



THANKSGIVING "OVER THERE"

Civil War Voices from the Front

1861 account printed in Plymouth's Old Colony Memorial newspaper

"Camp Butler, Newport News, Va., Nov. 17, 1861

Mr. Editor: -- It may be interesting to the folks at home to know how the soldiers from Plymouth passed Thanksgiving, and how they enjoyed themselves. I cannot answer for Plymouth volunteers in other places, but certainly those who are quartered here, spent the day as pleasantly as could be expected, under the circumstances.

Last Sunday night Gov. Andrew's proclamation was read to the Battalion, and also the order recommending that all Massachusetts men every where should, as far as practicable observe the day. Accordingly, some patriotic member of the company conceived the idea of having a Thanksgiving dinner for as many of the company as chose to partake thereof. Mr. W. C. Barnes undertook to arrange matters, and have everything in readiness. A goodly number of names were obtained, and at noon, on Thursday, twenty-eight men fell in, and marched to the hall on the shore. I wish you could have seen that hall. It is a long, low building, unfinished inside. It is a long time since we have seen such a table as that, or indeed, a table of any kind; nevertheless, we managed to wait patiently until the Captain arrived. As we sat there waiting, every one seemed to be thinking of home, and many thoughts were uttered about the friends at home, and many were the conjectures as to what they were doing at that particular time.

When the Captain made his appearance, word was given to 'go in.' We actually sat down to a table with a white cloth, loaded with all manner of good things, and handled knives, forks and spoons, like civilized men. Moreover, those who wanted it, drank cider out of a tumbler. The men ate heartily, and yet seemed to remember that too great a change of diet would be injurious. Turkey, chicken pie, and pudding disappeared, and our host seemed to enjoy it as well as ourselves."

1861 letter from [probably] Harlow Vail, Co. A 124th Illinois Infantry from Kewanee (Henry County), Illinois

Camp Nevin, Ky, Dec 9, '61

Dear Sisters Tirzah & Sarah

I have read your kind letter Friday morn. This morn we martched 13 miles towards the enemys camp & we have had a good time martching today. The weather was beautiful & warm more like summer than like winter. The suney South is beautiful & I think that I should like to live here very mutch, who would not like to live in a land of sun shine. I would, were it not for the rebels that abound, not the kind you speak about. You ask how I spent Thanksgiving well I had -- a bully dinner hard bread salt pork or bacon as we call it & coffee. That was the extent of my thanksgiving dinner, during the day I thought of you at home having your nice dinners & wishing mabe that you might present a plate to some of us soldiers filled with some of your own goodies...

there is a lady in Chicago that says to me when you write to the Vaill girls give my love to them & send as much of your own as you are a mind so well [] I presume that you would like to know her name well if I must tell, why Nettie Worth. My love is put in here somewhere & you will have to look sharp to find it. I know that it is in here & I send you a sprig of a cedar tree that I broke off from a tree in Elizabethtown. I sent Nettie B flowers the other day, they were very pretty before I pressed them. One thing about this sprig it was picked in the town where Abraham Lincoln was born in. I did intend to get a piece of the house but now I am away from there 13 miles. & I do not know when I shall be permitted to be there again. One day last week & by accident came across some of my old school mates they were in the Wisconsin 1st & we had a good visit of about two hours & one of the Boys took dinner with me we had a splendid dinner coffee hard bread cheese, soda crackers & butter, & for desert salt bacon.

Last eve I was on guard & after I came off from my relief I wrote till ½ pt 12 to finish two letters one to Nettie & the other was to Nettie's sister in N.Y. I get good long letters from her. She is real good to me she writes often to me, & gives me good advice & what is the best of all she remembers me in her prayers. I am in a rather comical position as I am writing laying with my face downwards my shoes off & my feet sticking up against the front pole of our tent...

Well I shall have to haste & write as I begin to hear the drummers call to reveille will sound in a minute & in a short time we will have taps & then to bed all must go to sleep. No more this time.
HBV

1861 letter from Zebina Y. Bickford, Private in the 6th Vermont Infantry, Company D to Miss Emily Bickford, Barton Landing (Orleans County), Vermont. Zebina enlisted on October 15, 1861. This letter was written on November 28, 1861 from Camp Griffin, Virginia. Zebina died on April 30, 1862. This letter is extremely long but beautifully detailed.

