**Excerpts from the Civil War Letters of Lieutenant George L. Waterman**

**Context-**

George L. Waterman was the only surviving son of Lawson and Angelina Waterman of Peninsula, Ohio. Another brother had died in childhood. He had no sisters. The Waterman family owned extensive property in Peninsula which they farmed. The also ran the largest canal-boat building yard in Peninsula and operated a quarry as well. In 1858 George Waterman moved to Cleveland to attend business college. While there he joined the Cleveland military society/ militia known as the Cleveland Greys. This unit was among the first to respond to President Lincoln’s call for volunteers after the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April 1863. Waterman served with this unit as a soldier through his 3 month enlistment, and saw action at First Bull run before returning home for almost a year. In 1862, in response to Lincoln’s 3rd call for volunteers he took it upon himself to recruit soldiers in Boston Township and successfully persuaded 22 (including Levi Barker Boodey) to join the Union Army. As a result, he was commissioned as a lieutenant in C Company of the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry which was formed mainly out of soldiers from the Summit County area of Northeast Ohio. The 115th OVI mustered in Massillon, and was deployed to Cincinnati, Kentucky, and Dayton, Ohio and vicinity through 1863 where it acted as a home guard defending against Southern incursions and maintaining law and order. Lieutenant Waterman was an effective officer and earned the respect of his men. The 115th OVI saw little action, but suffered- as most units did from illness which accounted for most of the lives lost in the unit. Waterman himself died of an infected wound incurred when he was shot in a scuffle with a Southern sympathizer following riots in Dayton in September 1863. He was honored with a public funeral in Dayton and his body was returned home for a hero’s burial in Cedar Grove cemetery in his hometown of Peninsula, Ohio.

**Guiding Questions-**

1. Why did George L. Waterman volunteer for military service? What was he serving/ fighting for?

2. What does Waterman say about his life in the Army? How does he describe his fellow officers and the soldiers under his command?

3. What are Waterman’s politics? Is he a Democrat or a Republican? How can you tell?

4. When is Waterman’s morale at its highest? At its lowest?

5. What does Waterman say should be done to bring the war to an end?

6. What does Waterman ask for or comment on about his family, friends and hometown of Peninsula, Ohio?

7. What can you infer about Waterman’s plans for after the war?

8. How do his letters differ depending on whether he is writing to his mother, to his father, or both?

9. What are your questions?

**1. Columbus, Ohio, April 19th, 1861**

Dear Parents,

I snatch a few seconds to inform you of our successful arrival here at the Capital of our native state; we are quartered in the Legislative Chamber of the State House where we arrived at 10 o’clock PM. We left Cleveland at 2:30 PM and are to be in ranks and ready for Washington at 3 Am tomorrow. We are 96 in number Rank and file- ie Officers and Privates. We are picked me, hosen out of 200. I do not think you would know me dressed as I am in gray and carrying my knapsack and little tin cup swung to it. At all the way stations on our route we have been greeted and cheered by immense crowds, and we were escorted to the Depot at Cleveland by a larger crowd than Old Abe drew and we go fully determined to sustain and redeem the flag and honor of our Country. Father, you cannot help thinking that I have done right although it may cause many a pang of sorrow to think that your only son has chosen the course of a soldier. Comfort Mother, I know it will be hard for her to reconcile herself to the idea of my joining in the good fight, but I think you will not have cause to censor your son for not doing his duty. But it is necessary for me to catch a few hours sleep before marching, therefore I bid you good bye. I will write again when I arrive at the capitol.

**2. Camp Dennison, Lancaster, Ohio, May 1st 1861**

Dear Mother;

I received your letter with Fathers and it made me feel homesick for a time to think that you will not be reconciled to my situation and Mother, believe me you are looking upon the dark side of the picture and do not see it in its true light. We have not received any news yet that leads us to think that we shall have any fighting to do and we probably shall not have to go into action at all and may be will remain quartered here the whole 3 months. And Mother, I beg of you to think differently and that your son is doing his duty like a man instead of staying at home and hanging to his Mother’s apron strings like a baby and again I pray you to think differently. I am well and hearty and my good Mother, am looking forward with pleasure and pride to the time when I shall return to my home again. I have told faterh all the news and he will read the letter to you, but again dear Mother, I say bare up and think I am well and in a good situation to see the world and get experienced in the ways of the different sections of our country. I shall write as often as possible and shall expect to hear from home quite often.

