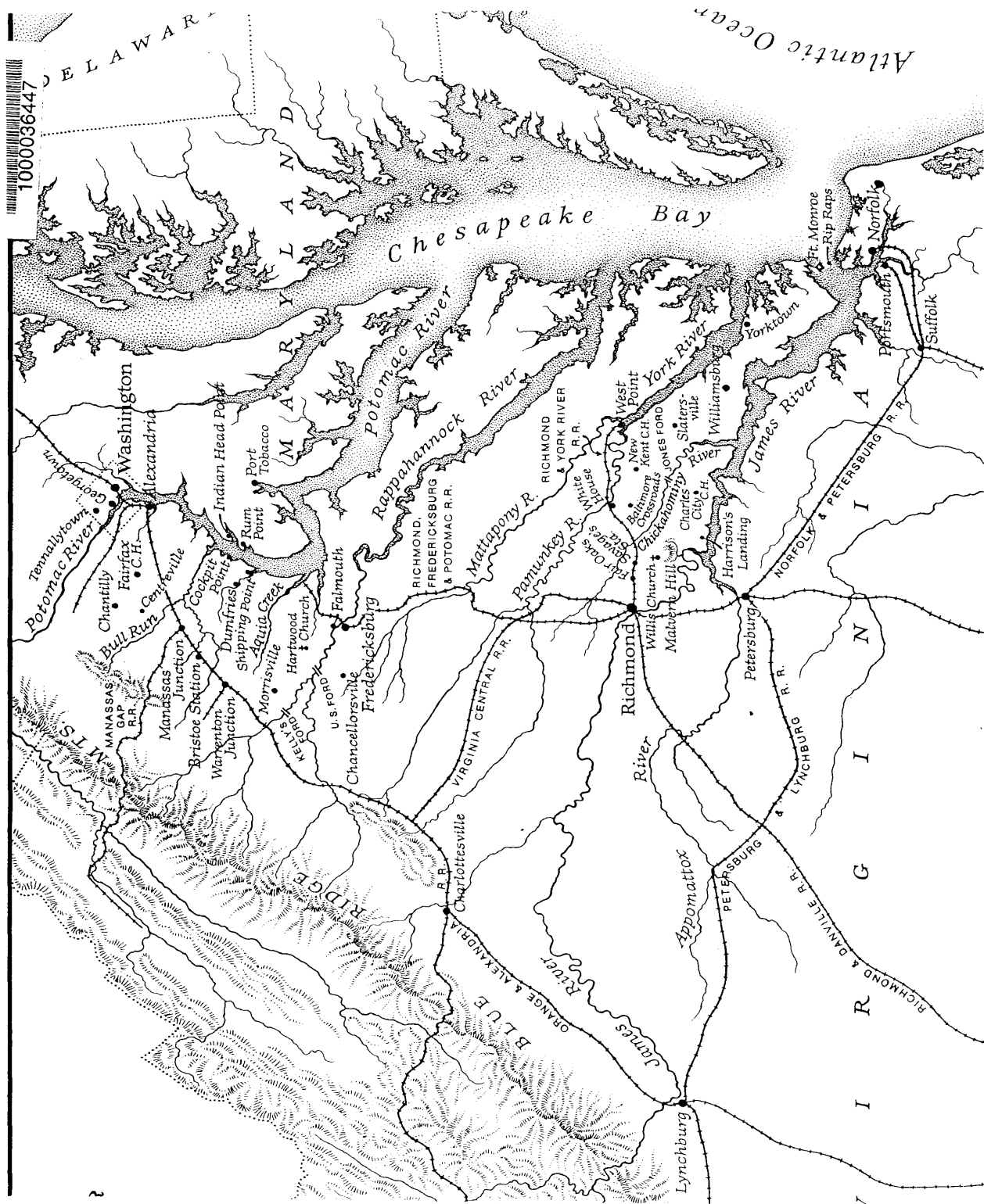
N. J.

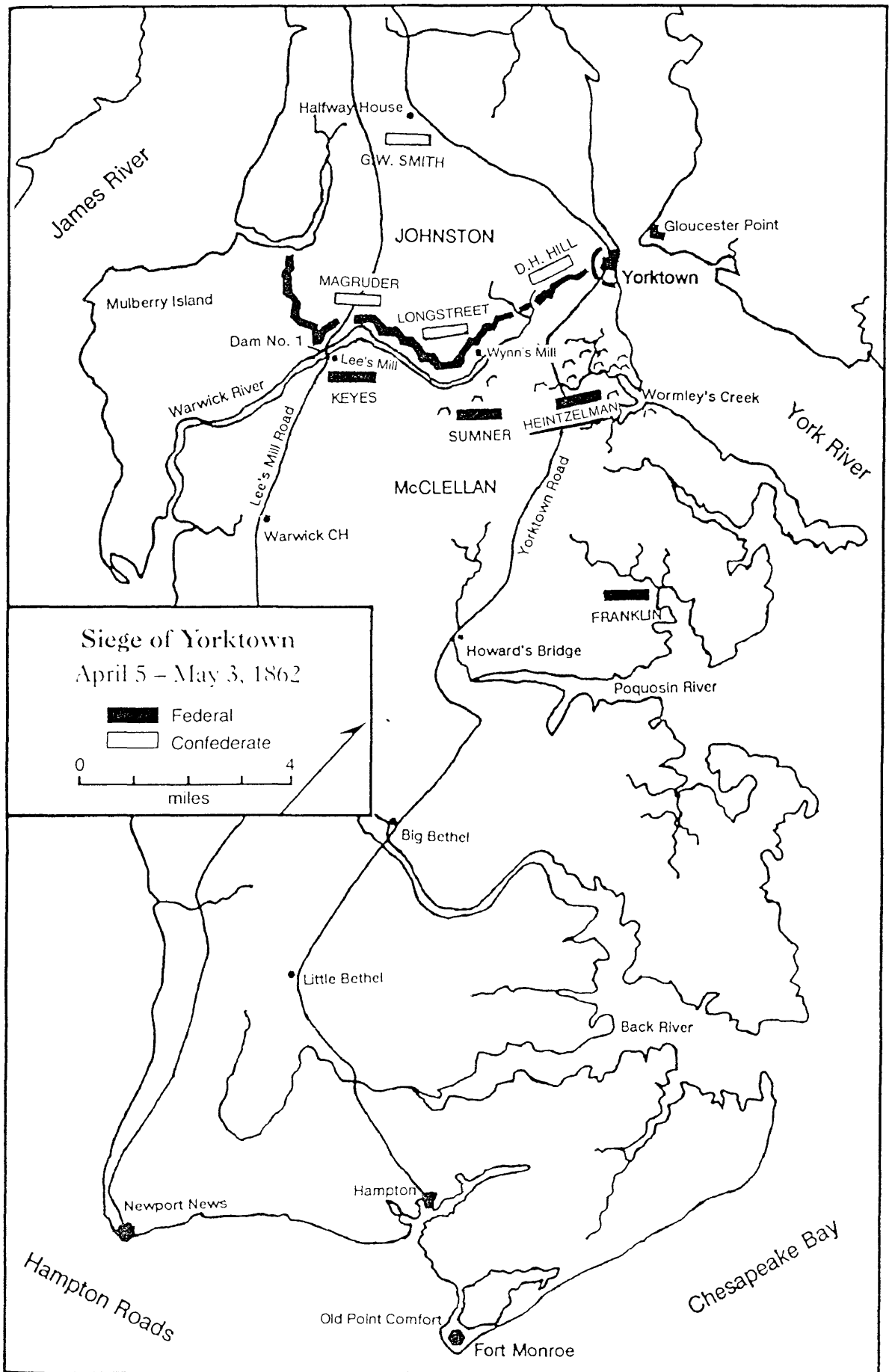


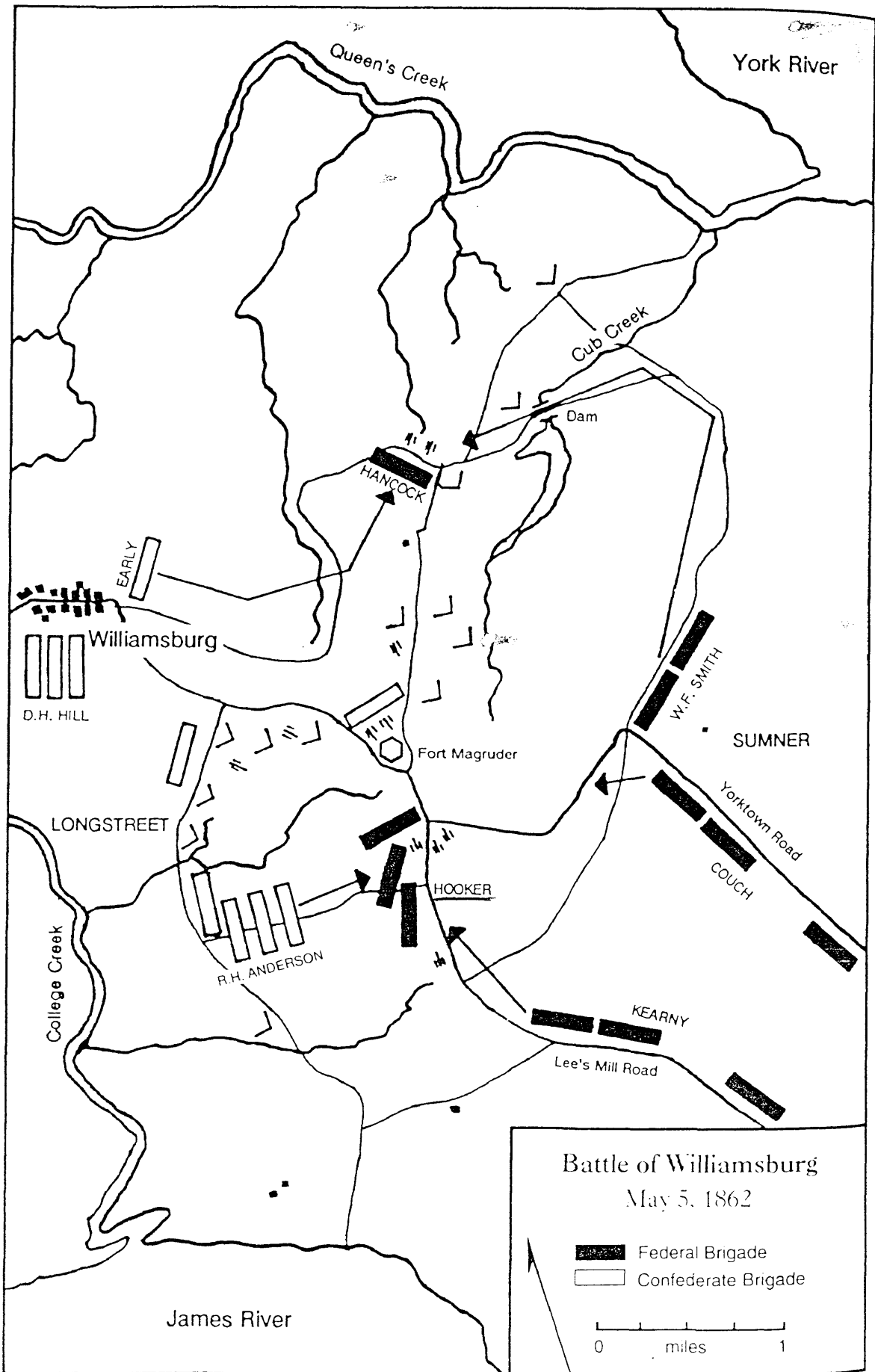
PATTERSON'S
 Campaign in the
SHENANDOAH VALLEY
 1861.







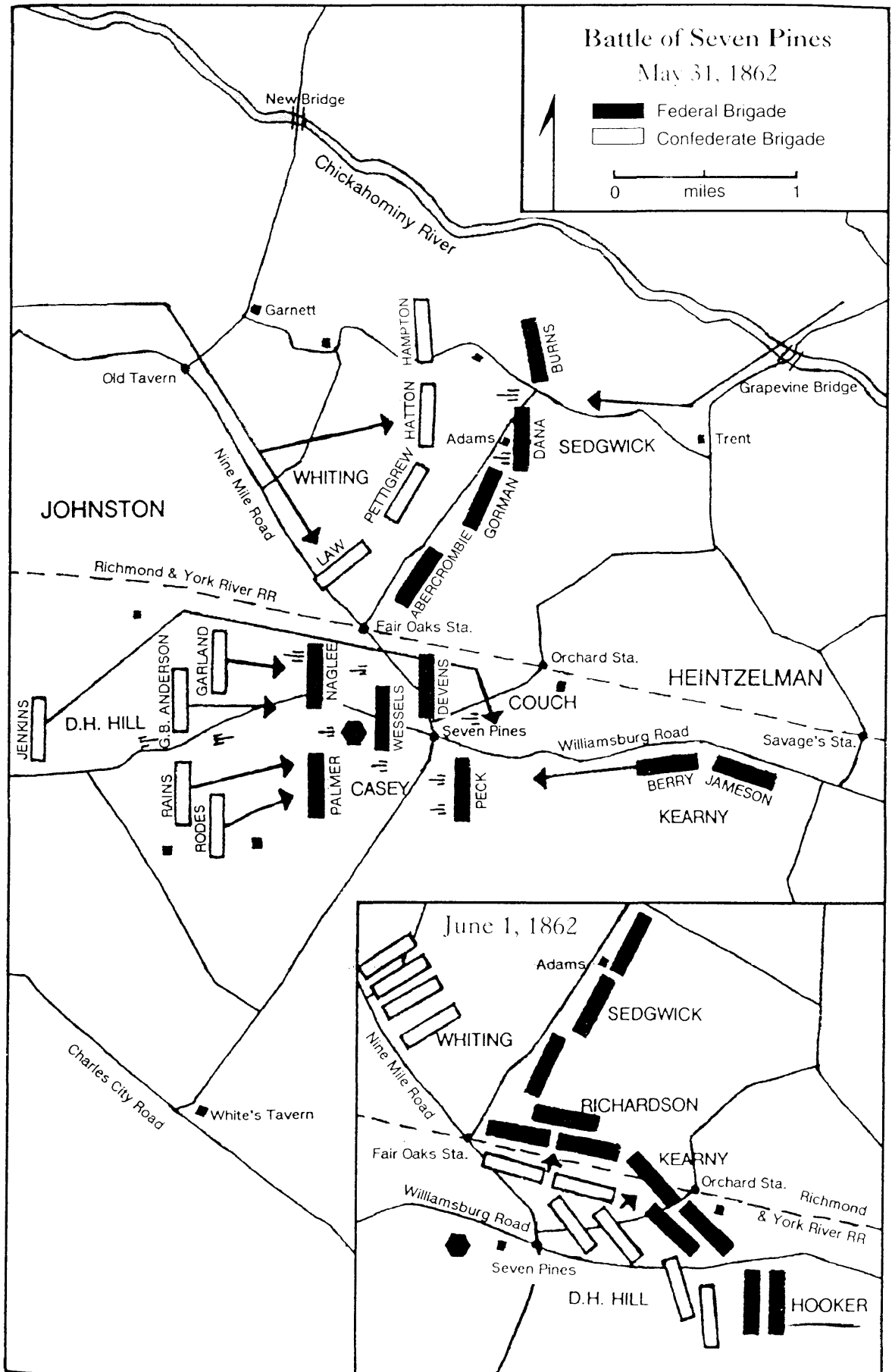




Battle of Williamsburg
May 5, 1862

Federal Brigade
 Confederate Brigade

0 miles 1

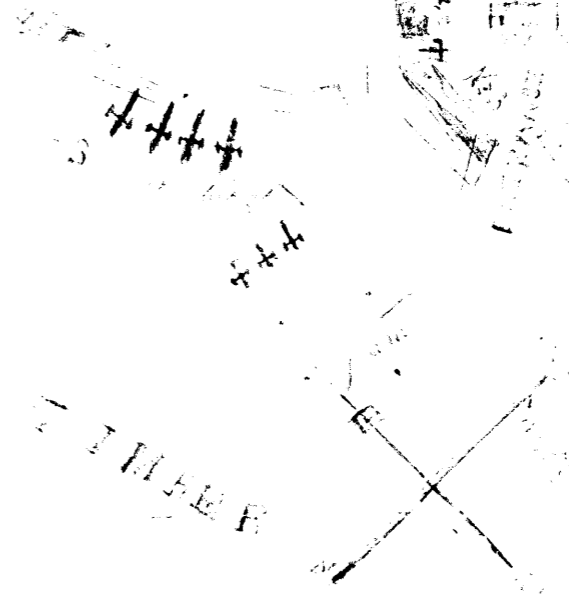
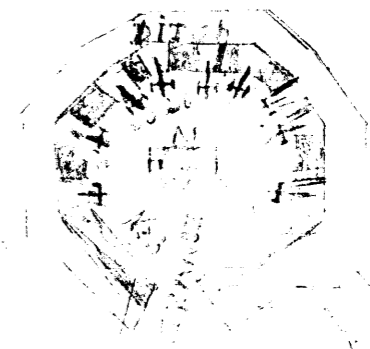
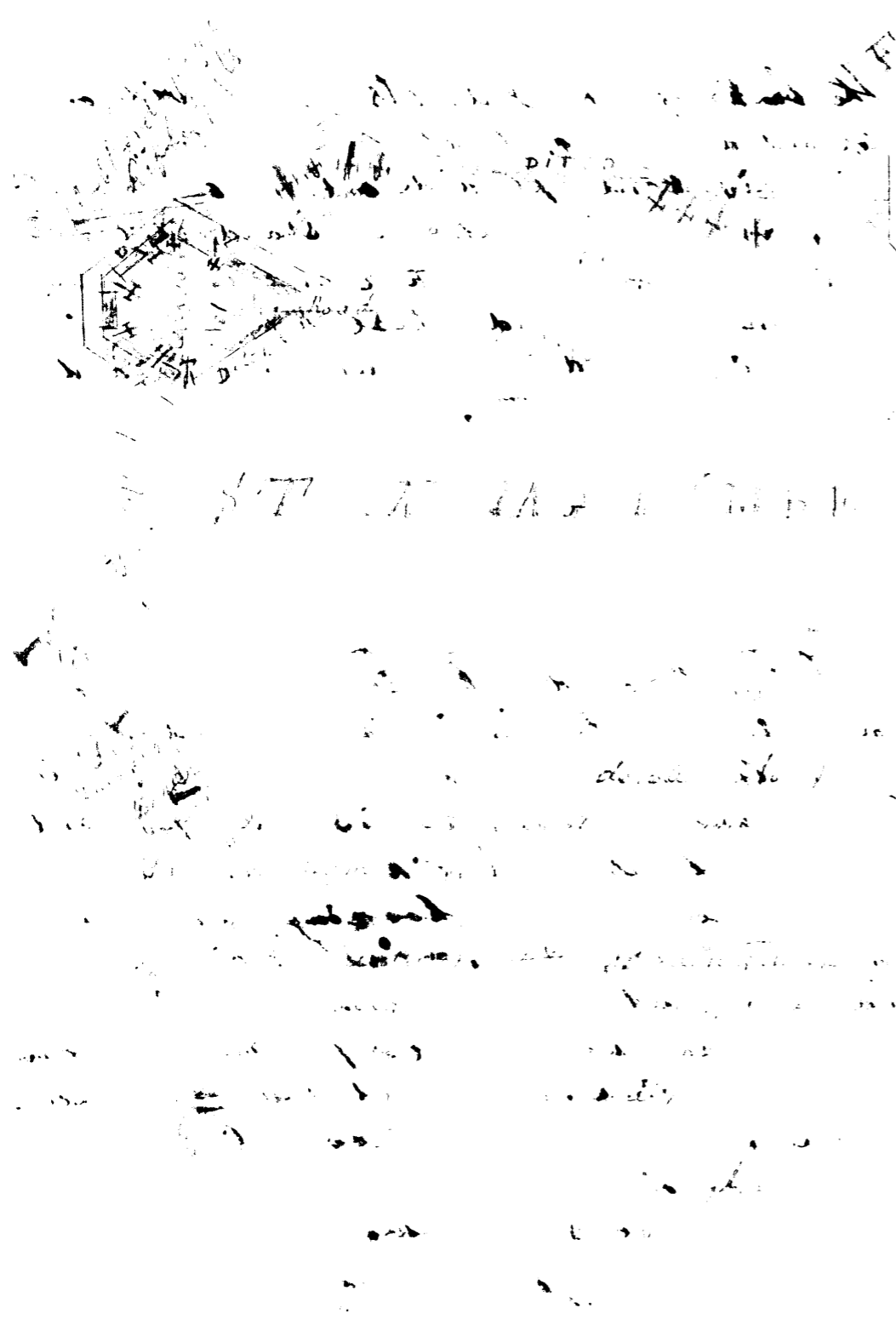


