

to take the car. We had to
leave our trapsacks and we
could take our own coats
& blankets. There is a tent
which is the most perfect of
cameras about 2 feet high
with buttons on each
side. Take a piece of the
men's cotton canvas
together & make a coat
that will be sure
to last.

1862

1862

The 123rd New York Volunteers

by Dana Smith

2023

San Francisco, California, USA, Earth

A variable edition of sets of 6 silkscreen prints on Stonehenge paper, 30x22 inches, accompanied by 6 digital prints 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 last months of 1862 into the winter of 1863, where we see the real people and the stark carnage from 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.

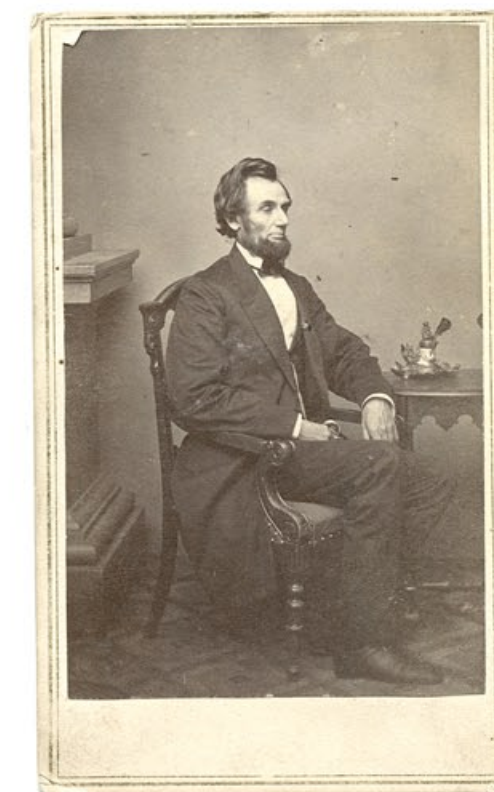
William Garret Fisher's letters home while fighting the American Civil War are a collection of over 140 letters preserved by his family. Will Fisher, living in Cambridge, New York at 17 years old, joined the Union Army on September 30, 1861, as a bugler in Company A, 7th Regiment of New York Cavalry 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 to transcribe 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. Below the photo are two postcards that Will carried with him.

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.

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





This is a pretty city.
It is a town full of wounded &
sick men. One man
was lying his leg out
about a mile out of town
in the Burnside first
attack. The rebels, when
they came to the cars
had a lot of men
lying on the ground.

1862

The 123rd New York Volunteers

Never Smelt Anything So Bad In My Life

by Dana Smith
2023

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

Will Fisher to his mother
Headquarters 123rd Regt. Co. I, NYSV, Frederick City, Maryland
October 1, 1862

Dear Mother,

I will again inform you of our whereabouts. Well this is Wednesday morning about 9 o'clock. Monday morning I wrote you a note that we were packing to move. Well, we waited till about 4 PM when we started for the city (Washington) along with the whole division to take the cars. We had to leave our knapsacks, all we could take was our overcoats & blankets & our shelter tents which is two square pieces of canvas about 2 yards square with buttons on it & each man takes one piece & then 2 men button their pieces together & put them on a crotch & that is all the tents we have. When we see our knapsacks again I don't know, but I hope its soon, for we haven't a thing but what I told.

I had to buy this paper of a store here in the city. Well, we got to Wash. about dark & expected to take the cars right off, but we laid down on the side walk till about 2 o'clock when we went aboard of the cars which were open platform cars. Here we waited till about 9 o'clock the next morning when we got underway for this place. We came most up to Baltimore & then took another road and came here. We got in here about dark, riding all day. When we got here the regt. went out into a field & camped. I was detailed to guard the baggage as corporal of the guard. Jimmy Sherman was one of the guards from our camp.

We had a very easy time of it & this morning. Jim & I have been looking around. This is a pretty city. It is cram full of wounded & sick Rebels. We seen one man having his leg cut off. About a mile out of here is where Burnside first attacked the Rebels. When we came by it on the cars last night I never smelt anything so bad in my life. Some of the Rebels heads and arms were out of the ground. If you remember the Rebels had this city 27 days, there was fighting on this street where I write. It is 8 miles to where the battle of South Mountain was fought & 26 miles to Harpers Ferry. Where we will go I don't know, but you may write & direct to 123rd Regt. NYSV Co. I, Washington, D.C.

You will have to take lead pencil in such circumstances as these. I can't write to any but you & John till we have more time. Much love to you, & Aunt Sarah, & all the friends far & near.

