

*Civil War Letters*  
of  
*Henry Albert Potter*



**Henry Albert Potter, still in good health himself, sees one of his friends die. His command sets up an ambush. He awaits the publishing of a letter he wrote to the local newspaper.**

Headquarters Co "H"  
Camp Park', Murfreesboro  
Thursday May 14, 1863  
Dear Sister

I must write you a line today. We have moved our camp farther from town in a nice piece of woods, cool and shady. We call it Park' Camp and like the name it is appropriate, it is a park and we like to Honor our Col that soon will be [Josiah B Park, Ovid, mustered as Lt Col May 23, 1863].

I am telling you the same old story. My continued good health, but you don't get sick of it do you? It is a good story. I hope I may always hear the same from home and be able to write it every time. But with my health I must tell you of death. Hiram Knowles is gone! He died Tuesday morning. So we pass along! Consumption was his disease as near as I could judge. I visited him last week. He looked very bad. Coughed and ??ed a good deal and was weak. His discharge papers were made out some time ago and forwarded, but nothing has been heard of them since. He won't need them now. He was anxious about them when I saw him. Spoke of home and did not seem to think he was going to die. I could not bear to tell him. He was worried about the ?? I told him it would be all right and not to worry and not to be uneasy. I shook hands with him and said Good Bye I knew it would be the last time. But He did not.

Father,

He spoke about buying his lot. I wrote to you about it. You can use your own judgment. I hardly believe we want it. Do as you think best.

I will see that his business is arranged as much as I can. I will speak to Lieut. Carter [Julius M Carter, Ovid] about it. He has not drawn much pay. I don't know how much is due him - quite an amount.

I have to borrow all the money I use. I have not been mustered. I have Pay due me from Dec 31 and Lieut's pay from Apr 6th. I have bought me a new sash, \$10.00 and a new Dress Coat and Straps. I have not got a Bill of that yet about \$35, I expect.

I was out on Picket last Sunday and had quite a little adventure. Captured 3 Rebels and their Horses and Saddles and arms complete. Quite a feather in MY cap. Several of the rebs had been seen for 2 or 3 days back, on the road in front and they nearly all stopped at a home about a mile beyond my videttes. I thought perhaps I could nab them, so I took a Relief, mounted, and went to our outpost á little before Daylight. I then dismounted tied my horse and had seven of my men do the same, ordering the remainder to come to our support if they heard firing. We went down cautiously to the house. I sent a man to the left and right of the road, for you know, we

were outside of our lines and did not know what we would come across. We got to the house about daylight, surrounded it. No one there, but, the owners, strong old sesesh, Alexander by name. Presently we saw 3 horsemen come up the road. We secreted ourselves so that if they came to the house we could surround them. They came on, my men ran out in the road in the rear of them cried surrender. One of them, who had had his gun in his hand all the time, raised it as if to shoot. When quicker than thought my boys fired. One ball struck his hip and came out just below his belt in abdomen. Another on struck his wrist another one struck his horse. I hollered at the men to stop firing or they would have killed him. I felt sorry for him, smart good looking, if he had not raised his gun the boys would not have fired. He died in a day or two. I expected the firing would draw more of them upon us and when the ambulance came, I took 20 men with me and went down. But no one came in sight. Since then they have kept a ?fire there all the time.

I must close if my letter is published in the Clinton Rep., send me a copy.

My box has not come. I am asking for it. Write soon.

Albert

**Henry Albert Potter finds out his letter to his home town paper some controversy and hurriedly confirms what we suspected all he is in possession of "Truth" and his critics only need a life and they, too, will see things his way. We see that soldiers may have fought to free the slaves, their viewpoint modern. The regimental band gets new instruments and he look for a quick end to the war.**

Camp Park 5-17-1863

Dear Father

I like to get letters from home. I like to hear that you are sorry if there is any one offended by my letters in the only stated my own individual opinion and in saying that the army as whole concurred in those views. I told the truth, but the not prudent at all times and especially in these dark times in politics. Here in the army we all think alike in regard to the ones as a balm for their grief, I would respectfully recommend conscript law. Let them come. They need enlightenment.

I am well. We are enjoying quite a rest here in our Brigade. had a Scout since McMinnville. Only Picket and guard duty to Horses are feeling nice. We take them out once a day to graze, oats and corn they get. We are ready to move at a moment's there are no signs of it at present. Our position in Virginia changed a great deal. There seems to be a clog somewhere in do you suppose it is?

