"YOUR MOST OBEDIENT SON"

THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF WILLIAM TELL COBB

A Thesis

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

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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

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[1]The 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

INTRODUCTION

On February 23, 1862, a brown-eyed, light-skinned, sandy-haired young man got out a pencil and some paper. On this his twenty-second birthday, he reclined his 5'6" frame and began to write to his father. Orderly Sergeant William Tell Cobb of the Fifth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry, Company F, addressed the letter to "Mr. Samuel Cobb Mauricetown Cumberland Co N.J." and attached a three-cent stamp. The letter made its way northward from the Maryland side of the lower Potomac River, south of Washington, D.C., where Cobb was then stationed, to the township of Downe, one of the eight townships in Cumberland County. It eventually reached Mauricetown, a small town in southern New Jersey inhabited mainly by ship captains and seamen.

Ships sailing in from the Atlantic would enter the Delaware Bay and travel up to the mouth of the Maurice River. After winding north eleven miles up the river, ships would land at Mauricetown, the first high ground on the west bank of the river. In 1844, the town had an academy, 30 dwellings, a post office, and a Methodist Episcopal Church. In February 1847, Samuel Cobb purchased land in Mauricetown on which he would later build a house for his family. When Samuel bought the land his family consisted of his wife of eleven years, Margaret, and his children, eight-year-old Edwin, and six-year-old William Tell.[1]

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[1]The Cobb family Bible and other family records were provided by Phyllis Williams, a descendant of William Cobb's sister, Almira Bacon Cobb. Noted subsequently as Cobb Family Records.

Cumberland County Book of Deeds, Cumberland County Court House, Bridgeton, NJ, Book 287, May 27, 1903, 167. This record mentions the 1847 deed (Book B.D. of Deeds, February 1, 1847, 115). The actual deed could not be found.

John W. Barber and Henry Howe, eds., *The Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey*

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.

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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

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(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.

[2]Cobb, 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.

[3]H. 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-forth 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

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[4]Cobb Family Records.

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

[6]James 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).

[7]Wiley, 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

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[8]Cobb, June 11, 1861.

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

[10]Wiley, 184.

[11]Wiley, 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 Regment 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

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

[13]Cobb, June 11, 1861.

[14]Mitchell, 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 aney...[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.

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[15]According 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.

[16]Cobb, July 20, 1862.

[17]Cobb, 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

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[18]Wiley, 39.

[19]Wiley, 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.

[20]Donald, 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 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...[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

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

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

[23]Cobb, March 27, 1863.

[24]Cobb, 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

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

[26]Wiley, 53-54.

[27]Wiley, 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

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[28]Mitchell, 94-96; Wiley, 96-98.

[29]Donald, 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

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[30]Cobb, 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.

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[31]Cobb, September 7, 1861.

[32]Cobb, June 9, 1862.

[33]Linderman, 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 armey I think of home evry 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]

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[34]Wiley, 189-90.

[35]Cobb, March 27, 1863.

[36]Billings, 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.

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

[38]Mitchell, 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 landsmen 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

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[39]Robert 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.

[40]Francis 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.

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[41]Miller, 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 looks 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.

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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-

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[1]Samuel 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

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[3]Bates, 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.*

[4]Bates, 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

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[5]Thomas 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.

[6]Boatner, 812; Katchner, 15-16.

[7]Boatner, 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.

[9]Bates, 186.

CORRESPONDENCE JUNE 2-JULY 18, 1861

Camp Gray June 2nd 1861

Dear Father

As I have not written for severl weeks I have a few moments to spare and will use [them] in give ing you an account of a Solders life wee arrived here last [Thur?]sday morning To Chamebersburg on Wensday night at halfpast 11 in the Cars the next day wee come out here wee left Philadelphia at 11 Oclo[ck] on Wensday and 11 Oclock at night wee arrived here and at day brake wee turned out and went to the Town of Chamebersburg wich was a bout thre quarters of a mile distant and after remaning there for three or four hours wee came out here and pitched our tents and wee are here still but we expect to leave here soon there is about 12000 troops here at presant and expect severl Regments more in afew days. When wee leave here wee expect to march to Harpers Ferry wich will bee some time this week wee may have some hard fiting to do but I think not. wee are now within 11 miles of the Enemy and wee are rady to meet them aney day. wee see vary easy times at presant drill three times a day in the morning the first thing thing [*sic*] is to get up at the beat of Revillee wich is at daybrake and then answer to Rolecall at half past five have squad drill wich last one hour. at 7 o clock have breakfast at 9 Oclock wee have Companey drill wich lasts one hour and at 4 Oclock wee have Regimental drill wich lasts some times twenty minutes and some times 2 hours and at 9 1/2 Oclok tatto beets and then evry man must bee in his tent lites must

bee out and all must bee quiet. Such are the roeteen [*routines*] of the Camp Wee have plainty of Companey here. there is 10 Companeys in the regment and 77 men includeing Captain and Lieuts and Privets. and each Companey 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. Ed[10] 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

