

George Oscar French (1844-1865)
Civil War Letters – 1863, part 2
Transcribed by Dawn Hance; typed by Joann Nichols; edited by Paul Zeller

Undated [Probably July 5, 1863]

Ella & Alice [sisters]

Ella you must write me [?] I can read your writing without trouble & think you are a first rate writer for a little girl & of course if you are NICE you will have your picture for me someday – for it is most a year since I came away & I want to see how you change if any & Alice you must have yours on the same plate if possible

The flies are charging into me like fury & I must stop as they will eat me quite up. Love
to Smid & All. From Oscar

Fort Stevens D.C. Aug 12 [1863]

Friends at Home

Yours of the 2nd is before me. I had begun to think you were never going to write to me again. We are having very warm weather, thermometer from 92° to 113° in the shade my health is good—first rate. I lost a great deal by being sick last fall. I don't exactly see what you mean by keeping the right side of me &c you seem to imply I am a fool, to be coaxed around by others. The way of it is this

The first four months we were in the District & while Capt. H [James Hyde] & 2nd Lieut H.S. Foote were lying drunk & Billy Goodrich was detached at the Brigade QM [Quarter Master] then the Company was under the Com'd of the non "Com offr's" Of course I lying in the Hosp had no opportunity to show my hand, & Nichols having the influence of his Brother, Col W.T. [Nichols] of the 14th & he was getting passes to Fairfax Co & 18 passes to the city & otherwise making himself conspicuous. Well, he got sent home recruiting. He goes home & gets an Officers suit everything (including cord in pants) except straps & went to Bor^o [Brattleboro] with 15 recruits & touching his cap to Maj. Austin an Old Army Off'r said "Maj. here is 15 recruits for the 1st Art. & I have sent my Sergt. North" who will report to Rutland in two or three weeks with 15 or 20 more. He could not long put on airs around an Officer of the Regular Army & the Major found it out & swore that he should never have a commission if his influence with the Adj't Genl. would avail anything, & said he was not fit to hold the position he did i.e. Sergt.—Certain it is I could drill him when we left for Clifton Barracks last Spring. On the other hand, Macomber [John H.] got a furlough for ten days to take home the body of his brother in law, who was buried at the Soldiers Home, & after he went recruiting orders were sent him. I could drill him too when he went away. I have never been reprimanded during the year of service. I have never missed a roll call or failed to obey & carry out my orders to the letter. It is not always the best men that get promoted. the other day I was in the Capt's Office & he said to me "Sergt You have done first rate for the past eight months" excellent & I am going to do well by you. Ord. Sherman [Co. C's Orderly Sergeant Merritt Sherman. This position is also known as First Sergeant] will soon be promoted & you are to have his position. I have spoken to the Colonel of You & he thinks well of you & after that there are to be four Lieuts to each Battery & you will stand the fine chance in them before winter." This he told me word for word & even went so far as to speak of sending for money for my outfit - & this is what I base my talk of promotion on but it may all blow over for I am poor & have no rich friends to boost me into favor like Nichols. Don't say anything about it for it might blow over & Lieut Meeker previously told me the same thing - One thing is certain I don't care for I am in a good place now & if I get no higher I shall have no more responsibility resting upon me - Sherman is sick & I have been running the co for a few days & find it quite pleasant, in fact easy enough & very much to the chagrin of Peter D. [Donnelly] who acts quite mum. I was forced to give Tim [Barber] two hours knapsack drill to day for his sauce. he is docile as a Lamb. I am in a great hurry today. Give my love to all the Brothers & Sisters

Oscar

[Undated letter written by George Oscar French after the death of Clara K. Wood August 11, 1863, 17 years of age from Castleton. This letter was either written Sunday August 23 or 30, 1863]

Folks at Home,

Having a few moments to spare I thought I would improve them in writing a line to you. It is Sabbath 5 P.M. & the 2 Co. from this Post have gone to Fort Slocum for inspection of arms & to have a dress parade & I am in the Captain's Office all alone, in my glory.

It is about supper time at home & I can see you all around the table eating some of Mothers good biscuit & butter. The likes of which I have not seen during the year or more that I have been away from home. The reason I am not with the company is I am off duty today, the first time for months, but not feeling very well this morning & knowing of the march to Slocum I just went on the sick list. I rec^d those \$7.00 & 51 all right & mean to be careful of my soap at all times but things are so awful high here that if any one gets the little luxuries of life that it costs like fun. butter .40 cts eggs 30 & cheese 25: milk 10 cts, wine measure &c &c. I mean to spend more than I at first intended for I did not then know any of the circumstances & I assure you I am very prudent. There is Will Alfred [Pvt. William H. Alford of Castleton, Co. C, 11th Vermont] draws all his money here & sends for more than I do at that & Tim's clothing acct for the year is \$97.80 taking most four months Govt pay to square it "& others most as much" some more, while mine is \$45.70, quite a contrast. Mother talks of writing to Len Russell. I'll tell you when he was sick I used to do his writing &c as I would do for any comrade & since he went home I have written to him two or three times isn't because I wanted to hear how he got along & not because I had any particular friendship for him. By the way I think little Ella [sister Ella born 1856] is a first rate writer. is she healthy? I used to fear that consumption had got hold of my little sister. I would like to all of your pictures but I suppose it is no use to talk of it. Lt. Col. R.C. Benton is gone to Alexandria to see the Vermont Brigade who it is said are going to Charleston. [Lieutenant Colonel Reuben C. Benton, 11th Vermont] I got a letter from Byron the other day. the 10th [Vermont Infantry Regiment] is down on the Rappahannock doing picket duty. Byron is well. We have changed the old Austrian [rifle musket] for the new Springfield Rifle Musket pattern 1855, a splendid gun & the boys are very much pleased. I will now close with love to all.

