

## Allen Gray Letters

Camp on Stones' [sic] Creek Near Murfreesboro Tenn.

Thursday Jan. 15, 1863

Friend Holbrook

After so long a silence I again seat myself to drop you a few lines to let you know that I am still alive and kicking

Since I last wrote you I have met with many adventures and have passed over considerable territory I was at the storming of Fort Pillow on the Mississippi – was at the taking of New Madrid and Island No. 10 - was with the forces under Pope in the siege of Corinth – was at the Battles of Farmington – luka- Corinth and Murfreesboro- After the siege of Corinth our reg't [sic] was ordered to Decatur Alabama where we remained a couple of months and lived high on confiscated Poultry – Swine vegetables etc - About the 1st of September we rec'd orders to prepare for a march to Nashville Tenn. and I was ordered to proceed to Tuscumbia Ala, 50 miles distant to draw rations for the reg't [sic] to subsist on during the Journey - As luck would have it no more trains were to run to Decatur – The R.R. was abandoned- I had come away from Decatur on the last train – I reported myself to Genl. [sic] Stanley then Comdg [sic] at Tuscumbia but he refused to let me attempt to reach my reg't [sic] for the present – There I was almost penniless and without a blanket or a clean shirt – Tuscumbia was abandoned and we went to luka but soon left for Corinth where I connected myself with the “Yates Sharp Shooters” and with them I participated in the “Battle of luka” marched back to Corinth and assited [sic] in the defence [sic] of that place on the 5th of October – The Rebels having defeated and the danger being over I was ordered to proceed to my reg't [sic] at Nashville via! Louisville Ky. arriving at Columbus Ky. I obtained permission of Genl. [sic] Dodge to go by way of Chicago – and arrived there on the night of October 10th went out home the next Evening – Of course it wouldnt [sic] do for me return to the wars again without visiting Miss Nellie Adams seeing that we were affianced – So I visited her on Sunday and brought her home with me to remain there till I again left home Now comes the most remarkable portion of my story – On our way to my home we became remarkably good natured and loving and after a while concluded to go to Chicago the next day and get married unbeknown by anyone – Letting no one into secret we visited Chicago got our License and with a friend or relative of Either of us – called the Rev. E. M. Boring Presiding Elder of the M.E. Church and got fairly hitched together in the traces of matrimony – We did not let our Parents into secret till the next day although we passed the night at my Fathers [sic] house – When my folks found it out they considered it as a good practical joke – but when her folks found it out they were hopping mad for about an hour but finally became reconciled to it and thought is

[sic] was all right – I remained about a week with my wife visited Evanston and its good people and again started off for the walk leaving my bride in tears – Passed through Indianapolis and Louisville and finally arrived at my regt [sic] at Nashville Tenn [sic] hale and hearty – By the way before I left Chicago I sent you my wedding cards and my Photograph did you receive them? When I found the reg't [sic] I learned they had not tasted Either coffee or sugar for two months

Well we remained in camp at Nashville till Christmas when an advance was ordered on the Rebels at Murfreesboro – We met the Butternut Gentry two miles north of Murfreesboro on Stones Creek and after five days hard fighting whipped them and took the place. which is now one vast hospital alike for friend and foe – Our Reg't [sic] is in Genl [sic] Sheridans [sic] Division and held a position on the right during the fight where fell the bullets the thickest – there was the 51st to be found -On the 31st Inst when the Rebels had almost gained the day - and were driving Everything before them - The 51st and 27th Ills. charged bayonets through the rocks and timber and drove five Rebel Regiments in disorder from the field and capturing 100 prisoners Genl. Rosecrans says that charge saved our army from a disgraceful rout – In our brigade composed of the 22d 27th 42d and 51st Ills reg't [sic] we lost two colonels and one major killed also many captains and Lieutenants – and had 900 men killed and wounded – our Banners are torn to shreds by shot and shell but still we are as ready as ever to meet the traitorous crew whenever we can catch them – To day it has rained very hard all day – but this Eve it is freezing and snowing – but I dont [sic] care for the weather I have a good furnace in my tent and am very comfortable – Hoping to hear from you very soon. I remain as ever your friend and schoolmate Allen W Gray Com. Sgt. 51st Regt. Ills. Vol. 3d Div. 3d Brigade Dep't [sic] of the Cumberland Nashville Tenn [sic]

[written on top margin of first page] Eugene A Lyford our former classmate was orderly Sgt of Co. I. 88th Regt Ills Volor [sic] 2d Board of Trade regt [sic] and was killed in the fight at Murfreesboro- H.G. Meacham takes his place as orderly of the company – Their camp is near ours- McCasky is in an Indiana Regt. now stationed near Nashville.

