

COMPOSITE PASTE OF ORIGINALS

Item 17 a

Dear Sister Your welcome letter was duly read and I was glad to hear from you and that you was well and enjoying yourself. You say that you missed me from home but Kate nevermind we shall come out all right in the end. (*Indecipherable words here: it looks like "and" and the following two words are "then blank". Contextually, the whole phrase makes no sense.*) Kate they are making such a row in my tent that I can hardly write or think of anything either. I got a letter from Ambrose yesterday he wants me to write him but he did not send his PO address and I don't know where to direct you must tell me or tell him to write again just (*the word is smudged here: the following two words are "he like"*) he spoke of coming here to join the company but the company is full now I am glad you enjoyed yourself so well at the fair I could hardly believe what you wrote about Mary. What could she have been thinking of do you have any horseback rides now you must put ("*Bron*", "*Brian*" "*Bion*"?) on the buggy and drive him when you'll like don't let anyone abuse him they can use but not misuse him. I have about 200 horses here but do not drill on horse any yet I can't tell when we shall Kate I got past out of the line yesterday and went on a tramp around the Island the woods are full of Chestnuts and I laid in for a good lot of them wish I could send you some. Ed was with me we went down the shore had a bath in salt water there is a great many fine shells I picked up some but had to throw them away again for I have no place to keep them. Kate Ed was just here he says that there is room for two more in the company and if Ambrose wants to come he can join by writing immediately back then we can keep a place for him but not long tell him to do as he likes I like it here well don't know as he would we shall stay here a month I think give my Respect to all enquiring friends write often Ralph I wrote to George last week Kate I sent home my Bible for there was a man here gave us all a smaller one could carry it better the ambrotypes were good ones (*word indecipherable here*) you thought of them.

Item 1

Camp Scott Oct 12th/61

Dear Friends

I presume you want to hear from your soldier boy again by this time. In my other letter we were quartered in the guard house that was pretty hard quarters it had been occupied by a division of Sickels [unreadable here; possibly the number 11 or the letter H or M]brigade and it was filled with vermin. But we are in our own tents now and all contented our provision is not quite as good as we expected we do not draw our rations but are fed on a contract it will probably be better when we are organized into a Regt and every [unreadable; probably 'Co.'] get their Govmt rations We have our full Uniform with the exception of our overcoats dont know when we get them. Their is a great comotion in camp this mornni=g the Officer have just told the men that their pay will be \$13 instead of \$14 per month as expected many say that they will leave want [meaning 'won't'] be so used dont know how they will help themselves for my part Shall stay as soon for \$13 as \$14 did not come here for the pay come to fight not much chance for that yet for our Capt. told us this morning that we should stay here a month yet. dont believe he know though. There is a rumor that when we do move we shall go to Calafornia from there to borderes of New Mexico to keep things there but it is all guess work. We are drilling a good deal now some of the [unreadable; probably Co.] learn fast others dont want to learn wont mind and have to go to the guard house. The Major is here in command of the Regt his name is Davidson from N.Y. he is a very fine man but has got to learn as much as the greenest private. We have had a rain storm here it lasted 3 days did not rain hard but steady pretty much all the time our tents keep us dry and we all laugh and feel well. When you get the wheat thrashed I want you should write me how many bushels there were of it. Does it rain there as much as ever it has been dry and pleasent here all the while except this storm and I think that is over with for the present you must tell the folks and neighbors for me what I would write them if I had time but there is so many to write to I cant get time to do it Ed and the rest of the boys send respects write often and all the news to

Ralph

Father we sent all of our things home in one box directed to J.S. Putnam you will find mine there marked with my name take and use them if you can

PS. If any one is coming down here from Attica or vicinity tell them to come over and see us all without fail

Direct To Stapleton, Staten Island care of Capt. Wheeler ~~Ira Guards~~ Ira Harris Guards

Item 1[emended]

Camp Scott Oct 12th/61

Dear Friends

I presume you want to hear from your soldier boy again by this time. In my other letter we were quartered in the guard house. That was pretty hard quarters. It had been occupied by a division of Sickels [unreadable here; possibly the number 11 or the letter H or M]brigade and it was filled with vermin. But we are in our own tents now and all contented. Our provision is not quite as good as we expected. We do not draw our rations but are fed on a contract. It will probably be better when we are organized into a Regt and every [unreadable; probably 'Co.'] get their Govmt rations. We have our full Uniform with the exception of our overcoats. I dont know when we get them.