From Oscar

Weather hot as ever. Bill says Clara Wood is dead, so it goes, where is Hal Hawkins

[Written across letter] I did a botch job folding this letter.

Fort Stevens, August 25th [1863]

Brother Will

Yours of the 16th came to hand in time & found me all right & kicking. As to that Algebra "I'll tell you. In the first place, Miss Parker did not know or care anything about it" for she is not a book worm "& could have no possible motive for taking or concealing it & I do not believe she knows" or cares anything about it. I think I put all my books [?] late [or date] in the trunk before I came away except my old course books & those I hove out the window. I was very careful to pick up everything that I thou^l of value & pack away. So you had not better write to her for it would not amount to anything in the end, besides she does not live in Wells & that is not the P.O. address. As to your Gold hobby – I think you act very boyish about it – "not to say silly. You say "if I had been where you have &c. I would sing the same song." Now I think I have been in as many tight spots as you & never regretted I was poor but always rather "that I have not improved my time better. For never were truer words than that knowledge is power." Money is very good in its place but all we want is enough as we go along - & saving a little for a rainy day. Therefore my Brother don't work yourself up to a frenzy thinking about your station in life . for however much you may think I am mistaken I assure you "your mind will undergo a very material change in that respect before you are 20 yrs old – I don't pretend to advise you because I think I am so much wiser than you but you see Will" I have been there myself & know just how it is with boys & I advise you to go to school through the winter or for six months. If I were in Old Vermont & a free man I would go six months – sure – I begin to see when I missed it in not going the last winter at Fons – but I was like you those \$50.00 looked big in my eyes, but I wish now I had spent them for schooling & they would now have returned me 200 pr ct. of the Capital.

We have changed our old Austrian guns for some splendid new Springfield Rifles. I don't hear from home very often & from Em never. The folks are playing out on writing. Getting to be an old story I plainly see.

We are drawing rations of whisky now. One gill a day. Well tintured with "synchronia sulphurs"

Father says you are farce for coming out as a substitute. Now I beg of you don't entertain the idea for a moment for you know nothing of a Soldiers life [Cannot find the rest of this letter. Search other folders] its hardships & danger you would not stand it out here or on the front a month & again I don't like the idea of my brothers being bought – like an ox or horse – if you are bound to come enlist for the 1st Art'y Bat 6 & you will then have a hard enough time to suit you – I bet, but I think if you ere here you would get to be corporal in a few months & then you would not have to work or stand guard But don't think of coming & go to the line the 1st of Sept & you are welcome to my state pay for two months if you will – I beg you will consider it & think favorably of the project & I will even help you more than that & consider it a privilege to do so.

My health is good – we are having a good many sick now. & our Co – Co. B has got fifteen in the Hospital. Fever. for a few days the weather has been cooler & is now quite comfortable.

I must now close

So much & so much
From Bro Ock

[This letter details the daring exploits of Sam Dowling at Gettysburg. See Dowlings letter to French's father, Ezra W. French. Use a hyper-link to get to the Dowling letter]

Fort Stevens August 28th [1863]

Folks at Home

I got that bundle of letters of the 22nd yesterday, & contrary to the expectations of Mother it found me well & prospering. The Ord (Sherman) is sick & I am running the Company this week. there are a great many sick now days but I am fortunate in having good health. I am tanned black as an Indian & tougher than a bear. Indeed this Sun is enough to tan a white man black or a darky white. Beats all how the folks are dying off in Vermont: not a letter do I get from home, but from one to half a dozen dead. I got a note from Em & Coz Byron to day seems to me Em acts kind a queer. You ask about the soap Do as you think best. I suppose L. is good enough for it although he is not burdened with money any more than the rest of us. My clothing acct is as you said 45.70 including rubber & woollen bks [blankets] Knapsack, Haversack & canteen which would reduce it below \$35. we shall be mustered the 31st Monday next, for two mos pay which will complete the year & everything will be squared up. I hope Will will conclude to go to the Sem. this fall. I wrote him as well as I know how to & said I would give him two mos State pay which I will gladly do if he will go for six months. Harry Sheldon has been up here & Tip Douglass from the Hawes Light, Fairhaven co. [Pvt. Harry G. Sheldon, Co. M, 1st Vermont Cavalry Regiment] Harry says that he saw Sam [Sgt. Samaul Dowling, Co. H, 1st Vermont Cavalry] kill 15 men at Gettysburg, he dismounted got behind a tree & fired his carbine 13 times & Harry said he saw a Reb drop every time & another time a Reb rode up to Harry pistol to his head & demanded a surrender. Sam dashed up & made a thrust at him slit his bowels out, cutting from his shoulder to his leg as he sat on his horse & again he saw Sam split a Reb with that big saber from his skull through his face & into his shoulder joint. Harry says he knows Sam was taken prisoner, saw him just after the battle & all right. Says Sam don't know what it is to be afraid. [Dowling was captured July 6, 1863, and paroled November 17, 1863]

I sent a couple of pictures to Smid, he must give Ella one & you little girl must not stop writing for I read your little letters & prize them very highly, but I cant find enough to write to all of you. I write home & you must divide it up between you & be NICE about it. How does Smid get along with the drum? About Pete & Tim they are all right. I might write scandal home for a year & not be through then, but I don't know who it would benefit.