Camp on Stone's [sic] River near Murfreesboro Tenn.

Thursday Eve Feb'y [sic] 16, 1863

Friend Holbrook

Your favor of the 1st Inst came to hand yesterday having been 25 days on the road. although a letter generally goes through in a week-

In directing my letter to Thornton Station I did not know as it would find you there Still I knew your relatives would forward it to you if you were not at home. In the same manner as a letter follows a reg't [sic] from place to place. I expected you would be back at college again this Winter tugging away at the abstruse Sciences and mathematical

roots as we did of yore. I do not suppose there would be much pleasure in attending the [illegible] now nearly all the old numbers being gone and only a few mere boys to fill the class where men once stood Leaving all joking aside – how does the old college flourish now a days? I very seldom hear a word from Evanston and when I do, it is generally in a round about way

Mrs [sic] Bryce I expect must be rather lonely with her two daughters gone and her husband away most of the time selling histories – I pity her for she was a good friend to us and used us well. Prof. and “Proffess” [sic] Jones I suppose are luxuriating in the Japanese Sea by this time and cutting a terrible swath as Consul- How I should like to paint his gate at his new home just to let him know that some of the Evanston Painters were about. You recollect “Thomas” the [illegible] with the big nose who used to keep old Bach in Shermans [sic] new house – he is Chaplain of the 88th Ills the next regt [sic] to us – and he is a perfect fanatic on the subject of religion and I think does more harm than good for Christianity. He is so anxious to do good that he frequently is the victim of misplaced confidence. Meacham is still alive and flourishing and will probably be promoted to a Lieutenantcy [sic] in place of his Lieutenant who drummed out of the service in disgrace for giving giving [sic] as a cause for resigning that he could not conscientially [sic] serve under Lincolns [sic] Proclamation to free the Slaves

Lyfords [sic] remains have been disenterred [sic] and sent home to his friends- I accidentally ran across Will Wood a short time since – he is a Lieutenant in the 19th Ills. You were not the only one who was taken by surprise at marriage nearly all my friends were – but you know accidents will happen. I am of your opinion that I have captured a good woman for a wife still I will candidly say I never dreamed of marrying her till I enlisted - I suppose you will doubt this nearly all my Evanston friends do nevertheless it is the truth To be sure I respected her and enjoyed my self in her society but I did not know that I loved her till we were separated by the call to arms. One remark in your letter has puzzled me not a little you say “You (ie [sic] me) are changing I am not” I dont [sic] exactly comprehend you I seem to fell my self the same thoughtless happy personage as ever – I dont [sic] realize that I am a man or that I am married – the world seems as beautiful to me as ever life has no cares for me- I laugh and talk as much as ever and in fact I am your old friend Gray I have about reached my maximum height and am rapidly filling up - I now weigh 140 lbs [sic] and live on Hard tack and Sow belly washing them down with coffee uncontaminated with that vulgar fluid – “milk” Nothing can be had in this region except from the Sutlers who generally make us pay a good price for their goods – cheese they charge 50 [cent sign] pr lb [sic] butter, 75 cts [sic] eggs 50 [cent sign] pr doz [sic] Potatoes \$5.00 pr bush Rot gut whiskey (on the sly of course \$6.00 pr. gallon letter paper or Envelopes 2 for 5 cts [sic] Tobacco \$2.00 pr. lb [sic] and every thing else in a like proportion – I look upon the Sutlers as a set of modern Shylocks but they are considered as as [sic] necessary evil in the army – You would be astonished to see the amount of business they do in a day. I expect the Alpha Mu is about “Bust up” well it was a good thing while it lasted-

