EDWARD A. ACTON was born in Salem, New Jersey, on February 22, 1829, the son of Isaac Oakford and Lucy Bilderback Acton. He was a descendant of Benjamin Acton, who came to Salem on the Kent in 1677, and was, like his ancestors, a Quaker. Isaac Acton was the owner of an iron foundry and a manufacturer of farm implements; he also had a number of farms in Salem County. Edward grew up in Salem, hunting, fishing, and attending school. After being graduated from Salem Academy, he became a civil engineer. In April, 1850, he married Mary Woodnut, also a Quaker, a descendant of Samuel Carpenter, provincial treasurer of Pennsylvania.

When the Civil War broke out, Edward Acton responded to Lincoln’s first call for troops by joining Johnson’s Guards of Salem County. He was made first sergeant when the Guards became Company I, 4th Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers.¹ After complet-

¹ Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Civil War, 1861–1865 (Trenton, 1876), I, 62.
ing his three months' enlistment, Sergeant Acton re-enlisted for three years, and became first lieutenant of Company F, 5th Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers. This regiment was mustered into service at Camp Olden, Trenton, in August, 1861, reporting immediately to Washington; in December, it was attached to General Joseph Hooker’s division of the III Corps, stationed in Maryland. With Hooker’s Division, Lieutenant Acton was transferred to Virginia in April, 1862, to participate in McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign to capture Richmond. The 5th New Jersey Regiment took part in all the battles associated with this campaign—Yorktown, Williamsburg, Fair Oaks or Seven Pines, Savage Station, Malvern Hill. In the hard-fought battle of Williamsburg, on May 5, Lieutenant Acton was severely wounded in the temple and left hand and arm. Following the conflict, Samuel H. Starr, colonel of the 5th New Jersey Volunteers, reported: “The regiment was brave, and I have every reason to congratulate myself in having command of as gallant a regiment as any in the service. . . . I can only mention those by name who distinguished themselves under my own observation. . . .” Lieutenant Acton was one of the officers cited.

Upon his return from sick leave in June, Lieutenant Acton was promoted to captain of Company K in the same regiment. With this unit, he fought at Seven Pines on June 25, and in the other engagements of the “Seven Days’ Battles” which ended at Malvern Hill on July 1. The Peninsula Campaign was over; Richmond was still in Confederate hands. In July and early August, McClellan retired his troops to a base at Harrison’s Landing on the James River, from which several battles were fought, including the second battle of Bull Run. It was in this battle, on August 29, 1862, that Captain Edward A. Acton was killed.

During his months of service, Edward Acton wrote faithfully to his wife “Mollie.” His letters are long and informative, and include not only the details of battle, camp life, and soldiering in general, but comments on politics and politicians, as well as his interest and solicitude for family and friends at home. The letters selected for

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2 John Young Foster, *New Jersey and the Rebellion* (Newark, 1868), 129-130. See also *Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey . . . ,* 1, 228. For Co. F, see *ibid.,* 250-252; for Co. K, see *ibid.,* 262-264.

3 Foster, 139 (note).
publication are those of the Virginia campaign, from the embarkation of Hooker's Division for Fortress Monroe to the fatal battle of Bull Run, April to August, 1862.

Captain Acton was intensely patriotic. His great concern for the Union and his determination to fight for it were strongly disapproved of by the Society of Friends and Salem Meeting. His father especially was distressed. But Captain Acton was not to be deterred. He left his wife with three small boys, and went to war. There he died. His body was recovered from its battlefield grave behind the Confederate lines on January 1, 1863, and was reinterred in the Friends' burial ground in Salem, as he wished. Included with these letters is an account of Isaac Acton's recovery of his son's body, told by Dr. Oliver S. Belden, a Salem physician and assistant surgeon of the 5th New Jersey Regiment who assisted in this melancholy mission.

Philadelphia

MARY ACTON HAMMOND

Camp of 5th N. J. Vol, Hookers Division
Lower Potomac April 4th 1862

My dear Mollie,

This is probably the last note thee will receive from me, dated at this point. At last we have received our final orders and to-morrow morning at day light, we start for Fortress Monroe or Hampton—we do not know yet precisely which. Hampton is at the mouth of James' river and about 10 miles from fort Monroe. When we get there I will at once write thee and tell thee how to direct to me.

It is not to be expected that we will long remain idle after reaching there for the government is preparing for a mighty blow somewhere in that vicinity. There are now concentrated at the points I have named, 120,000 men. I have but little doubt it is intended to attack both Norfolk and Richmond. The Government seems to be now gathering all its great strength to crush out, at the earliest day, this wicked Rebellion. I cannot write any more now. Give love to all. Kiss the children. I never enjoyed better health than now. Thee shall hear from me as soon as we reach our destination. With much love dear wife. . . .

4 The G.A.R. chapter in Salem was named the Edward A. Acton Post.
My dear Mary,

As my note of last Sixth day evening has by this time informed thee we should probably do, we left our old camp directly after sunrise on the next morning. Our Regiment was shipped by noon when the Steamers (5 in number) moved out to the mouth of the “Mattawaman Creek” and dropped anchor. We remained here until a little after 12 O’clock first day evening when the whole fleet got under weigh for this place.

By daylight in the morning, our boat with the “Steamer John Brooks” were near the mouth of the Potomac. The rest of the fleet not being in sight. Our Captn (of the boat I mean) fearing a storm brought the boat to anchor and we lay till near noon just inside of Smith’s point, when again we started on our journey. About 3 O’clock it commenced to rain very hard and to blow also making it very rough on the Bay; so rough indeed that many of our comrades were quite sea sick. Near 5 O’clock we came to at the warf at the Fort when Col Starr went on shore to report for orders. We are to land at Ship Point somewere about 20 miles from here but just in what direction I cannot inform thee. I think though it is on the James River.

This morning it still rained and blowed but now at 12 O’clock the rain has ceased and there are some signs of clear weather. Col has sent on shore for a pilot to take us to our destination. We probably shall soon be off. We do not know weather our other boats have yet come in or not; but suppose they have not. I can give thee no discrip-
tion of this place as I have had no opportunity to look around on account of the storm; but I have seen the celebrated little “Monitor,” the same that had the desperate fight with the Rebel “Merri-
mac.” She does look for all the world like a “Yankee Cheese Box on a raft.” The oddest looking thing in the shape of a boat that I have ever looked upon. The sides of the boat are but a very few inches above the water—in fact the waves yesterday broke clear over her.

5 On Mar. 8, in a five-hour battle in Hampton Roads, the ironclad U.S.S. Monitor had fought to a draw with the Confederate ironclad Virginia (formerly the U.S.S. Merrimack). At this time, the Virginia was still guarding the James River, keeping the Union fleet in Hampton Roads.
Right in the middle of her deck rises a round tower that looks like the Gas reservoir at Salem Gas works. No person would suppose a so insignificant looking craft would be capable of such terrible excution. I looked on her in wonder and surprise and thought how much credit and gratitude her inventor deserved and thought how opportune was her arrival here; who could fail to see in it the hand of Providence? Surely our cause must be just for lately He has shown to us many manifestations of his care and his mercy. Victory after victory has he given us, in many places where it would seem impossible that victory could be gained.

The harbor is filled with a large fleet of all kinds of vessels that shows to me for the first time some of the mighty proportions of this war—the gigantic scale upon which it is carried on. It certainly must soon run out unless our troops meet with some heavy and unexpected reverses. I am very anxious for the time to come. We have a rumor of a battle at Yorktown day before yesterday but have no particulars save that the enemy were badly defeated with a loss of 700 men, the loss on our side being 400. The enemy are said to be completely routed and Gen McClelland has advanced 30 miles. If this is true our destination is "Onward to Richmond." So may it be.

I suppose we are now to see active work. I will write at every opportunity if only a few lines. Thee must write to me oftener than thee has been doing. Do not wait for my replies but write at least twice a week—say on first and fourth days. The mails to this point run with more certainty here than they did at our old camp. Until I write again, direct thy letters to "5th New Jersey Volunteers, Hooker's Division, via: Washington D. C. and Fortress Monroe."

. . . I have just heard that our destination is up the York River. . . . We shall [not] get off from here until the weather becomes pleasant. It looks now as if it would pour down rain again. Our men are well as can be expected and my health was never better than now. We are to [be] attached to Gen Heintzelman's Corps-de-Arme and before two weeks I hope to write thee from Richmond. . . .

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6 McClellan began the siege of Yorktown on Apr. 5, but did not occupy the town until May 4 when Gen. Joseph Johnston evacuated it.
7 In May, 1861, Samuel P. Heintzelman was made brigadier general of volunteers in the Union army. He commanded the III Corps during the Peninsula Campaign, in which he led the advance on Yorktown and the main attack at Williamsburg.
My dear Mary,

We are still anchored in the same place as yesterday. It is stormy and the Bay is too rough for us to venture out to our new destination. This is the fifth day of our being on board this boat without putting foot on land but we are much better off here than we would be on shore in this disagreeable storm. My hands are so numb I can hardly write, it is so very chilly; we have no fire on board that we can use and there is no stove we can put up in the officers quarters, but we are under shelter and have comparatively comfortable sleeping quarters. This thee knows is much better than bivouacking on the wet ground and being exposed to the bitter storm now rageing.

The officers quarters are in the after saloon of the Boat and thick we lay I can tell thee; some of us sleep on seats at the side of the saloon and others directly on the floor with only their blanket around them. We have nearly 700 men on our boat; they sleep on the deck as close to-gether as possible and covered by their blankets; they say they sleep perfectly warm and comfortable. They are in the very best of spirits and look upon our trip as a sort of holliday excursion that relieves them of all work and drill duty, but notwithstanding their merry disposition, I can see to day a lurking impatience to get forward to our destination. They wish to participate in the battle to be fought in Yorktown which we find has not yet been fought as yesterday reported. A very few days after this storm has passed over will no doubt bring it on and the result cannot be doubtful; our forces will carry the fortifications and then we start for Richmond. I do not know how important a part our troops are to play in these coming movements but I should think it would be no insignificant one, for we are to come directly under the command of Gen Heintzelman, who is one of the bravest and most trusted Generals in the army. His position is now in the advance and no doubt it will be for some time to come. Gen McClelland himself is in the field and personally in command of these troops and directing their movements. We all have the greatest confidence in him and think he will conduct the army through successfully and with as little loss of life as possible.

I want thee dear Mary to bear up cheerfully and bravely for a few weeks. Borrow no trouble—let it come to thee, do not meet it.
I expect in a few days to see us all in positions of more or less danger and it will be only the guiding care of Him who rules the Universe that will bring us out of our trial unscathed. I know He watches over all; our fate is in His hands. I know too "He doeth all things well." But rest assured that while I shall strive to do my duty in any position in which I may be placed, I shall not thoughtlessly nor heedlessly nor recklessly place my life in danger but shall use all means consistent with duty to save it. With this assurance I hope thee will dismiss thy fears and remain as cheerful as possible under the circumstances. Remember thee is a soldier's wife; show the world thee has the fortitude of one. I cannot but feel that I shall come to you all and that we shall spend together yet many happy days. . . . I hope this will find thee well in health and spirits and rest assured I will write as often as possible. Give my love to the children and kiss them. I expect they grow finely. . . . With love to all friends and best love for thee dear Mollie. . . .

