

EDITED TRANSCRIPTION – Original files: “Letter Dec. 20th 1863 pg. 1-2.tif” & {Letter Dec. 20th 1863 pg. 3-4.tif}

Edited to enhance readability. Added notes are *{italicized-bracketed}*.

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Headquarters 23<sup>rd</sup> Michigan Volunteer Infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade 2<sup>nd</sup> Division 23<sup>rd</sup>  
Army Corps  
Near Blaine’s Crossroads, East Tennessee, Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>, 1863

Dear Wife,

As today is Sunday and a very pleasant one, too, I thought it best to improve it writing to you, for I know you want to hear from me often and to dispel your fears. I write to you as often as I can and I hope you get my letters. Sometimes the mail is obstructed and in consequence you don’t get them regular. At one time it was most a month that there was no mail went north from our army during which time we could not send a letter if we wrote, but since the 6<sup>th</sup> the mail has departed for the north regular every two days and by this time you must be aware that I am safe and sound. My health is good as I could ask for, and so is the health of the whole regiment. I wrote to you two days ago and since then we have only move one mile and took up a new position in line of battle as reserve. There is two lines in advance of us. We expected an attack day before yesterday, but they only made a small fight on our right ~~and~~ which only lasted about an hour which resulted in the capture of twenty-one hundred rebels and the rest of them retreated and we have not seen them since. Our corps was not engaged at all as we are next to the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps and on the left. We got in position just dark on the 17<sup>th</sup> inst and our regiments place was in a cornfield. We soon went into camp there in ??? doubled on the center and so we could deploy in less than no time if we were attacked. Well, that night it rained and you may imagine what a nice place we were in on that plowed ground. The mud was soon mixed up and like a bed of mortar. I lay down between two corn rows and covered myself over with a rubber blanket and as I did not sleep any the night before I soon was asleep and I slept until morning without awaking up once. In the morning I found I lay in the water and I had pulled one of by boots off during my sleep and my foot was as wet as it could be. I got up and I felt as well as I could ask and eat a few hard tack and drank a cup of coffee made of muddy water which gave the coffee the appearance of having a plenty of milk in it. We soon after moved out of the mud and have since been enjoying very fine weather and cold frosty nights. I got me a pup tent and make out to keep very comfortable and everyone say that I never look

*{Page 2:}*

so well and healthy as I do now. I suppose that you are keeping house now and Lottie is living with you and going to school. I got a letter from her last night which I must answer soon. I do not think that we will go into winter quarter at all

this winter for it looks as though we were going to have a winter campaign. The rebels want to drive us out of East Tennessee, but cannot do it. We have got the best of it so far and are bound to hold fast all we get. We have got a large army here and can hold possession in spite of all the force that can be brought against us. I suppose that Oscar {S.} Davis is on his way here now. I have some mail for him. I was very lucky in finding a pair of gloves on the march to Knoxville {TN} from Lenore {TN} the day we fought at Campbell's Station {TN}. They will last me a week or two, yet only for them I should have suffered with cold hands. I have a change of underclothes and with what I have on completes my whole baggage. I have no desk now and I have to carry all of the regimental papers in haversack. We have not yet been supplied since our loss at Lenore and we have no surplus baggage to transport. One wagon is all we have got now while we are allowed six. I carry all my traps on my horse rolled up in my blanket and strapped before my saddle and when we halt for the night all I have to do is to spread my blanket on the ground and roll up in it and I am camped. If it looks like rain I put up my pup tent and crawl under that. It will soon be Christmas and I would like to take dinner with you if I could for I would do a good dinner justice. However, I shall not complain if I have only hard tack and coffee. I have learned to take what I can get and be satisfied for it would do no good to complain. My time is nearly half out and I have stood it first rate and I believe I can stand another year and a half. I guess by that time my services will not be needed any more in the army. If I was home they might draft me and then I would have to go. Now I do not fear a draft and I have now arrived to a position that a drafted man can hardly hope for. Although I am the junior lieutenant in the regiment I do the duty of the senior 1st lieutenant, so you see I am getting along as fast as I could ask. I hope you have received the one hundred dollar draft that I sent you by Captain {Henry S.} Raymond. You must use it as you think best and make yourself comfortable for my greatest wishes are to see you comfortable. You did not say who that young lady is that is going to board with you for company this winter. Give her my respects and let me know who she is in your next. I wish I could be company for you and Frankie. I would like to come home and surprise you again as I did last spring. I would if I could, but as there are yet several officers that have not been home I cannot get a leave of absence for some time. You may rest assured that I will come home again as soon as I can, so we must be patient and time will soon pass and if I am spared we will again enjoy peace and happiness that we could not appreciate before.