It is Thanksgiving Day and I have not much to do but write and thinking perhaps you did not hear from Virginia any oftener than you wished to I thought perhaps a few lines from some of us cousins would be very acceptable. If not do not answer this, if so answer it if you will. It is just about the time that Vermonters are taking their thanksgiving supper and I have no doubt you are enjoying it first rate. Well so are we soldier boys. You may think that we are home sick today but it is not so, not with me at any rate for we received a box of clothing and a few nicknacks consisting of eatables, from Glover last night and that makes a very good thanksgiving for us. The clothing is the best part of it however. It came just the right time we were all wishing it would come the night before thanksgiving. Our company are gone out on picket guard that is all the well ones and if I had been able I should have gone with them, but I have been sick with the measles and was not able to go. The people in Vermont all seemed to think that we came here in the most healthy season of the year but that the third came in the most unhealthy season, but I would rather have come when the third reg't came than to have come when we did. The third reg't has lost only seven men by disease although they came here in the hottest season of the year, that in the month of July. While the sixth that came out here only six weeks ago has lost six men and has about three hundred more on the sick list. In our company there are eighty two privates and there are forty five of them on the sick list. Only one dangerously sick. I think that if those who have died here had had proper care they might have lived and returned to their friends at home or at least sold their lives on the battle field. One poor fellow that died while I was in the hospital while he was dying said to a friend who was standing by tell my father & mother that if I had had good care I should have lived to have seen them again. Our boys had good care but it was our tent boys that took care of us, often have I heard those in the hospital say that if they had the care that company D boys had they would not be so sick. There has not been a single death in our company yet for all there are so many sick. Supper is ready so I can't write any more now.

Part second six o'clock Thursday eve

Thanksgiving supper is over you cant imagine what a lot of fine things we had for supper, so I must

tell you. In the first place we had a piece of sour bread and salt pork. This is what we usually have although the bread is not always sour. We generally have good bread and of late enough of it, but when we first came here we were kept pretty hungry we did not have half enough to eat and our meat a part of the time was not cooked at all. Well I almost forgot I was telling you what I had for supper. After the bread and meat I had some of mother's cookies and doughnuts that came in our box. They tasted a good deal like Vermont victuals. Well you must wait a few moments until I can read a couple letters that have just come in. I have got my letters read and I will now continue my writing. One of my letters was from Sarah & Alice. They gave me a very cordial to come and spend Thanksgiving with them but the letter was one day to late for Thanksgiving day is passed and evening has come. Therefore I shall have to wait until next year before I accept their invitation. The other letter was from home. They were all well there when they wrote. Charley Refford is passing around his cake that was sent him from home and I must stop once more and help them eat the cake. It was first rate cake I tell you a good deal better than we get here everyday. I suppose you have had a good sleigh ride before this time. I have not had one yet nor do I expect one while we stay in Va. We have not had any snow here yet that stayed on the ground all day. It snowed a little one night but it melted away before noon the next day. The days are very warm here but the nights are very cold. It has been the warmest thanksgiving day I ever saw it as warm as it is in Vermont in September. Last night when we were on dress parade the Colonel read the proclamation of the Governor of Vermont and requested us to keep the day as Vermonters should. After dress parade was over our first Lieutenant told us that those who did not go on picket might get up just as good a supper as the circumstances would permit of we might have baked turkey chicken pie or anything else we chose, but nothing of the kind could be purchased here with love or money. Three were of us went out this forenoon to try and get something for supper but we could not find anything that we wanted so we concluded to let it go till next year when we hope to be at home it does not seem as though this war could last more than a year longer but perhaps it will there is no one knows how long we shall have to stay here I suppose we have got good leaders and those who are capable of managing our army. I hope so at least.

Part fourth

Remember friends that are far away. Write as soon as you get this and do not fail to write over half a dozen sheets for I have nothing to do now but read letters. My love to all. Write soon. Write soon. Write soon. Write soon. Write soon and often. This from Zebina

1862 letter from Sergeant W. A. Slocum (?), 9th Maine Regiment

"Camp of 9th Me. Regt, Nov. 26, 1862.