There is a great comotion in camp this mornni=g. The Officers have just told the men that their pay will be \$13 instead of \$14 per month as expected. Many say that they will leave because they won't be so used. I dont know how they will help themselves. For my part, I shall stay as soon for \$13 as \$14. I did not come here for the pay, come to fight. There's not much chance for that yet for our Capt. told us this morning that we should stay here a month yet. I dont believe he knows though. There is a rumor that when we do move we shall go to Calafornia and from there to borderes of New Mexico to keep things there, but it is all guess work.

We are drilling a good deal now some of the [unreadable; probably Co.] learn fast others dont want to learn, wont mind and have to go to the guard house. The Major is here in command of the Regt. His name is Davidson from N.Y. He is a very fine man but has got to learn as much as the greenest private.

We have had a rain storm here. It lasted 3 days. It did not rain hard but steady pretty much all the time. Our tents keep us dry and we all laugh and feel well.

When you get the wheat thrashed I want you should write me how many bushels there were of it. Does it rain there as much as ever? It has been dry and pleasent here all the while except this storm and I think that is over with for the present. You must tell the folks and neighbors for me what I would write them if I had time, but there is so many to write to I cant get time to do it. Ed and the rest of the boys send respects. Write often and all the news to

Ralph

Father, we sent all of our things home in one box directed to J.S. Putnam. You will find mine there marked with my name. Take and use them if you can.

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Direct To Stapleton, Staten Island care of Capt. Wheeler ~~Ira~~ Guards Ira Harris Guards

Item 2

Part of this letter is penciled out. It's a repeated strikethrough, not a single line. It was most likely done by Kate. Ralph's writing in haste and using a pen.

Camp Scott Nov 9th

Head Quarters

Ira Harris Guards

Nov. 9th 1861

Dear Sister

Your welcome letter of the 4th was received last night. So you and Lib have been down to see Uncle Freeman[s?] had a good time I presume Lib. did not see Charley did she. if she as much of a fly away as ever I need not ask since I don'd think she has changed much since I left hardly 2 months but it seems a-~~quite~~ quite a long time since I have seen any of you. You say the cold weather has set in there I know how it looks there very muddy and cold. there has been no cold weather here to speak of one or two nights were quite cold [begin p. 2] and to day it is raining hard some chilly but not what we call cold our tents keep us dry and blankets and overcoats keep us warm.

last sunday we went after our horses over to the city i have a very pretty bay it looks like a first rate horse and rides good our Co. got their overcoats and Sabres Monday Saddle bidles Etc the same day so that we are now armed and equipped with the exception of Revolvers and spurs make a fine appearance on parade I wish you could be here to see us some fine day but if you cant all us hope you hear a good report one of these days if we ever face the rebels. You must not let the war new distress you any for the same protecting hand ~~keeps~~ is stretched forth for me now as when I was at home you must not worry on my account in the least i have some confidence in our officers but they are not as capable as I wish they were but they will have some chance to improve yet and I hope they will use it but whatever is to be will be if it

should be any lot to fall I know I have friends away up in Western New York who will say he tried to do his duty but enough of this. I am sorry Kate you were disappointed in going to school to Buffalo but never mind it do the best you can for the time it may not always be so and as for keeping District school always why I dont think you will. And now Katie I want to ask you about Louise Wallis She promised to answer a letter if I wrote one to her I have written two and received none in reply I cant think I have written anything in either that could offend anyone I should not have written the second one but as you failed to receive some of my letters I did not know as it reached the address it is some weeks since I wrote the second and you know I am to proud to beg favors from any one you wrote me she had gone on a visit when she comes back I wish you would find out if you can if she has received them if she has not I will try again I dont know but I am asking you to do something you will not like to undertake but I would like to know if she ever received them. Our Regt is under marching orders the Capt. said we should leave next Tuesday (Nov12) I hardly think we shall get away as soon as that but we shall probably leave sometime next week I will try and write home again before we go if I have time I don't know where we are going yet. Merritt has gone over to the city to day I should have gone but was on duty.

[written in the margin] Ed and myself are going to the city Monday if nothing happens to prevent. Ed sends Respects and love to all Ralph

[written inverted on top of front page] I have just heard we are going to Anapolis Md. (they have barracks there) and drill there this winter. there is not much dependence to be placed in reports of this kind I give it for what it is worth Ralph

Strikeout

I am sorry Kate you were disappointed in going to school to Buffalo but never mind it do the best you can for the time it may not always be so and as for keeping District school always why I dont think you will. And now Katie I want to ask you about Louise Wallis She promised to answer a letter if I wrote one to her I have written two and received none in reply I cant think I have written anything in either that could

offend anyone I should not have written the second one but as you failed to receive some of my letters I did not know as it reached the address it is some weeks since I wrote the second and you know I am too proud to beg favors from any one you wrote me she had gone on a visit when she comes back I wish you would find out if you can if she has received them if she has not I will try again I don't know but I am asking you to do something you will not like to undertake but I would like to know if she ever received them.

