

1864



# 1864

## by Dana Smith

2024

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, the background 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 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. The third layer shows handwriting from the letters of William Garret Fisher, written while fighting the American Civil War, applied in semi-transparent metallic ink to float above the image, shimmering in and out with a 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](http://www.willfisher.org).

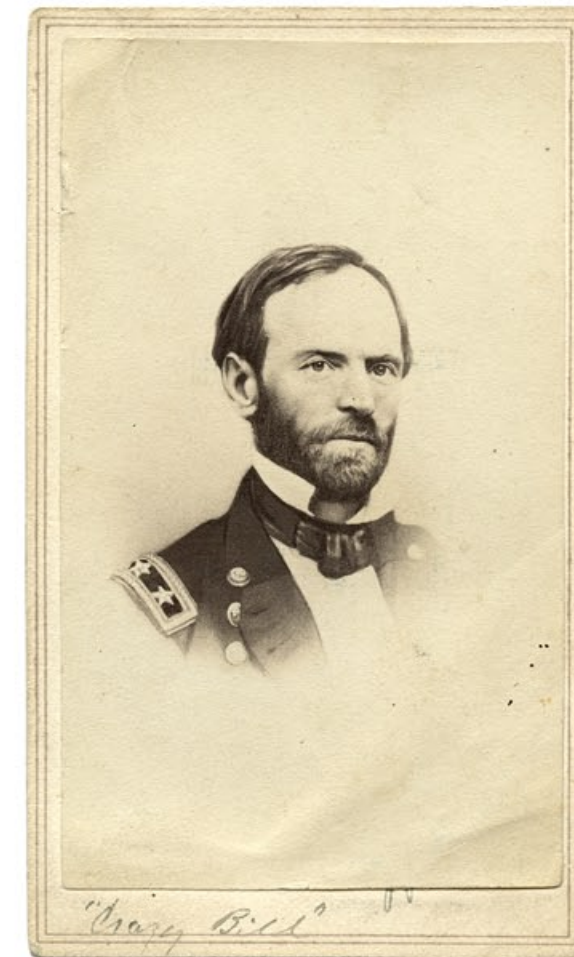
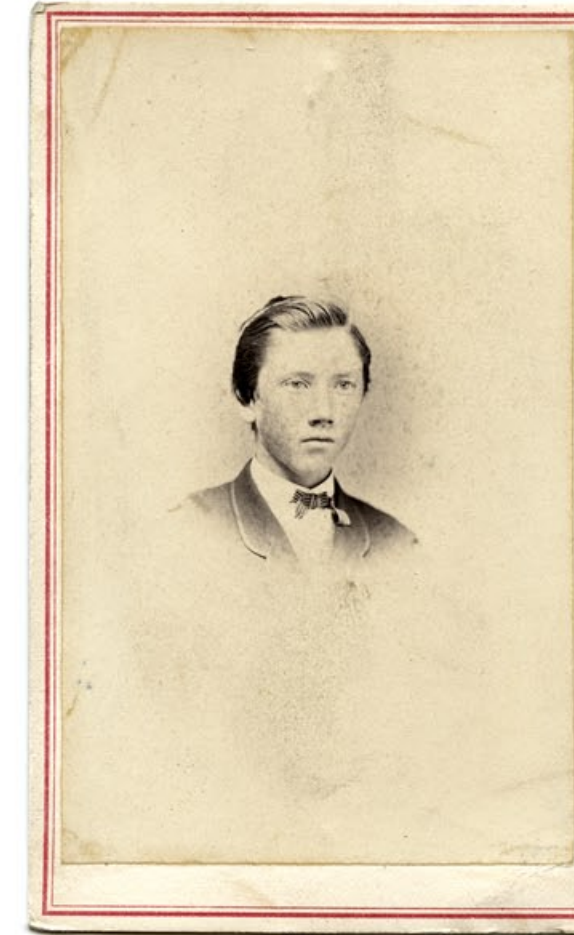
Will Fisher's letters were handed down to the artist from her great-great-grandfather through her mother, Judith Fuller Smith. Judith assisted her father, Pierpont Fuller in the tedious job of transcribing the original handwritten letters. Scanned images of the letters are seen on the right side of all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

