The War Between the States was essentially the translation into military terms of a political problem, nationalism versus sectionalism, and its foremost issues, the territorial extension of slavery and the nature of the Union. These questions, so long the province of the politicians, became the prime concern of the masses of both the Union and the Confederacy when the first gun opened fire upon Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. Peaceful secession or peaceful preservation of the Union were no longer possible; indeed, four years of bloody, desperate, human conflict and the stimulation of enduring hatreds took place before solutions of the major political issues were reached at Appomattox Court House.

Initially, men of the North and the South responded to the calls of their respective governments with wild, almost fanatic, bursts of patriotism. Most of the new volunteer soldiers expected the war to be a short, romantic excursion replete with glorious conclusion, but after First Manassas, Shiloh, and the Peninsular Campaign the veteran fighting men of neither side retained many illusions about the character of the hostilities. It readily became apparent that sublime Rebel defiance and grim Yankee determination were involved in a supremely serious contest.

Among the many volunteers who signed the muster rolls of the Union Army during the sobering summer of 1862 was Frank H. Shiras, who joined the center section of Hampton’s Battery F, Independent Pennsylvania Light Artillery, and was sworn into Federal service on August 12. The original sections of the battery were organ-

* Mr. Workmaster is Associate Historian of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg. A teacher and archivist, he is president emeritus of the History Round Table and a member of the Council of the Pennsylvania Historical Association.

1 Frank H. Shiras was born at Pittsburgh in 1830, the son of George Shiras, Sr., and Eliza Herron. He had two younger brothers, George, Jr., born in 1832, and Oliver Perry, born in 1833. His father’s family was active in many endeavors since arriving at Pittsburgh in 1795, most notably the Pittsburgh Point Brewery. His mother’s father was the third pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh. Frank died at Los Angeles, California, in 1913.

ized at Pittsburgh in October, 1861, and the group was employed in the Shenandoah Valley between 1861 and 1862. The new center section joined the veteran portions of the unit shortly after the battle of Cedar Mountain and prior to the crushing defeat of John Pope's Federal Army of Virginia by Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at the battle of Second Manassas. The center section of Hampton's Battery F missed the critical battles of South Mountain and Antietam where the remainder of the unit saw action, and during the winter of 1862-63 the group encamped successively on Bolivar Heights near Harpers Ferry, close to Fairfax Station, and at Aquia Creek Landing. Engaged at Chancellorsville, the battery lost its commander, Captain Robert B. Hampton, who was killed on May 3, 1863, as Lee's troops overwhelmed "Fighting Joe" Hooker's Army of the Potomac. At Gettysburg on July 2 the unit was stationed in the Peach Orchard salient and on July 3 it was situated on the left center of George Gordon Meade's battleline near the focus of Lee's controversial frontal assault. After several minor engagements, Hampton's Battery F was transferred back to the Shenandoah Valley in 1864 where most of its time was spent in quarters near Harpers Ferry. In April, 1865, the battery returned to the East, being posted at Washington.

A number of years before the war, the entire Shiras family became the close friends of Romelius L. Baker, senior trustee of the Harmony Society. The relationship grew, and Frank's brother, George Jr., a promising young member of the Pittsburgh bar, won the gratitude of the Society for his defense of their interests in the case of Davidson versus the Harmony Society. Naturally, the young soldier in Hampton's Battery F wrote to Baker as a friend of his family during his three year term of military service. Baker was an austere yet kindly old gen-

3 Unfortunately, no letter by Shiras describing this battle was found in the Harmony Society Archives.


tleman who headed a communal group consciously opposed to the direct participation of its own members in warfare; nevertheless, the Harmony Society was dedicated completely to the support of the Federal cause on the homefront and Baker was anxious to obtain firsthand information on the progress of Yankee fortunes at the battlefront. Using keen observation and vivid description, Shiras supplied Baker with a series of accounts that retain their intrinsic interest and vitality almost one hundred years after their composition.

A group of these letters came to light during the reorganization of the Harmony Society Archives at Old Economy in 1953, and, with the realization that these manuscripts constitute an exceptionally graphic record of individual military experience during the War Between the States, they were prepared for publication in their entirety. Every attempt was made to reproduce these letters in the most literal manner; however, difficulties arose from the fact that modern printing is unable to recreate a longhand manuscript exactly. Original spelling and punctuation were retained without change, and capitalization was reproduced as accurately as possible. The erratic character of punctuation, capitalization, and spacing necessitated the arbitrary indication of probable sentences through the insertion of blank spaces within the text. Each of the letters is headed by an archival code denoting the initials of the sender and the receiver, the name of the archive, the type of manuscript (Autograph Letter Signed), and the number of the document.

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:I

Washington City
Sept. 3. 1862

Mr R L Baker  
Economy Pa  

Dear Sir

It is Now Nearly one Month Since our Section of the Hampton Battery left Pittsburgh, we Numbered fifty two Men on leaving, at Harrisburg we were Sworen into the United States Service, and furnished with uniforms, we then went by rail road to Baltimore from thence to Washington City, after Spending a day in looking at the City, we went by boat down the Potomac to Alexandria at which place we Seen
the Hotel in which the lamented Ellsworth was killed, it is now used as a hospital for the sick and wounded.

From Alexandria we went by Rail Road to Culpepper, found the town full of wounded men from the battle at Cedar Mountain, saw many dreadful sights every house and all the churches being crammed full of the wounded we then started and marched fifty miles to Front Royal where our cannon were, but found our troops just ready to march back to join Popes army.

So we turned and marched back to Kellys Ford on the Rapahannock River arriving on Friday afternoon here our Section of fifty two men were armed with muskets and furnished with forty rounds of ball cartridge, about five o'clock the battle began General Seigel was in command, after they had been fighting about an hour we were told to charge we rushed up the road, and met Gen Seigel on horseback he called to us in English to come on we then followed him through a corn field but the rebels had retreated across the river we stood near the bank in a swamp, for about two hours but none of us were either killed or wounded, the cannon shot and shell passed close over our heads cut off trees as thick as my body, many men and horses were killed all round us, I saw a shell strike a horse just under the saddle the horse fell on the man and the man died before morning although the shell did not touch him, about nine o'clock both sides stopped fighting.