We have got our hats at last. we ought to have had them a month ago, but better late than never, this is the last stamp & I should really like another invoice I write this in a great hurry excuse blunders Don't know as you can read it

From Ock

Fort Stevens D.C. Sept 17th 1863

Friends at home

I am in debt to you two letters & will now write a big one & pay up for both if possible. I should have written before, but we were expecting to be paid off & I thought I would wait. I think however we will be paid off this month. I am glad you let me know how the papers are. I have not got that acct you sent me some time ago. I cant keep any papers hardly over night. The figures draw rather better than I expected & I am satisfied with the results of the year. I am glad that the health of you all is so good As for myself I am firstrate—tough. I have not allowed myself to eat everything I could get hold of. I recd those stamps but you must remember I have a good many correspondents & don't like to send a "Soldier letter" I have recd within two weeks letters from Cousins Byron & Alice, Aunt May & Ell Uncle Ock, Will & Em. Two from you & two from friends in Mass.

The 2nd, 5th[?] & 6th Vt. Regts arrived in Washington night before last at 11 oclock from New York Mike OBrien (Cons brother) & Billy Miller from Poultney started for our camp when they arrived at 2. A.M. On learning that the old Brigade was in the City Pete & Bill & I & some others started for the Balto [Baltimore] Depot where we hauled up a little before daylight. The 2nd was in the "Soldiers Rest" where we stopped a little more than a year ago. The 5th & 6th in another big fort shed & scattered around on the ground sleeping soundly. We had a good visit I saw Gid [Pvt. Gideon Hawkins of Castleton in Co. B, 2nd Vermont Infantry] Jasper [Corp. Jasper A. Benedict of Castleton, Co. B, 2 nd Vermont Infantry] & all the boys in the 2nd. Oc Babbitt, Jake Lewis &c in the 5th. [Pvt. Osacr Babbit of Castleton, Co. I, 5th Vermont Infantry and Sgt. Julius Lewis of Poultney also in Co. I] We staid until the boys went across the river at 10 A.M. Well, whether you believe it or not, the Old Vermont Brigade is the toughest & strongest set of men, I ever saw in my life. I did not hear a murmur nor a grumble, every man was cheerful & hearty. I feel proud of them for they are Vermonters. Johnny Reb in New York would have stood a poor show before the Fighting Brigade form Old Vermont. The puny ones are all killed off or otherwise disposed of & every man is now a Veteran.

Speaking of Tim's financial affairs. You say "he cant break his allotment &c because he is under age" Don't make any difference. He has broken his allotment of Govt pay & could break the State pay also & make it subject to his order or check, any where & I don't blame him a bit. He wrote for the paltry sum of \$2.00 & Frank [Tim Barber's father] wrote him saying "he could not spare the money, he wanted to buy some sheep this Fall &c. I read the letter for Tim, he was mad & said he was as good as any sheep in Vt, after reading it Tim went to the Cpts Office & had his allotment cancelled which is done by his order on the Pay M. Genl. Next week Tim got a letter from Frank saying he had got notice that he could draw no more of the Govt pay of Priv L.T. [Lemuel Timothy] Barber of Bat'y C 1st Vt Artillery &c. Tims acct is thus. Due U.S. for clothing over drawn \$51.92. Mine is "Due French" for clothing not drawn.76 cts which is better than one man in fifty in the Regt. You know I was always careful of my clothes & although the footings for the year do not show me Cr \$200. Yet much as I would wish

they were more, I am contented. I will not deny myself some “of the comforts of life if money will procure them. We will probably be paid before the 1st of Oct. & I owe [?] as follows – one vest (Military blue) cost \$3.00 one cap (fancy) cost \$2.50, & other little things which will foot up \$1.50 or 2.00 more but I will make the dimes reach as far as possible. You bet. I have written to Will & tried my best to get him to go to school, but he don’t seem inclined to go, & I don’t know what more I can do to convince him. I should like to have Sister Alice go too, but I don’t know as she will. I will pay her tuition at the Sem as long as she will go. I don’t get a chance to fiddle much & it is so uncertain about our staying here, that I don’t think twould be best to send it down this Fall. Smid is very welcome to the hat, if he will play “quick time” on his drum for his fat Uncle.

My love to you all & good night

O.G. French

Fort Stevens D.C. Sept 19th [1863]

My Dear Brother Will,

Your kind letter of the 6th is before me & I tell you it was recd with pleasure. I will try to answer it in detail but don't know as I have the time tonight to do it justice. In the first place Will you are too confident about Miss P's having that Algebra. I know her too well & I merely repeat "She has not got it" for I have written to her a few times No harm in that, as I know of By the way Will I have got two good correspondents in Mass, one in Foxboro & another in Springfield, first rate good letters from them, I tell you. You inquire about cheese. I don't know what good cheese is worth. I have not even seen any except what Mother sent me at Fort Saratoga. Sutlers White Oak cheese sells for 20 cts per pound, butter very stale 40 cts, eggs 50 a doz milk—chalk & water—10 cts wine measure—everything very high. Potatoes \$1.50, sweet \$1.25. Yes, Will, do inquire about the carrots & turnips & let me know who has the biggest as soon as you can.

About going to school. Now Will I think you are missing it in not hear to Father's advice for you know that he has the welfare of his children at heart & as he has had a great deal more experience than you or I you cannot suppose that he would advise you to do anything that would not in the end, turn up for your greatest good. I will not say anymore upon the subject but first ask yourself this question, "Would not a few dollars laid out now for schooling" be put at good interest if I improved my time? You certainly do not think your education finished "if you do" & don't want to go to school anymore you are very different from me. From the most of people. The greatest thing that I think I am losing down here, is the opportunity for schooling in my younger years. I should have went the past winter if I had been at home. But enough of this . . . I have already occupied too much of your time in talking to you of what you do not wish to hear about I only wish Will "that you could see it in that light"

You speak of getting friends in a strange Neighborhood—I tell you a fellow always will find friends away from home quicker than he will at home if he only behaves himself. At least I found it so in all my living away from home. I beg leave to contradict you. It is not a "impossibility" for you to go to Castleton Sem [Seminary], it is just one of the easiest possibilities if you are a mind to think so—

Yes Will we are Brothers & I think as much of you as of any of my Brothers & Sisters. Indeed I am more anxious about you just now, than any than the rest of them.

