



## Civil War Letter Writing Activity

*This activity is designed for classroom use after your visit to the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum. The activity requires an envelope pattern – contact Joe Long to obtain this item. In the five letter examples included, the punctuation and spelling has been left as it appears in the letters.*

**Goal:** This exercise will enhance the student’s understanding of communications in the 1860s.

**Supplies Needed:** Pencil sharpener for the new pencil, scissors (optional: ink for the quill pen and tape or sealing wax for the envelope).

**Letters were mailed in a variety of ways:** They were sent via the railroad for delivery or a friend or neighbor often carried packages and letters to soldiers. Letters were addressed to a “P.O.” or “in care of.” Letters were frequently composed in a “crosshatched” style, meaning the writer would write vertically and horizontally on the same page. This was done to save paper or because there was no extra paper. An example of a letter written in the “crosshatched” style has been included in the packet.

### **Suggestions for using the envelope pattern in the class:**

1. Select any or all of the letters enclosed to read to your class:
  - a. Examples of letters written between two commanding officers
  - b. Example of a letter describing a battle
  - c. Letter to a sister announcing death of a brother
  - d. Example of an 1827 vacation letter (optional)
  - e. Crosshatched letter example
2. Pass the packets out.
3. Have them make the envelope using a piece of blue paper.
4. Have them write a letter and suggest they use one of the topics from the example letters.
5. Provide some wax (or something sticky) to seal the envelope.
6. Address the envelope.
7. Send the packet and letter home with the student.

## Example Letters

### A. Examples of letters written between two commanding officers

Lieutenant Colonel Bland was wounded in the arm at a Civil War battle called Malvern Hill, July 1, 1862 and had gone home to recuperate.

The following are excerpts of two letters to Lt. Col. Elbert Bland while he was recovering at home in Edgefield. Both letters are from Col. David Wyatt Aiken, 7<sup>th</sup> S.C. Volunteer Infantry. These letters bring to light information on the Malvern Hill battlefield, plus supplies and uniforms in August, 1862. Photocopies of these letters were recently shared with us by Bland's great-granddaughter, Mary Wallace Day.

#### Letter One excerpt:

From 7<sup>th</sup> So Ca Regt Aug 3, 1862, near Richmond: "In addition to some 45 [tent] flies given us by the Department I managed to get permission to send to Petersburg by wagon for some necessary "duds" and among other things, brought from there twenty very good 'bell' and 'army' tents. I had brought also nearly all of our cooking utensils and among other things your camp chest."

"[Brigadier General Joseph B.] Kershaw too has issued an order requiring all officers to be regularly uniformed within a certain time & this too has caused the dry bones of many of the Lieuts[lieutenants] to rattle, for really procuring uniforms is a job now of no little import. From \$80 to \$100 for a coat in Rich[mond] is supremely unmerciful but there is no getting around it now. I went a few days ago & bought twelve swords & belts for them in Rich. The belts are very nice indeed, English, recently run the blockade; the swords are made eight miles above Rich, and look like the rough specimens of an artists best efforts. They will do, However, and add much to the military appearance of the Regt."

#### Letter Two Excerpt:

From "H'qts 7<sup>th</sup> S.C. Regt, Aug 19 1862 {8 miles east of Richmond}: describing the Seven Days battlefield, "The devastation, desolation, destitution and terrible loneliness of that whole country from where you were wounded {Bland in the arm} down to the river, would make it a complete wilderness but for the natural clover, and capital corn, which has not had a plough in it since the battles. But, Oh me, how lonely the country seems; no fencing, no stock, houses opened and rifled, barns torn to pieces, and the very water brooks stagnated by accumulation of filth from the camping grounds of both friend and foe. The graves of friends, and the grave pits of the enemy still show where the battles raged, while the truncated trees no less prove that they too were witnesses to the slaughtering of human lives. The very birds seem to have deserted the place."

On uniforms: "Our conscripts are tolerably well fixed for camp life, nicely equipped & when we get our new uniform, I think the old 7<sup>th</sup> will astonish her neighbors. We are having a uniform made in Rich at the Govt rooms, dark steel mixed jacket with light blue pants. The pants are to be lined throughout with osnaburys. Both cloths are heavy & good, English manufacture. Some of the men in the Regt are opposed to it, but I forbade the Qt Mast [quartermaster] paying out a cent of clothing money, & hence they must come in."