Item 3

This letter to Ambrose Norton on 7x9 stationary is more carefully written than the first two. He mentions his promotion to corporal and briefly reflects on 'moving up.' Cemetary records describe him as a private. They also describe his younger cousin Edward as a lieutenant.

The stationary has a small embossed crest in the upper left hand corner similar to the one on the letter written by his father, James Sibley Tolles [item 19].

Camp Scott Head Quarters

Ira Harris Guards Nov 10th

Friend Ambrose

In your letter to me you say you do not like appologies So I will not stop to make any{unless this letter be one}for not writing to you sooner for I think you are to blame (as well as myself) for not giving me your address. To begin with, I am enjoying the best of health and like camp life extremely well. The grub is not quite as good as it was at home did not expect it would be there is enough but the less said about the quality the better I think they might give us better and we shall probably have better when we draw our own rations at present we are fed on a contract which will soon be out. We are progressing with our drill finely our Co. is called second to none in the Regt. it is made up of farmer boys mostly there is 3 Germans and one Irishman in the Co of ninety one men the rest of the Regiment is made of Irishmen mostly some rough characters but will make good soldiers when diciplined The Lieutenant Wilson that burned Harpers Ferry is here a first Lieut. in Co. A. a harder case I never saw or heard of he abuses his men sometimes the worst way I am very glad I am not under his orders his common salutation to a soldier is get out of the way you [begin p. 2] you son of a b___h or I'll split you head and the man has not much chance of redress but enough of Wilson you spoke of my promotion to a corporals post well it is not a very enviable position I have thought some of resigning at first but as I became more acquainted with the duties I like it better it is not much above a private but it is a beginning to something higher and if a man gets up he must commence from the beginning I suppose. We have our armes horses equipments Etc and are now drilling on horses it is awkward work for some but they are gaining slowly. our horses are not first rate as a lot some good are more that are not so good I have for mine five year old bay mare. good

size and may be a good horse ride easy but I much rather have the bay pony that I left at home there is some here that is not larger than he is. We are preparing to leave the Island in a few days ~~our~~ the Captain told me ~~we~~ this morning we should go Wednesday (13th Nov) Where we are going you can tell as well as I there are rumors of all kinds but not much dependence to be placed in them there is no danger of going into active service at present it would be a little less than murder to take us into action now for our officers know little more than the men and that is little enough. We were paid a part of our wages last week pay for a month and ten days it was very acceptable to me as I was nearly out of [undecipherable, underscored word here, possibly 'tin'?] I must close this as I have to go on duty now (stable guard) till 12.M. to night. I will send you my next address as soon as soon as find what it is and shall be glad to hear from you often.

Your Friend Ralph

[written left margin] Respects to enquiring friends R

[inverted addition on top of p. 1] Ed—wants to be remembered to you he is enjoying himself well R

Item 4

Headquarters I. H. G. Reg't.
Co. F
Dec 13th
Camp Harris 1861

5th Regmt N. Y. Cavalry

Dear Sister

Yours of the 6th was recd the 11th and I need not tell you with what joy it was opened for I had begun th think I never should hear from home again. So you have the mumps have you well you must have look handsome with your chops all swelled but if you are careful you will soon be over it if you are not before this. One of the boys in my tent has had them I take credit for doctoring him he is about well now. There is about 20 sick with measles Merritt has had [begin p. 2] them he was quite sick but is getting around now I took the best care of him I could under the circumstances he would not have the surgeon come near him said he wold rather trust me for a doc. the boys do not (any of them) like the Surgeon of the Regt. he gives Dovers Powders for all kinds of diseases and they wont go near him unless they are obliged oo My own health is good (tell father I weigh 154 pounds 10 pounds more than I did when I left home) never better for which I am thankful. We are dirling pretty thorough now and we have our breakfast at 7 in the morn then water and clean our horse guard mounting at 8 ½ dress parade at 9. mounted drill from ten till eleven rest half an hour then sabre drill till 12 when we have dinner at 2 then another moounted drill [begin p. 3] and supper at 4 ½ P.M. water and feed our horses after supper roll call at 8 ½ lights out at nine and so we go one day just lke another you can tell what I am doing every day unless I get a pass from the Capt. and go off looking round the country which is the case quite often for the Capt. lets me and Ed go whenever we ask him since we are always back on time. we ride