The Band have received their new instruments. They are play every evening here in the woods. It sounds so nice.

I am sorry that there should be any feeling shown of the kind exhibits. It looks very much like jealousy if he were in my also have a "nigger waiter". I wrote to Esquire Shepard not expect a heavy shot. That is if he deigns to answer at all. not. Why don't Mr Gilbert

write me a letter of (my letter) Rep[ublican] I have almost forgotten what I did write. I am again soon. What did you say about Josh Rapler.

I was not surprised for I expected it, but I did not know that Gilbert, Ovid] leg had been amputated. It is awful. I can it. He has not wrote me in a long time. I suppose he has not been to. I have not rec'd my box yet, am looking for it still.

Do you suppose that Mr Gilbert's people blame me for enlist? As it has turned out, I am sorry he did and poor Hiram [Hiram Knowles, Ovid] too.

Thank you Frank, for the flowers but we have all kinds flatter yourself mother on an early closing of the war. I my three years out. But I am coming home this fall, if possible, things work well, I am going to have my likeness taken again to before long.

Give my love to all my friends, if I have any and write Your affectionate son  
Albert

The stamps came good  
Write often.

**Henry Albert Potter writes "John" (Probably John Gilbert of Ovid, his friend) with erroneous news from Vicksburg and wishful thinking about a quick end to the war. Captain Abeel, who was captured under a flag of truce during the prelude to Stones River (according to the 4th Cavalry commander, Col Minty but vehemently denied by General Bragg) returns from captivity fit and well which ends Potter's role as commander of Company H.**

Camp Park, Murfreesboro  
May 26th 1863

Dear John

I will write you a line tonight telling you I am well. I have not been feeling firstrate lately, caught a bad cold which ?? some and I have rather a billous turn not much appetite but I begin to be all right again. We are getting glorious news from Grant if it is only true. We have the word here today that Vicksburg is ours with 20 or 30,000 prisoners. I do hope it is so. But he has certainly done a big thing if it is not so and everybody is encouraged.

[Vicksburg did not fall until July 4th, 1863, what had actually happened was that on the 14th of May, General Grant captured Jackson, MS and effectively cut off all chance of CSA General J E Johnston getting reinforcements to Pemberton in Vicksburg]

We are ready to move at anytime and I believe the army here will do something soon. There is a possibility that the 1st Cavalry Brigade will be stationned here thro' the campaign but we know not for a certainty. We have had orders to burn a supply of charcoal to last at least two months. That looks like staying.

We done a good thing the other day down at Middleton near Shelbyville. You

will see it in the papers. We traveled all night through the roughest country you ever saw and came on them at daylight, the 1st Alabama and 8th Confed found them in bed and such a scampering but I was not there, but was sorry I was not well enough. We captured over 100 prisoners and all their camp and some fine horses, 200, I believe. We got their colors (1st Ala). Some of Co B's boys [Ovid Company] had a hand in that. Lew Wilcox [Lewis H Wilcox, Ovid] was one of them. We are going to send it to the governor of the state as a relic. With some resolutions which you will also see in the papers. It was a good strike. I hear that the account of the capture of the 3 rebs that I took is in the Tribune. I have not seen it. It is in the 19th.

Our captain Abeel is back [Alfred Abeel, Dearborn, taken prisoner on the move toward Murfreesboro before Stones River] to the company again. He is tough and fat, so I am not in command now. The boys do not like him very well. I don't know how I will like him. But Col Park [Josiah Park] told me he was going to transfer me to the command of "M" Co for the present as the officers in that Co are sick. I don't know how it will be -- don't care much but I like this Co firstrate.

I wish you could come down and see us, we have warm weather, rather too warm now but such nice nights. Moonlight now. Maj Gen Stanley [David S Stanley] visited us and is visiting with the Col now. The band are getting out now to serenade him. We have got the new instruments. Silver. I will tell you they are handsome. Our band is going to be the best in the Dept. The instruments cost \$800.

I believe this thing will be nearly wound up this summer. All things look bright now. If Hooker would only do something to count. You see the rebs are pressed at every point. They are in hot water. We are on every side of them and it does look as if they could not stand long against us.