F. T. I M B E R

F. T. I M B E R

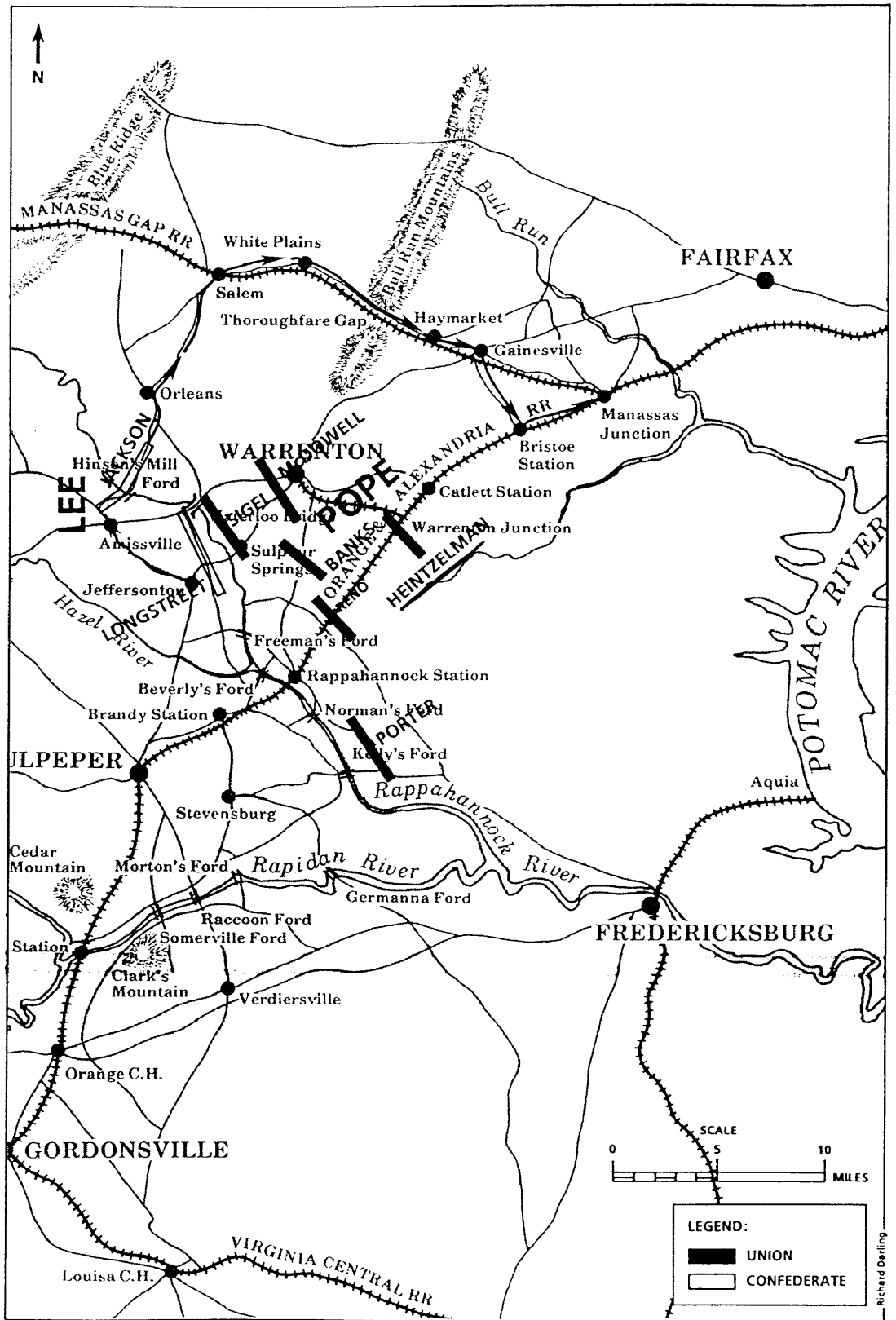
H. T. I M B E R

H. T. I M B E R

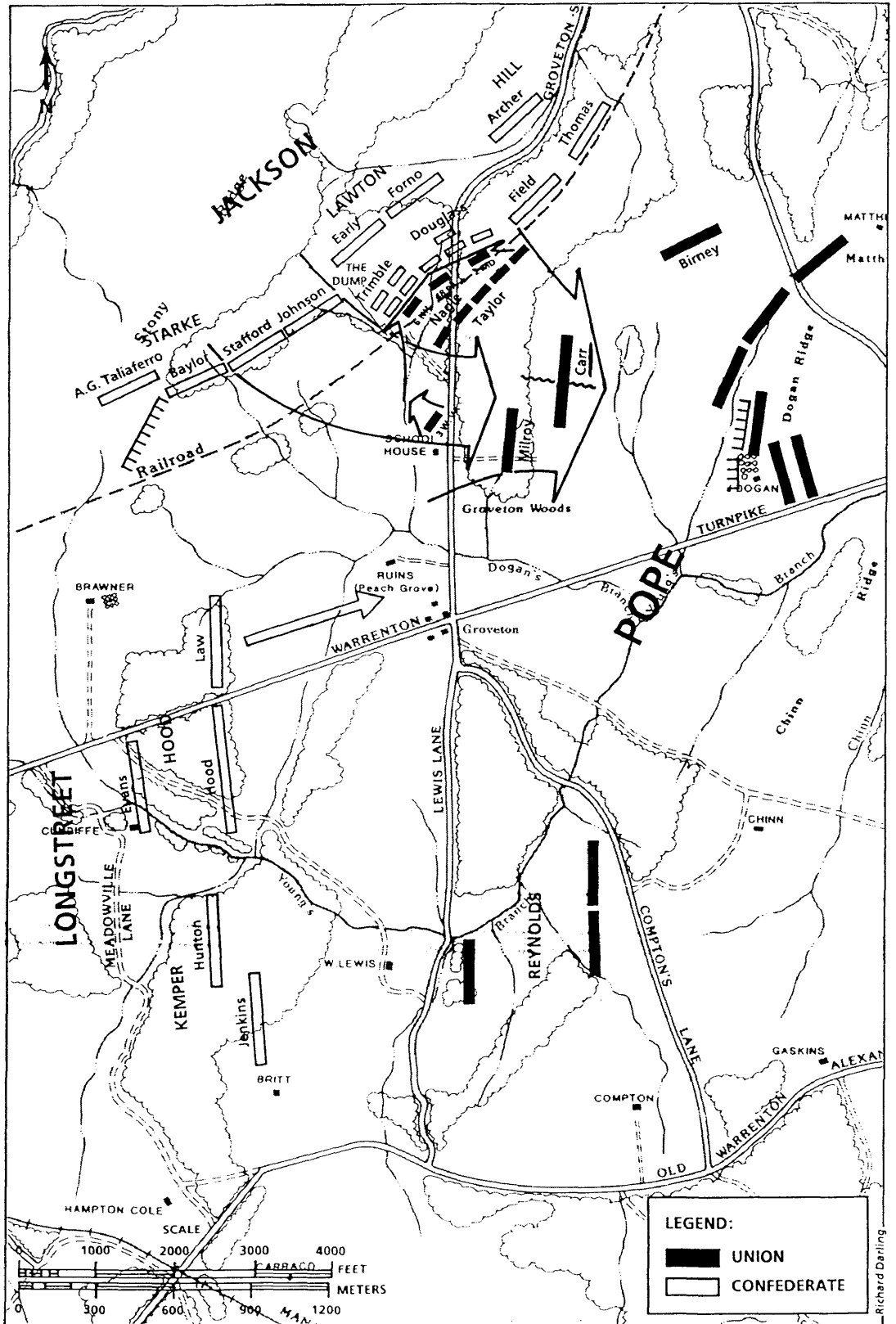


The banks of the Redoubt is 6 ft wide on top and about 8 feet at the bottom, the Ditch is 8 ft wide and from 6 to 8 ft deep, on the side with well stand is logs placed on top of one another and dirt thrown against on the out side these Rifle pits is 4 ft 9 in high and is 2 ft wide on top and 6 feet wide on the bottom.

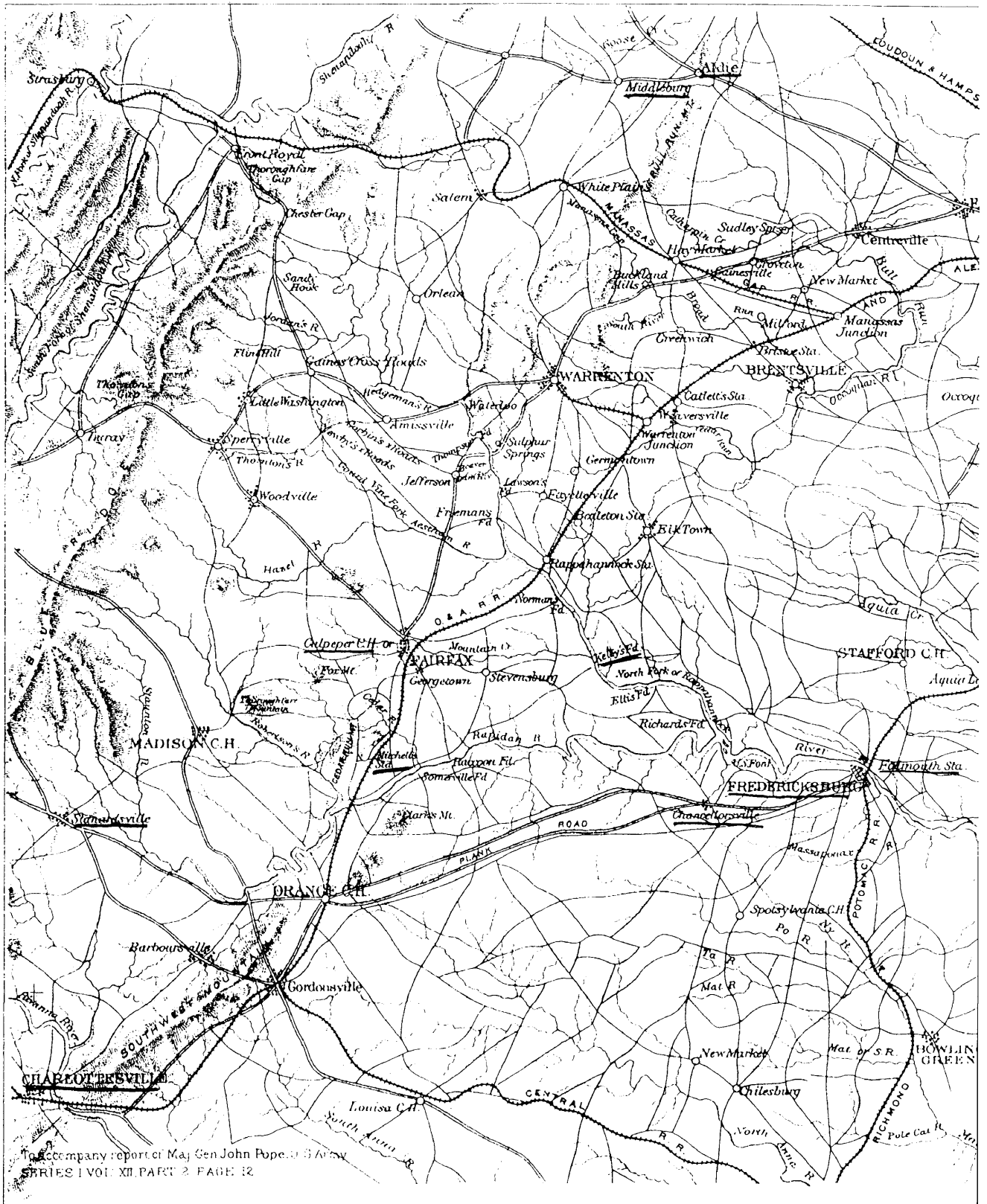
Dear Father, I would like to have a box with some thing to eat in it if it would not cost to much trouble I find that boxes does come here and as our grub is very poor and I am not very well I would like to have some thing from home we are ~~looking~~ looking for the pay master every day, ~~just~~ just recieved your letter and was glad to hear from home I wrote to you the other day with letter I presume you have recieved by this time, I am glad that you recieved that money, we have pretty easy times here at present and if you keep me in stamps I will try to give you what news I know, give my love to mother and all the rest of the Calib family none at present from your most obedient son William J Calib



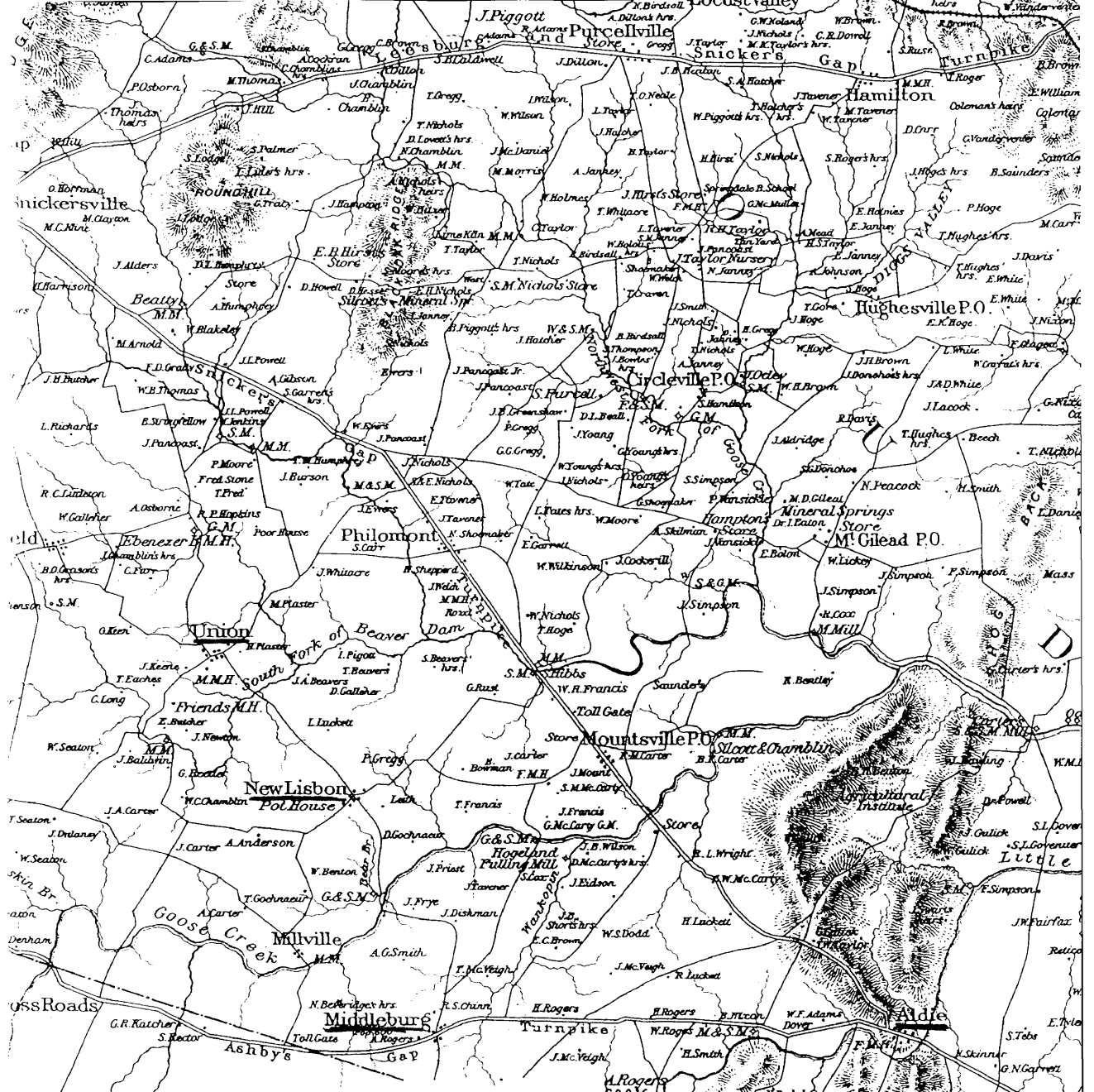
Jackson's flank march



Nagle's attack, 4 P.M.



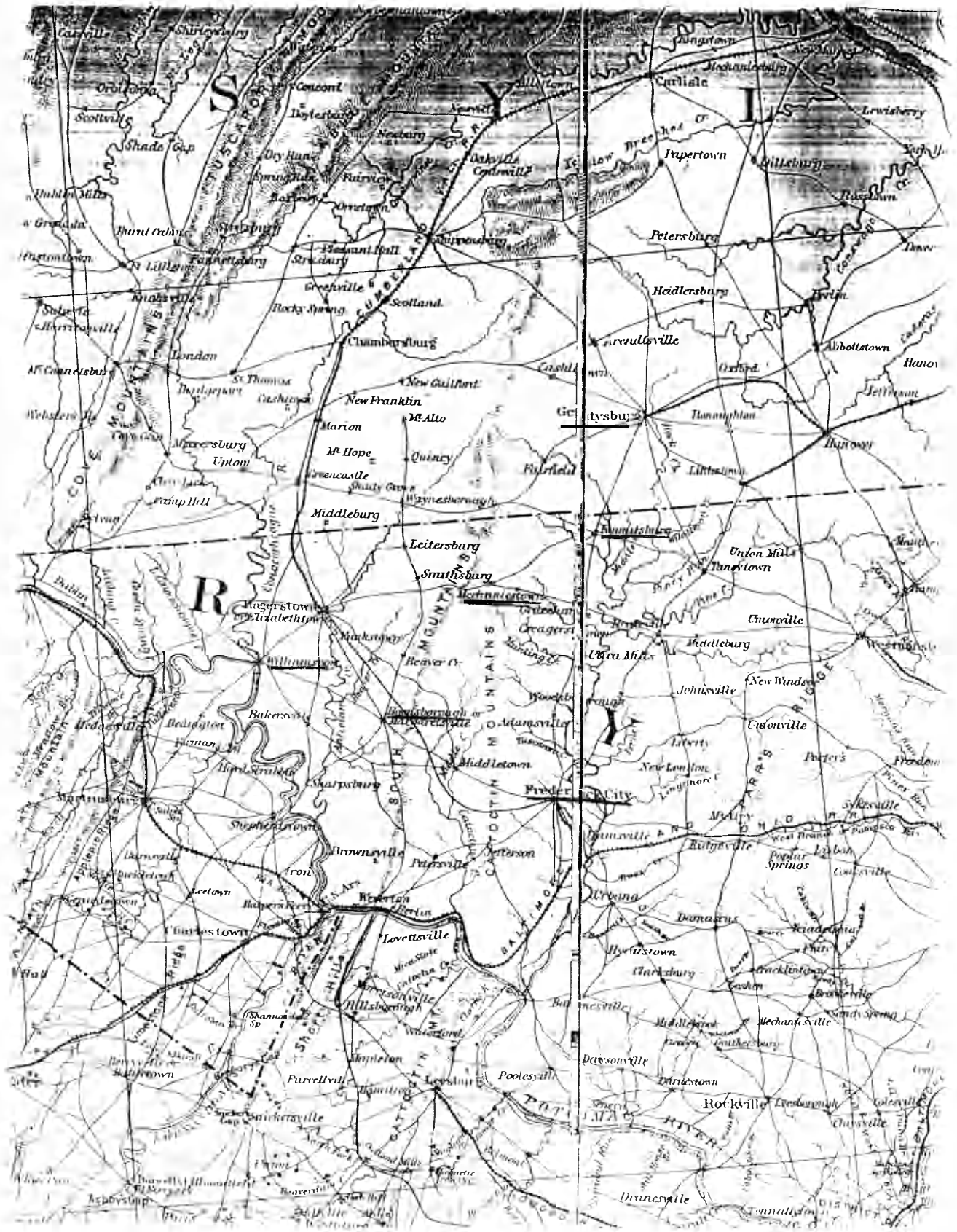
To accompany report of Maj Gen John Pope, U S Army
 SERIES I VOL XII PART 2 PAGE 12