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I suppose you think paper is scarce by the way I use old blanks. Well, Susan, paper is scarce here and hard to get at any price. So I use anything I can get hold of. I heard an officer this morning inquiring for ??? a piece of brown paper to write a letter on. ?????? he said he could not find any other and did not know as he could find brown paper. This answers very well and as long as it lasts I am all right for I can write where it is white and ?????? find room to write a good long letter. If I can only fill all the paper will hold it would tire you to read it. Well, Susan, I will describe as near as I can how we look or how we occupy ourselves.

In the first place imagine a wide valley and in the valley camps and soldiers scattered as far as can be seen and a road running up the valley not a fence to be seen by the roadside there is a house and at the back of the house is an orchard on a little knoll and in the orchard is the 23<sup>rd</sup> Michigan camp and at the rear of the line about thirty yards is a fire with a shorter tent on one side and two more on the other. Sitting on a rail before one of the tents with a pocket ink stand by his side and this piece of paper on his knee writing to his wife is your husband. Occasionally he looks up, dips his pen in the ink, and resumes his writing. On the opposite side of the fire is another officer mending his pants, occasionally muttering because he cannot thread his needle. Another is writing on the bottom of a pail turned up, another asleep in the tent while the whole camp is occupied in the same manner or looking for greybacks,

*{Page 4:}*

an amusement which we all take part in more or less according to the luck they have in anything. The little buggers we generally find then in the seams of our clothes and the only way to get rid of them is by boiling our clothes, which we do every chance we get. By the way, I had a dream the other night. I dreamed you came to see me and I was ~~afraid~~ afeared to sleep with you because I was lousy. You must not think I am so all of the time, for I use every precaution against it and change my clothes as often as I can get them boiled, and I generally keep pretty clear of them, but occasionally one gets on me then for a skirmish which makes a capture of him then between two thumbnails he is sacrificed for his imprudence. You said that Frankie could talk most everything and has not forgot me yet. I am glad to hear she gets along so fast. She is now over two years old now and I would like to see her very much. Give my respects to Mr. and Mrs. Delavergne and tell them that Lute is at Knoxville and is well. He hurt his knee some time ago and is a little lame yet. He will soon be fit for duty again. How does Jane get along? Is she full of the old Harry as ever? Well, Susan, I have now wrote a long letter and if you can read it you will do well for it is hard writing on my knee. Tell Lottie to write again to her as soon as I can. Give my respects to all inquiring friends and write soon to your

Affectionate Husband,  
D. D. Keeler

Co 23 Mich V I 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade 2<sup>nd</sup> Div 23<sup>rd</sup> A C  
near Plains Cross Roads East Tenn Dec 28<sup>th</sup> 1862

