

Dr U. G. Owen's Letters

Letters to Laura a confederate surgeon's impressions of four years of war

Normandy Tenn
[Bedford County]
Nov. the 19th 1862

To Mrs. U. G. Owen

My Dearly beloved Wife

This is the first time that I have addressed you by mail in ten months, and Oh! what a pleasure it is to sit down and write to my devoted wife. Little did I think one month ago that I could write to you this soon. Oh! how sad I felt on last Saturday morning when I dropped that note from the cars. I knew that tears flowed from those soft blue eyes and that bosom swelled with sighs weeping over the departure of one so unworthy of your fond love and true devotion.

My Dear I am at Normandy Depot 12 miles from Shelbyville 30 miles from Murfreesboro. We are camped on the rail-road 8 miles below Tullahoma. Normandy is a little village depot, post office here etc.

I let Geo. P. Henry ride the little horse through by land from Lenoir's depot. I look for him tomorrow or next day. My health is improving fast. I have a fine spring near my tent, take my meals in town and live well.

I am in one days [sic] ride of home and to where you are. Can go to either place in a day, only 35 miles horseback to Mother's. I hope we will stay here some time. Geo. Henry said he would call at Mr. Kline's the day he left Lenoir and get my shoes if they are done made.

The Soldiers are all getting furloughs home now. They live in this country or at least the majority of them do.

It is a dark warm rainy day and I have but little to do, and I can spend the time very pleasantly indeed writing to my better half.

Today is Wednesday and I hope you will get [this] on Saturday and answer it on Sunday. No soldier clothes to make that day.

You must work and make the poor and naked soldiers clothes, who are suffering all the privations of life to fight that you and others may live comfortably, think of that. I hope that you did not take my parting hard as I was gong [sic] to Mid Tenn [sic] where you can always hear from me and me from you.

I am very proud to know that you are comfortably situated with kind friends. Earth cannot afford more comforts than you enjoy there with a kind and motherly Aunt and dear cousins.

I hope to hear from you soon. Write often I will write often to you every five days. I will keep you posted about our moves etc.

My Love to Aunt Nancy and all the rest of the family.
Your devoted and unworthy servant
U. G. Owen

Read six Chapters every Sunday in the New Testament.
Write to Dr. U. G. Owen
Surgeon 4th Tenn [sic] Regt
Normandy Station
Bedford Co
Tenn [sic]

Normandy Tenn
Nov. 27th 1862

My Dearly beloved Wife

I received your very welcome letter on yesterday Wednesday 26th inst. Eleven months have elapsed since I had the pleasure of reading a letter from you by mail.

I am still at Normandy but expect to leave tomorrow morning and go to Manchester Coffee County 12 miles from here and 11 miles from Tullahoma 20 miles from Murfreesboro. Cars run from Tullahoma to Manchester and McMinnville.

Manchester is the extreme right wing of the line of battle of our Tenn [sic] Army, Shelbyville is the extreme left wing and Murfreesboro is the center. We have now a tremendous army in here 80,000 in fighting order. And a terrible fight expected.

The enemy are advancing out of Nashville this way. At Nolensville now. They have a large force also Cannons can be heard today in the direction of Murfreesboro.

I am busy now vaccinating the Regiment two cases of Smallpox in Tullahoma 8 miles from here and several in Knoxville.

You had better stay there with your Aunt Nancy at present. My movements are not settled yet but may stop in Manchester some time. I'll keep you posted.

Commented [JW1]: 162 in the text, presumed to be 1862
not sure if original typo or not

Commented [KG2R1]: Agree

I have succeeded in getting two pairs of pants, one coarse and one fine pair, and swapped off my Yankee overcoat and got a large fine grey one two capes on it. I gave 35 dollars to boot but got fine large overcoat. I am well fixed except shoes. I want you to have me a pair of boots made pay cash down for them put them in your carpetbag and lock them up. I want a pair worth 35 or 40 dollars. I must have another pair of boots for this winter I will be in the mud and snow until May next I will not need the shoes if I get the boots. I want high tops water proof heavy sole if they cost 45 dollars. Make Mr. Foster and Pepper make them.