Camp of 5th N J V on "Cheeseman's Creek." Hookers division, April 18th 1862

My Dear Mary,

Thy letters dated the 6th and 13th inst. I received today and thee can hardly think how much pleasure it give me to hear once more from thee.

We left Fortress Monroe on the morning of the 11th inst. at 4 O'clock and arrived at Ship Point at 7 O'clock the same morning. The storm of the 3 days previous had delayed many other vessels beside those of ours and consequently immediately after our arrival a large fleet of steamers arrived loaded with troops, probably to the number of 15,000 or 16,000—certainly not less than 14,000. The delays in landing so many men kept us back till after 12 O'clock.

After landing we marched to our camp ground over one of the worse roads I ever saw. It was some two miles distant. On our arrival there we stacked arms, unslung knapsacks, took off our equipments and at once marched back, in fatigue dress, for our commissary stores and baggage—for our teams, which had been loaded on schooners, had not yet arrived and the only way we could get to the camp our food and the officers tents was for us to carry them—after getting these things out our men pitched their tents and
we had for that night one of the queerest looking camp grounds thee could ever immagine. We encamped in the pine woods, with a thick undergrowth of bushes, and the company tents were put up so irregularly that at night we could scarcely find our own men.

I think I told thee of our having shelter tents furnished us in place of the old tents we had been useing before and gave thee a discription of them. We officers have, before this movement, had two wall tents for our own use, but now we [have] only one; and our accomodations are on the most primitive style. After the tent was put up we went into the wood and cut crotches, or forks and laid poles on them; on these poles we laid short pine branches and boughes—these we wove in on the poles and then covered them with Indian Rubber blankets. We all three sleep on this bed and at night, cover our-selves with three woolen blankets. We rested in this way 'till last thirday when we moved where we now are.

Our move was only one-and-a-half miles, but we had to cross the creek. We have now a splendid camping ground but on next second day we will move still further forward. We shall be in the advance and no doubt shall see some very hard work. I do not wish to deceive thee, dear Mollie, the probability is we shall be in a fight. Thee can certainly not expect less, but yet thee must try to learn that thy fears so far are far fetched, and too, that thee anticipates resultes much more serious than thee should.

Yesterday I was to the front of our army—the preperation is makeing there for the greatest struggle of the war—and yet I cannot help but think that we shall take Yorktown without much loss of life, for Banks with his army is advanceing on Richmond and McDowell with his army is marching down in the same direction. If the Rebels do make a desperate stand at Yorktown and are defeated (as they will be if they stand) the armies of Burnside, Banks and McDowell\(^8\) will cut off any of their retreat they may attempt to make. Many of our officers think and say that the war of the Revolu- tion was decided at Yorktown, and that the war of the Rebellion will be decided at the same place; I think it will not be; yet I hope it may.

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\(^8\) Following a successful campaign in North Carolina, Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside had been placed in charge of troops withdrawn from the South to support McClellan; Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks was with the V Corps in the Shenandoah Valley; Gen. Irvin McDowell's troops had been assigned to the defense of Washington.
This I do think and believe—the results will go far and very far toward deciding it. Ambitious men who desire power and fame have staked everything upon the success of this rebellion and their own personal interest, as they interpret it, will lead them to follow out the course they have marked for themselves to the bitterest end, knowing their defeat is their ruin. These men will meet in the history of this war with the record they deserve. They will be ranked with Judas Iscariot, & Benidict Arnold. Their punishment will descend upon even their children.

I cannot write further. I have just been notified the mail is just ready to close. . . . With love to thee Mollie. . . .

[P.S.] . . . We cannot get stamps here. I have none. I wish thee would send me some.

Camp of NJV, Hookers Division, on Cheeseman's Creek, Va, April 19th 1862

Dear Mary,

The letter I wrote last night was written so hastily that I scarcely know what I did write. I am certain though that many things I wished to tell thee were omitted. Captn Reynolds⁹ is using my pen so I am writing with a lead pencil.

Day before yesterday I was out on the advance lines and saw more troops than I have ever before seen collected in one body. I have no doubt that I saw more than 500 pieces of artillery and [at] least 30,000 men. We have now more than 120,000 men between here and Yorktown and skirmishing is continually going on on our front lines. The great battle will not take place for some days yet. Not until our artillery is in full position. When it does come off thee can be confident that our forces will be successful.

To morrow or the next day we shall move on the advance, and probably on the extreme advance. We shall see hard work. I told thee in my letter that I would not deceive thee. I know that we shall be in dangerous positions. I may lose my life. I desire that my body shall have its last resting place under the old tree in our burying

ground—beside our children and Grandmother Acton. Don't think for a moment that I am downhearted or melancholy. I only write of this to provide for anything that may happen—yet I have the greatest faith, as I told thee when at home, that I should return unharmed; it may be otherwise. Let the result be what it may, rest assured it is only a feeling of duty that leads me to bear all the privation we now endure.

To morrow, I am again officer of the guard. As soon as we move I will write. I must close, it is near 12 O'clock. . . .

Camp Winfield Scott, 5th NJV,
Near Yorktown Va. April 23rd 1862

My Dear Wife,

We have moved once more and are now on the extreme advance and but a short distance from where the deciding battle of the Revolution was fought.

It was a bitter day, Seconday, when we received the order to strike tents, pack our goods and march. The men went to work with alacrity, and but a short time elapsed before our waggons were loaded and we were on our way toward the great guns that we heard booming on our front. It had been raining more or less all day, but soon after our starting some signs were shown of clear weather—now and then a glimpse of clear sky—anon, a bright flash of sunlight gleamed along the roads 'till just before we reached our present camp ground, when the sun burst forth in all his glory, rendering cheerful the damp ground upon which we must encamp at night.

Our march was about 3½ miles. We come ahead of our waggons and were obliged to wait for them to come up before our own and the other officers tents could be put up. The men carried their own tents and immediately commenced putting them up. Before our waggons come up (some of them stuck fast in the road)—a heavy shower come on to which most of us were exposed without shelter of any kind. I never knew it to rain much harder and we were thoroughly drenched in a few minutes. I fared a little better than some, for my Indian Rubber coat protected my body and breast so they were kept dry. In the very hardest of the rain our tent come and was put up by us, but the mud and water were several inches deep after the tent was hastily pitched. At dark we went into the woods and cut wooden
forks or crotches and poles; we drove the forks into the ground, put poles across them and thus made a very good beadstead; upon these we put our mattresses and spread our blankets and enjoyed a good sound sleep 'till morning, in our wet clothes.

Morning come with a clear sky and bright sun; we had gone supperless to bed, in the morning we breakfasted on hard crackers and coffee, at noon dined on coffee and crackers, but at night our provision had come and we suped sumptuously on crackers, coffee *sweatened with molasses* & beefstake.

About 10 O'clock in the morning I was ordered to take command of 100 men, with 10 non-commissioned officers and report to the Major of one of the New York Regiments. His name is Lowe. He met us at Gen Hookers Head Quarters, took us nearer the rebels than we have ever before been. We proceeded to within 1000 yds of one of the enemies heaviest batteries and directly in its front. We were in a narrow strip of woods just in rear of our advance line of pickets. As soon as we arrived we quietly commenced work. Our object was to throw up a battery to command theirs. It was a daingerous operation for their guns could easily have shelled us from our position. One discharge of grape or schrapnel would have swept us out entirely. We were not more than 20 yds from the edge of woods. Through the bushes we could see their guns looking threateningly down on us and their sentries watchfully paceing to and fro, but all unconscious of our close proximity. We scarcely spoke. There was not a loud stroke of the axe, nor a heavey fall of a clod, but 400 men (300 had joined us) worked steadily, quietly and with earnest will 'till nightfall, when 400 men more relieved us or took our places. The work still goes on and we are undiscovered. By to-morrow morning if we are not discovered before, the battery will be finished and the guns mounted ready for work. There will be 6 heavy seige guns on it. This is the way McClelland is working and in a few days his plans will be compleated and the enemy not only, but the whole North will be astonished at the amount of work he has accomplished. We shall have probably a bloody battle, but we shall gain a victory surely more brilliant than any that has been won during the war.

I can give thee no idea of the number of troops around us, but the quantity is immense. Most likely not less than 130,000 men. Of these about 15 or 20,000 are daily at work building fortifications, bridges,
pontoons, roads, &c; Thousands of cavalry are with us, hundreds of Field Batteries, and troops from all parts of the North, brave, sturdy, stalwart men who love their country better than their lives. Such men are not to be defeated! Such men deserve and will win victory.

We are encamped on the property of the Rebel Gen Magruder, in one of the largest peach orchards I have ever seen and it is now in full bloom.

The mail is now just passing. I close as it waits for me. Give love to all, and God bless thee. The enemy are retreating . . . .

Camp “Winfield Scott” Near Yorktown, Va.
5th New Jersey Vol, April 27th 1862

My Dear Wife,

Thy letter dated the 21st I rec'd yesterday while on picket—from which I only returned this morning . . . .

Since my last, we have seen some of a soldiers life in reality. On Fifth day night I was up all night as officer of the “Grand Guard,” the next night I was up till late on company business and yesterday morning at 4 O clock we were called to go on picket duty; It rained all day yesterday and a more unpleasant day for the duty we could not have had. I was placed in command of one of the most important posts directly in front of the enemy and during 24 hours many was the bullet that whistled over my head and near my body; I have had but little sleep for the last 72 hours—in fact we get but little now—so I shall make this short, but to morrow if I can get an opportunity I will give thee a detailed account of all that has occurred. I shall enclose a letter captured in an abandoned “Secesh” house by a man who at the time was under my command. It is written as thee will see by a man who, at the time, was a member of Congress from this State. He was very prominent while in Congress and is a man of much ability. Thee will notice that the letter was written some time before our difficulties broke out, and yet that then the South were prepairing for what they have since done. They were

10 Gen. John B. Magruder, a West Point graduate, was appointed a colonel in the Confederate army in March, 1861, and in May took command of troops on the Virginia peninsula. In October, 1861, he became a major general and gained considerable reputation for his defensive tactics in delaying McClellan’s 1862 campaign.
takeing “Measures to arm our people, which is necessary, whether we look to the preservation of our peace within the Union, or to our defence if forced out of it.” They of course ment by “our people” the Southern portion of our citizens. This letter shows indisputably how deep laid must have been their plans even at that early day. Please take care of the letter, for it may be important at some future period.\footnote{This letter has not been preserved.}

I also send thee the likeness of Gen Hooker. It is very good. I am very well; my health is good, but I am very tired and sleepy. If not sent away, I will write again to-morrow. Do please write oftener.

Give my love to all: Keep in good courage and may our all wise Father protect thee. . . .

[Confederate General Joseph Johnston slipped away from Yorktown just as McClellan was ready to begin his attack on May 4. As Johnston retreated, McClellan followed. A costly battle with the Confederate rear guard was fought on May 5 near Williamsburg, forty-six miles from Richmond. Lieutenant Acton was wounded in this battle. Furloughed home, he remained there but a short time, returning to the army with his wounds still causing discomfort. He rejoined his regiment just after the battle of Fair Oaks, a stalemate action in which Johnston attempted to wipe out the Army of the Potomac.]

My Dear Mollie,

This morning I try to write thee but it is very awkward I assure thee. My arm and hand are very much in the same condition they were when I left home. I have no use of my second finger more than when thee last saw it. My arm is mending very slowley, but I still have to carry it in a sling; I am very much afraid it will be a long time before I get full use of it.