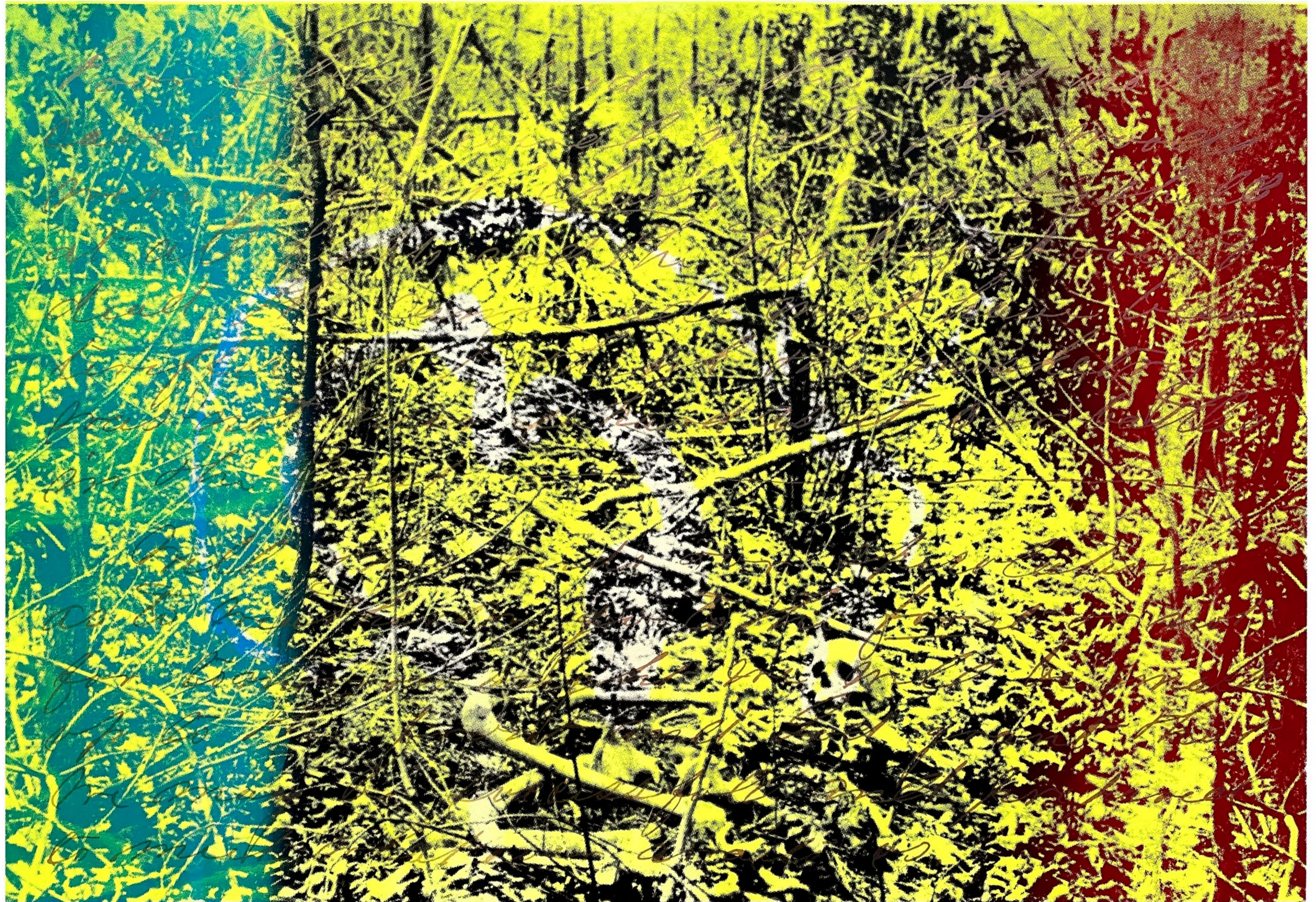
Here, to the right of this text, above, is a photograph of William Garret Fisher, probably taken around the time that he dropped out of school to volunteer, with his mother's permission, to fight for what he thought would be a short stint, but became a 5 year saga, as detailed in his letters home. The photograph below is a post card of General William T. Sherman that belonged to Will Fisher. Will was distantly related to Sherman through his mother, Eunice Sherman. While fighting the Atlanta Campaign of 1864 Will writes many times of Sherman's popularity amongst the troops. "I tell you Gen. Sherman gets many a "God bless you" when we are passing through these formidable works for his masterly skill in flanking them out without doing it by assault. I think everything of him. I overheard him say in the forepart of the campaign that he had got men enough to flank them every time & he was going to do it in preference to assaulting them."

So, it is clear that these primary source documents of Will Fisher'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.





1864

# Smack Up To The Front

by Dana Smith  
2024

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

Will Fisher to his mother  
Chickamauga Battle Ground, Georgia  
Evening, May 4, 1864

Dear Mother,

I seize a moment tonight to write you a line on my lap that you may know I still live. A week ago tonight we left Elk River, as I wrote you just before starting, and marched to Decherd. The next day we went over the mountain (Cumberland) and Saturday night arrived at Bridgeport and on the way were joined by our new chaplain, Mr. White, from Whitehall, N.Y.

Sabbath morning he made a few remarks before starting and we went to Shellmound, 7 miles. There is a very wonderful cave there 9 miles long. The next day, we went to Whiteside, 10 miles, and the next day (yesterday) we came to Chattanooga and today we have come out on the Ringgold Road about 10 miles, most of the way over the old Chickamauga battle ground, where, of course, I have seen a great many sad sights. I saw in one place where a capt., lieut., and 17 men from a company of 82 Ill. Vols. were all in one grave. Poor fellows, died in the most noble cause. For several miles the woods were perfect "chaos." Cut off by shells at all heights and the tops lopped over and dead. The cannonade must have been terrific, but I think the musketry was not near so hard as at our battles in the east.

Well, thus ends our speculations as to whether we go to the front or not, for tomorrow night we will be smack up to the front, and God grant that we may be successful and prepared to meet whatever awaits us. Our Third Div. is one day in advance of us, that is Gen. Butterfield's Div. The 2nd Div. under Geary is to come yet. We had a good view of Lookout Mountain where Hooker fought among the clouds. Have not seen Gen. Hooker yet.

Ira King, my bosom friend in camp or march, wants me to have you tell his folks that he is along all right and well. We stick close. I have seen Lem every day since we started. He has had his knapsack carried and stood it well. More healthy than when he was in camp. I was so fat and soft that it liked to floored me the first two days but have got inured now.

Lots of love to Sarah, tell her that I will think of her and you too amid whatever excitement I shall pass through. Love to all, good night and write soon to your loving boy.

Will

Photo credit: photographer G. O. Brown, *Views in the woods in the Federal lines on north side of Orange Plank Road.* Chancellorsville, Virginia,