Col Park told me he wrote you a long letter, have you got it? I have no news to tell you and will wait till morning before I finish Next Morning Write soon all the news

Albert

**Henry Albert Potter and his comrades get in over their heads out on the Alexandria Pike. Seems after meeting the Rebels with artillery on the other side of Lebanon, the Col (Robert Minty, Commander of the Regiment) decided the orders only told them to go to Lebanon, and "orders is orders" so they returned, rather hastily, it seems, to Baird's Mill safely on the Murfreesboro side of Lebanon. Knowing high troop estimates always coincide with wise decisions, I would question the rebel force being at 4000, and in my opinion 1500 (or less) Rebels with artillery attacking a nighttime Union encampment at dusk that far away from the Union base at Murfreesboro, would make any Col have second thoughts about the prudence of staying there. In**

**Minty's report which I enclosed following the letter, Minty laments not having any artillery and that he could have taken Alexandria if he had had such.**

HeadQuarteres 4th M.V.C.  
Camp Park, June 17/63

Dear Father

We just got in from our 6 days scout and it has been a hard one -- I tell you. We did not start until about 3 pm and went to Lebanon 28 miles distant that night. We traveled out six miles from town where we halted and fed. We had heard from our scouts in that direction that there was about 1000 or the rebels at Lebanon and we intended to clean them out. On dismounting, when we halted, one of the 5th Iowa boys was almost instantly killed by his comrade next to him. His Carbine caught in some manner on the saddle or stirrups and went off. The ball passing thro' his left lung and out on right side cutting one of the large arteries. Poor Fellow! He never spoke. One cannot be too cautious. I would hate to be killed by my friend or by myself.

After feeding at about ten o'clock we started again. We had about 1500 all told. We had a passable road and went along pretty good jog. Got into Lebanon just daylight. No rebels there. All went away last night was what the citizens told us. Went off on the Alexandria Pike. It is a mystery to me how they get their information for they heard of our coming even before we knew where we were going ourselves, for we never know where we are going until we move. But they did. We followed after them on the Alexandria Pike came upon their near guards about 11 am had a little skirmish in which one to the 4th regulars was killed. Then went back a short distance and fed our horses, gave them wheat in bundle about noon we started again. It was a very hot day and our poor horses were tired in the forenoon our Reg't was on the left as skirmishers and the ground was very rough, stony and hilly. We moved cautiously skirmishing all the way about six miles into a nice valley with good feed and the Col concluded to stay there all night.

We had orders to move only to Lebanon and our coming any farther was at our own risk. Well, we posted our pickets in front and in the right and left strongly and were settling down to rest when Bang! Bang! Came their artillery from a hill. Our pickets rushed in letting us [know?] there was quite a force in front with 5 pieces of artillery. They were mountain howitzers I tho't by the sound. We immediately formed and went out to see what was there, but they had run back again and it was growing dark. The Col had also learned that they were about 4000 strong with artillery at Alexandria and so of course it would not be prudent to move after them and their demonstration in front was only to divert our attention while they were trying to FLANK US on BOTH SIDES. So we moved back after calling in our pickets by a cross road and an ugly one too. Baird's Mill on the

Lebanon Pike 21 miles from Murfreesboro. Got there 3 am this morning as tired a lot as you ever saw -- not a wink of sleep had we. I never was so sleepy in my life and when we got to the Mill I just lopped down on the ground and slept about two hours as sound as a log. When we moved on and got into camp about 3pm tired and dusty---

Wheat is ripe, partly cut, corn is growing very fast. I saw some drawing in hay as we came along. Their wheat is poor.

It is very dark and I will stop. I am well until now

Albert

I got a letter from Amelia today, it is as you say. I don't get all the letters you write and you don't get all that I write. I have not got the box yet.

Albert

For background here is the Colonel Minty's report of the skirmish at Alexandria and the "retire" to Lebanon -- Mike

JUNE 15-17, 1863.-Expedition to, and skirmish near, Lebanon, Tenn.  
Report of Colonel Robert H. G. Minty, Fourth Michigan Cavalry, commanding brigade.

HDQRS. FIRST BRIGADE, SECOND CAVALRY DIVISION,  
Camp near Murfreesborough, Tenn., June 18, 1863.

SIR: In accordance with orders received from Major-General Stanley, I marched with the First Brigade at 5 p. m. on the 15th instant, taking the Lebanon pike. I arrived at Stone's River at 7 p. m., fed horses, and halted until 10 p. m., so as to strike Lebanon by daybreak. At Baird's Mills the enemy's picket fires were found burning, but evidently the posts had not been occupied for some hours.