It has rained nearly every day for the past month and every thing [sic] is decidedly wet – Stones River is very high and the army is “mud bound” and there is no prospect of an advance till the roads get better – Rail Road communication is again established between Louisville and Murfreesboro and very heavy trains are daily running in the Gov’t. employ For the past week my Sister Mrs [sic] Howland has been in camp here with her husband who is quarter master of Palmers [sic] Div. Day before yesterday we took a horseback ride over the battle field of Murfreesboro- Nothing very remarkable is now to be seen unless it be the rudely constructed breastworks of fence rail and rocks the numerous graves – the riddled trees and shorn branches – the fragments of uniforms – blankets – old shoes cartridge boxes with here and there an undischarged shell or cannon ball – and the many decaying carcasses of horses – while the rudely constructed huts of cedar boughs tell how how [sic] the troops sheltered themselves from the weather during their bloody six days fight – But to the participant in the fight who heard the terrible screaming of the shells and the “zip” of the bullets as flew through the air there are many places of interest. Here he sees the place his General fell – here – where his reg’t [sic] stood it was forced to retreat - here – where they charged so valiantly on the Rebel horde – here – he took a prisoner – there his comrade was wounded and just beneath that tall oak lie the remains of his slaughtered companions in arms - with a rude board to mark their resting place. I plucked a few early flowers and a sprig of cedar to send to my wife for a memento of the battle field. For the past two weeks our Brigade has been at Salem four miles from our present camp – They were on an Out Post and stood a sort of Picket Guard and had no tents or other shelters except their blankets and their bush houses – Secesh Refugees are coming into our lines in great numbers – 48 came in on one road the other day – They are conscripts and some of them have been weeks lying hid in the woods trying to get into our lines – You have no idea of the amount of destitution in the south – You read of the horrors of war but to realize it you must see the sufferings of the people with your own eyes- Their clothing is generally pretty well worn and their food is is [sic] of the coarsest description mostly of Bacon and corn bread – Medicine for their sick is not to be had at any price except our Surgeons accomodate [sic] them- Verily war is a fearful scourge to a country and ruin and devastation follows in the wake of an army. Pay masters are busy at work paying the army we expect to be paid tomorrow or next day for four months. Speaking of money reminds me of a conundrum I heard propounded the other day – Why are Green backs like Jews? Ans. Because - they are an issue by Abraham and know not that their Redeemer liveth [sic] – rather cute though irreverent – Our regiments are fearfully reduced from their orig number – the average strength of each regt [sic] in the whole army will not exceed 350 men and these are daily decreasing by sickness – death desertion detail etc. The old regts [sic] dont [sic] think much of the new regts [sic] and call them “Hundred Dollar Men”- Strange as it may seem the new regts [sic] number generally less than the old ones for duty. Gen’l [sic] Rosecrans has issued an order for the formation of a Legion of Honor to be composed of the bravest and best men of each reg’t [sic] – five privates from each company to be selected by ballot by the company – 3 corporals and 2 Sergts [sic] to be selected by the

reg't [sic] – They are to be mounted and splendidly equipped – In the abstract the idea is excellent but in reality it will prove a nuisance or man favoring institution. I think our prospects [sic] are daily improving – Day light seems to glimmer in the horizon though far off – I think the coming campaign will result in the capture of Vicksburg – Richmond and Mobile the backbone of the reptile seems to be broken and need but a few more vigorous energetic [sic] strokes to finish it – Well here I am at the close of another sheet so Ill [sic] quit – and [illegible] your letter A.W. Gray Com. Sergt. 51st Ills Sheridans [sic] Div [sic] – Army of the Cumberland via Nashville Tenn [sic]