The next day we started and marched to Catleitt Station, here four of our men and five of our mules were taken by the rebels, we then retreated to Manassa Junction, here we remained a day our army

7 Elmer E. Ellsworth was the young organizer of the colorful United States Zouave Cadets, a Chicago militia unit that made a tremendous impression on the country just prior to the outbreak of the war. Commissioned a colonel, Ellsworth formed the First New York Fire Zouaves in 1861; he was killed by the keeper of a hotel at Alexandria, Virginia, in May of that year after he had entered the building to remove a Confederate flag flying from its roof. Ellsworth was probably the first popular hero to become a martyr of the Northern cause.

8 Major General John Pope's command in the East during the summer of 1862 was the Army of Virginia. He was ridiculed for his bombastic proclamations and his dispatches dated "Headquarters in the Saddle."

9 Major General Franz Sigel earned most of his reputation in the Shenandoah Valley where he was defeated repeatedly. He was eventually replaced by Major General David Hunter who fared little better.

10 The reference is to Manasses Junction, the meeting point of the Manasses Gap Railroad and the Orange & Alexandria Railroad.
was fighting all day under Gen Seigel and held their ground, our Battery lost one Man killed, one had both legs Shot off at the knee's, one lost an arm, and Some five or Six were taken prisoners, they also Captured from our Battery one Cannon and knocked the wheels off another with Solid Shot.

It was a dreadful fight we lost about Eight Thousand Men killed wounded & missing The rebels would rush right up on to the Cannon, Swearing and Cursing at us for being damned Yankee's, they are afraid of Nothing and fight like devils.

The Next day they attacked our troops under Mc Dowell took forty of our Cannon and drove us off the field, the Next day our Battery was ordered to leave the army and March to Washington City and get New Cannon and Seventy five fresh horses. We reached here last Monday Night and are encamped Near the Capitol, as Soon as we get out Cannon and horses we will join the army again.

It is enough to Make a Man Sick to See the Suffering that is Caused by this war, a Constant Stream of wounded Men is Coming in from the army, the Rebels load their Muskets with a ball & three buck Shot which Scatter and wound a great Number of Men.

Virginia is fast becoming a desert Not one house in ten has any one in it, all have gone South, in a March of two hundred Miles I did Not See five young Men, they are all to a Man in Jacksons army, all the fences are burnt up, No farming whatever going on, in the last three weeks I have Not Seen three hundred acres of Corn. I can tell you Mr Baker the whole population will be forced to leave Eastern Virginia before Winter or starve. The State is ruined. Both armies are taking everything they find.

Excuse this Scrawl as I have but little time to Myself and a Camp is but a poor place for letter writing.

Please and remember Me to all My friends in Economy, and let Me hear from you by letter at your Earliest Convenience, My Address is as follows

[Endorsed] F H Shiras
Hamptons Battery Banks Division
via Washington City.

Bad News Mr Baker, the army has fallen back to the banks of the
Potomac, we have just learned that Banks & Seigel are at the chain Bridge seven Miles above the City, this May be false Cannot Say, the whole City is in an uproar.

But I must close, so wishing that the dread realities of war May Not be Carried into the good State of Pennsylvania as has been threatened by the rebels

I remain your friend

[Endorsed]  F H Shiras

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:II

Washington City
October 1st 1862

Mr R L Baker

Dear Sir

We are Still in this City, that is the Center Section of the Battery under Command of Lieut N. A. Harbours, the other two Sections are at Maryland Heights, they have been in the late fights, had three Men wounded, and three horses killed.

we are waiting for horses, they are very hard to get, we have every thing else ready for action.

When we first Came to washington we Made a bad location for our Camp down on what is Called the Island, Nearly all of us became Sick, two of our Men have died, one a young Mr Lee of Pittsburgh Merchant Tailor, the other a Son of Mr Nevin of Sewickley, the bodies have both been embalmed and Sent to Pittsburgh. We have changed our Camp and are Now located on Capitol Hill and hope to be More healthy.

Washington is full of Sick and wounded Soldiers, all the churches but three have been turned into Hospitals So has the Patent Office and also the Capitol buildings, City Hall and a large Number of Private houses.

11 The reference is to Second Lieutenant Alfred N. Harbours.
12 Southwest Washington, divided from the other sections of the city by an old canal, was known popularly as the Island.
13 The young men were Private Richard H. Lee and Corporal William I. Nevin.
The heat here is intense, and no rain has fallen for two months. Everything is covered with dust.

I have had a fine chance for seeing the city, and have visited everything worth seeing. Among other curiosities, I have seen the coat in which General Jackson fought the battle of New Orleans, the printing press on which Ben Franklin worked when a boy, the bear skin dress in which Dr. Kane made his trip to the North Pole, an entire suit of clothes worn by General Washington his tent, sword, camp chest tea urn &c, also the war saddle of Baron Stuben used by him in the war of the Revolution. Also a lot of fine silk robes, two splendid swords and two saddles, bridle & horse trappings presented to James Buchanan & General Cass by the Japanese commissioners when they were in Washington a year or so ago, and any amount of other curiosities to great to mention.

I yesterday Mr. Baker received my first promotion being made 1st corporal of the section, and gunner on the first gun. In time of battle, I will have entire control of the gun, pointing the gun, giving the command to fire &c, it requires steady nerves, good eye, and a man to be a good judge of distances, so as to know what kind of fuse and shell to use.

I have been sick some, but at present am well and hearty.

Please remember me to Mr. Henritzy, Mr. Lentze, Beam Sylvestus and all other friends\(^{14}\) also Squire Irons, tell him I shall write him some of these days.

My best regards to yourself

Ever your friend

[Endorsed] Frank H Shiras

Hamptons Battery Washington DC.