I arrived at Lebanon at 4 a. m., and had some difficulty in learning anything definite about the enemy. I at [last] learned from some negroes and a Union family that the rebels, about 600 strong, under Colonel Duke, had left Lebanon at about 5 p. m., the 15th, by the Sparte (or Alexandria) road. I immediately followed them to Spring Creek, 5 miles out, watered the horses, and dismounted to feed, when the rebels attacked my pickets from toward Alexandria, driving them in, and following them sharply with about 300 men, mounted and dismounted. I sent Lieutenant-Colonel Sipes, with the Seventh Pennsylvania, to the right, and Major Mix, with the Fourth Michigan, to the left (directing them to keep a little in advance of the head of the column on the pike), the Fourth Regulars on the pike, the Fifth Iowa in reserve, and the battalion Third Indiana guarding the ambulances. My advance was necessarily slow, in consequence of the rough nature of the ground over which the flanking columns had to pass. The rebels retired slowly, fighting stubbornly, until near Shop Spring, where the advance of the Fourth Regulars, under Lieutenant O'Connell, charged and drove them

from the fences, from behind which they had been fighting. Our horses were tired, and those of the enemy apparently fresh, so that the only result was to drive them. Having now arrived at the junction of the cross-road leading to Baird's Mills, which gave me a good line of retreat, I took a position on the right side of the road, to allow the men to get their breakfasts. Unfortunately, there was no feed to be had for the horses.

At 11.30, I again moved forward, the Seventh Pennsylvania in advance, followed by the Fourth Michigan, Third Indiana, and Fourth Regulars, the Fifth Iowa on the flanks. We drove the enemy as before. At about 2 o'clock I arrived at Watters' Mill, halted the column, and sent Colonel Sipes, with the Seventh Pennsylvania and two companies of the Fifth Iowa, 2 miles to the front; threw out strong pickets 1 1/2 miles in every direction, and fed horses.

At Lebanon, and at all points along the road, I received information that Morgan was at Alexandria with 4,000 men and from six to twelve pieces of artillery. When Colonel Sipes returned he brought confirmation of these reports. Skirmishing was kept up with my pickets on the Alexandria road at intervals all the afternoon. At 7 p. m. a courier came in from the front, reporting that the enemy was advancing in force, and immediately after they opened fire with their artillery. I sent the parties from both the right and left reported that a heavy column was moving down each flank. I immediately doubled my pickets, and remained in position until 9 o'clock, when I fell back, taking the crossroad from Shop Spring to Baird's Mills, at which place I arrived at 2.30 a. m. without molestation.

Up to this time we had marched 56 miles. Some of the men had had one hour's sleep, and the others no sleep whatever. At 6.30 I resumed the march for Murfreesborough, arriving at Stone's River at 10 o'clock. I halted for a couple of hours to rest the horses, and then returned to camp. Captain Davis, Seventh Pennsylvania, who commanded the rear guard from Baird's Mills, reports that a strong force of the enemy came into that place from toward Lebanon as he was leaving it, but attempted nothing further than an exchange of shots.

If I had a couple of pieces of artillery, John [H.] Morgan should either have given me battle or Alexandria; but without them, I felt that I would be fighting at too great a disadvantage and uselessly sacrificing the lives of my men. I therefore considered it my duty to retire.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,  
ROBT. H. G. MINTY,  
Colonel, Commanding.

**Henry Albert Potter writes a short note to his sister in which he explains the problems of shipping butter through the mail.**

HeadQuarters 4th Mich Cav. Camp Park June 19th 1863 Dear Sister It is after

Taps and I am all alone in the office so I will write a line. I received your letter and Mary Longcor's by today's mail and of course was glad to hear from both of you. Mrs Longcor need not be ashamed of her letter I am sure, for I seldom get a better one. I am well and contented as long as I am so. We were out on a scout this week but I wrote to Father about that the day after I got in. We are all just as glad to get back to camp from a scout as I used to come home from a hard jaunt or a day's work in fact it is our home. I got my box yesterday. I am sorry [to tell?] you but in the butter it was all oil and run over everything. Spoilt nearly all the paper and greased and scented the shirts and handkerchiefs most beautifully. But it is all right. Dan's sugar was nearly all dissolved, the apples were rotten but, hold on, I am telling the bad side. The Maple Sugar was all right much obliged to Mrs L for the plums and to Malbone and John for the Paper and envelopes. The tie is very nice. Tell Emma, the one I did have was burnt with my things. The coffee and Tea, combs and pencil suspenders[lost]

