



1863

Dana Smith

I know that you fear
much for me and I must
confess this fighting
made me feel a little
survivor Tom

1863

THE VINDICATOR
POSTOFFICE

P. S. B. K. to
and S. D. H. M.



1863

by Dana Smith

2021

San Francisco, California, USA, Earth

A variable edition of sets of 5 silkscreen prints on Stonehenge paper, 30x22 inches, accompanied by 5 digital print on Moab Entrada natural rag paper, 30x22 inches. Edition of 45 portfolio sets, in a custom digitally printed envelope, not numbered.

The result of a painter's approach to silkscreen is a wildly variant edition - each print is really a unique monoprint. The process of printing used three layers or screens. The first layer of ink was applied using a painterly technique designed to create bands of color and random shapes that depict a horizon in time where memory appears and disappears, and where the ghosts of history sometimes reveal themselves or retreat in darkness. The second layer is a halftoned photographic image selected from the Library of Congress archive of Civil War photos. Each photo shows a moment in time from the year 1863, where the soldiers, the generals, the postal workers, the wounded, the gravediggers, all are making eye contact across the centuries. The third layer is handwriting selected from the letters of William Garret Fisher, written while fighting the American Civil War, and is applied in semi-transparent metallic ink to float above the image, shimmering in and out with the shift in angle of the viewer.

William Garret Fisher's letters home while fighting the American Civil War are a collection of over 140 letters preserved by his family. Will Fisher, living in Cambridge, New York at 17 years old, joined the Union Army on September 30, 1861, as a bugler in Company A, 7th Regiment of New York Cavalry Volunteers also known as J. Morrison's Black Horse Cavalry. When this Regiment was mustered out of service six months later in April of 1862, Will re-enlisted as an infantry private in the 123rd Regiment, New York Volunteers, and was back in camp by September, 1862. He served with the 123rd Regiment throughout the remainder of the war. All of Will Fisher's letters are archived at www.willfisher.org.

Will Fisher's letters were handed down to the artist from her great-great-grandfather through her mother, Judith Fuller Smith. Judith assisted her father, Pierpont Fuller in the tedious job of transcribing the original handwritten letters. Scanned images of the letters are seen on the right side of all the digital prints in the sets, with the transcribed text on the left.

Here, to the right of this text, is a photo of William Garret Fisher, probably taken around the time that he dropped out of school to volunteer, with his mother's permission, to fight for what he thought would be a short stint, but became a 5 year saga, as detailed in his letters home.