\(^{14}\) The two prominent members of the Harmony Society mentioned were Jacob Henrici and Jonathan Lentz.
Dear Friend

For some time I have been intending writing you but have been so busy as not to be able.

In your last letter you made some enquiries about the condition of the Washington Monument, all work was suspended on it when I was in Washington City, and it looked truly desolate, everything being covered up under canvas. No work has been done for about a year. Nor can I give you any information as regards the resumption of work on it. It is high enough to make quite a show as you view the City from the dome of the Capitol.

We are located on top of Bolivar Heights, a hill about as high above Harpers Ferry as the vineyard hill is above your town, all the woods have been cut down for three miles in every direction so we may have a fair chance to shoot, rifle pits and breast works have been made clear across from the Potomac River to the Shenandoah, about four miles. Harpers Ferry is located just like Pittsburgh between the two rivers.

Knapps Pittsburgh Battery is camped just next to us, and a battery from the State of Maine below us, making eighteen guns, in all, four are brass twelve pounders the rest are ten pound rifled cannon, throwing shell four miles in any direction. On Maryland Heights just across the Potomac we have a large number of heavy guns all fixed for instant action, then we have a force of sixteen thousand infantry, all armed with the rifled musket & sword bayonet, under the command of Major General Slocum, this large force is called the 12th Army Corp, and is again divided into three divisions, we belong to the Second division commanded by General John W Geary, formerly Governor of Kansas and at one time a resident of Westmoreland County Penna. The weather has been very fine here all fall, not very cold, just such weather as our Generals like but still very little has been done towards whipping the rebels,

15 Hampton's Battery F normally was equipped with six ten-pound Parrott rifled cannon.
Last week I done Some Shooting at Some rebel Cavalery they were about two Miles off on a hill, they Soon ran after we began firing, but I do Not know if I hit any of them or Not.

I think we will remain here all winter we are Now building a log Stable for our horses & preparing for Cold weather.

I Shall live in a tent all winter, by keeping big fires we Shall keep from freezing.

The people here are all rebels they hate us bitterly, and appear determined to fight to the last, the women are the worst, they declare they will fight after the Men are all killed rather than give up.

The removal of Gen McClelland gives almost general Satasfaction to the army here, and I hope May be for good, and that General Burn-sides May take Richmond by New-Years day, Still we Must have due patience You know the old Saying "Rome was Not built in a day," and I fear the taking of Richmond will require time and a vast loss of life.

Before long I think our Battery will take a March up to Winchester to See if Jackson has left the Shenandoah Valley or Not, it is hard telling where he is, he Marches So fast, he is hard to Catch We May have Some fighting to do before getting back. If So I Shall write you full particulars if I am Not killed Myself.

Father is having a great time fishing at Dubuque one day he Caught fifty white Salmon,

My health Continues good and Since Cold weather Set in I am becoming quite fat.

Remember Me to all friends in Economy, and hoping this May find you in good health and wishing you long life and happiness, here and here after

I remain
Your friend

[Endorsed] F H Shiras

P. S.
Please write Me Soon and address to F H Shiras 12th Army Corps, Hamptons Battery, via Washington City

16 This expression on the occasion of the removal of Major General George Brinton McClellan is surprising in view of the general esteem in which "Little Mac" is said to have been held by his troops. See Warren W. Hassier, Jr., General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), passim.
Camp Near Fair Fax Station Va  
Dece 25th 1862

R L Baker Esq  
Economy Pa

Dear Sir

Yours dated on the Ninth Came duly to hand last Friday, we are Now encamped about one Mile from Fair Fax Station on the Alexandria & Orange Rail Road, and are distant fifteen Miles from Washington City, and three Miles from Fair Fax Court House Va.

This portion of the army is Called the 12th army Corp and is Commanded by Major General Slocum and Numbers about twenty thousand Men, divided into two divisions under Generals Geary & Williams, we have a total artillery force of thirty Six Guns mostly ten pound Parrots the balance are twelve pound Brass Guns. Our battery belongs to Gen Gearys Division.

On the tenth of this Month we left Harpers Ferry, and Marched to Leesburg then to Fair Fax Court House then to the town of Dumfries Near the Potomac, here we found the rear guard of Seigels army and learned of the defeat of Burnsides at Fredericksburg, and received orders to fall back on or Near Washington for fear of Jackson Making a flank Movement on the capital. We arrived here on last Friday after having Marched for ten days from daylight to dark, and experienced every kind of weather, first three inches of Snow and bitter Cold, then rain and Mud, Causing the roads to Cut up in a Most dreadful Manner, then it changed to Cold again, freezing the Mud on the top but our Guns and horses broke through every step, We only Marched Six Miles the last day from daylight to dark and part of the time had ten horses hitched to a Gun, we were also forced to do without tents Sleeping on the bare ground and having only one woolen blanket for a cover our Crackers also gave out and for two days I lived on raw fat pork & Coffee, Pork we find eats better on a March raw, than Cooked it is all fat and when Cooked Melts all away. We have Now got tents and are living pretty well, but will Not be allowed to build winter quarters, but be ready to March at any time to any place the Rebels May Make an attack. Or if Jackson Crosses the Mountains again we will
return to Harpers Ferry and be ready to keep him out of Maryland.

This last defeat of ours is a Sad affair, and I fear will result in the independence of the South. How do you good people at home feel about it, does it Not begin to look as if fighting was of No use, and that the Sooner we Make peace the better. The future looks dark to Me, I Can See No Cause for hoping when our Generals act as they do. And we are fast running into debt to Such an extent that every one will have to pay half his income to Support the Government & army. We have received No pay yet, and Many of the Men have Not got any for Six and Seven Months.

My health is very good I weigh Now one hundred and Sixty one pounds a gain of twenty three pounds Since leaving home.

And Now Mr Baker hoping you May all be enjoying a happy Christmas in Economy, and that this Miserable war May be ended ere another Christmas Comes round, I Send My kind regards to you one and all, My address is as below

Your friend

[Endorsed] Frank H Shiras
Hamptons Pennsylvania Battery
Gen Gearys Division 12th army Corp
via Washington City DC.