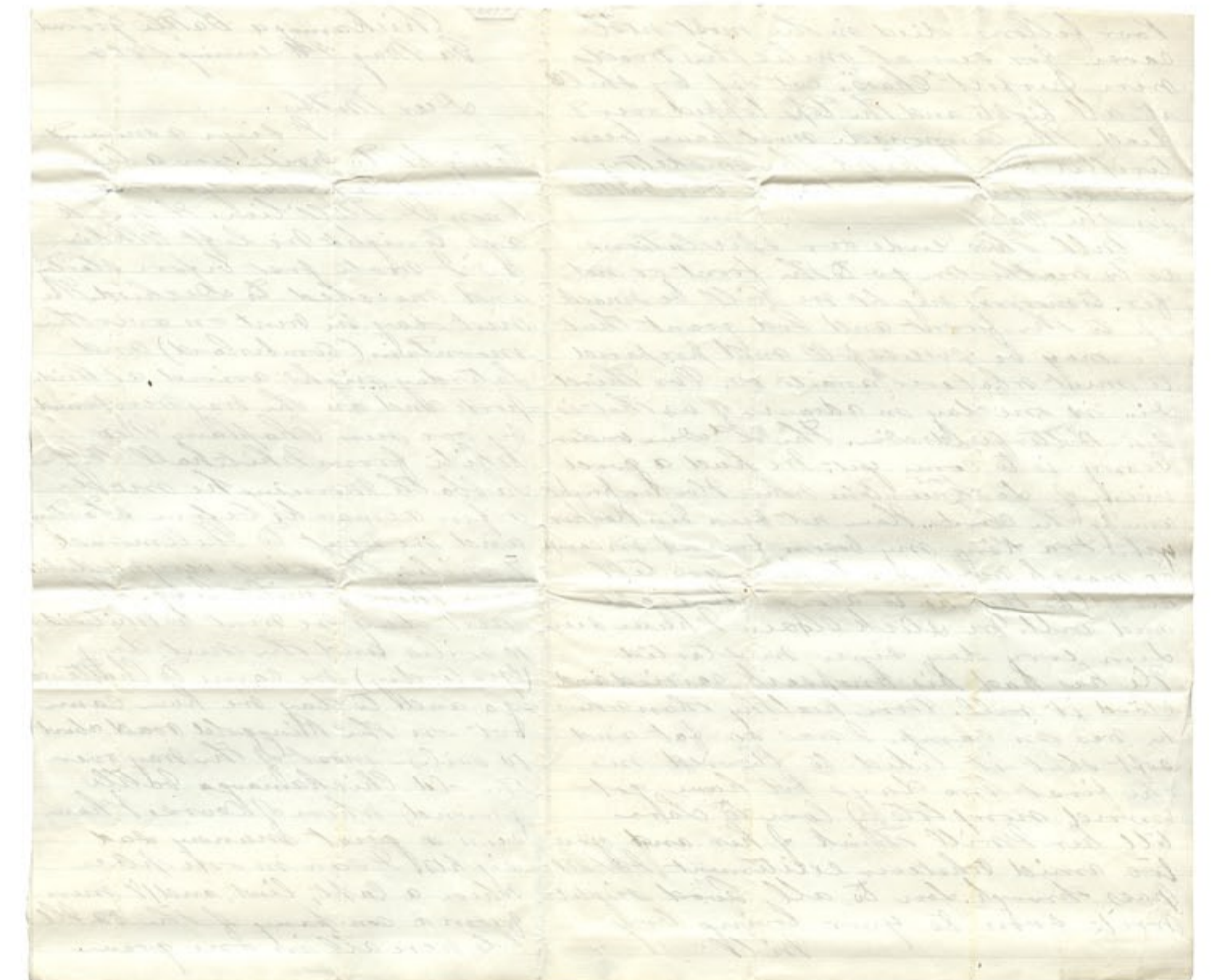
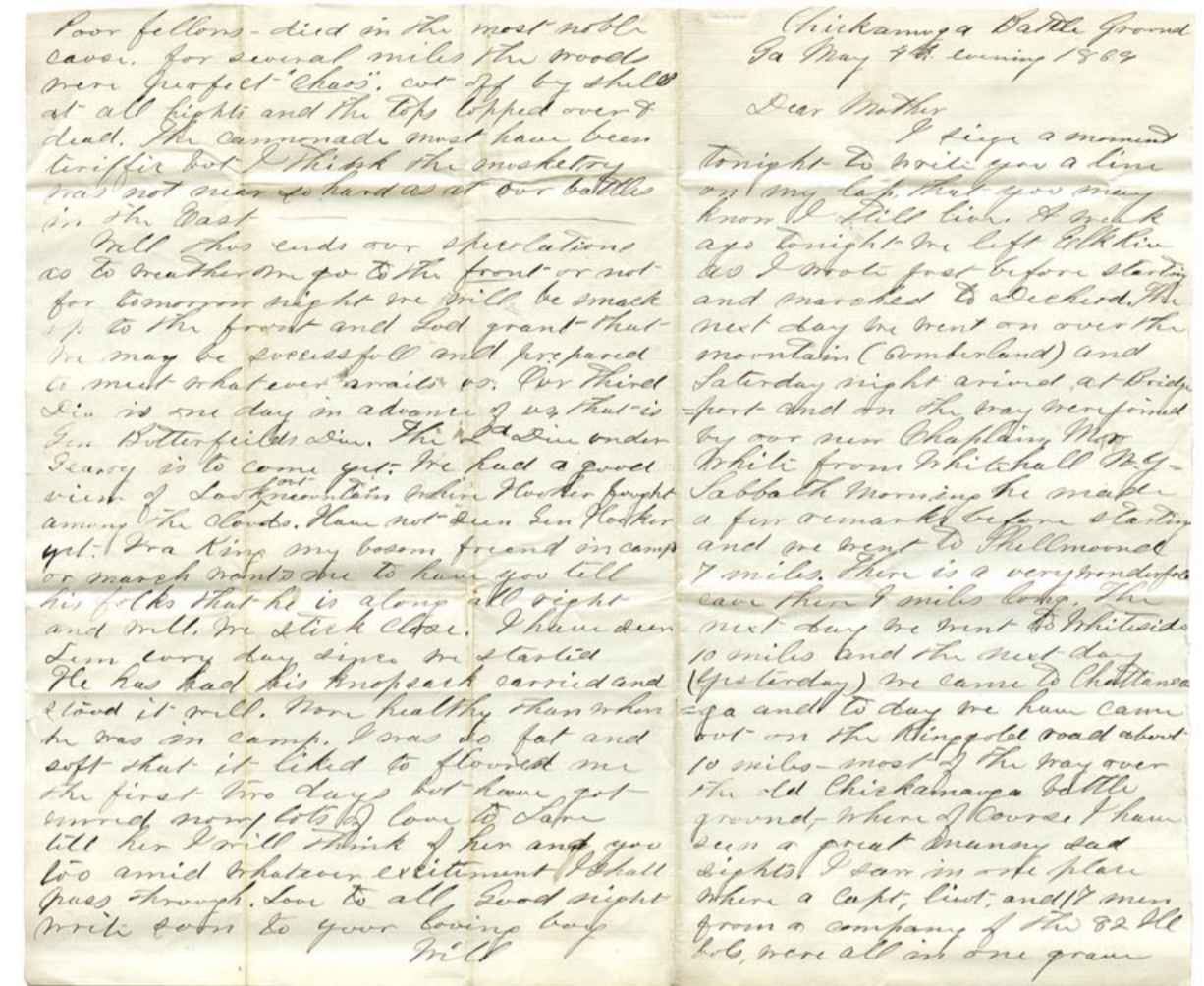
Library of Congress item 00652523

Photo credit for title page: photographer unknown, *View from casemates Confederate fort-D, looking north.* Atlanta, Georgia.