[On outside of letter] Headquarters 4th MVC June 19th 1863 Potter Lieut and Act'g Adj't  
Writes home sending love and acknowledging rec't of box=  
and  
letter etc etc. Respectfully forwarded "via" Uncle Sam

**Henry Albert Potter writes his sister and tells of his recent illness. He reflects on the rumored death of Jeff Davis and the positive morale of the Union forces in Tennessee and his (incorrect) forecast of a speedy end to the war.**

Camp near Salem Tenn  
July 23rd 1863

Dear Sister

You are doubtless anxious to hear from me and perhaps uneasy for fear of my safety. At last we are encamped but for how long I cannot tell. We have been constantly on the move since June 24th. The day the army moved from Murfreesboro. I am well as usual excepting a bad cold, but am feeling well at heart. When I wrote you last I was at Murfreesboro in hosp. I was there about one week. My poison is cured We are about ten miles from Winchester near the Fayetteville branch of the Nashville and Chattanooga RR The cars run down to Descherd's Station about 12 miles from here and I understand there are no obstructions as far as Bridgeport. Our Brigade has been to

Huntsville, Alabama. Just came back this week. There are no rebels this side of the Tennessee River excepting a few guerrillas in the mountains. They dare not show themselves. Centerville is the prettiest place I have seen in the South. The news we are getting daily is most Encouraging I have had read since the war commenced, for a speedy termination. Vicksburg and Fort Hudson are ours giving us clear sweep of the great River and loosing our large army there. I believe by this time Jackson is ours and General Johnson is whipped at Charleston we are doing nobly. We will take the place no doubt. Bragg we know nothing about, He has, I think, divided his Army and Morgan is reported captured, while Lee's army is very much demoralized. The army here is highly excited over the good news. Our star is in the ascendant again. There is a rumor here that Jeff Davis is dead but whether so or not can't tell. The old scamp would die, it might save him much disgrace and humiliation and a blessing to the distracted Country. I have rec'd the likeness at last - they are very good. I must close. Write some. I rec'd yours of the 13th. I will write oftener now.

Yours affectionately  
Albert

Henry Albert Potter, in a tradition still followed today, blames the government and not the people for the problems they are in. This letter was written about one month before the battle of Chickamauga. Potter is writing from a courier line set up between Rosecrans' army (General Crittenden) moving toward Chattanooga and Burnside's army moving toward Knoxville.

Courier Station No 4  
Sunday, August 30, 1863

Dear Father

I have no news to tell you this morning only that I am well. It is a cool sunshiny morning rather too cool, in fact, for comfort. I don't see that but you have as warm weather at home as we do down farther south. I am stationed on the courier line yet, don't have but little to do as the whole company is here. I have written aunt Sarah Ann this morning. The people here are a poor and ignorant set as you ever saw. They are to be pitied more than blamed for their disloyalty. They have always lived in the mtns and know nothing of what transpires outside of their own little world. They were told by leaders that there was no Union or government and as we had no advocates or army here, what could they see? They believed it. But now they see they were mistaken, nearly all have taken the oath of allegiance once more and glad to have their property and persons protected from confiscation and conscription. How long we will remain here I cannot say. We are liable to move at any time. I think we will move as soon as

we get sufficient supplies to reach Chattanooga. I will write as often as I can write.

I remain, as ever,  
Yours in love,  
Henry Albert Potter

Henry Albert Potter takes time out from chasing CSA General Wheeler to scribble a note. (We needn't worry about General Wheeler: he survived without being "gobbled" as Potter put it and played a prominent role as always in CSA cavalry operations in the west.) On the day this letter was written one part of the brigade under Colonel Minty was in Murfreesboro due to a mixup in command which left Minty relaxing instead of joining up with the rest of the brigade at Farmington, TN where a battle was in progress. When the orders got unscrambled Minty took off and arrived at the end of the fight, for which tardiness Minty was arrested. Minty was later cleared of all charges at a courts marshal and returned to command of the brigade. Minty's brigade consisted of the 4th Mich(Potter's unit), the 7th Penn and the 4th Regular Army Cavalry regiments and, sometimes, the Chicago Board of Trade Artillery battery.

Murfreesboro Oct 8th 1863

Dear Folks

I am in the above place in chase of Wheeler. Have been after him from the Tennessee. They are making a big raid. Have cut communications with Chattanooga now. Have had a couple of fights. Think we will succeed in gobbling all of them. We have enough to do it. I am tough and rugged.