Please write soon

FHSR-LB:HSA:ALS:V

Acquia Creek Landing, Bank of the Potomac
January 27th 1863

Mr R L Baker )
)
Economy Pa )

Dear Sir

Yours dated January 12th enclosing your kind gift of five dollars was duly received, and you May depend it was Most welcome, we are Still without any pay whatever.

we have been Elven days Marching from Fairfax to this place a distance of only forty Seven Miles, Never in My life do I wish to witness Such roads & Mud it rained on us day and Night for seven days, all My
clothes and blankets were soaked, and at night we had to lay down just as we were without tents or covering and without any dry thing to put on. In many places we had to put sixteen horses to each gun to pull them through and out of the mud holes. Our supply trains all stuck fast, and were forced to throw out and leave any amount of boxes of crackers barrels of pork & beans, and our line of march is lined with dead horses & mules, all this was done so our corps could join Gen. Seigel and act as a reverse force in the great battle that was to have taken place at Fredericksburg last week, but the weather spoiled all of General Burnside's plans and the attack has been given up.

We shall most likely stay here some weeks, we are about seventy miles from Washington city by river, and fifteen miles from Fredericksburg by rail road, the government has built large warehouses and docks, and all the supplies for the army of the Potomac are received and sent by rail road from here. Nearly a hundred sail vessels steamers and canal boats can be seen from our tent door, our wagons joined us last night bringing our tents so we are once more under shelter, it is quite warm and raining hard.

We are now part of General Seigel's command, his head quarters are at Stafford Court House seven miles inland from here, he came out to meet us on our march, along with General Kane, a brother of Doctor Kane whose trip to the North Pole you have most likely read, General Seigel looks very well, much better than when I saw him last fall, he will now have about thirty-five thousand men under his command, and it is said will act as the reserve division to the army. But I think we will have no battle until spring comes and better roads, this last move of the army has killed thousands of horses & mules destroyed a large quantity of stores, and the troops have endured very much suffering and large numbers will have to be sent to the hospitals.

The report today is that Hooker is in command instead of Burnside, I hope Mr. Baker we may have success, but I feel rather blue and uneasy about the war, the troops are growing discontented not being paid, and the country cannot long stand the expense, I think the result will be known by June, if we do not gain some decided military success by that time, the south will win her independance.

Tell Squire Irons I wrote him a letter from Fairfax, as I had promised so to do before leaving home.
My kind regards to you one and all,

Ever your friend

Please write me)

[FH Shiras]

at your earliest)

convience)

Hamptons Pennsylvania Battery
Gearys Division 12th Army Corps
via Washington City

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:VI

Acquia Creek
March 22sec 1863
Sunday

R L Baker Esq

Dear Sir

Yours dated March 19th I have just received, Yours written after your anniversary Never reached Me,17 I have all along feared you had written, and it had Miscarried. Many letters do Not Come to hand.

Our Camp here is quite a pleasant one, we are about one Mile from the rail road depot & Steam boat landing, the Potomac is about four Miles wide at this place and from the hill back of our Camp we have a Splendid view of the river for fully fifteen Miles up Stream, and four down. Stream. The Landing is full of Steam boats and Ships bringing forage and food for the army, our Corps was reviewed last week by General Hooker he expressed himself very well Satisfied with the look of the troops, He is full of Confidance and determined to have a big battle before long. we are expecting to March every day but the roads are Still very bad. I do hope we May for our Countrys Sake be able to bring this war to a close by Next fall, but we Shall have Some big battles and hard fighting this Summer.

There is about five thousand Sick Men in the hospitals two Miles below here at Wind Mill point, they are Mostly laying in large tents, the deaths average about twenty daily.

17 Shiras was making reference to the anniversary of the Harmony Society's founding.
Our battery continues very healthy, Still we are Needing More Men, we Now Number one hundred and Seven, but Should have one hundred and fifty Six. Lieut Harbours will leave for Pittsburgh before long to get recruits.

I had a letter from father yesterday he will return to Economy about the first of May, he and Mother are very well.

The Money you Sent Me was very acceptable as at that time I was without a Cent and I thank you from My heart Mr Baker for being So kind and thoughtful and also for writing to Me as you have done, letters from friends are one of our Main pleasure’s here in the army.

There is Still Some Snow on the ground but the Sun is Shining clear and warm today, and good weather Must Soon Come, then I hope we May Move forward and drive the rebel army from off the Soil of Virginia.

Seigels Corps is encamped about four Miles to our right Seigel has Concluded to Still remain in the army, he has been wanting to resign, as he and Halleck do Not get along well, the whole army would be Sorry to See him leave, he is Considered one of our best fighting generals

I See by the papers you had a visit from General Negely.

Remember Me to all My friends in Economy I am glad to hear that you are all enjoying Such good health, I have lived this whole winter in a tent and have Slept on the ground every Night and yet I Never enjoyed better health In writing Me Mr Baker address as below and I think it will Come Safely to hand, I will write you whenever we begin to Move and fight if it So happens I escape without being hurt Myself

Ever your friend

[Endorsed]  F H Shiras
Hamptons Pennsylvania Battery
Gearys Division 12th Army Corps
via Washington City

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:VII

Acquia Creek
April 20th 1863

Mr R L Baker )
)  
Economy Pa )

Dear Sir
Yours dated March 30th Came duly to hand, we are Still in Camp, although expecting to Move forward every hour against the rebs, we were already to Start last Tuesday but Something went wrong, I fear our repulse at Charleston has Stopped Hooker for the time being. 

Yesterday Halleck, Stanton, and Lincoln went up to the front, Showing that we will Soon I think have a big battle all the troops I See are eager for to go into battle, and if our generals only do their duty we Shall I think Soon be in Richmond.

The roads are good and the weather Mild, but as yet the grass has grown but little and everything is very backward for the time of year.

Father & Mother will Soon be back with you.