Library of Congress item 201264670

Photo credit for envelope: Civil War envelope for U.S. Christian Commission showing carrier pigeon with letter.

Library of Congress item 2011648564





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1864

# This Unholy Revolt of Barbarism Against Liberty and Christianity

by Dana Smith  
2024

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

Will Fisher to his mother  
Elk River, Tennessee, Camp of the 123rd  
April 9, 1864

Dear Mother,

I was very much gratified night before last, to receive another good letter from you, date of March 23rd. (Excuse these mistakes for I don't know what I wanted to write.) I don't know what makes the letters so long coming through. They sometimes get along in six days but this one of yours and some of mine seem to be double that time coming.

You cannot realize the regret that I feel in writing you the changes that have been made in our dept. You probably heard by the papers that the 11th and 12th Corps have been consolidated into the 20th Corps. That is to be the name of the new Corps and to be under command of Gen. Joe Hooker. If that don't have a slight smell of saltpeter or gunpowder, I don't know what does. Gen. Howard of the 11th Corps has been assigned to the command of the 4th Corps formerly commanded by Gen. Gordon Granger. But Gen. Slocum the very idol of the old 12th Corps is ordered to report to Gen. Sherman for duty. I never saw the like, the affect that the news has on this regt., it casts melancholy over every one in the corps. Gen. Hooker has been a very successful general, but he is a strong fighter and for my part I am willing to follow him on to speedy victory. I am not afraid, as some are, that he drinks so as to unfit him for service, for I have never seen him drink and don't think he does, to excess, at least. President Lincoln told Hooker when he started for the West, to beware of Bourbon County, Kentucky, which makes quite a joke on him, but I don't think he is guilty. I think his appearance gave rise to the story in the first place. He has a very red face and looks more like Andrew Wood than anyone I think of. Therefore, except Gen. Slocum, I would rather be under Hooker than any other general.

I think it quite probable that we will leave here for the front within a month. Can't tell whether we will go to the front here or go back to the Army of the Potomac but would prefer the latter because it is so much more convenient to a great many comforts than in this dept. I have come to the conclusion that the armies are going to see hard service this summer, but will also see the end of this unholy revolt of barbarism against liberty and Christianity. My firmest hope is in the reelection of Mr. Lincoln or some equally as good man. If he be elected, the Rebels know his policy too well to hope for anything else but a continued prosecution of the war, even to extermination itself, until they come to their reason again. On the other hand, if a man be elected who has his black heart as full of treason as any Copperhead that I ever knew, why then all of this four years fighting will be lost and this as miserable a nation as figured on the face of the earth. But I suppose you are as well aware of all this as I, so I will write something else, but cannot help spouting sometimes about it, for it is of as much importance as any coming military campaign and although I am just a boy that can't vote, next fall I shall use my influence for old Abe if he is nominated. This regt. will poll at present standing nearly six hundred votes and at least five hundred and seventy five would go strong for Lincoln.

It seems as though it was destined for Lem to leave me, he has at last gone. He has been detailed for headquarters guard at the brigade hd. qtrs. It will be a good situation for him for he will get his load carried on the march and on the battlefield they will have to guard the hd. qtrs. baggage, guard prisoners, and pick up "shysters" or shirks, those who run for the rear, so you can see it is not quite so dangerous, which is something of a consideration. This will not separate us entirely for we will see one another occasionally, but I hate to have him leave me.

I rec'd a letter from Lib last night and it was a real good one, I tell you. She tells me all the news. She said Sarah Jane wanted her to tell me to send her my photograph and she would send one in return, of hers. I should like to know how I am to do in the matter for, to commence with, there is no place or opportunity to have one taken, and besides I have never seen a picture yet taken by these army photographers that I would be willing to send to a friend.

The engineers and mechanics are building a kind of blockhouse or stockade so that a less force can guard the railroad bridge. It is very ingeniously constructed and is bullet and bomb proof.

I have not heard anything more from John since he wrote personifying his boy. Lib says they have a good deal of fun with you when you came after the papers about grandmother. I did not expect to be promoted to uncle quite so soon but however feel proud of the title and think it must make you feel quite antiquated as well as myself. You don't know how much I would like to be at liberty to come home and see my new relatives as well as some that are older.

There was a woman just at the door begging for something to eat. She had a snuff stick in her mouth, and the little boy and girl who were with her were both chewing great quids. They beg their tobacco as well as their eatables of the soldier.

I should think that you would need some wood soon. I suppose you will have transportation (excuse the military phrase) for it some way by wagon if not by sleigh. I do not want you to wear your life out though on those old chunks you have to burn. So Jack Tearny (one of the boys was just talking about Tom Beadle and you see I wrote above and had to scratch it out) Hiram King who died, Lib said eats 10 lb of candy a week. I know he is or was the greatest man to eat sweetmeats when he was in the army. When I get home I want you to have Gen. Slocum's photograph saved.

I have received the stamps in both the letters, six in the first and three in the last. I have borrowed nine of Lem since his box came and have not paid them yet. I get one quite frequently for writing for other boys. But I must close. I suppose I will not write you many more times from this dear old camp and I want to urge you to write often when I get to moving around. I feel like leaving home to think of leaving this camp. It is strange what an attachment we will form for a camp in a few short weeks. But if we are to take part in the grand performance this spring one cannot hope to stay here much longer and I see the people up there are getting impatient to see the armies jamming around again. And how does Aunt do? I hope better. My best love to her & you.

Your aff't & loving son,  
Will

Photo credit: photographer Mathew B. Brady, Indian delegation in the White House Conservatory during the Civil War, with J.G. Nicolay, President Abraham Lincoln's secretary, standing in center back row and interpreter John Simpson Smith at back left, Washington D.C, March 27, 1863.