Camp near Acworth Cobb Co

Wednesday June 8, 1864

Friend Holbrook

After so long a silence I seat my self to write you another letter- Since you last heard from me we have been almost continually on the move - We reenlisted as Veterans and went home. I was in Chicago five weeks but so busy at recruiting that I could not visit you as I had calculated on - We were at home during the latter part of February an [sic] for part of March- While I was home I received a commission as First Lieutenant of Co "G" of the 51st. Arriving at Nashville on our return trip we found the railroad so pressed with military business such as carry stores supplies to the front that we were obliged to hoof it to Chattanooga about 120 miles – laying over a few days at Chattanooga to draw new arms we marched to Cleveland Tenn [sic] where we rejoined our old brigade – Resting here only a week – we again set out on the tramp with the army in the grand movement towards Atlanta and at present writing we are about 100 miles south of Chattanooga – and tomorrow morning at day light we again are to continue our journey – Having now given you an epitomy [sic] of our movements I will proceed matters in detail - just as they present themselves to my mind.

Your letter of Feb 22d I never rec'd till the 17th of April owing to our being North on Veteran furlough – I should have answered it before but I have scarcely had time and opportunities to write to my wife as often as I should – While I was home I paid Evanston a visit – saw the [crossed out] several of the old boys though they are most all gone and new ones stepping in to their place. I saw Henry Pearsons- Capt [sic] Russell and Col Beveridge he was very glad to see me and I was too see him- I learn by the Chicago papers that our old friend Linn has raised a company of hundred day men – with Springer for his 1st Lieut [sic] and one of the students of the [illegible] for 2d Lieut [sic] – They had a grand sword presentation to the three at Evanston Dear me what a fuss the people at home are making over the "Hundred day men" Seems to me every young man in the country would spring to the call – No danger – no fighting- simply garrison duty why it is only paztime [sic] – fun – or a grand excursion to the south if you are pleased to turn it so-. Why I should think they would come just to see the country

and have a little experience in soldier life- and after the war is over they could say "We did it" as well as the oldest Veteran – I called on Co "A" C.L.A. a couple of months ago and had a very pleasant visit with my old comrades – They had a theatre in operation exhibiting or performing twice [illegible] – I was fortunate enough to witness one of their performances and it was very creditable – Milner and O.C. Foster were the principal performers and the life of the concave – Foster was as fat and smiling as ever and Milner as argumentative as of old – Charlie Smith has not gained any that I could notice in flesh, The battery did not reenlist as Veterans their time will be out the 16th of July next – It belongs to the 15th Corps and is some where near us- I am going to hunt it up one of these days as it is in the army here with us – Weill I suppose you would like to learn something about our doings lately so here goes – Leaving Cleveland we proceeded towards Dalton skirmishing as we advanced and marching in time of battle over hill and down dale through woods and swamps tearing down fences and tramping down fields of grain we arrived within 8 miles of Dalton and took position on Rocky face Ridge the rebels perforce letting us occupy one end of the ridge while they held the other- The ridge is very rough rocky woody and steep as well as high- As soon as one arrives at the top he commences to go down the other side or in the [crossed out] other words it is some like a wedge no top at all – well here we lay three or four days skirmishing all the while till the rebels evacuated Dalton when we followed close upon their heels- We found the place very strongly fortified their lines of strong breastworks in front each protected by an abattis of fallen trees and timbers or by stakes driven into the ground and the tops sharpened Here I saw 16 stakes where fourteen deserters from a Morth Carolina reg't [sic] had been tied and shot to death Sixteen had been sentenced to die – but one died in jail the night before the execution and the other was pardoned but strange to say the latter has since made his escape to our lines – In their retreat the rebs [sic] always place their most [illegible] hooks as rear guard most of the rebel army would desert if they could get a chance- They are heartily tired of the war – From Dalton we followed them Resaca where they had fortified themselves [illegible] of [illegible] us [illegible] an [illegible] we accepted them [crossed out] fighting them for two days – Finding we were flanking them they again packed up their traps and travelled our forces so close upon them that they could not burn the bridges across the river- The next place we found them tired out and resting was near Pumpkin Vine Creek – about four miles from Dallas Ga here we watched them and fought them for ten days and till having got rested they have again started towards Atlanta and we are again close upon them – Genl. Sherman will not fight as long as he can flank the enemy and I admire his judgement I think we shall be in Atlanta before the 4th of July next I dont [sic] think the rebels can hold out longer than till next winter if till then During the campaign thus far the 51st has had 5 men killed and 30 wounded and we have had some pretty hot work – Our regt [sic] has been very lucky thus far although in the thickest of the fray we have Capt [sic] but few- I am now in command of two companies all of their officers being sick or wounded – we have very warm weather and rough living but plenty to eat we forage green apples whitte [sic] berries potatoes etc – Corn is about 2 feet high and looks nice

down here – Hoping that Honest Old Abe may be our next President – I remain as ever your friend and well wishes