After we get to Marching and fighting, Mr Baker I Shall if Spared and keep My health, be able to write you concerning Matters of More interest than I Now Can laying here in Camp with little or Nothing to do. I Shall write you on every convient oppertunity.

My kind regards to you all, and I truly hope you May all Continue to enjoy the good health you have always as a Society enjoyed, and that we May Soon be able to rejoice together over the final overthrow of the rebellion, if I am Spared to return in Safety to your peaceful town.

We have had two balloons up for Several days, but what they See, is kept Secret.

Please write Me when convient to yourself

your friend

[Endorsed]  F H Shiras

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:VIII

Camp Near Potomac Creek
June 3rd 1863

Mr R L Baker

Dear Sir

Yours of May 20th Came duly to hand we have once More changed our Camp being Now about two Miles back of Falmouth, We have

18 The reference probably is to the attempts of the Union Navy under Admiral du Pont to capture Charleston, South Carolina, the symbol of secession.
had No rain for three weeks and the dust is almost unbearable. the wind begins to blow shortly after Sunrise and during the whole day we are enveloped in clouds of dirt & dust.

Our battery has been transferred from the 12th Corps to the Artillery Reserve Corps, Lieut Irish has been appointed Captain in place of our late lamented Captain and I think will Make a good officer\(^\text{19}\) he has shown himself to be one of the bravest Men in the battery.

Our Mail does Not Come to hand from Some Cause, Not More than a dozen of letters have been received by the whole battery Since the 10th of May.

Our Camp is on the Fitzhugh Estate at one time the finest in Eastern Virginia and it was on this farm that Washington passed his youthful days, General Sickles has taken possession of the house as his headquarters the garden has been partly occupied as a burying ground by the Fitzhugh family for Many years and over the graves are Many handsome Marble Monuments.

But all is Now going to destruction every rod of fence burnt and all the wood cut down and burnt up for fire wood.

In fact utter ruin is fast coming over this whole land, a vast treeless dusty plain Now reaches as far as you can See, with here and there a Solitary chimney Standing to Show where once Some house has been.

Not hearing from father or Mother of late, I judge they Must be by this time back with you good people in Economy. I wrote Mother several days ago Sending it in Care of brother George.

The rebels on the other Side of the river have been very busy for the last two weeks improving their earthworks, they have every ford guarded by artillery. This army will Make No More until reinforced by the drafted Men.

My kind regards to all friends in, and about Economy.

Ever your friend

[Endorsed] F H Shiras

Address

F H Shiras
Hamptons Pennsylvania Battery
Tompson's Volunteer Division of Artillery
Reserves Army of the Potomac, Va

\(^{19}\) The gentleman receiving the promotion was Nathaniel Irish.
Mr R L Baker

Dear Friend

It has been Sometime Since I have written you. we have been So constantly on the Move for over a Month that letter writing has almost been impossible.

About the Middle of June we broke up our Camp Near Fredricksburg Va and Marched to Fairfax Va, here we remained Several days, until we learned that Lee was in Maryland, we then Marched to Edwards Ferry where we crossed the Potomac on Pontoon bridges, then we Marched to Fredrick City Md, then by Woodboro & Tanneytown into Pennsylvania just back of Gettysburg on Thursday Morning July 2sec A battle had taken place the Night before between the rebels and the 1st and 11th Corps it was a bloody affair both the Corps behaved well but were at first overpowered, but the 12th Corps joined them and they drove the revels back about two Miles. 20

Considerable fighting went on Thursday until about four O clock when our battery and about twenty More were ordered to the front, our post was in a peach orchard along Side of a fine two Story brick house we had barely got ready when the “rebs” charged with a Shout and also began firing with More than a hundred Cannon all along the line, in a few Minuets the Smoke was so thick I could Not See anything in front, under cover of this they ran a battery down within two hundred yards of us and poured load after load of grape on us, the peach tree branches were cut to atoms, the bullets flew round us like hail hundreds of infantry Men fell dying and dead around us, Adam Rath wheel driver on My Gun fell stone dead off his horse Shot through the head, Jacob Kersh fell his left leg torn off by a round Shot, John Her bert dropped with a grape Shot in his leg, Captain Irish tumbled off

20 These few sentences are an over-simplification of the battle of July 1. The Confederates actually drove the Union I and XI Corps southward through the streets of the town from the battlefield of the first day toward Cemetery Hill where the Union XII Corps was held in reserve. The pursuit was abandoned by the Confederates because General Lee was not yet on the field and on the pretext of approaching darkness. The Rebels then retired to reform their batteline in preparation for the battle of July 2, but the failure to press the retreating Union forces proved to be a major factor in the result of the battle of Gettysburg.
his horse Struck by a Shell on the left leg, horse after horse fell dying or dead, Six horses on Number 1—Gun fell dead all at once, we now got the Command to fall back, just as the rebels charged on us they got all round our guns, but a New Hampshire regiment charged and drove the rebs back and Saved us all from being taken prisoners, we were forced to leave one gun having No horses to draw it off with,

We now went to the rear got a fresh Supply of powder and Shell, and Some Coffee to drink about ten O clock we hauled out in the dark as quiet as we could and posted our guns on the left Center of the New battle line, as day broke we could see a long line of rebel infantry and batteries drawn up 1300 yards distant, a few shots only were fired during the Morning where we were but over on the right wing the fight was very heavy, the rebs charged No less than thirteen times but were always repulsed, About two O clock while we were all laying round taking it easy, two Signal guns were fired in quick succession and before I Could get on My feet More than one hundred and fifty Cannon were discharged at us, then ensued an artillery fire on both Sides of the Most awful kind, it was one Never ending roar Shells dropped and exploded on the ground over our heads back of us, and in front turn where you would the work of death was going on, Caissone after Caissone blew up horses fell by dozens Neighing and Making the Most unearthly of Sounds in their death agony, in about forty Minuets more the order came Cease firing, we now lay still for fully a half hour, the rebs kept firing however as hard as ever, The word now came down the line, prepare Cannister Shot, the rebs are going to charge, fire only at the infantry.