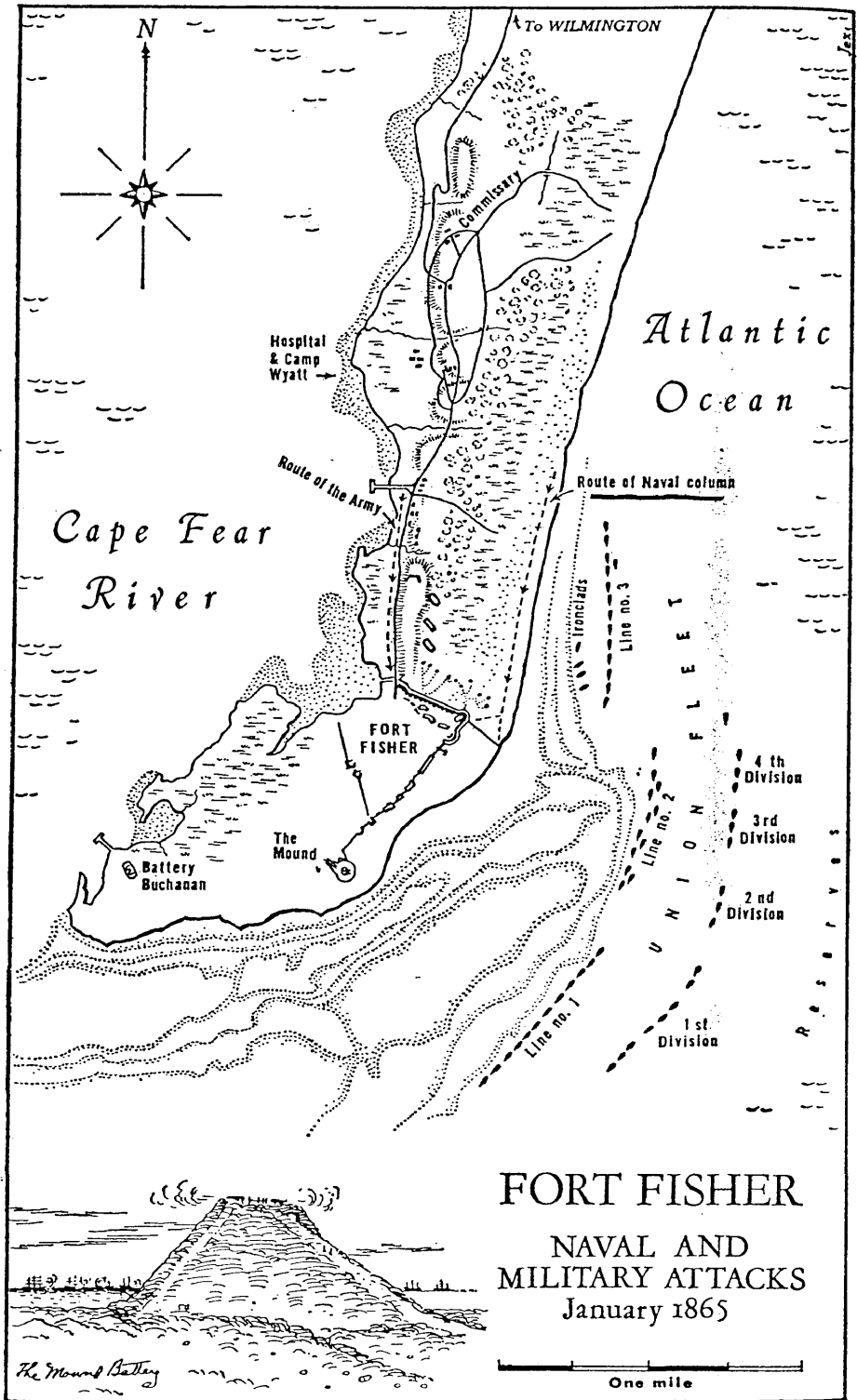


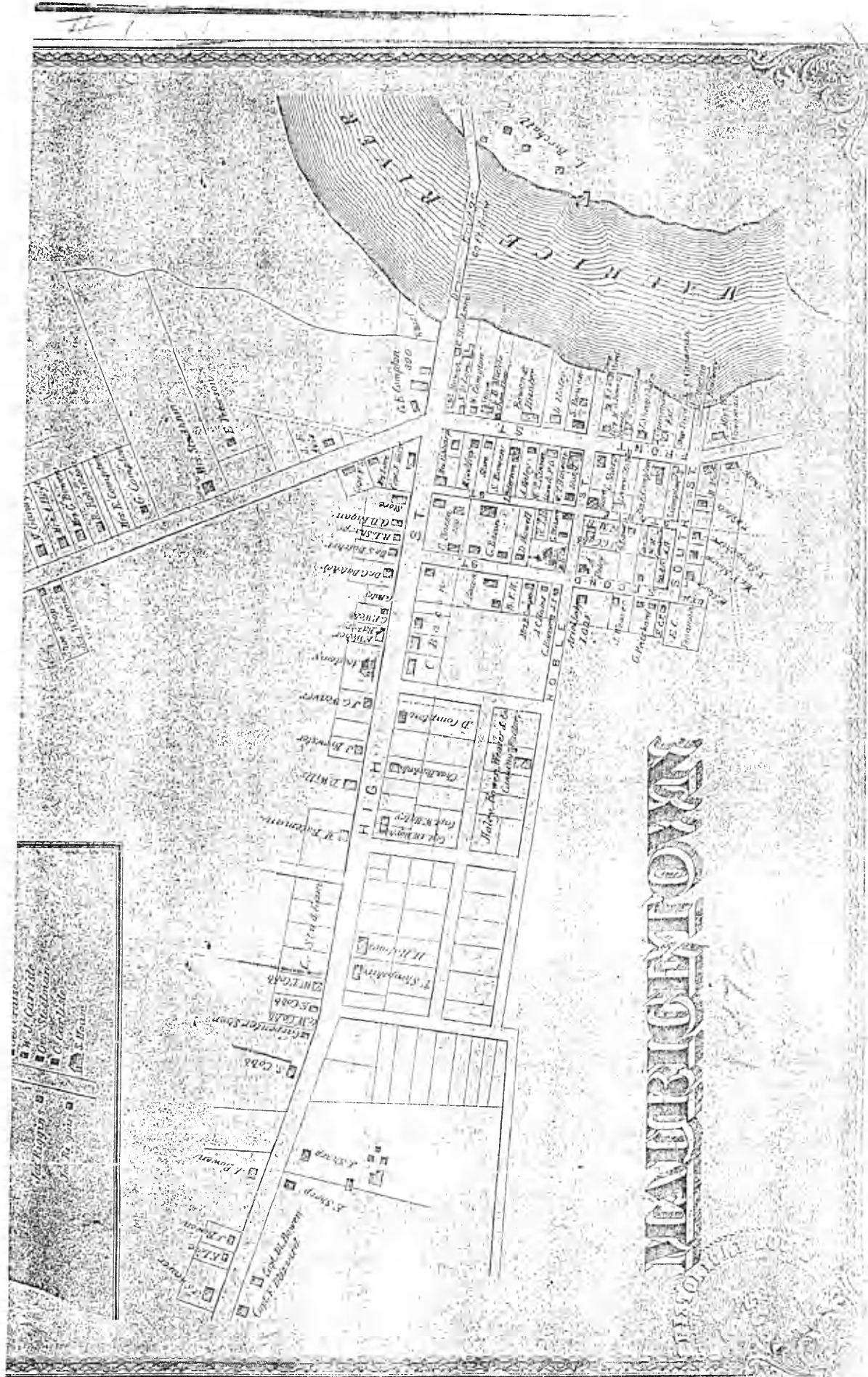
DATA USED IN COMPILATION

- Surveys by John J. Young, Wm. H. Price and others under direction of Top^y Engineers over that portion of Virginia included between the river Potomac and a line from Queen Bridge via Minor's Hill, Peach Grove, Florida, Fairfax C.E., Annapdale, Springfield Station and Accotink to Mount Vernon, also along turnpike from Prospect Hill to Dranesville.
- by Capt Preston C.F. Rice Vol. T.F. Smith's Division & Coast Survey parties under direction of Lieut. Col. Malcolm T.E. A. D.C. Lambory The apsis from Falls Cr. to Sugarland Run also Georgetown turnpike from Prospect Hill to Chain Bridge and County between it and Potomac Comparisons have been made with such other Coast Survey Charts as could be obtained especially with that furnished by Gen^l Franklin of the country occupied by his Division.
- Reconnaissances by Lt. Col. Maxwell, Top^y Eng^s beyond Dranesville, by Maj Palmer, T.E. to Mathias Point, White House Point and to Pine Hill, by Capt Wilkinson opposite Quantico Creek by 1st Lt. Abbot T.E. above Blackburns Ford and vicinity by Capt Schumacher T.E. to Gen^l Kings Brig. of his outpost, by Capt Wm. Boice T.E. to Gen^l Hancock's Div. of country about Bone Hill and toward Wolf Run Shoals by Top^y Engineers and other U.S. Officers to Conoverville and Sudley Springs.
- Information furnished by Gen^l M^l Call, Gen^l Maude and Gen^l Reynolds in vicinity of Dranesville and Difficult Cr. and between turnpike and the Potomac.
- furnished by Gen^l Hancock, Gen^l Brannan and Capt West Vol. T.F. of country occupied by Smith's Division.
- furnished by General Morell and General Waterfield of Country occupied by Gen^l Pitts John Packer's Division.
- furnished by Officers attached to Gen^l Mackenorth's, Gen^l Kings and Gen^l Augur's Brigades.
- furnished by Maj^r Ferguson, Vol. T.F. to Gen^l Meade's Division.
- furnished by Gen^l Franklin.
- from Gen^l Hooker of country occupied by his divⁿ also from Col. Ch. Scrantom & Mess^{rs} Wm. Screnton, Bled. Hornbucker, Hurd, Gaston, Strahler, Gregg, Little, Ahey obtained by Gen^l Richardson and by Capt Wm. Boice, Vol. T.F. to Gen^l Meade's Division beyond outposts and toward the Occoquan.
- given by Mr. Roberts & furnished by Gen^l Kearny. Country about the Occoquin as given by Lt. Col. Alexander Figg U.S.A. & Mr. Harburt. Country about Fring Hen de. N.E. part of Dist of Columbia, by A. Bostlike.
- Map State of Virginia, by Hermann Boye, corrected 1850 by E. V. Bachholla furnished by Bureau T.E. Survey for Great Falls Aqueduct by Lieut. W.C. Augus Corps of Engineers 1852.
- St. Vermon estate by Wm. Callingham.
- Loudoun County by Yardley Taylor.
- Orange and Alexandria Railway by Attest Paul.
- Manuscript N.E. part of Virginia, by the Bureau of Topographical Engineers.
- Accotink Turnpike In Gen^l Geo. Washington.
- Loudoun & Hampshire Railway 1856.
- Manassas Gap Independent Lane of Ruding 1863.
- Proposed Canal between Goose Creek and Alexan. Cr. by Baldwin.
- for Rappahannock and Rappahann. Rivers and their vicinity furnished from the Records in the Office of Lt. Col. J.N. Mansfield of Camp and (7) West Point 1850.
- Additional Corrections

Cromwell Run
 Tortown
 Hopewell



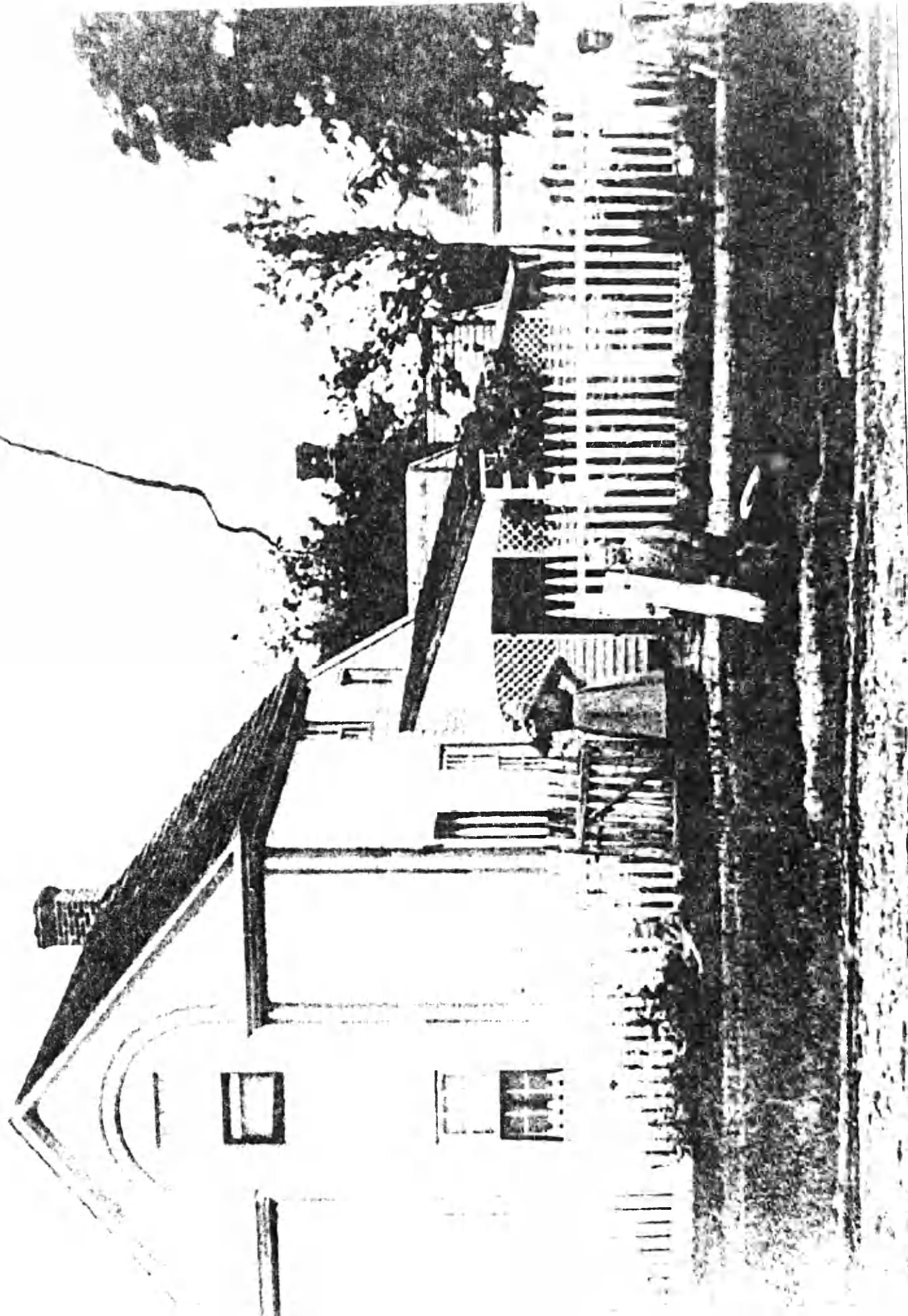


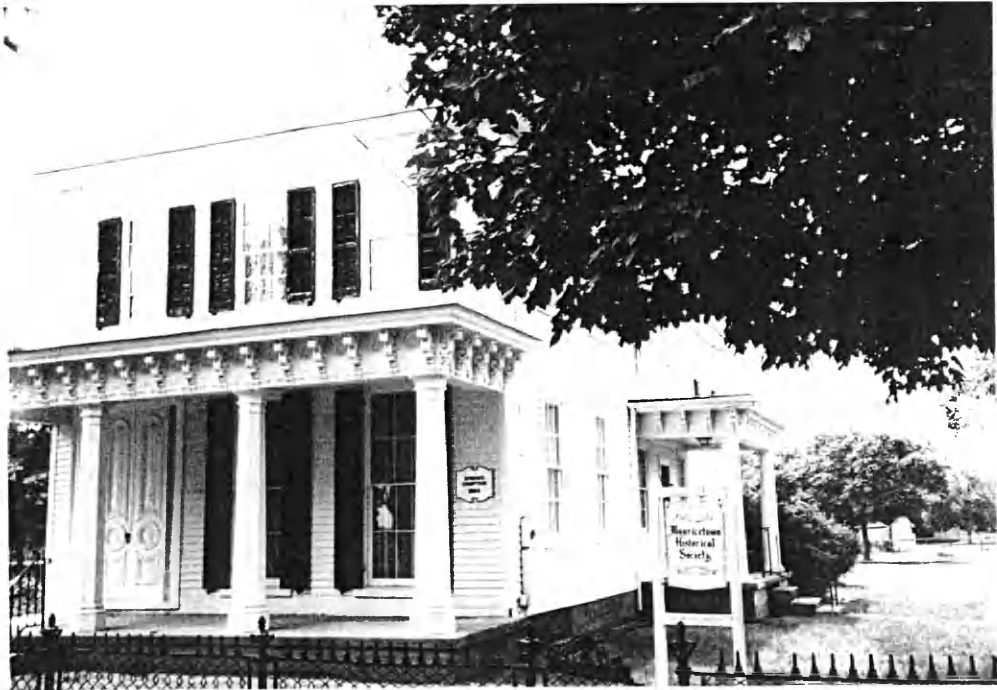


MORNINGTON

1875

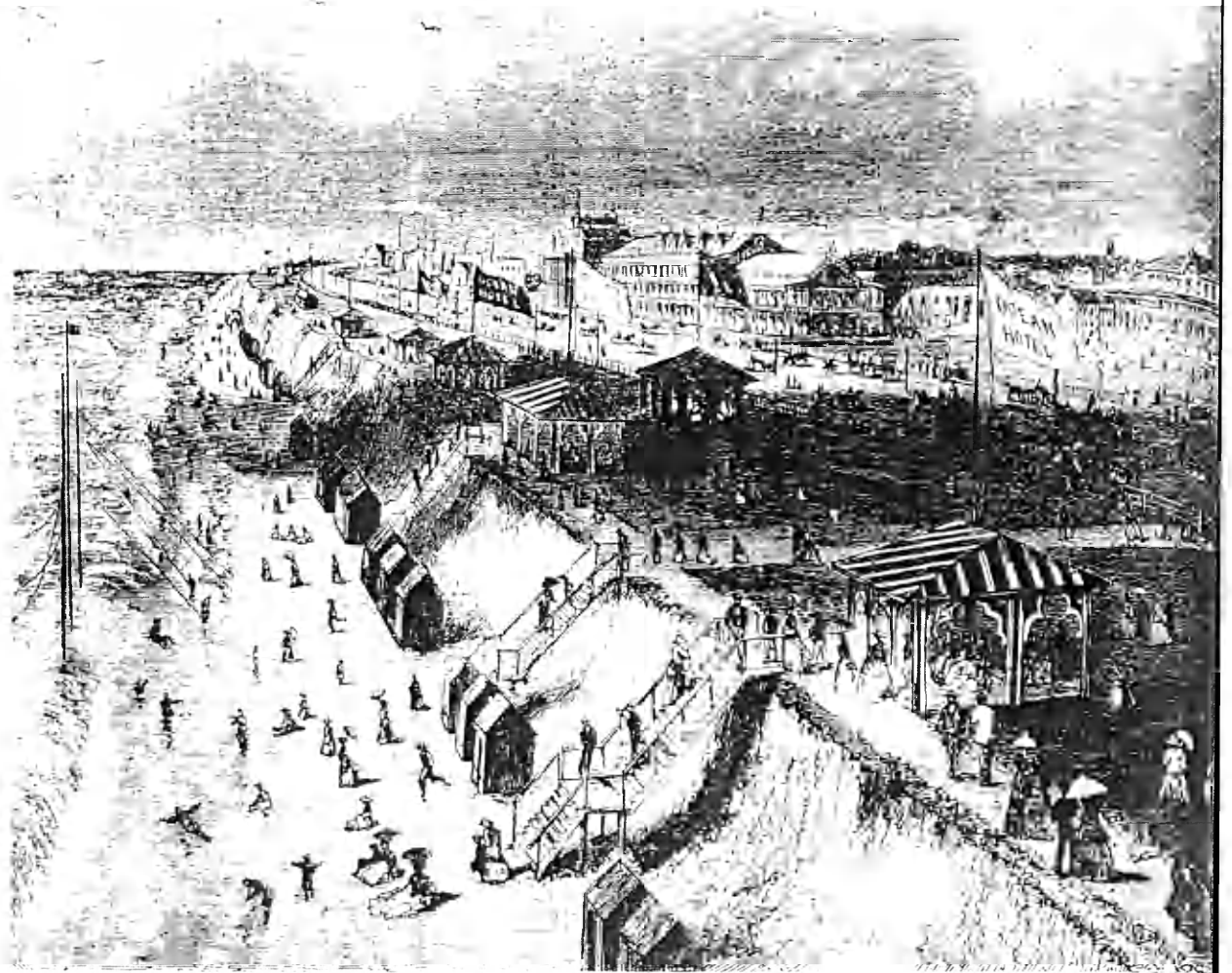
This is a copy of the photo I have of the Cobb House. I presume this is Margaret Cobb with some of her children. Since my great-grandmother was the first girl, she is probably the girl in the right of the picture. PW











PART IV: "WEE HAVE SEEN SOME OF THE HARDEST TIMES": SECOND
BULL RUN, AUGUST 1862-SEPTEMBER 1862

After marching from Harrison's Landing, back down the Peninsula to Yorktown, Cobb's brigade boarded the steamship *Baltic* on August 21, and set sail. The next day the ship ran aground and the Fifth and Seventh New Jersey were transferred to a lighter ship and sent to Aquia Creek; from there they moved on to Alexandria. The regiment then marched to the outskirts of the city and set up camp. According to Alfred Bellard some thirsty soldiers picked up some "liquod potations" and commenced to "reeling around the streets drunk."⁵⁸ On the 26th the brigade took the cars to Warrenton.⁵⁹

Hooker's Division and the rest of Heintzelman's Corps had been sent to join Major General John Pope, the commander of the newly formed Army of Virginia, whose forces lay north of the Rappahannock River in the vicinity of Warrenton. Lee knew he had to act quickly before the rest of McClellan's army arrived from the Peninsula to reinforce Pope. On August 25, Lee sent Stuart's cavalry and Stonewall Jackson's men westward around Pope's army in order to get in Pope's rear and cut communications. Lee intended to arrive the next day with the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia. By nightfall of August 26, Jackson had taken Bristoe Station and Manassas Junction on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad between Pope's army and Washington. That night Pope

⁵⁸Donald, 128.