round and talk to the planters they all profess to be Union men but there is a strong undercurrent of Secessionism which is kept in check by the troops here for there is about 10 Regts. of troops quartered around here and in sight of our camp. We passed one man the other day after we had got by he gave a hurrah for Davis we turned our horses and rode back to him and made him give three cheers for the Union he done it but made some wry faces about it we told the Capt. when we got [begin p. 4] back he said we had done right but ought to have punished him more before we let him go. You told me about your thanksgiving supper I will tell you what I had for mine we had just got here to camp and I set down and took out of my haversack a piece of bread and bacon that I had brought from Baltimore got a cup of water and had a supper that I presume that I enjoyed as well as anyone in York state for I was hungry and it tasted good I find Kate after all that the true seasoning for victuals is a good appetite.¹ You told me that Louise had a letter from me that is all I wanted to know you need not make any further enquiries let it go it is of no consequence dont tell her or let her know that I have written you anything about it that is all. I am glad you and Josie are good friends again give her my respects tell [Valanch?] a good word for me and that I will be ready to go to Cal. when I get back from the wars want she should be ready too Miss Taylors friends name is Joseph [Lydel or Hydel] dont like him very well but I guess he is quite a good fellow. must stop write often Ralph [Written in side margin] Love to all. how is Aunt Rachel. Ralph

¹ The original has a penciled cross [about 3/8 of an inch] at point. The remaining material is lightly hatched with pencil lines.

Item 5

I missed something when I described this stationary in the inventory. Ralph Tolles has sketched two two chevrons on the arm of the leading rider followed by '[Undecipherable, possibly an L.] corporal RNT'. He's held the rank now for three months.

Ambrose is now in the Army attempting to recruit a company in Attica. He and Katie will marry soon.

THE NATION'S DEFENSE

*HEAD-QUARTERS 5th NY
Camp Harris Feb 19th 1862*

Dear Sister

Why dont you or
Father write I have not heard from you in a long long while
and I wrote to and sent Father an express [undecipherable
here; possibly 'scrip' but it may be 'script'. Context is
monetary] the first of the month I have not heard from him
since the money must have gone safe for the other boys that
sent with me have heard from their friends folk, and I do
think it strange that I do not hear from some of you If any
of you are sick let me know right away. There I have been
scolding and worrying enough [begin p. 2] for I know you
must have written and the letters have miscarried what
makes me think so is the other boys Luke and Ed have not
had a letter since I have and I know there must have been
some written To day when the mail came in thre was only
five letters for our Co. we generaly get from twenty to
sixty there is something wrong I dont know where but dont
stop writing some of the letters will get here I am enjoying
as good health as could ask I get a cold once in while but it
does not last long we have very bad wether here it rains one
day snows the next and the next it will be pleasent as one
could ask the birds will be flying around for the bluebirds
and robins have been here all winter they do not sing as
they do at home but they remind me of home they look [begin
p. 3] and act just as they do there when they first come in the
spring I suppose you have had some good sleigh ride this
winter for I see by the papers and in Fathers letter that you

have good sleighing there I would like one good sleigh ride
I think if I could harness Bion in the cutter and drive him
~~awa~~ a little ways that could enjoy it right well How do you
get along with your school and who is the big boy of the
school this winter how does Ambrose get along with his
enlisting and why does he not write to me I think I have
some claim on him now that he is a brother soldier I do not
think he will find many recruits in Attica but hope he will
get up a good Co. I do not know as they will be needed not
if ^[begin p. 4] the Government follow up the victories of the
past few days O Katie we received great and cheering
news. You should have seen our Co. turn out and heard the
three times threee they gave when we heard of the capture
of Fort Donalson and heard the regrets at the escape of
Floyd O they say if they had only caught and hung him.
but his time will come yet. There is no news in camp that
would interest you it is the same thing over and over up in
the morning breakfast ~~tak~~ groom the horse. drill dinner
drill groom the horses again supper roll call to be and so it
goes every day; relieved by going on guard getting passes
to town ~~Ete~~ and whatever mischief we can find in camp.
Now sister you must write a long letter and write them
often give my respects to all friends.

Ralph

Item 6

THE NATION'S DEFENSE

HEAD-QUARTERS
Camp Harris Mar 4th, 1862

~~Annapolis Feb 27th~~

My Dear Sister

Yours of the 24th

was came through in quick time I had one from Father the day before yours came ~~that~~ and one from Ambrose There is no news in camp unless it is very monotonous the same thing over and over drilling and standing guard. I was detailed yesterday to take a file of men and go after one of our boys that had gone to the city and was so drunk he could not get home we found him in a fence corner and had to take him on our backs and bring him in. it is the first one of our [apparently Co.] that I have seen so drunk ~~he~~ Last night at roll call our Capt read our marching orders dont be scared any at that for it dont amount to much. the orders were for us to be ready to march at short notice when that notice will come no one knows it may come to day and it may never come if they want us we are ready to go if not we will stay here. I am glad your scholl is so near done for I am afraid it is to hard for you not to go out to much nights tell Ambrose to take good care of the colts if he drives them for I ~~am~~ shall want to use them when I get out of the army that will be only 2 years and a half longer it is six months tomorrow since I enlisted It does not seem more than six weeks to me time passes away very fast here You say that [Valarich?] was over to make you a visit how I would like to have been there just for ~~a~~ a little while for I would like to see all of our friends once more for to tell the truth Katie it is a little