**B. Letter to a sister with news of a brother's death and a battle in Virginia.  
Legibly and clearly written, no misspelling.**

Camp of 7<sup>th</sup> SC Regt on James River  
14 miles below Richmond July 4<sup>th</sup>/62

My Dear Sister,

Although I wrote home two days ago in regard to the sad bereavement we are called to mourn, I take the present opportunity of writing to you more at length on the same melancholy subject.

It is impossible for me to get off or I would like very much to bring him on at once. This however is impossible as I said before & I have done all that I could. You have doubtless already received intelligence of his death from a dispatch sent by Capt. Cothran.

We have also lost Sergt. J. P. Robinson [in the fight on Sunday] and Saml Kno Killed same time Jim was. We had also wounded on Sunday evening Corpl J. A. Corley severely in the neck. P.W. Davis in the leg T. P. Quarles in hand & J. M. Kennedy in leg also. The last two are slight hurts. In the fight of Tuesday evening we had two slightly wounded named Brown & Guillibeau. So that our loss in both engagements has been three killed & 6 wounded.

The loss of the Regt. In both engagements was 122 Killed, wounded & missing-

The enemy are suspected to have embarked on board their transport on James River & gone to parts unknown. We are still lying near the scene of our late fight & have no idea what our next move will be. Our victory is complete though their gunboats saved them from being entirely cut off & captured. The result of the past few days has been glorious to our cause but truly saddening to us as a family. Let us however take courage my dear sister and divine consolation from the reflection that our much lamented Brother has offered his life a willing sacrifice on the alter of Liberty. I cannot mourn him as if he had died a natural death and at home. I look upon all who die-as he did- in defence of his country as heroes, the very circumstances of whose departure go far towards mitigating the poignancy of our grief. I feel [& know it will be so with you and all the rest of the family] that a void has been left in my heart which nothing on earth can fill, still as I said before I cannot look upon our sad bereavement as if it had occurred in a natural

way. Enclosed I send you and article {not found} he had cut from a newspaper & which he seemed to think a great deal of it & be encouraged-

As for myself I have passed through safely & am now in good health. All the Compy besides those previously mentioned as wounded are doing very well – some few are sick but none seriously– Do write to me very soon.

My best love to all the family & respects to inquiring friends.

Your affectionate Brother  
T. W. Willis

**Some names mentioned in the letter and their demise including T. W. Willis:**

Sergeant James A. Willis, Company C, 7<sup>th</sup> SCV Infantry – Killed in action, Malvern Hill, 7-1-62, age 21, from Abbeville District

Corporal Thomas W. Willis, Company C, 7<sup>th</sup> SCV Infantry, KIA Gettysburg, 7-2-63, age 24, from Abbeville District.

Private James M. Kennedy, Company C, 7<sup>th</sup> SCV Infantry, KIA Sharpsburg, 9-17-62, age 19, from Abbeville District.

**C. Example of a letter describing a battle.**

One of the Battles at the nine month Petersburg, Virginia siege described in a 1 November 1864 letter by Ebenezer B. Rowe, Company D, 4<sup>th</sup> South Carolina Volunteer Cavalry. {punctuation & paragraphs added, spelling left as is.} Private Ebenezer B. Rowe, served in a dismounted unit during the nine month siege of Petersburg, Virginia. On December 27 and 28, 1864, Rowe was involved in defending a Union diversionary attack supporting an attempt to take the Confederate involved in defending a Union diversionary attack supporting an attempt to take the Confederate South Side Railroad. A letter to his Mother and Sisters, dated 1 November 1864 recalls the action...

2 miles of Petersburg 1 Nov 1864

Dear Mother and Sisters

I drop you a few lines to inform you that I am well and unhurt and truly hope this may find you all enjoying good health and fine spirits and doing well. I have not herd from home in two weeks, the last I herd Esther was very sick I am very anxious to hear from her. Son had fever since I left but I hope they are all better.