I went to Capitol Hill one week ago to day, to see the old Vt Brigade, which was reported to be there. I lost my journey however for they were not to be found. Last Wednesday at 11 o'clock P.M. the Old Brigade arrived in Washington. Two of the boys started right off for our camp (5 or 6 miles from the depot) they got here at 2 in the morning & I & some others started off for the Balto Depot at a little before daylight. The boys were surprised to see us & we had a good visit I tell you. The old Brigade looks firstrate & the boys feel firstrate. They were rightly selected to enforce the draft. Copperheads would not stand much of a chance with brickbats to pelt the Old Brigade.

There is not much news to write. I forgot to tell you about Battery L. arrived here a short time ago, & we expect Battery M in a few days. They are awful green I tell you, we boys have sport with them—It don't seem as though that we were ever so green as they are. A years service will learn them something. We were mustered the last day of August for two months pay but have not been paid as yet. Capt says we will be paid next Tuesday. Prospect is we will stay here this winter, but the Officers say we will leave in the Spring I hope so, for it is very tiresome doing garrison duty so long a time in one place.

We are having some wet weather now, rather more than for some time past, & the weather is consequently cooler. My health is good, & also all of the boys from No 6. W. Barber sends his respects. Bill & I bunk together & have ever since we left home, have shared the same blanket & the same cup of coffee & I should hate to part with him. Well I have made out quite a letter from nothing, it is getting quite late & I must quit

And so good night

From Ock

Fort Stevens D.C.

Sept 23d [1863]

Dear Father

Yours of the 20th is before me & read with pleasure. I like to hear from home as often as possible, though as you say I haven't quite paid up in the letter line. Your letter reached me at Ft Slocum while we were being paid off. Now I stand like this, paid for sending home the dead \$1.50, Sutler \$2.00, watch trade \$2.00, little debts, aggregate \$1.00 total \$6.50. I have owing to me, Tim \$1.00 T[?] Williams \$2.50, M.[Mark/Marcus] Russell 50 [cents]. Total \$4.00 Balance Dr 2.50. I am afraid I will not be able to get all the things I spoke of in my last. By the way, these \$4.00 I will not get this payday, while I have got to pay my debts. I am getting some very good lessons, & learn something every day. I received \$10.65, & you will get \$24.00 as usual. I tell you what I want is an officers blouse (i.e. long) the cost will be about \$5 to \$7 in Vt. & Cap says you can leave it at Geo. Spencers in his care, as S. is going to send him an overcoat, & mine will come free of expenses the cost of them in W. is \$10 to \$12 & the cost of common blouses (short) is \$3.55. I drew two of them during the past year. If you get it you will have to hurry so as to get it in with the Capts. & Recollect that my arms are a trifle longer than yours. I also want some socks, say two or three pr. Cost of Army socks is 32 cts & I have actually worn out two pair in three weeks poor things, & perhaps a big towel, envelopes cost 20. cts here, if they are enough cheaper in Vt. to make it an object, you might send a bunch or two. To get these you can use State pay for the mth [month] & as much from the \$24.00 Gov. as will do it. Don't get a blouse if it costs over \$7.00 I would not get any as it is but I think I will make it more than good from this yrs clothing a/c I have got a firstrate watch, patent Lever[?] very heavy could sell it for \$20.00. I will get the \$4.00 before spoken of in time but not now. I have lost \$3.25 by Deserters. Shall look out in future, you bet. Yes Tim is in the Cookhouse all he gets extra, is from the sale of grease [?] swill &c about \$1.00 a week, perhaps. I don't see how Uncle Chan [Chauncey Barber] can draw T's [Tim Barber] pay unless he makes another allotment in his favor. I could not guess how much Bill has laid up for the past year, his money is in Uncle C's hands & he does not know how he stands with his Father. He often says he would like to know how he stands. Seems to me the people are all dying off in Vt. more sickly than it is here. Mother don't worry about my health, for I am very tough now, indeed. Recruits are arriving for this Regt & we shall be full by spring

I am in a great hurry to night don't know as you can read this Our time is fully occupied now in fatigue building batteries covered ways &c, a great deal is being done to strengthen the Defenses of W. this Fall & we some expect to use them this Fall.

Excuse the moneyed character of this letter, & I will try to do better next time My Love to all the Brothers & Sisters & all the rest.

In Haste
Oscar

[Note he sends home picture of Cpl. Asa Mathers and one of himself to Will.]