Beyond this I am in good health and spirits. It was on Fourth day last I reached camp and oh! how gladly I was welcomed by the company. The whole regiment was completely taken by surprise
when they saw me. None had dreamed of my returning so soon and all agreed I should have remained at home at least till my arm had recovered; yet all think the more of me that I come so soon. Dr. Fisher\textsuperscript{12} will not allow me to go on duty that will expose [it] to rain or the night air—he says while my arm is doing well it is by no means out of danger—if care is taken of it I will in a few weeks be well—but if exposed inflammation may still set in and give trouble, so I am only attending to company details, or in other words doing only such work as I choose. In military language, I am “off duty.”

Now for my trip. I met Lizzey Keasbey who put herself in my care to Washington. Her brother the Doctor is housekeeping and she takes charge of his house. She was very pleasant; I saw her safely to her brothers that evening about 5½ O’clock; the next day the Hon John T. Nixon, Hon J.L.N. Stratton\textsuperscript{13} & Ike Hackett accompanied me on a visit to some of the different Hospitals in the City. I found several of my acquaintances from the 6th & 8th Regiments but none from my own. I was looking for Charles Hall, Samuel Ray, Richard &\textsuperscript{14} Hutchinson, members of our company who were wounded in the last battle. I did not find them, but since reaching camp I learn they are at the Columbia Hospital which is just out of the City.

Secondly, I took the Steamer “New Haven” for the “White House” landing on Pamunkey River.\textsuperscript{15} We ran down to the mouth of Potomac river but a north east storm coming on we anchored till 10 O’clock thriddy night. When the storm had ceased and the heavy sea in the Chesapeak had subsided, we again started on our voyage, about sunrise or soon after we were opposite Yorktown, by 10 O’clock at West point and at the mouth Pamunkey, and at noon on Fourthday I landed at “White House.” I wish I could give thee a

\textsuperscript{12} Dr. James C. Fisher had been appointed surgeon of the 5th Regiment, N. J. Volunteers on Apr. 4, 1862, and surgeon of the 2nd Brigade, N. J. Volunteers on Apr. 21.

\textsuperscript{13} Nixon and Stratton were Republican representatives in Congress from New Jersey. Neither man stood for re-election in 1862. \textit{Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949} (Washington, 1950).

\textsuperscript{14} Pvt. Richard Hutchinson and Corp. William Hutchinson were both members of Co. F. It would seem that Capt. Acton had inadvertently omitted the name William.

\textsuperscript{15} White House on the Pamunkey River, about 20 miles east of Richmond, was the advance base of the Army of the Potomac where McClellan waited for McDowell’s reinforcements. West Point, some 35 miles east of Richmond on the York River, served as the landing point for Union supplies.
full description of all I here saw. But I have neither time, space, or ability. In a narrow crooked stream no wider than Salem Creek at Penns Neck Bridge were miles of vessels and steamboats that we sailed between on our way to the warf; they would number by hundreds and I do not know but by thousands—and then the busy scene on shore: Vessels of all kinds and sizes unloading! Waggoners moving noiseily about with their teams, some loading, some unloading and all apparently busy. The teamsters are all, or nearly all black—contrabands of course—and there are hundreds of them. There is at this place a regular encampment of them. I saw Officers gaily equipped galloping rapidly to-and-fro—Cavalry moving hither and thither—Infantry moving forward—to the front no doubt—Long lines of Waggon trains carrying forward supplies for the immense army in advance. Camps stretching over many acres of ground, with their occupants laying idly in tents, sheltered from the hot noon-day sun or else cleaning their arms. The contraband women and children in their camp flitting from tent to tent and their clear ringing laugh falling musically upon my ear. The many Rail Road cars loading with army stores and passengers; and on the open cars that were loaded with corn and oats to see the sacks of grain covered with liveing freight listening anxiously for the starting whistle—all this made up a scene of varied and exciting interest—a scene such as is rarely beheld in a life time. It was a scene worthy of an Artists pencil and of a Poets numbers. I wish I could describe it to thee just as I saw it—but I cannot. Thy imagination must try to fill out the picture. I sat on one of those loaded cars 'till 3 O'clock in the hot sun waiting for the train to start. At last we were off and by 5 O'clock I was at "Orchard Station," some 7 miles from Richmond and the nearest station to our camp. A half hour later I am in my tent.

The ride out was a pleasant one and through a rather pretty country. I was much surprised to see the amount of damage done by the flooding of Chickahomony—thou doubtless has heard that they had constructed large dams at the head of the river—well when the heavey rains had raised the river to an unusual heighth they cut these dams and caused the whole low country bordering the river to be overflowed. I saw wheat fields with wheat out in head that have been entirely submerged. Fields upon which corn had been raised last year, the ground could not be seen.
Our camp is on the battle field, graves are all around us and it may be under us. Our men say no more horrid sight could be seen than was presented to them when they encamped. Hundreds of dead men and horses. I will speak no more of this.

Col Starr welcomed me heartily and told me he had only a few days before sent my name to the Governor\(^{16}\) for a Captancy in Co.K.—this Co is from Freehold, N Jersey. He says my commission will come this week. This was very unexpected and yet very pleasing as an evidence of his good feeling. . . . With much love for thee dear wife, I am thine. . . .

Camp of 5th N. Jersey Vol, Near “Seven Pines” Va, June 16th 1862

My Dear Mollie,

Although I only mailed thee a letter this morning I am again writing to thee and thee will be surprised, probably, at the contents of this letter. The fact is I am not so well satisfied in camp as formerly and I have not felt happy since I left thee in tears two weeks ago, and I feel more particularly unhappy when I miss so many familiar faces from the Regiment that I probably shall never see again—many of them I can never see for their forms are laying cold and still beneath Virginia soil.

Our Regiment is not now what it has been; we scarcely number more than 400 effective men and I fear very much will never be above this standard.\(^{17}\) New officers have taken places of old ones and the hearty, cheerful courage of the men seems to have been worn down by hard work and sickness to the sort of mechanical courage and performance of duty, in painful contrast to their former high spirits and cheerful alacrity. Our own company number[s] only 43 men for duty—all the others are either dead, wounded or sick. Since starting from home, 3 have died, 1 killed [in] battle, 15 wounded seriously, 4 discharged on account of disability and there are many sick—a

\(^{16}\) Charles S. Olden, a Quaker, was governor of New Jersey, 1860–1863. His sympathies were strongly Union and he co-operated with the federal government in every way he could.

\(^{17}\) When the 5th Regiment was mustered into service in August, 1861, its strength was 861 men: 38 officers and 823 noncommissioned officers and men. Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey . . . , I, 228.
number of them scattered in different Hospitals we know not where.

Among the Officers, 1 has died from wounds in battle, 6 were seriously wounded, and I am the only one of them returned to duty—some of them will never return—3 have resigned, 1 has been transferred to another Regiment.

'Tis not like the old Regiment and I do not feel happy try to as I may. Yesterday I seriously contemplated handing in my resignation and should certainly have done so could I only get into business at home, but there seems to be nothing for me to do unless I could buy out some small business already established and even if anything of that kind could be found to suit thee knows I could not raise the money for that purpose so I have no choice but to remain here weather I will or not. If I had money enough to buy out such a business as Thos Sinnickson Jr. is doing—I mean the coal & wood business that would suit I think—but where is the use of speaking of it. I cannot do it so that ends the matter.

Col Starr has sent my name to Gov Olden requesting him to commission me as Captn of Co. K of this Regiment; I shall probably receive my commission this week, sometime. The old Captn resigned a week or two since and I shall in all probability fill his place. The company is from the vicinity of Freehold, Monmouth County. One month ago I should have been delighted with this mark of confidence, but now, while I am grateful for the honor, I really feel that I had much rather be at home. The promotion will increase my pay to about $130.00 per month, but at the same time it will also increase materially my responsibilities and duties.

Another thing tends to make me feel as I do: Col Starr has himself sent in *his* resignation which, if accepted, (and I do not doubt but it will be) he too will leave us, and a strainger will take his place as our commander. I do not like it. Col Mott*¹⁸* thee knows was taken from us while I was at home, Major Truax*¹⁹* was taken from us while on the Potomac—in fact we hardly know ourselves. Takeing all this in consideration and knowing, too, how bitterly both thee and

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*¹⁸ Gershom Mott became lieutenant-colonel of the 5th N. J. Volunteers on Aug. 17, 1861; on May, 1862, he was promoted to colonel of the 6th Regiment, N. J. Volunteers.

*¹⁹ William S. Truax, a West Point graduate, became major of the 5th N. J. Volunteers on Aug. 21, 1861, and served with the regiment until Mar. 7, 1862, when he was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the 10th Regiment, N. J. Volunteers.
Mother are opposed to my being here, is it any wonder I should feel anxious to be at home and tempted to resign my commission?

Home was never more pleasant to me than during my last visit and never have I left it with so much regret; and had I anything to do I would not stay here any longer than I could help. Yet I should leave with much regret the men who stood manfully by me in the hours of danger through which I have passed, who stood without flinching in the iron tempest of the ever memorable 5th of May—who passed through the fiery ordeal of the first of June—who now every third night stand upon dangerous picket post, exposed to the storms and deadly bullets of a strangely deluded enemy. Many a noble spirit is there among them. Many a brave heart throbs within there manly bosoms. Who could help regretting to leave them after learning to know them as I have—after having toiled with them through summer’s heats and winter’s snows—on the Parade ground and the Battle field? He who could has no heart such as should animate the being of a brave man—but is by nature a cold and a selfish, yes and an unprincipled man.

My arm does not improve rapidly, in fact I do not think it is any better than when I left home, at least I cannot use it any more than I could then—this annoys me for I am a useless appendage, doing nothing of importance, and I fear I shall be able to do nothing for some weeks yet—I mean nothing like active duty. I can attend to company details without difficulty but Doct will not let me go on picket or other duty that exposes me to the night air or may be likely to keep me out in the rain. The bones at the joint are very sore.

This is not a very cheerful letter. I hope my next will be more pleasant for thee. I have relieved my mind, probably this will make me feel better. If I ever get so that I can go on duty I shall no longer feel this way. I do not think there will be much fighting for a week or two yet, probably not then unless the enemy should come out to attack us, which is not very likely since the drubbing he received here two weeks ago. But this war is terrible. I see around me the sickening evidences of this last battle. Heart-rending descriptions are given that the mind revolts from with loathing. Bitter—bitter indeed is the fruit of this war. What punishment can be meted out

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20 Battles of Williamsburg (May 5) and Fair Oaks (June 1).
that is severe enough for the Monsters who inaugurated it? Famil[i]es
bereft—Widows mourning—Orphans helpless—Strong men maimed
and shattered—Hundreds of thousands of lives sacrificed—all this for
what? Simply to gratify the ambitions of some of the most graceless
scoundrels that ever lived: deep—deep will their punishment be.
Write soon and give love to all. . . . Please send me some stamps.
Goodbye dear Mollie. . . .

[P.S.] My gold pen is broken, please send me another.

Camp of 5th NJV, Near
Seven Pines Va. June 27th 1862

Dear Mary,
Thy letter of the 22nd I received yesterday and is the first I have
received since leaveing home. I was surprised to learn thee had not
received a letter from me before writeing, for I had written thee
twice and both letters should have reached thee previous to the
22nd, however I suppose thee has both of them before this.