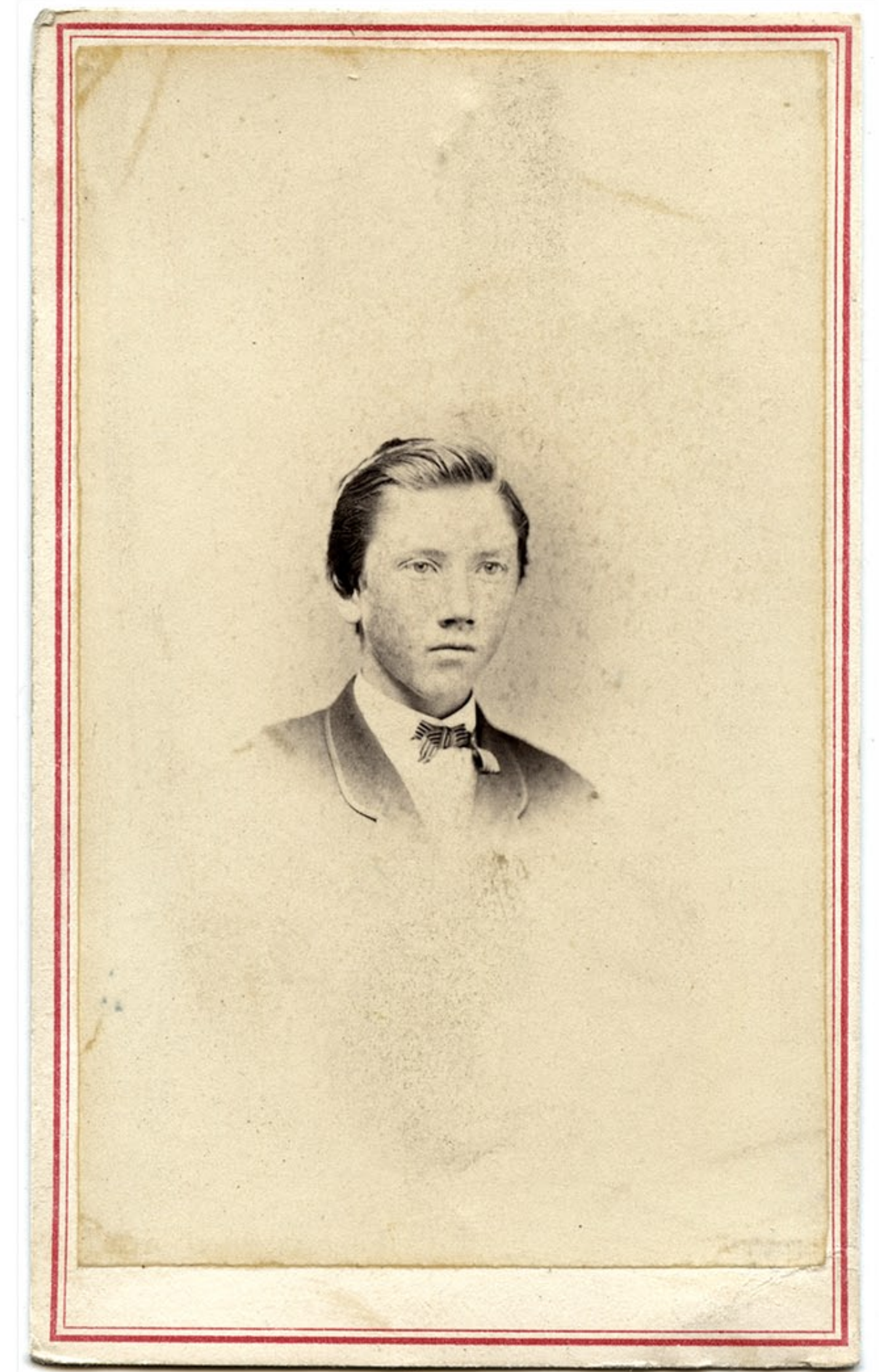
So, it is clear that these primary source documents of Will's eye-witness accounts of some of the most traumatic episodes in the history of the United States speak directly to the artist personally. It is her aim, and perhaps her ancestral responsibility, to re-construct and illustrate the troubled legacy of this epigenetic heritage.

Cover photo credit: Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Post Office Headquarters Army of the Potomac*, April, 1863, Falmouth, Virginia.

Library of Congress item 201364872

Silkscreens printed by Dana Smith with Mats Stromberg at Morrison Productions.

Digital prints printed by Dana Smith, Dana Dana Dana Limited Editions.



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1863

May An All Wise Providence Preserve Us & Direct Our Leaders Aright

by Dana Smith
2021

Text from Will Fisher's letters home while fighting the American Civil War:

Will Fisher to his mother
Camp of the 123rd, June 6, 1863

Dear Mother

I deem it necessary to write a little note to you tonight as I may not have another chance before we leave, for we have got marching orders again, 8 days rations.

It is now about 10 o'clock PM. This afternoon, from 4 till 6, we heard some of the most terrific canon firing I ever heard. It was in the direction of the Rappahannock. It was awful, & now while I write some of the boys that were down that way on passes are coming in & they say that the 2nd & 6th Corps have crossed the river & advanced toward the enemy till this afternoon when they had a desperate fight. The results are unknown. They crossed about 15 miles below the town. We are undoubtedly about to make another grand struggle for the old Union & may an all wise Providence preserve us & direct our leaders aright.

