



“WE CAN HEAR THE
CANNONS
ROAR
EVERY DAY”

The Civil War Letters of Philip Lantzy

By Joseph Gibbs

Between 23 July 1861, when he joined Company A of the 11th Pennsylvania Reserves, and his death at Antietam on 17 Sept. 1862, Pvt. Philip Andrew Lantzy frequently wrote to friends and family in his native Cambria County. His missives detailed his feelings, thoughts of home, and experiences in the Union army.

The 28 surviving letters – along with his notes on the back of an illustrated card of Union generals – illuminate a unique period in Western Pennsylvania history. They also document life in a unit which saw hard service; of all Union regiments (more than 2,100 during the Civil War), the 11th Reserves suffered the eighth-highest percentage of men killed.¹

Lantzy was the youngest of nine children of Swiss immigrants Joseph and Mary Ursula (Bitter) Lenzi, who had settled in Carrolltown (now Barr Township, near Spangler). Born late in 1840, Philip was baptized on 5 December at St. Joseph's Church.² No written description of him exists in the National Archives' holdings of regimental files, though a war-time photograph survives.³

Lantzy joined the 11th Reserves as it started a rail journey east to Washington shortly after the Union defeat at First Bull Run. On 23 July 1861, his name was added to the roll of the Ebensburg-raised Company A, known as the "Cambria Guards." The unit had been organized by Capt. Robert Litzinger, whose illness later forced him to resign, and Lt. Andrew Lewis, who replaced Litzinger as captain.

Family and faith

The new recruit came without his parents' approval. "Tell Father and Mother," he wrote in one early letter, "that they Should Not take it hard for it is to Late Now [to] think hard of me going A way for I was Not Contented A Bout home...."⁴ His family may have tried to pressure him to return, because at one point he

stated that "I Could Not Think of coming home unless we were [h]onorably Dis Charged," adding hopefully that the war might end soon.⁵ He tried to use his siblings as mediators, asking them to tell their parents that "there is more than one Left there homes Be Sides me and Left there Parents without Eny thing...."⁶

Catholicism ran strong in the family, and perhaps to ease his parents' fears, the new soldier wrote often about his spiritual well-being. The regimental chaplain was a Methodist, but Catholic services were available. Lantzy observed in one letter,

I was at Mass this morning and we will have A Sermon this after Noon and then we will go to Confession and Receive [the Eucharist] in the morning.... the Priest came first to Give the Soldiers to Prepare to When they Git in to A Battle so That they will Die in the Care of god[.]⁷

He emphasized that he regularly said prayers for his parents as well as himself. Besides a religious medal given him by a priest, he kept with him a scapular from his sister. One of his letters referred to a request she had relayed from

their parents "to Say the Five wounds of our Savior[.] I Do Say them Every Day and the Angel of the Lord Adored, and the Priest Gave me A Prayer and told me if I Said it Every Day that there would be No danger to Say one our father to the Blessed Virgin Mary[.]⁸ He then added,

I have often Been on Guard and I have Nelt Down on my Beat and Said my Prayers and I have often said my Prayers when I was in Bed untill I went to Sleep[.] So You must Not think That I have forgotten what the Misionery made us Promis under the Cross that we will Live as Catholics and Die As Catholic and I will Do What I Promised[.]⁹



The original flag of the 11th Pennsylvania Reserves, captured at Gaines Mill.

Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee, Harrisburg, by arrangement with Penn State Press



Officers of the 11th Pennsylvania Reserves, probably from early 1864.

Page 27: The lone wartime portrait of Philip Lantzy, a soldier with Company A (the "Cambria Guards") of the 11th Pennsylvania Reserves.

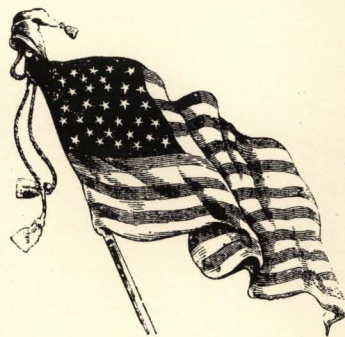
James Beck collection, USAMHI, Carlisle, Pa.