Laura my health is very much better I feel hearty and stout now can eat enough for three men.

My horse came some days ago by Geo. Henry. G. P. Henry is now Captain Henry. He is commissary of the Regt gets 140 dollars a month. I will have to get another druggist. He sends his love to Cousin Mary Kline and family. No news at present. Wagons are being loaded to move in the morning to Manchester. (Good bye)

Write to your true Husband. U. G. Owen
Surgeon 4th Tenn [sic] Regt

Best love and wishes
to all the family

Manchester
Coffee Co
Tenn [sic]

Readyville Tenn
(12 miles of Murfreesboro)
Dec. the 16th 1862

To Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen
My beloved Wife

I received your's of Dec. 1st inst. on last night. I wrote to [you] some days ago from this place. I told you that I expected [to] move in a few days to go to Lebanon in Wilson County 20 miles from Nashville. I still expect to leave but do not know exactly when.

I do not want you to travel about now towards Alabama. The Small-pox is in that region. Soon as there is no danger you can go. I dont [sic] think that the Small-pox is in Alabama, but in the Hospitals at Tullahoma. I dont [sic] think there are any cases on the road to Alabama but there might be some danger.

I told you in my last that your Uncle Jim Buchanan's son had joined this Regiment. He said that his sister was talking of going to see you.

You say that my boots will be ready. I am glad that you can get them.

I have one more request, that is for Cousin Mary. Captain Henry is nearly barefooted, has my old boots on now and needs a pair of boots like mine and wants you and Cousin Mary to prevail on her Pa to have them made. And you must do it. He wears my number except very much higher in the instep. Soldiers are as thick as hail in all this country. Yankees will have to get further or fight before very long, and we will whip them from off our own soil. We have about 80,000 good noble fighting boys who are resolved to redeem the bright sunny land of Middle Tenn. or let their bones bleach upon the battle field in the attempt. God grant that they may succeed. Come off more than conqueror. I know that you are patriotic as I am and want Middle Tenn [sic] redeemed as bad as I do.

While I am writing this the brass is playing Annie Laurie. What a sweet tune, it make me think of my Laura Ann.

I want you to be vaccinated. I will send you virus enough to vaccinate you and the family. It is fresh and good off the arm of a healthy man. I vaccinated myself and Regiment. Get some person who can vaccinate well, Dr. at Loudon. You must attend to [it] soon, dont [sic] fail.

Write to me soon as you can
direct it to Dr U. G. Owen
Surgeon McMurrays [sic] 4th Tenn [sic] Regt
Rain's Brig
Stevenson's Division
Readyville
Tenn [sic]

It will come then anywhere
Vaccinate yourself soon as you possibly can
My love to you and Respects to the family. Capt. George [Henry] sends his regards to you and love to Cousin Mary.

Your true husband Owen U. G.
Envelope and how to back
Dr. U. G. Owen, Surgeon
McMurry's 4th Tenn [sic] Regt
Rain's Brigade
Stevenson's Division
Readyville
Tenn [sic]

below Stevenson's Division you can write where I am. Tenn, [sic] Nashville Tenn [sic] or Readyville Tenn [sic] alone or whatever state I may be in. But that Regt Brigade and Division I will always be in, and if you dont [sic] know what state or county or town I am in just write my name Regt Brigade and Division and it will come but always write the State, County, town or post office if you know it.
Resptfly [sic]
U. G. Owen

December the 20th/62

To Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen
My beloved Wife

I wrote to you some few days ago. Since that time General [C. L.] Stevenson's Division has been ordered to Mississippi to reinforce General [Sterling] Price, but our Regt will not go to Miss. We have been transferred to [George] Maney's Brigade and [B. F.] Cheatham's Division. I have just got here today, left Readyville on yesterday, came through Murfreesboro today. Our Regt is on the pike 20 miles from Nashville and 10 miles from Murfreesboro near Laverne 18 miles from home. We are getting near the Yankees, our pickets have little Skirmishes every day. I have heard several cannon shots today.

Battle's old Regt is camped one mile from Murfreesboro on the Eagleville pike.