In love and haste

Albert

Vacation is over and I hereby offer another letter from Henry Albert Potter. In this letter to his uncle Evan in Ovid, Henry, amid catching a lice, tells of how the cavalry lived off the land and as much as admitted it went too far. For the curious, Colonel Minty (the Irish Brigade commander from Westport, County Mayo, Ireland) was absolved of the charges and returned to lead the brigade again. This is the 27th of my great grandfather's letters I have posted. 1-21 are on our website at <http://www.public.usit.net/mruddy> If anyone is interested in #s 22-26 let me know and I will forward them.

Mike

Headquarters 4th Michigan Cavalry  
Camp near Maysville, Alabama  
Sunday Oct 25th 1863

E M Potter [Evan Malbone Potter, his Uncle]

Dear Sir

This is a cold wintry uncomfortable Autumn day and I feel ill-natured but I am going to scratch off a line to you, for it has been a long time since you have heard from me - or I from you. I wrote a letter to John [John N Gilbert, Ovid, Mich] the other day and one to father [Edward Coke Potter]. They are the only two I have written this Month.

My Health has been excellent except for two or three days last week I caught cold but feel better now. We have had a very different Fall from what we had last. It has been cold cloudy, windy and rainy mostly all the month - decidedly uncomfortable. The brigade has not seen a wagon or piece of a train since it left Washington, East Tennessee Sept 30, 1863 to chase old Wheeler day and night from that place to Pikeville in the Sequatchee Valley, to McMinnville, to Murfreesboro, to Shelbyville, Lewisburg, Pulaski from there to the Tennessee river at Lamb's Jenny 3 miles above Muscle Shoals where they got away from us. I rather think they got worsted. We captured mostly all their artillery and took about 600 prisoners and killed. I have not seen a clean shirt or pair of drawers or socks since the 30th ult. The consequence I need not tell you for Oh! I feel I feel a louse in my pantaloons this minute.

Jolus (?)

True as preaching by Hokey

We have not had any news that can be relied upon in a long time. We hear Rosecrans is sent to the Potomac and Grant succeeds and that Stanley is relieved of his command. I know that Col Minty [Robert H G Minty, Ireland] is under arrest for not moving the brigade up in time at the fight with Wheeler and Wharton below Shelbyville, but he had r'cd orders, they want to make much of him.

I would hate to be a citizen living in this country about this time. We have moved so fast and so meteor-like Uncle Sam couldn't touch us consequence was didn't draw any rations and Uncle Jeff had to suffer. We had to forage on the country. We lived well but I admit the thing went almost too far with some. A great many have been ROBBED OUTRIGHT of everthing but it is stopped now.

We have lost one good Officer this month. Lieut. Tucker [Edward L Tucker, Macon Mich] wounded in skirmish near Washington Sept 30, died at Chattanooga seven after he was a 1st Lt and comdg Co. I am now in command of two Co.s H and B. Lt Carter [Julius M Carter, Ovid Mich] is sick & at Murfreesboro. I presume Mrs Carter has heard from him ere this.

We have four month's pay due us Nov 1st I am going to apply for a leave of absence as soon as we are paid. Going to try hard to come and see you. Can't tell how it will end. Suppose our folks would like to see me

don't  
know.

Maysville is about 10 miles north east from Huntsville, Ala, near the line of the Charleston and Memphis RR. The cars run now as far as Paint Rock 15 miles from here and 35 miles from Stevenson(?) where the road intersects the Nashville and Chattanooga RR.

Malbone, write and tell me what you are doing and what you intend to do next year. I think some of resigning but only think of it at present don't mention it. I am doing well here and my chance for promotion is good as soon as there is a chance but sometimes I think I would rather be home doing something there but I am only writing this to fill it with,

Love to all,

Remain, affectionately yours,

Henry A Potter

(Direct as before)

Henry Albert Potter writes a letter on the same night Sherman's ill-starred attack began with his troops crossing the Tennessee River and thus began the battle of Chattanooga (Missionary Ridge)

Camp near Chattanooga  
Monday November 23rd 1863

Dear Father

I have not had a chance to write a word in some time and now [?] the first opportunity. Our regiment left Maysville the 17th destination unknown. Only it was thought a big raid was contemplated. We were paid up to Oct 31st the day we left. We passed thro Stevenson the 19th. I sent you \$400 by Adams Express. The agent informed me the line was clear and had not been molested in some time. It will reach you all right, no doubt. I did not pay charges. I have a Receipt for it with me - write me on reception of it.