“Well, I will give you a small sketch of the big fights {Fair Oaks & Darbytown Road} we had last Thursday and Friday. Thursday morning before daylight the Yankees charged our Pickets and drove them in and we all [got] down to our breastworks and about Sun rise they charge us which consisted only of our dismounted caverly but we held in check

untill we were reenforced with infantry I was throwed out on a skirmish line on the rite of our Breastwork to prevent the enemy from flanking us but they charge us with such force that we had to fall back but it was in the after noon before they flanked [us] but it done them no good our infantry crossed the swamp and met them in a thicket and give them a good whipping and run them back with heavy loss the dead yankees was strewed all over the woods and in front of our Breastworks the fight was kept up until dark without ceasing.

On Friday morning by the time they could see the Sharp Shooters opened fire on our Breastworks and kept it up until about 11 or 12 oclock at which time we silenced them and run them away they attacked our lines at several different points at the same times but was repulsed at every point our loss was very light none in my company and very few in the Brigade one killed and three wounded in the dismounted portion. I hear there is about sixty killed and wounded and missing in the mounted portion of the Brigade. One of Gen Hampton's Sons {Lt. Thomas Preston Hampton, age 21, KIA 27 Oct 1864 at Burgess' Mill [aka Boydton Plank Road or Hatcher's Run], VA.} was killed. They were engaged with the enemy some two or three miles from us with a diferent army that was trying to get to the South Side Rail Road, but they got badly defeated in that attempt. I hope they are convinced now and will go in winter quarters and close up this campaign for they must know that they cannot get Petersburg nor Richmond.

I hope the Lord will still be with us for it is only his mercies that we are saved I wish you could go down and see Esther and stay as long as you can with her you and sister or both, I think it would help her I expect she is lonesome.

The yankees seems very quiet the usal cannonading is going on at Petersburg which is kept up nearly every day and Sharp Shooting with small arms every night we have to make up a piece of Breastwork hear which will take about three or four days and then we will go back near the Brigade if the yankees don't give us another fight before that time.

Well I must close for this give my love to all the family and all enquiring friends and partake of the same from your loving and affectionate Son untill Death.

Kiss the children. E. [benezer] B. Rowe

**D. A vacation letter, very descriptive, which can be used in lieu of war letters, or you may want to use it at another time. Members of the Latta family were merchants in York and Columbia.**

Transcription of a letter postmarked July 9<sup>th</sup> & written by W[illiam]. A. Latta to:

Mrs. Margaret A. Smith [aunt & wife? of Judge William Smith]  
Or in her absence

**R. W. Hill, Esq. [identification not established could be William Randolph Hill]**  
York Ville, South Carolina

Philadelphia July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1827

Dear Aunt,

I suppose you have heard before this time of our arrival at New York on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June on the Packet Hudson, forty two days from London, where we remained two days and came to this city, from which we wrote to W. Hutchinson very soon after. We had a very disagreeable, cold, passage; as much so as the Captain had ever experienced at any season of the year. I have delayed writing to you much longer than I expected when I wrote you from Aix, but as I wished to give you the particulars of our passage to Marsailles [what I had not time to do then, the vessel by which it was to be conveyed being on the point of sailing] also some account of our stay and travelling through France, I thought it better to defer to do so until we would arrive here.

