

George Oscar French (1844-1865) Family Papers
Post Death Letters – 1865
Transcribed by Dawn Hance; typed by Joann Nichols; edited by Paul Zeller

2nd Div. Hospital
Near Petersburg, Va.
April 3, 1865

Mr. French,

My dear Sir:

It becomes my very painful & unwelcome task to inform you that your son, Lt. French, was instantly killed in action with the enemy, yesterday morning.

He was shot thro' the head just above the right eye, by a minni ball.

This will be terrible shocking intelligence to you & I would break it to you as tenderly as possible.

No other one can know the anguish of your heart.

Your son was a noble man & an excellent soldier & officer. He was respected & beloved by us all. We shall miss his tall & manly & imposing form moving with so much of dignity in our midst. We shall miss him especially in the hour of battle, for he was a brave man. It was his habit to tell the boys to come on & follow him.

Very dear Sir, you have made a very generous sacrifice in giving this nobel son to your suffering country & the sacrifice will be fully appreciated.

Your son had an honorable wound. He fell, too, in one of the most memorable & successful battles of the war. It was a glorious day for our side & very damaging to the enemy.

The remains of your son are at the hospital. They have been embalmed & will be either sent home, or interred here decently for the present. I haven't time to write more this morning.

Be assured of my tenderest sympathy in the deep affliction wh. Presses down your heart with sorrow.

Very sincerely yours,
Arthur Little
Chaplain 1st Vt Arty

City Point Va. April 6 / 65

Post Master Castleton Vt.

Sir

Some three days ago there was a Corpse, sent to this point said to be the remains of Lt. French 1st Vt. Bat. Arty. of Castleton Vermont as there was no one in charge, it was not forwarded and to day it was found to be offensive owing to not being embalmed, it was ordered to be buried by the Provo Marshall.

Thinking that his friends mite wish to know where his remains were, I have taken this method of informing them.

Fraturnaly Yours
E. Ingalls

Burkeville Va.
April 17th / 1865

Mr. French

Dear Sir

You have No doubt Herd of the Death of your Son, who was killed on the Morning of April 2d. Our Brigade Led the Charge. We Lost but one Man and that, was your Son a great Loss it Was to me. He Laid on the field perhaps 3 Hours and after fighting all day. I Returned to The Hospital and found the Body Embalmed I had a box mad as good a one as I could under the Circumstances, and sent his body to City Point, Wich place it is Buried Would of sent It Home, as we have to get an Order to send Bodies Home and the Army was Moving it was Impossible to find it at that time, but Knew That by sending it to City Point we could get at it any time. Sergt. John Donnely was sent to City pint with the body of Myron Sherman [died of disease 16 April 1865] and I told him That if he could get permission to send The Lieutenants body home to do so, as Regards his Pictures he had, some taken but and. He did not Like them and Sent them Back With the understanding that he should Have some better ones. He sent them by Surgeon Bourne and the Artist said that he Would pay him for Six More to Make out the Dozen, he would Warrant Them to be good Pictures, but He Wrote to George that The Negatives Was Spoiled and Wanted him to come and set again, therefore he Has No Pictures. But, the Money, he paid the artist Will try and Recover, as soon as possible. As Regards his Effects I have in money, belonging to him, Seventy Dollars and Eighty cents, Wich I will forward to you at the Earliest Opertunity. I Remain, With Much Respect

Your Obt. Servant

S.B. [Silas B.] Tucker

Capt. Com'd Bat. C. 1st Vt Artillery

Camp in the field Va
April 19th 1865

E.W. French Esq
Castleton
Vermont

Sir

I am aware the chaplin of our Regiment has given you all the facts that could be given in relation to the death of your son. But I having a little business with you at the earliest possible moment You will find with the Lieuts effects a note the amount \$40. against me. The agreement was that I should pay him next pay day, we shall probably be payed off about the 15th of next month. If you are in want of the money I can pay you immediately, or at least as soon as I can send home and get it, but I should be very much obliged if you would allow it to run until the time agreed upon. We all truly sympathize with you in the loss of your son, and of a noble and gallant Officer, who was always at his post, he died while nobly leading his men on to victory, being foremost in the charge.

If there is anything I can do for you in regard to the Lieut's affairs, please let me know.

I remain Yours
Very Respectfully
Wm V. Meeker
1st Lieut 1st Vermont Artillery
Comd'g Battery "C"

[John Donnelly of Castleton whose brother Peter Donnelly was killed at Weldon Railroad.]