Friend Lizzie,

Yours of the 5th ult came at hand in due time. And was much pleased to hear from you. You say in your letter you shall always be happy to hear from me, if my wife will have no objections. Lizzie! If I thought I was not doing right in writing a friendly letter to you I would not do it. I do not wish to do anything that is not proper, but I do not see anything that is improper to a married man to write a friendly letter to any of his friends, either male or female. I have but a very few correspondents to what I use to have before I was married. I believe you are all the young lady correspondent that I have that is not relative to me. Your letters has always been very interesting indeed and I have thought a great deal of them. Such letters are a great comfort to a soldier and should miss your letters much, for I receive but a very few letters from young ladies besides my wife. I dropped a number of my correspondents when I came out this last time on this account. And I miss their letters very much. An interesting correspondent is a great comfort to a soldier, friend Lizzie! Mr. Sands belongs in [----]. Now I would not be so unkind as to get you a rogue for a correspondent. William Sands as far as I know is a good man, he is one that likes to enjoy himself but as for being anything bad about him I don't think there is. Lizzie I would like to be a good country lad about this time and be at-home. Pumpkin pies is what I love. And as for the paregoric, I will save that for my

family.

Well Lizzie, Thanksgiving is over with and I expect the young folks had a grand time at home. We did not get ours until last night. We rec'd 4 turkeys, 6 chickens and 3 ducks which made us a very good supper, but don't you think I lost all of mine. I was taken sick in the night.

I suppose you have heard of my new position. I have been appointed Orderly Sergt. of Co. E and I have had my hands full since I came to the company. It is impossible for me to make my letter interesting so you will have to excuse it. I will close with many good wishes to you. Write again soon.

You friend,

Sergt. W. A. Slocum(?)."

1862 letter from Horace B. Ensworth, 81st NYSV

"York Town Va, Nov. the 27, 1862

Dear father and sister

I now seat myself to wright you A few lines once more to tell the honest truth of the matter I havent herd from you since the 13 of Nov only as you have wrien to other folks in the regt I have wrien some five letters to you myself and am a getting discourge about hearing from home and I wrote to Lucy. Wall I cant wright enymore for this is the last of them stamps that you sent milett and me I dont know as the letter that I have [wrote] have gone through.

Well father I supose that you want to know how that I am a getting a longe. I will tell you all about it. I feel as well as I ever did in my life all but my knees, let me walk up a steep hill and it ters my legs some but that is nothing. I will soon get over that. I shall go to the Company to morrow but won't have to doe duty for a spell. I under stand that you are a coming down to see me. I would like to see you but don't like the price you will have to pay, the captain says it will cost a hundread to a hundread and fifty dolars and they talk of giving furloughs before longe and then I can see you all, if I was very sick yet it would make a diferance, a citersun cant travle for nothing in this country. We live first rate hear. I eat more than before I was taken sick. The sutler Mr. Buel keeps beer in bottles, it is the real old stock they cant no one get it, the Comishnd officer the Captain let me have a bitte and I shoed it to the doctor and he sed it would doe more god to strength me than his medersen so the Captain gets it for me. That is what has done the buisness up.

Well father I wish you and the rest of the folks a happy Thanksgivin for I am a getting one my self of rost turkey, chicken pie and oyster pie and everything good, the officers are having a feast to day. The doctor saved us a good meel of it, they is 7 in the Hospittle. Wall I dont think of any thing more to wright, give my herty respects to all. Wright soon and often, direct your letters to NB Ens. I will bring this to a close by biding you all good days, yours in haste from an absent son."

1863 letter from A. Mason, Lieutenant 38th Massachusetts in Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Captain Charles C. Doten

"...The dinner passed off in grand style and no one got drunk though many toasts were given with a will none more heartily drank than the health of Capt. C.C. Doten. Our appetites had been sharpened by a very pleasant ride of some three hours and we did full justice to the entire list. The 'right wing mess' observed the occasion in due form by a dinner composed of the prescribed elements and had a party at a house near by in the evening. The 'left wing mess' had an assembly at a neighbors to eat roast turkey but did not celebrate so zealously as the others. Most of the companies had some extra dish for Dinner and on the whole thanksgiving in the 38th was well marked."