Dear Wife as to day is Sunday and a very pleasant one too I thought it best to improve it writing to you for I know you want to hear from me often and to dispel your fears I write to you as often as I can and I hope you get my letters. Sometimes the mail is obstructed and in consequence you do not get them regular. At one time it was most common that there was no mail went north from our Army during which time we could not send a letter if we wrote, but since the 6<sup>th</sup> the mail has departed for the north regular every two days and by this time you must be aware that I am safe and sound. My health is good as I could ask for, and so is the health of the whole Regt. I wrote to you two days ago and since then we have only move one mile and took up a new position in line of battle as reserve there is two lines in advance of us. We expected an attack day before yesterday but they only made a small fight on our right ~~and~~ which only lasted about an hour which resulted in the capture of twenty one hundred rebels and the rest of them retreated and we have not seen them since. ~~Our~~ Our Corps was not engaged at all as we are next to the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps and on the left. We got in position just dark on the 17<sup>th</sup> and our regiments place was in a corn field. We soon went into camp there in ~~the~~ ~~center~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~field~~ ~~so~~ ~~we~~ ~~could~~ ~~deploy~~ ~~in~~ ~~less~~ ~~than~~ ~~no~~ ~~time~~ ~~if~~ ~~we~~ ~~were~~ ~~attacked~~ well that night it rained and you may imagine what a nice place we were in on that ploughed ground the mud was soon mixed up and till a bed of mud. I lay down between two corn rows and covered my self over with a rubber blanket and as I did not sleep any the night before I soon was a sleep and I slept until morning without awaking up once in the morning I found I lay in the water and I had pulled one of my boots off during my sleep and my foot was as wet as it could be I got up and I felt as well as I could ask and eat a few hard tack and drank a cup of coffee made of muddy water which gave the coffee the appearance of having a plenty of milk in it. We soon after moved out of the mud and have since been enjoying very fine weather and cold frosty nights. I got me a pup tent and made out to keep very comfortable and every one say that I made better well than I did at the

you are keeping house now and Lotie is living with you and going to school I got a letter from her last night which I must answer soon. I do not think that we will go into winter quarters at all this winter for it looks as though we were going to have a winter campaign & the Rebels want to drive us out of East Tennessee but cannot do it we have got the best of it so far and are bound to hold fast all we get. We have got a large Army here and can hold possession in spite of all the force that can be brought against us & I suppose that Oscar Davis is on his way here now I have some mail for him. I was very lucky in finding a pair of gloves on the march to Knoxville from Senore the day we fought at Campbell's Station they will last me a week or two yet only for the I should have suffered with cold hands I have a change of under cloths and with what I have I complete my whole baggage I have no desk now and I have to carry all of the Regimental papers in Waveruck we have not yet been supplied since our loss at Senore. And we have no surplus baggage to transport one wagon is all we have got now while we are allowed six I carry all my traps on my horse rolled up in my blanket and strapped behind my saddle and when we halt for the night all I have to do is to spread my blanket on the ground and roll up in it and I am camped. If it looks like rain I put up my pup tent and crawl under that.

It will soon be Christmas and I would like to take dinner with you if I could just believe I could do a good dinner justice. however I shall not complain if I have only hard work and coffee. I have learned to take what I can get and be satisfied for it would do no good to complain. My time is nearly half out and I have stood it first rate and I believe I can stand an other year and a half. I guess by that time my services will not be needed any more in the army if I was home they might draft me and therefore I would have to go now I do not fear a draft and I have now arrived to a position that a drafted man can hardly hope for. Although I am the Junior Lieut in the regiment I do the duty of the Senior 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut so you see I am getting along as fast as I could ask. I hope you have received the one hundred dollar draft that I sent you by Capt Raymond. You must use it as you think best and make yourself comfortable. My greatest wish is to see you comfortable. You did not say who the young lady is that is going to board with you for company this winter. Give her my respects and let me know who she is in your next I wish I could be company for you and Frankie. I would like to come home and surprise you again as I did last spring. I would if I could but as there are yet several officers that have not seen home I can not get a leave of absence for some time. You may rest assured that I will come home again as soon as I can. so we must be patient and time will soon pass and if I am spared we will again enjoy peace and happiness that we could not appreciate before.

...ers, commanded by Colonel  
 ...rm of ...  
 ...nized by Capt.  
 ... miles.

..., from the date of enrollment, unless sooner d  
 called into the s  
 at

TRAVELING.	SUSTINENCE AND FORAGE.		AMOUNT for clothing in kind, or in money advanced.	VALUE OF equipments, arms, acc., &c., &c., from the United States, to be paid for if lost or destroyed.	VALUATION. in dollars, of—
	Furnished by themselves since the muster into service.	FORGE.			
To place of rendezvous, No. of miles.	No. days.	No. days.	Dolls.	Dolls.	Horses, equipments.