Well, as I told thee I would probably be, I am now Captn of Co K.
My commission is dated for the 11th of June and I received it from
the Governor of our State on Seventh day last, so I am now no
longer with Co. F. Hereafter direct thy letters to "Captn E A Acton
Co K, 5th New Jersey Vol, Hookers Division, via Washington D C.
and Fortress Monroe."

I disliked very much leaveing the old company and they, all of
them, seemed sorry to have me go. Lieut. Godfrey has now in com-
mand of the company and is well enough for duty. I have as my first
Lieut, Theodore P Large—he is from Lambertville, Hunterdon
County. I have as yet no 2nd Lieut, as the old one has been pro-
moted. A new one will probably be given me before long. The most
of my men are from Freehold in Monmouth county and are a very
good set, but they need a great deal of work—I mean in the way
of drill.

Every third afternoon our whole Regiment goes to the extreme
front for picket duty for 24 hours, and this is all we do but it is hard

21 Thomas C. Godfrey was promoted to first lieutenant, Co. F, 5th Regiment, N. J.
Volunteers.
work though and very daingerous. The last time we were out (on thirday & fourth day) I was on duty for the first time since my return to the Regiment and just in time to participate in my second Battle, for on fourthday an engagement took place makeing the third in which our Regiment has participated since the evacuation of Yorktown.22

On thirday at half past three O'clock we left camp and marched up a mile to our fortifications and lay all night behind them. Every thing was quiet—no fireing occuring. The next morning after sunrise I was ordered to take my own company and with companies G. and B. march to the front picket line and relieve the pickets who were on post all night. The three companies were all under my command. After my men were all posted I went along the whole line to see that every thing was quiet and that all my men had been properly stationed. I then returned to my station about the center of the line so as to be prepared for any thing that might occur, but thinking I should have a quiet day.

This line was in the edge of a thick woods and nearly a mile in length—the woods were about 400 yards in width and in many places the Rebel pickets were within 100 yds of us. Now thee will have some idea of how I was stationed and how important was my duty. My men were all under cover and watching carefully every thing near them. I had seated myself on a stump and lighted my pipe for a good smoke and was thinking of you at home, wondering how soon I should get a letter from thee and wishing I could see you—when a corporal, from the left of my line, come up to me to tell me that Gen Kearney's command were skirmishing through the woods in front of us from the left to right. I immediately sent word along the line instructing my men under no circumstances to fire a shot while Kearney's men were in front of us—they passed slowly and carefully through the woods and along my front and I felt a battle was likely to be fought. Soon the musketry opened away off to the right of my command. I stept out of the woods and mounted a high

22 Battle of Seven Pines (Fair Oaks), June 25. This engagement began the “Seven Days' Battles” which ended at Malvern Hill on July 1 and concluded the Peninsula Campaign.

23 Philip Kearny had been appointed brigadier general of volunteers in command of the 1st N. J. Brigade. He served under both McClellan and Pope in the Virginia campaigns. He was killed at Chantilly, Sept. 1, 1862.
stump and could see our troops in vast numbers advancing into the woods and along the roads. The rattle of the musketry now became perfectly furious and I knew hard work was being done.

Soon I received orders to draw in my pickets and march my command to my Regiment which at this time was laying in an Oats field as a Reserve. We lay here for 2 or 3 hours, the fire in the woods becoming sharper and sharper. Presently the cheers of our brave boys told us of victory. After the firing was all over, I marched my men back and established them again on the same picket line, soon I was again ordered in & sent through the woods to establish a new picket line right in the face of the enemy—this I did holding my men well together; I was supported by some of Gen Sickels' troops. Soon the ball opened my command on the advance. The bullets flew thick but thank Heaven not one of my men was wounded. In a little time I was again ordered back to my regiment and as I was moving out I met Gen Sickels who commanded [me] to fill out one of his Regiments which I did and again we were into it.

In a little while the enemy again gave way. I now marched back to the Regiment & we lay down in the field till near sunset when we received orders to march to camp; just as we were moving off Gen Grover came up and told us that the enemy was advancing again on our left and wishing us to go in and help repel the attack so in we went and formed in line of battle but the enemy did not get fairly to us. It was now dark and here we remained without any incident occurring till about 10 O'clock when the enemy advanced on our line when the firing opened on them in a terrible manner and they fell back. Soon after this we were relieved by the 4th Main Regt and marched back to camp. This was about 12½ O'clock at night.

At 4 O'clock next morning we again marched out expecting the Battle to be renewed but the enemy did not dare come out again. He made his demonstration on the right of our lines some 10 or 12 miles from us but was badly beaten by McClellan. The Battle lasted all day and the right advanced 1½ miles near Richmond. I hear that the enemy lost in killed and wounded 10,000 and in prisoners, 4000.

24 Daniel E. Sickles organized the Excelsior Brigade in New York and as brigadier general led it in the Peninsula Campaign. Later he commanded the III Corps.

As I write this, another Battle is going on in front of the center of our army. The cannonading has been very heavy but the Rebel guns seem to be silenced. Not many days can elapse before Richmond will fall—the sooner the better.

I am feeling a little better satisfied than when I last wrote but still this does not seem to be the same Regiment. I fear I shall never feel as well contented again in this Regiment; yet things may change very much and come back to the old order. I hope they may.

John Williams I am afraid has been taken prisoner—he has not been heard from since the battle on fourth day. I am very sorry to hear of the children having the whooping cough. Be careful of them and see that they have good medical attention. This is a good time in the year to have it. I sincerely hope thee will not get it. . . . I must bring this to a close as it is near time for us to go out again to the intrenchments this being our night on. I trust we will not again go into Battle before our tour of duty expires. With much love to thee dear Mary. . . .

Camp on the James River, Near City Point Va. July 5th 1862

My Dear Mary,

To day we received for the first time since the 27th of last month, what we have looked anxiously for—a Mail. I reced by it two letters from thee—one dated 25th of June and the other, with no date but post marked the 21st of January last and directed to the Lower Potomac.

It was welcome notwithstanding it had been so long on the road. I wrote thee a few lines this morning and sent them by private hands to Washington D C to be mailed thee there. I hope thee will get them very soon. I also wrote thee on the 27th of June a long letter giving thee an account of my second Battle which took place near the “7 Pines” on the 25th of the month. This letter I fear thee has not recd & if thee has not, thee never will. I think it must have gone down by the 7 O’clock line on Seventh day morning (28th), which was captured by the rebels at “Division Station”; for fear this is the case there is one piece of news in it I must repeat here. I wrote

26 Battle of Gaines’ Mill.
thee that I feared John Williams had been taken prisoner. We have not heard from him since the action on the 25th of June & if not killed or wounded (if he had been either of these I think we should have known it) he most certainly must be a prisoner.

I would love to give thee a full detail of all that has occured to us since my last to thee and also the many and varied scenes that I have witnessed during the last 10 days—the constant roar and din of battle—the hasty and rapid marches—the quick massing of troops and all the phariphinalia of a mighty army—the splendid sight of 60,000 armed men moveing and maneuvering 'neath the early morning sun, all upon one field—the horrid sight of mangled bodies, dead and dieing—the shrieks & groans of wounded men on the field of Battle filling the night air with sounds of anguish—but to do this I should want a day and a doz sheets of paper. Thee must be satisfied with but a very brief and hastily written outline which may be inturpted at any moment, as we have had notice that we must move again to-day although I hope that will be countermanded as it is now fast approaching night.

I hardly know where to begin, but will presume thee has reced my letter giveing the details of the 25th of June. Well, on the 26th "Stonewall" Jackson attacked Gen Porter, on the right of our lines, and was defeated after a severe and terrible contest—on the 27th he was reinforced to the amount of 60,000 men and again attacked Porter; several times Porter drove back his hordes with immense slaughter and just as victory seemed perching on our banners, Gen McClellan gave orders for a movement toward James River for which he had been prepairing for several days & which could no longer be delayed.

In these two Battles the Richmond papers say the Rebel loss is 23,000 killed, wounded and missing; our loss is set down at less than 6,000—it is certainly not over 7,000. The reason of the great disproportion of the losses is that our forces fought behind their own intrenchments and served their artillery in a much better manner

27 Gen. Fitz-John Porter commanded a division of Heintzelman's III Corps and later commanded the V Corps. He was heavily attacked at Gaines' Mill but successfully withdrew his troops. Later, at the second battle of Bull Run, he failed to act as ordered and was court-martialed. He successfully cleared his record after being cashiered, and in 1886 was reinstated in the army.
than the enemy served his. On the 28th, the enemy made a demonstration on our center and left (the left is our position) but found us too strong for him to venture an earnest attack—we had bitten him too often for him not to be afraid of our fangs.

On the 29th we left our camp before daylight for James River to cover the right and center of our army, Hooker's and Kearney's divisions closing the rear of the column. We stopped about 1 mile from the old camp to allow the last of the center to pass us & lay behind intrenchments 'till afternoon. About 12 O'clock, noon, the enemy approached the Rail Road at "Savage Station" expecting to capture, no doubt, a large lot of stores, but most of them (stores) had been removed, and what few were left were then burning. They marched forward with confidence thinking we were in full retreat but before they knew themselves Kearney opened on them with grape and canister. The action was lively for a little while and we fully expected to be into it, as we were within ¼ of a mile of the action, and would have been the first called upon to support if support had been necessary. It was not necessary. Kearney beat them and I believe captured their battery of 4 or 6 guns.

The right and center had now passed us & about 2 or 3 O'clock we took up our line of march in the broiling sun and through a woods over a narrow road that shut off what little air was in circulation. I was taken sick on the road and had to lay down in the woods. I was very sick at my stomach and lay down for awhile, then walked on again as long as I could, then lay down again, &c 'till twilight when Doct Belden got off his horse and let me ride him.

About 9 O'clock we turned in a field and lay down on the ground for rest—but formed in line of battle—I was wrapped in a Rubber blanket and slept with a knapsack for my pillow. In the morning I was better; we stay[ed] here till noon (our food, crackers & coffee, scant at that) when Gen Hooker sent hurredly for two Brigades; ours & Sickel's immediately advanced. I knew this meant a battle.

We moved less than a mile at quick time—almost double quick—to a field where we saw I do not know how many Regiments formed as reserves; we passed them—on through the field we marched directly past them. We knew now we were wanted. Every step was firm, every heart beat steady. On we marched through the woods to another field; we filed along the edge of the wood and formed our
line of battle leaving a large open ground between us and another woods through which the enemy were expected to advance on us. Another line of battle was formed ahead of us—it was expected to break so as to draw the rebels into our line which was formed so that they could not see it till they come up to us, and also so that if they once got in, it would be almost impossible for them to get out.

It was nicely planned but the plan was never fully executed. The first line was too strong and would not break. I looked at my watch, it was 2 O'clock & 20 minutes when our and the Rebel pickets first become engaged, immediately afterward the artillery began to play on both sides—the Rebel's with shell, ours with Shell, Grape & Canister. The Rebel shell broke over us pretty lively for a time; and two or three of them sent showers of fragments around me. I do not want to show any levity, but thee does not know how familiar they sounded as they whistled by me. I cannot say they sounded like old friends, but they certainly had a sound I recognized.