I would like to go home Christmas but you are not there and I would not enjoy the trip, if you were there I would be very certain to but as it is I will probably not go. I have no Asst Surgeon nor no other person to attend to my buisness [sic] when I [am] absent. I expect to be in Nashville soon. I wish you were at home. I want to send brother Bob after you as soon as I can see him.

I am looking for him every day. If the Yankees leave Nashville I will send after you to come home where I can see you and you could come to see me often if I stay in Middle Tenn [sic] all Winter. Cars run to Murfreesboo [sic] now. Direct your letters to me in this way.

Dr. U. G. Owen
Care of Col J. A. McMurry
Maney's Brigade
Cheatham's Division
Near Murfreesboro
Tenn [sic]

Bugles is playing lights out I must close. Capt. Henry joins me in sending our best respects to all.

Your devoted husband
U. G. Owen

Shelbyville Tenn [sic]
January the 12th 1863

To Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen My beloved Wife

This is a warm and beautiful Monday evening and I will write you a few facts from the battle field. You no doubt have heard of the great battle at Murfreesboro Dec. 31st and for several days [sic] duration. Our loss was about 8000 killed and wounded. Enemy's loss near 20,000 killed and wounded, 5062 prisoners, 42 cannons. Our Reg't lost 7 killed dead on the field, 49 wounded, several of whom have died and several more will die. For three days the Surgeons were all very busy. We could not care for one-half as they were wounded so fast, 2(00) or 300 crying doctor, doctor at the same time. Some dying, others groaning etc [sic] etc. All made a horrible scene. I rode over the field and in places the ground was covered with dead. I saw 10 dead Yankees to 1 dead Southerner on the field and horses lying thick. I saw some horses all dead in pile and 100 men dead near where our men charged a battery killing every horse and nearly all the men. Surgeons were all ordered to remain away from danger with the wounded, two or three miles off. I stayed on or near [the battle field] the first day then went to the Hospital in town. We whipped them badly killing ten to one, but on the following Saturday night General Bragg ordered us to fall back to Shelbyville where we are yet and will stay for some time. Brother Bob has brought all his tobacco here and sold it. People are very much distressed in our neighborhood Yankees have been back there. I dont [sic] think they are there now though. I think of trying to go home in a few days. Buck Jordan's son Johnson was killed died on the field. Hardaman Tucker was killed. Bob moved all my medicine to Mother's. Bob White is living in our house.

Bob expects to start after you in this month. I got him to promise to go after you and carry you to Alabama or bring you home wherever you wanted to go. We will probably [be] in this country all Winter.

I have traded off[f] the little horse to Jim Rives. Got a fine horse and a splendid traveller [sic] worth two of the little horse. John Bigger is here but went home a day or two ago. Mr. Faris' boys [are] also here, Eagleville company is in our Division. Men from our country are here every day to see their sons. I hear from home every few days, it is only 20 miles to Eagleville from here. I hope Brother Bob will go after you soon, I have an Asst. Surgeon now and have more time to visit. I hope we will meet before long some where in Ala. or at home in Tenn [sic] if the Yankees dont [sic] get back there again.

Our wounded were left with the Yankees at Murfreesboro. I have nothing more to write today. I have been so situated that I could not write but after this I will write often. My best Respects to all.

Your devoted husband U. G. Owen
Care of Col. J. A. McMurry
Maney's Brigade
Cheatham's Div [sic]
Shelbyville
Tenn [sic]

Write soon

To Mrs. Dr. Owen
Loudon Tenn.

[image - General Benjamin Franklin Cheatham]

[image - General Earl Maney]

Shelbyville Tenn [sic]

Janry [sic] 22nd 1863

To Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen My beloved Wife

I am well and hope you are well and hearty. I have not a word of comfort to write you today all the news is bad, that I have to tell you this time. The Yankees have our country, robbed every body took all Mother's meat, every horse every mule all the corn and fodder etc etc etc. My fine young mare is gone. Mother picked up a few pieces of meat that they dropped off the wagon in the road near the house. Bob was hid upstairs and got out of the window on a pole. They slept in her beds with their dirty boots on, ruined the beds, house and every thing else, nearly broke her up entirely. Served Chesley Williams in the same way and broke up his table ware destroyed all Mrs. Williams plates, cups and saucers, knives and forks and then cut up kindling wood set fire to it and would have burned down the house but Mr. Williams told them where some of our pickets were. Mr. Williams thinks they will burn his house yet.