Summary: Photograph of the Southern Plains delegation, taken in the White House Conservatory on March 27, 1863. The interpreter John Simpson Smith (misidentified in source as William Simpson Smith) and the agent Samuel G. Colley are standing at the left of the group; the white woman standing at the far right is often identified as Mary Todd Lincoln. The Indians in the front row are, left to right: War Bonnet, Standing in the Water, and Lean Bear of the Cheyennes, and Yellow Wolf of the Kiowas. Yellow Wolf is wearing the Thomas Jefferson peace medal that aroused such interest. The identities of the Indians of the second row are unknown. Within eighteen months from the date of this sitting, all four men in the front row were dead. Yellow Wolf died of pneumonia a few days after the picture was taken; War Bonnet and Standing in the Water died in the Sand Creek Massacre; and Lean Bear was killed by toops from Colorado Territory who mistook him for a hostile. (Source: Diplomats in buckskin, by Herman J. Viola, p. 101).

Library of Congress item 2004669812

Elk River Tenn Camp of the 123rd  
April 9th 1864

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Your aff't & loving son  
Will



1864

# Southern Aristocracy Is At A Heavy Discount

by Dana Smith  
2024

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

Will Fisher to his brother  
In camp at Elk River, Tennessee  
February 7th, 1864

My dear Bro,

You really don't know how gratified I was day before yesterday to receive that inestimable letter from you. I was very thankful to get it but thought that "laziness" was rather a cool excuse to offer for such a long silence. Please don't forget this lecture for upon a repetition of the offense you will get a more severe reprimand than you did this time. I would thank you too, for writing such a long one.

Well, on the first place I suppose I must tell you where we are. we are at Elk River or Estill Springs, so called from the fact that there are some mineral springs near by which are very strongly impregnated with sulphur. You can smell them ten rods distant. There is quite an extensive railroad bridge across the river which we have to guard. It is a splendid location and said to be very healthy. It is very much infested with guerrillas or bushwhackers as we call them. There was a man from Co. A shot a short time ago while out on scout. The guerrilla was concealed in an old shed near by in which the fellow was posted on picket for the night. The sneak had no way to escape only by the door where the sentinel stood and fearing to stay where he was he shot the fellow and ran for his life. He lost his hat and gun near by while crossing a ditch, which were recognized by the negroes who were acquainted with him. He was not caught and well it was for him that he escaped for if one had got our hands upon him he would long ere this have been food for some hungry vulture or turkey buzzard. There is no safety in sauntering two or three miles from camp without being well armed for they will pounce upon him like a cat upon a mouse.

We are in the most comfortable circumstances we have ever been since we have in the service. We have the best of quarters, nice little shanties about ten feet long, eight wide and six feet high, with four and five men in a shanty. There was a large brick factory near which we tore down to make fire places and chimneys. We are just as comfortable as we could wish, to be sure there are innumerable little home comforts which we are deprived of. After the novelty of a soldiers life wears off, he is well satisfied with the accommodations we have here. After the expiration of six months or at least a good hearty campaign, he is contented most anywhere, only those who came from some sense of duty are contented anywhere. Those who came to satisfy a mere curiosity or for any pecuniary benefit are soon discouraged and sick of it, and begin to work their way into the hospitals and berths which are "non combatant," and finally get out of the service by some means. The strength of a regt. or troop in work of battle can never be relied upon until the "shysters" are all culled out.