lonesome here once in awhile dont think by this that I am homesick for that is not the case You say that Aunt Rachel is about the same it is singular that she ~~does~~ gets no better she has been so so long as for Lib is she is getting worser I dont know what will become of her but guess she will outgrow it if she lives long enough what is Uncle Frank doing this winter is he at Loomis yet I suppose that I ought to write to them but there is so many to write too and so little time to write that I hav neglected them

have not time write
more to day nor anything else to write that I can think of.
My best to all.

Ralph

Ed and Merritt wish to be remembered to all.

R

ITEM 7

THE RESULT OF
UNCLE SAM'S GOVERNMENT

Peace, Plenty and Prosperity

Camp Harris March 4th 1862

Head-quarters 5th N.Y.V.C. *Regt. Co. F*

Near Annapolis Maryland

My friend Ambrose

I was on guard last night and being excused from drill to day I will try and answer your kind letter First I am going to scold some because you do not write oftener here I have had only two letters from you since I left six months ago although I have heard of you somewhat oftener than that. I am sorry you had so poor success in recruiting I was in hope you would get [begin p. 2] a good Co. but I knew you would not get many to enlist in Attica Well there is nothing that is very interesting in camp we do not hear much news untill it goes home and comes back again. We have two drills each day except Sundays then we have a dress parade which is quite a fine affair only when it is stormy and cold then it is a different thing. There was a contraband came into camp the other day and offered to show the way to a party of secesh Co. I were sent out with him but found nothing but a secesh flag and an ambrotype of Davis these they took and brought to camp but the worst rthing they done was to return the nigger to his master the General did not like that and sent some men back [begin p. 3] after him they found his master beating him took him away and brought him into camp again I saw him when he came in his back was all raw and bleeding they told him he might stay here or go where he pleased. he is in the camp yet but says he is

going north Monday we had orders to be ready to move at short notice when that notice will come no one here knows we may march tomorrow and may not leave here in six weeks the boys are all ready and anxious to go they say that they want to see some work The Major of our Battalion told us yesterday that we were the best drilled Co. in the Regt. and we shall try and keep that name I think you will hear a good account [begin p. 4] of our Co. if we ever go into action. Ed had a letter the other day which said Marian Wilkie invited a party to her wedding and that no one came to marry her how [indecipherable; possibly "is"] write and let me know how it is to bad I think to trifle with her in that way I would not allow it if I was there for I would marry her myself first that is if I dont care what I say. [The preceding mixed sentence is verbatim]. The call for watering horses has sounded and I must close write often and all the news remember me to all friends

Yours forever

Ralph N. Tolles
Corporal Co. F Ira Harris Guards

Item 8

THE NATION'S DEFENSE

Direct To the 5th N.Y.V. Cavalry Co. F.
Care of Capt Wheeler Washington
D.C.

HEAD-QUARTERS 5th NY
Camp Blank Mar 9th, 1862

Harpers Ferry Virginia

Dear Sister

Yours was
received while I was in Washington or rather just as I left there. I wrote to Father while we were there giving him a history of our movements since we left Annapolis. They have kept us moving around from pillar to post just as if they did not know what they wanted of us but it gives us a good chance to see what there is to be seen and board and lodging thrown in [begin p. 2] I will try and describe our stopping place as well as I can before this rebellion commenced Harpers Ferry must have been a splendid place there is some of the finest scenery here that I ever saw the Public works were of the most extensive and the inhabitants what there is left say that it was one of the happiest places there was in the state but now it presents a scene of desolation seldom met with the Public works are burned the people have pretty much all left and our troops are quartered in the buildings or Co. are quartered in the Odd Fellows hall the upper story and a part of our horses in the lower part the rest of our horses are in a church. the rebel cavalry used it before we came here. the pews are all