I shall not attempt it by commencing at the Straits of Gibraltar, previously nothing having occurred but sea sickness, which is not very agreeable company, particularly when attended by as much head winds as we were; On the 16<sup>th</sup> January, and 50<sup>th</sup> day after we sailed, discovered among the lowering clouds which to the North East darkened the horizon, some deeper blue than the others; that attracted our attentions and after several hours intensely and anxiously examined, proved only by their immutability to be land which on the Morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> the wind having changed favorable, obviously discovered itself to our view to be the coast of Spain, between Cadiz, the towering steeples of which we saw on our left. Gibraltar and the wide mountains of Africa on our right. We passed Cape Trafalgar off which, Lord Nelson was killed, The scene became more beautiful and interesting until we were nearly opposite the Town and Rock of Gibraltar, where it is vain for me to attempt a description, the Spanish side being prolific and well cultivated, the flourishing state of vegetation of various descriptions and refreshing appearance of the green groves and orchards with which the hills were covered, interspersed with neat white cottages and small villages [to us wearied with the calms and storms by which our patience and resolution alternately had been exhausted on the ocean, where counteracting comforts and pleasures are few,] afforded a prospect, beautiful and almost exhilarating to behold, as even to have participated their real enjoyments, at any other time and under almost any other circumstances, added to this not only those natural joyful feelings which always attend when approaching land [even if it is barren and desolate] after being excluded from the view of it for many weeks; but also by many pleasing ideas associated with approaching a kingdom long since conspicuous among the most interesting and important in the world, and from which the incorrect Knowledge I had of its origin and history. I had contracted a great desire to see. We did not stop at Gibraltar and owing to its situation behind the rock saw but half of the town, the rock forming a promontory from North to South two or three miles long and half a mile wide is considered one {of} the most strongly fortified places in the world, the North, East, South sides being perpendicular, from 12 to 14.00 feet high, so well fortified by nature requires very little from Art, the Western which forms part of the bay, is a very difficult ascent fortified very strongly from within 15 feet of the Water to a great height up it, formed a barrier quite as invincible as those wild

precipices which bound it on the other three sides, this place has been maintained by the English since 1704 against repeated assaults from French and Spanish armies the garrison always supplies sufficient for three years in not unjustly computed as impregnable as long as England remains so, and conquerable only by perfidy [Straits are 12 miles wide] We entered the Mediterranean in the evening and were then 10 days to Marsailles, which appeared to fly with double swiftness and time to hang less heavy on our minds; occasioned by interesting views from the Shore which we were in sight of all the distance although it is much more mountainous and barren than near Gibraltar, still presented not infrequently interesting prospects, the lofty summits of mountains in the interior covered with snow, their barren, uncultivated sides gradually descending to the Ocean, produced scenes than which it would be difficult to imagine more beautiful and reviving. There are a great many towns and villages, along the coast, also great numbers of towers some very high, and antique built by the Moors perhaps centuries past, all are alike rendered interesting by the idea of their being so very ancient, which is confirmed by their appearances. We had quite disagreeable, boisterous weather [with the exception of a few days at first] from Gibraltar to Marsailles, what we did not in the least anticipate, having been incorrectly informed respecting the Mediterranean, where storms are always expected in the Winter. [as we were informed afterwards but by experience know to be true for one]

On the 28 arrived in sight of the light house which we were not certain was that of Marsailles until very near it, we took a pilot on board who assured us it was; and I think from his attire, we more readily and reasonable might have supposed ourselves in the Frigid Zone than South of France, his woolen cap as close down to his ears as possible, stockings drawn over his pantaloons above the Knees, his entire wooden shoes, about 4 inches high, probably no more than 12 or 14 long, attached the feet of a Frenchman not more than 5 1/2 feet high, had quite a jocular appearance, but at the same time created doubts in our minds that we had been misinformed even as it respected the climate, the weather having been colder than usual his dress was somewhat accounted for.

We sailed into the Port [which is about half a mile long and a quarter broad of an oval form] in the evening. The entrance is not wide enough to admit two vessels to pass each other. The wind having blown from the harbor for 16 days previous very few vessels had been able to enter; consequently [the wind changing the day before] a great number arrived and the port was very crowded; some ships had taken their pilots on board and were driven off as far as the Island of Sardinia, and two or three detained 30 & 35 days. The approach to Marsailles [in fine weather] is certainly very delightful; the mountains surrounding presenting a complete amphitheatre in form, we were very fortunate in being admitted pratique? (p.2, line). After two days, some vessels when their bills of health are not very good, are detained from a few days to [sometimes] 60, during the two days that we remained on board we found it necessary to get some fresh provisions, fruit (p.2, 11 lines from bottom)??? In payment they received the silver in a cup of vinegar, and if we sent letters or notes on show they were always well seeped in the same, and anything put on board from land was handed attached to the end of a long pool for the purpose, in this respect you can easily judge how superstitious they

are; vessels that are sentenced to be detained some time, are sent about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile out of port between some small islands on which the crew can debark themselves frequently, these regulations were instituted in the year when a plague broke out and swept off 50,000 person, half the number of habitants at that time [contains at present between 120, & 140,000]. Before we were permitted to disembark we had all to visit the Quarantine Office situated near the water, enter one door from the boat and round to another in the boat again, we....