It close for the nearest
to nothing more
me but I remain
devoted son Philip Lantzy

Write soon Direct as you

Philip A. Lantzy

Yr. all,



FLAG OF THE FREE.

1862
Camp, Pierpont Pa
March 4, 1862

Dear Father and
Mother sisters and
brothers I take my pen

in hand to address you a few
lines to let you know that I am
hiding about at present time I
have got a shivering bad cold
but I think I will be ready for
duty now I am sure I am ~~now~~



Lovelle Krug

The top portion of a page from
one of Philip Lantzy's letters;
this one written at Camp Pierpont.

An undated view of the Lantzy
homestead. The site, originally
part of Carrolltown, is in
present-day Barr, Pa.

Early experiences

Whether Lantzy or any other member of the 11th Reserves understood the results of First Bull Run at the time the unit headed east is not clear. The casualty account Lantzy later relayed vastly exaggerated Confederate losses.¹⁰ Regardless, his comrades wanted combat; they hopefully (and prophetically) nicknamed their untested regiment the “Bloody Eleventh.” To most of them, the war at this stage was a great adventure. Stationed near Washington, Lantzy wrote that “I have Seen More While I am gone Soldiering then Ever I would of seen on that mountain if I had A got as old as 2 hundred years[.]”¹¹

Within a short time, Lantzy got his first close look at Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, commander of the newly formed Army of the Potomac. This came during a 20 August review of the troops at Camp Tennally, where the regiments of the Pennsylvania Reserves Division were being collected. He also mentions President Lincoln:

[W]e was in spected By General McClellan[.] he is the Commander of the Penna Reserved Corps¹² and there was A Bout 9 thousand Soldiers in the field of infantry and A Bout 20 pieces of artillery and A Company of Cavalry[.] it was A Nicer sight than Ever Eny of you will See on the Mountain I am shure[.] General McClellan ... Rode A Round us But we was A Lined with in A Bout 25 yds and A Bout 2 thousand in Each Roe and the President of the united states was A Long ... and there was so many men there that I Cant Tell you how many Generals was there[.]¹³

The review Lantzy described was deemed a success; McClellan wrote to his wife that “The men were very enthusiastic & looked well.”¹⁴ And division commander Brig. Gen. George McCall told the men that “both the General [McClellan] and the President have expressed to me their unqualified approval of your soldierlike appearance on review, and of the discipline thus manifestly shown to exist in the corps.”¹⁵

Evidence that the war was not going to be limited to the parade ground came a few weeks later. On 15 September 1861, Lantzy wrote that “we Can hear the Cannons Roar Every Day,” and that on “the 11th of this month ... They Had A fight A Bout 10 miles from our Camp[.]”¹⁶ On that date, a two-regiment Union force reconnoitered across the Potomac, crossing the Chain Bridge and marching to Lewinsville, withdrawing after a brief fight with Rebel

cavalry under the command of then-Brig. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart.¹⁷ Lantzy noted that the 11th Reserves

was Not Called on for we had to Go out on Picket That Evening and we had to stay till The Evening of the 12th[.] Then we was Relieved By the 6th [Pennsylvania Reserves] Regiment and then we came to our camp.... we heard Since that that Batle was Not A Large one[.] There was Four men of our Side Killed and 9 wounded ones and we cant tell how many of the Rebels was Killed. [The Confederates] Run off[f] as they allways Do[.] the Rebels wont Stand No Fair field fight[.] they will fight A Little while and then they will Run Like the Deel [Devil].¹⁸

Lantzy saw his first Rebels shortly afterward, during picket duty at Great Falls, Md., on the Potomac. There, he and his comrades struck up a truce with Virginia troops on the other side of the river. The peace ended when a South Carolina unit replaced the Virginians – a firefight took place on 30 September – but Lantzy described the period of fraternization:

[W]e was on seven Day Picket and I Did talk with the Sece-sions my self A Cross the River.... the Rebels Said that they wished to God that we would Not Nead to fight Enny mor[.] it Looked hard to hear them say that they would Just as soon Shoot Jeff Davis and Buregard as Abe Lincoln or General Scott[.]¹⁹ they said that they had Onlly Enlisted for 12 month and they asked us how Long we had Enlisted and we told them 3 years or During the war[.]²⁰