I see some of our neighbors nearly every day. Your Pa is confined to the house with sickness. One of the Negro boys got his skull broken very badly and is probably dead. They could not get a doctor to him. I dont [sic] know which one of them it is. The Yankees have not been that far down from Murfreesboro yet, stopped at Eagleville. They will ruin your Pa if they do. Eagleville company is in our division and some of the boy's parents are here every day or two. All the neighbors are sending off their stock and selling it. A Young man of our acquaintance was killed at the battle before Murfreesboro, Bob Wilson, old Bob Wilson's second son who lived near Dr. Scales. Dud Scales and his wife have parted, he tied her to the bed post some time ago. I dont [sic] know what for, but that is what I was told by some of the neighbors. Hardaman Tucker was killed, he and Duck Lanier were to be married soon. He was trying to hire a

substitute [a] while before the fight at Murfreesboro so he could go home and marry. Duck took it very hard. He was a fine man and a true soldier. I liked him mightily myself.

I am looking for Bob every day to go after you and take you wherever you want to go. I dont [sic] want you to get in the Yankee lines any more during the war. I will spend all my wages to board you rather than see you exposed to the insults of the lowlife Yankees. They are going to rob and arrest the men and insult the ladies this trip into Mid Tenn. They were very good before but awful this time. We will probably remain here and keep them from coming any further this way. The people are very kind to us here. I get dinner every few days in the neighborhood near and very often in town. An old Lady asked me some days ago if I was married, if not she would give me her daughter, (by the way a nice young lady) I told her I had a sweet little wife up in East Tenn [sic] but had not seen her for some time. Capt. Henry got a letter with your name signed to it but I knew it was not your hand write making some inquiries about me. You said you feared that I was wounded as you could not hear from me. I told him what was in Cousin Mary's part of your letter. He said he would go after the boots. I expect he will go to Knoxville on buisness [sic] soon and he will call to see you and bring you with him to Larkinsville or wherever you want to stop or bring you on here to Shelbyville for I know I want to see you as bad as any body else does. I am not certain that he will go but rather expect that he will. My boots must not get overlooked but must be coming. Boots cannot be got here at all anywhere or at any price. Cars run to Shelbyville.

No news at present. My best respects to all, Aunt Nancy, Cousin Sallie and May Mr. Kline and Archy and boot makers especially. Capt. Henry sends his best regards.

Dr. U. G. Owen, Surgeon
Col. J. A. McMurry's Regt
Gen Maney's Brigade
Gen [B. F.] Cheatham's Division
Shelbyville
Tenn [sic]

Shelbyville Tenn [sic]
Sunday Feby 1st 1863

To Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen
My beloved Wife

I received your last letter on Friday last, and will answer it this dark rainy and lonesome Sunday. I am well and hearty, and that is about all the news. I have written to you every week and do not know the reason why you did not get the letters. I am glad to learn that mine and Capt. Henry's boots are done, he is barefooted now. Take care of them and we will try to get them to us.

I have not heard a word from home since I wrote last. I have not heard from your Pa, nor do I know which one of the Negro boys had his skull broken.

Everything is quiet here now. No indications of a fight but the Yankees are still at Murfreesboro.

Were you vaccinated the time I wrote to you about it and sent you some vaccine virus in the letter. Tell me in your next.

I think we will fall back to Bridgeport [Alabama] on Tenn. River between Stevenson [Alabama] and Chattanooga before a great while, unless we are heavily reinforced, that is if the Yankees advance. We have not a sufficient force here to contend with them. Dr. Jim Buchanan has moved to his farm in the country two miles from Larkinville [Alabama].

I do not know when Capt. Henry will go to East Tenn [sic] although he talks of going in a few weeks but not certain. I expect you need some money. I have plenty, 1,000 dollars and can't send it home. I will send you 100 or 150 dollars if you wish it, let me know, I may have some opportunity of sending it to you. I think you may well be proud of your trip to East Tenn. for by it you have escaped the vile insults of the plundering Yankees. There is great talk now both North and South about peace. I hope it may be made, but awfully fear it will not this year. I would like very well to spend the next Winter at home with you in peace. God Speed the time when we can return to our old home and hear no more of war.