**3. Camp McClellan, Near Philadelphia, May 21st, 1861**

Dear Father,

Father, our whole Company have decided not to enlist for three years and they will be disbanded at the end of the three months when I shall return home. You said in your last letter that they were trying to get up a company of Cavalry in and around Peninsula and that you had been solicited to join it. Now although I am your son and it is entirely out of reason for a son to advise his father especially when the son has as poor judgements as I have, please overlook this overstepping of all propriety and listen to me; do not I beg of you join any company unless it si for a home guard for Uncle Sam has got young men enough “to do battle” for him and his and besides that, your business cannot possibly spare you. Again I say excuse me for this seeming overstepping of my age and discretion for something seems to say to me that you are thinking that you will join in the defense of your country’s honor and the Union; again I ask you not to do any such thing.

**4. Washington, July 23rd, 1861**

Dear Parents;

You will probably hear of the great battle that we have just fought; therefore I need not tell you any of the particulars as I am very foot-sore and tired. I am all right and so are most of the Grays; we had two killed and one wounded. Our small loss was owing to our being skirmishers and therefore were scattered about so it was difficult for them to pick us off. We were defeated and lost everything; our forces, what is left of them, are now in Washington. Our loss in men was about 3000; their loss was about equal.

***George Waterman returned to Peninsula after his 3 month enlistment expired following the first Battle of Bull Run and spent the next year in Peninsula. In August, 1862, in response to a 3rd call for Volunteers he organized Union meetings and recruited 22 “Boston Boys” for service in the Ohio 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. As a result he was commissioned a Lieutenant in the Ohio 115th OVI, and was assigned to C Company, the same as Levi Boodey.***

**5. Cincinnati, Ohio, November 2nd, 1862**

Dear Parents,

I do not see many of the boys (from Boston), although the house where I am staying is in sight of the camp, but the company are all on duty nearly the whole of the time and they cannot get away to come and see me very often. Levy Boodey has been a little unwell for the last week and has been excused from duty and has been with me a good share of the time… the boys patrolling the city have had a first rate time to do duty and they have plenty to do I can tell you. Their principal duty is arresting soldiers who hav not got papers, and they take a good many; they are from all the Ohio regiments. Some are real deserters, and some have been furloughed home and are on their way back and teg lost in the city, and a good share of them are paroled prisoners, who come to this city and think they can slip away to their homes from here , and Uncle Sam will be none the wiser for it but twill think they were killed, but they get into the hands of our patrols when they are fast again. Those who are trying to find their regiments are sent to them from here, but the deserters and paroled prisoners are sent under charge of an officer and guard to Camp Chase.

Ps- Boodey is all right again and goes on duty tomorrow.

**6. Kemper Barracks, Cincinnati, Ohio, Feb 8th, 1863**

Dear Father,

I am the only commissioned Officer for duty here at the Barracks and I have my hands full all the time. We have confined here now, 45 deserters and also in the Barracks 72 men awaiting transportation to their regiments; last month we forward 1323 men to their Regiments so you see we are doing some good if good it may be called and I have about concluded that it does no good to keep the Army together for they do not seem to accomplish anything and I have come to the conclusion that fighting will never end the war at least during the present Abolition administration who had never done anything to suit my ideas except trying to organize (Black troops) and I hope they will succeed in that far beyond even their own desires yet I would not like to stand up and fight side by side with them after all but I guess I could stand it. I would make the trial anyhow if Old Abe would draft every one of them out of the north and send them into the field…