In five Minuets more we saw a dark gray solid mass of men come slowly out of the woods in the front they had to cross two clover fields to reach us, we now poured Case Shell into them but still they came on, at one place near the right our men gave way but soon rallied for about five Minuets, Neither side gave way, then several hundred rebs dropped their muskets and rushed into our lines, soon the whole of Long Streeths Division gave way, 21 our men now charged and the rebs broke for the woods all this time their artillery kept pouring a

---

21 Shiras was never at his best when identifying units of army organization, especially when they were from the Confederate States Army. Here he was referring to brigades from Lieutenant General James Longstreet's Corps and the later reference to "Hill's Men" concerns brigades from Lieutenant General A. P. Hill's Corps.
Shower of Shell and grape on us, we Now turned our whole fire on them, but in ten Minuets More we Saw a Second line of Infantry Coming down on us this was Hills Men, they Soon broke however and ran for the woods we No began Shelling their batteries for over two hours the firing was incessant on both Sides, Most all My Men had left, all our officers had been hit and left the feild but Captain Irish, he found two of our Men behind a large rock and Sent them to Me I had fired about five More round when a 24 pound shell burst right under the gun, all the Men fell, I thought dead, but only one Named Purdy was badly hurt, he was a Mass of blood & dirt, I and another Man picked him up and Carried him up behind a large rock here we found Frank Weyman laying Shot in the Mouth an awful looking object his head Swelled big as a bushel also Lieut Miller bullet through his leg Sargent Todd bullet in his leg, Basset hit in the Side Lieut Stevinson hit on the head, all were in a pile behind the rock to avoid the flying Shell, leaving Purdy with them I returned to My gun and Continued firing until dark,

We lay Still expecting an attack all Night but None took place about Eight O clock Next Morning another battery Came and releived us, and we went to the rear, Lee's army was on the retreat and we Marched round by Fredrick City to this place, we are expecting a battle every hour.

Our total loss was three Men killed twenty eight wounded, and five officers wounded thirty one horses killed and one gun lost.

Day before yesterday a dreadful accident happened [+] us, one gun had been left loaded after the battle, one of our Men Not knowing it, tried a friction tube in it, it went off killing one of our best Men Named Charles Bright and badly wounding another.

Henry Atwood from Pittsburgh arriving this Morning, he Came on with Will Weyman to hunt up Frank Weyman they found him at Baltimore alone, and badly in want of attention, our other Men are all Scattered in different hospitals.

22 The reference is to Private Hugh Purdy.
23 The men behind the rock were Second Lieutenant Joseph L. Miller, Sergeant (later First Lieutenant) Joseph B. Todd, and Corporal James Basset. No record of a Lieutenant Stevinson appears on the battery roll.
24 This accident occurred on July 10, 1863, at Boonsboro, Maryland, and it permits the attachment of a positive date to this letter.
I have Not heard from father Mother or George Since the battle I have written a Number of times.

My kind regards to you one & all in Economy Please and excuse all Mistakes as letter writing Surrounded by talking Noisy Soldiers is No easy Matter, please write Me at your earliest convience

Your friend

[Endorsed] F H Shiras
Hamptons Pennsylvania Battery (Co F)
Tylers Artillery Reserves, 1st Brigade
Army of the Potomac

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:X

Warrenton Junction Va
Sept 13th 1863

Mr R L Baker )
)
Economy Pa )

Dear Sir

I had intended writing you long ere this, but our daily life has been So dull and devoid of all interest Since the Maryland Campaign, that I have put off from day to day writing you hoping that More active Movements would Soon take place.

We have been Six weeks in this Camp today doing Nothing but drill about two hours each day, our Camp is located on the edge of a large woods, the Country here is very flat, the Soil red Clay, in Summer water is very Scarse, but in the winter the whole Surface is More or less covered by water.

The farms here are very large Mostly from fifteen to twenty five hundred acres, all the Negro's have left for the North, or been Sent South by their Masters, No Crops of any account have been raised for the last two years Most all the houses are deserted, desolation Covers the whole of the Country, what few people are left are bitter rebels.

Our battery Marched 286 Miles during the last Maryland Campaign, We have Marched Since leaving Pittsburgh thirteen Months ago, about 1663 Miles.

A heavy Cannonade is going on at the front today, our Men are Shell-
ing the rebel picket line I presume, as the rebels have become very Savage and cross of late Shooting our pickets every chance they get. We are Sad in Need of Men in this army, the Conspects are poor Soldiers as a class, deserting on every chance and we fear in battle will be of very little account. War Matters in the South and West look favorable and even Charleston will Most undoubtedly fall this Month.

I had a visit day before yesterday from the Rev Mr [illeg.] whose family are Now with you at the hotel, he will visit Pittsburgh before long and lecture at Sewickley on the battle of Gettysburg.

We Soldiers feel very anxious about the result of the fall elections in Ohio & Pennsylvania the Success of the Union Party is all important, every vote ought to be polled,

The Success of the Peace Party will give the rebels fresh hope, and they will prolong the Struggle in hopes of a Compromise, but elect Curtin and Brough in Pennsylvania and Ohio this fall, and with reasonable luck by our armies, we will crush the Davis government and have true peace over the whole land by Next Summer.

My kind regards to Mr Henrici and all other friends in Economy, Write Soon

Ever your friend

[Endorsed] F H Shiras
Hamptons Penna Battery
1st Volunteer Brigade Artillery Reserve Corps
Army of the Potomac

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:XII

Friend R L Baker

As we are Now Settled in Camp for it May be a few days I shall write you a few lines that you May know I am Still Safe in the land of the living From the Newspapers you will have learned that the Army of the Potomac has been on the Move for the last two weeks, our battery left Culpeper Va this day two weeks ago falling back along the track of the Alexandria Rail Road to Manassa junction, we then turned off crossing Bull Run at Mitchells Ford thence we Marched to Centerville.