My Health is excellent - can eat bacon and hard tack right smart. I don't want to say another word about coming home for I don't see the smallest chance at present. Even a certificate of disability comes back disapproved, unless it is necessary to save a life. So you see my hopes of home are slim and I don't want to disappoint you. As long as I keep well you must be satisfied.

I believe there will be the biggest fighting done near here that there has been on the continent and the day not far distant either. Our communication must be made good at all hazards, that is the first important

step. At present we run up rations by river to within about 8 miles of Chattanooga. From there by wagon Train crossing the river twice on pontoons. The rebels hold the point of Lookout Mountain, which runs to the river. I have made a sort of a map by which you can form an idea of our lines and also the rebels. You will see the road our supplies have to come over by water to the jenny then by train the rest of the way. Crossing the river twice by pontoons. I was on Raccon[Raccoon] Mountains yesterday at the signal station which is marked from there you have a grand view of both Armies. You can see the rebel tents and earthworks plain. It is about 2 miles air line from the top of Raccoon to Lookout Mt with a glass you can see the rebs' quite plain. They kept up a cannonading all day yesterday. You would see the smoke from our Batteries fifteen seconds before you heard the report. Amelia[Amelia Potter, Henry's Sister] can you figure how far off? Sound travels 1142 feet per second. The rebels have a very large Army. We could not see all of it. A part being hid behind Lookout and Missionary Range. Sherman was crossing the river all last night with his Corps. We are encamped opposite Chattanooga a mile from the river. I will mark it. The view from the signal Station was the grandest sight I ever saw. You can see the mountains of North Carolina and north to near Cumberland Gap, Kentucky. Then to have spread below you the two great armies in the world, seemingly within reach of each other. You can imagine I cannot tell you anything about it but I must close. I will write every opportunity. Write as soon as you receive the money.

Yours affectionately  
Henry A Potter  
Love to all

You can see the necessity of getting the Rebels off Lookout -- as they are now they hold the railroad. We must have that at all hazards. Besides the river they have a good line but Grant will out-general them.

Henry Albert Potter writes he was out chasing Longstreet during the battle for Chattanooga (Missionary Ridge). This is the 30th letter transcribed of Potter's letters home. The rest can be seen at our website under "4th Michigan Cavalry."  
Mike

Courier Station near Cleveland  
Friday Dec 18th 1863

Dear Father, Mother, and Sister

You are doubtless very anxious about me and think I am killed or captured sure but I am neither on the contrary am alive and well as ever. Have had excellent health since I wrote you last at Chattanooga. Since then we have been here and there and everywhere. Away from everything and everybody part of the time working in rear of the rebels and chasing their trains.

I believe when I wrote you last I told you we expected a battle soon and sent you a sketch of the two armies as they appeared from Raccoon Mountain and also of a pontoon across the river above Chattanooga in the rear of the rebel line. Well it came to pass as I anticipated. Our Brigade[Minty's Brigade: 4th Regulars, 7th Penn and 4th Mich Cavs -mr] crossed the Tennessee Tuesday the 24th Nov with Sherman's Corps and following the line of the Knoxville RR burnt the bridges and destroyed all commissary stores which we found. When we reached Cleveland 30 miles from Chattanooga, we had captured and burnt 65 wagons and taken over 200 prisoners, burnt all bridges of importance, cut telegraphic communications between Bragg and Longstreet, -- which was our intention when starting on the raid. We started on the 27th, captured about 260 hogs, a first thing for us and destroying the Copper Rolling Mill, their only factory of \*caps\* in the Confederacy. It was the grandest sight I ever saw, we put 50 boxes of shells and torpedos in the walls before firing it and such explosions you never heard. The rebels hurried us out quite unceremoniously. Our regiment was guarding prisoners. They fired into us too fast altogether to suit me. I had one man wounded and a horse shot but further than that all got out safely. We then went back to Chattanooga and moved out with Sherman to reinforce Burnside at Knoxville. Went as far as Loudon when hearing that Longstreet had been repulsed and was retreating, we turned off to Marysville. From there our Brigade moved over the Alleghanies in North Carolina and a hard trip it was, I tell you. Rain and cold on the mountains making things disagreeable. I have crossed the Cumberland and Alleghany Mts and been in five rebel states and expect to be in all of them before I get thru with it. KY Tenn Ga Ala and N.C. We found plenty to eat in NC plenty of apples and peach brandy. No army had ever troubled them of any size. Lots of them never seen a Yankee, as they call us, before. They are ignorant and simple - but nearly all stick to the old Union, also many have been conscripted most of them were glad to see us.