Here as we passed one after another scrutinized by two other doctors and custom house officers, to see if we could walk pretty nimble, they were so polite as to permit Mother and Sarahphina to remain in the boat, we were then ordered back to the Brigg to undergo another inspection by a Physician sent to examine the vessel also, every thing proving satisfactory. He then pronounced us at liberty to debark ourselves as soon as we wished but not our baggage which had to be examined by the Custom House Officers, to see if there was anything smuggled; after permission was granted you will conclude that we delayed as little as possible which was the case, after debarking the appearance of every thing so different, manners language, building and even carriages; all so extraneous to me, produced some inexplicable sensations in my mind, and made me to feel considerable regret on leaving the vessel, and an attachment to it, before unfelt. The city is divided into the Old and new town, the former is very antique it was built by the Romans, and contains many antiquities, but like most old towns that we saw is very crowded, streets crooked, narrow and filthy; the new part which includes about three fourths of the city is regularly laid off, not so filthy; forming some very handsome streets, the houses are generally from 4 to 6 stories high, of stone plastered with a yellow stucco, generally airy, less adapted to Winter than Summer, the floors are all tile of an octangular form; polished and painted look [after a person gets accustomed] quite pretty at first they had a very singular appearance. This city is at present of no little importance being the most commercial in France, though its ancient importance in some aspects has declined, particularly its almost unrivaled celebrity for literature is nearly sunk in oblivion. Athens at one time along being entitled to a superiority over Massilia [its ancient appellation]. From its central position surrounded on all sides by different nations; in the Port may be seen flags of almost every Kingdom in the world, and in the streets at every moment the eye is arrested and attention attracted by some new dress, strange manner, and different languages, which is frequently interesting to us, at the same time conveys considerable knowledge of its different people in some of those respects. We spent one week very agreeably rendered so by the polite attention our letters [some to French and some to American Gentlemen] procured; what we did not anticipate in so large a city where are so many foreigners. We had an idea of going to Nice in Italy, 150 miles distant, where are a great many English in Winter, but as the season was so far advanced Aix, about 20 miles, was considered as suitable climate for Father's cough, where were also some English, the night before we left... There was... of snow to the great astonishment of the citizens as well as ourselves {they thought... there would be... [severe?] cold weather} the environs of the city and country between it and Aix is handsome grapes are produced in great quantities, the manner in which they are raised I will write you in my next. All kinds of fruits in abundance are raised, though at that season none were growing near Aix. That city contains about 25 or 30,000 inhabitants; there is one very handsome street called [le cours] it is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mile or  $\frac{3}{4}$

long, from 100 to 120 feet wide planted on each side with tow rows of trees, forming a promenade which is crowded every pleasant evening, particularly on Sabbaths [which day I wish to write you considerably, respecting the manner in which it is celebrated there] with hundreds of people airing themselves, in the streets are 3 fountains all very ancient, and what is rather singular, the two, one at each end of the street are cold and the one in the center warm, these fountains are always running water every street is supplied with them which are generally from 7 to 10 feet high of Marble and white stone on some of them are obelisks 20 or 30 feet high, in another letter I wish to give you an account of the customs of the People which are very different from ours. I commenced the Language in Aix and learned sufficient to ask for any thing we wished on the road traveling, I am pursuing it here which occupies my time very much, for the advantage of speaking it I board with a French Family; as I do not wish to cross write letter you will please excuse the size of paper when this is rec'd. I should be glad you would write me as I am anxious to hear from you, not having had that satisfaction since we left. Father's health is very good, his cough quite easy, the weather having been so extremely warm since our arrival had debilitated him a little, [thus had some affect on every person] Mother & Sarahphina are well and with Father write in love to you.

W.R. Hill and family, also to Aunt Hill and family.

I shall expect to hear from you soon.....

I remain affectionately your Nephew, W. A. Latta