Ever your own boy,

W. G. Fisher

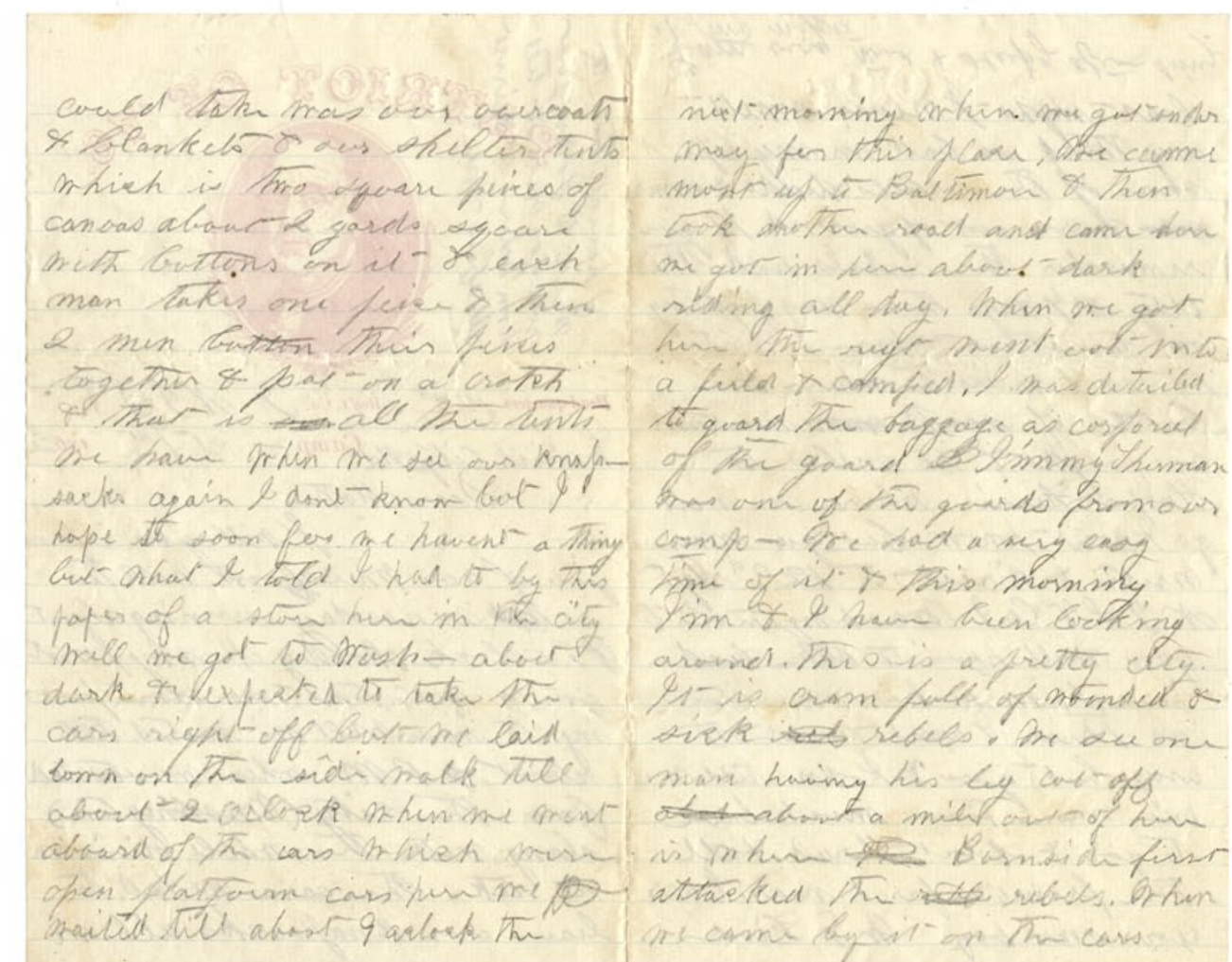
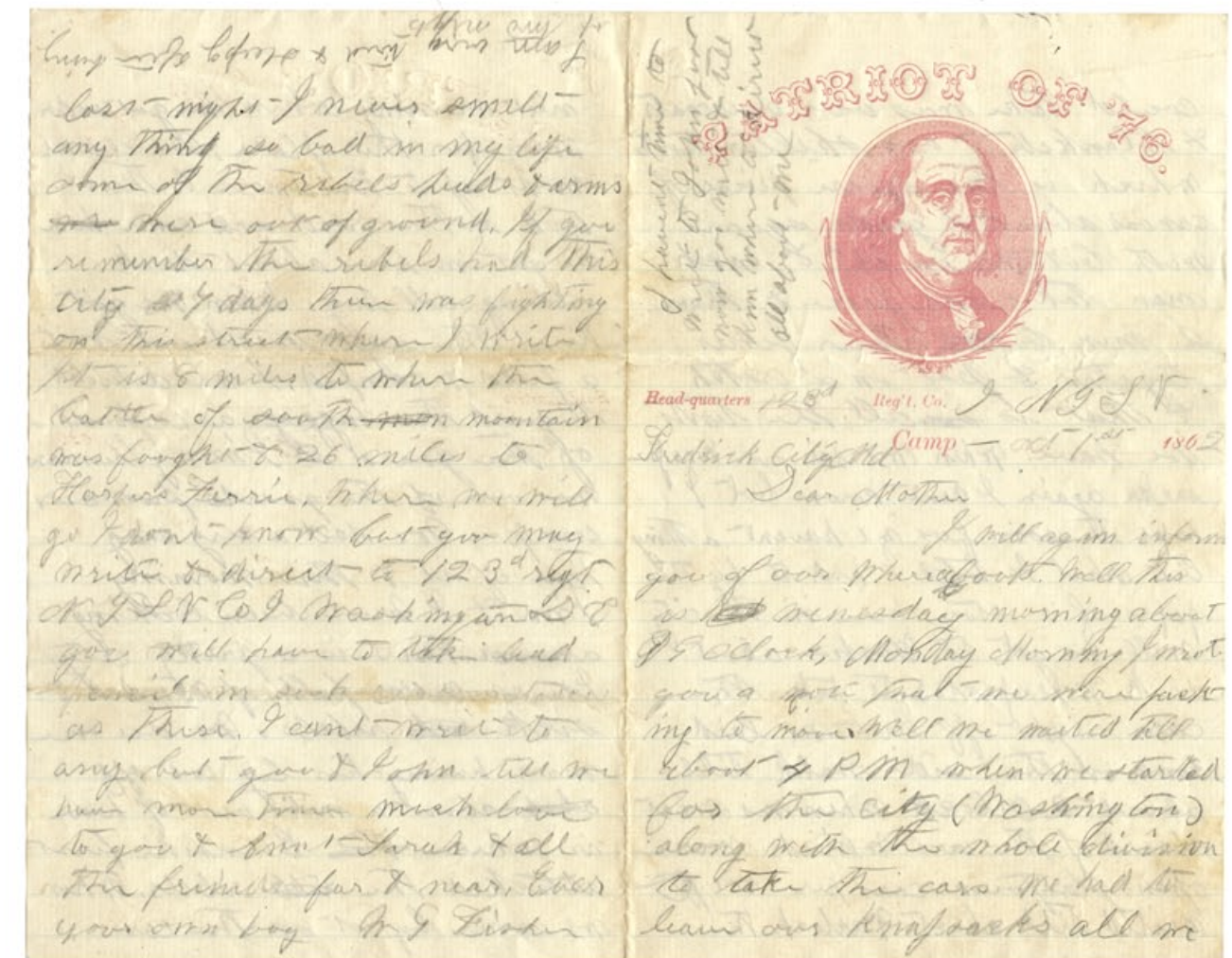
P.S. I am very tired & sleepy after being up two nights.