torn and the altar torn down it seems a sacrilege but [begin p. 3] we were ordered to put our horses in there and in they went all the ["nice"?; hand writing not readable here] building are served in the same way the rebels done it before they left here. this will do for the present I will try and give you further details when I write again And now Katie I will say that your letter surprised me a good deal I did not think of your being married so soon I can hardly realize it now I need not tell you how well I should liked to have been at home but that was not to be You ask me to advise you Kate I dont feel capable of doing that you say you feel lonesome and as if there were none of your friends near you but Kate you have a brother that will stand between you and all harm wherever you may be even if I had to desert from the army and I believe there would be nothing else that would make one leave till discharged You say you think of [begin p. 4] going West soon I do hope that I shall be free and come to see you there before you go be sure and write often as I shall want to hear from you and you cant tell how acceptable your letters are. Tell Ambrose for me that I should [two short indecipherable words here] brotherinlaw tell him that I mean to write him soon I received a letter from him just as I left Annapolis and will answer as soon as we get settled down again and that brings me back here again where we are going or when I cant give any kind of an idea but think we shall go from here to Winchester V.a. in a few days but may be ordered back to Washington till youu hear from me again they will follow us from there. Katie I have not written half what I wanted to but shall close for want of paper and will write again soon best wishes to all

Your Brother Ralph

Item 9

E PLURIBUS

1776

1862

UNUM

Headquarters, 5th N.Y.V.C. Regiment Company F.
Camp Harris March 10, 1862.

Dear Sister

Yours of the sixth is just received. I had been led to expect Coras death by Father's last letter. She has been sick a long time and must have suffered a great deal but now her sufferings are at an end and we can but hope that she is happier than while here. I had also heard that Joseph R. and Lydia were to make a match hope they will be happy as long as they live in live to a good old age. Did they have a wedding please write and give me all the particulars. And now I don't believe there is a great many more to get married around there for they have been marrying all winter. I have been to this city all day today getting our horses shod. Got back to camp just as supper was ready we had for supper good coffee and bread and butter there was no meat cooked tonight. That does not trouble me for I do not eat two rations of meat in a week I was pretty well tired with my days work and was glad to get into camp again think I shall sleep sound tonight There is not much news in camp the Vermont Cavalry left here yesterday for Poolesville I think from all appearances that we shall move soon and I have pretty good reason to believe that our destination is Washington but there is nothing certain known here yet I shall keep you informed of our movements as soon as made

I am afraid that Father is doing to much this winter I wish he would hire a man to help them for it is too bad for him to drive down. Through them cold storms that you have up there.*[Note: this is a section of the letter that has been cut out.]* Katie I don't feel like writing more tonight and I will just close this year and go to my bunk and sleep till roll call so goodnight and best wishes to all

Your brother

Item 10

HEAD-QUARTERS
Camp Harris March 30, 1862

Dear Father

We have received orders this warning to be ready to march this afternoon. And are very busy packing up our baggage our destination as near as I can find out is to Harper's Ferry and I expect we shall join General Banks. I have heard that we should not be allowed to write letters back after we left here don't know how true it is but if there is any such thing you may depend on my writing at every opportunity. I have not time to write much now as there is a good deal to do. I am now going into enemy country and expect there will be work to do and I am going to try to do my part as a soldier. Have not time to write more Love to all. And may I have always your blessing and prayers

Ralph

If we stop where we can on the road I'll write you again and send this to George

Item 11

HEAD-QUARTERS 5TH N.Y.V.C.
Camp -- -- -- -- April 29, 1862
New Market Virginia

Dear, Brother & Sister

Yours of the 20th was received yesterday. I need not tell with what pleasure perused. You will see by the date of this that I have got pretty well into the state of that that has the Sacred Soil. We left Harpers Ferry last Friday and marched here in three days 85 miles we have pitched our tent here for the first-time since we left Annapolis how long we are going to stay here or where we are going I can't tell. There is a report in camp that our Regiment have been ordered back to Washington I don't think there is any truth in it but still there may be for they have more cavalry here now than they can use. We're drilling every day as much as ever our revolvers were furnished at Harpers Ferry and we are practicing with them target firing 1 1/2 hours each day each man in a Company fires two rounds and the two that make the best shots are excused from duty the next day I don't want to be boasting but I am excused from duty quite often. The Vermont Cavalry brought in four rebel prisoners yesterday they were hard looking fellows but did not seem to feel very bad at being taken nor care what was done with them. They will be sent on to Baltimore some of the rebels are coming in and giving themselves up they give up their arms and take the Oath of allegiance and then go to their homes somewhat wiser than when they left they all acknowledge that their cause is hopeless that they have not power enough to cope with the North and have given up the idea that Secesh is equal to five Yankees for there is none of Jackson's Army that will stand a charge of even numbers. Jackson is still retreating and the advance of our Army is following him up close. I don't know if he is going to make a stand at all. Yesterday I saw General Banks and General Shields. Shields you will recollect was wounded at Winchester he has taken command of his Brigade again but wears his arm in a sling yet he has a sharp eye and looks every inch an officer. I can't say as much of Banks as he looks more like some old merchant than anything else I can think of his Headquarters is here now but he will probably move soon as the Army is moving on. They occupied Harrisburg the 24th.