About 3 O'clock the engagement became general and very severe on the left, but soon we found the Rebels were being driven, then thee should have heard the cheer upon cheer that was given along the whole of our line. I have never heard anything like it. I got on a fence in our front & soon saw a new movement in the line in front of us. The line of battle was changed. It was thrown into the woods on the left—I mean the extream left—and by the left—the Rebs were flanked. I watched the movement for I felt I could understand what was intended without explanation or hearing a gun fired. I was right: In a very few minutes the work was commenced with fury on both sides. Nothing that I ever before heard could compare to it.

Slowly the fireing on the left ceased as the enemy was driven from their position, the extreme right—here musketry become absolutely terrible. I can give no similey that will give thee the least idea of its terribleness. Almost every moment I looked for our first line to give way and we were ready to take their work off their hands. They would not give way. Now the enemy's Battery is taken, 6 guns—such cheering! It seems as though the very heavens would be rent. The fireing is, if possible, redoubled in fury but slowely, very slowely, at dark the enemy leave. The field is ours. We slept on the field that night and the cries of the wounded was fearful.

I must close as we are moveing. . . .
January

Camp of 5th NJV, Near James River opposite City Point, Va, July 7th 1862

My Dear Mollie,

On account of our moveing I was compelled to break off my narrative the day before yesterday. I shall now endeavor to finish, but do not know how soon I may be interrupted.

I believe I was writing of the groans of the wounded and dieing on the night of Seconday, the 30th of June. After the battle had ceased we lay down on the ground and got what little sleep we could. I was so tired and worn out that I soon dropt in a sound sleep, which lasted probably an hour or a very little longer when some picket firing wakened me. It was then that I heard those terrible groans and shrieks. Some calling for water—"for Gods sake bring me some water!" others calling frantically for the Doctor—"Doctor! Doctor! Oh! my God where is the Doctor?" others again groaning aloud in their anguish and calling piteously upon the name of some friend who could not go to him! Anon I would hear a boyish voice calling in a sobing and pleading tone for something or somebody, the sobs chokeing his utterance, so that at the distance I lay I could not distinguish his wants! Again, I would hear weeping voices bewailing their fate and begging for some relief from their sufferings and alas! what was more terrible than all, many were blaspheming and curseing most horridly. No voice can convey the faintest idea, no pen can describe in any but the most imperfect manner, no tongue however eloquent could portray but in the feeblest style, nor could any language, no matter how chaste and powerful, illustrate the terrible fearfulness of those cries of anguish. They are ringing in my ear now with awful distinctness and will ring there for many a day to come, whenever my mind shall revert to this day of battle; but I must dwell on this no longer.

At 2 O'clock on the morning of the 1st of July I threw ½ of my company out as pickets, but had hardly stationed them before I recd orders to draw them in again and prepare to move. At or before 3 O'clock we were marching rapidly for the James River. The road was good and was crowded with Artillery, Cavalry and Infantry, moving orderly, but with the greatest celerity for our destination. We were marching for another battle.28 The enemy being beaten the

28 Battle of Malvern Hill. Following this battle, McClellan's troops went into camp at Harrison's Landing.
day before were preparing to attack us on our extreme left (our position had now been changed; we who before June 29th had been on the left were now on the right) and we were marching up to support this position.

Soon after sunrise we marched into a large field, or rather a series of fields—the fences had all been destroyed giving the appearance of a vast field to our camping ground. I think there must have been at least 500 or 600 acres of rolling ground entirely clear of fencing and with very little timber. This tract was bounded in a circular manner in front by woods and in the rear by the river. In the center of it was a hill that commanded the whole and as I stood here just a little after sunrise and looked for the first time upon our whole or very nearly our whole army I could hardly conceive any power that could overwhelm us. It was a great and grand sight, the like of which in all probability I shall never see again. Lines of Battle were formed almost as far as the eye could reach. Troops were in almost every conceivable position—in Square—in Column at full distance—in Column at half distance—in Column closed in mass—in Echelon. Some moving rapidly to their designated places, others with arms stacked resting on the ground. Some kindling fires and making coffee, others hastily slinging knapsacks and falling into line. Yonder is a squadron of Cavalry in line, there is another column, and here-away galloping like mad for that belt of woods is still another; now they are out of sight: they are sent out no doubt as scouts. In looking over the field I see many of these squadrons. But yonder come Rushes Lancers, the tips of their long lances flashing in the sunlight and the red streamers flaunting sauceily from lance staffs as they move in stately regularity toward "Headquarters" near the River.

Boom! What is that? ah! it is a Rebel shell and as if it were a signal our Artillery starts from almost every part of the field and is quickly put into position. But a few minutes, and on my right, just across the little swamp near which we are resting I hear one of our Batteries open upon them. For a little, the practice is brisk, but soon our Battery silences there. Now matters seem approaching a crisis and I think I begin to understand a part of the programme of the day.

29 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry, called Rush's Lancers because they were organized (1861) and led by Col. Richard Henry Rush, and carried lances at the request of McClellan. Before the end of the war, the use of the lance was discontinued. S. L. Gracey, Annals of the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry ([Philadelphia], 1868).
I said that the land was rolling. It is almost hilly and the ravines or vallies between the hills run in almost every direction across the land, and all of them seem to connect.

This enables our troops to take these Ravines, and, under cover, move to most any point unseen by the enemy until they arrive at the point they wish to occupy. Our different lines of Battle were nearly all formed in this way and kept out of sight but held closely by and ready to support our different Batteries. This showed me it was our Generals intention to fight this Battle, principally, with Artillery.

About 9 O’clock, we were marched to our position on the right into a little swamp directly in front of the Battery to which I have just alluded. This is a New Jersey Battery and was commanded [by] Captn Beam and consisted of 10 guns, I think of “Parrotts” pattern, and 2 Rocket guns, making 12 in all. This Battery is one of the best in the service and on this day well sustained its reputation. I never before saw such rapid and effective firing as this Battery kept up during the time it was engaged. Captn Beam, I am sorry to say, was killed by one of the enemies shell about 12 O’clock. It was stationed on a beautiful hill just behind us that give the gunners a fine view of nearly the whole field and as per consequence every shot they fired passed over where we lay. In front of us lay another hill over which the enemy must pass before they could reach the guns, if they should attempt to capture them. Back from the top of this hill for a half mile the land was slightly descending and but very little rolling till it come to the woods where we supposed the Rebels were in force. Our Battery commanded this plain and whenever the enemy made his appearance, he was welcome[d] with a shower of shell and grape which quickly drove them back.

Just after we reached our position, a Rebel battery succeed[ed] in establishing itself in the field in front of us and opened upon our Battery. Many of their shot and shell struck around us where we lay; some going over us and some falling short, ’till presently one burst right in Co. E.—the next company to mine—and within a very few feet of me, killing one poor fellow outright, wounding another so that he died in an hour or two and breaking the arm of third so that it had to be amputated. Of course I thought of Williamsburg and could not but feel grateful for my almost miraculo[u]s escape there.

30 Capt. John E. Beam, Battery B, 1st Regiment of Artillery. Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey • • •, II, 1380.
These were our only causalities during the day—I mean in our Regiment. The fight between these two Batteries was well contested for more than an hour when the Rebels were driven from the field. About 2½ O’clock the battle opened on the left with both Artillery and Musketery, but principally with artillery.

Four batteries were now in full play on our side, comprising some 50 or 60 cannon. Thee may try to imagine the roar! It was tremendous. Some stray Rebels had got out into the field opposite us. A little more than half way from the Battery to the woods stood a barn and a large cattle pen. The Rebs tried to get a battery in position here but did not even get their guns unlimbered before our guns drove them like a flock of frightened sheep to the woods. Our guns now paid their compliments to the cattle pen and the second shell scattered the rails and the Rebs together—it was sport to see them “skeedaddle” for the woods. The guns were now trained for the barn and fired in very rapid succession, where the “Chivalry” buzzed out like Bees from a hive and such leging it for the woods I never before saw.

After this the woods were shelled and thoroughly searched with grape and canister—this was the last of the Rebels troubling us on the right. On the left, in the mean time, the battle grew hotter and hotter, the cannon thundered away incessantly—the whistling of the shell—the screeching of the grape, canister and schrapnell and case shot & the wizzing of the Rockets told us a fearful struggle was going on. The musketry now redoubled in volume and we could tell a close hand to hand contest was going on. The Rebels came out of the woods with a full determination of capturing our left battery. They advanced in the midst of a terrible iron hail; our grape & canister mowed great swaths through and through their ranks but these gaps were closed up quickley and the rebel hordes still pressed steadily on for the coveted prize; again and again and again were great roads opened in their ranks & with the same steady, determined closing up, but at last it was too much for flesh and blood to bear, with a cry of almost terror, they broke and fled from the woods.

Now for a little time there was a lull in the battle roar, but soon it was resumed with increased determination on both sides. The enemy was largely reinforced but was again repulsed with great slaughter. Again their was a lull and both sides prepared for the last great struggle which both knew must now come. The Rebel Battery
played with double fury. His infantry formed in the edge of the wood and started across the field at a charge, at double quick and with a yell that seemed to reverbrate in the clouds. Our guns played furiously but the charge was too impetuous to be stopped by artillery. Now was the time for infantry. The men stood like statues immoveable—not a shot was fired; on come the Rebels within 100 paces—80 paces—60 paces—still not a shot fired except by artillery—within 50 paces—and still no command except the caution of the officers—“Steady men—Steady men”—40 paces—Ah! now comes the word—“Ready—Aim—Fire” “Charge Bayonet, double quick. March.”

The enemy, now within less than 30 paces, staggered by the murderous fire at such short distance, cannot face the solid wall of gleaming bayonets advancing so rapidly upon them—they turn and fly pursued by our brave lads who follow them through the woods and capture and secure their Battery. Now the welkin rings with the “hurras” of our men. The enemy is beaten; it is now near dark, he advances no more. Our men lay down for the night, all except the pickets and guards and artillery men. The latter keep their guns playing incessantly till near midnight, shelling the woods in front. This night cannonadeing was beautiful beyond description. I shall make no attempt to describe it, but shall consider it sufficient description to say it surpassed any exhibition of fireworks that I have ever seen or conceived.

With this ended the 7th day of fighting and with it I must close this letter. I am sitting on the ground in the woods writing this, subject to constant interruptions. I have not time to read [it] over to make corrections, but I guess thee will be able to make sense of what I have written. At the first opportunity I will finish the account up to the present time and continue the history as anything important occurs. . . .

Kiss the children for me. I feel much worried about them. Do write often. With much love I am thine, dear Mollie. . . .

Camp of 5th New Jersey Vol.
Near “City Point” on James River July 11th 1862
My Dear Wife,

It is now several days since I wrote thee and a still longer time since I heard from thee. . . . I have felt very anxious about the
children ever since thy last letter and a few lines would be much better than nothing. So please write oftener. Thy last was dated June 25th—fifteen days ago.

I closed my last letter I think with a description of the battle of July 1st which I have since learned is termed “the Battle of Malvern Hill.” After the close of the artillery firing we lay down on the ground just where we had been all day stationed, and slept at the foot of our gun stacks ‘till about 2 O’clock the next morning (July 2nd) when we were roused and ordered to march without noise and as rapidly as possible for our final position. In an incredibly short period we were again on the march and found the road as on the morning previous, filled with rapidly moving troops and teams. The nearer we came to the river the more steady became the stream of waggons until we reached 3 miles from the landing where we found the line of teams unbroken to the river bank. Of course we were compelled to turn out into fields and to take by-roads to reach our destination.