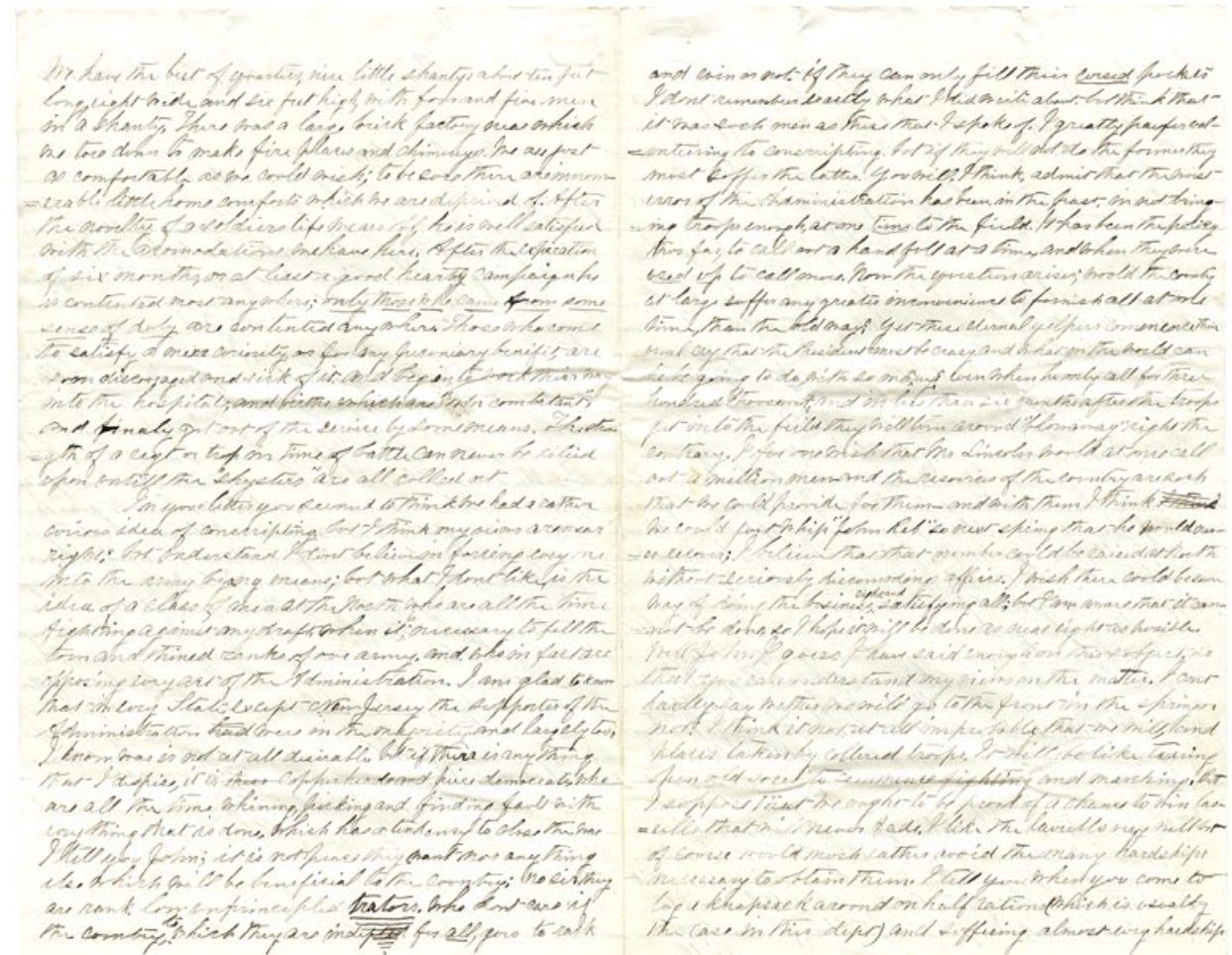
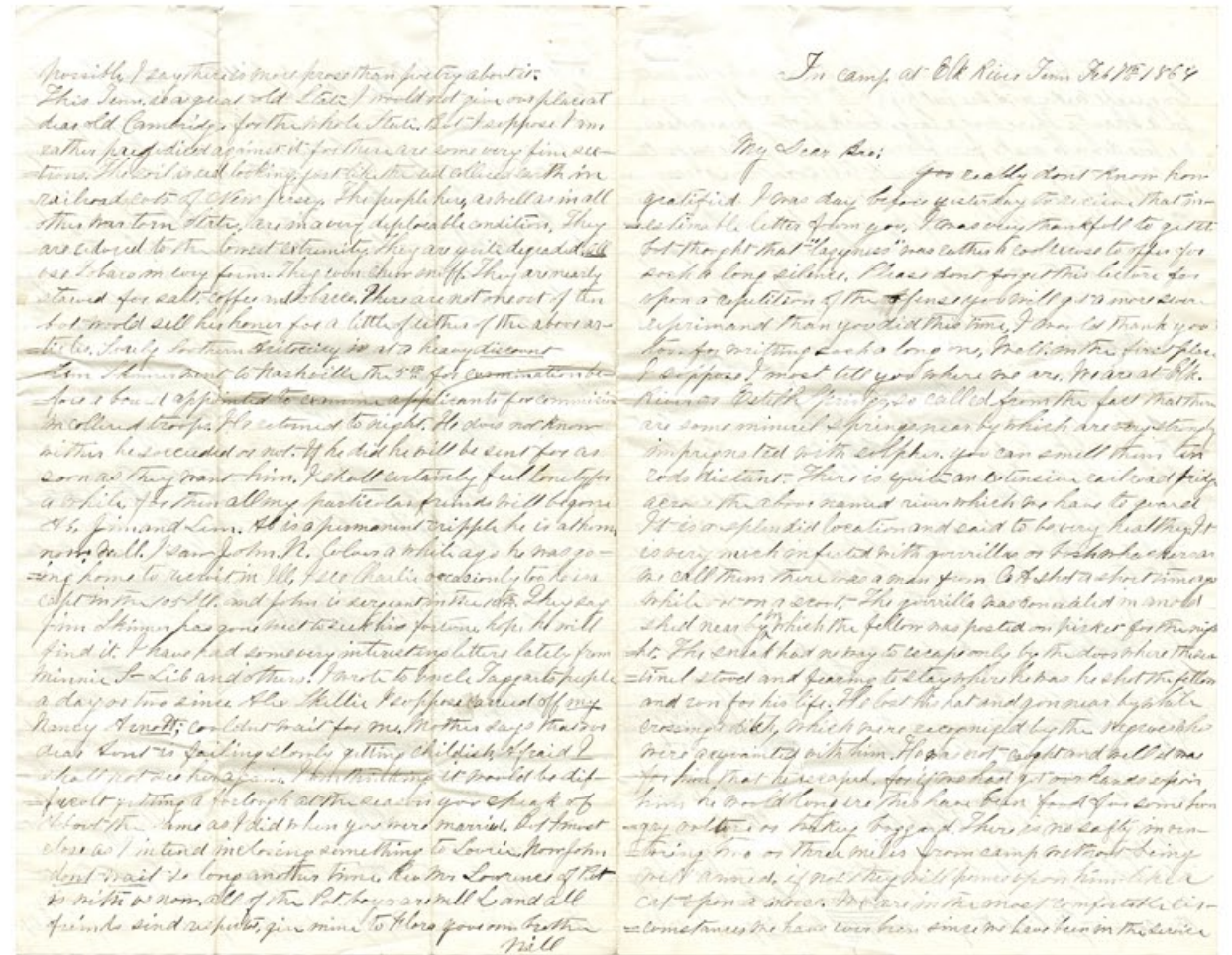
In your letter you seemed to think we had a rather curious idea of conscripting, but I think my views are near right, but understand I don't believe in forcing every one into the army by any means, but what I don't like is the idea of a class of men at the North who are all the time fighting against any draft when it is necessary to fill the torn and thinned ranks of our army and who in fact are opposing every act of the administration. I am glad to know that in every state except New Jersey the supporters of the administration were in the majority and largely too. I know war is not at all desirable, but if there is anything that I can despise it is the Copperheads and Peace Democrats who are all the time whining, picking and finding fault with everything that is done which has a tendency to close the war. I tell you John, it is not peace they want nor anything else which will be beneficial to the country. No sir, they are rank, low, unprincipled traitors who don't care if the country to which they are indebted for all goes to rack and ruin or not, if they can only fill their cursed pockets. I don't remember exactly what I did write about, but I think that it was such men as these that I spoke of. I greatly prefer volunteering to conscripting, but if they will not do the former they must suffer the latter. You will, I think, admit that the worse error of the administration has been in the past in not bringing troops enough at one time to the field. It has been the policy thus far to call out a hand full at a time, and when they were used up to call more. Now the question arises, would the country at large suffer any greater inconvenience to furnish all at one time than the old way? Yet these eternal yelpers commence their usual cry that the president must be crazy, and what in the world can he be going to do with so many, even when he only calls for three hundred thousand, and in less than six months after the troops get into the field they will turn around "blow away" right the contrary. I for one, wish that Mr. Lincoln would at once call out a million men and the resources of the country are such that we could provide for them - and with them I think we could just whip "John Reb" so next spring that he would never recover. I believe that that number could be raised at North without seriously discommoding affairs. I wish there could be some way of doing the business right and satisfying all, but I am aware that it cannot be done, so I hope it will be done as near right as possible. Well John, I guess I have said enough on this subject, so that you can understand my views on the matter. I can't hardly say whether we will go to the front in the spring or not. I think it not at all improbable that we will, and our places taken by colored troops.