**7. Cincinnati, Ohio, Feb 12th, 1863**

Dear Father,

There seems to be a general conviction here that this war will end in a short time, but I do not know what anyone can see that looks favorable, as the saying is, ‘ it is too big a thing for me to see through’ . How is it with you? I think the more Old Granny Abe fights, the more he will have to fight; and I am glad to see the opinion is gaining strength so fast that he should be superseded, and some good Democrat put into his place. Then I think this would be ended soon; I supposed when I enlisted that those ‘ 800,000’ more were going to be sent into the field and the things rushed through, but I don’t see that either, yet I enlisted and took an oath to obey the orders of the President; and I shall do it if I can until the war is changed to peace, if it is 20 years hence if I should live so long, and I think I have a fair prospect of it now for I never enjoyed better health than now, and my Boston Comrades are all well, and with me…

**8. Cincinnati, March 15th, 1863**

Dear Parents,

Father, I do not wish to have you think me an Abolitionist, far from it, I am a Douglas Democrat, and go in for the Union right or wrong and cannot recognize such me as the Editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer as Democrats, nor any men that endorse their Principles, they are snakes in the grass, real Copperheads, cowardly traitors, not fit to be hung by white men, nor (blacks) either, I go in any way to make the union and wish the (blacks) could be put into the front rank and made to fight the southern chivalry. I think the army should control the whole thing and the President and the People have nothing to say in the premises.

**9. Townsend Bridge, KY, March 30th, 1863**

Dear Father;

Unionists are like Hens teeth here and that’s a pity for I never laid eyes on a prettier section of Country, some of the finest farms that lay out doors are here along the Blue Licking over which is Townsends Bridge… Father I Hardly know what to think about your sentiments as regards the way the Enquirer goes on- that Paper I cannot countenance nor any one who believes in the sentiments it advocates. I do not care who it is, although of late it pulls in its horns considerably and well it may for it would have gone the way of the Crisis ere this and I can tell you I would be very slow to obey an rer to quell a Riot that was tearing it out. You say I am prejudiced, I have closely read the Paper all winter and have been nearer the Border than you and have seen how it works. I believe I have studied the paper as much at least as have you and I say it is not Democratic in any of its sentiments. Now father, I am a Democrat, a Douglas Democrat, and was taught by your example that one of the cherished principles of the Party was that the Majority Rules, also to love my country, and sustain the Constitution and the Constitution says that the President shall be elected by two thirds of the voters. Old Abe was so Elected and according to the Constitution I must stand by him whether I like him or not- and I have taken my sacred Oath when I was mustered in to do so, and I love my country too well to have it go to ruin under my very nose which it must do if the Enquirers principles are lived up too for there is no such thing as Peace nor Compromise thank God without a Union at the North. And the South say they will United with the North on no accounts whatever; however much the North may Humble themselves. Now I hope you do not wish to have this country divided, I at least do not, and you need not expect me home to stay until one side whips the other in fair fight. You will say I have been led off the track by Abolitionists; my Captain and First Lieutenant are both Republicans but I am and always have been a Democrat as I look at Democratic Principles and by special orders we are not allowed to say one word to each other upon any political subject, but I must close. Do not write until you hear from me again from your Union Democratic soldier son.

**10. Cincinnati, Ohio, May 4th, 1863**

Dear Father,

I am glad to hear that you are getting along so well with your work in the Boat Yard, and I hope the farm is also prospering. I suppose John is still there. I do not think I shall do much farm work this summer, my work will be more easy, but very disagreeable. It is too much confined, we do not get proper exercise. Our condition with the exception of the name is much the same as that of our prisoners of whom we have 86 Rebels and Sympathizers, 72 Deserters, and 42 Straggles, also four feminine Secesh. Lieutenant Edie has gone to Johnson’s Island with the condemned Rebels of whom you have probably heard.

I should think from all accounts that you must be having a small war in Peninsula but I imagine that a union will be effected without much trouble.