Prelude to Dranesville

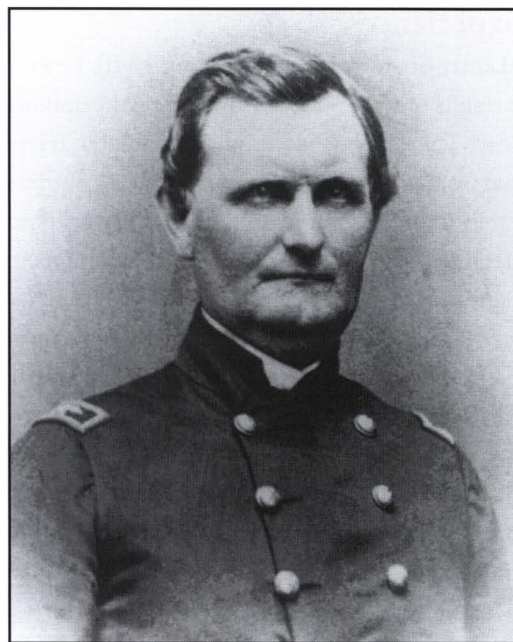
A few months later, camped in northern Virginia, Lantzy documented a 6 December expedition to the farm of Dranesville secessionist R.H. Gunnell. Though under arrest at the time, Gunnell was believed to have invited the Rebel army to buy or otherwise appropriate his crops, so Gen. McCall sent a well-armed foraging party to clean out the property before the Confederates did. This mission involved all of the 11th Reserves’ parent brigade – then commanded by future Army of the Potomac commander George Meade. The task force included a battery and a cavalry squadron; another brigade and battery were stationed within supporting distance. No enemy soldiers were seen, though a small

Rebel force retreated when it saw the Union brigade approaching.²¹ Of the episode, Lantzzy wrote:

Yesterday we were out on A for[a]ging Expedition and we had 53 wagons with us and we went A Bout 12 miles out in the Secesion parts and we had A Bout 6 thousand Soldiers A Long and 16 pieces of Cannon[.] we Loaded all of the wagons with Corn and wheat and oats[,] hogs[,] Potatoes and Every thing we could Get[.] we got A Bout 15 horses and A Yoke [of] Oxen[.] we got them with in A Bout 2 miles of the Secesions[.] But they were A fraid to attack us[.]²²

The raid's success brought on the subsequent Battle of Dranesville. On 20 December, Confederate Gen. D.H. Hill, in charge of Rebel forces near Leesburg – made anxious by the expedition to Gunnell's farm – dispatched a wagon train to Dranesville with orders to comb the area for remaining food and supplies. As escort, he sent Stuart, commanding 150 horsemen, four cannon, and about 1,600 troops from four infantry regiments. They were intercepted, however, by a larger Union force, which McCall had dispatched when he learned of the Rebel advance.²³ The 11th Reserves was not part of this fight, but Lantzzy reported information that filtered back:

our men whiped them Last Saturday A Bout 12 Miles from our Camp[.] we Could hear the Cannons and Guns go off Plain for we was on Picket Guard and we Could Not Go[.] But the Cause that they Got in that fight that our men went out to Get some Grain from the Rebels and when they Got there the Rebels Attacked them[.] But we had 8 [?] thousand men A Long and had 12 Canons A Long[.] the Rebels comenced firing on our men then our men Returned the fire and whiped them Bad and at the same time our men was Loadening the wagons and Got them all Loaded and sent them to Camp and followed the Rebels and Drove them from there camp and took all there Blankets and all they had and killed A Bout 60 of the Rebels[.] our Loss was 4 [?] killed and 15 wounded[.] we cant tell how many of the Rebels was wounded[.]²⁴



USAMHI, Carlisle, Pa.