Photo credit: Alexander Gardner, *View on battlefield of Antietam, four dead Confederate soldiers from General William Starke's Louisiana infantry along the Hagerstown Pike*. Antietam Maryland, 1862.

Library of Congress item 2014646936

Photo credit for title page: photographer unknown, *Pickets cooking their rations*. Fredericksburg, Virginia, December 9, 1862.

Library of Congress item 2018671418





I besides I saw times that I would
give anything for some thing to eat -
I tell you when a man is sick he
cannot leave on government feed any
more than nothing. I don't know
as we are carrying to get paid
off. One thing of this government
can't pay its soldiers better & feed
them better I hope it will get
licked like dam hill

1862

The 123rd New York Volunteers

I Would Give Anything For Something To Eat

by Dana Smith
2023

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

Will Fisher to his mother
Camp of the 123rd Regt. NYSV, Loudoun Valley, Virginia
November 25, 1862

Dear Mother,

I will now answer your welcome letter of the 19th & also one of the 14th inst.

I was almost scared to death to read the reports of my health in old C. What should start all of these reports I don't know. But I am sure my health is not near so bad as represented for this morning I just came off of guard for 24 hours & am on duty all the time. My feet are entirely well & I eat about 2 rations a day, never was any better or more contented in my life. I have 2 pair of drawers, 3 woolen shirts & 3 cotton ones. I hope this will ease all of your fears for my health. I guess I was a little to blame for waiting so long without writing. I will try & do better in the future.

For 2 or 3 days the boxes of provisions & boots & gloves from the North has been very great owing to the fact that we are expecting to winter here. We are already building log shanties for winter. Now the most I am in need of is a pair of gloves. Now, Ab has just sent for a pair of boots & will have a box sent, & says you can put in a pair of gloves just as well as not. We can't get them here because we haven't the money to buy them with. I have not got a red cent nor Ab hasn't, nor Jim Sherman, & if we go into winter quarters we have have got to buy stoves. I tell you, a 2.00 bill would look like everything just now. Ab has sent for some. When I was sick I had to use my money for something to eat & besides I saw times that I would give anything for something to eat. I tell you when a man is sick he cannot live on government feed any more than nothing. I don't know as we are ever going to get paid off. One thing, if this government can't pay its soldiers better & feed them better I hope it will get licked like Sam Hill. If you see Mr. Shiland you can see if you will have time to knit me a pair. If not, buy a pair & have them charged. Do just as you please about it.