I haven't anything more to say today. My best respects to all. Capt. Henry joins me in sending you all our kindest regards.
Write to me often

Your husband
U.G. Owen
Care of Col. J. A. McMurry
Genl [sic] Maney's Brig
Genl [sic] Cheatham's Div [sic]
Shelbyville
Tenn [sic]

I cant [sic] write anymore until I get some postage stamps. I can not get any here. o you must be certain to send me a dollars [sic] worth if you can get them, or less. Send all you can conveniently.

U. G. Owen

[image of an envelope with an illegible stamp in the top right corner. Addressed to Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen Care of Mary [illegible] Rockford Surry County N. Carolina illegible text vertically along the left side]

Shelbyville Tenn [sic]
March 5th 1863

To Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen
My beloved Wife

I received your last some days since. I must confess that I did not write to your sooner. I have missed a week but I was sick and you must excuse me, but I am better today able to ride about. We are preparing to leave hear sending off our extra baggage, the roads are very bad. We will probably get off in 5 or 6 days. We will go to Tullahoma 20 miles from here. I have had a patient with Small-pox but he will get well in a few days. I vaccinated myself and it took well on me, it took well on me when a boy, and I was with the Small-pox a great deal while in New-York.

I have not heard a word from our neighborhood since I last wrote you. I saw a man from Franklin a few days since, and he told me that he saw a pile of ploughs and other farming utensils as large as a meeting house to burn up. Yankee Generals have issued orders for farming utensils to be burned and says that the people shall not raise any crops at all. All our Superior Officers are confident of peace in a few months, but Lincoln's conscript bill dont [sic] look much like it to me but I hope I am mistaken.

It is one of Captain Henry's men that has the Small-pox. So he has taken all his company away from the Regt and is camping in the woods, and the patient has gone to the Hospital.

Laura it looks like I and Capt [sic] Henry will never get to go or send after our boots, but you must take good care of them for me. Boots are selling for 50 dollars here now.

Your Pa will not be allowed to plant a crop this Spring. The Yankees pretend to say that they furnish rations to all loyal citizens. I dont [sic] know what the rebel families will do. I expect they will be forced to take the oath to prevent starving. The Yankees compel the ladies as well as men to take the oath, great many have done so. I am proud to know that you are out of their clutches, and can avoid taking their horrible oaths. I will spend all my wages to board you rather than have you in their lines. I will with the greatest pleasure and proud of the chance pay Mr. Kline a very big price to board you. You must not go in the Yankee lines any more this war. The Winter is gone and I hope it is my last one in the Army. I had a very severe chill when I was first taken sick. I think I will get well very fast.

If I ever meet with an opportunity I will send your trunk to you. I will close.

My best respects to all. Capt. Henry came in to see me today and sends his love to Cousin Mary.

Your husband U. G. Owen
P. S. Brother Jo troubles me. I never had heard whether he had got back home or not.

Undated Letter
Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen

My beloved Wife. I received your last letter this morning, and will answer it immediately. I will give you the news all bad. I am very sick have been confined to my tent 4 days. My lips are parched with fever, and I am reduced to a Skeleton. You never saw me look so bad. I can scarcely walk.

I am going to send a furlough today to Gen'l [sic] Bragg to get him to approve it for me to leave for 30 days until I recruit my health. And if he does not grant it I will be sent to the Officers Hospital at Rome Georgia, and if I go there I will try to get permission from the Surgeon in charge to let me stop at Calhoun [Georgia] and I will go to your Uncle Henry Dobson's but I hope Gen'l [sic] Bragg will give me a furlough then I can go where I please, if I could get away from camp where I could get something to eat I would get hearty soon, but I will die unless some change for the next few months.

Brother Bob and your Pa were here yesterday, both well and hearty. Bob came to go after you, being young and discharged from the Army it was dangerous for him to try to pass on the cars. Your Pa thought he had better not go and left for home this morning, but heard your letter read.