⁵⁹*O.R.*, I, 12, part II, 453-454.

discovered Jackson in his rear, separated from the rest of Lee's army, and saw an opportunity to crush him.⁶⁰

The next morning Pope ordered the Union forces to about face and advance on Gainesville and Manassas. Stonewall Jackson's artillery and infantry fire tore apart the First Jersey Brigade (First, Second, Third, and Fourth New Jersey) just deployed after arriving near Bull Run Bridge by railroad.⁶¹ Splashing across Kettle Run, Federals ran into Major General Richard S. Ewell's Georgians and Louisianians. Cobb's Second Jersey Brigade, now commanded by Colonel Joseph Carr and which had added the 2nd New York and the 115th Pennsylvania to its ranks, led the advance. Carr led three regiments, including the Fifth, straight along the railroad while Hooker led two others to the left. The Confederates unloaded heavy fire on Carr's men, but when Hooker arrived with his regiments and the rest of the division and its artillery, Ewell was forced to withdraw. The Fifth lost no men in the fight, but the division as a whole had suffered 300 casualties. The Federals had driven Ewell from Bristoe, but Ewell had succeeded in heading off the Union advance, allowing Jackson time to maneuver at his own pace.⁶²

That night Pope issued an order that would have all his men converge upon Manassas Junction to strike Jackson. But when General Kearney arrived at the junction on the afternoon of the 28th, Jackson had already gone. In search of Jackson, Pope ordered Kearney, Hooker and the commander of the Ninth Corps, Major General Jesse L.

⁶⁰John J. Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas* (New York, 1993), 116-118.

⁶¹Hennessy 118, 124-127.

⁶²Hennessy, 131-135; Donald, 129-131.

Reno, to march to Centreville, mistakenly thinking Jackson there. After having found Jackson and engaging him at Groveton, Pope, early on August 29, ordered Kearney to march to Manassas from Centreville. Neither Hooker, now resting near Bull Run, nor Reno had yet reached Centreville but were ordered to continue their march and follow Kearney's route to Manassas from the east.⁶³ When Hooker reached the battlefield he was ordered to support the center of Major General Franz Sigel's attack on Jackson's position along an unfinished railroad. Two regiments of Carr's brigade, one being the Fifth New Jersey, were sent to fill a gap in the Union line. They fought the Confederates for two hours--the same men they faced at Kettle Run--until they were withdrawn. By the end of the day, 48 of the 350 men remaining in the Fifth were casualties.⁶⁴

Having suffered heavy losses, the Fifth played only a small role on the second day of fighting. As General James Longstreet's men were driving back the Union left, the regiment was called up to support an artillery battery. When the regiment was ordered to support the infantry, the artillery pieces they had been guarding were taken and turned on the Federals. Arriving on the far left, the regiment soon fell back in the face of artillery fire and kept falling back until it reached Centreville.⁶⁵ At the Second Battle of Bull Run, as at the first, the Union army was routed. The next day, September 1, General Kearny,

⁶³Hennessy 194-200.

⁶⁴Hennessy, 223, 260-261; Donald, 134.

⁶⁵Donald, 140-143.

who had been promoted to Major General in July, was killed at Chantilly after wandering into Confederate lines.⁶⁶

After the battle, the Fifth New Jersey, depleted and tattered, remained in the defense of Washington rather than join the rest of the army into Maryland. Cobb claimed that Brigadier General Cuvier Grover took command of Hooker's Division when Hooker was promoted to Major General, but Hooker had already achieved this rank in May 1862. When Hooker was sent northward into Maryland with command of the First Corps of the Army of the Potomac, Brigadier General Daniel E. Sickles, not Grover, took command of his division. Cobb did not discuss the Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg, September 17, 1862) nor the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation issued in its wake.

⁶⁶Boatner, 449.

CORRESPONDENCE, AUGUST 26-SEPTEMBER 29, 1862

Camp near Alexandrew Va Augst 26th 1862

Dero Father

I recieved yours of the 16th on the 21st I recieved it on board of the Steem Ship Baltics wich wee Shiped on board at Yorktown and come to this Place whare wee will leave in a few days for the Shannandoah Valey there is Sommaney troops here a head of us that wee cant get on the Cars to leave here for our destination wee have no tents pitched for wee expect to leave evry hour but wee have not gon yet, I have not got much time to write to you for the mail leaves Shortly and will have to write fast wee left Harrisons Landing on the 14th and marched all the way down the Paninusla and Shiped at yorktown for here wee had a raney time of it the first day and night that wee was on board of the Ship but the soecond day and night was vary nice for us. I sent my sword and sash home by one of our band men I will give you directions how to get them they are in Bridgeton. if you send for them the Directions is as follows. Call at Samuel Reeves She [*Shoe?*] Store and in quire for Edward .C. Collines Bridgetown give my love to all of the family Ed and mother no more at pre[s]ant

from your most Dutiful Son.

W. T. Cobb

I am in a hurry write soon

Camp near Alexandrews Va Sep 6th 1862

Dear Father

I recieved yours of the 18^{inst} and was vary glad to here from home once more. I wrote to you when wee arrived here from the Panintula and have not had aney chance to write to you befor. Since I wrote to you last wee have seen some of the hardest times that wee have seen since wee come out here. wee arrived here at Alex^a on the 26th of Augst and stayed here two days wee then embarked on board of the Cars for Warington [*Warrenton*] whare wee arr[i]ved a little befor dark, wee cooked our Coffee and eat our last hard tack (Hard Crackers) wee then laid down for the night wee had laid there 4 hours when wee herd firing in the direction from whence wee came, the next morning wee was ordered to moove at day light wich wee did, and strange to say wee went rite back on the vary Road that wee come (but not in Cars but on foot) well wee suspected something wrong by taking that course. wee marched untill after noon when wee over took the Enemy, wee give them battle and if wee didant make them take out it is a caution wee Run them down a hill and kept up such a terable firing and Hooraying that they broke and run like Sheep befor us wee killed a grate number of them and wounded maney more they did us little damage wee took a good lot of Prisonors with Guns and other war empliments. wee then went on a bout 3 miles farther and stoped for the night, wee being pretty well dired out after marching 10 miles and fighting a battle in the bargain

after resting about half an hour orders come for our Regiment to go a bout 4 miles to the Northwast to do picket duty, well you may judge our feelings with recieving these orders but wee never flinch from nothing wee went and Captured 14 prisinors during the night wee went to whare the rest of the Brigade was encamped wee lay there about 2 hours when wee started off a gain and wee went through Manasses junction and turned the Road to Centerville at sundown wee stoped at Bull Run whare the black horse Cavilry Charged on our men in the Three months service. wee laid there untill 2 Ock the next morning when wee started off again wee marched through Centerville and took the Road to the left (wich leads towards the Blue Ridge) wee went 6 miles down this Road and Come on the field of action once more whare the Shot Shell Grape Canister and Bulits was flying in evry direction well wee went in to it in good earnest and fought about 2 hours when was relieved wee went out in to a large Field and laid under a heavy fire of shot & s[h]ell the remainder of the day (nothing to eat all day wee was like a drove of half starved hounds rady to fight with hunger) wee lay her[e] all night with vary little Sleep the next morning the Ball opened a gane and at 2 Ock wee was brought into it agane and after fightin for 2 hours a trying to Stop a flank movement of the enemy wee was ordered out on account of the enemy getting in front on our right and in our rear

[written at the top of the next page with a line around it]

I did not get a [s]cratch in the fights and I am well and in better helth than I have had for 2 months past,

[the page continues]

Continuation of the other Sheet

you may guess our situation with fireing on 3 sides of us, wee went out as cool as if nothing had happened wee marched out under the protection of our Artilary wich stood on a hill and you have laughed to See the Johney Rebs Run when wee got out of the way of our Artilary they broke and run like so maney Sheep, by this time wee found that the enemy was out flanking us on our left and wee was ordered to fall back this was a bout 4 1/2 Ock in the afternoon wich wee done in good order wee marched all night a waiding up to our middles through Creek and Brooks over Stoney Roads up hill and down hill through Drenching Raines Sokeing to the vary Skinn on our Backs and not a man Complained for that day wee had recieved some Raw Pork and hard Tack wich was our onley want for rest wee did not look for (and have not since wee left the Panitula wich was on the 15th of last month wich wee struck our tents and have not had them pitched untill yasterday wee pitched them. wee have slept under our tents but they was not pitched wee roled up in them at nights so wee have slept since the 15th of last month no Blankets and no knapsack wee used our haver sacks for a pillow and glad to get that, this is a Small Spesiman of our condition for wee are allmost naked I have not got a shirt to my back and no Stockings to ware and would not have had aney Shoes to my feet but I got a pair on the Battle field as maney others did wich wee took from what ever course [*source*] wee could obtain them this is owing to us having orders to send our KnapSacks and all of our Clothng away when wee was at Harrison's Landing but wee will

draw new Clothes to day or to morrow wee will get a new fit out Compleet) I will give you a few words wich pased between Gens Banks. Hooker. Carney. Sigal. Says Gen Hooker to Gen Banks (on the night of our arrivel at Warington) I have but a few men and they are worn out but I will take them down the R. Road and cut off[f] Jackson and if you do not send Some one down there Washington is gon, I will take the lead and make the first attacket on the enimy. Gen^l Carney Said that he would take the advance the Second day and support Gen^l Hooker. Gen^l Sigal Said he would take the advance on the third day Supported by Gens Hooker & Carney so wee went it is my belief that if the army of the Potoma[c] had bin 6 hours later the whole army of the valley would have bin captured I see the case vary plane but wee got them out of a scrape and are all right. I am acton Orderly Sergent and expect will be O.S. but I dont want that position. the Stamps that you sent me first got wet so that I cant use them but the last ones I have all right. give this to Ed when you read it and tell him that I have no more paper or I would write to him. wee have a plenty to eat and are doing well. wee lay a bout 2 miles from Alex^{ra} I would like to see some boddy from home. give my love to mother and all of the rest of the Cobb family write soon nomore at presant

from your most dutiful Son

W. T. Cobb

[written in the right margin of the last page]

write soon & tell Ed to write

Camp near Alexandria Va Sep' 14th 1862

Der Father

I have just recieved the box that you sent to me and I was glad to get it. Some of the articles in it was spoiled but the majarity of the things was good. the sigars. Cherries. and some of the Cakes ware good the Bread and some of the Cakes ware spoiled the Chees was spoiled also the ham is as good as ever and I am a going to have a good supper off of it. I have just recieved a letter from George and was vary glad to here from home George did not give me maney important news, he told me that you had recieved my Sword Sash & watch wich I am vary glad to hear from, he also give me a list of the volunteers from our Place wich I am vary glad to here for I think it is time that some of our mauricetown (Cowards) is turned into Soldiers, it makes little differance to me now how much fighting there is for wee are a laying here in the defence of Washington wee lay near Fort Lyon and wee are rady to meet the Johney Rebs at aney moment if they See propper to pay us a visit wich I hardly think they will do, the new troops is doing the fighting now and wee are a laying back getting rested wich wee vary much need. I will give you a list of our Grub wich wee now have, viz, 1 Loaf of Bread evry morning (warm at that) fresh Beef two days in five. Potatoes. Good Salt Pork. Salt Beef. Mixed vegetabls. Beens. Coffee. Sugar. and then the Boys go out a forageing at knights and get Peaches. Grapes. Green Corn. Sweet Potatoes. tomatoes. and what other vegetabls they

can find. Chickines. Gees. Turkeys. Ducks and when they can find them they kill pigs. but all of these are vary nigh gon for there is so maney of these Old Soldiers a round here that they have taken vary nigh evry thing that they can get. I will give you one example night befor last 15 men went out of our Company and when they come back they had 17 pairs of Chickines and about 5 bushels of Sweet Potatoes, 2 bushels of Peches. and the remainder was loaded with apples and round Potatoes they went 7 miles to get them, they started after tattoo at night and did not get back untill 4 Ock in the morning this is a spesimen of Soldiers life when in Camp wee have it differant now from when wee was on the Panintula, I wish you to send me a box and I will send you the money for it I will tell you what I want. viz your and mothers Ambrotype, 100 sigars in a box and some small letter paper and envelopes and 2 pars of Cotten socks. 1 Calico Shirt. 1 Pocket Handkirchief. and if you can get aney Caned fruit send me some. and if you want to send aney Cakes you can put a patition in the Box. dont for get the paper for it is vary hard to get out here. you may think it vary queer in my sending home for such articles but wee cant get them out here unles it is in a box and if you send them as soon as you can I will be likely to get them rite off for there is an Express office in Alexandra, when you send me the box send me a letter and tell me what it costs and when wee get paid I will Send you the money, if you can find aney butter no difference how strong Send it a long. tell mother to send me a big Cake. I would like 2 lb of Sugar. and send me a few Stamps in a letter, I will stop writeing at presant. I am acton O.S. and expect to bee if our O.S. is

made SergeantMajor. nomor give my love to all

from your most obediant Son

W^m .T. Cobb

Camp Near Alexandria Va= Sep 18th 1861 [1862]⁶⁷

Der Father,

I recieved your letter the day after I wrote my last letter to you. and I was vary glad to here from home a gain. I wrote in my last letter that I wanted a box of things and I will give you directions how to send it. you will have to send it to Philadelp[hi]a and put it on board of one of the following Steemers viz James Jerome Capt Jerome, C.C. Alger, Capt Fenton, S. Seymore, Capt Shore, these Steemers leaves Phila= evry Wensday. and Saturday at 12 AM the line is called Hands Line" for Alexandra, Georgetown, and Washington, and it comes through in 36 hours, the Boats leaves No 14 North Warves, Agent for the Loine Thomas webster Jr, Wee Lay near F^t Lyons yet but wee do not know how long wee will stay here for wee have had orders to be rady to moove at a moments notice and wee dont know how soon wee will leave here but I hope not vary soon for I want to get some rest befor I leave here wee are in Gen= Grovers

⁶⁷This letter, though dated 1861, seems to have been written in 1862. In the previous letter (September 14, 1862) Cobb mentioned the watch he sent home and in this letter answers a question about it. In addition, Hooker was promoted to Brigadier General, U.S. Army, around this time. Hooker had held the rank of Major General, U.S. Volunteers, since May 1862.

Division now since Gen= Hooker has bin made major General but Gen= Hooker has command of us for wee are in his Corps and wee are glad of it for he is a General that wee can trust in, if you see fit to send me aney thing to eat in the Box you can do so, Something like Sweet Potatoes, Round Potatoes. Onions. Cakes and somethang of that sort. dont forget the Sigars for these ones that I got in my box Smokes so well that I would like to have some more, I receive the Pioneer evry week and thank you vary much for getting it for me. I will Send you Some pay for these things when wee get paid off, wee have just sent our Pay Roles in and I expect wee will [be] Paid off in the course of two or three weeks. I have nothing mor of importance at presant so I will Close with sending my love to mother and all of [the] Rest of the family,

N.B. you wanted to know who should have that watch I sent it to you and I want you to get it and lock it up untill I Come home I dont want it used, I would rather give the last shirt on my back than to loos that watch or seal. you get the watch and keep it for me for when I come home I want it, nomore,

From your most Obedant Son

W.T. Cobb

Camp near Alexandria Va= Sep^r 29th 1862

Der Father

I recieved your letter three Days ago and would have written befor but as wee was on picket and the Consiquence was that I had no chance to answer it befor, wee Come off of picket yasterday, our picket duty here is not vary havy. there is no Rebs around here and when wee go out on picket wee get all of the apples that wee can eat but wee have so far to go that wee cant bring aney home with us wich wee would like to do. our duty out here is to detect Spies no man or person is allowed to pas in or out of our picket lines without apass Signed by general Grover wee Caught two Spes yasterday morning and brought them in to head quarters and I have not seen them since, wee can get all the Chest nuts that wee want for there is a plenty of them down here I have had several good messes boiled and can get them at aney time, but wee get vary few Beens wee useto get Beens. Potatoes. Onions. Dride Pees. Beets and several other eatables but wee get non of them now, I would like for you to send me a dollar for I could get some tomattoes, I want a mess of Stewed tomattoes So bad that I think if I had a mess I could nearly dance over them there is a plenty of them to Sell out here and I would like to have Some of them, I expect that wee will be paid off pretty Soon but I am a fraid that it will bee to late to get them, I wrote to Zeak the other day but have not recieved an answer yet but I look for one to day from him he is in the 17th Reg of N.J.V if Mother

makes any Shirts for me you can send them in the mail and I will get them, if you get my box Started and you get the Receipt for it send it to me so that I can present it to the Agent here at Alexandra to get the box, the next time you write tell me where Ed is and how he likes the new Schooner, give my best respects to Boss Blew & Joe Vaniman Mr. Collines and in fact to all that worked in the yard when I worked there, we have Sibley⁶⁸ tents at present and live in them first rate we have our beds Raised on Stakes from the ground and we have good Sleeping bunks. Give my love to mother the Children and your Self included No more at present write Soon,

from your most Obed' Son

William .T. Cobb O.S.

N.B. I am getting as fat as a big [pig].

⁶⁸Large cone-shaped tents resembling teepees designed to hold about 12 men, though often it would hold many more. Wiley, 55.