Katie you speak of having nice times visiting new relations and are ready to reproach yourself for being so happy don't you do that be as gay and happy as you can. I would not have anyone be sad on my account for I am enjoying myself as well well as circumstances will admit. As for your injunction to come as soon as I can be sure I shall do that when this unholy war is ended and Uncle Sam does not need me any longer and if you should go west of course I will come too. Brother Ambrose you tell me you find Sister Katie all that you wish her. She has always been a good Sister and I am sure she will be a good wife but do not attribute anything to her scapegrace of a brother who

you are pleased to call braver than her husband. I repudiate all claim on that score knowing that it was not for the want of courage that kept him home but other duties. And there has already enough gone to war we can whip South with what we have. All the paper I have must close Ralph

(The following material it is written in the margin of this last page).

Ed and Merritt said regards. Ed he says he will write soon. My respects to all friends
yours affectionately Ralph

Item 12

New Market Virginia May 8, 1862

My Dear Uncle.

It becomes my duty to inform you of some painful intelligence. Yesterday afternoon Ralph was accidentally shot by one of his comrades. It happened in this way: in the fight which our company had with part of Ashby's force, day before we captured a number of carbines and rifles. One of these pieces was laying in front of one of the tents, when Ralph and a young man by the name of John McMillan got into playing around in front of the tent. Ralph had a pickax in his hand and McMillan picked up a gun put a cap on the cone and pointed at it at him and snapped it. The gun exploded the ball entered the back part of the body near the hip passed through the bone and can not be found as yet. He was taken to Lt. Curtis's tent and that Surgeon sent for. They could not find the ball. They ordered the to be kept wet with cold water to prevent inflammation. Merritt and I sat up with him last night and done as we were directed. He was in much pain during the night and at times was delirious. This morning he became drowsy and is asleep now. I asked the Surgeon this morning what he thought of him. He says he is afraid the ball is passed through into his bladder. If that is the case he cannot live. I talked with him this morning and told him what the surgeon said. He took it calmly.. Said he was glad I had told him his danger. Said if he died he wanted to be sent home and wanted me to tell you that he always tried to do his duty. He wanted me to write to you and tell you the circumstances. I feel so unmanned and bad that I can scarcely hold a pen to write. In case my fears are realized I shall use every endeavor to send him home and come with him myself. He wrote you yesterday telling you about the skirmish. It was the first one we had been in and I can assure you that Ralph was foremost in the charge, and by his bravery won the admiration of all who were present. Everything will be done for Ralph that can be done rest assured of that. O! Uncle you don't know how bad I feel for you. I cannot reconcile myself to the thought that Ralph, the best friend I ever had the bravest and the best liked man in our company must leave us.

Mr. Tolles

Dear Sir

I am sitting by the bedside of my dear friend Ralph. I cannot tell you how deep the sorrow of my heart is for he seems nearer than a brother to me. I can give you but little hope. He is in the hands of a merciful God and to him let's now look and pray for that help which our Heavenly Father alone can impart. If it is his

fate to fall in the pride and glory of manhood he fills an honor grave. His name and his kind acts to us will ever live in the hearts and affections of his brother Soldiers. If you could see the sad faces and hear the expressions of sorrow the fall from the lips of all it would add some consolation to your afflicted heart. I can never forget his kindness to me when sick at Camp Harris. He administered relief to my every want, and by his constant care he seemed to me like an angel of Mercy. In the late battle he won immortal honors. He was in the foremost rank. Everything that can be done to alleviate his suffering will be done. We will not leave him till death takes him a prisoner from us. But let us hope in God. He does not willingly afflict the children of men. With many desires for God's welfare I have the honor to be your humble Servant.

Merritt N. Chafey

To James S. Tolles Esq.

(The following occurs after the above note from Chafey.)

6 o'clock P. M.