Recollect, in the morning we were only 1 1/4 miles from the river, but we marched parallel with it for 10 miles. We had not marched more than half the distance when it commenced raining very hard and continued to do so ‘till after dark; the roads soon were muddy and the marching was horrible. Just imagine the rain pouring in torrents and the roads more than ankle deep in this yellow clay such as thee sees during the winter near the “Court House” and Champion Atkinson’s and thee will form some idea of what we were passing through. Many men dropped from the ranks unable, from sheer exhaustion, to move further without rest. We plodded on as best we could [our] weary way, worn and hungry—for two days we had nothing to eat but hard crackers (about 2 apiece per day) and water, some of the men—but few though—had a little coffee: on this day we had eaten nothing, yet their was no complaining. The men stood it like heros! When I say there was no complaining, I mean comparatively speaking: I mean there was no ugliness nor murmuring against commanding officers, no lack of confidence in our directing Chief. Men would not be human who did not feel the fatigues attendant upon the trying scenes through which we had passed and were still passing. Not would it be natural for them when born down with their exertions to keep from complaining of their weariness, or to smother their desire for rest. They bore their privations with cheerful hearts
and fine courage, is what I mean; and with confidence in their officers undiminished, but rather strengthened by the skill shown in the management of the whole of the vast movement and the successes gained in our hard fought battles.

It was near 10 O’clock when we were halted near Harrisons Land- ing (where Gen Harrison was born); guns were stacked and our weary men lay down in the rain on the wet ground to rest. In about an hour we moved again a short distance to the ground where we expected to camp; guns were again stacked and some tents were put up, but alas! again we were ordered to move, and trudged again very wearily more than a mile through mud now nearly half knee deep, to a clover field that made us an excelent camping ground. Our men soon pitched tents (small shelter huts) and were out of the rain. In one of these tents I lay down with only an india rubber blanket be- tween me and the wet ground with a [log?] for a pillow, and no feather bed nor luxurious couch upon which I had ever rested gave so much comfort as I felt as I lay on my hard resting place. It was real luxury that I felt, for I was truly resting.

About 3 AM O’clock we had hard crackers (7 per man) and coffee (full rations) served out to us. The fires were soon kindled and coffee quickly boiled and our first meal of the day (and with some for more than two days) was eaten—Crackers and coffee!—Crackers broken in the coffee and eaten with a spoon as thee has often seen me eat my bread & milk! This was our meal. It would have done thee good to have seen how it was enjoyed. The crackers are what is called Pilot Bread and are about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches square and $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch or less thick. It is baked very hard—so hard sometimes that it is almost impossible to bite it with the teeth. This is the kind of bread we use altogether. Now and then some of the sutlers tempt us with soft bread which they bring from Washington or Baltimore: the loaves are much smaller than our Baker at home makes and they are willing to sell to us as an accommodation for 25 cts per loaf. I haven’t been tempted yet and do not think I shall be. Soft bread I think would taste very poor, that is if I recollect just how it used to taste—it really does seem to me that I used to enjoy it at home—but I dont think I can ever di- gest it well at 25 cts a loaf here! I would certainly become dispeptic.

Well, after “Crackers and Coffee” we turned in for a good rest. Nothing of importance occurred during the night and we lay till
Revellie in the morning. This is now 3rd of July (Fifthday) and we are lead to believe that we will not move again soon. Rations are brought in and the cooks are at work cooking fresh beef and other meat. At 10 O'clock, artillery is heard on our right, it is rebel artillery but is not noticed much for the time being, 'till near noon when several of the balls land directly into our camp; this is too much and our own war dogs are set to barking at a rapid rate and the gun boats, too, open. A Regiment of Maine infantry is also sent out, and approaching the battery very cautiously, they suddenly dash on it with fixed bayonets and capture guns (4), all the cannoneers, horses and caissons and never lose a man and return to camp in triumph.

At 3 O'clock we are surprised to learn that we must tear down and pack up for a move. We are told we are "fighting Joe Hooker's" best troops—are the "brave Jersey Blues" who have been tried and found "true blue" and that "old Joe" smells work ahead and wants us. We move away to a wheat field and in line of battle lay down 'till morning without being disturbed. Give love to all dear Mary and do write soon. I am just called for work, and must run.

Since I closed that other sheet, I have had my company out on duty but am in again in time I hope to finish this page.

On the morning of the 4th of July, before sunrise, we started for our old camp ground but had gone but a little distance before we were halted and marched back to the position we occupied all night.

Pretty early in the morning our things from the old camp came to us and our tents were again put up and we were told we should remain here at least two weeks and probably a month. This was delightful news. Our tents were surrounded with bushes to break the hot rays of the summer sun. A brook of clear running water nearly arm pit deep was nearby—pure water in abundance was also at hand. We could bathe every day and in a short [illegible] again as good as new & all of us congratulated one another, as well as ourselves, upon our good fortune and felt that our lot had indeed been cast in "pleasant places." It was the 4th of July, too, the "Natal day of Freedom"—"the Birth day of the Nation," the hallowed anniversary of the Nation's independence.

True, we felt a little gloomy at times when we thought of traitors trying to destroy what their fathers had built up for them at so much
cost of treasure, of blood, of suffering and of life—when we thought of the vast proportions of this stupendous but most wicked and unnatural rebellion and when we thought of the *craven* politicians at home and in Congress, who will not give us reinforcements when we want them to close the war, stop bloodshed, to save life, to restore peace and reunite a shattered Republic, men who to gratify personal feelings of envy, of hatred, of ambition and of the lowest selfishness embarrass a good President, badger an honest and well meaning administration, keep an army on the offensive and at the same time see it outnumbered gradually 2 to 1 and when its commanding Officer begs, aye! pleads, for reinforcements, do nothing for its relief for fear of the overshadowing popularity of one of the greatest living Generals. They fold their arms calmly and wait to see his army destroyed, his men butchered in an unequal contest in order that thus they may break him down. What do they wreck if the Peninsula does redden with human gore, if thousands and thousands are maimed for life, if lives are let out as freely as drops of rain upon my tent at this moment. . . . What do they wreck if all this occurs so that they attain their own selfish ends?

It is true these reflections made me a little gloomy but then the cannon soon thundered forth a salute to the day and as Battery after Battery sent forth their compliments to the day, and as Band after Band give forth sweet strains of music and later in the afternoon as Regiment after Regiment sent up cheer after cheer for Gen McClellan as he rode along the lines, the gloom wore off and I felt there was an Over-All Seeing Providence—a Great and Good Creator, “Who doeth all things well,” “an All-Wise, Supreme Ruler of the Universe” who doeth justly and loves mercy. My mind was again easy and that night I slept soundly & rested better than for a long time before.

This brings me now to the 5th of July where I will commence in my next. . . .

Camp of 5th N.J.V. Near Harrisons Landing Va, on James River July 13th 1862.

Dear Mollie,

Yesterday I received thy long looked for and most welcome letter. My mind was relieved about the children and thyself, and I felt
sorry that I scolded thee a little the day before in the letter I then wrote; but Mollie do not hereafter wait for my letters—for thine will reach me much sooner than mine will thee, and without much chance of failure. I received thy letters now in about four days, while I suppose mine are about a week in reaching thee, and some of them I presume thee will never see. There are times when the mail from Camp is stopped for days at a time; while the mail to us reaches camp without interruption unless we are moving, in which case it follows us and is distributed as soon as convenient.

Thee asks about our pay. There is two months now due but I suppose we will not get it ’till some time next month. Thee knows I drew the two months previous before leaving home. . . . Our late busy and exciting times delayed us in making out our Pay Rolls, which were only finished yesterday, when they should have been in the Adjutant's office on the last day of June. I was fortunate enough to have mine in among the first. From here they go [to] Washington for inspection and calculation; and return here with the Pay Master when he comes to pay off the Regiment. . . .

As long as the army have full faith and confidence in Gen McClellan—as long as soldiers who make the sacrifices, bear the toil, endure the privations, fatigues and sufferings incident to a soldier's life, who fight the battles, shed their blood and offer up their lives to aid in crushing this rebellion, are willing to follow his leadership—choose him as their chief in battle—rely upon him as their support in danger—believe in his ability as a General and confided to his care, in fullest confidence of the wisdom of their choice, their lives—let puny cravens at home, whose fears make them tremble at shadows, cease their senseless braying or receive the castigation their annoyance to decent persons should gain them. I hate them and despise them. They set up their judgement against the best military talent of the country: they who hardly know the difference between front and rear rank—the difference between Line of Battle and Column by company. These are no less incendiary than the open Southern sympathisers. They are the persons, and the only persons, responsible for the loss of life we have just met—for the terrible ordeal through which we have just passed, and through which only the skill and genius of a McClelland could bring us in safety and with honor. They are the Murderers who by their clamors prevented us from
receiveing the reinforcements which would have enabled us before this to have been in Richmond and virtually to have ended the war.

It is a crying shame that men at home, who will do anything rather than shoulder muskets for their countrys defence, should, by their senseless cries, and their assumed knowledge, be allowed to embarrass the governmental action and keep an army in the field straining every nerve against a vastly superior enemy—our men overworked, worn out with constant picket duty, work in trenches and hard marching; our ranks rapidly decimated by disease as well as by the enemys bullets. It is more than hard—it is cruel Murder, and these poltroons deserve the scorn and indig[n]ation of all true patriots, and very many deserve more: they deserve promotion—but at the end of a hempen cord. They are the bain of the Republic. . . . I have spoken plainly and earnestly about this matter, for it is an evil that is assumeing giant proportions and for the good of the Republic cannot be too soon stoped. We in the army feel the effects of it and see all its workings. . . .

It was the morning of the 5th of July when I broke off my last letter; well every thing passed quickly 'till about noon when orders come to prepair to move. Here then was a death blow to our hope of rest. Every thing was rolled and packed; but tents were left standing 'till the last. About sunset I received orders to have my men turn in till 3 O'clock in the morning when they were to breakfast and strike tents ready to move before sunrise. We now congratulated ourselves that [we] would have a good nights sleep anyhow, but, alas! for human hopes, only a very few minutes elapsed before a new order come in to "strike tents and move immediately." We were all cross at this, from Col Starr down, but it did no good to get cross—move we had to, and move we did. It was dark before we started and although it was but a short distance that we marched (about 1½ miles), we met with so many delays that it was near midnight before we lay down upon the ground, without covering, to sleep—in line of battle of course. Early in the morning, the 6th of July, we moved a short distance further into the woods and stacked arms in line of Battle and staid without any adventure 'till the evening of the 7th, when, just at dusk (as usual) we moved in front of the woods and lay on the ground, again, all night, without covering. The morning of the 8th, just after dawn, we moved just in the edge of the woods,
stacked arms, and all hands commenced building a log breast-work covered in front with earth. By night we had quite a formidable fortification thrown up. Just before dark but after we had quit work, President Lincoln paid us an unexpected visit, escorted by Gen McClellan, Staff and a squadron of cavalry. Cheers rang long and loud as the distinguished visitors passed along the lines of the army. We all hope this visit will result in good. We believe it will. This night like the previous one we slept without cover on the ground. On the 9th, before noon, we finished our breast work and set down to rest 'till the cool of evening. A fire broke out in the fallen timber on our front during the day and in [the] afternoon was blown over the Breastworks in our midst—of course we were driven back. Soon the under brush was burned off, we then, with some work, succeeded in putting out the fire, and immediately commenced clearing the ground for camp. The next morning, the 10th (we had spent another night on the ground without covering), we finished clearing camp and once more pitched tents. Our location is very pleasant in the edge of the woods giving us plenty of shade to turn aside the scorching rays of a July sun. This night it commenced raining and the next day, July 11th, it stormed all day. Yesterday, the 12th, passed without anything occurring of note. To-day all is quiet and I am Officer of the day. It is thought we shall remain here for a month or six weeks. I hope we may, and if we do I shall send home for some things that I need badly. With love thine dear Wife.