I have as yet unbounded confidence in Gen. Hooker, but a good many have not. I have heard some pretty hard stories about Gen. Hooker which I do not believe. However, one was this, on our arriving at Chancellorsville & having completed his arrangements of the line of battle he is said to have said "I now have a position that God Almighty can't drive me out of." This is awful, if true, but I don't think it is.

I was sergeant of the picket last night & I had one man shot in the arm. I think by a guerilla. We have to be pretty wide awake now days.

But the taps are beating & I must close & hope we will not have to start tonight.

I was thinking of the contrast between my situation & John's just at present.

I got a letter from Aunt Taggart tonight, all well.

But goodnight, with a prayer for preservation. I know that you pray much for me. I must confess this fighting makes one feel a little serious.

I am ever your boy,

Will

P.S. I like to forgot Aunt S. & my sister, "ahem."

Photo credit: Timothy H. O'Sullivan, Gen. Joseph Hooker and staff, Falmouth, Virginia, 1863.
Library of Congress item 2013647701

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1863

They Are Afraid As Death of Us

by Dana Smith

2021

Text from Will Fisher's letters home while fighting the American Civil War:

Will Fisher to his brother
Kelly's Ford, Virginia, August 8, 1863

Dear Brother,

I suppose by this time you are exceedingly anxious to hear from me & likely censure me some for not writing before but I claim that I have had a good excuse until quite lately. That is the few days that we have been laying idle since coming here for you know we were on the continual move for about 2 months. We did not see a day from the day we left Stafford till coming here but what we were on the march or some equally fatiguing duty (fighting for instance) & were often drenched to the skin & had nothing under heavens but what was sopping wet so you can easily see the condition that our stationary and bibles would be in under the circumstances. Writing was out of the question most of the time unless you could borrow some of the officers.

Well here we are again down on the Rappahannock at Kelly's Ford where we crossed when we went to Chancellorsville. Both sides sustain a line on this river. The pickets are on each bank of the river.

There is an indication of a move at the present. I think the program for the fall campaign will be a reinforcement of 60 or 70,000 from all the armies of the west coming into Tennessee & being thrown forward by the Nashville Railroad into Western Virginia coming on to Gen. Lee's flank & the noble, superb, courageous, unflinching, glorious Army of the Potomac will strongly press them in the front.

I tell you we have been giving them such doses lately that they are afraid as death of us, especially the cavalry. It is a certain fact that Gen. Kilpatrick with a single brigade of cavalry often drives the whole Rebel Stuart's cavalry & he could take Richmond in 5 minutes if it wasn't for the infantry.

We had one fight over the river driving them back to Brandy Station. I suppose you heard of Lieut. Beadle being taken prisoner at Gettysburg. He had but just got back to the regt. from his wounds.

I think we will not have to have but one more grand struggle.

But I must close. My best regard for Sister L. Aunt Taggart is to Cambridge.

In the meantime I am your own afec't brother,

William Garret

Photo credit: Andrew J. Russell, 1st Connecticut Battery, Fredericksburg, Virginia, May 2, 1863.
Library of Congress item 2012649392

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Kelly's Ford Va Aug 8th 1863

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1863

All Buried In One Grave, Officers & All

by Dana Smith
2021

Text from Will Fisher's letters home while fighting the American Civil War:

Will Fisher to his mother
Stafford C. H., May 19, 1863

Dear Mother,

As I have an opportunity to send a letter by Skellie, I will write for he is going tomorrow morning.

John wrote for me to get a furlough the last of this month & come home & attend his wedding, but I am afraid it is useless for Ab isn't here to work for me now. I miss him awfully but am in hopes he will be back with us before long.

I don't know about Beadle. The Dr. seems to be afraid that he won't get well.

There is some of our boys that we thought was killed that are all right. I think Kelly Bishop was the only one killed.

John Larmon was taken prisoner while attending to his duties taking care of the wounded. He has been paroled & is here with us now. He saw all of the battlefield & all of the 123rd's dead, helped bury them. They were all buried in one grave, officers & all. He said they were buried as well as possible. John Larmon has won a high name by his good conduct.