PART V: "IT IS ONLEY GOOD FUNN FOR US OLD INFANTRY BOYS TO GET IN TO A CAVILRY FIGHT": FREDERICKSBURG, CHANCELLORSVILLE, ALDIE, UPPERVILLE, AND GETTYSBURG, OCTOBER 1862-SEPTEMBER 1863

In October 1862, Colonel Starr resigned command of the Fifth New Jersey to return as captain of what was the Second U.S. Dragoons. After a reorganization of all the regular cavalry in August 1861, many regiments were renamed; the Second U.S. Dragoons became the Second U.S. Cavalry. Having fought and gained honor under these names, the cavalry regiments apparently did not appreciate losing them: the name Dragoons was still being used when Cobb was recruited by Starr to join the regiment. Those selected for cavalry duty left Alexandria at the end of October 1862, taking the train to Carlisle Barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to be mounted and trained.⁶⁹

After training, the men joined the regiment in Northern Virginia and continued to act, as the regiment had since March 1862, as part of Army of the Potomac's Provost Guard.⁷⁰ In September 1862, Brigadier General Marsena R. Patrick, who at Antietam had led the Third Brigade, First Division, First Corps, was given command of the Provost Guard.⁷¹ Because the Second U.S. Cavalry was attached to the guard, the regiment escaped the slaughter at Fredericksburg (December 11-13, 1862). Major General Ambrose E. Burnside, who in November had replaced McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac, had orchestrated the bloody assaults on the town's heights.

⁶⁹Donald, 158-159, 162; Albert Gallatin Brackett, *History of the United States Cavalry from the Formation of the Federal Government to the First of June, 1863* (New York, 1865), 218-219;

⁷⁰Dyer, 1690.

⁷¹Dyer, 280; Boatner, 622.

Shortly after Fredericksburg, Lincoln appointed Hooker to succeed Burnside. In an attempt to better coordinate his army's cavalry, Hooker brought all the Army of the Potomac's cavalry into one corps in February 1863 and placed it under the command of Major General George Stoneman. Stoneman then divided the corps into three divisions and one Reserve Brigade made up five understrength regiments of Regulars; the Second U.S. was one of these understrength regiments in the brigade. Brigadier General John Buford commanded the Reserve Brigade.⁷²

During February and March 1863, both Union and Confederate cavalry spent most of their time exploring fords along the Rappahannock, looking for ways to get into the enemy's rear to obtain information and cut communications lines. An engagement at Kelly's Ford on March 17, though a Union defeat, showed the increasing competence of Federal cavalry. The next month, as part of Hooker's plan to take the main body of the army around Lee's army at Fredericksburg, Stoneman's corps left Falmouth on April 13 to cross the Rappahannock and raid Lee's lines of communications two weeks before the main force of the army was to follow behind. Because of heavy rains the corps was unable to cross until April 29.⁷³

By April 29, Cobb was back at Falmouth on guard duty and did not see action in Stoneman's Raid. Cobb described the cannonading the Federals unleashed to divert attention from Hooker's movements above Fredericksburg. Hooker's attempts ultimately failed when he halted his 70,000 men near Chancellorsville rather than attack the

⁷²Stephen Z. Starr, *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War* (3 vols., Baton Rouge, 1979), vol. 1, 339.

⁷³Donald, 201; Boatner, 803.

Confederates. Lee sent 26,000 men under Stonewall Jackson to flank the Union right and Jackson successfully rolled up the Federal's right flank at Chancellorsville on May 2. Hooker soon had his army back across the river.⁷⁴

As the armies licked their wounds, Hooker replaced Stoneman with Major General Alfred Pleasanton. When Pleasanton was appointed on May 22, the Reserve Brigade had only 830 serviceable horses for 2226 men. By June 3, Lee had begun marching his army from Fredericksburg in a move that would eventually take him behind the Bull Run and Blue Ridge Mountains northward into Maryland and Pennsylvania. Buford was sent to find the Confederates, eventually locating them in Culpeper County. On June 9, the Union cavalry splashed across Beverly and Kelly's Ford and attacked a surprised Jeb Stuart at Brandy Station. After twelve hours of fighting among nearly 20,000 cavalymen, the Federal cavalry finally earned a measure of respect.⁷⁵

As Lee moved northward--not westward toward Vicksburg as Cobb suspected--the Union cavalry continually tried to penetrate Stuart's cavalry screen. Cobb rejoined his regiment and brigade--now part of the First Division of cavalry led by Buford--in time to see some action at Aldie, Middleburg, and Upperville (June 19-21). Three days after Stuart began what would be an infamous ride around the Union army on June 25, Buford was across the Potomac in Middletown, Maryland. Major General George Meade had just replaced Hooker at the head of the army when Pleasanton promoted Captain Wesley Merritt to brigadier general and placed Merritt in command of the Reserve

⁷⁴Long, 343; Denney, 279.

⁷⁵Starr, 36.

Brigade in Buford's Division in place of Samuel Starr. Starr, who back in April had been promoted to major of the Sixth U.S. Cavalry, would lose his right arm on the third day of Gettysburg.⁷⁶

Buford detached Merritt and the divisional trains and headed for Gettysburg, arriving there on June 30. After Buford held off Major General Henry Heth's Confederate division for two hours on July 1, he began to move to the Union left flank. The next day, as Merritt was slowly making his way from Mechanicstown to Emmittsburg, Buford left Gettysburg, desiring to refit his men, and eventually arrived at Westminster, Maryland, early on July 3. That afternoon around 1:45 p.m. the advance on the Federal center--Pickett's Charge--ensued. Meanwhile Merritt, marching from Emmittsburg, reached the Union left at 3:00 p.m. After skirmishing for a hour and a half, Merritt's men attacked along the Emmittsburg Road, only to be in full retreat thirty minutes later. The three days saw 17 men in the Second U.S. Cavalry killed, wounded, or missing.⁷⁷

Both armies badly shaken, Buford reunited his division near Frederick on July 4. He moved through Middletown to Boonsboro hoping to capture the retreating Confederate trains unable to cross the Potomac at Williamsport due to the heavy rains. On July 6, Buford met the Rebels at Williamsport and was repulsed.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Starr, 416-418; William H. Powell, *Powell's Records of Living Officers of the United States Army* (Philadelphia, 1890), 564.

⁷⁷Starr, 423, 426; Longacre, 169, 205, 235, 240-241; *O.R.*, I, 27, 185.

⁷⁸Longacre, 255-258

As fighting continued around Boonsboro on July 10, Cobb received a gun-shot wound in his left hand. While the records available tell slightly different stories, it appears that his hand was dressed by the regimental surgeon before he was sent to a temporary hospital in Boonsboro. On July 15 he was admitted to the General Hospital in Frederick, and was then transferred to the General Hospital in Annapolis. He remained in Annapolis until August 29 when he was sent to the General Hospital in Baltimore. From there he was transferred on September 4 to the convalescent camp at Carlisle Barracks.⁷⁹

While doctors and nurses were tending to Cobb, the New York City Riots broke out on July 13. The next day, July 14, Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia were south of the Potomac River.

⁷⁹Declaration for Invalid Pension, Pension Records, August 30, 1879, National Archives; Second U.S. Cavalry, Medical Records, National Archives. The chronology of Cobb's travels while wounded was pieced together from the above records that contained some discrepancies. The Second U.S. Cavalry Medical Records indicate that, after staying in Frederick, Cobb was sent to Washington on July 18 with a flesh wound in the palm of his *right* hand. But the record from Annapolis says the wound was in his *left* hand, as did Cobb himself in his Declaration for Invalid Pension in 1879. Moreover, there is no record of a hospital stay in Washington, nor did Cobb mention one in his pension declaration. Finally, Cobb recollected that after being seen by the regimental surgeon, he went to Boonsboro, then to Frederick, then to Baltimore, then to Annapolis which again contradicts the Second U.S. Cavalry Medical Records.

CORRESPONDENCE: NOVEMBER 2, 1862-JULY 1, 1863

Carlisle Barricks November 2nd 1862

Der Father

You m[a]y think it vary Strange of my not writeing Sooner but it has took us So long to come here that you would have thaught that wee have gon on a trip a round the world, but wee have bin comeing from Alexandra to Carlisle whare wee are now in barricks, you may wander what has brought me here. I will tell you I have joined the Regular Service to go in a Cavelry Regiment it is the 2nd U.S. Dragoons and our Old Colonel is Captain now but I expect he will be permoted to Major befor long I onley Enlisted for the remainder of my three years wich is a little over 21 Months I think that I have carried a knapsack long enough and so I thought that I would try riding on horse back a while, wee arrived here last night after dark and wee was tired enough to[o] after riding in the Cars all the way from Washington and wee come through so vary Slow that wee were almost tired to deth. I would like for you to write to Forgison [*Fergueson*]⁸⁰ and tell him to Direct the Pioneer to 2nd U.S. Dragoons near Carlisle Pen^a and when you write to me direct the same I cant tell what Companey I will be in yet but when I find out I will write and let you know, I expect that wee will get our pay Some time Soon at least I hope so for I want some money from Uncle Sam he owes me nearly 4 monthes pay, when wee get paid off I would like for you to come out here and see me when you

⁸⁰James B. Ferguson, editor of the *Pioneer*.

write let me know what you think about it you can come to Harrisburg and the cars runs
right down here to Carlisle it is onley 24 miles from Harrisburg down here I will Stop
writeing at the presant give my love to Mother and to all of the Cobb familey, I will
write soon agane when wee get squared away. you must write soon and let me know
how the folks is a getting along nomore at presant

from your obediant Son

William ,T, Cobb

Carlisle Barricks November 12th 1862

Dear Father

I received your letter of the 4th and was glad to here from home once more. I have
not much to Say at presant, you was saying that you would like to know how much it
cost to come out here I cant tell you how much it costs to come out here, wee have not
got our pay yet and I dont know when wee will get it wee may get it pretty soon and it
may bee Some time befor wee get paid wee have not got aney money since wee was at
Harrisons landing and wee begin to want Some, I would like for you to come out here
and see me and wee might get paid about the time you come and I could give you Some
money, you can come a direct rout to Carlisle and have no trouble in finding the Barricks
when you get here. if you come out here I will pay you for the time you loose and your
expe[n]ses out here and back if you come dont for get to bring me something from home
I would like to have my Flute in particular. give my love to Mother and all the rest of

the Cobb family this is all of the paper and Stamps that I have. if you have any more money than you know what to do with it send me a little until we get paid. write soon and let me know when you are coming out here I would like for you to bring Mother out with you for I want to see her very bad also. we have had a fine Sleighing Snow here but it has all disappeared and weather is very fine now, I will close writing at present write soon and give me the news,

from your most obedient Son

W^m .T. Cobb

N.B. Direct as before 2nd U.S. Dragoons Near Carlisle P.a

Camp of the 2nd U.S. Cavalry near Washington Dec^{br} 28th 18,62

Dear Father

I received yours of the 21st and was much pleased to hear from you once more but I would rather see you than to hear from you, we are in the same encampment that was in when I last wrote to you and I expect that we will lay here for a few weeks yet perhaps not on this same ground but within the vicinity of Washington, reports are that we are going to do provost duty in Washington I can't say how true it is but Cap^{tn}

Starr is provost Marshall of Washington⁸¹ and I think that we will go over there on duty there is but 4 Companies of us here and I think the case looks very probable, we have not got all of our arms yet and we cannot tell how long before we will get them, it is very high New years down here and I expect that it is getting pretty well along towards it up there at any rate we won't have it much before you do, we had a very nice day on Christmas but it was a very dull Christmas with us and I would like to have something for New Years and to do so I shall have to get you to send me a New Years Dinner you can send it by Harndens Express and I will be pretty sure to get it but if you send it by Adams there will be no certainty in my getting it, if you do send it to me direct it to 2nd U.S. Drag^s Co ,B, near Washington D,C, Via Harndens Express C^o and if you get a receipt send it to me one day after you send the box, and I will go to the office and get the box, if you send one send it as soon as possible, I am sorry to hear that our boys have had such bad luck but among us so many we could not expect for all to escape, if you here of the missing write and let me know and give me a few more particulars I am sorry that Zeak lost his tobacco for it is a very scarce article out here in the army if you send me a box send me some smoking tobacco you can get it to Dan^l Wills, I expect that we will be paid off by the middle of next month and then I can get some paper and envelopes so that I can write pretty often to you, I am glad to hear you say that you think that there will be good times around home this winter, I will now close my letter by sending my

⁸¹Starr was appointed Provost Marshall of Washington in May 1861, but there is no indication that he held this post in December 1862. Powell, 562-564.

love to Mother the Children and your Self and wishing you all a Happy New Year,

Nomore at presant

from you most dutiful Son,

W^m .T. Cobb

NB write Soon

Camp near Falmouth Feb 6th 1863

Der Father

I have bin looking for a letter for some time and have not recieved aney it has bin So long since I recieved a letter that I hardley know weather I could read aney other persons writeing or not, I have not got vary good paper to write uppon but it is all that I got and you must excuse me for not writeing on better paper if you want me to write more you must send me Some paper and envelopes for I cant get aney out here without money, I have a little piece of buisness to do and I want you to help me if you will, I will tell you what it is I want to get a Commision in the Regular arney and for you to help me you will have to write to John. T. Nixon⁸² at Washington and tell him that if he

⁸²John Thompson Nixon (1820-1889) was born in Fairfield, Cumberland County, New Jersey. He served in the NJ State Assembly (1848-1850)--acting as speaker of the Assembly in 1850--before being elected as a Republican to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1858. After serving two terms (March 4, 1859-March 3, 1863) he decided not to run again, returning to his law practice in Bridgeton, NJ. Clifford P.

will try for me I will get all the recommendation that will be required and if he will get me one I will pay him well for it, I will tell you what I want A Second Liut^{cy} [*Lieutenancy*] in C^o (B) 2nd U.S. Cav^{lry} and if he cannot obtain one for this companey I would like to get one in the 7th Reg^t of Cavly wich is a new Reg^t tell him that if he can obtain one for me it makes no differance what Reg^{mt} it is in, I will have to send this letter without aney stamps it is the first that I have sent without a Stamp for some time, wee have a plenty of mud down here for it rains nearly evry other day and keeps it vary bad under foot, wee are Provost Guar[d] yet and I expect that wee will remain so while wee are in the arney of the Potomac, if you will Send me some paper and envelopes with a few Stamps I will write often I am just agoing to go up to the express office to See if there is aney box there for me I expect that you have sent it by this time, I will close by sending my love to Mother, Edd, Call, and all of the Cobb family, yourself included, wee have not got aney pay yet and dont know when wee will get aney, there is 103\$ due me now and I dont know how much more ther will be due me before wee get paid off. nomore at presant

from your most obdt Son

W^m .T. Cobb

Reynolds, chief compiler, *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress* (Washington: 1961), 1572.

Camp of 2nd U.S. Cav^y March 15th 1863

Der Father

I recieved your two last letters, the ones that Spoke about Nixons letter to you but they come too late for me to do aney thing and So I will drop it for this time but will try Some other time, I recieved the money you Sent me and was glad to have it but I cannot get aney post Stamps out here and wee have to pay such prises out here that a little money does not go vary far I dont know how long befor wee will bee paid off but I hope it will bee pretty Soon, my bed fellow got a box a day or two a go and the things in it is vary good I will tell you what he has got, Six cans of Roast Turkey, Six cans of Roast Chicken, Six Cans of Butter 3 Cans of fresh Apples 3 Cans of Cranberry Jam and several other Cans with differant kinds of Fruit in them, and the best of it is that I have the privilage of eating as much as I want he wrote for his box the same time that I wrote for mine but he got his and I did not and now I would like for you to send me a box with some of the same kind of articles as I have mentioned befor you can by sending to Philadelphia obtain aney thing you want if you send aney box dont send aney thing that will spoil I want to buy this box myself and if you will buy the things and send them to me I will pay you when I get paid off, I dont want you to pay as much as a box will cost out of your owen pocket for me but I will send you ther money as soon as wee get paid, I would like for you to send it as soon as you can for there is so maney that has go[t] boxes

since I sent for mine that I thought that I would try for another myself, we expect to be paid in a few days and I hope so, we have just come off of a scout we went out about twainty Five miles beyond our pickets to see where the Johnneys was we found them but it was nights only that we would go near there lines we went in side of their lines night befor last and we looked around four or five hours and satisfide ourselves about them and then we started back, we was out two days and nights it was a lively but a vary hard trip we had to bee vary care full how we went for wee was the only regiment of Union troops that there was out there and wee about twainty Fife miles in the Enimeys land, wee have quite a considerable [amount] of duty to do and I dont get much time to write wee have to go out on picket evry Eight days and stay three days when wee go out and so you can juge about what time I have you must not waite for me to answer your letters but you must write pretty often and I will answer them when I get the chaunce when you write to me again let me know how Ed is a geting a long and all of the news around home for I want to know, I was over to see our boys the other day and found them in good spirits. give my love to Mother and all of the family and tell them that I cannot get aney furlow but I will come home some time, I will now close by sending my love to all in quireing friends. the Collines family. Wills faimly and above all the Cobb family your self in Cluded Nomor at presant

from you most Ob^d Son

William .T. Cobb

Camp of 2nd U.S. Cav^{ly} March 27th 1863

Dear Father

I recieved yours of the 17th inst and was vary glad to here from home again, you said that you guessed that I had for gotten home but you are mistaken there for although I am in the army I think of home evry hour in the day and it is my last thought at night you think that I have forgotten home but it is not so I would like to bee at home once more to stay but not to stay untill the war is over for there is use for me out here at presant and it requires the help of evry true American Citison that you know as well as I can tell you, I wrote a letter to you on the 16th of this Month when you wrote your letter I do not expect that you had recieved my letter, but I expect that you have recieved it by this time at least I hope so you mentioned in your letter that you had sent me a box but by the time it gets here it will be worth vary little but that matters little to me so I get the box for the tobacco will not be spoiled and that is the main point with me at presant for I smoke a grate deal and it is a grate comfert for me to set down and have a good smoke, you wished to know why I did not write more I will tell you wee have so much duty to do that I have little chance to write or do aney thing else you wished to know if I would let you have som money you know I would if I get it but I have got to get it first when I get it you can have it with the gratest of plasure but I have a question for you could you let me have a little money to get som small articles with such as paper envelopes

penns ink and a few other articles with, I cannot tell you when I will get paid but I hope it will be soon, I have nine months pay due me now and expect to have ten months due me before I get any money, I have not much time to write when you write to Ed give him a Brother's respects which is of the best kind I have not much more to say but you wished to know if I knew any thing of our movements I am not able to give you any information as regards to it [it] but we expect to move soon, I will close by sending my love to Mother. Call. and all of the Cobb family and all inquiring friends your share included, I am in better health than I have been in for a long time none at present write soon and often

from your most O^{bd} Son

W^m. T. Cobb

write when ever you feel like it and I will answer whenever I have the time

Camp near Acquia Creek Va April 29th 1,63

Dear Father

I received yours of the 7th inst and was very glad to hear from home once more I would have written before but we have been so busy that I have not had time to write we have been out on a Reconnaissance and we had a pretty hard time of it, there was