On Thursday the 15th we were ordered to join the 2sec Corps under
Command of General Warren, at Mitchells Ford on Bull Run, we Started and reached the Ford about three O clock in the afternoon it was a Cold dark wet day, our troops were laying along the run bank, we posted our five Cannon on a high bank above the ford, in about a half an hour we Saw the “grey” “backs” Slipping down among the pine brush on the other Side, in another five Minuets they began firing, Soon they began to Yell as usual, and we knew they were going to charge, all at once out they Came in Solid line, and at the Same time they rushed up Seven Blakely Cannon and commenced pouring Shell into our infantry, we Now also began firing and in twenty Minuets drove them off killing in their battery one horse two Men wounding two Men, dismounted one Cannon Smashed one powder chest and only lost in our battery one horse, our firing was very accurate, and if they had Not retreated we would have used them up in a few Minuets longer, their infantry kept firing until dark but only killed a few Men, they then retreated.

We remained at the Ford until the following Monday and were witnesses of the death of a deserter by Shooting.

It was an awful Sight, the deserter was a Small plain looking Man, he Showed No fear About two O clock in the afternoon the line was formed at General Caldwells Tent first Marched the guard twenty five Men then Came four Men Carrying the Coffin then Came the deserter arm & arm with the Chaplin, then the Men who were to Shoot him and last the band playing a dead March they Marched Slowly down the hill about a Mile on to the run bottom here Some four thousand of his fellow Soldiers were drawn up in a hollow Square with the grave in the Center, he was Marched Slowly past his grave the Coffin placed along Side of it and his Coat & Cap removed his hands fastened behind his back and his eyes Covered by a cloth, he then Sat down on his Coffin, and after a Short pause the word was given and a volley fired, Most of the balls Struck him in the face he fell across his Coffin dead What an awful way to die Mr Baker ——— to March behind ones own Coffin down to the grave What agony Must a Man thus endure, Yet it Must be for desertion is the ruin of an army.

We are Now encamped on the Warrenton Rail Road about two Miles from the town, it has been raining for a Couple of days and we are fairly buried in Mud Still it is Said we Must advance as Soon as pos-
sible to keep Lee from going South to help Bragg. it will be almost impossible to do So Yet, as the rebs have destroyed the rail road, and we Must fix it first So as to get forage and rations.

Mr Baker I am very Much obliged to you all for your efforts in My favor with Agnew for promotion, but it is a difficult Matter to be promoted in artillery, Much More So than in any other branch of the Service.

I have heard from father & Mother at Madison, wisconsin, father is having fine Sport fishing.

I write this on an oats bag on the gun Carriage and My fingers are Stiff from Cold, So please excuse this bad writing, My kind regards to you all, I trust Grant will gi'c the rebels their death blow in the South this winter, for we Cannot do Much here for want of Men.

Pray write Me and address

Your friend

[Endorsed] F H Shiras
Hamptons Battery, Penna Artillery Reserve Corps
Army of the Potomac
FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:XII

Camp Near Brandy Station
Dece 16th 1863

Mr R L Baker )

) Economy Pa )

Dear Friend

As we are once More enjoying a Season of Comparitive rest and quietness, I Shall this Morning try and pen you a few lines.

The Artillery brigade of the 2sec Corps of which we are a part Consists of Seven batteries Numbering a total of forty two guns, under the Command of Colonel Monroe, we are Now encamped Near Brandy Station and in Sight of the farm of John Minor Botts25 the Country from here to the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains is one vast plain with the exception of one high knob called Poney Mountain on this Side of the Rapidan, all our Movements are fully exposed to the observa-

25 John Minor Botts was a strong Unionist from Virginia who deplored sectional agitation over the slavery issue during the 1850’s.
tion of Lee who holds possession of all the high peaks of the Blue Ridge on which his Signal Corps keep Constant watch of all our doings through powerful glasses.

During the last week we have built ourselves log huts 12 by 8 feet for every Mess of five Men and put Stone fire places in each of them our Next job will be building Stables for our poor horses, the last advance over the Rapidan Nearly used them up during the Seven days and Nights we only got the harness off them one Night.

We also Suffered Much from the Cold, Monday night on the Chancellorsville plank road Near Clarkes Mountain I Saw a large Number of Men taken out dead from the Rifle Pits, from having No fires as it was too risky to build any at Night on account of the rebel Sharpshooters, who kept Shooting every chance they got.

Our battery was under very heavy Musketery fire at Robertsons Tavern and a heavy artillery fire at Mine Run, but were So fortunate as to escape with only two Men wounded.

Furloughs for ten days are Now being issued for two Men out of every hundred to go home, but I fear as My Name Comes very low down on the Roll I will Not get any this winter Still I would like very much to be able to get one and visit you all, and See father and Mother before encountering again the risks of another Summers battles and Marches, and Mr Baker I have been informed that Mr Stanton of the War Department, will grant furloughs if application be Made through and by the proper parties to him, Will you be so kind as to use your influence in My favor through General Morehead or the Hon Mr Williams, who is said to have great influence with Mr. Stanton if you Should See fit to Make any effort in My favor you had best State that I have Seen Sixteen Months of active Service, and have received No furlough Since enlisting, also State I hold the rank of Sargent and give My full address So in Case they take any Notice or action in the Matter the War Department will know just what portion of the army I am in,

Captain Thompson and Lieut Paul of our batter leave in the Morning on a furlough for Pittsburgh. 26

26 The reference is to Captain James Thompson and First Lieutenant Robert Paul.
My kind regards to you all, hoping that good health and all that makes this life pleasing may be your portion.

Ever your
friend

[Endorsed]  F H Shiras
Hamptons Penna Battery
Artillery Brigade 2sec Corps
Army of the Potomac

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:XIII

Harpers Ferry Va
Sept 1st 1864

Mr R L Baker  )
)  )
Economy Pa  )  Dear Sir

Since I was home on a furlough, Nothing of any interest of which to write has fallen across my path as a Soldier. We have been armed with Muskets and been doing picket duty along the Shenandoah River for about six weeks, Sheridan has once again advanced up the Valley and it is to be hoped he will succeed in taking Lynchburg and thus aid Grant in his efforts before Richmond.