Dear Uncle

The Surgeon has just been here. He is still undecided where the ball is. Some of his symptoms are better and some are worse. Indeed Uncle in my opinion you must be prepared for the worst. Yet there is a chance for recovery. Until a change for better or worse I will write you every day and will do all in my power for my more than brother in case of his deceased. I shall try to bring him home. I must close as tis time for the mail to close remember me to your family – your nephew Edward

Item 13

[Envelope fragment]

Item 14

Camp near New Market Virginia
May 9, 1862

Mr. James S. Tolles
Dear Sir

In the absence of Captain Wheeler command of the company has fallen upon me and I feel it my duty to send you some words of consolation. Deeply do we feel the loss we have met. I know that Ralph's place can never be filled. We shall miss him at roll call we shall look for his manly form at dress parade but it will not be there. We shall miss him on the field of battle, for in the charge of Harrisburg he was one of the first to deal death blows to the Rebel foe. Nobly did he conduct himself and by his daring bravery showed that he was a true soldier. Ever ready to do his duty, he was a model worthy of imitation. He embodied all those noble elements that contribute the true man. Gentle to all, kind to the sick, administering to their every want, he won the affections of every member of my company. We did everything that lay in our power to save him, but death has taken him a prisoner from us. Had he been slain upon the field of battle we should not have felt as we now feel -- though he has fallen in the bright morning of manhood his name will ever live in our hearts and affections, be assured you have our sympathies and that we mourn with you over your irreparable loss. With many kind regards and wishes for your welfare, I have the honor to be

Yours very respectfully
1st Lt. Levi Curtis,
Commanding Company F
5th New York V. Cavalry

Item 15

Buffalo, New York and Erie Rail Road Telegraph

May 12, 1862

The following Message left Harpers Ferry
For J. S. Putnam
Attica

Am coming with the remains of Ralph Tolles I will telegraph from Elmira at what time I
will arrive in Attica inform his father
Edward Tolles

Item 16

11 o'clock P. m.

Buff May 13

Kate

if I could be there to mourn with you I should, but I must stay here and do what I can to keep the business from all going down, if I don't do better than I have today it won't make much difference where I am for I have been just about crazy, Kate what shall we do! I can't give him up. All the Brother we had and, so good you and I knew him to prize him I hope it won't kill Father it seems as if he was afflicted more than he could bear you must go to him and tell him that we want you to dress in mourning. It won't make any difference in our feelings but it will be a mark of outward respect and I don't think we can show too much of it write or telegraph the moment you learn anything

Item 17

NEW YORK AND ERIE R.R. CO.'S TELEGRAPH

May 14, 1862

Received at.....M. from Baltimore
To Edward Tolles
Attica

Corpse of S. Tolles went forward from Baltimore this AM
W. H. Frey

Item 18

(Folded sheet of paper labeled in pencil on the outside "Inventory Ralph")

New Market Virginia May 9/62

Invoice of personal effects of Corporal Ralph N. Tolles late of Company if this New York volunteer cavalry who died May 9, 1862 from the wound received by an accidental discharge of a gun.

1	Silver Hunting Case Watch
15	dollars in the US Treasury Notes
1	" " Gold
1	Over Coat
2	Blankets
1	Dress Coat
1	pair Pants
2	(probably "pair shorts")
2	pair Drawers
2	Under Shirts
2	Over Shirts
1	pair Boots
1	Stable (<i>word unintelligible</i>)
1	Cap
1	Pocket Knife
1	Tobacco Box
15	three cent postage Stamps
3	one cent postage stamps
1	Gold pen
1	Silver case

The above effects have been given over to his father, he being his legal heir --

L. Curtis 1 Lt. Co.F
NY Cavalry
Command

Item 19

Attica May 29, 1862

First Lt. Curtis

The Telegram from Harpers Ferry on the 12 instant bringing the sad intelligence of the death of my son fell on us, a bolt from a clear sky. But we submit to the inscrutable Providence, Ralph was to us a noble manly boy, worthy of parents attachment and sisters love.

But although nearly overwhelmed with grief we do not regret his going to the defense of his country. We did not believe Ralph was a coward. The Revolutionary blood of the Putnam's flowed in his veins and we did not believe it had degenerated. And the testimony you and his companions in arms are pleased to ("*hear of his reaching?*") To meet his country's foes has confirmed our belief. I have no more Sons for my country, but my nephew Edward is still with you and beside him I have two other nephews in the Army in defense of those rights their ancestors bled for and myself if need be will fill the space made on Earth by the death of Ralph.

We thank you for your kind and manly note of condolence and consolation and which you convey to us a sympathy of a soldiers heart and make such honorable mention of our dear departed one, and be assured it would be a source of great consolation could I grasp the warm hand that penned those lines and thank him in person. Your kind letter and the sympathies of friends in the Army and at home which have been so generously extended to us have gone as far as anything on earth can go to assuage our grief. Be assured it will be remembered to the last moment of our existence.

We beg you to convey to Captain Wheeler and each member of his company for your special regard to our son while living and your more than generous munificence in sending home the remains without expense to us, our most heartfelt gratitude. You have laid us under enduring obligation for which we pray that the Lord most high to bless you forever and in His own good time return you in health and peace to your families and friends.

From a bereaved father and family.

I am Sincerely and

Truly your Most Obedient

James S. Tolles