Sept 30th 1863

Folks at home—

Yours of the 27th has just arrived. I see you are getting punctual again. Things are progressing about after the sort at this Post. Our boys are busy building new barracks 100 x 20 or 25, each for one Bat [battery], which it is Calculated will be filled up to the full complement before Spring. The Detail that was sent home for conscription got back, but nary conscript. About 30 recruits have been received in Bats [batteries] 7 & 6 at Fort Slocum. The 11th & 12th Army Corps are taking the cars in Washington for Rosecrans or Burnside. By the way I got a pass last Saturday & went to the city, went all over the Navy Yard & Smithsonian Institute, took me all day & was well repaid for my time. At the Institute there are curiosities from every part of the known world, paintings, statues &c a man must look a year to see all there is in it. I also borrowed \$5.00 of the Capt & got me a vest \$3.00 & cap \$2.25. I wish you would send me about \$7.00 but don't borrow it or take any of your own, for I can wait till you get the \$24.00 but I would like to pay the Capt as quick as I can conveniently. You enquire of Nate Bliss, he is all right & makes a good soldier. [Pvt. Nathan G. Bliss, Jr. of Castleton, Co. C, 11th Infantry] Seems to me Frank is rather a curious manager by all I hear. Bill must write a great deal about Tims bothering &c he is a jealous dispositioned chap I can get along with Tim but he is sometimes a little saucy & familiar. Father says he is going to Saratoga so I suppose that you Mother will be at home but don't you worry about the money, let it be till Father gets home. If it don't come handy. I sent you Corp'l Asa Mathers picture please keep it till I get home, also mine for Brother Will he wanted one so bad last Fall. I had six of them taken at Brightwood & this is as good as any of them, cost \$1.50 for the six. By the way I don't see Ellas or Franks or any of them down here yet, but I suppose it is an awful job for you to get about it. I don't get a letter from Will lately, is it possible he is playing out too? Smid has been unwell, Father says. I am very anxious about you all. I think of his frank boyish face & wonder if he is changed any since I left home, fourteen months ago. But I suppose they will all be grown beyond my remembrance if we stay out here 23 months longer. I don't believe Uncle Chan [Chauncey Barber] will come out here though I would be glad to see him & we would give him a board & a couple of blankets to sleep on. Father says "how much is such a letter worth &c" It is worth a great deal to me & I always read them over a good many times. By the way I have got a couple of Lady correspondents in Mass, good ones, one in Springfield & one in Foxboro & I get some very refreshing letters from them. Of course Ella you must tell me about dicky, keep her sister mine, to remember your big brother by. I see you are getting to be quite a correspondent & your little letters are very interesting to me & I begin to think little Ella is getting to be a young lady also, for such elegant and very proper language fit for a graduate of Castleton Sem. I wish you could be here to make a raid into Archy Whites Peach orchard—twould do me good to see you eat them.

Our target practice is to commence in October & we expect sport. I made the best shots last Spring [?] with old barbette No. 18 & will give a good account of myself this Fall.

The weather is splendid warm & hazy, all Nature seems to be in a doze. I tell you this is a beautiful country & a great farming country, but no society, every one talks the darky lingo. "Deed I do" &c I am down to the bottom & will close

Love to all
From Oscar

Fort Stevens D.C.

Oct 17th [1863]

Through some unaccountable means I don't hear from home this week at all at all. Yours of the 4th came to hand in time & the \$7.00 all right. Yes $12 \times 12 = 144$, looks big, but I needed it every cent & not a cent did I fool away. Some of the boys spend every cent of their money, Gov't & State, hardly a man but plays out more than I. Yes I have got a gold pen cost \$3.50, cost me 1.75 & cheap enough. I tell you twould be economy for you to get one. I got a line from Will last week & will answer it when I get some stamps. Battery M. arrived here Friday morning 150 enlisted men. Nichols 2nd Lieut. Prospect is we will be filled to 1800 by the 1st April next. We have got a new brass band firstrate one. Will says that it is generally believed that Mark will have the biggest carrot in No. 6 and it is not decided yet which will have the biggest turnip. Our barracks are nearly completed & we will be in by 1st of Nov. the ground where they stand is or was the site of a negro church burying yard. It is graded to the depth of 20 feet & over 100 bodies have been taken up & dumped over the bank. The weather is delightful very pleasant & warm, plenty of chestnuts though the supply of peaches & apples is becoming exhausted. My health is good, firstrate & I am fat as a bear. Harry Sheldon was here yesterday, he says Sam [Dowling] was exchanged & arrived in Annapolis last week. I expect to hear from him soon. I am glad to hear so good an account of Sister Alice. And for all I used to say I did not mean anything & I am heartily ashamed of it, now you bet. Al is smart & I think just as much of her as any of my brothers & sisters, which is a good deal, perhaps much more than you ever gave me credit for. I think of the family at home very often & I am constantly building airy castles for their benefit, or thinking of some way in which to benefit them. I would like to get all your pictures; send me as many as you can. You say you don't recognize my pictures, but the boys say it looks very natural. One thing I part my hair on the opposite side of my head from what I used to, it is more natural, those things on my shoulders are the brass shoulder scales those for a Sergts being larger & of a different pattern from Corpl's & privates. My prospects are good, but the wheel is big & moves slow. most time for dress parade & I must quit & go to supper. -----

After supper, which in these latitudes is a very simple affair (bread & tea!) & I am down again to finish this letter. By the way I would make a suggestion. Don't you think I write considerable longer letters than you do? & so many of you to write too. A week ago last Sunday Corporal [Myron] Wood [Corp. Myron Wood of Fairhaven, Co. C., 11th Vermont]& I went out to Friend Dulys where you recollect I wrote to you about going last Dec. & had a good visit. His son left him this Summer when Lee was in Md. & Penn. & joined the Rebs, was taken prisoner at Gettysburg & is now in Fort McHenry, Balt'o good enough for him. He has two daughters confounded good looking girls, & the best appearing of any I have seen in this Country. The oldest one 20 is Union, the other 17 is tintured with Secesh, as is the old Lady (who by the way is a clever old soul). The old gentleman is strong Union. All of them treat us well, & urged us to come again, which we will do when we get a chance. I send you two more pictures please keep them. I will add to them from time to time. I mean to get the pictures of our field & line Officers & all of the company I can. When you draw those \$24.00 I want you to use it for the children. Clothe them up warm for winter, & if you have not the funds on hand use that & welcome. I would much rather it would go so if needed than have it lie in the

Bank at .50 pr cent interest I mean what I say. What do you think if the Elections? Aint it a big wheel. Do you get any of the papers I send you? & do you take Harpers magazine now? & do any of the No. 6 people inquire about old French? If you have not got a blouse don't get one. I will wait a spell yet I guess. Do you ever hear from Fon? Well I am most down to the bottom & must close. With my love to all--& write soon

Affectionately Yours

Oscar

P.S. By an order published to night Maj. Gen Auger takes com'd of this (the 22nd Corps) vice Gen Heintzelman Temporarily No. 6 boys are all well

[Written across one page] Sarah Twing is married.