[10]Cobb'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[g] 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 secsion 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 plainty 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 Companeys took abarl 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 Wills[12] how to direct his letters to me

W.T.C.

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[11]Cobb 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.

[12]Zeakele (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 George[13] and [?] and that was dated on the 28th of June I thought that you had forgoten that you had a son in the armey 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 directtians 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 proseedded 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

[13]Cobb's younger brother.

red an account of it in the papers but the scene in the field you have not, the first that wee saw was a barn and blacksmith shop on fire that had bin set on fire by the first shell that Cap Doubleday[14] had throwen at the Rebble 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 woonded 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 woonded 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 retreatted 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 proseedded to martensburg and encamped ther for two weeeks and

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[14]Abner 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 hopeing 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, Call[15] and keep a good shair yourself. you must not for get to write assoon as you get this no more at present. tell Zeak & Scorp[16] 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.

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

[16]An 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.[17][18]

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

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[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 idiosyncracy.[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:

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[19]William 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.

[20]Stryker, 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]

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[21]*Pioneer*, September 28, 1861, 2.

[22]Donald, 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.

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[23]Donald, 24-26; Boatner, 131.

[24]Donald, 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]

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[25]Donald, 34-35.

[26]Fifth 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.

[27]Kenneth 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.

[28]Fifth 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 in tentionsions [*intentions*] 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 aney thing new at presant. 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 clost to camp to attend to my duty I have not bin out of the Camp except to drill the men wich I have to do evry morning before breakfast and from 9 Ock until 10 and then a gain 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 milatary tactics I do the drilling in such good order is what makes them think so. wee have a vary nice Companey there is two from Millville and the rest is from Salem Alawaystown and Pottstown[29] and I a lone am from Mauricetown, Wee have prayer meetting in the Camp evry night there is several members of Church in our Camp and they see happy times here you had better belive if you was here you would think so aney how. The Flying Artilary has bin practising and they have botheard [*bothered*] me a grate deal in write ing 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 wich 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 posttage stamps as you pleas I donot

[29]These 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. dont 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 bigest 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 in[30] 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 Soverign[31] 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

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[30]On 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.

[31]Thomas 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 betwen 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 plainty 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.

[32]Cobb 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 nigt and was glad to her that you was all well at presant, but I did not like it when I heard that [the] Harrisses[33] 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 drawed 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

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

[34]According 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 bee so as to need my presance, I will not be able to get home before the middle of February or 1st of March but if you can do aney thing at presant go ahead and do it the sooner the better. if you send me aney 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 maney other eatables as she has a mind to, dont for get 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 in quireing friends no more at presant,

from your most Dutiful Son

William T Cobb

Direct as before

N.B. wee are down the Potomic opposite the rebbel Battary and evry vessel that passes they get shelled from the battery last night they was throwing shells at a vessel wich 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 a bout the battery throwed some shells over the river and drove some of the rebbels off and then set fire to there buildings wee are encamped on the bank of the river whare wee can see all the rebbels moove ments, our

Camp is in the woods and they cannot see us from the other side wee 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

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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 teld 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 armey 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 hospitol 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 armes 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 Companey 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 Companeys 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 fireing 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 wee have it yet it is a procustion [*percussion*] shell throwen from a 10 inch gun wee 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 Presant for Payday wont come not untill then and that will bee too late to send a newyears Presant But I can send it afterwards, give my love to mother and all of the Children. Call. Ed and yourself in to the Bargen nomore at pre[s]ant

from your obediant Son

William. T. Cobb

write as soon as posible direct as befor

Armey 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 didant go vary bad out here and them pies didant 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 fireing 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. Armey on lower Potomic

from your most Dutiful Son

Wm .T. Cobb. O.S.

Camp on Lower Potomac Feby 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 Conciquintly 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 rod 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 Battels[35] 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

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[35]In 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 Works[36] 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 Time[37] 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 instroments now. no more

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[36]Dionysius 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.