Tell Aunt S. that sweet oil & alcohol cured my rheumatism. She had better try it. It cures everybody here.

I will wait till mail time before I close & see if I can think of anything else to write. I guess Uncle Nat is never going to write.

I don't know as there is anything else to write this time. I should like the gloves & the other if you can. Don't distress yourself. I will close with love to you & all the rest,

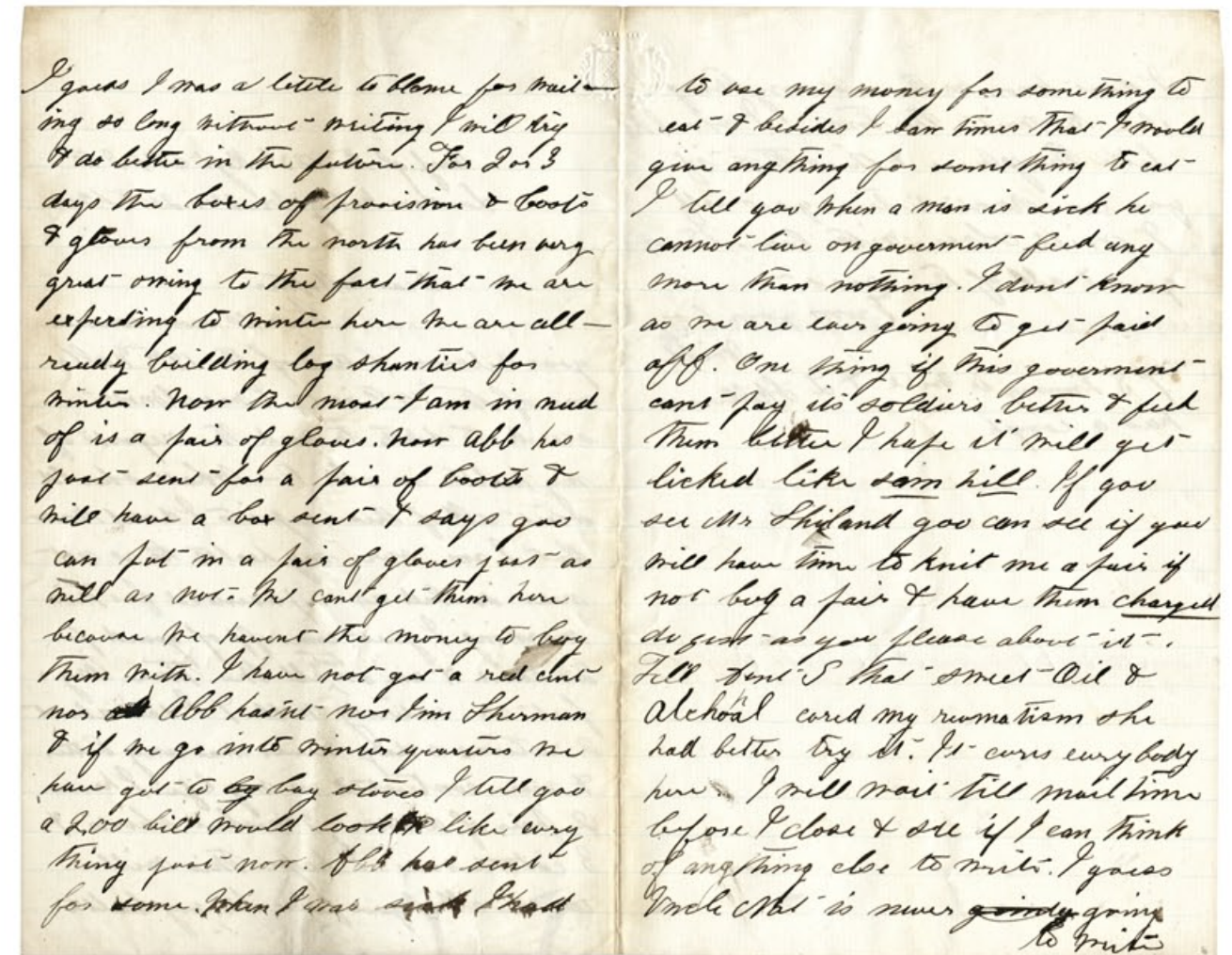
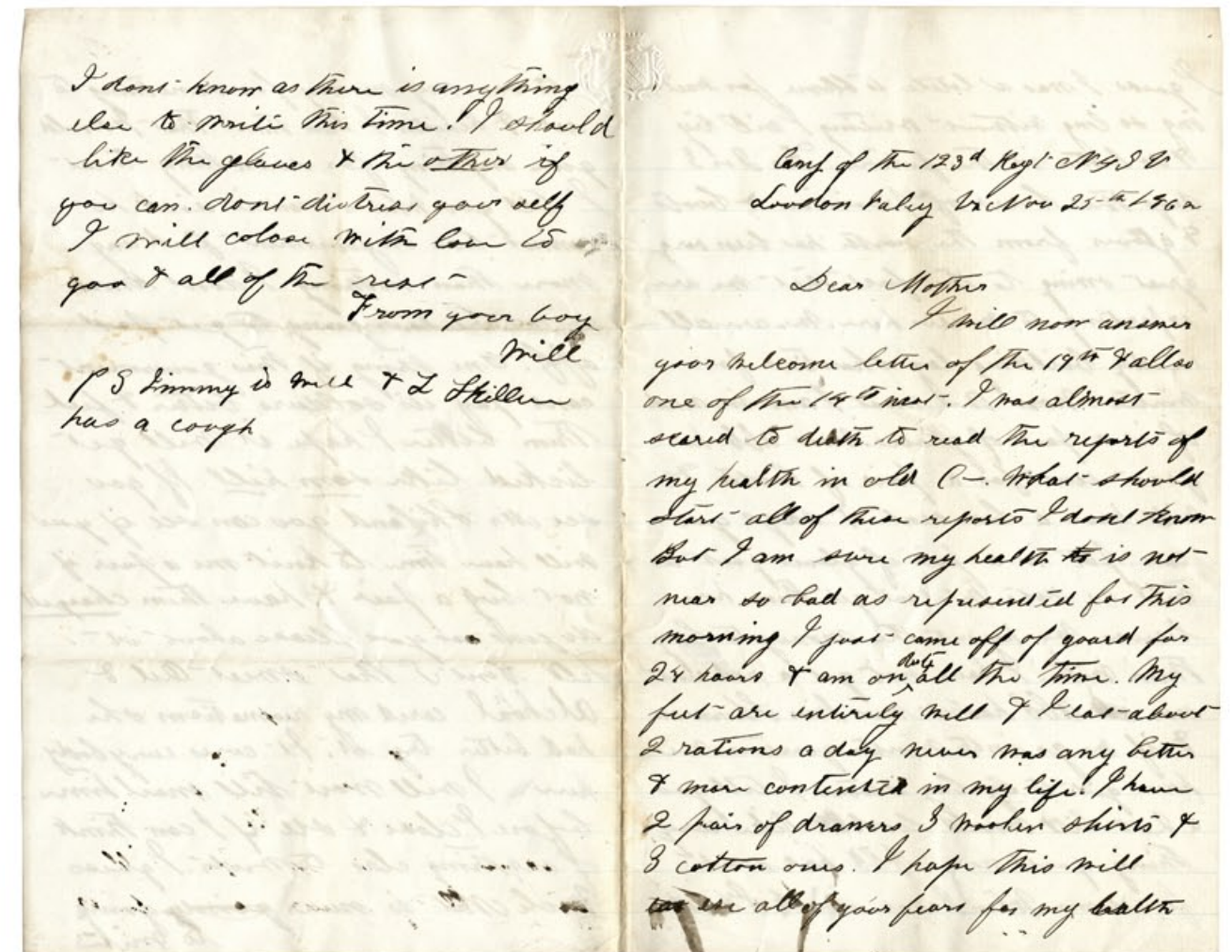
From your boy,