Your Pa brought Silvy with him and sold her to a man living [in] East Tenn [sic] for \$1600. She caught old Tim Sledge by the whiskers and nearly shook his teeth out and threatened to go to the Yankees. Tobe Sledge deserted and saw men hunting him coming in both ends of a lane and no chance to run drew his knife and cut his throat but failed to kill and is now lying at home and will probably get over it. Yankees took all my medicines took Father's clothes Mother's clothes Negroes clothes, took Sam Gus and Charles. Jack and Abe are at Fagans trying to make a little something to eat. Your Uncle Baker hasn't a horse on his place. Y[ankee]s took everything Aunt Matilda Owen had, corn, meal, flour, pots, ovens, Skillets, Sifter, and broke her up entirely and took her son John off to prison. After taking Mother's corn cut the cribs down. They break open all the locks, search drawers, closets, bureaus, ward robes. Chelsey William's wife tried to keep them out of her smoke house, they knocked her down choked her and nearly put her hip joint out of place. She is confined sick now from the effects. Old Andy Ralston's wife nocked [sic] two of them down with a cedar poll. [sic] Sister Martha has another baby, three weeks old and is very low now. Bob says that mother thinks she will die. Capt. Bill Rucker was killed dead at the Skirmish below Nashville not long since his

body was brought home. Mr. Fagan had his arm broken in the same Skirmish, they were both in Calvary. Old John Jordan, Jim Allison, Old Billy Demumber, Bil Haley, Bob Haley, Bill Covington all took the oath, Yankees caught Tom Wilson with a great deal of money and two Negroes hand-cuffed. His wife begged for him but no use they carried him off and will probably shoot him. It is death for a man to sell a Negro now in there. Your Pa told everybody that he was carrying Silvy to East Tenn [sic] to his daughter Laura, his own family did not know that he brought her here to sell.

Y[ankee]s ransacked Bil Demumber's house and took Sam off. Your Pa is going to take Frank, Lewis, Mike, John, Seal to East Tenn [sic] and hire them out, he and Bill and Arch will make a little corn, potatoes and you Ma and Mary will cook and wash and take a regular poor man's life of it, how would you like to be there. The whole family are awfully troubled, they expect the house will be burned. I look for your Pa back here in a week. I told him about the trunk, I hope you will get [it]. If he brings it here before I leave I can carry it. I dont [sic] know what to think about going to East Tenn. Mr. Kline has been troubled so much with sick men that I hate the idea of going there. Your Pa says I must go off from camp. ankees burned down Chesly Williams and Floyd storehouse last Saturday. Some other houses caught from them and burned down also.

I haven't had any more cases of Small-pox. I had one case only and that about three weeks ago. It is not spreading at all here. All the mills in the country are burned. Mother has an awful time and half the time has nothing at all to eat. Your Uncle Baker has come to Duck River to get a little meal and not a horse. Your Pa has our young mare at his house. I told you that the Y[ankee]s took her off.

I will get an answer from my furlough in ten or 12 days. Answer this as soon as you can. I intend going to the Hospital if I dont [sic] [get] the furlough, and probably I can get off from the Hospital but maybe I cant [sic]. There is an [sic] Hospital at Rome [Georgia] for Officers, at one dollar a day and rough fare at that. You will think this is a long letter for a sick man to write, but I have had to stop and lydown [sic] several times since I commenced it. What must I do if I get my furlough approved, must I come to Loudon or where. Your Pa talks of taking all his white family to East Tenn [sic] Georgia or N. Carolina. One thing is certain he will have to leave or lye [sic] in prison a year or two. Mary give Bob a letter to carry to you, so I will send it by mail. My love to all. Your husband.
U. G. Owen

To Mrs. Dr. U. G. Owen.
near Loudon East Tenn [sic]

If I dont [sic] get my furlough I will go to the Hospital and if I get permission from the Surgeon to go to some house in the country I will write for you to come to me. And even if I get my furlough I expect to go to you and both of us to take a trip to Georgia, Ala or

where you want to go. I would like very well to have been at the party at Mr. Klines. I would have got something good to eat and drink.