It will be like tearing upon old sores to commence fighting and marching, but I suppose that we ought to be proud of a chance to win laurels that will never fade. I like the laurels very well but of course would much rather avoid the many hardships necessary to obtain them. I tell you when you come to lug a knapsack around on half rations (which is usually the case in this dept.) and suffering almost every hardship possible I say there is more prose than poetry about it. This Tenn. is a great old state. I would not give our place at dear old Cambridge for the whole state. But I suppose I am rather prejudiced against it for there are some very fine sections. The soil is red looking, just like the red colored earth in railroad cuts of New Jersey. The people here, as well as in all other war torn states are in a very deplorable condition. They are reduced to the lowest extremity. They are quite degraded. All use tobacco in every form. They even chew snuff. They are nearly starved for salt, coffee, and tobacco. There are not one out of ten but would sell her honor for a little of either of the above articles. Surely southern aristocracy is at a heavy discount.

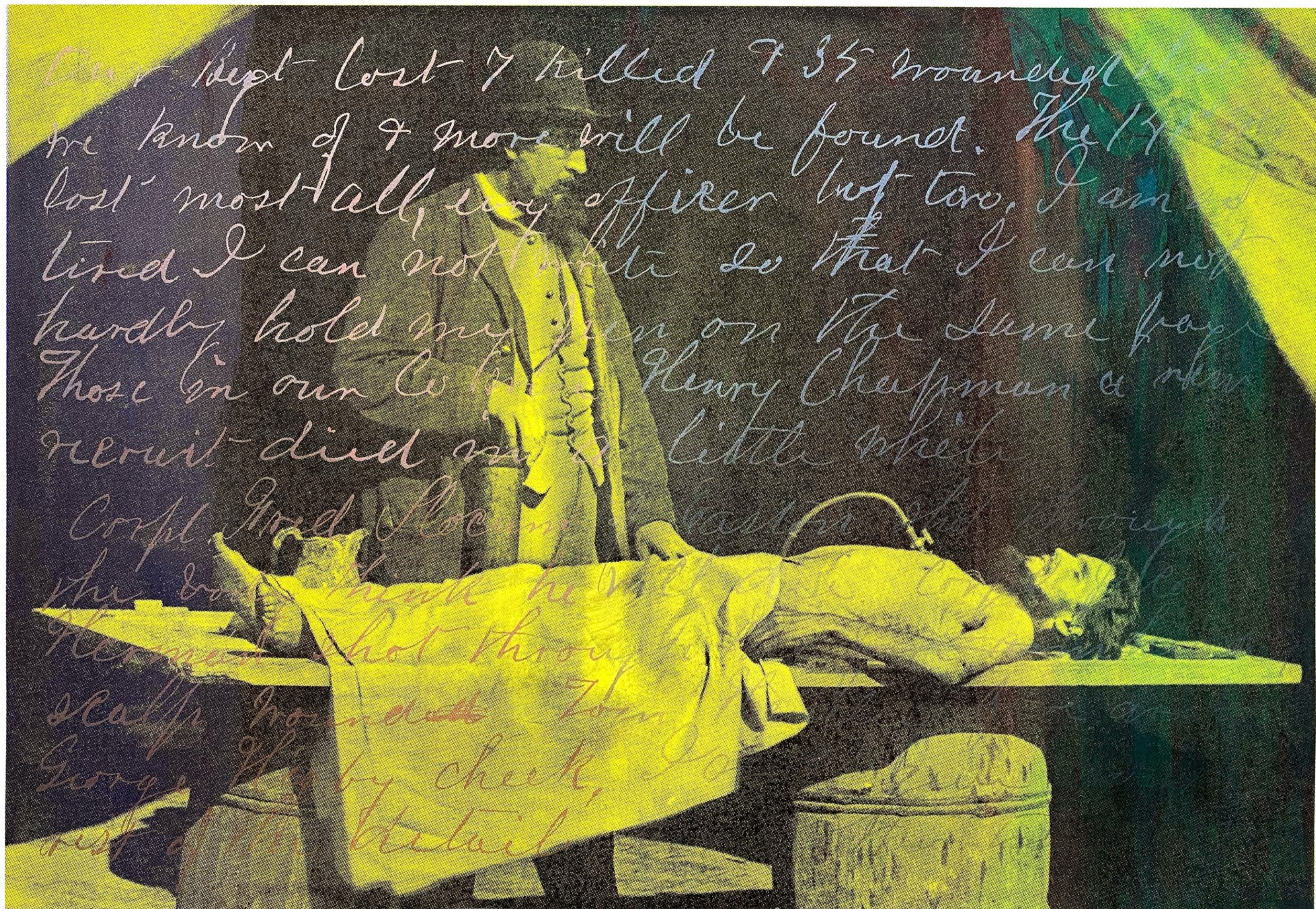
Lem Skinner went to Nashville the 5th for examination before a board appointed to examine applicants for commissions in colored troops. He returned tonight. He does not know whether he succeeded or not. If he did he will be sent for as soon as they want him. I shall certainly feel lonely for awhile, for then all my particular friends will be gone: Ab, Jim and Lem. Ab is a permanent cripple, he is at home now. Well I saw John N. Culver awhile ago. He was going home to recruit in Ill. I see Charlie occasionally too. He is a capt. in the 105 Ill. and John is sergeant in the 10th. They say Jim Skinner has gone west to seek his fortune. Hope he will find it. Have had some very interesting letters lately from Minnie L., Lib and others. I wrote to Uncle Taggart's people a day or two since. Alex Skellie I suppose carried off my Nancy Arnott, couldn't wait for me. Mother says that our dear Aunt is failing slowly, getting childish. Afraid I shall not see her again. I am thinking it would be difficult getting a furlough at the season you speak of. About the same as I did when you were married. But I must close as I intend enclosing something to Laurie. Now John, don't wait so long another time. Rev. Mr. Lawrence of Putnam is with us now. All of the Putnam boys are well. L. and all friends send respects. Give mine to Flora.