Will

P.S. Jimmy is well & L. Skellie has a cough.

Photo credit: Timothy O'Sullivan, Commissary tent at headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, near Fairfax Court House, Virginia, June. Fairfax, Virginia, 1863.

Library of Congress item 2012650157





The Heroes & Moles show the effects
of the war. It is plain yet their marches are hard on
the poor beasts, when we was on the march before
the last three days there was a lot of the poor mules
sank down into the mud & died of exhaustion. It was
hard but there is no cost to suffering in this
I often think that if there is any one connected
in any way with this war it is they who are
it for many of them have already been killed
as much as they can for at the moment they
are still alive.

1862

The 123rd New York Volunteers

The Poor Mules Sank Down Into the Mud and Died of Exhaustion

by Dana Smith
2023

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

Will Fisher to his mother
Fairfax Station, Virginia
December 27, 1862 & January 1, 1863

My own Dear Mother,

As I have a little leisure to night I will improve it in writing to you. I will commence one & send it when completed. I wrote one & sent it soon after the halt in our march, which you have probably received before this time.

We have all got rested now & feel like colts again. The horses & mules show the effects of the march quite plain yet. Those marches are hard on the poor beasts. When we was on the march before the last three days there was lots of the poor mules sank down into the mud & died of exhaustion. It looks hard but there is no end to the suffering in times of war. I often think that if there is anyone connected in any way with this war who is trying to prolong it for any profit to himself he will have about as much to answer for at the judgement day as any other class of sinners in the world.

We all expected to spend Christmas in Richmond, but we got disappointed this time, & still live in hopes that the war will be over some day or other. I have just been out to roll call & while in line we received marching orders again so I will close for tonight & if I have any time in the morning I will give you any new particulars I may learn.