Fort Stevens D.C.

Nov. 4th [1863]

Folks at Home

Yours of the 1st has just arrived & read with pleasure. You complain very bitterly about my not writing oftener, but I write just as often as I can possibly find anything to say, & perhaps oftener. I am glad to get so good an account from all the folks in Vermont. I have got but a few minutes to write to night & shall write in a hurry. If Em is in debt \$40 [or 20] I will give her \$10 & lend her the \$14 till Spring, but will not take a cent for interest. My health is firstrate good. My boots are playing out as did my shoes a month ago. I think I will buy me a pair of bootees in Washington after pay day, as I know where I can get them for \$3.00, pretty good ones. I have been on fatigue all day, & am some tired. What is the trouble with Eliza Ann Hulburt? Carl writes she is loafing around &c & don't pay for her board. Again I read "She must take it all & pay interest to April 1st," &c What do you want to be hard on Em for? I don't care for money if Em wants it providing I get what little I want myself. I will send back the sober picture, think the other is the best. Don't you. The 1st Arty is filling up very rapidly. The Colonel said last night, that by the 1st of Dec. we would number 1800 Enlisted the full complement for Artillery.

We have moved into the new barrack & are now building Officers quarters &c Laundry &c. We expect to be paid this time as soon as the 15th got our rolls in so early. Tim has left the cook house, no cook can be in office over two months. There will be a great many promotions this Winter. Our Lieut told me to day that Sherman – Our Orderly – could get a commission to Bat. G. if he would take it but he will take none but in C. in the new barracks there in a room done off for the 1st & Bat Q.M. Sergrts, each with tables &c We will enjoy ourselves this Winter You can get good wages at work for Government. \$20 at least. I suppose I wish you could get down here this Winter. But don't suppose you can or will. You don't want Abolition papers as you call them. Nor do I want Copperhead speeches. Don't love them. Pray don't "trouble yourself" to send them & I will be equally careful not to offend by sending that odious Chronicle. Captain is out by the fence talking with a (would be) recruit. I am most down to the bottom & will stop. I would write to Ella if I had time.

Love to all
From Oscar

Fort Stevens D.C.

Nov 18th [1863]

How are you all tonight? I believe I have received a letter or two since I wrote to you. I have been waiting for something to write about before I answered them—have waited so long, but am afraid that my stock is about run out.

There was a fellow up to our camp, a citizen to see some of the boys & I found out by him that Jack Gibson was at the Dismounted Camp with some other boys from Vermont, in Co. A., 2nd N.Y. Veteran Cavalry. I applied for a pass that very P.M. & got it Saturday the 7th & went over accordingly & had a good time, the Dis Camp is across the Eastern Branch at Grisboro Point the left bank of the Potomac. I saw the monitor Sangamon at the Navy Yard, with quite a fleet of wooden gunboats &c. Jack sends his love to Uncle Warners folks, says he is ashamed because he did not come over & see them when he was in Vermont. Another item is We are moved into our new barracks & cook house & are living like pigs in the clover – to what we used to. We were paid off on the 11th for two months & up to the 1st of Nov. The bluff boards are in great circulation as usual after every pay day. Willie Harringtons [Pvt. William C Harrington of Castleton, Co. C, 1st Vermont] box arrived here all safe on the night of the 12th, I am greatly obliged for the things sent me, the socks look most too nice to wear. Al said she “run” the heels, & they did not look so well &c just as though a soldier cares for looks when he is comfortable & you know I was never very particular in that respect. About 80 recruits arrived Tuesday night for the 1st Art. – 32 for Bat. D & 1 for Bat C, the others for the various Batteries of Fort Slocum. The report that some one from our Co is to be shot is false. C.F. Bliss is waiting sentence of G.C.M. for Desertion. I guess he will be sent to the Rip Raps for from 5 to 7 years & I have reason to know. Fon Moulton, that deserted from Clifton Barracks in April last has got back pardoned by the President, his wife presented the petition in person & Old Abe wrote his pardon immediately signing it with his own hand. Orderly Sherman has been sick & I have been acting as Orderly for ten days, to the satisfaction of all concerned & to my own personal ease. He will probably go on duty tomorrow, however & I will go on guard. My Mass. girl sent me Harpers for November & two or three nice papers—I will send some more pictures. [Lt. Col.] Benton is a generous hearted rough old Tiger worshipped by every man in the Regiment. I send our first Surgeon’s picture, the one that took care of me in both of my spells of sickness, he is not with us now, the Officers had charges preffered against him & he resigned, he was a good man, a Christian & a skilful Doctor, the poor unfortunate who were obliged to go to the Hospital thought everything of him, he would often use his own private money to get the boys some little comfort. [Surg. Charles W. B. Kidder of Vergennes resigned September 10, 1863]

I am very sorry indeed, to hear of Mothers poor health. All I can do is to wish for better times & to urge my brothers & sisters to take as much as possible off from her hands so that she need not work so hard. I think there is no necessity for Mother to work at all for the Children are all large enough to work, & do all that is required to be done around home. Will will soon be home to do the outdoor work & I don’t see why Mother need to work at all. Tim [Barber] sent for \$2.00 & Frank said he could not send him the amount giving as an excuse that he was in debt & had no way to get out. Tim wanted I should

tell the old man if he did not pony up & send the \$2 that he would break his allotment of State pay but talked him out of the notion, & finally wrote Frank a kind letter which will be better all round. If Frank is as hard up as he pretends to be, he must indeed be destitute. Don't be offended because I sent the "Chronicle" I sent it to Al on account of the stories & I am sure she is not particular about the politics. If you get Ems note for 31 please send it to me—I will return it immediately. You say Pitt has sold his farm. What is he going to do now? seems that land is about as good property as a fellow can have now a days, & Then between them all girls &c. I don't get time to write home. I think 62 letters a very small amount to write in about the number of weeks. I write as often as you, & my letters are much longer.