Camp of 5th N.J.V. Near “Harrison's Landing” on James River Va., July 15, 1862.

My dear Wife,

Thy letter dated the 1st I received last evening about 9 O'clock, much to my surprise as our mail is generally distributed at 9 O'clock in the morning; and this morning our mail had been received and distributed. So my surprise was complete as well as pleasant.

Last evening I read to Dr Beldin that portion of thy letter referring to him. He said he had just written his second letter home and told me to say he would write oftener in future. He is very attentive to his duties, and I think will soon give full and entire satisfaction. The medical officers of the army find a different sort of practice than they had at home, and it takes time for them to learn the full routine,
and break down prejudice. Dr Beldin has succeeded in this respect better than any other surgeon who has been with us. His duties are very arduous just now and will no doubt continue so for some time. . . .

I wish thee would send me by express 2 tin plates, 2 knives and forks, 2 tin cups (there is a sort of heavy tin cup—I prefer these if they can be had), 1 coffee pot, one tin sugar bowl, 1 tin salt box, 1 tin peper box, 1 Cedar bucket iron bound and strong, 1 small frying pan with short handle, and one wash basin—also 1 metal pitcher, strong but cheap. I need these articles very badly and cannot get them here; even if I could they would cost me all of $10.00 if not more. . . . If thee sends, it must be soon as possible for it may not be long that we shall stay here. Please send me a loaf of home made bread. . . . Thee can get a bill of the articles and as soon as we are paid off I will send the money for them. I have nothing at all to eat off of, or to cook with, so thee may imagine the fix I am in. . . .

With much love thine—Mollie. . . .


My Dear Mary,

Thy note was received this morning dated 23rd: also thy letter dated the 20th. I received on Sixth day. I was glad as I am alway to get they letters, but wish thee would make them a little longer and tell me how different persons are, and all the news generally. Almost anything that comes from home is interesting: Matters or occurences that you at home would hardly notice we are glad to hear of. I feel anxious, too, to hear how recruiting for the new regiments gets on—whether or not many enlist from Salem: also if there are any persons I know who are getting up companies. . . . I had, this morning, a very kind letter from Ex Gov Newell, but not one word did he say about this matter. I have some little hope of being appointed Major of one of these new regiments, but which, if any, I cannot tell. Col Mott of the 6th regt—formerly, thee will recollect, my old commander—recommends me very warmly: thee knows I was under his command when wounded at Williamsburg and was directly under his eye during the whole of that engagement. Gov Newell writes that he

31 William A. Newell, a physician, was governor of New Jersey, 1857-1860. During the Civil War, he served for a time as examining surgeon for New Jersey draftees.
had written Gov Olden "urging my appointment" and "will see him personally very soon" about it. He says my conduct entitles me to the position I ask and "even a higher one" and that he will do all that he can for me. He closes his letter saying: "we have pride in your bravery and sympathy for your sufferings," and signs himself, as he has befor proved himself to be, "Your friend." The letter is a very handsom one, and one that I shall take pride in keeping as long as I live. . . .

We are still laying here uncertain how soon we shall move, but do not know of anything now that will be likely to hurry us away from here while the present hot weather lasts. The only thing that has occurred to break in on the monotony of the past week was a review of Kearney's and our divisions by Gen McClellan. We marched about 2 miles to find suitable ground for the manuvering of the troops and it took all the morning to make the review and inspection of the different Battallions. Of course I could not help comparing our thinned ranks with what they were little more than one year ago. It is only about 13 months since we left Trenton with more than 900 men in our ranks and on this review we could only muster about 400 men! What a difference in so short a time. Hard work, disease and the Rebel bullets have laid low many a poor fellow and made sad havoc in our ranks. . . .

I wish thee could get the particulars about John Williams and give them to me. We were all very glad to hear from him again. It is the first intelligence that any of us have had of him since the engagement of the 25th of June. John was a good soldier and always attentive to his duties. . . .

With much love for thee dear Mollie. . . .

Camp Kearney, Alexandria, Va.

October 12th 1862.

Mrs. Mary E. Acton
Madame!

To comply with your wishes I will once more in my mind go through the events of the 29th and 30th of August which proved so diastrous to our army and especially to you and your family.

Late in the evening of the 28th of August, we encamped between Manassas and Centreville, after two days march from Warrenton Station and the brilliant engagement at Bristow Station, in which
your noble husband so gallantly distinguished himself in leading our regiment on a charge up the railroad which completely routed the ennemy.

Early in the morning of the 29th we again took up our march in pursuit of the ennemy; we reached Centreville at about 8 o’clock A.M. and marched then on towards the old battle ground of Bulls’ Run. Our darkey servant having managed to get something to eat for us, Captain and me sat down along the road and we ate our breakfast. Captain was in good humor and told me after breakfast was over that he felt a good deal better and were now ready to fight. The Battallion having marched on while we were eating, Captain struck a double quick to catch up; for my part, I being under arrest at the time, I came up slowly in the rear of the battalion and therefore I will let our orderly sergeant give you the details of his last moments, he being throughout the battle on his post alongside of the Captain, and on very good terms with him. He states the following:

“Captain joined us again shortly after he had his breakfast and we marched on at a pretty good rate. We could distinctly hear the sound of cannon and as we came up closer we could distinguish the fire of musketry, which became heavier as we approached the field of battle. We were to much tired out to speak much but now and then the Captain spoke to me or I adressed him. Once I told him: ‘Captain I do not believe we will all get out of this,’ whereupon he said: ‘Well if we have to die, let us die like men.’ Whether he had an idea of his death or not, I don’t know, but if he had it he never expressed it.

“About at 11 o’clock A.M. we reached the battle field and halted in an open field; about two hundred yards ahead of us was a forest, from which a continual roar of musketry came up in our ears. Brigade after brigade went into these woods and returned in a fearfully scattered manner. About at 1 o’clock P.M. our turn came and we marched in in line of battle. In the woods immediately in front of the rebels we deployed as skirmishers. Captain himself had a gun which he had captured in the fight at Bristow Station, and was anxious to see the rebels, who were covered by a natural embankment along a railroad track.

“We had now nearly reached the opposite end of the woods and the balls came whistling thicker and thicker and we hid ourselves the
best we could behind trees, stumps, etc; a tremendous fire from the rebels at once made us come to a halt. I was at that time four paces from the Captain and behind a big tree, while he was on an open spot to the left of me. All at once I saw him aiming and firing of his gun; looking in the direction he fired I saw about 8 or ten rebels in a heap not over 60 yards from us, and discharged my piece; while I was reloading my piece I saw Captain about half turning around asking for another cartridge, but before it was handled to him he dropped his gun, cried 'help' and fell. I immediately ordered the four next men to take him and carry him to the ambulance, which was done with the greatest possible care, much to the praise of those men, who stood under terrible fire while endeavoring to carry him out. While passing me he said: 'This is my last hour. Send my love to my wife and family.'

"Being now in charge of the Company it was impossible for me to leave my post and so I told the men to see him safely brought in an ambulance. Soon afterwards the men returned and told me that they put Captain in an ambulance and that he was alive yet the time they put him in. They had taken his sword and pistol of him as the belt seemed to pain him a good deal and laid it alongside of him in the ambulance. Night at last broke in and we fell back behind our batteries, only to rest to fight."

There ends the Sergeant’s statement as I joined the Regiment again. As soon as I heard of Captain Acton’s being wounded, I went down to the hospital to see. Much to my grief, I found Captain dead under a tree. The ball had entered his left side and came out on the other side, lodging in his canteen. Upon inquiry, I learned he died in the ambulance and was put down there. Sword, pistol, watch, pocket-book, and even his hat had been taken from him. I had his body carried under a tree and early next morning I sent four of our men of our Company to bury him. He was decently buried and a head-board with name, Company, and Regiment put on his grave. It was his wish to be sent home, but our retreat on the thirtieth prevented us from doing it.

The Company joins me in grief for his loss as we not only lost a good and gallant Officer but a friend to us all.

Captain Acton has pay due to him from the 30th of June to the 29th of August—one month and 29 days.
Any other information I am able to give you, you shall willingly receive from

Your Obedt Servant

Theodore P. Large, 1st Lt. Co. K.
5th N.J.V.

[P.S.] Captain's trunk is in my possession but in such poor a condition that I will have to box it up. As soon as I can get a box I shall send it off and give you notice of it in a letter.

INCIDENTS

Connected with the Recovery of the Body of the late Captain Edward A. Acton, late Captain, Company K, Fifth Regiment N. J. Volunteers, from Bull Run Battle-field, Jan. 1st, 1863.\(^{32}\)

... Early in the afternoon of December 31st, 1862—day before New Year's—imagine a group of three persons, composed of Isaac Acton, the father of the Captain; John W. Mulford, of Salem, New Jersey; and the writer of this article, at the National Hotel, Washington, D. C., having solemnly resolved to recover, if possible, the body of the late Captain from the battle-field.

The first step in the execution of the resolution named was to secure a general pass from General S. P. Heintzelman, the Military Commander of the Department of Washington and surrounding country extending to near Bull Run battle-field, and who resided at that time near the War Department. Without any delay we wended our way up Pennsylvania Avenue to the residence of the General, who at first positively refused to grant us the pass. After much argument and entreaty he granted it, accompanying the grant with the final expression, uttered with much emphasis, that "I do not think that my extreme pickets extend that far; but, if you are willing to assume all the risks, you can have one."

So with a pass in our possession we commenced our eventful journey about five o'clock that evening, December 31st, 1862, by taking the most direct route to the Long Bridge, after having passed several pickets on the road. We ascertained before our arrival at the Bridge

\(^{32}\) Woodstown Register (N. J.), Feb. 19, 1884.
that the Alexandria boats had stopped running for that day, and that, if we desired to reach Alexandria, Va., that night, we would be obliged to use our own two-wheeled omnibus arrangement, which can be used by any and all foot passengers any hour of day or night. We determined to travel afoot to Alexandria, five miles distant, that evening; and soon the darkness gathering around us, and the reflection of the bristling bayonets of one series of pickets after another along the passage way to the Bridge as evinced by dim picket-fires, so quenched the military ardor of John W. Mulford that he concluded to beat a hasty retreat back to Washington and left Mr. Acton and myself to pursue our journey to Alexandria under cover of a gradually-increasing darkness.