Good night, Will

Jan. 1st, 1863

Well, Mother, I will commence by wishing you & Aunt Sarah a happy New Year & hope you had a merry Christmas. The other night I closed my letter rather abruptly with a march in view in the morning, which program was carried out, for early in the morning of the 28th we had to roll up our blankets & start, which is no very light load to carry, viz: 3 loaves of bread, 3 lb of pork, & coffee & sugar. We did not take our knapsacks, left them in camp under guard. Those unwell were also left. Lemuel did not feel very well & did not go.

Well, we started & marched down the same old road as far as the Occoquan River. This was Sabbath & our reasons for going were that the Rebels had attacked an Ohio brigade the day before & took some of them prisoners & killed a few & we went down to try to trap them, but we didn't make it out, for they had left before we got there. We got there about noon & went out skirmishing a few miles but did not find anything of them. We found 3 dead bodies in the woods which were killed in the battle. The Rebels had stripped them entirely. We then went back & laid by the river all night till next day in the afternoon when we started & marched back to camp & this is all there was of the march. During our march I have had to throw away some of my things. I have almost forgotten what I did have when I started, but I can tell you what I have got now. I have just two shirts, one woolen one & a cotton one. I have my needle book & bible, 2 handkerchiefs, (white ones). I wear my 2 shirts both at once till they need washing & then wear my blouse coat till I get them washed.

I have just received a letter from you & John giving me quite a blowing for not writing, but you cannot have received my letter which I wrote since we arrived here if you have lost, a good long letter with a full description of our 7 days march. You say my last letter was dated Nov. 25th. That was the letter I wrote asking for money & waited for an answer till the 11th of Dec. when we started on the march of 7 days & as soon as we halted, I wrote again saying that Jimmy Sherman was taken prisoner. But I have since learned that it is not true, he is at the convalescent camp at Alexandria. I guess we have now got into a place where we will stay till we are mustered out of service which will happen about the first of May. I want you to answer this immediately & let me know whether you have received my letter which was dated between the 15th and 20th of Dec. I was glad to hear of Cristopher Greene's being discharged for he looked bad when I saw him last.

I will admit that I have not written so often as I might, but the truth is I do not feel much like writing after marching all day or doing any other duty, but I will try & write while we stay here as often as once a week, & you answer as often as you can. If you have not got my last letter just let me know & I will describe it over again or else get Uncle Nat's folks letter & read that. Yesterday, we got the first express matter since we left Loudoun Valley. There was lots of it.

I think Jim will be with us again soon. If you want to send a box of anything, it will be a good time now. If you send one you had not better send any chickens, but, if you want to, you may send some kind of a meat pot pie, mince pie, fried cakes, ginger cake, a little sausage & not any butter for me. If any folks is a mind to, they can put in some walnuts, apples, & the like. I would also like a bed tick, any old one will do to sleep on while we stay here.