Camp near Burkeville junction Va

Apr 20th 1865

Mr. French Dear Sir

Your letter of the 9th reached me on the 14th. I got a pass for City Point that day ~~with the~~ to take the remains of Myron B. Sherman [Corporal Myron B. Sherman of Castleton] and for the purpose of looking after the remains of poor Oscar who fell at the head of his company while charging the enemys works on the morning of the 2nd. I knew nothing of his death until we had got a long way into the enemys lines the news came to the company that Oscar was killed. That was a hard blow. he was like a brother to me. I cant not have felt worse if it was my brother. he was killed before we broke the enemys lines. I wanted to go back to take care of him. I asked for permission to go back but no as there was but one Sergt there. I could not go the Capt [Tucker] and Pat [probably John's brother Pat Donnelly] and Tim [Barber] and several others of the company was back on picket near where we made the charge. I knew they would take care of him. Pat Tim and Charly Howard carried him back to the Hospital made a coffin had him embalmed and sent to City Point to be sent home we raised \$115 in the Company for the purpose of sending him home.

I was surprised when I received your letter we all expected that his remains had reached home before that.

I started for City Point immediately after receiving your letter after making considerable inquiries I came across Lieut Dudley [First Lt. Andrew J. Dudley, of Co. I, from Calais] of my Regt he told me to go to Capt Bliss of Co K 28th Colored Regiment. I found him, he said that he found his body on the wharf on the 7th and the Provo Marshal ordered him to be buried that he would not be allowed to be sent home then for he was too far gone he said that he smelt very bad the Capt told me where to find the grave. I did all in my power to have him taken up but of no use. if I could have got air tight coffin I would have taken him up.

I blame Capt Tucker for all this. if he had done the part of a man he could have forwarded it righth along. he was back to the rear all day. I am very sorry that I didn't leave the field and see to it my self. it is very hard for a man to get to rear in time of battle unless a wounded man. If Oscar had binn with his own company when he fell I never would have left him until I left him on the boat at City Point. I hope you will pardon me for not writing before. the night after Oscar was killed I sat down wrote you a few lines but there was no mail left the Regt for ten days. I knew the boys that was wounds from Castleton would write you so I did not sed it. the day I received your letter I started right away. the Capt said that he would write you that day to let you know the circumstances. I have just got back this morning. You spoke about the Pictures Oscar had some taken but did not like them and sent them back but one he did not like them and

was going to get more but the negative was spoilt and could not get any unless he went again. The day I went to City Point the Capt gave me Oscars Wallet containing 70 dollars an 87 cts. I will have it sent to you the first opportunity. The Capt went to Washington yesterday on twenty days leaf. we are here in camp about 5 miles from City Point

The company feels the loss of their young officer very much. he was loved by all the Company. I must bring to close. any thing I can do for you I will do willingly. excuse this poor writing

I remain your humble servant
John Donnelly

P S write soon

The boys of No 6 are all well what is left of them. there was but one killed I suppose you have seen the list of the wounded. We have endured considerable hardships since we broke camp and have accomplished a great deal in so short a space of time

Burkeville, Va.
April 20, 1865

Mr. E.W. French
My dear Sir:

I am very sorry you should have this unnecessary anxiety about the remains of your son.

He was embalmed by the Surg. Of our Regt. without charge to you or any one else, as well as it is possible to do such work under the circumstances, where there is a wound in any part of the body. Of course it is impossible for it to retain all the fluid which is injected for its preservation. It will leak out, the best one can do.

We could not forward the remains of your son at the time of his death with leave obtained from Corps HdQrs, & there was not time for that. It was our purpose, therefore, to send him to City Point & have him so buried that you could disinter him at any time. He can be removed in a metallic case, or, what is less expensive & just as good, is an air-tight wooden coffin, made so by cement.

I trust you will succeed in obtaining the remains so precious to yourself & family.

With sincere sympathy
I remain yours truly
Arthur Little
Chaplain 1st Vt. Arty

City Point Va. April 25 / 65

Mr. French

Dr Sir

Yours of April 11th is received, and in reply would say that I have made inquiries of Lt. Berry who had charge of seeing that he was buried and he informs me that the grave was properly marked. I think that the Body could be taken up now, properly not as well as in cooler weather, if the Body is disinterred now it will have to be disinfected. the expence of getting the body now will be viz-- coffin & case 38.00

Disinfecting &c	25.00
Express on Body	<u>41.00</u>
	104.00

I have written to the chaplin of the Regt. stating the circumstances and I think that he will interest him self enough to come down and see to it. I would gladly do it my self if I had the time, but as I am situated I could not very well do it but will give all the assistance in my power to aid you in getting the Body, and if you should conclude to come Yourself this Spring after the Body you can inquire for me at the Mail Dock and I will render all the assistance I can. I am Respectfully