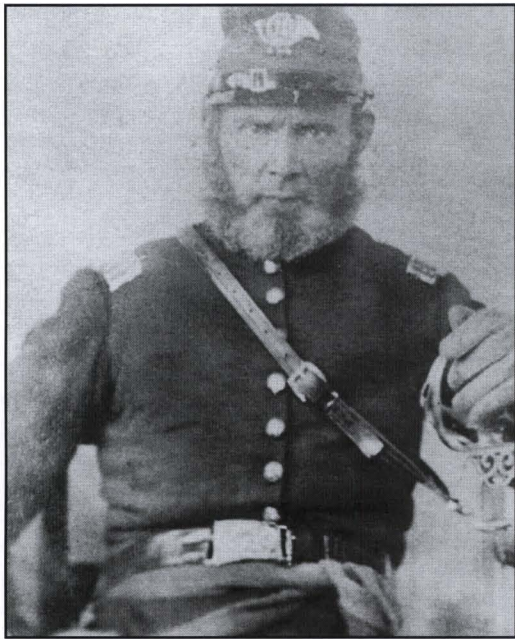
Col. Thomas Gallagher was the first commander of the 11th Pennsylvania Reserves.

To the Peninsula

Not long after the fight at Dranesville, the Pennsylvania Reserves settled into winter quarters. In the spring, with McClellan mounting his Peninsula Campaign, McCall's division moved to Falmouth, Va., across the Rappahannock from Fredericksburg, to await transfer to the new front. Lincoln made another appearance here on 23 May 1862:

[W]e was Reviewed By the President Lincoln and the Secretary of War[,] Stanton by name[.]²⁵ there was a bout 32 Shots fired by the cannon for a salute when the President came on the Review ground[.] it was a nice sight to hear the troops give him three Rousing Cheers[.] he rode a Common Cavalry horse and he was dressed in very poor clothes[.] if I had not known him I would have thought he was a citizen[.] he rode along in front with the general McCall with his old Stove pipe hat in his hand and his long nose Sticking out before him. the president said that we all looked well and he wanted us to move on towards Richmond.²⁶

By the end of June, the Pennsylvania Reserves division had formed part of the V Corps front north of the Chickahominy River



Madeline Payne Moyer

Cambria Guards officer Andrew Lewis, mortally wounded at Gaines' Mill.

outside Richmond. Alone of the 11th Reserves' 10 companies, the Cambria Guards (captained now by Andrew Lewis) fought in the Union defensive victory at Mechanicsville on 26 June – the first of the Seven Days' battles. Lantzy left no account of this episode. But he had something to say of the next day's fight, Gaines' Mill (also called First Cold Harbor), at which the entire regiment was surrounded and captured nearly intact. He detailed casualties and a few incidents:

Our Regiment was nearly all taken prisinor and the Boys are all well Except some that was wounded in the fight[.] we was in the fight about 2 hours and when the Rebels Broke through on our Right and Left and Surrounded us when we was Retreating and then we had to Surrender as prisinors of War.... There was Nine Killed of our company and 10 wounded. Our Capt [Lewis] was killed and our first Lieutenand [James Burke] was wounded in the Leg[.]

He noted that at one point, perhaps during the rout which preceded the surrender, he was struck on the back by a spent musket ball which bounced off without leaving a wound. "My

Prayers was not forgotten before I ... went in the battle field," he wrote, "and are not neglected Since...."²⁷

Captain Lewis had been hit in the right leg above the knee, and captured after the battle. His leg was amputated, and he died on 2 July. Fellow prisoners from the 11th Reserves buried him near the battlefield.²⁸ Conditions for the wounded were terrible; Burke later wrote home that he and eight other men from the regiment wounded in the 27 June battle "lay upon the battle-field twenty days, most of the time in a negro hut," receiving little food or medical care.²⁹

Richmond and Second Bull Run

On the day after Gaines' Mill, Lantzy and thousands of other Union prisoners were transported to Richmond for stays at various stockades, including Libby Prison before it was reserved for officers only. Enlisted men sent there were eventually culled out for transport to Belle Isle. Most of those captured were exchanged in August, Lantzy among them. He had little to say about his prison experience in his few post-exchange letters, allowing only that "We all was used bad while we was prisinors for they did not give us a Nough to Eat...." He observed that "Richmond is A miserable Looking plase for they have so many Sick and wounded there...."³⁰