Allen W. Gray 1st Lieut [sic] 51st Ills Inftry [sic] 3d Brig 2d Div 4th Corps Chattanooga

Jefferson Ills Feb. 27 1865

Friend Holbrook

Your letter of the 30th of Jan - reached me a few days ago after having gone the rounds to Dixie and back -

My fathers [sic] health being so poor and he having so much business on hand I tendered my resignation to Gen'l [sic] Thomas who accepted it Jan 24th 1865 - I was not tired of the service nor did I have any less confidence in the justice of the cause for which we have been battling during the past four years - Still I felt that if Every able bodied American would do as well as I had the war would have been brought to a close long ere this - I have participated in twenty one battles and skirmishes during the 3 years and 9 months I was in the army - and I feel no consciutous [sic] scruples that I did not perform my whole duty while a soldier- So much by way of introduction-

Civil life seems very strange and quick yet is pleasant. One needs to suffer privation and peril to fully appreciate the beauties of home. On arriving at home I found an heir – a bright black eyed baby boy about two months old – Oh! but he's a beauty – and so good natured seldom or never cries – but needs considerable attention nevertheless as he dont [sic] hold water much better than a sieve – like the cover to old thunder mug he leaks - If you should happen in Chicago one of these odd days come out and see me and my family – You can take the cars on the North Western Railroad and get off at the first station “Plank road” My brother in law – J F Merchant has a store close to the depot and by reporting to him you will get transportation to our house – or you can find the omnibus ready to start at 3.30 pm from the corner of Clinton and West Sake st [sic] – which will set you down right at the house.

I expect I shall work the farm this summer- though I like farming about as well as a cat does soft soap – as Artemas Wards says it isnt [sic] my forte My father and mother are both in Nashville – Father is confined to his bed with inflamatory [sic] rheumatism in his arm- shoulder and head He has (temoporarily [sic] I hope) lost the use of his right arm

Speaking of Strawn - the Chicago papers at the time of “Elections” spoke of him as an “obscure young Lawyer – not very flattering to his pride was it? He was a Brigadier Gen'l [sic] in the Sons of Liberty – He held a far more enviable position as high private in the Union Army As you say he's a foolish head strong impulsive boy I told my wife about Strawns [sic] attacking our old thunder mug with his revolver – and if she didn't laugh why – no matter

Isn't it refreshing to read of Genl [sic] Sherman and his exploits – He seems to go just where and when he pleases – forced the evacuation of Charleston in mighty short notice after he set about the business-

He will have Richmond the first thing we know - In my estimation he is the smartest and best General in the U.S. Army – I dont [sic] think much of Grant I look upon him as the pet of power he has always had all the men and munitions of war he asked for- while other generals might plead in vain for help – I think the rebellion is on its last legs – Jeff Davis has robbed the cradle and the grace for soldiers – No more are to be had unless he arms the slave – which will prove dangerous [illegible] –

Already the day is breaking – the light of liberty is beginning to shine in all its beauty Honest Abraham has declared that the bond men shall be freed and that all men shall be equal in regard to rights Oh but I feel glad that I have done some thing towards eradicating the [crossed out] the root of discord and contintion [sic] in our land – that I have helped to strike the [illegible] from suffering humanity and bid them bathe in the sunshine of Liberty

Regards to your wife and parents and believe me as of old

Allen W Gray

P.O. Box 3337 Chicago Ills

[written along margin of first page] By the way what has become of your College that mine is in fine order but out of fashion- Never got my money worth out of it Does yours look seedy [illegible]?

[written on top margin of first page] Rawleigh I understand is an officer in the Rebel army – what rank I know not