[37]Rev. 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 presant 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 familey nomore at present

from your most dutiful Son

William .T. Cobb. O.S.

write soon

Camp on Lower Potomac Feby 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 hardley 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 Horten[38] he is one of the player in our brass band he is Lydia Ann Blues brother. I am well acquanted 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

[38]John 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

Wm 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 wantted 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 Companey for they didant 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 Companey, Captn did not like it but he said that he could not denigh it, this is the reputation that I have in this Companey and not only this Companey 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 fireing 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 Tibbels[39] he is in the 4 Regiment N.J. Vols he sends his love to all of the people of

[39]At 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 presant

from your most obedient Son

Wm .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 retreatted 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 improoved on learning to play the Calls on Bugle wich the Companey is vary much pleased with it to think that I am to bee bugler of the Companey 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. Armey 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 a go and he said that you wanted me to let you know how to direct that box I think that you had better keep it untill I send for it for wee expect to march evry moment and I would rather you would keep it as you have the Books rady 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 wich if you get it you will find several articals in it if you want to use aney of them you can but dont give aney of them a way I sent it so that you will have to pay the freigh[t] on it so that it would be shure to go, when I finish this letter I am a going to write to Adams express Co at Washington and tell them that if they recieve a box with my address on it to return it to you and I will give them the directions wich if you have sent it it will not bee lost, I dont know when wee will be paid off but I hope it will bee pretty soon, I wanted to know who the senitor from our County is not the one in washington perhaps you would like to know what buisiness I have with him well I will tell you I have made an aplication for a Commision to go in the 10th Regiment of N.J.Vs and if you have aney influential friends there I wish you to get them to help me all they can I sent the aplication [to] Sheppard from Mauriceriver township I have not herd from him yet for he has not had time to write, Capt Reynolds give me a reccommendation to the Govaner, I dont know how I

will make out yet but I hope I will succeed in getting one, I am well at presant and hope that these fiew 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 presant

from your most obediant son

W^{m} .T. Cobb

[written in margin]

Direct as befor

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,

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[40]Donald, 49-52; Sears, 28-29.

[41]Sears, 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

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[42]Sears, 62.

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

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

[45]William 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

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[46]Sears, 103-110.

[47]Sears, 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

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[48]*Pioneer*, June 7, 1862, 2.

[49]Sears, 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]

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 prooved 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 from[51] if wee

[51]Contrary 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 Pennsyl[vani]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 Battle[52] 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 Conserning the horrors of a battle field 3 days after a heavy fight, I will give

[52]Seven 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 buisiness 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

Wm .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 sertain, 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

Wm .T. Cobb

Camp near Harrisons Landing July 20th 62

Der Father

I have a few more moments to spare and I occupy them in writeing a few lines to you, it has not bin but a few days since I wrote to you but as I have the oppertunity I will use it I here that the State autharities 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 gowith 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 Sombody 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 armey 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 guns[53] 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.

[53]A 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 magizines

" 32., 20., 6., 12., is for guns carying 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 Harrisons Landing July 29th 1862

Dear Father

I recieved your letters the one with the money in I recieved 3 days a go and was vary well pleased to get some money for if wee have money wee can get a long pretty well but if wee have no money it goes pretty tough with us I will tell you how I dispoesed of the money first I bought 5 papers of Smokeing tobacco for 50cts, Second 15cts for Rasons, third 12 cakes for 25cts, 25cts for paper and Envelopes, 10cts for a Philadelphia Inquirer, for buiscuit 25cts for 5 onions 15cts for Rasons 15cts, and the Remainder for Small articals. Your Last letter I recieved day before yasterday in wich you Stated the deth of Emma Cobb I have nothing to Say conserning her at present but I hope that She is better off where She is than befor She died, if you here the particulars of her deth write and let me know, you stated in your last letter that you whare a 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 quarter master is at the Landing evry day to get all of the boxes that Comes 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 Harrisons Landing VA) and think I will get it at least I hope so, you Said that I would recieve 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 rest[54] per haps 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 point[55] 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 Johns[56], 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

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[54]Single 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.

[55]Located at the mouth of the Maurice River cove.

[56]Cobb 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,

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Camp near Harrisons Landing Aug 9th [1862]

Der Father

I Send in charge of (Mr Edward. C. Collines[57] 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

[57]Edward 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