I might write you in detail a dozen sheets full but it is not necessary the 4th Mich is now on courier duty between Charleston and Chattanooga. I am half-way between Charleston and Cleveland. I live in a house have a room by myself and board with the family. They are nice folks although a little tainted with secession.

Did you receive the money I sent you. I have not a word from home since

the 16th of Nov don't know when we should get any mail. Write as often as you can. The great battle was fought while we were raiding in Bragg's rear. I never saw the cause so bright.

Love to all  
Albert

[Written over the other letter -mr]

This is a poor letter but it is better than none. We have been busy all the time. I have no time to even think of coming home at present. Have not even seen camp since the 17th Nov when we left Marysville, Alabama. The people are nearly all Union here. We have plenty to eat. I am a little anxious about the money but think it's all right.

[written around the edge of the letter -mr]

You want full accounts of the battle. It was the greatest thing. The rebels had a splendid position. Our victory is decisive.

Henry Albert Potter writes he was out chasing Longstreet during the battle for Chattanooga (Missionary Ridge). This is the 30th letter transcribed of Potter's letters home. The rest can be seen at our website under "4th Michigan Cavalry."  
Mike

Courier Station near Cleveland  
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Henry Albert Potter and the 4th Michigan Cavalry, after the stand and retreat at Reed's Bridge at the beginning of the battle of Chickamauga, were sent North to chase CSA General Longstreet who, unwisely perhaps, was sent to attack USA General Burnside at Knoxville. While the Union Cavalry was chasing Longstreet, the battle of Missionary Ridge (Chattanooga) was fought. The inspirational charge by General Hooker's troops up Lookout Mountain was made easier by Longstreet's removal from the area where Hooker attacked and was capped by the flying of the Stars and Stripes over the two armies facing each other in the valley below. Some feel (cf Peter Cozzens: Shipwreck of Their Hopes) that the Stars and stripes flying on top of Lookout Mountain before the main battle helped to infuse bravery in the Union Troops and depress the Confederates and perhaps played a roll in the setback the South received on Missionary Ridge. "Corporal Bragg" as Potter calls him, was CSA General Braxton Bragg, not a popular General even before the defeat at Chattanooga. Bragg was removed after the battle by Jefferson Davis and replaced by General Joseph E. Johnston. An example, possibly apocryphal, of the Confederate soldier's lack of respect for Bragg can be shown in an interview Bragg held with a Confederate Soldier who was captured by the Union Forces during the Battle of Chickamauga and who then was recaptured during the pell-mell retreat of the Union troops back to Chattanooga. The soldier informed Bragg that General Rosecrans and the Union troops were in full retreat. Bragg said to him, "Are you sure? Do you know what a retreat looks like?" The soldier replied, "General, of course I know what a retreat looks like, haven't I fought with you for over two years"

Courier Station near Cleveland Tenn  
Friday Dec 18th 1863

Dear John [letter to his friend, John Gilbert, of Ovid, Michigan -mr]

I am not killed, wounded or gobbled as you imagine I must be before this, I suppose, because I have not written. But this is the first chance I have had to write a word and, even now, I don't know as it will ever reach you. We have since the 17th Nov been pushed here and there & all over from Marysville, Ala to Murphy, North Carolina and into Georgia - but I have enjoyed it first rate. Never had a better time & now when we are settled down on a courier post - I living in a HOUSE, eating on a TABLE, & sleeping in a BED, am not as well as well suited as if on the move - it seems too tame - but I can stand it.

My health is tip-top & that accounts for everything being all right. I am getting fat on good living: apples, and Peach Brandy.

You have, no doubt, rec'd an account of the Great Battle before Chattanooga - well I have not had any detail of it at all - but I know Corporal Bragg, as the rebels call him, was awfully whipped and cut to pieces. I had a grand run of the armies on Sunday before the battle from a signal sta on Raccoon Mts, could see the whole rebel line their tents and batteries on Mission Ridge. They had a grand position. It looked like an impossibility to drive them from it. But old US done it & the result is that the Confederacy has gone up. During the battle a detachment from different brigades, the 4th Michigan being one, under Col Long [Eli Long, later brigadier General, commander of the 4th Ohio Cavalry -mr] crossed the Tennessee above Chattanooga and more than slayed the RR to Knoxville, cut the telegraph, thus destroying all communications between Bragg and