Having passed the long bridge and along the main road for a distance of two or three miles, which by its loneliness was anything but comfortable, we were overtaken by an ambulance containing a driver and a medical officer having a golden leaf on his shoulder-strap. We immediately hailed it and asked from the officer the privilege of a ride to or toward Alexandria, which was very kindly granted, after stating to him our names and our mission to Alexandria. As soon as we were comfortably seated in the ambulance we ascertained, to our mutual satisfaction, that the medical officer before us was Dr. Josiah Curtis, who many years before was one of the most successful teachers of Salem Academy, Salem, N. J., but was now medical director of the hospitals of Alexandria, Va., and immediate vicinity, with headquarters at McVeight Hospital. After this unexpected exchange of acquaintance he said that he would entertain us at his headquarters, and thought he could be of service to us in obtaining transportation from Alexandria to the battle field and would if he could go with us. The ambulance after arriving at Alexandria passed along Washington and Queen streets, reining up in front of the McVeight Hospital after a journey of three miles. Dr. Curtis being a shrewd, wide-awake Yankee, soon had us seated at his own table, loaded with all the delicacies of the season, and converted this New Year's Eve into a regular New Year's festal occasion. After participation of the meal Dr. Curtis pledged his word that he would see the Quartermaster of the Department, and secure transportation if possible direct to the battle-field, and the assistance of an undertaker. But the Quartermaster positively refused to furnish an ambulance on the
ground that only the day before three or four ambulances, with their drivers, had been captured by the local guerillas about half-way between Alexandria and Fairfax Court-House; but he would furnish transportation by rail to Clifton on the Orange & Alexandria railroad, which was about eight or ten miles from the battle field, and then we would take the risk of securing a team there to carry us to the battle field. The Dr. also secured for us the services of an undertaker after the positive refusal of two others to go with us, and after a very discouraging hunt for one for three or four hours. Having completed our arrangements to start with an undertaker the next morning by rail at eight, and having declined an invitation to stay with the Doctor the balance of the night, we rested at the Marshall House on King street till morning, occupying a room only a few feet from the spot where Colonel Ellsworth, in April, 1861, was killed by Jackson, a former proprietor of the hotel. Early the next morning at eight o'clock, January 1st, 1863, Mr. Acton, the Alexandria undertaker and myself constituted the party to take the cars from Alexandria depot for Clifton, the first station this side of Manassas Junction on the Orange & Alexandria railroad. Dr. Josiah Curtis, although eager to go and see the battle-field, declined going on the ground that if he went without permission from the Surgeon General, and assumed any risks, he would be relieved of his command as Medical Director.

After a very tedious journey of seven hours on the railroad the party, composed of Mr. A., the undertaker, and myself, arrived at Clifton about three in the afternoon of January 1st, 1863, taking with us a wooden box partially filled with charcoal as a substitute for a coffin. Upon arriving at Clifton we were confronted with two formidable obstacles to a further advance on our journey. First, the German Colonel, commanding a New York regiment and commanding the extreme pickets of that portion of the Department, positively refused at first to endorse the pass on the ground that his extreme pickets did not extend to the battle-field and that if we ventured beyond them we in all probability would be taken prisoners.

33 Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth of New York was shot by James W. Jackson, proprietor of the Marshall House in Alexandria, while removing a Confederate flag from the hotel. Popular reaction amounted almost to martyrdom.
But after telling him that I would go, even if he did not endorse the pass, because I had authority to do so from his superior officer, he at last reluctantly signed it. Second formidable obstacle to our advance was to secure a driver and team that would carry us to the field. This was effected after a very desparate hunt for two or three hours, because all the farmers whom we at first approached positively refused on any and all terms to furnish us with the needed and *sine qua non* conveyance, alleging as a reason the certainty of capture of the whole party. Having at last secured a team and driver the party, now composed of four persons, set off at six o’clock, and after dark, January 1st, 1863, from Clifton for Centerville, where by a circuitous route through the woods we arrived about eight o’clock in the evening. At Centerville we found the First Vermont Cavalry Regiment stationed, and their pickets extended along the road from Cedarville toward Bull Run battle-field for a distance of near two miles, and this was the last protection furnished us on the road. In defiance of many remonstrances and no encouragement whatsoever from the multitudinous series of pickets through which we passed, we advanced beyond our pickets to the place of burial four miles distant. Mr. Acton and myself resolutely persisted in our determination to advance.

After leaving our pickets, the first evidences of life were manifest in a light at a small farm-house to the left of the road, about a mile beyond our pickets. As the party drew near the locality, the relater of this article, in a spirit of innocent mirth, thought he would test the military courage of the undertaker and driver of the team by the relation of three remarkable incidents, which happened to the writer of this article on Sunday August 31st, 1862. First incident was to inform the party that the writer was taken prisoner early Sunday morning, August 31st, 1862, in that very house, and that I thought that the occupant of that house was the very person who was instrumental in my capture. After giving them this information, the undertaker was so terrified that he wanted to beat a hasty retreat at once back to the pickets. Second incident which increased the timidity of the timid ones of the party, was to show them an apple tree along the roadside, about fifty yards from the farm-house alluded to, beneath whose shade and in the presence of the writer of this article, about two o’clock in the afternoon of August 31st, 1862, a truce party—seven
in number—headed by General Larned\textsuperscript{34} and sent by General Pope,\textsuperscript{35} commander of the Union forces, was met by a truce party—seven in number—headed by General Roger A. Pryor and sent by General Stonewall Jackson, commander of the Confederate forces. An interview was held for a period of two hours whilst General Jackson, alleged to be about a mile in the rear, was deliberating upon propositions for disposal of the sick and wounded Union men that had fallen into the hands of the enemy immediately after the battle. Third incident, which put to another test the courage of the timid of the party, was to state that after the truce party had ended and before the writer had escaped beyond the reach of the Confederate pickets, his body, near by that very locality and by the merest accident, escaped from being riddled by the contents of a dozen Confederate muskets which were pointed at him.

After the relation of these incidents to the party, as well as what had previously occurred to discourage the party, the feelings of the undertaker—who was naturally a coward—were so thoroughly wrought upon, that he not merely insisted upon but begged to turn back when we were within two or three miles of the place of burial. Under the inspiration of this high state of nervous excitement his imagination was so quickened and deranged, that he could picture behind every tree, a rebel cavalryman and in every rustling sound the sound of an enemy's rifle ball. I therefore concluded that if I desired the services of an undertaker, and not a genuine subject for medical treatment as a result of pure fright, I must not subject his courage to any more tests; so I tried to pacify his feelings by advancing fifty yards ahead of the party until we came to the place of burial. After having advanced through the formidable array of barracks on both sides of the road, in which the rebel army was encamped the first winter of the war, and mounting the first high hill beyond the first branch of the Bull Run stream, we soon came to the road along another branch of the stream which led directly to the place of burial at the foot of a high hill which overlooked the whole field of the

\textsuperscript{34} Gen. Larned has not been identified.

\textsuperscript{35} Gen. John Pope had organized the Army of Virginia in June, 1862, to relieve the pressure on McClellan and protect Washington. After the failure of the Peninsula Campaign, McClellan's troops were transferred to Pope's army. With Richmond safe for the moment, the Confederate army began to move against Pope; at Bull Run, Pope was decisively defeated and on Sept. 5 was relieved of his command.
battle. There, under a small tree, the body of the Captain, along with Lieutenant Abbott of the Seventh New Jersey and another of the Eighth New Jersey, was buried with an inscription on a small wooden head board, designating his name and rank. At this spot we arrived about eleven o’clock at night. After a faithful use of pick and shovel for an hour, under the light of the moon which had just begun to rise, we succeeded in removing the body from its resting-place, finding it buried in the Captain’s military clothes surrounded by three or four thicknesses of canvas tent as a winding sheet, and, after a four months’ burial, in such a remarkable state of preservation that the features of the countenance could very readily be recognized.

Such an occasion as the removal of a body from its temporary resting-place on the field of battle at midnight, under the light of the moon which seemed to have risen at that particular hour for the special benefit of this mission party of love and patriotism, beyond all protection from Union bayonets and in the heart of the enemy’s country, could not fail to awaken, not merely in the heart of the bereaved father, but also in the minds of all the party, some very sad-dening thoughts and reflections. All of the party were ready to shed the tear of sympathy on that sad occasion, hallowed by so many sacred surroundings and associations.

The occasion seemed to be a fitting one to the writer to rehearse to the rest of the party the time when and spot where the Captain met his death:— on the 26th of August, 1862, between two and three o’clock in the afternoon, and about half a mile from the top of the hill—at the foot of which he was buried, in a strip of woods skirting a large open field. He was killed by the bullet of a sharp-shooter concealed in a tree, which lacerated his bowels in a terrible manner and caused death in twenty to twenty-five minutes after reception of the wound. The occasion bringing vividly to the recollection of the writer the tree at the edge of the woods about fifty yards from the spot where wounded, beneath whose shade the Captain, in the presence of the surgeon and assistant surgeon of the regiment and four men of his company, died from peritonitis as a result of his wound. His body, by the aid of an ambulance, barely

escaped falling into the hands of the enemy. The occasion also bringing to recollection the spot near by where the Captain on the eve of the battle, and where the regiment was drawn up in line of battle, remarked to the writer that he had a distinct premonition this was to be his last battle; but he was going to do his duty as a soldier, let the consequences be what they may.

But prudence and anxiety to avoid any further risks of capture and imprisonment and death in the enemy's country, forbade us from indulging even the thought of visiting the two last spots alluded to, even though so near at hand, and urged us to get back within our lines as soon as possible.

When the body had been deposited in its temporary coffin (in the wagon) and we were ready to start for home, the hour of midnight had fully arrived. This was the first and last watch meeting that any of us ever celebrated on a battle field.

After a spirited drive of an hour, at one o'clock on the morning of Jan. 2d, 1863, to the utter astonishment and surprise of the Vermont Cavalry pickets, and in contradiction of their prophecies of capture and imprisonment, we arrived with the body, back within our lines, without molestation from any source of rebel guerillas or spies; thus relieving the writer of this article from a responsibility which he never under any circumstances wishes to assume again, and furnishing as much relief to the terrified undertaker as if the State of Virginia had been given him.

After participating in a soldier's meal, at Centerville, at about three o'clock in the morning with the Staff officers of the First Vermont Cavalry Regiment, we wended our way to Fairfax Court House and Fairfax Station on railroad, passing on the way two historical spots of special interest to many Jerseymen. First spot where Phil Kearney, who, in the gallant defence of his State and Country, met his death at Chantilly, Va., Sept. 1st, 1862 at about eight o'clock in the evening. Second spot, not far from the first or about half way between Centerville and Fairfax Court House, where another Jerseyman of directly the opposite stripe and who had command of several regiments at the first battle of Bull Run, kept them picking blackberries when they thirsted for fight and were within sound of the many cannon and in all probability would have converted the first battle of Bull Run from an inglorious defeat to a
glorious victory if these regiments had been allowed to do their duty. . . .

The body was taken by railway from Fairfax Station, Va., to Alexandria, Va., in the 7 o' clock train, Jan. 2d, 1863, and there left for a few days to be embalmed. Thence carried by express to Salem, N. J., where in the midst of relatives and friends it was finally buried in the Friends' burial ground.

O. S. Belden, M.D.

37 This is probably a reference to Gen. Theodore Runyon of the 1st N. J. Brigade, whose troops at the first battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861, served in a reserve capacity to maintain communications and round up stragglers. Gen. Runyon, although under orders, was later criticized for not sending his troops to the front where, it was claimed, they might have prevented the disaster. Foster, 55-57.