This town is about ruined by the war - one half of the houses have been burnt, Five Churches are occupied as horse Stables by our officers, and all the United States Arsenal Buildings are only so many piles of broken burnt bricks.

We are encamped on the high ground between the two rivers Shenandoah & Potomac, just back of the town, we are Strongly entrenched, beyond us towards Charlestown a high ridge extends from river to river, it was on it we were encamped Nearly two years ago when we were in the 12th Army Corp.

The weather here has become quite Cold at Night, but very hot during the day, Causing Considerable fever & ague, our Company has Now twenty four Men laying in the Baltimore Hospitals Sick, and five have died Since the 1st of July of Typhoid Fever.

I hope Mr Baker the draft will prove a Success this time for we are
Now badly in Need of Men, and as large Numbers of those now in Service will receive their discharge before Spring their time having expired Men Must be had to fill up their places, and also increase our armies above what they Now are if we want to end the rebellion any-ways Soon.

I had a letter from Mother Saying She would return to Economy this week, father has been with you Sometime I believe.

I hear old Mr George A Bayard has taken a young wife this summer he Must be verging on Eighty years of age, his New wife is about twenty Six.

I would Not be at all Surprised if we remain here all winter on the 12th of Next October all the old Members of the battery will receive their discharge, we expected to get out also as we were So promised when we enlisted, but at Harrisburg we were Mustered for three full years So we are Now told me Must remain until the 8th of Next Au-gust.

I am enjoying the best of health and if only am So fortunate for the balance of My time as I have been in the past I Shall have Nothing of which to complain in My Soldier life.

My kind regards to all friends in Economy, pray write Me Soon

Your friend

[Endorsed] F H Shiras
Battery "F," Indpt Penna Artillery
Harpers Ferry Va

FHS-RLB:HSA:ALS:XIV

Hamptons Battery
January 20th 1865

Mr R L Baker
)
)
Economy Pa
)

Dear Friend

It has been Some length of time Since I have written you, and the rea-son is our Mode of life in Camp has So little possessing any interest that I find but little worth writing of.
We are encamped Near the banks of the Potomac on the Maryland Side, and distant from the town of Harpers Ferry about one Mile, we have a fine horse Stable good board roof, and good huts for the Men,

My daily life is about as follows, at Six O clock every Morning the bugle Sounds, when I get up Start the fire, put on the kettle of water, for Coffee, at Six and a half O clock the roll is Called and the bugle blows for feed, and the horses are then fed, after which I get breakfast at Eight the bugle again Sounds when all the Sick are Marched to the doctor and examined, Then we have guard Mount that is Twelve Men are detailed for the ensuing twenty four hours as guard on the guns and horses, at Nine O clock the bugle again Sounds when our horses are Marched to the river and watered, at ten the bugle blows for drill on the guns by the Cannoniers, we drill until half past Eleven, then Cook and eat dinner, wash dishes Cut wood, at half past three again water the horses half past four the bugle Sounds and the whole Company turns out in full dress the roll is Called, and all who are absent reported for punishment Then the bugle again Sounds to feed the horses and Curry, then comes Supper, at Six the bugle Sounds for hay for the horses. Seven and a half the bugle again Calls out the whole Company, the roll is Called, all who are absent are reported for punishment, at eight the bugle blows when every light Must be put out in Camp, and No Noise whatever be Made.

Such Mr Baker is the daily life of an artillery Soldier when in Camp, of course on the March it is different, everything is done by the bugle Calls, and the whole Company is Moved like a Machine,

The weather is Now Cold, and dry, and but little wind So we are living very comfortable I enjoy the best of health

There are Some Splendid farms Now for Sale in this State (Maryland) and the improvements first class, labor very cheap Seven dollars per Month & board, and plenty of Second class Negroes for board alone, but these are generally boys and old Men.

I was Surprised on our late March to Winchester and Charlestown Virginia to See how the Negro’s Still cling to their old homes with the rebel familys with but little to eat and less to wear Yet Still they remain, in reality free to go or Stay they prefer Staying in old Virginia at least large Numbers do.
The desolation Caused by General Sheridan in the valley is very great Some of the finest kind of houses, (Such as you See in Sewickleyville) have been utterly destroyed, and every living thing Swept off the farms Nothing left but bare chimney Stacks and a few gate posts Miles on Miles of fencing all burnt just as it Stood, desolation everywhere, hardly a Mill left, Nothing but bare Smoked walls, And then what few Men you See are full of rage and bitterness and will Not talk if they Can avoid it to any-one wearing Soldier clothes.

Today we have had a grand inspection by the cheif of artillery on General Sheridans Staff and on Next Sunday we are to have a grand review by General Stevenson.

Today Mr Bushnell and Henry Atwood and Mrs Atwood arrived from Pittsburgh they will remain a day or So.

But I Must close, by Sending my kind regards to you one and all in Economy, My thoughts Mr Baker often Carry Me back to Economy, for after all a Soldier life is Not one that Suits Me, and it teaches one what a real true blessing Peace is. But I Console Myself by the thought that when I Cease to be a Soldier, I will enjoy the change only So Much the More. So hoping this May find you in good health & Spirits, and that you will be So kind as to favor Me with an answer

I remain your friend

[Endorsed]  F H Shiras
Hamptons Battery
              Hamptons Battery
              Harpers Ferry Va

Shiras was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant on March 9, 1865, and he was mustered out of service with the rest of Hampton’s Battery F to return to the civilian life for which he yearned on the following June 26.27 Shiloh, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Chickamauga, and a host of other place names were burned indelibly into the fabric of America’s heritage between 1861 and 1865, and the Republic emerged from the struggle as a single national unit without the institution of slavery. The undying record of Union and Confederate sacrifice reflects the individual experiences of millions of men like Frank H. Shiras.

27 Clark, History of Hampton Battery F, 74.