There is to be two badges of honor given to Co. I & they could not decide which two to give to so we drew lots for it. Inman Thomas got one, the other, a stranger to you.

One of our sergeants is missing and both lieuts. wounded so I guess I will be apt to get a little lift this time which will be a sergeant's place for I am first cpl. now. If Capt. Hall jumps anyone over me I shan't like it.

I am in hopes that we shall get home this fall with the war all closed up. If we don't I shall get a furlough next fall & come home & see the folks.

You spoke about 2 shirts. I would like to have a pair of these small checked blue cotton shirts. If cotton is very expensive you need not get any.

I have lost my "house wife" so I have no needles or thread, send along a few. I wrote to you last Friday for a little money. If you have not sent it send it by Skellie. If you want to you may send \$5.00, not any more than that. I have not got any paper nor envelopes. I don't know Jack will bring anything or not. If he will, send by him.

I have not received any letters from you in a good while nor John either. I don't know whether you have got any letters from me since the battle or not. I have not heard from you since.

We have no prospect of moving again right away The old camp here is as pleasant as ever.

I wrote to Jim Skinner to get me some tobacco, if he gets it all right. I want some the worst way. You can pay him for it.

I never have heard whether you got my money from the bank. It is hard to wait so long for any news. Love to Aunt Sarah & all the rest. What does Uncle Zina think of the battle?

I am, Will

Photo credit: Wounded soldiers at hospital, Fredericksburg, Virginia, photographed between 1861 and 1865.

Library of Congress item 2012650256

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1863

The Blood of Our Comrades

by Dana Smith
2021

Text from Will Fisher's letters home while fighting the American Civil War:

Will Fisher to his mother
Kelly's Ford, Virginia, August 8, 1863

Dear Mother,

I had the unspeakable pleasure of receiving a letter from you, and was very glad to hear from you.

We have been fortunate enough to be allowed to remain here thus long & we are in hopes that we will stay until the hot, dog days are over, then look for far more brilliant operations & successes than you have yet heard.

I think the program for the fall campaign will be to reinforce the army of Meade with about 70,000 men from all the western armies and have them thrown across Tennessee by the Nashville railroad into western Virginia on to Gen. Lee's flank while the grand noble, indomitable, and courageous Army of the Potomac will strongly press them in the front.

It will all be done in a hurry & be done before you folks up north know anything about it. You see, don't let folks know all we are going to do.

I wish they would draft enough to completely overwhelm them with numbers without having to fight any for we don't like to fight half so well as the papers say. When they tell that the men are all on the "qui vive" for a brush, it is all gas. There is no soldiers in the army that ever went into battle that wants to go the second time unless it is necessary. I once thought I wanted to go into a battle, but I would not consider myself slighted in the least to be allowed to stay out.

But I want to put down this - I shan't undertake to name it. I am more patriotic now than ever & it is real patriotism. We want to avenge the blood of our comrades that is now fertilizing the hillsides of Getty. I would give all I have or ever expect to have if the whole North could just see the fighting that was done on that field. Thursday afternoon was the hardest infantry attack made upon us. The 3rd Corps took the blunt of it. The entire Corps of Longstreet & Hill made the assault upon our left center, they were 62,000 strong. I cannot describe it. I had a good view of it.

I should like to be to home while Aunt E. is there. I should like to see her very much. How does Aunt S. do? Well, I hope, & Jimmy S. I want to remember this time that I did get the things Skellie brought. If we stay here I will increase my writing. Lemuel is well & there is not a sick man in the company except Thomas Weir, he seem to have a kind of a decline, homesick. My love to all the folks.

While I remain, your loving boy,
Will

Write all about the draft. Send me some envelopes & once in a while a stamp, not a great many at a time. Go to the bank & get my money for we are going to be paid soon. 4 months pay, up to the 1st of June. Is there any extra postage now? If get any let Aunt Eliza have that that I owe John.

Photo credit: John Reekie, *African Americans collecting bones of soldiers killed in the battle, Grant's Wilderness Campaign, Cold Harbor, Virginia, May-June 1864.*
Library of Congress item 2018666599

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