Some few of us Sent back to Acquia Creek to do guard duty and it fell to my lot to bee one of the party that come back and I am not Sorry for it, there is a grate Cannonading a going on up in front to day I expect that there is a battle in vogue by the noise that they mak, I recieved the money that you sent me and I am vary much obliged to you for it for it done me some good I bought bread with it and eat it up on the march wich done me quite a good deal of good it is hardley worth while for me to tell you aney about our Scout for you will See an account of it in the Papers, but I will give you a Slight idah [idea] of it, one night for ^{inst} encamped in a woods after dark and fed our horses got some Coffee and wee would have sleped some but the rain come down in Such torrants that wee could not lay down so wee had to eathe[r] sit or stand untill about 12 Ock when our Squadren was ordered to mount wee did it wee started for Kelleys Ford wee went through Old Roads, through swamps and mos all other impasable places, you may guess how nice it was with the wet brush a strikeing us in the Face and Eyes well wee rode in this manner untill daylight when wee Come to the River wee Struck our Course up Streem wee had not proseedded far when we had a salute from the opposite side of the River wich made us get out of that in quite a hurry, this is a Sample of our Scout, I will have to Close pretty Soon, I recieved my box the other day I went to the 24th N.J.V. and Zeak told me that there was a box in there Comisary with my name on it I went to See and found it there but there was nothing good in it but it is a mystry to me how it Should get in the 24th N.J. Voll^s and directed to the 2nd U.S. C^{avy}. you must excuse my bad writin for my paper is wet and I have a vary poor penn wich makes vary bad writeing but I hope that you can make it out, I want to goo up to the Front this afternoon to see what is a

going on for if there is any fighting a going on I want to have a hand in it and I think that I will go up on the Cars this afternoon. I will close by Sending my love to mother and all of the children and also to Ed=and Call and to all inquiring friends, tell mother that I am as fat as a pig and as harty as a buck it is pretty hard for me to get enough to eat now, but if we ever get paid off I will get filled up for once I think, Nomore at presant write when ever you feel like it and never mind my answering them for I will write when ever I have time and materials to write with,

from your Most Obeidant Son

William .T. Cobb

Camp at Head Quarters Armeý of the Potomac May 30th 1,63

Der Father

I have not herd from home for some time and not knowing when I should hear from you I thought I would write a few lines to you to let you know how to direct, as I am not with the Regiment at presant and I expect you Direct your letters to the Regiment the same as you did here to for but my not beeing with the Regiment is the cause of my not hereing from home, wee are a doing Provost Duty at the Hed Quarters of the armeý of the Potomac, wee see pretty easy times at presant I will give you an Ideah of what wee are a doing, and what our Business is, our Business is to take Straglers to the

differant Corp^s Head Quarters to wich the[y] Belong and by doing so wee have to go all over the army of the Potomac and wee have a good chance to see what is a going on wee also have to go as Orderleys for the Generals here at head quarters also withe their Staff when it is recquisite [*requisite*] for us to, and part of our Business is to Search Sutlers Stores to See that they have no Liquer with them that is a piece of work that the most of our Boys like to do for if a Suttler is caught with Liquer and will give them a Bottle or two they will let him go. as regards to my Self I do not use it and if I get hold on aney of them I will take them up for it. when a Sutler is found with Liquer he has all of his goods Convescated and looses not onley the Liquer but his whole Cargo of goods and in my oppinion it is a law wich is a vary good one here in the army wee see vary easy times here wee get the Best of Army Fair here wee get soft Bread hot from the Oven evry day and wee get hams and good ones at that wee get Pork, Beens, Sugar, Coffee, Potatoes, Rice, Fresh Beef, ane a few other articles too tigious [*tedious*] to mention at present, I was up to See our Boys two or three days a go and found them all in good Spirits and [they] long for the time to come when they will walk on Jersey Soil. they Say that if they had as long to Stay as I have they would go crasey I should considder them vary week minded if they would for I have bin in Uncle Sams Service over two years now and I have not went crase yet. I have not quite fifteen monthes to Stay yet but I have a will to help me out with and I have found So far since I come in the army that all is required is a good and Strong will and he will get a long. when you write to me Direct Provost Guard Cav^{ly} Detachment in care of Gen^l Patrick via Washington D.C. I will close by Sending my love to mother and all of the Children also

to Ed= and Call and keep a good Shair for your Self. No more at presant

from your Most Ob' Son

William .T. Cobb

write Soon

Camp at Head Quarters Arney of the Potomac June 7th 1863

Dear Father

I recieved your letter of the 1st ins' day befor yasterday and I was glad to here from home once more. I have not much news to tell you this time but I will tell you what I do know, a part of our arney Crossed the river day befor yasterday in three differant places but what there in tentions whare is not knowing [known] to evry boddy but I will tell you what it is for, Old Joe [Hooker] had an ideah that they was evacuateing over here and a going to Vicksburg and hee did not want them to leave him in that manner So he crosed over to attracked their attention while General Grant give them a good flogging out west. I will give you a Sketch of our Crossing wee Crossed at the U.S. Ford and about a mile below Fredricks burg and our lower Crossing is a bout 8 miles below Fredricks burg wee done it up in good style wee had pretty heavy Cannonading at Fredricks burg but not vary [much] at eather of the other places wee have three or four One hundred and

Twenty pound Sige Guns opposite Fredericks burg wich Soon Silanced there guns and wee Soon had our Pontoons laid and our Infantry was Soon acrost. there is a little joke wich I will relate to you haveing a good position on the hill on this side of the River wee could see evry moovement in boath armeys well the Johnneys was a laying in there Rifle pits a waiting our Infentry to Come up and then open on them but our Artillary beeing in good position Could Shell the pitts wich they lay in but they did not do it untill our boys got Clost enough for the Johneys to rais and fire on them and just as they began to fire on our men our Artillary opend on them and wee give them Shells so fast that they could not fire on our men nor run all they could do was to lay down in their pitts out of the way of our heavy Shells and while they lay in there our Infantry Charge[d] the pitts and took them prisinors befor they was aware of what was a going on, wee took two Regiments of them this Rather astonished them but wee got them and wee had vary fiew lost in the in gagement it was but a piece of Sport to our boys to go over as the[y] know what it was for, when you write to me the next time I would like to have Some Post Stamps if you will for there is vary few out here, when you write again direct as you did the last you sent to me, in Care of Geⁿ Patrick Provst Martial, army of Potomac Cav^{ly} Detachment. I will Close by sending my love to Mother, Ed, Call, and all of the Children your Self included nomore at presant write soon

from your Most Ob' Son

W^m ,T, Cobb

N.B. I saw our Boys last Sunday I was with them all day.

Camp on the Mountaines June 25th 1863

Dear Father

I recieved yours of the 20th yasterday and was vary glad to here from home once more. I have left General Patrickes and come to my Company. I Joined my Company just in time to come out on this last Raid with them and I would rather bee with them than aney whare else for wee go all over the State of Verginia and wee get all wee can eat and drink. there is no end to Cherreys down here and wee get all wee want of them. and milk wee can get all wee want of that to. and in fact to take this Raiding Business in to Consideration it is the Best business that I ever done Since I come a Soldiering well to the Raid wee left Warington Junction on the 10th of June I believe and went up to Thurroughfare [*Thoroughfare*] Gap and stayed there two days watching the Rebs then left there and Started for a Small town Called Aldie it is Situated about 20 miles below Leesburg and it is in a Gap in the mountaines that Runes from Bull Run to Point of Rocks (I have not herd the name of them) well wee got here after three days march and (the Dusty Rods I never saw the like befor) here wee had a fight with the Rebs Cavilry drove them through the Gap and wee did not attacked them aney more that day. but the next day wee went through the Gap and wee had one lively time that day you better believe I will give you a little discription of our march that day. wee took the Road that leads to Winchester and went about a mile and a Quarter when wee saw some Rebs in a strip of

Woods. we went out as Skirmishers to find out how many there was of them we soon routed them out of that went on about a mile farther found some more done the same as before and so we had it for 10 or 12 miles when we came to a small town called New Lisbon here there were Cross Roads one Running to Union, one to Upperville one to Middleburg and the one we had come run to Aldie. we had but one brigade of Cavalry was all the troops that we had, while behind a piece of woods the Rebs had two Brigades awaiting for us to take the Road to Union, and then they would come up in our Rear and Cut us off and take us if they could but the yankeys was too Sharp for them in Stead of us a taking the Union Road we took to Middleburg Road and went down that on a full Galop the Rebs Soon Seene that they was out Generaled and Come after us at full Speed, but we wanted to Show fight, we turned into a strip of woods but put our battarys in Position and brought our Cavalry in position to Support our Battary and then dismounted about 400 men and sent them up to a Stone fence (wich is the onely kind that they have down here) this work was done in less than five minutes, at this

[written at the bottom of the page] Continued

[written at the top of the next page] Concluded

moment up come the Johnes full tilt when the first thing that they knew they got a Shower of grape and Canister afrom our Battary and then our boys that was a long the

Stone wall began to let go with there Carbines the Rebs began to let go at us but wee was too well Sheltered by the Stone wall. the fight lasted about 20 minutes [in] wich wee had not one man Scrached the Johneys loss was some 10 or 12, when they left they left us as fast as they come after us the[y] did not bother us aney mor that day the next day wee got Reenforcements and drove them a crost the valey Captured 7 pieces of artillary 6 or 8 hundread Prisionors and as maney horses wee have just got in off of the Raid after haveing Several hard fights (what they Call hard fights in Cavilry but it is onley good funn for us old Infantry boys to get in to a Cavilry fight, after this you will Direct to the Companey, C° .B. 2nd U.S.S Cavl^{ry} I have vary nigh a years pay Due me now I will give you an account of it. Commenceing July 1st 1862,

	\$ cts
One monthes Privates pay	13.00
<u>3 months Sergeants pay at \$17 per month</u>	<u>51.00</u>
<u>Pay Due me from the volunteer:</u>	<u>\$64.00</u>

5 mor days will make a up the year wich is Due me. and to count it in it will make 8 monthes Pay at \$13 per month wich is \$104 and add my vo[I]unteer pay to that will Make 168 Dollars and take out \$13.91^{cts} will leave me \$154.09.^{cts} wich will make quite a pile when I get it, I will close my letter by Sending my love to Mother and all of the Children your Self included write soon and often and if you do not recieve aney from me you

must write for I donot all ways get a chaunce to write nomore at presant

from your most Obd^t

William .T. Cobb

On Pickett near Mackaicsville= [Mechanicstown] M^d July 1st, 1,63

Dear Father

I wrote a letter to you when wee was on the mountaines in Verginia but I did not get to mail it untill wee come here and I mailed it as soon as wee got her. wee come here 4 days ago and have bin a doing pickt duty ever since when wee come here wee come through Fredrick City M^d and here wee found the Union people and they use us vary well if a man has money here he can live vary well I will give you a few prices that wee have to pay for articales here for a large loaf of Bread, 15^{cts} for Buscuit 25^{cts} a doz. butter 20^{cts} per lb. eggs 10^{cts} Milk 3 and 4^{cts} a quart, and evry thing else in proportion and them that have money can live vary well but them that has no money has to go without, but when it comes to the cherry question wee stand as good a sight as aney boddy, wee have had vary dry weather down here for the last tow [two] monthes untill with in a week past wich it has rained nearly all of the time and wee have a grate deal more rain than wee wish for at present I recieve the Pioneer weekley now and I am vary glad to get it I would like for you to write oftener to me than you do and I want you to tell Zeak and

Charley Bacon to write to me tell them that I am well and as good a Soldier as I ever was, I will not enter on any of our marches but I will tell you that I am a setting in a fine Clump of large Oaks with my horse tied to one and I am a setting under another one a writing to you I just come from some Cherry trees about 4 Rods from where I now set and I feel as if I would not need any more Cherries for the next half hour and perhaps longer, I do not know when I will ever get any more pay yesterday I was mustered in for pay which makes twelve months pay due me and I would like to get it if I do not get my pay I will not be able to let you have that money that you was a speaking about some time ago but I am in hopes that I will get it pretty soon, I will close my letter for it is a getting late and I must go and see if there is some hard tack in my haversack, if you can get any money to send me a little I would repay you when I get what is due me, I dislike to to [sic] make a request of this kind but since I Joined the Company I have not had the best of grub and none too much of it when we are on the march three days Rations has to do us Five, and oftimes in this case a little money dose not come a miss, give my love to mother and all of the Children Call and all and keep a share for your self nomore [written up the side margin] at present

from your most dutifull Son

W^m .T. Cobb

write soon as possible

[written at the top of page 3 of the letter]

write to Ed and tell him to write to me, give my love to him.

PART VI: "WEE TALK AS FRIENDLY AS IF THERE WAS NOTHING THE MATTER AT ALL": PICKET AND RECONNAISSANCE IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA, SEPTEMBER 1863-APRIL 1864

While Cobb recovered at Carlisle, his entire regiment was sent to the new cavalry depot at Giesboro in Southeast Washington to be remounted and refitted and to recruit more men. Cobb claimed he rejoined his regiment on September 26. No letter remains that speaks of his participation in the Bristoe Campaign in the Fall 1863 in which Lee drove Meade from the Rappahannock back to Centreville. After tearing up some railroad tracks, Lee withdrew to the Rappahannock. Meade followed Lee and drove him back over the river. Lee continued south and, by November 10, he was again south of the Rapidan.⁸³

Then Meade took the offensive. He crossed the Rapidan and on November 27 found Lee's army on the western bank of a tributary of the Rapidan called Mine Run. When Major General Gouverneur K. Warren commanding the Second Corps found the Confederate right too strong for an attack on November 30, Meade called off the assault. The next day Meade began his retreat back to Brandy Station to set up winter quarters.⁸⁴

In late February 1864, Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick set off for Richmond with 3,500 cavalymen to break the defenses of Richmond and free some Union prisoners. Meanwhile, on February 28, the Second U.S. Cavalry joined Brigadier General George Custer on a raid near Charlottesville to divert attention away from

⁸³Miller, 31, 35; Denney, 332, 333; Williams, vol. 2, 767-770.

⁸⁴Williams, vol. 2, 772-773.

Kilpatrick, burning and looting as they went. After running into some Confederate horse artillery, Custer withdrew to Stanardsville. Custer met more resistance from a brigade of Stuart's cavalry, and after some charges and countercharges, Custer retreated towards Culpeper.⁸⁵

Cobb discussed few of these actions in which the Second was involved. Either he did not participate or the letters do not survive. After his wounding, Cobb seems to have spent his cavalry days on picket duty and reconnaissance missions. Most of his time on duty was spent along the Rapidan River, with his camp about eight miles south of Culpeper along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad at Mitchell's Station.

⁸⁵Denney, 379; Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative* (3 vols., New York, 1963), vol. 2, 910-911.

CORRESPONDENCE, SEPTEMBER 30, 1863-MARCH 31, 1864

Camp Beaufort Sep^r 30^h 1863

Dear Father

I recieved yours when at Carlisle and was glad to here from you, I have left Carlisle and Joined my Regt last Saturday and I am vary glad to see some of my Company again, wee lay near Washington a bout 2 miles on the south side of the East branch wee have a vary nice Camp here it is on a vary high hill and wee have a good view of the Potomac a[nd] the City of Alexandra, wee have pretty good times here wee drill once a day and wee have good living here but wee do not know how long it will last there is some new Barrick a getting Built about a mile from here and they say that they are for us to go in to this winter but I could not say to aney sertainty how true it is but I hope it is so,

I wish you would write to Ed and tell him that I recieved his letter but it was to late for me to writ to him, and tell Call that when I get some paper I will write to her, for I am short of paper and Envelopes, and no money to buy aney with, you told me when you was to see me that you had sent me some money but it is not here I would be vary glad to be paid now it is the Oppinion of all hands that wee will be paid pretty soon, when you write Direct as usual tell Zeak to write, when you write give me Ed^s directions, I will close by sending my love to Mother and all of the Children Ed, and

Call included and in fact all inquiring friends your self not forgotten, no more at present,
write soon,

from your Most Ob^d Son

W^m. T. Cobb

Camp Near Culpeper V^a Dec^r 15th 1.63

Dear Father

I recieved yours day befor yasterday and was vary glad to here from you, also to here that you are a geting better, you said that you had your Owen [*own*] planing about the house that you are to build for Ed Compton and if I dont see a fine house when I come home I shal lay it to the fault of the builder and so you had better but [*put*] the Extries on pretty well or I may find fault with the workmanship and also with the Planing of it, you stated that the Haleys Vill [*Haleysville*] Church was a getting along vary well and as I always was an attendant of that Church I feel it my duty to do some thng for it and I propose to make itt a presant of a fine Bible and if you will I wish you to inform those that has that part at it to attend to and get their permision and also let me know when it will be finished so that I can send the money (if I get Paid) in time, I think that they will Except [*accept*] the offer from a Soldier, if I get paid I will send the Money to you and let you puches [*purchase*] the Bible and you can represent it in my name, you

can tell the People of haleys ville that at [as] I have allways bin an attendant of their Church I make this request, when you write I wish you to give me a list of Prises of the best Bibles that will do for a Church, there is vary litle doing out here at presant. wee are doing Provost Duty in Culpeper and have vary nice times of it, I will Close by sending my love to Mother, Call, Ed= and all of the Cobb family your self included write soon

from your most O^{bt} Son

W^m .T. Cobb

Camp Near Mitchels Station Jan^{ry} 1st 1863 [1864]⁸⁶

Dear Father

A happy New Year to you all, and may it bee a happy one to you, I recieved your Christmas Presant and was much pleased with it, I am allso vary well pleased with the few lines that mother wrote to me I wish to know whare they ware Composed at or at least who the Compr[s] [composers] was, you did not tell me a bout [what] that Bible would cost I would like to know about it for I want to give the new chirch some thing, I have got but one stamp and I will have to make mutch of it I would like to have some stamps if you will send them to me, I have made a rais of a little money that I borrowed

⁸⁶Cobb seems to have misdated his next two letters as they both relate to the new Haleyville church finished in 1864.

or I cannot say it was borrowed for it is money that I Loaned when I was in my Old Regt= and they have bin Paid and I got what was Due me from the men that Owed me, If you will I would like for you to send me 3\$ worth of stamps and use the rest for a New Years Dinner for the Cobb family as soon as I get some more money I will send some more, I will Close by sending my love to Mother and all of the Cobb family. No more at presant

from you most Ob' Son

William .T. Cobb

[This letter was sent to Cobb by Reverend S. Townsend]

Mauricetown, N.J. Jan 12th 1864.

Mr W^m B. Cobb.

Dear Friend,

I learn through your father that you had a special desire to find the Bible for the new church at Haleyville: a very laudable desire, and I have used my best endeavors that it should be gratified, but the way does not seem to be clear after all.

I suppose your father informed you that about three days before he received your first letter in regard to it I had been to Phil^{da} and spoken to Dr Wishart⁸⁷ to find the Bible and Hymn Book. I thought however I would make a change, let Dr Wishart find the communion sett, & you find the Bible. I wrote to him to that effect, and supposed it was satisfactory, though I received no answer from him. But within a few days I hear from him that he was not pleased with the alteration, - had spoken for the Bible before he got my letter - was much pleased with the privilege of furnishing it - in memory of his father who preached a long time at Haley's - and was sorry I wrote concerning a change &c. So my Dear friend, it seems your generous offer was a little behind time, and now permit me to suggest the next best plan.

The cushion, cord, and fixtures will cost from 8 to 10 dollars, - the altar chairs - sofa chairs - will cost 10 dollars, - the Communion Sett of Britannia ware - will cost 14 dols - you want to give some present to the Church - choose either one of these - send word through your father, & it shall be called your present and so announced.

I am quite sure this will be satisfactory to you. I am very anxious it should, and if I could make a better arrangement I would, for I would do any thing in my power to gratify the feelings of a dear Soldier Friend, for I have the highest possible respect for them.

I know we all owe you a lasting debt of gratitude for the noble manner in which you have rushed to the defence of your Country in this the time of her peril, and for the

⁸⁷Dr. Wishart was known for his "Pine Tree Tar Cordial" frequently advertised in the *Pioneer* as a cure-all for everything from scrofula (tuberculosis) to bleeding piles (hemorrhoids). *Pioneer*, April 30, 1864, 2.

unspeakable and long continued perils which you have borne, while we have been enjoying our quiet homes.

May God bless you: - and may you decide at the beginning of this New Year to be a praying man, - a happy Christian man, and then if you persevere, all will be well for life or death.

With much respect, Yours Truly, S. Townsend.

Please write soon to your father--

Camp Near Mitchels Station Janry 17th 1863 [1864]

Dear Father

I recieved a letter from M^r Townsand the Pastor of our District, and he told me that he had sent to D^r Wishhart and D^r Wishhart did not like the arranegments vary well, and he wished to make the presant in memory of his father wich of corse I am willing he should do Mr Townsand told me that there ware several other articals wanted and I would as leave present one of them as the bible I will send Mr Townsands Letter to you and you can get aney of the articals that you wish and I will send you the Money when I get it,⁸⁸ you will tell Mr Townsand that I am perfectly satisfide with letting D^r Wishart

⁸⁸The *Pioneer* reported (again incorrectly stating Cobb's middle intial) that on a cold February morning "a splendid Bible and Hymn Book [given] by Dr. L.Q.C Wishart...and the Communion Set [given] by Wm. B. Cobb" were seen by newcomers at the church's dedication. *Pioneer*, February 27, 1864, 2.

present the Bible & Book, There is no news at present out here, I will close by sending my love to Mother and all the rest of the family yourself in Cluded nomore at present, pleas attend to this buisniss for me,

from your most Ob' Son

William .T. Cobb

Camp Near Mitchels Station V^a March 31st 1.64

Dear Father

I just recieved your letter and was vary glad to here from you and from the folks at home,

you was a speaking about the Order that you saw in the paper. I will tell you the su[b]stance of that order, it is this, there is a grate many Old Reg^{ts} has reenlisted with the exciption of a few men and they ware transferred to other Reg^{ts} and now there Old Reg^{ts} has returned from furlow they are to return to them again. this is the substance of the order it has no allusion to Regulars at all, so you see that there is little hope in that quarter for me, I will write but a short letter this time for I want to write to E^d yet to night for I am a going on pickett to morrow you must excuse the shortness of my letter but time is prescious with us at the present so I will close by sending my love to Mother and

all the rest of the Cobb family also keep a shair for yourself Pleas write soon and I will
write when I get time nomore at present from your mos Obe Son

W^m .T. Cobb

[The following note was written by Edwin on an empty leaf of the above letter.]