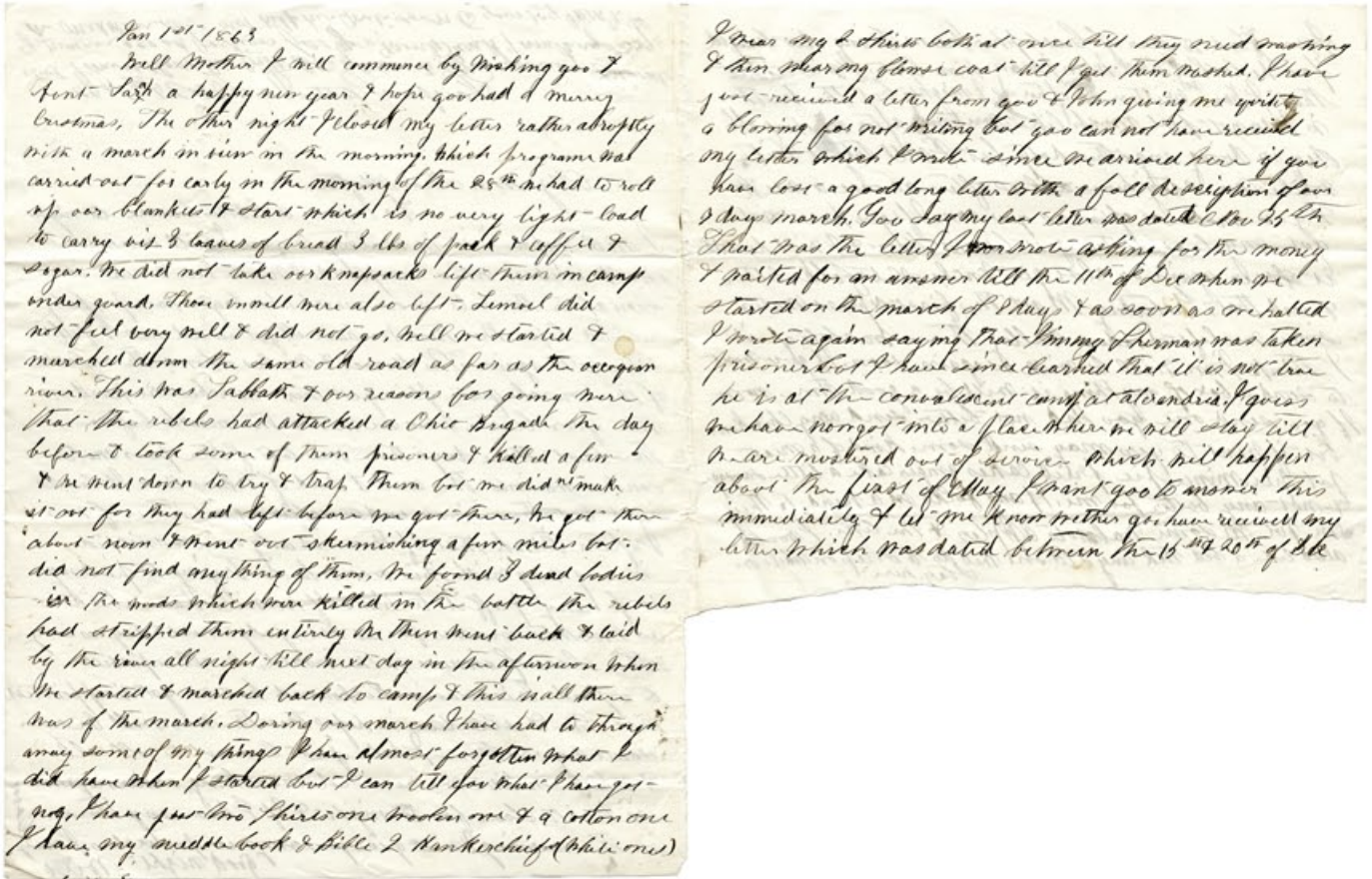
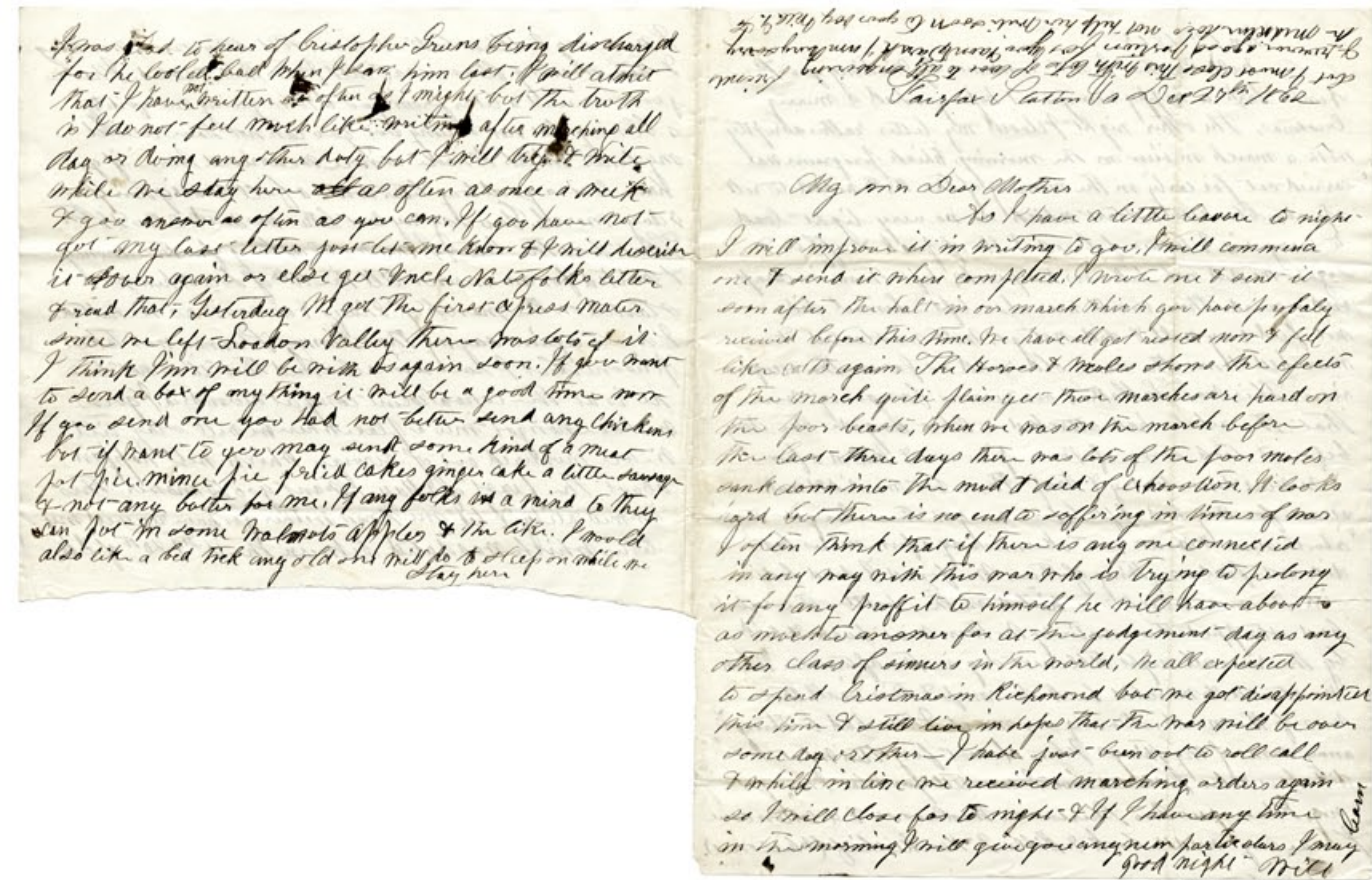
But I must close this with lots of love to all inquiring friends & reserve a good portion for you and Aunt Sarah. I am very sorry the medicine does not help her.