**11. Dayton, Ohio, May 8th, 1863**

Dear Father,

You will see by the heading of this that we have again changed our station; we came up here on the night of the 5th to quell the Riot caused by poor whiskey, and the arrest of C.L. Vallandigham; he was arrested as you have proabaly seen by papers, on the night of the 4th, for saying that he did not recognize the authority of either General Burnside, or of the President, and for other disloyal sentiments uttered in his late speeches at Columbus, and another place, the name of which at present I am enjoined to keep secret. You have probably seen a full account of the work of the Rioters, and of the quelling of the mob by us Blue Jackets; there is a Detachment of men from Columbus 115 in number and 40 of our company from Cincinnati here, the whole under the command of Lieutenant Colonel McElroy of General Burnside’s staff. The Colonel has proclaimed martial law and we are engaged in enforcing it, and making arrests of the participators in the Mob; the City is very quiet now and there is no interference in our proceedings, though there was at first, but the populace soon found that Bayonets were not to be trifled with so they do not attempt to throw any obstructions in our way. Captain Means is at the Barracks with the balance of the Company. Lieutenant Edie and myself are here with 4o of them. The Boston Boys here are Boodey, Boies, Coe, Coady, Dolan, Cassie, Cassady, Greenover, Garrison, Killbow, and Humes, they are all in good health and fine spirits at the subjugation of the Butternuts. Father, do such men as Vallandigham merit the name, or carry out the principles of Democracy? If they do, “I cannot see it” as they saying is; I think I am a Democrat myself, but if I had the same sentiments that they had I think I should be one of the worst villains that ever lived. I hope they will all be hung, or sent over the lines to their friends. General Burnsides is one of my kind of Democrats, also little Mac, how different their characters are from these cut throat villains…

**12. McClean Barracks, Cincinnati, Ohio June 19th, 1863**

Dear Father,

There has been some excitement in town for a few days, because of the Raid into Pennsylvania, which I imagine is not half so extensive and affair as is reported. There is also some excitement about the draft, I should like very much to have some of the men in and about Peninsula drafted into the army; it would do them good, to take a hand in soldiering, they would see the Elephant. I am sorry that my favorite Little Mac could not be nominated for governor, I think he would have been elected if he had the nomination, but perhaps he will be of better service where he is, or rather, where he will be, for I think he will yet command the Potomac Arm again; he is the only man living who can handle such an Army. I think Brough will be our next Governor; he is a Democrat I understand, but I never heard of him until quite recently; perhaps he is a good man.

**13. McClean Barracks, Cincinnati, Ohio, July 5th, 1863**

Dear Father,

My Fourth of July was rather a dull one. The City looked very beautiful, nearly every building in town had a display of the stars and stripes of various sizes; some of the flags were 60 feet lon. I should think the Streets were indeed a splendid sight and as most of the Citizens were out of town there were no crowds. Many of the inhabitants went out to Dayton, others went to Hamilton; some went down and some up the river, on pic-nic excursions &c &c. … I sincerely hope the heat is not so unbearable at home; if it is, it must be a continual torture to work in the yard. How comes on the Boat building? I suppose you have plenty to do yet in the yard, let alone the farm. I should like to be at home and help you just a little… If the news we have got here this morning are true, our army in Pennsylvania are doing good work and if they can follow up their success, I look for a speedy closing of the war.

**14. Dayton, Ohio, Aug 16th, 1863**

Dear Father,

I received yours of the 10th; I must say that I think that is pretty cool, you say Mother said you must write and you had to obey orders , as though you would not have written if she had not told you to; and you need not tell me you have nothing to write for everything at home will be news to me…

Father, your notion that the people in this section would be more loyal if they were persecuted less is all in your eye, especially the persecution part. You will not hear a good Union man complain of being persecuted, they, whether Democrats or Republicans, are glad to have soldiers in the vicinity; but these d---ed, miserable, Free Speech, Peace men are very much persecuted- I should like to persecute them to suit myself… Now I profess to be a true Democrat, and think the administration do not always do what is for the best, and I am in for free speech and free everything except Free Treason which is what the Copperheads mean by free speech, they want to hurrah for Jeff, for Beauregard, for Morgan and others, and they swear they will wear Butternut breast pins and all such freedom as that, and you cannot make me believe preventing them from doing it is detrimental to our cause, though it may be persecution to them… I would like to have any one show me one instance where Pendleton Pugh or Vallandigham have done the first solitary thing, or said the first word- in favor of, or in conjunction with the Administration; I know it has not always done right, nor has it always done wrong, as they have tried to show, if they had been true men they would have helped, instead of checked the administration…