After the exchange, the 11th Reserves was re-formed and its parent Pennsylvania Reserves division temporarily became a part of Gen. John Pope's short-lived and ill-fated Army of Virginia. Lantzy was detailed on guard duty at the time his regiment joined the march to reinforce Pope, and he seems to have missed the Union rout at Second Bull Run. In his last surviving letter, written just before that battle, he again detailed hearing the sounds of distant fighting, this time from the direction of Gordonsville. He hoped that his comrades "have had a chance to Take revenge for what they done to us when they took us prisoner and I allso hope they could whip them Bad and make them run...." But he voiced concern on the North's commitment to the struggle:

if we do not wach the Rebels they will have there confederacy in Spite of us for our army is very weak now and the Rebels know it and they are lashing [?] on us Every where but if we can hold them in check for a weak or so we will be Reinforced [so] that we will [re]turn the compliment and Run them in to Richmond and take there old Capitol and

hang Mr. Jeff. Davis and then we will soon gain the great day when we will all Return.

For the latter to happen, he acknowledged, “we will have to have a good many more men than we have now.” After noting that Lincoln had called for more volunteers, Lantzy observed that a man from his company had been detailed to return to Ebensburg on recruiting duty:³¹

[I]f there is Eny of the Boys want to join our company to be Soldiers ... they can Just Put there names down on his Roll and he will Bring them to our company free of all Passage[.] it would be much easier in our Regt that has been in Service[.] they will not nead to drill half as much as they would in a new Regt and I would Like to See some of our Boys Pick up heart to come out as a volunteer and help to defend our country for it [the war] wont Last Long if they come out and help us whip the Rebels[.]³²

Consolidating the victory at Second Bull Run, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia invaded Maryland, and the Pennsylvania Reserves division was reattached to the Army of the Potomac for the subsequent campaign. Lantzy was likely a participant in the Union victory at South Mountain, another action marked by heavy casualties in the 11th Reserves.

A few days later, on 17 September at Antietam, Lantzy's regiment took part in the Union I Corps' early morning attack which started from positions in the North Woods, advancing to the edge of the infamous Cornfield on the Miller farm. There, the 11th Reserves engaged soldiers from Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood's “Texas Brigade” – the same unit which had broken the Union line at Gaines' Mill.


Lantzy was killed somewhere on this battlefield – his death at Antietam is confirmed by muster rolls and a list of interments in the National Archives' collection of regimental papers. If his burial site was marked, it could not be identified after the war. His remains likely lie in Antietam National Cemetery, one of 1,792 “Unknown” soldiers interred there.³³ ☼

Joseph Gibbs is author of *Three Years in the 'Bloody Eleventh': The Campaigns of a Pennsylvania Reserves Regiment* (Penn State University Press, 2002). He has worked as a reporter and editor on several Massachusetts newspapers, and has taught at Boston College and Boston University.

The complete, annotated transcripts of the Philip Lantzy letters are available online at www.pghhistory.org/magazine.htm