Yes Al I think that naming that Gal Ella—is horrible—yea-tis hideous as tis hateful—but you know I wanted our little Gal to be named Agnes Matilda.

Well I am played out, & must close. I am tired writing & I believe you are all tired reading this ghost of a letter.

Good Night & love to all

Oscar

By the way I think those Gov. envelopes are slazy things—poor.

Ock

Fort Stevens D.C.

Nov 23d 1863

Folks at home,

I have a few minutes to write, though not much of anything to say. I recd your letter only a few hours after I had posted the one to you with 4 pictures, also at the same time one from Father at Saratoga. But really Em I was surprised at getting such a letter from you. I suppose I am indebted for this to the absence of Father from home, else you would have kept a discreet silence as heretofore, but never mind. Tuckers news or not. I am glad to get a letter from home & I do not look for a letter, as a means of finding out “news” or “gossip” that may be afloat in No. 6, but rather, as a history of the family at home, every member which is very dear to me & little incidents in the everyday life of one of you is of more interest than you can imagine. I don’t like the way you talk about “long nosed Sisters” &c now Em you are not hardly fair to talk that way to me. Did I ever say anything to justify such an expression? I think not. I am sure I love all my brothers & sisters & only regret that my means are not sufficient to help them as much as I would.

I write for one thing not to have my fiddle sent, as in my last letter to Father. Reason is that the turn things have taken, have put quite a different aspect upon affairs--& I don’t want it sent beside the boys have got one that I can use—I am well—tough, & wish you all the same—the children must do all they can, & not let mother do a thing, if it can be helped. It is most time for roll call & I must stop. I bid you all

Good Night

Oscar

[Letter ends abruptly—is there more? Note the story of the woman slave and her children]

Fort Stevens D.C. Dec 9th 1863

How are you at home each – all. Perhaps I have been negligent about writing but I have been very busy for most of the time during the past two weeks. I have been over to visit to Fort Totten to day with a squad digging rifle pits. Tomorrow there is a Brigade Drill at Fort Bunker Hill, three & ½ miles distant. We start at 10 oclock A.M. I am sorry to hear of Mothers continued sickness. All I can say is to be careful & don't work when you are not really able, for what consequence is a little work compared to good permanent health. I am glad to hear Sam [Dowling] is all right. I would write to him if you had given me the Ward & in what Hospital he was. Well Em I don't know what to say to you, hardly it is very evident that there has been some misunderstanding between you & I but I would not for the World, there should be any hard feelings—I have no Friends but those in the little cottage by the Railroad—that I care much for & I am convinced they are the very people who care the most for me. Brother Will must not be angry because I don't answer his letter. I got it in due time and was well pleased with it but I think we can visit with one another in my letters home, & in your letters to me just as well as to go to all the bother that you mention in your last. How is my dear little Brother Frank? He has not written me a word in a long time. I think of him often & hope that he is a good boy in fact I think he is and I hope he helps Mother all he can. If you do, Smid, you will have your reward. The happy thought in after years, when you are grown up, and away from home, that you have done what you could to help Mother, and make her burdens lighter, will repay you a thousand fold. Be a good boy Smid and remember your Uncle. On the night of the 7th it was my lot to see another of the proofs that Slavery is a fine thing, & such a benefit to the poor African. Our picket station is in a grove of tall dark pines, forests of which mingled with chestnuts & gums stretch for miles, out into Maryland. The roads are mere paths, wide enough to admit a team, & while walking along them one frequently comes upon other roads, unexpectedly, as there is no fence to mark their limits or direction. Our hut or station is at the fork of the roads. I had been my rounds (about 4 miles) & had just got back inside the hut when the Sentry outside in the woods sung out Halt! Who goes there? Answer—Nobody but poor colored folks. Advance. By this time I was out there gun in hand, to see what was up. They came up half scared to death. A mother with her four girls & an infant son two years, the others ranging from 11 down. Two bundles contained all their effects, the largest ones carried these leading the other two, 7 & 9 by the hand. I asked them if they were cold. Indeed says the mother, I am not, but Manda and Elvira (the two smallest) are so cold they cant hardly walk sides Manda is beat—so she is lame. We got them in, made them some coffee, give them bread & pork, all they could eat. By the light of the fire I could see scars on the mothers face beside her forehead was purple, fairly mashed & little Amandas, 7 years, face & nose were all skinned & bruised. How long have you been coming. Two nights. What made you run away. Cause they beat us so, we could not stand it. Twas allus hard but since the War broke out & my husband lef' they beat us harder than ever. What is this little one whipped so for? Cause she could not lift a bucket of water. I thought this child is just the age of Sister Ella & I would like to see Rufus Aghant or any other Secesh beat