Fortress Monroe April 4th 64

Dear Father,

I got this to day from Will and I guess he made A mistake in directing it and you
got my letter. I am well; we began discharging to day and will get out Wednesday; I
expect we have got 14 days [?] and going on 15. I have no reason to complain so far: but
think I am lucky in escaping the heavy weather wee had the last two weeks. give my
love to Mother and all the rest of the folks yourself included,

Yours fraternally

E. Cobb

[Cobb sent this letter to his father by mistake]

Camp Near Mitchel's Station V^a March 31st 1.64

Dear Brother

It has bin a long time since I have written to you and I have just recieved a letter from Father and he gave me your Address and [I] take the plasure of writeing a few lines to you wee have so much duty to do at presant that I have hardley time to write, wee average two nights in bed out of Seven I expect to get to night in bed and tomorrow I expect to go on pickett and stay two days, Perhaps you would like to know something about our Pickett Duty.

Well wee go out in the Morning, and when wee get to our respective post wee divide off into releaves and then wee are posted well the first that wee do after wee get posted is to exchange papers with the Rebs, the next is to have a talk on Politicks, War matters and then wind up with talking about the wooman [*women*], and if wee have aney surplus Clothing to sell wee make a trade with them, I will give you a speciman of our tradeing for ^{inst} one of our boys had a pair of Boot to sell took them down to the River and inquired of [a] Reb what he would give for them the Reb replied that he would give 30 dollars in our Green Backs and 6 large plugs of navy tobacco when our boy said that it was a bargaine the Boots ware ware [*sic*] accordingly sent over (by means of a little boit [*boat*] mad[e] for the purpeous wich has a long string attached to it and a stone to the

other end the stone is thrown across to [*the*] river (which is very narrow) and pulled over by the other party) Johnny then puts the 30 Dollars and the tobacco on the boat and throws the stone back the boat is then pulled [*pulled*] over and the Yankee pockets the 30\$ of Uncle Sams best issue, and perhaps before he leaves another Rebel will bring some tobacco down to sell and so times goes with us, I give you that as an instance but I might mention Dozens of such instances, we talk as friendly as if there was nothing the matter at all, when you get this you must answer it and when my time is out this summer I want you to give me a berth with you and if there is any site for you and I to get a vessel in partnership I will go in with you provide that when I get out of the service you will give me a chance, please answer this as soon as you receive it when you write home give my love to Call and to all of the Cobb family, my regards to John Outen, a large share of my love to you Direct, Co B 2nd U.S. Cavalry via Washington D.C.

Namor at present from

your most affectionate Brother[r]

W^m .T. Cobb To Proff E. Cobb

PART VII: "I NEVER SAW MEN FALL SO FAST IN MY LIFE": PATROLLING THE HIGH SEAS, AND THE FALL OF FORT FISHER AND CHARLESTON, APRIL 1864-JULY 1865

In March 1864, the War Department issued General Order No. 91 which allowed any man who could prove that he was a "mariner by vocation, or an able seaman, or ordinary seaman" to transfer into naval service.⁸⁹ Obtaining such a transfer, Cobb was mustered into the U.S. Navy on April 26, 1864, in Baltimore, Maryland, for one year and six months. At the rank of Ordinary Seaman, he was assigned to the receiving ship *Allegheny*.⁹⁰

Receiving ships were generally old vessels that transported new recruits to their assigned vessels. Accommodating over 1,000 men, these ships also served as home to sailors when long-term repairs were being made to their vessels.⁹¹ Originally an iron-hulled steam gunboat, the *Allegheny* had been operating in its new role as a receiving ship in Baltimore when the war broke out. As the situation in Baltimore became unstable early in the war, the ship was towed across Baltimore Harbor to Fort McHenry where it could rest safe, protected by Federal guns. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles then

⁸⁹Robert M. Browning, *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron During the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 206, fn 23.

⁹⁰Second U.S. Cavalry, Muster Rolls, Register of Enlistments, National Archives; Receiving Ship "Allegheny," Muster Roll, April 30, 1864, National Archives.

⁹¹Browning, 201.

ordered the ship sent to Annapolis to protect that city. When the safety of ships in Baltimore again could be assured, the *Allegheny* returned and continued its duties.⁹²

While on the *Allegheny*, Cobb heard of newly-promoted Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's movements toward Richmond after the Battles of the Wilderness (May 5) and Spotsylvania (May 10). Yet the Army of the Potomac continued to suffer heavy losses, and by July 1864 those at home as well as those in the service wondered if the war would ever end. As Grant and Sherman appeared to be stalled in front of Petersburg and Atlanta, frustration found its way into the pages of the *Pioneer* as well as in some unusual places. When building Ed Compton's house, Samuel Cobb wrote this supplication on the base of one of the columns:

Samuel Cobb Mauricetown, New Jersey July 15, 1864 Oh God, crush out the rebellion and restore permanent union, peace and universal freedom.⁹³

The war was dragging on and men were still being drafted; but despite the frustration, the Union army offensives continued to deplete irreplaceable Confederate forces.

Cobb soon left the *Allegheny* and went aboard the steamer *Daylight*. The vessel served with the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron enforcing the naval blockade of the southern coast. Early in the war, this ship had served as a guard and picket ship, intercepting four vessels containing contraband cargo. She participated in the attacks on

⁹²*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (2 vols., Washington, 1991), vol. 1, part A, 190-191.

⁹³The base of the column is on display at the Mauricetown Historical Society Library located in the former home of Ed Compton that Samuel Cobb helped build in 1864.

Fort Macon, N.C., in April 1862, and on Fort Fisher, N.C., in November of that year.⁹⁴

Before long Cobb transferred again, this time to the wooden-hulled, screw sloop-of-war *Shenandoah*. The ship's guns included one 150-pound parrot rifle (not 200-pound as Cobb stated), two eleven-inch Dahlgren smooth bores, one thirty-pound parrot rifle, two twenty-four-pound howitzer rifles, and two heavy twelve-pound howitzer smooth bores. The ship had returned in August 1863 to the Philadelphia Navy Yard after patrolling as far north as Halifax, Nova Scotia, in search of the Confederate raiders *Tacony* and *Florida*. The sloop then sailed to join the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron at New Inlet, N.C., outside of Wilmington on September 8.

The *Shenandoah* spent most of the next fifteen months patrolling the waters between Wilmington and Nassau. During the war British ships were arriving regularly at Nassau loaded with supplies and war material for the Confederacy. To get the supplies to Confederate ports both Confederate and British ships had to run the blockade, outrunning ships like the *Shenandoah* attempting to enforce the blockade.⁹⁵

On December 3, 1864, the *Shenandoah* arrived at Green Bay in the Bahamas under the suspicion that Confederate ships intending to disrupt Union commerce were being fitted out there. After finding no evidence of this activity, the ship sailed back to North Carolina to join the rest of the fleet in its Christmas Eve attack on Fort Fisher which guarded Wilmington. Doing "good service" according to Rear-Admiral Porter

⁹⁴*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, vol. 1, 247.

⁹⁵*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, vol. 1, 480-481; David D. Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (Secaucus, NJ, 1984), 622-623

commanding the fleet, the *Shenandoah* bombarded the soon-silenced fort and continued shelling the fort into the night.⁹⁶

On Christmas Day, firing resumed in an attempt to cover the assault of three thousand army troops sent to capture the fort. The troops advanced on the fort in the late afternoon as Confederate guns poured out grape and canister fire from its heavy guns. After advancing to within seventy-five yards of the fort, the men retreated amidst continuing fire, General Benjamin Butler having decided that the fort was too strong to be taken by an assault. Most of the troops reembarked during the night, though about 700 to 1000 men were stranded on shore; those stranded would be returned to their ships in the next two days.⁹⁷

A second attempt to take Fort Fisher was made in January 1865. On the 13th, the *Shenandoah's* boats helped to land an army force of eight thousand men led by Major General Alfred A. Terry. This force of 4000, comprised largely of the same force that had first assaulted the fort, was supplemented with two brigades of black troops. Union vessels bombarded the fort on the 13th and 14th, disabling Confederate guns to prepare the way for this force. In addition to the army, 1,600 sailors and 400 marines from various ships volunteered to be a storming party. The captain of the *Shenandoah*, Daniel B. Ridgely, sent fifty-four sailors, including Cobb, and fourteen marines ashore under Lieutenant Smith W. Nichols. Union guns began firing at 10:00 a.m. on the 15th as the

⁹⁶*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, vol. 1, 481; Porter, 697.

⁹⁷Virgil C. Jones, *The Civil War at Sea* (3 vols., New York, 1962), vol. 3, 332-334; Denney, 508.

sailors and marines headed for shore. At 3:00 p.m. the Union barrage ceased and the assault began.⁹⁸

Colonel William Lamb, commanding the fort and the 1,800 Confederates inside, began firing on the entire naval force headed by Lieutenant Commander K. Randolph Breese. As the sailors and Marines advanced, cutlasses and revolvers in hand, the Confederates unleashed rifle fire and grape and canister. Some Union men managed to reach the top of the parapet before scrambling back to the sea. Although repulsed, these men had distracted the Confederates long enough to allow the army to take the western end of the fort. Supported by gunfire from the Union fleet, the army fought through the bomb-proofs, often in hand-to-hand combat, eventually driving the Confederates out of the fort. Major James Reilly, who took command after Lamb was wounded, surrendered the fort and his men at 10 p.m. Union casualties numbered about 1,000, while the Confederates lost about half that many. The naval column had suffered seventy-four dead, two-hundred eight-nine wounded, and twenty missing. The men from the *Shenandoah's* landing party returned with six wounded men and five missing.⁹⁹

The next day, a powder magazine at Fort Fisher exploded. It appears that some Union soldiers, accidentally ignited the powder while exploring the magazine. The explosion added more men the list of Federal casualties.

⁹⁸*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, vol. 1, 481; ones, 341, 347-350; Denney 516-517; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*. (Thirty vols. and index, Washington: 1894-1927), I, XI, 539. Subsequently referred to as *O.R.N.*

⁹⁹*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, vol. 1, 481; Denney, 517, Jones, 351-359; Fox, 539; *O.R.N.*, I, XI, 443.

The *Shenandoah* transported men to shore hospitals after the battle at Fort Fisher. A few days later it joined Admiral John A. Dahlgren's South Atlantic Blockading Squadron in Charleston. In February, the sloop joined several other ships in landing troops at Bull's Bay, north of Charleston, in an attempt to divert attention from Major General William T. Sherman's men moving northward through South Carolina. On January 17, Confederate forces, afraid of being cut off by Sherman's men in their rear, evacuated Charleston hoping to reach Robert E. Lee's army in Richmond and Petersburg. The next day Union forces entered the city.¹⁰⁰

The *Shenandoah* returned to the Philadelphia Navy Yard in March. On April 9, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. A few days later on the 14th, Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theater by John Wilkes Booth. The next day Lincoln died and the *Shenandoah* was decommissioned. Sometime after the fall of Charleston, Cobb had transferred to the receiving ship *Princeton* on which he served until being discharged on June 11, 1865.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, vol. 1, 481; Porter, 760-761; *Civil War Naval Chronology*, V-39-42.

¹⁰¹*Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, vol. 1, 481; Muster Roll, Return of the Receiving Ship *Princeton*, June 17, 1865, National Archives.

CORRESPONDENCE, MAY 24, 1864-JULY 30, 1865

U.S. Reciving Ship Alleghany May 24th 1864

Dear Father

As I have not recieved aney letters from you for a long time I thought that I would write a few lines to asertain weather you are all forgotten how to write or not if you have you can get some one else to write for you.

I sent my Discharge about 2 weeks a go and have not hered from it yet I am affrid that that it has not gon home and if it has not or if it has I wish you to write and let me know a bout it for it is a good one and I donot wish to loose it

their is not much news on board of our ship to tell you at presant but the news from the Army is vary good and I hope that they will Continue as good as the[y] have bin for the last week or so,

when I last wrote to you I did not feel vary well and did not write much. I have read the New Gospel of Peace, the Ship wrecks, the Way to Prosper¹⁰² and in fact about all the Book [t]hat you sent me, the Book Called the way to Prosper is Continually being

¹⁰²William Falconer (1732-1769), a British poet, wrote *Shipwrecks* some time before being lost at sea in 1769. Cotton Mather (1663-1728) in *The Way to Prosperity* (Boston, 1690) instructed men on living the good life. Especially interesting was Richard Grant White's (1821-1885) *The New Gospel of Peace According to St. Benjamin* (New York, 1863). White used biblical language to create a fascinating allegorical tale in which Abe the Honest, Litulmak (McClellan), John the Boaster (John Pope), George the Meade, and others, were pitted against the unholy alliance of Jeph the Repudiator (Jefferson Davis), Robbutleeh (Robert E. Lee), the Dimmichrats of the North (Northern Democrats), and the Pahdees (the Irish) who were fiendishly trying to end the war. Cobb's father sent these to maintain and strengthen his son's moral and patriotic spirit.

read it has went around of the Ships Company, I am a studying Navigation and I am a
geting a long vary well,

I send my Regards and thanks to the Ladys Relief Assosiation for their gifts to
me,¹⁰³ and you must tell mother that I am vary thankful for the articles that she put in to
the Box for the[y] are of the gratest importance to me and will bee of grate use to me. I
find a vast differance in being here and in the army, here I have a good Hammack and
matress to sleep on at Night and I know whare it is, but in the Army I had no bed to lay
on but the ground and in the Mo[r]ning I would not know weather I would get to lay
down or not at night, and if I did perhaps it would be in the mud,

I will close for the presant by sending my love to Mother and all of the family your self
included, also all inquiring friends, Pleas write soon. I have no more stamps,

from your Most Ob'. Son

William .T. Cobb

U.S.N.

¹⁰³Mauricetown seems to have had an association similar to the Ladies' Soldiers Relief Association of Bridgeton, NJ. Formed in December 1861, the Bridgeton Association--and those like it all over the country--sent quilts, night shirts, blankets, drawers, books, magazines, food of all kinds, and many other items to soldiers in various theaters of the war. *Pioneer*, March 1, 1862, 2.

On board U.S. Reciving Ship Alleghany June 6th 1864

Dear Father

I recieved your vary welcome letter on the 4th inst and was vary glad to here from home once more and that all was well I had began to fear that some of the family was sick by your not writeing sooner but I am vary glad to find it differant.

you was saying in your letter that you was so buisey that you could hardly get time to write but I think that you might give George the proper materials to write with and let him write to me when you have not time, and when you have time then you could write me a few lines.

you was speaking about the draft you said that Ed Haley was drafted he can get into the Navy if he wishes to by applying for a transfer,

I do not know how long I will remain here, but I hope that I will get a way soon and Captor [*capture*] some Blockcade Runers for I want to make some prise money befor the War Closes.

their is no News to send you at the presant but if you have a mind to you can send to the Editor of the Pioneer and have him to Direct it here. I have read most all of the Books that you sent me. The New Gospel of Peace is vary good. Homers Illiade is too much for me. I found the letter that you was a speaking a bout and was glad Enough of

it, among the maney things that was in my Box I found a white shirt, it is something that I have not worn since I left home.

I use my slate and pencil a considerable [amount] and I hope by the time that my time is out, to be a good Navigator, you did not say what you thought of my Discharge the next time you write I want you to let me know what you think of it. I will close for the presant by sending my love to Mother, and all of our family your self included direct as befor Nomore at presant

from your most Ob^t Son

William . T. Cobb

U.S.N.

On board U.S. S^r Daylight off Fort^{ss} Monroe Augst 5th 1,64

Dear Father

Yours of the 30th inst Come to hand this morning, I was vary glad to here from home but I was vary sorry to here the news of your situation, and if such a thing is posibl do not have the place mortgaged if you can avoid it aney how at all, and this is the first that I knew of my having aney ground there, I will tell you what I will do, I will sign an allotment of 10\$ to you per Month for the remainder of my time as soon as I get a chance but I can not tell how long befor I will get a chance but when I get a chance you may look

for it I will let you know if it will save a mortgage on the place it is all that I can do for the present.

Augst 7th 11 AM

As wee have come from F^t Monroe and arrived at Norfolk I will finish my letter, wee are in the Dry Dock at the Navy yard of Gosport Near Norfolk, wee will get over huled here I do not know how long it will take us but not over two weeks, wee was out to sea but on account of our Boilers being in bad order wee put back for repaires. You were speaking a bout my sending ten Doll^s to bee mad a life member of the Society but it is imposible for me to get one cent for they do not pay off untill the expiration of term but my time will bee out in the course of time and I will have a chance to Do some thing for my self, if you can get a long aney how at all without puting the place under obligations do so for I do not want it done if it costs all that I make the remainder of my time, I will have to stop for the present by sending my love to Mother and all the Children yourself included, write soon Direct as befor Directed U.S. S^{tr} Daylight North Atlantic Blockcading Squadren v^{ia} F^t Monroe Va

no more at present

from your Most O^{bt} Son

William ,T, Cobb

U.S.N.

On board U.S.S. Shenandoah Sep^r 10th 1864

Dear Father

I have not written to you for Some time and as I have bin transferred from the Daylight to the U.S. S^r Shenandoah I thought I would write and let you know the ship that I am now in. I wish you to tell G. Wills the ships name that I am now in and tell him to write to me, tell Call the ships name so that she Can write to me

the ship that I am now in is not a blockade vessel she is a Cruicer she goes to sea and Cruises betwen Willmington and Halafax her armor is 1 30lb^s Parrott 1, 200^{lbs} Parrot 2, 11ⁱⁿ gunes wee carry havy mettle she is a sloop-of-war- I like her vary much- when wee go to sea wee stay not over 30 days at a time, I wish you to write soon Direct U.S.S. Shenandoah via F^{ts} Monre North Atlantic Blockading Squaren, give my love to mother and all the Children. yourself included Nomore at presant

from your most Ob^l Son

W^m .T. Cobb

write soon Pleas Excuse this short letter sircumstances will not permit me to write longer (not time at present)

On board U.S.S. Shenandoah Sep^r 14th 1,64

Dear Father

I[t] has not bin vary long since I last wrote to you. I made an allotment of half pay for you to day it will begin on the 1st of next Month my pay is \$16 per Month and I allotted half of that for it will take the rest to get Clothes with as wee have to pay for our own Clothes here the Government dose not furnish us with Clothes as in the army you can draw it evry month or let it run for two or three Months just as you pleas the 1st Month will be up on the last of October and if you want to draw that months you will have to go (or send by mail) between the 1st and 10th of November and so on. Directions Jos. S. Chambers Navy Agent 3^{ed} P^t below Chestnut Philadelphia, this money you can use if you need it I send it to you and the family it is a small sum but it may do some good in the Family, wee expect to go to sea to morrow wee are going a cruiceing [*cruising*] between the Islands of the West Indies and perhaps will not be back here befor spring and wee may be back here in a few weeks please write soon Direct as befor. give my love to Mother and all of the Children and tell them that I have a little over a year to stay and then I want to Come home to stay. I am well and hope you are all the, same, I also send my love to you. I will Close for the presant. write soon. Direct

Shenandoah insted of Daylight Nomere at presant,

from your most Ob'

W^m .T. Cobb U.S.N.

