

# FIVE CIVIL WAR LETTERS

John K. Ross, Jr.

The original letters were found in the Civil War vertical file in the Paducah Public Library. These letters have been transcribed with difficulty as many words have faded. Nothing in the file indicates who donated these letters to the library.

Four letters are from a Confederate soldier named Sam House. He wrote one letter from New Madrid and three from Columbus, Kentucky. In his letters, he tells of camp rumor and gossip, picket raids, Yank gunboat attacks, and picket duty in freezing weather. He is obviously well educated and has an excellent sense of humor.

The fifth letter is from Frank B. Smith of the 1st Illinois Light Artillery, Battery "A" (also known as Wood's Battery). In his letter he tells of a well documented incident during Grant's siege of Fort Donelson. It can be found in the Official Records of the Army, Volume 7, in Taylor's report of the capture of Fort Donelson.

New Madrid Missouri  
Monday Augt 12 1861

Dear Father

A detachment of our company came up to this place two weeks ago & the balance followed a few days ago! All well and in fine spirits for the march. This is a beautiful country as had (?) a (flood?) the town contains about two thousand Inhabitants they are very kind to the Troops—the army takes up the line of march across the country on Wednesday. We go with the siege pieces—If anything should happen to me—my two trunks are at (Wyame?) & Parks & Mr. (Stover?) has my watch and chain. I expect my opportunities for writing home will be very seldom now so dont feel uneasy if you dont hear from me often—love to all friends—love & kisses to all the folks—May God have mercy on us & bring us all together again when the war is ended.

Your Affect Son  
Sam House

Envelope addresses: Sam C. House Esqr  
Knoxville  
Tenn

Columbus Kentucky  
Saturday Oct 12th 1861

Dear Father & Mother

I received Sisters letter of 27th and yours of 29th Sep in due time and I have intended answering each since but this is the first time I have had a chance to do so. I was overjoyed to hear that both Frank and Will (name unclear) have joined the Southern cause! I have not heard anything more of the whereabouts of Frank. On Tuesday we had another Engagement with the Gun Boats which lasted about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour & nobody hurt on our side although they threw

several 64 shell in our Batteries. Our Guns were the nearest. One Boat had six Ball holes punched through her and one wheel disabled report says she sunk before reaching Cairo! I dont know how true it is. Yesterday three Boats were in sight all day but they did not come close enough to exchange civilities. On Wednesday night a company of Cavalry from this place on a scout attacked the pickets within Two Miles of Paducah killed & captured all except One. Our loss: 1 killed 2 wounded severely & unfortunately all by our own side. They being eager to capture the Enemies Horses were mistaken in the dark for Foes and fired upon. One of the wounded Young Flemming a Brother of (unclear) M Flemming of your Town was left within 2 miles of the scene of the Fight a company went out yesterday to bring him in. I hope he will not die as he is a splendid fellow & good soldier.

I am glad to see Emile (unclear) has such a good position no doubt he will fill it to entire satisfaction. Saw by the papers that Zollicoffers Command is kept pretty busy cleaning out the Yanks from that section of Kentucky. Tell John to write me sometime.

The news as to our future movements! troops continue to come in daily for miles around it is our Camp [sic]. Camp rumors say one day we are to attack Paducah next Louisville next day some other place, but not one word escapes the General as to when he intends to strike! You may be sure when ever the blow falls it will be effectual. Love & Kisses to all. Remembrance to all friends tell Sis I will write her soon & Mother I hope has got well of her cold. Tell all hands to write Me. I am

Your Affect Son  
Sam

{ much obliged for this }  
{ sheet of Paper. }

Columbus Kentucky  
Monday Feb<sup>y</sup> 3<sup>d</sup> 1861

Dear Nell

Your letter of 19th Jany just received. strange to say may have taken a voyage to Columbus Ohio or some other Yankee port. Uncle Franks note is short and to the point as usual. Who should have thought that old Duncan would have married a widow. I thought he was looking out for a young wife but I expect the "L'Argent" was a great inducement—I thought Mrs. Nisbitt revered the memory of her *Dear Husband* so much that she never would again enter the bonds of holy "Padlock"—but so goes the world—great world this and "heaps of peoples"—I am so glad to hear Sister is so much better. tell her to take good care of herself and make haste and get well. This is unfavorable weather for a throat affection! The weather at this place is "Beautiful." We have not seen the sun in I don't know how long! ground been covered with Snow for several days and Sleet-Rain & Freeze on top of that. last Night was the most unpleasant I ever passed! Very Cold—the ground a sheet of Ice! raining all the time—and freezing as fast as it fell. I was on guard—stood 4 hours. I tell you I came near "going up"—no fire. I thought several times old Massa Lincoln had better stop his foolishness and let us all go home. it is my opinion that the Rump Government has about played out and will go up the spout in the Spring. I don't admire the place Johnny has. he wont like it. I know it is a confining life & dont pay. Besides he has no rank really. I was offered the same place in "Old Granny Polks" Establishment—but I asked them to "Scuse" me if they pleased. I came out to "Soger" not to clerk. I could stay at home & do that.