her. Well they were very intelligent, clean & civil. They hid in the pine forest two days before they started, had traveled all one night. Laid over at the house of a colored friend, the next day started that night at 6 & traveled 18 miles till one o'clock. The mother carrying her babe all the way. All the way, expecting to be followed by the Master. She said We pushed hard all night to get into the Union Lines. Can my Master come from Howard Co. & get us? No said I pointing to the 15 Springfields that were stacked close by, for those are Federal bayonets. You are free and no one can beat you or your babies any more. It was a freezing cold night, very cold for this country. We gave the little ones our blankets & the slept soundly. In the morning they parted for the Contraband camp on 11th blessing Linkum & the Union Soldiers. Thursday 10th—100 recruits came last night just 15 mos from the time we arrived in Washington. 31 to fill Bat D & 24 for C, making us total enlisted 101. Hiram, Pat D. [Donnelly] & Hent are among the number. Hen & Tip look hard—not very good for an Artillery Regt. Em said she would like to see Hent Peck on the double quick. Well, all the motions of the drill & Maneuvres with heavy guns are at the double quick to day is a very splendid one & warm for us. Sun shining bright. The air is just cool enough for comfort. Orders were read on dress parade the other night to the effect that all Brigade & Regimental Comdrs must have their commands in order to march at a moments notice. But I don't suppose we will move before Spring at any rate. Adj. Gen'l Washburn telegraphed to Col Warner to know how many men he wanted to make up 1800 & the probability is we will be filled right away. I guess that people don't enlist for any other but the 11th. A very strange violent disease has broken out in Bat D one man died in 24 hours after he was taken several others are taken & I am just told of them (Chaffee & Collins) are on their last breath. [Pvt. Russell J, Chafey of Wolcott, Co. D, 11th Vermont died December 10, 1863. Pvt. Albert A. Collins of Wolcott, also of Co. D, never returned to the regiment. He was transferred from the hospital to the Veteran Reserve Corps December 31, 1863. He was mustered out of service June 26, 1865] As many as 15 different surgeons have seen them. Some call it spotted fever, but none know what it is. It is supposed to have spread from an old graveyard over which our barracks stand. The hill on which the fort stands was the site of an old church & as many as 200 bodies have been exhumed & dumped over to form the grading when we built. The hill was excavated in some places to the depth of 20 feet. Well will wait for the mail perhaps I will get a letter from home. I am off duty to day & so get over the drill. Ralph Richards & Merritt Clark have been here. M.. Clark says the question is being agitated in Vt. to pay the three years men a bounty of \$300.

After the mail & no letter from home. I sent you or Alice two papers with some writing. Do you think it a good place to write on papers? Send me the \$7.00 when you get them. I don't think of much more to say. So I will bid you all

Good Night
From Oc

Chaffee is dead & his body started for Vermont. Collins cannot live, others have the diarrhea & some must die.

Fort Stevens D.C. Dec 12th [1863]

Oh, Dear What is the reason you don't write—Most 3 weeks since I had a letter from home. We have had a Brigade drill to day, four miles from here, in sight of our old Camp at Fort Saratoga. Well it was close en masse, deploy, march in review &c for five hours & then march back, & the mud sticking to a fellows feet all the way, am some tired to night of course. Who wouldn't be? One of our recruits name is Frank Farwell. Hen Peck will not be worth the junk he eats he is so slow to comprehend he never will learn to drill. 150 recruits will leave B'oro [Brattleboro] Tuesday next & we will be full in one week from to night I wrote to Jo Harrington, ordering a coat & pants. I don't know what they will cost, but I have worn my old dress coat 16 months & must draw a new one soon, & a pair of pants. I cant get them to fit me as I would like, & if I don't draw them I will get the money at the end of the year, beside they will look better for a chap that is on a line of promotion. I will be at least Orderly in less than a month & I was assured to night that I would be commissioned 2nd Lieut in less than two weeks. I know that our Co Officers will do all they can for me & if I am bluffed out of it, it will be because somebody has more influence on their side than I. If I get a commission I will want \$100 to start with, but I wont borrow trouble before hand. I wish Father to get those clothes & put in that fine shirt that I bought after I enlisted. (If it is not used up, perhaps a couple of white handkerchiefs & send them to me by express. Father can pay for them from my last two mos pay. I suppose but I cant help it, beside I will make money by buying at home, they will fit me better, look better, & wear longer. A great deal depends upon a man looking slick about his success. I have directed Harrington how to make them, he will put no buttons on the coat. I have a set here, new ones, cost \$1.25 & can have them put on here just as well, the coat should not cost as much, in to \$1.00 certain on that account.

Hiram Ross says Smid is a good boy. I believe he would make a better soldier than he, but I don't see his picture. Don't forget to send it along as soon as it is convenient. I don't hear from Aunt May Ell or any one else. What is Uncle F. doing? Don't hear a word from him. Tell Em that Frank Roberts is one of our recruits. I wish that those things could be sent as soon as possible. Of course you will not mention what I write Nobody's business. Now write soon if there is anybody at home to write.

Good Night & Love to all

Oc

Fort Stevens Dec. 21st [1863]

Folks at Home,

Yours is recd & you bet was very welcome I am on guard tonight & cannot write but a little But I will write just a little to let you know how the things are. I will ask but for \$5.00 this time & please get the things clothes you know started as soon as possible 250 more recruits arrived in the City tonight for the 1st Vt Arty. The Batys [batteries] at this Post will be filled first. Our Brigade had a drill today at Fort Bunker Hill, & review of Brig. Gen. Bary Chief of Arty [or Adj] of the US Armies. I got clear by being on guard. I am well. I shall come home before the 1st of April. Only 3 men died from that disease called by some spotted fever. But no one knows what it was for certain. One of our boys John McGuigan is at the point of death with pneumonia (same that I had last winter). [Pvt. John McGuigan of Dorset, Co. C, 11th Vermont, died January 9, 1864]

About the \$100. we will wait until the time comes – I will tell you about it perhaps I will not want it at all. About the Regiment being under marching orders. We are under orders to be in Condition to move at a moments notice, But we will probably not move before Spring. The Colonel said today that we would have then But Jimmy wants to move only with 1800 men and then he will make a strike. For two months we have had drills constantly, sometimes 5 or 6 hours a day, & the first Arty. is a splendid Regiment & Jim Warner knows his business. No. Don't want the fiddle. twont pay. I can write no more tonight for time presses & I must go back to the guard room.

Good Night

Ocks

I wrote to Jo. about the clothes in full.