E. Ingalls

Camp near Danville Virginia

May 7th 1865

Mr. French Sir

Yours of the first came to hand last night glad to hear from you and to hear the folks were all well Considering Oscars thing. the Capt has sent his valise home. he got back yesterday he got 5 or 6 Photographs of Oscar at City Point they are not very good ones. his Sword and Pistol was taken from him by some damed thieves that belonged to some NY Regt before any of our boys found him. there was a fellow from Co F of this Regt got there in time to get his memos [mementos] and Pocket Knife and other little things and gave them to Tim Barber. I am very sorry that we could not get his Sword & Pistol as Oscar got them from Sam Dowlan [Dowling] he thought more of them than if he bought them. wouldn't like to have seen them damed thieves taking them. I would shoot as sooner than a Reb

As soon as the Capt got back I returned the wallet to him as he thought he was responsible for it. I had not told you in the letter his silver Pencil was in the wallet. in fact I did not know then when I went to City Point the Capt gave me the wallet and told me the amount I opened it and found it all right. in your letter you spoke of a Gold pen. I took out the Pencil but there was no pen. I think he had a Gold pen. I spoke to Tim about it he says he had one. what has become of it I don't know. I gave Meeker the message you sent. he said he was very thankful to you an would pay the money as soon as payed or before if you want. I spoke to the Capt in regard to the pay that was due Oscar. he said that he would write you about it. he said that it would be some time before you could get it. I am very thankful to you for the offer you mad of using Oscars mony. I have binn pretty hard up for mony before now but never have the time that I was hard up enough to use a cent of that mony. You will get the money just as he left it if the Capt don't touch it which I don't think he will not. Mr French if there is any thing in the world that I can do for you I will do cheerfully and willingly. if I can get my discharge here or in Washington I wont go home until I get the remains of poor Oscar so when we get payed we are going to try to raise mony enough in the co to get him a nice monument. I spoke to as some of the boys about it. there is not one in the Company but willingly help. we left Burkeville sunday the 23rd after making a furred march up over a 100 miles in little over four days reached her foot sore and tired. pretty rough march. there is a large prison here where Bill Barber was for some time. there is between 5 & 6 thousand of our men buried here that died while prisoners. I am very sorry to hear of Bills [Barber] death. I can hardly believe it yet

We have just got orders to fix up our tents and build up from the ground. that looks like staying here a spell. the first Division of our Corps has gone to Petersburg, we have binn expecting to go back every day. this is a very pleasant place. having pretty good times generally as there is no more fighting for us. we are all anxious to go home. I have often thought how poor Oscar would enjoy this if he was living. I must close. the boys of No 6 are all well. Tim [Barber] is as fat as a pig. I am in hopes we shall get home before the 4th of July. write often and I will try and answer although I cant write a good letter. my respects to all. good by

Yours Truly
John Donnelly

[Most likely John Donnelly brought Oscar's remains back to Castleton when he was mustered out June 24, 1865, and delivered the funds for Oscar's monument.]

Danville, Va.
May 14th 65

Mr. French

Dear Sir on the 17th last month I directed my Cleark to write you concerning the disposition that had been made of Lieut. French's remains. I was very sorry when I found I could not send them for I promised him I would send his remains home if it was his lot to fall, but I done the best I could. I left my command on the field of Battle at night to go back and look after his Body so what I done had to be done quickly so I could be with my command as soon as possible for we advansed the next morning, he was buried at City Point. I sent Sergt. [John] Donnelly with the remains of Sherman to that place and told him to find the Grave of L^t French and if possible to send him home for no Coffin could be obtained. I think it would be better to let the Body remain until fall now for the Body was not very well embalmed on account of the wound. I sent you his Carpet Bag containing his clothes by Express. I should have sent the money had I not given it to Sergt Donnelly to pay expenses in case he sent the Body, but I have it now in my possession and shall transmit it to you as soon as I can do with safty .. we all sympathise with you deaply in our affliction. I for one can appreciate your feelings only last Monday I received intelligence of the death of my only child a little Boy of three years. he come to his death in a shocking manner he fell into a kettle of boiling watter he lived about twenty six hours. I have no use to write. the war is ended and we are all very anxious to get home. the men from Castleton are all well as usual.

I am
Sir Your obedient Servt
S.B. Tucker Capt
Comdg Battery C, 1st Vt. Arty

P.S.

The Lieuts. Sword and Revolver I was unable to find. the Photographs enclosed are some I had printed form the large one he sent back but they are very bad ones but I think you can take the large one to a good artist and get some good pictures from it