Page N^o 1

On board U.S.S. S[h]enandoah off Norfolk Navy Yard

Nov^{br} 13. 1,64

Der Father

As I have another oppertunity of writeing I take it in writing to you. wee left Key west about a week a go and come North wee stoped at Beaufort and then proseeded on to Norfolk whare wee now lay. wee had a vary good passage on, it is vary cold here for the time of year. it is much colder here than it was at key west, when wee come here wee went to Coaling ship. and the vessel that wee took Coal out of was the Sch^r (Page N^o 2) Fredrick Tylor the vessel that Lorenzo Ogden sailed and Acy Robines and Whitefield Sropshire sailed her once I met on board of her, an old [friend] of mine it is Alfried Harris Hudsons Son wee had a good time to geather. I was on board of the vessel with him untill nine Oclock last night. he told me all the news the [*that*] he knew. he is a comeing home when he comes to Phil^a this time he is only a comeing home to stay one day. I give him a green coconut and he said that he was a going to take it down home

with him to show to some of the Mauricetown folks that never [saw] a green coconut. I put my name on it so that if any one sees it they will know who sent it from (Page N° 3) the Sunny South. Alfried said that he would try to get over to our house to tell you what I had to say and look, when George wrote last he said that you wanted to know what I am on board of this ship I will tell you, I am an ordinary seaman I get \$16 per month, half of which I have allotted to you it begins on the first of September there is two monthes pay (at[e]last half pay I should have said) due you will go (or send) to Phil^a for it. I am well and harty, as I hope you all are at home. I would be vary glad to come home to see Mother, your self, and all the Children. George told me that he was a going to sea with E^d I am vary glad that he can help you, but I am sorry that he has to leave home so soon (Page N° 4) but as he is under Ed^s Controle perhaps he will do well enough. you must charge Ed vary carefull to be carefull of him, and when my time is out I want to go with him my self and then I will learn george Navigation. I will close for the presant by sending my love to Mother, Your self, and all the family. Pleas to write soon as you get this. Direct as befor. Nomore at presant but I still remain your most ob^{dt} Son

W^m .T. Cobb U.S.N.

On board U.S. Ship Shenandoah Dec^{br} [2?]nd 1.64

Dear Father

I recieved yours Day before yasterday and was glad to here from home a gane. I had begin to think that you had forgotten me but I find you have not. you was a speaking a bout the 8\$ per Month that I allotted to you I give you the privlage of useing it if you wish but in case you do not want to use it you may keep it untill my time is out then I will have some thing to start with, but if you need it use it for I would rather you would use it than to have need for it and not do so. I hope that E^d Compton will make up to you what you have lost on his house, I wish you to write often, write as soon as you here from my time [*sic*]. I would be vary glad to help you on the Big Schooner, but I have become so acquainted with Navigation that I expect that I shal go to sea the remainder of my life unless something better affords. I have 10 months and 29 days more to stay that is not long to one who gets use to it as I am, wee do not know how long wee will stay here but I hope not long for I want to get into warm weather, I wish you to write to E^d tell him whare I am and to write to me and I will answer it. also send my love to E^d & George, W I will Close fore the presant by sending my love to Mother, Anna, Fremont, Clinton, also your self, I wish you to write soon. Direct as befor, Nomore at presant.

from your Most Ob^{td} Son

W^m.T. Cobb U.S.N.

On board U.S.S. Shenandoah

Under Fort Fisher N.C. Jan^y 17th 1865

Dear Father

As I have not written to you for some time I take the presant oppertunity in writeing you a few lines to notify you that Fort Fisher the Key (to the so Called Confederacy) is ours we took it this you may rely uppon for I was an Eye witness to the same when you read the papers you are not certain of the fact but I know it to bee so, when you read the papers you may read an account of the sailors and how they showed their Bravery when chargeing on the Fort I was in the Charge, now to the Detales of the affair, wee left Beaufort on the 12th [of January] and come down here, wee arrived here that night and come too, off the Fort untill morning when wee Began the Engagement wee Bombbarded the Fort all that day (the 13th) and all day on the 14th and on the Morning of the 15th at 9 O^{ck} wee was ordered to Man all boats, Armed and Equiped, (previous to this all the men that was to go on shore was picked out,) wee was Called the stormeing party. at 10 O^{ck} wee landed and started up the Beach towards the fort and from this time (out) wee was under fire. our ships kept up the Bombbardments from whare wee landed to the Fort was a bout 2 1/2 Miles wee Crawled on our hands and knees untill wee got with in a half a mile of the Fort when the signal was given to Charge and then wee started on a full Run. wee Run untill wee come up to a stockade that they had a

long the Beach when wee lay flat upon the Beach, (the instant wee started on the Charge the Rebs let fly Grape, Canister, and Shots from Small arms, and wee had to face it all with nothing in our hands but a Saber and Revolver, but wee did not Stop wee kept on untill wee reached the Stockade but that did not afford aney protection to us for the beach was So level and the fort so high that they could Shoot down upon us whilst wee had to lay and take it as fast as they could Shoot. Father I have bin in a grate number of Battles But for the Space of time I never Saw men fall So fast in my life. I cannot Discribe it with pen and paper but I will do the best I can. for ,Example, there was 1 Shower of Canister Come through the ranks whare I was running up the beach and out of about Twenty that Stood with in 8 paces of me there was but four of us that come out of that Shower, I had not gon twenty feet farther when another Shower come and done the Same as the first and So on untill wee got Clear of there fire way down the beach, after wee got to the Stockade wee lay there Some time, when wee began to Cheer and tride to get to the Fort but there was a ditch about fourty feet wide, and the Side of the Fort was about fifty feet high So wee Saw that there was little use of us trying to get in to the Fort in that way, So wee lay Still for a few minutes longer when the Signal was given for us to fall back, wich wee did, in our falling back is when wee lost the most men for the Rebs let loose Grape and Canister faster than ever, whilst wee lay under the Fort wee could See a Rebel General on the Fort A waving his Sward and wee could here him telling his men to give it to them (meaning us) and well they did give it to us, wee fired Several Shots at him but our Revolvers would not reach him, he was a bout fourty yards from us, but one Sailor got a dead Marines Musket and fired at him the first Shot Mist

him but the next time he fired he hit him and wounded him, whilst wee was making the
attacked on the Fort in front there was two thousand Soldiers come up in rear and got into
the Fort befor the Rebs knew it, they had gained three Mounds when the[y] (Rebs that
had bin Drawn over to the Side whare wee was,) found out that they was out witted) I
understand Since wee come back that it was only intended for us to go up on the Sea Side
of the Fort and Charge So as to Draw the Rebs to whare wee was So that the Soldiers
Could have a chance to get in to the rear of it, the reason why the Rebs did not mistrust
the trick was on account of, on the Side whare the Soldiers was they onley presented a
Small Skirmish line in front the main boddy laying behind Some rifle pits and as Soon
as wee got the Signal to Charge the Soldiers done the Same, So the Rebs was all on our
Side and none whare the Soldiers was (but wee Blue Jackets had to Suffer the Penelty,
the Rebs Say that they Never Saw a braver piece of work done in their lives!¹⁰⁴ by this
time it was Sundown wee reformed and went to help the Soldiers which wee did with a
will, wee fought untill a few minutes befor 10 Ock at Night when the Fort was
Surrendered to ,US, as soon as the Fort was Surrendered wee Signaled to the fleet and
Such another noise you never hered, of men huraying, Steam whistles Screaming,
Rocketts, the air was a live with rocketts of all Collars, I have Seen a grate maney Forth
of July⁸ Celebrated but this beat all that I ever did see, it done me mor good to See it for I

¹⁰⁴Colonel Lamb noted that following the "murderous fire" that swept the naval column, "the
bravery of the officers could not restrain their men from panic and retreat...we witnessed what had never
been seen before, a disorderly rout of American sailors and marines." *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*
(4 vols., New York: Century Company, 1884-1888), vol. 4, 650.

Lieutenant Commander Breese later commented that "the mistake was in expecting a body of
sailors, collected hastily from different ships, unknown to each other, armed with swords and pistols to
stand against veteran soldiers." Boatner, 294.

had an active part in gaining the Fort, we remained on Shore all night picking up what ever we could from the Fort, a bout 9 Ock on the morning of the 16th the magazine in the fort Exploded I would not under tak to discribe the Scenes after [the] explosion but is was awful to See, up to this morning they have dug 150 out which was covered up in the Sand from the Explosion,¹⁰⁵ there was a bout 2,000 Blue Jacketts there and about three Regiments of Soldiers that took the Fort (the Storming Party) there was about 300 Blue Jacketts killed and woonded bout how many Soldiers I am not able to Say, there is about 70 guns in the Fort, we took 25,000, Prisinors besides the Munitions of war,¹⁰⁶ we found wires leading to torpedoes on the Beach and in fact all a round the fort but the[y] had no time to Blow us up, also wires leading to torpedoes out in the river, I will give you a more minute account of the affare Some other time, as a trophy I have a Revolver which I brought off with me there is a grate maney wants it but I will not let it go, I will Say for my Self that I did not get hert, but I was awful hungry after being on Shore 36 hours a runing through Sand with no water and nothing to Eeat,, I will close by Sending my love to mother and all the family your Self included - Read this to all who it may consern, Pleas write Soon Direct as befor No more at presant

from you most Ob^{dt} Son

William ,T, Cobb U.S.N.

¹⁰⁵The 13,000 pounds of gunpowder killed twenty-five men and wounded sixty-six; thirteen were never found. Boatner, 294; Denney, 518.

¹⁰⁶Nearly 400 sailors were killed, wounded, or missing. The Federals had captured around 1,900 prisoners and 169 guns (47 of which were heavy guns). Jones, 361; Boatner, 293.

Charleston S.C. February 22nd 1,65

Dear Father

As I have not written to you for Some time I thought as long as wee have taken this place I would write you a few lines, wee lay with in two hundred yards of the wharf, I hahve not bin on Shore yet but wee expect to get liberty to go on Shore to See the place in a few days by what I can see from the Ship, the lower part of the City is pretty well tore to piecies but the upper part is not distroyed much, the Rebs has not distroyed much of there Earth works they left them as they Stood, I will give you the plan of attacked, Sherman made the attacked on the South west Side the monitors on the South East Side and wee (with 800 soldiers on the North East Side), there was about 150 Sailors wee went around in a bay on the N.E. side Caled Bulls Bay wee landed the Soldiers in the day time and when Night come wee would take them off ag[a]in and land them again the next day and wee kept on at that until the Rebs thought that wee had ten or twelve thousand troops and they began to think that wee would Cut their Retreat off so they made good their retreat while they had a chance, while wee was on the Expedition wee liveed on the Country wee have fresh mutton, fresh pork, Beef and many other articales, wee was a whole weeke on the Expedition and wee had to live on what ever wee could pick up, the People here Say that if it had not bin for us a comeing up in there rear that the rebs would not have left as soon as the[y] did. the People here Say that they are vary

glad that wee have taken posesien of the City, I do not know how long wee will Stay here but if the Admeral goes to Washington wee will Stay here for Some time for our Cap^m is Senior Cap^m of the fleet, and wee m[a]y Stay here for a long time, when you write to me Send me Some Stamps if you pleas for I am out, I try to make my grog money keep me in Stamps but while I was on that Expidition Some one took all that I had So I have to go a beging now which I do not like, tell mother that I would bee vary glad to see her and the Children but they will have to wait a while yet befor I can come home, tell them that I am now at the place whare the first gun was fired on the flag, tell them that wee Celebrated Washingtons Birth Day here in Charleston wee have a grand display of flags all the Ships in the fleet is dressed in flags and each Ship fired twenty one guns in honour of Washington and to night there is to be a grand display of lights and Rockets is to be throwen also, give my love to Mother the Children and your self included Please wr[i]te soon nomer at presant

from your most obt. Son

W^m .T. Cobb

U.S.N.

Wilmington N.C. July 30th 1,65

Dear Father

wee arrived here day befor yasterday wee have bin to Georgetown and discharged our cargo but on account of the vessel leaking vary badly wee could not go to Barbados and wee had to come here to Wilmington to haul out on the railway whare we lay at presant wee found a vary large leak in her [starboard?] seam I am in hope that when wee go off of the railway that she will not leak as bad as she had bin doing for it has bin as much as we wanted to do to keep her free I did not write from Georgetown for there is no regular post office there there is none but a military post office there now we do not know whare wee are a going to as yet but befor I send this I will find out and tell you whare to direct I am well as a person can be and I am getting as fat as a pig I like Cap' Newel very well and I dont wish to sail with a better man and Mr [Ensign?] the mate is as nice a man as can be found in a days travel, in fact we have a vary good crew all through I am vary well satisfied the Cap' is a going to get a load of spirits and rosin to bring north when we come when you write tell me whare Ed is and how he is making out also how [Fremont?] is let me know if one of the folks from the city has bin down or not If there is aney of them there give them my love and tell them that I am alive and well give my love to Mother and all of the children send [love] to George and [Linda?]

I will close for the present by sending my love to you along with the rest of the Cobb family no more at present

from your most Af^t Son

W^m .T. Cobb

N.B. I wish you wuld have me propped in the O. of O.F. so that I can be elected at aney time that I might stop in the river W.T.C.

EPILOGUE

When William Cobb returned home from the war, he resumed his work as a carpenter and a ship joiner.¹⁰⁷ After being home only a few months, the twenty-five-year-old veteran married twenty-three-year-old Hester D. Compton of Haleyville in the new Methodist church. The grave of Cobb's first wife, Emma, lay within yards of the church in which Reverend Levi J. Rhodes married the couple. Hester gave Cobb three children, Alice, born March 25, 1866; Lincoln Henry, February 10, 1868; and Oscar P., June 13, 1870.¹⁰⁸

In August 1879, Cobb applied for an invalid pension claiming he was "wholly incapacitated for regular manual labor" due to the gun shot wound in his left hand and the deafness caused by a premature firing of the *Shenandoah's* guns at Fort Fisher. The pension was not granted until October 1888. At some point between 1880 and 1884, the Cobbs moved to Long Branch, New Jersey, in Monmouth County, on the Atlantic coast of central New Jersey. There, despite his "incapacities," he joined the National Guard of the state of New Jersey in June 1884. By the time of the Spanish-American War in 1898 he had risen from the rank of private in Company B, 3rd Regiment, to First Lieutenant, finally obtaining that commission he had always wanted.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷U.S. Census, 1870 and 1880, New Jersey, Cumberland County.

¹⁰⁸U.S. Census, 1870, New Jersey, Cumberland County; William T. Cobb, Pension Records, National Archives.

¹⁰⁹William T. Cobb, Spanish-American War Records, New Jersey State Archives; New Jersey National Guard, Individual Records, William T. Cobb, New Jersey State Archives.

In order to serve in the Spanish-American War at the age of 58, Cobb applied to be restored to the rolls--thus suspending his pension payments--and reentered the army with his national guard regiment which became the 3rd New Jersey Volunteer Infantry. The company muster roll from May 12, 1898, states that Cobb was suffering only from "Slight Hemorrhoids" and a "Slight defect in hearing." He was promoted to Captain in December 1898 when Vice Captain Charles Morriss resigned. Following a brief bout with tonsillitis, and the ratification of the Treaty of Paris on February 6, 1899, Captain Cobb was discharged.¹¹⁰

Returning to the rank of First Lieutenant after the war, Cobb was moved to Company K of the 3rd National Guard Regiment. In June 1900, a sixty-year-old Cobb was induced to resign his position due to "severe deafness," and applied to have his pension continued. Back in February he had applied for a state medal issued to those who had rendered long and faithful service in the Militia and National Guard. Whether or not Cobb was awarded this honor for his fifteen years of service is unknown.¹¹¹

Cobb collected his last pension payment of \$22 on November 4, 1912. After a respectable 72 years, Cobb died of "apoplexy" (a stroke) on January 14, 1913, forty-eight years after the eve of the assault on Fort Fisher. Hester remained in Long Branch and continued to receive his pension until she died in August 1925.¹¹²

¹¹⁰William T. Cobb, Spanish-American War Records, New Jersey State Archives.

¹¹¹New Jersey National Guard, Individual Records, William T. Cobb, New Jersey State Archives.

¹¹²William T. Cobb, Pension Records, National Archives; Certificate and Record of Death for William T. Cobb, State of New Jersey, Bureau of Vital Statistics.

Had Hester travelled to the site of her husband's first major engagement in the Civil War--Williamsburg, Virginia--before she died, she might have come across a roadside stand selling bread, Coca-Cola, and Civil War relics.¹¹³ Among the muskets, swords, and unexploded artillery shells, perhaps she would have found a box of spent Minie balls. Running the balls through her fingers she might have wondered if any one of these had flown near her husband. Fortunately none hit Cobb on that day. And even though he had a bullet skip across his back at Fair Oaks and a gun-shot wound in his hand after Gettysburg, he survived the war, having served in the infantry, cavalry, and navy, and could then return home, and marry her. How very different her life would have been--and how short his would have been--had any of these bullets fatally struck her William Tell.

¹¹³"A Look Back," *The Daily Press*, Williamsburg, Virginia, October, 9, 1994, H3. Such a roadside stand did exist and was photographed around 1922.

APPENDIX

[This letter from Edwin to his father describes the battle between the Merrimac and Virginia]

Hattaras Inlet March 20th 1862

Dear Father,

We arrived here the 10th, and a tedious time we've had of it, I did not go out in that woesterly wind, that come out the day I got out the river, and the vesalt [*vesse*] is satisfactory too me, although Ive no doubt some of our wiseacres passed premature judgement on it. The Schooner J Frambes came out the day I come out the river, and he got down to Hattaras, and took the wind too the Eastward and hauled off shore, and blowed his sails away, when the wind came out to the W, away he went across the stream and he fell in with another Schr and borrowed a Mainsail, and then he got here just 14 hours ahead of us, I come out the Capes with Con & [San Marto?] and I run the land down and they run straight from Chincoteague, I run out of the wind at Cape Charles and they run out of it at Body [*Bodie*] Island. I took the wind S.E. and went in to Fortress Monroe, and that is why we are behind them. I left Old Point Paddys Day at sunrise and the next morning at 7 o clock was off the bar, our [lag?] days are up too day, we come over the [?] yesterday to wait orders. I cant tell anything about when or where we will discharge.

I saw the Battle at Fort Monroe between the Merrimack and our little Infernal Machine (for she is nearer that than any thing men ever contrived before), talk about excitement I rather guess there was some, I got underway to go up and see the fun but the Flagship ordered us out again. I was alongside the Monitor with the boat and all the injury she sustained that could be seen was several places where shot and shell had scalded the paint off the gun, the Capt of a French Man of War was aboard of her and said she would sink the combined Navies of the world, and cannot be taken herself. Her armament is 2 11 inch Rifled Dahlgren guns, that throws steel pointed shells. I see them fire a shell out of the Union Guns that weighed 520 lbs and 50^{lbs}, of powder to drive it, she weighs 52,005 lbs and 15 inch bore and is 3 feet in diameter at the breech, nice little pocket pistol is it not.

I see the papers say the Minnesota was well peppered, that is all humbug. I sailed all around her and could only see where she was struck 3 times, a shell through her Ensign flying [Gibbon?] shot away, and one shot under her Counter, that much I have seen, and 2 or 3 shells entered her ports, and that is what newspaper correspondants called riddled and disabled, but I want you to understand it was no place for nervous gentlemen during the battle, it was a perfect Thunderstorm of shot and shells, and it would have done you good too have heard 10000, throats cheering when the Merrimack turned tail too, it was comical (as well as terrible) too see the little Monitor sculling around the huge Monster, just like a little wiffet around a bull. I cant give you all the particulars now but will when I get home. I am well as is all hands. I,ve plenty of company and plenty to eat and nothing to do, but cant get a paper, Send me the Press if

possible and I'll pay the expense, give my love to Call, Mother and all the children and keep some for yourself. So no more present but still Remain [?]

F.L.T. [First Lieutenant]

E. Cobb

P S Direct thus

Edwin Cobb

Schr C. W. Holmes Hatteras Inlet N.C.

Care of Capt Barnes

write soon as you get this and let me know how to direct to Will. Hurrah for Uncle

Samuel I,m for the Union Right or Wrong keep me square in the Lodge, by all means.

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VITA

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Michael was born on September 29, 1969, and raised in Centreville, Virginia-- only miles from the Civil War battlefields at Manassas. After graduating from Paul VI High School in Fairfax, Virginia, in 1987, he went on to the College of William & Mary where he received a B.A. in History, graduating *cum laude* in May 1991. Two weeks after graduation, he married Suzanne Smallwood in the Wren Chapel on campus.

Following his employment with the U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Department of Education, Ludwick returned to the College in Fall 1993 to pursue graduate study in American History. He is currently employed at the College as Associate Director of Sponsored Programs in the Office of Grants and Research Administration. He continues to participate in Civil War living histories and reenactments with the Nineteenth Georgia Infantry.