I suppose you think paper is scarce by the way I use old, Blanks Well and Man Paper is scarce here and hard to get at any price. I use anything I can get hold of I heard an officer this morning enquiring for a piece of brown Paper to write a letter on he could not find any other and did not know as he could find Brown paper. This answer is well and as long as it lasts I am all right. I can write where it is white and find room to write a good long letter. If I can only fill all the paper will hold it would tire you to hear it. Well I suppose I will describe as near as I can how we look on how we occupy our selves. In the first place we are in a wide valley and in the valley camps are soldier so far as we can see and a road running up it valley not a fence to be seen by the road side there is a house and at the back of that house is an orchard on a little knoll and in the middle of the 28<sup>th</sup> mile camp and at the rear of the line about thirty yards is a fire with a shelter tent on one side and two more on the other. Setting on a rail before one of the tents is a pocket with stand by his side and this piece of paper on his knee writing to his wife is your husband. Occasionally he looks up dips his pen in the ink and resumes his writing. On the opposite side of the fire is another officer mending his pants occasionally muttering because he cannot thread his needle. Another is writing on the bottom of a pile of papers by another asleep in the tent while the whole camp is occupied in the same manner or looking for grey books or amusements which would take part in our

CERTIFY, ON HONOR, that this Muster Roll exhibits the true state of  
 of the  
 man answers to his own proper name in person; that the remarks set opposite the name of each  
 and soldier are accurate and just; and that the valuation of all horses and horse equipments since the  
 into service, was made by disinterested and good judges, and at fair and just rates.

MUSTER...

Service of the United States by Ranken - J. Wheeler  
discharged; from the 19th day of Sept 1862  
, in the month of \_\_\_\_\_, 186 , and marched

REMARKS.

from any absence; the date of an officer's assuming, or being relieved, from any command or special duty; the description of any special, extra, or daily duty, on which he is engaged, or any other duty, with No. date, &c., of order, &c.; in case of absence, the nature and date of the application for furlough, and the date of his return; the nature and date of any award of pension, or other bounty, and the date of its receipt; the date of his discharge, or other termination of service, and the cause thereof; the nature and date of any other service in the Army, or in the United States, or in any other country; the date of his enlistment, or other entry into service, and the date of his discharge, or other termination of service, and the cause thereof. The exchange of men by substitution, and the exchanging, swapping, loaning of horses, after muster into service, are strictly forbidden.

or less according to the rank they have in anything  
the little bugs are generally found in the seams  
of our clothes and the only way to get rid of them is  
by boiling our clothes (which we do every chance we  
get. By the way I had a dream the other night  
I dreamed you came to see me and I was afraid  
I pleased to sleep with you because I was lousy  
You must not think I am so all of the time for  
I use every precaution against it and change my  
clothes as often as I can get them boiled and I  
generally keep pretty clear of them but occasionally one  
gets on me then I use a Stumpick which makes a capital  
thing then between two thumb nails he is sacrificed  
his impudence if you said that I wouldn't could talk  
most everything hand has not forgot me yet I am glad  
to hear she gets along so fast she is now over two years  
old now and I would like to see her very much  
Give my respects to Mr and Mrs DeLuverne and  
tell them that I love at I enjoy all and is well  
Kesbert his knee some time ago and is a little  
lame yet. He will soon be fit for duty again How  
does Gene get along. is she as full as the old berr  
as ever, Well Susan I have now wrote a long letter  
and if you can read it you will do well for it is  
hard writing on my knee Tell Lottie to write again  
to her as soon as I can Give my respects to all  
inquiring friends and write soon to your  
Affectionate Husband  
J. Wheeler

Direct as before

\_\_\_\_\_ 186 , carefully examined this Roll, and, as far as practicable, caused the allow-  
ances, and remarks to be justly and properly stated; and mustered the \_\_\_\_\_  
for discharge; and \_\_\_\_\_ hereby honorably discharged from the service of

\_\_\_\_\_

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