**15. Dayton, Ohio, Aug 30th, 1863**

Dear Father,

You tell me to keep an eye open for promotion; there is no sign of a chance for me in my own Company and if I was competent to hold the position I would not leave my own Company and Regiment for a Colonel’s Commission in another; that is with the feeling that I am confident exists between my men and me at present. I like all of them and I am sure that they all like me; at least they treat me as though that was the case and as long as there is even a show of respect for me among them, I have not the least desire to leave them for a higher position if I was ever so worthy of it. They are all as true as steel; hold on, there are one or two exceptions, one from Boston I regret to say. You know who I mean but as a general thing every man can be depended upon even to the officers if I do say it myself.

***Lieutenant Waterman was shot in the leg during a confrontation with Southern Sympathizers on the night of September 2nd, the night before he was to have returned home on furlough. (See Thu, Sep 3rd Dayton Journal Article, “Another Copperhead Outrage”)***

**16. Dayton, Ohio, Sep 3rd, 1863**

Dear Parents,

I suppose the boys will tell a big story about my adventures and you will be alarmed about my welfare and will be starting off down this way to see about it. Now I do not want anything of the kind but I just want you to stay at home now- mind for it will only be a waste of time and money if you come. True I and Lieutenant Eadie had a row with some confounded copperheads and I got shot but the ball passed through the inside of the fleshy part of my left thigh. It did not strike any bones and the Dr. is coming to was out the clotted blood this morning and it will commence healing immediately and I hope will soon be well. I have a leave of absence and shall be home in a few days as soon as I can Travel.

Believe me I am doing well and now again I say positively do not leave home on my account…

***Lieutenant Waterman’s wound became gangrenous despite his medical care, and he died on Sat, Sep 19th, 1863 following an operation to amputate his infected leg. (See Mon, Sep 21 Dayton Journal Article “Dead”). Following a funeral service in Dayton, his remains were returned to Peninsula for another funeral service (“It was without doubt the largest funeral every held in Peninsula”\*) and burial in Peninsula’s Cedar Grove cemetery. Inscriptions on his tombstone read, “He died that his country might live”, and “In Memory of our soldier son”. He was 22 years old.***

***Upon his death, his fellow officers in the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry drafted and send the following memorial to his parents:***

Head-Quarters 115th Reg’t O.V.I.

Cincinnati, Ohio, Sept 19th, 1863

At a meeting of the Commissioned Officers of the 115th Regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry, of which Colonel J.A. Lucy was President, and Captain John A. Means, Secretary, the following resolutions, prepared by a committee consisting of Lieutenant Colonel T.C. Boone, Captaine H.R. Hill, and Captain E. Buckingham were unanimously adopted:

Resolved, That we, the officers of the 115th Regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry, have just heard with the deepest sorrow and regret of the cruel and untimely death, at Dayton, Ohio of Lieutenant George L. Waterman, of Company C, of this Regiment

Resolved, That Lieutenant Waterman, by his amiable and exemplary conduct, his constant and careful attention to duty his pure and earnest patriotism, had won for himself the highest place in our affections and esteem.

Resolved, That we recognize his assassination and death as the direct result of, and wholly occasioned by, the pernicious influence of those in our midst, who are so clearly and openly arrayed against the cause in which the Soldiers of the Union are engaged.

Resolved, That we deeply sympathize with the parents of our departed brother, who are so suddenly called to mourn the loss of an only child, their present pride and future hope, whose life has been sacrificed for no other reason than because he was an officer in the service of his country. Nature compels to mourn, but Faith rejoices in knowing that he, as well as his bright example, still lives.

J.C. Lucy, President, J.A. Means, Secretary

Source: **Robert P and Jeanette K Bishop- The 1858-1863 Letters of George Lawson Waterman, from School to War- Peninsula Historical Society, 1996**