Gen<sup>l</sup> Beauregard is expected here every day. I suppose he will change matters and things generally when he arrives—it is the best move that the Confederacy has made—this is the place to show his Genius. When the fight does come off at this place it will be no childs play.

I read Wills letter from Florence Ala together with (unclear) but thank God the information it contained I knew was wrong! send me the first letter you recd from Johnny after the Battle. the river is full of floating ice. The Yanks must be having a good time up at Cairo. They like it so well I dont think they will leave there soon. A Flag of truce came down yesterday but I did not hear what the object was. Love & Kisses to all. I wrote Mother a few days ago. All write soon & post me up on passing events.

Your Affect Brother  
Sam House

Columbus Kentucky  
Feb 26 1862

Dear Father

I have intended writing every day for a week there has been so many rumors of an attack every day that I thought each day I would wait until after the fight! Last Sunday a fleet of Enemy Gun Boats were down all day but did not do anything—there is a (unclear) to my letters not reaching home as I (unclear) & I think I (unclear) there may be Federal sympathizers in Knoxville who knowing my letters are from such an important Post as Columbus steal from the post office in the hope they may contain some information which would be of benefit to our Enemies! I can account for their miscarrying in no other way. I received (unclear) last letter glad to hear Sister is so much better—hope Mothers cold is well—times are looking gloomy in deed but we can hope that behind the cloud the sun is still shining & that if we trust in God & do our duty like men everything will turn out for the best. the troops here will give a good account of themselves when an opportunity is offered—Love & Kisses to all—write soon

Your Aff Son  
Sam

Tennessee River 10 miles from Tenn & Ky state line  
Monday March 17/62

My dear Friend

Your kind letter—Feb 20 is at hand and this may be the last mail for sometime. I hasten to acknowledge the (unclear) of your kind letter with the (unclear) inclosed. There is great difficulty about our mail I (unclear) with much doubts of my friend even receiving my letters. I wish much that I had time to write you a full account of our engagement at Donelson. I can only say that I was in the (unclear) of the fight and we arrived on the ground just in time to turn the tide of battle in our favor. The enemy was making a desperate charge to break our lines and thus make their escape it being their only hope. Taylors Battery was just about to spike their guns and were out of cannister shot we came up at a run the balls were whistling about our heads and the enemy was almost on us. We just had two guns in battery (our squad No 1 and No 3) opened fire on them with double cannister shot and drove them back with great slaughter. I was afterward told by a Col of one of the Tenn Reg that we killed two hundred of his men with our two guns alone. In seventeen minutes we fired twenty six rounds each. Taylors (unclear) which shortly after we came on the field. They had fought long and their men were much exhausted. They are a noble set of boys and their friends must (unclear) of them. I (unclear) with my many remarkable escapes the nearest I had to a wound was a ball passing through my shirt waistband and the nearest to death was a six pound shell passing four inches over my head (unclear) killing two men beyond. Balls flew all around hitting horses and lumber chests fortunately we had but three men wounded and they but slightly. I was the first of our battery to enter Donelson and had a dozen Rebel bayonets put at my breast (unclear) guards informed me that the (unclear). I

captured a splendid horse saddled and bridled and have her yet with me. Of course she is the lawful property of Uncle Sam and I may not be allowed to keep her but others who have taken guns and other such trophies still have them.

This is a delightful climate and I am enjoying it very much it seems very much like the month of May. We are quite ignorant of our destination. We are in force about thirty-thousand strong under Maj Gen C.F. Smith our battery is divided on two boats the Sunny South and our two guns on the Boston. I hope we will be able soon to give another Victory to our friends at home. With much love to all your family. Believe me your affectionate friend

Frank B. Smith

Str Boston

Columbus Kentucky  
Saturday Oct 12<sup>th</sup> 1861

Dear Father & Mother

Dear Sisters

Letter of 27<sup>th</sup> and yours of 29<sup>th</sup>. I got in due time and I have intended answering ever since but this is the first time I have had a chance to do so I was overjoyed to hear that both Frank & Willie & Catherine have joined the Southern cause. I have not heard anything more of the whereabouts of Frank. On Tuesday we had another Engagement with the Gun Boats which lasted about 3/4 of an hour & nobody hurt on our side although they threw several shells in our Batteries. Our guns were the nearest. One Boat had six Ball holes punched through her and one wheel disabled

Letter from Sam House to his Parents (first page)