Your own brother,  
Will

Photo credit: photographer George N. Barnard, *Departure from the Old Homestead*. 1862.  
Library of Congress item 2018670979







Our Regt lost 7 killed & 35 wounded  
we know of 9 more will be found. The 14  
lost most all, say officer but two, I am  
tired I can not write so that I can not  
hardly hold my pen on the same page  
Those in our Co. Henry Chapman a new  
recruit died in a little while  
Corpl. Fred Stocum was shot through  
the back think he will die  
Herbert shot through  
scalp wounded Tom  
George W. by cheek, I  
rest of the detail

1864

## Another Horrible Bloody Awful Conflict

by Dana Smith  
2024

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

Will Fisher to his mother

In the trenches 3 miles from Atlanta

July 21, 1864

Dear Mother,

Yesterday recorded another horrible, bloody awful conflict still more so than any we have had before. We crossed the river last Sabbath & have been advancing ever since till yesterday (Wednesday) when we laying for other parts of the line to come up even with us & at 4 PM the Rebs attacked the 2 Div. so we formed our line & had hardly time before they were on to us. We had it hot & heavy till dark. But we held them with our little single line against one of the most desperate charges they have made yet. McPherson was in their rear & they were bound to break through our lines but they found old Hooker there. Our brig. lost heavy. Our regt. lost 7 killed & 35 wounded that we know of & more will be found. The 141st NY lost most all, every officer but two.

I am so tired I cannot write so that I cannot hardly hold my pen on the same paper.

Those in our co. were Henry Chapman, a new recruit died in a little while. Cpl. Fred Slocum of Easton shot through the body, think he will die. Cpl. Jacob Herman shot through the head, scalp wounded, Tom Heneley, forearm, George Higby, cheek. I will give you the rest of the details some other time, but cannot this time.

This all from our co. Write soon.

From your boy,  
Will

Photo credit: photographer unknown, *Dr. Richard Burr, an embalming surgeon in the Army of the James demonstrating the procedure on a dead soldier.*

Library of Congress item 2018667145

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Write soon from your boy  
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Oh it was  
a sad sight  
to see the  
schoolhouse  
so full  
of children  
and  
now it  
is all  
ruined  
and  
empty  
and  
cold

1864

# Oh, It Was An Awful Sight

by Dana Smith  
2024

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

Will Fisher to his mother  
Camp 4 miles from Savannah  
December 18, 1864

My much loved Mother,

Dear Mother do you want to hear from your absent boy very much after so along a separation? I'll warrant you do. Well, I last left you about the 6th of Nov. at the ill fated city of Atlanta. I forgot if I wrote again or not, but at any rate on the 15th after one or two sham starts we got under way taking the line of railroad running to Augusta. There were these four corps, exclusive of the cavalry, viz: the 20th & 14th, composing the left wing commanded by Maj. Gen. Slocum, & the 15th & 17th, right wing under Howard. Each Corps took a separate road so as to make the destruction of property more complete, & to facilitate foraging.

Oh, it was an awful sight & one I never shall forget the morning we left Atlanta. An awful cloud of black smoke covered the face of the heavens as far as you could see & the constant thunder of whole blocks of buildings being blown to atoms by powder & the explosion of immense quantities of fixed ammunition, amid the cheers of thousands & thousands of Union soldiers as they turned their faces east and south. All this, I say, was a sight not easily forgotten nor easily described.

We, the left wing, continued going east till we got to Madison where we turned to the South & went direct to Milledgeville, the capitol of the state, where we found the rest of the army who had been around by Macon. We then came on by the Georgia Central RR to Savannah. We got to our present camp the 13th, so you see we have been on the road nearly 30 days.

We have not had a man hurt in the regt. yet nor we haven't fired muskets yet since we left. The Rebs are fortified here 4 miles from the city & we lay here close under their nose. They shell us all the time, but don't hurt a man.

I propose as soon as possible to send you a lengthy & minute description of the whole trip with maps & our mode of living, for we have lived on the country all together, one meal have ten cartloads of the richest forage & the next, nothing. Since we got here we have not had a thing only fresh beef & rice & it is over a week now. We have got a line opened around the right somewhere near Warsaw Sound, where we can get something now. We got a mail yesterday, 15 tons of it all, & the wagons have gone after rations. I expect it will be very nice having such good communication & by water too.

In the mail was a letter from you written Thanksgiving day. One from John, one from Aunt Eliza T., & one from Cousin John Taggart. You say you had got the money & I hope that if you got the letters I wrote before leaving Atlanta you must know that everything you sent me was received. Every package, money & all, that you ever spoke of have been rec'd. I will send you soon for the shirts & some other articles I want, together with some eatables to be sent to me at Savannah. Express will not be very high now to come here. We will be in Savannah soon.

I expect Ab & Min are one ere this. Tell them I must have a photo taken together. A great deal of love to every body, Aunt S., Laura, little Willie & ever so much for you. Write very soon to your own loved boy.

Will

Direct to Co. & Regt. with the corps marked plain at Savannah, Ga.

Photo credit: photographer George N. Barnard, Atlanta, Georgia, Ruins of depot, blown up on Sherman's departure. Atlanta Georgia, 1864.

Library of Congress item 2018666986

But don't hurt a man, I propose as soon as possible to send you a lengthy & minute description of the whole trip with maps & our mode of living, for we have lived on the country all together, one meal have ten cartloads of the richest forage & the next nothing. Since we got here we have not had a thing only fresh beef & rice & it is over a week now. We have got a line opened around the right somewhere near Warsaw Sound, where we can get something now. We got a mail yesterday, 15 tons of it all, & the wagons have gone after rations. I expect it will be very nice having such good communication & by water too. In the mail was a letter from you written

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U. S. Christian Commission



SOLDIER'S LETTER.



1864

Dana Smith