- ¹ The original letters are in the Department of Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University; copies and transcripts are on file with the United States Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, Pa. The author documents the regiment's history in *Three Years in the 'Bloody Eleventh': The Campaigns of a Pennsylvania Reserves Regiment* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002).
- ² Charles Lantzy, ed., *Genealogy on the Battle of Antietam, MD and the Battle of Gettysburg, PA* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: privately printed, 1997), 1; conversations and correspondence with Lovelle Krug of Nicktown, Pa.; and genealogy charts in the files of the Cambria County Historical Society, Ebensburg, Pa.
- ³ The National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C., has two files of 11th Pennsylvania Reserves documents in Record Group 94 (Records of the Adjutant General's Office): Miscellaneous Regimental Papers are contained in Box 4236, 8W3/R6/C17/SC; Personal Papers are contained in Boxes 117 and 118, 7W2/R6/C19/SE. The Lantzy photograph is in the James Beck collection, USAMHI.
- ⁴ Philip Lantzy to brother, 31 July 1861.
- ⁵ Philip Lantzy to brother, 22 Aug. 1861.
- ⁶ Philip Lantzy to friends, 17 Dec. 1861.
- ⁷ Philip Lantzy to friends, 1 Sept. 1861.
- ⁸ Philip Lantzy to friends, 17 Dec. 1861.
- ⁹ Philip Lantzy to friends, 17 Dec. 1861.
- ¹⁰ In his 27 July 1861 letter to his parents, Lantzy wrote of Bull Run that “There was About 7 [?] Thousand of the Rebbels Killed and there was only about 9 hundred of our men Killed[.]” Actual losses for First Bull Run were Union: 481 killed, 1011 wounded, 1216 missing; Confederate: 387 killed, 1582 wounded, 12 missing, as per Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861 – 65* (Carlisle, Pa.: Kallman, 1996), 77.
- ¹¹ Philip Lantzy to brother and “all relations,” 11 Aug. 1861.
- ¹² Lantzy was technically correct in naming McClellan as commander of the Pennsylvania Reserves, though he was in truth head of the newly formed Army of the Potomac. Pennsylvania-born McClellan was actually Pennsylvania Gov. Andrew Curtin's first choice to command the Reserves organization. Curtin's offer reached McClellan only after he had accepted a command from Ohio, where he served before the war as a railroad executive. Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan* (New York: Da Capo, 1992), 10.
- ¹³ Philip Lantzy to brother, 22 Aug. 1861.
- ¹⁴ Sears, *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 89.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in E.M. Woodward, Stanley W. Zamoski, ed., *Our Campaigns: The Second Regiment Pennsylvania Reserve Volunteers, 1861 – 1864*, (Shippensburg, Pa.: Burd Street Press, 1995), 39.
- ¹⁶ Philip Lantzy to father, mother, sisters and brother, 15 Sept. 1861.
- ¹⁷ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office 1880 – 1901, 128 vols.) [hereafter *Official Records*], Series I, Vol. V [serial 5], 165 – 168.
- ¹⁸ Philip Lantzy to father, mother, sisters and brother, 15 Sept. 1861.
- ¹⁹ Confederate Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard was then a principal figure in the northern Virginia front. Winfield Scott was then Lincoln's general-in-chief.
- ²⁰ Philip Lantzy to parents, 16 Nov. 1861.

- ²¹ *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. V [serial 5], 455.; George Meade to wife, 8 December and 11 Dec., 1861, in George Meade, ed., *Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913, 2 vols.), I:234, 235.
- ²² Philip Lantz to father, mother, sisters and brothers, 7 Dec. 1861.
- ²³ *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. V [serial 5], 474 – 75, 490 – 91, 999.
- ²⁴ Philip Lantz to brother, 22 Dec. 1861. Stuart actually reported 43 killed and 143 wounded. McCall listed 7 killed and 61 wounded. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. V [serial 5], 489, 494.
- ²⁵ A reference to Edwin McMasters Stanton, who in 1862 replaced Simon P. Cameron as Secretary of War.
- ²⁶ Philip Lantz to father, mother, sisters and brothers, 24 May 1862.
- ²⁷ Philip Lantz to father, mother, sisters and brother, 7 Aug. 1862.
- ²⁸ Letter by James C. Burke, *Alleghanian*, 31 July 1862, 3; "Death of Captain Andrew Lewis," *Alleghanian*, 7 August 1862, 2.
- ²⁹ Letter by James C. Burke, *Alleghanian*, 31 July 1862, 3. Burke was later promoted to captain, then major. See Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861 – 1865* 6 vols. (Harrisburg: B. Singerly, 1869), I: 855.
- ³⁰ Philip Lantz to father, mother, sisters and brother, 7 Aug. 1862.
- ³¹ Pvt. John Roberts, then recently exchanged, was detailed at this time as the Cambria Guards' recruiter in Ebensburg. "At Home," *Alleghanian*, 28 Aug. 1862, 3. Roberts' name and mission are also cited in Capt. Daniel Porter to "Capt. Baird," 7 Aug. 1862, and Special Orders No. 18, Headquarters, IX Army Corps, 16 Aug. 1862, in National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 94 (Records of the Adjutant General's Office), 11th Pennsylvania Reserves Miscellaneous Regimental Papers (Box 4236, 8W3/R6/C17/SC).
- ³² Philip Lantz to brother and sister-in-law, 24 Aug. 1862.
- ³³ Steven R. Stotelmyer, *Bivouacs of the Dead: The story of those who died at Antietam and South Mountain* (Baltimore, Md.: Toomey Press, 1992), 25.



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