Write soon to your boy,

Will G. F.

Photo credit: unknown, *A shattered caisson, Fredericksburg, Va.* Fredericksburg, Virginia, photographed between 1861 and 1865.

Library of Congress item 2013649038





on well all day & about dark we
found our landing of on the
middle of the tent with the
the lava flow a good
to about the lava
of the lava flow
to the lava flow
the lava flow

1862

The 123rd New York Volunteers

Old Abe Intends To Be Present At the Next Battle

by Dana Smith
2023

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

Will Fisher to his brother
Stafford
April 21, 1863

Dear Brother,

In looking over my letters I find one from you dated April 8th and for the life of me I can't tell whether I have answered it or not, so to be on the safe side I will write a little today even if I have spilt my ink.

The above is an apology for these lead pencil scribblings. I was extremely glad to hear of the improvement in your health for I was quite scared at your letter of the 4th of March. I hope it will continue good.

We are under marching orders for the past week, but still don't get a great ways so I think it must be some kind of a feint to cover movements of the cavalry which by the way have all gone somewhere. I suppose they are off to Kelly's Ford.

I am confident that old Hooker is going to give them particular fits this time. One thing is certain, I don't believe he is going to see all of his plans a month ahead in the Richmond Whig. Persons coming from Washington say they don't know nothing about the present movement even at that place.

The division commanders don't know nothing about their destiny. These are good signs which I am glad to see. I understand that old Abe intends to be present at the next battle & see who does the work & who don't. I hope so. The President, Sec. of War & Gen. Halleck all came down to the army day before yesterday.

I hope your situation as steward of the seminary will prove to be a good one. I suppose it does not interfere with your studies any.

I wrote to Aunt Taggart the other day, have not had any answer yet.

We have been paid off for 4 months up to the first of March. I sent 40 dollars home by the allotment system & had 12 to keep.

The boys are all well & send their love to you, but I must close to go on guard.

While I remain your dear brother,
Will

Photo credit: Alexander Gardner, *President Lincoln and Gen. George B. McClellan in the general's tent; another view*. Antietam Maryland, October 3, 1862.

Library of Congress item 2018666253

not had my answer
yet I have been paid
off for 4 months up to
the first of March I sent
40 dollars home by the
allotment system &
had 12 to keep. The boys
are all well & send their
love to you but I must
close to go on guard
while I remain your
Dear Brother
Will

1863
Stafford April 21

Dear Brother
In looking over
my letters I find one from
you dated April 8th and
for the life of me I can't
tell whether I have answered
it or not. So to be on the
safe side I will write
a little today even if
I have spilt my ink.
The above is an apology
for these lead pencil
scribblings. I was extremely
glad to hear of the
improvement in your health
for I was quite scared
at your letter of the 4th
of March. I hope it will
continue good.

We are under marching
orders for the past week
but still don't get a
great ways so I think it
must be some kind of a
feint to cover movements
of the cavalry which by
the way have all gone
somewhere. I suppose
they are off to Kelly's
Ford. I am confident
that old Hooker
is going to give them
particular fits this time.
One thing is certain I don't
believe he is going to
see all of his plans
a month ahead in the
Richmond Whig. Persons
coming from Washington
say they don't know
nothing about the present
movement even at that
place. The Division
commanders don't know
nothing about their
destiny. These are
good signs which
I am glad to see. I
understand that old
Abe intends to be
present at the next
battle & see who does
the work & who don't.
I hope so. The
President - Sec. of War
& Gen. Halleck all
came down to the army
day before yesterday.
I hope your situation
as steward of the Sem-
will prove to be a
good one. I suppose
it does not interfere
with your studies any.
I wrote to Aunt Taggart
the other day have

The Division Com-
mander doesn't know nothing
about their destiny. These
are good signs which
I am glad to see. I under-
stand that Col. ~~Ab~~ intends
to be present at the next
battle & see who does the
work & who doesn't.



1862

Dana Smith