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THE WAR
FOR THE UNION



*The
Hart Nichols Collection
1730-1930*

The Civil War
Letters Home

The Hart Nichols Collection 1730-1930 includes uncensored Civil War letters from brothers Ambrose Burnham Hart (1844-1909) and Walter Nichols Hart (1842-1884), the bulk written by the latter and dated from 1863 to 1866. The women in the Hart and Nichols families were responsible for saving and preserving these letters.

The Robert D. L. Gardiner Foundation generously provided a grant to Hofstra University to process and archive this collection.



Walter N. Hart. Color stamp. Letter to sister Louisa dated September 30, 1863 from Camp Sprague, Staten Island. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Benjamin Hall Hart
(1811-1875)

The Hart family

Benjamin Hall Hart of Hempstead, N.Y.
married Elizabeth (Nichols) Hart in
1837. They had seven children.



Elizabeth (Nichols) Hart
(1812-1897)

Mary Amelia Hart (1838-1932)

Edmund Hall Hart (1839-1898)

Walter Nichols Hart (1842-1884)

Ambrose Burnham Hart (1844-1909)

Louisa Abigail (Hart) Hubbard (1846-1918)

Elizabeth Emily Hart (1848-1933)

William Hall Hart (1853-1934)



Mary Amelia Hart (1838-1932)
Photo courtesy of Linda T. Hubbard



Edmund Hall Hart (1839-1898)



Walter Nichols Hart (1842-1884)
Photo courtesy of Linda T. Hubbard



William Hall Hart (1853-1934)



Elizabeth Emily Hart (1848-1933)
Photo courtesy of Linda T. Hubbard



Louisa Abigail (Hart) Hubbard (1846-1918)



Ambrose Burnham Hart (1844-1909)
Photo courtesy of Linda T. Hubbard

The Hart boys join the Union army

Ambrose Burnham Hart (1844-1909)

Enrolled 7/30/1862 – Poughkeepsie, NY

128th New York Infantry, Company D

Corporal

Promoted: Sergeant, 2/18/1863

Promoted: 1st Sergeant, 7/18/1863

Mustered: 1st Lieutenant, 7/23/1863

Wounded in action: 9/19/1864 Winchester, VA

Mustered: 1st Lieutenant & Adjutant, 2/22/1864

Mustered out: 7/12/1865 Savannah, GA



Ambrose B. Hart. Insignia stamp. Uncensored letter to aunt Louisa Adelia dated May 31, 1865 from Augusta, George.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Walter Nichols Hart (1842-1884)

Enlisted 9/23/1863 – Poughkeepsie, NY

18th New York Cavalry, Company G

Private

Appointed: Corporal, 10/13/1863

Mustered out: 5/31/1866 Victoria, TX

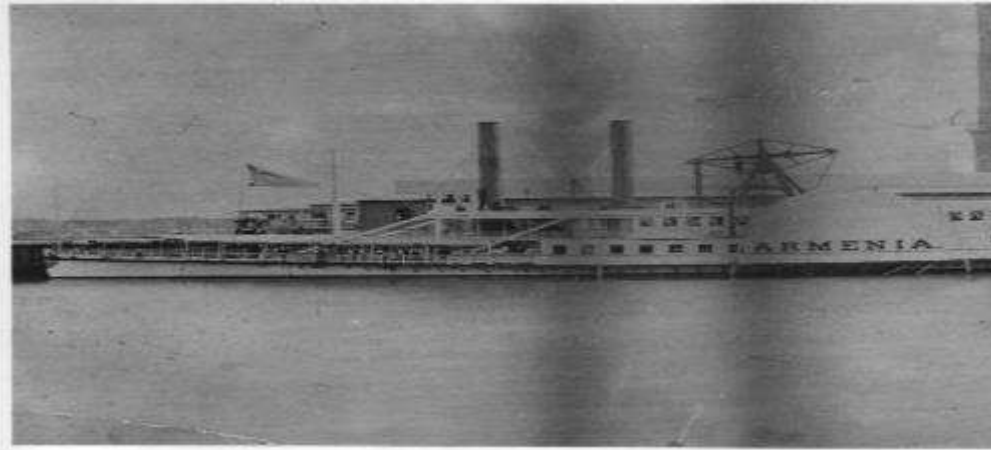


Walter N. Hart. Drawing of Insignia on envelope. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated November 28, 1865 from San Antonio, Texas.

Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Albany, NY

Walter N. Hart sailed on the steamer “Armenia” in September 1863 from his home in Poughkeepsie to Albany, the first stage of his journey to war.



Photograph of steamer 'Armenia' retrieved from Hudson River Valley Heritage.

Before boarding the “Armenia,” his enlistment papers were recorded; a physical examination conducted; and he was sworn in to 18th New York Cavalry, Company G.

New York City, NY

Walter N. Hart sailed for New York on the steamboat “Hendrick Hudson.”

Onboard were 100 cavalry horses.



At Headquarters at 5-600 Broadway in New York City,

Walter receives clothing consisting of:

- Sky blue pants,
- Dark blue jacket lined with yellow braid,
- Common infantry cap, and
- Cavalry cap of black felt with a black feather.



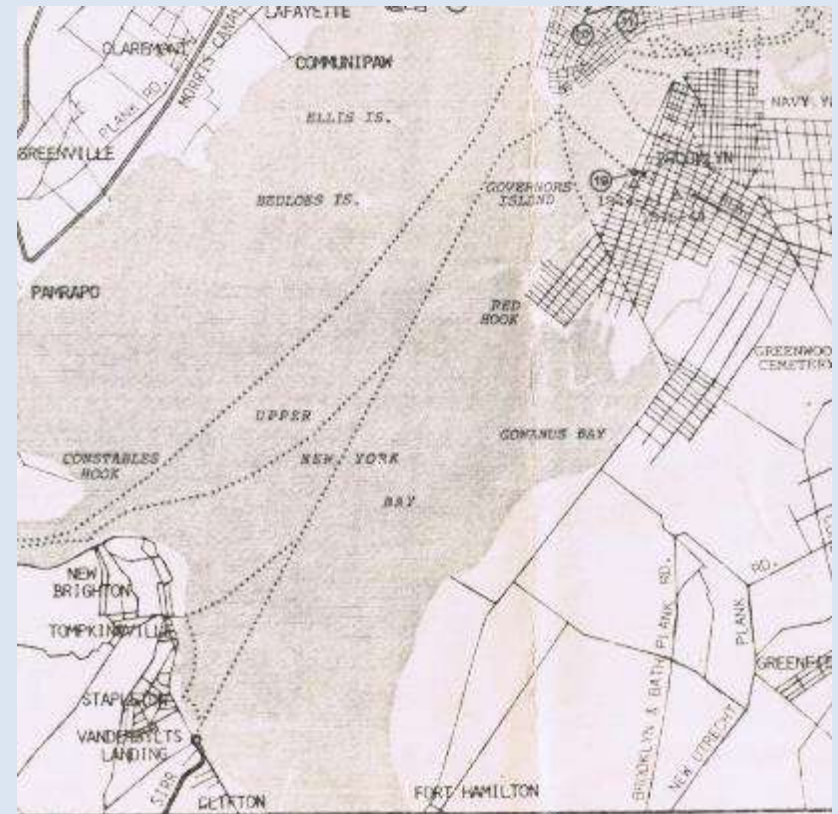
Camp Sprague, Staten Island

Walter N. Hart takes the Staten Island Ferry from the terminal in New York City for Camp Sprague.

Camp New-Dorp and Sprague Barracks, Staten Island.

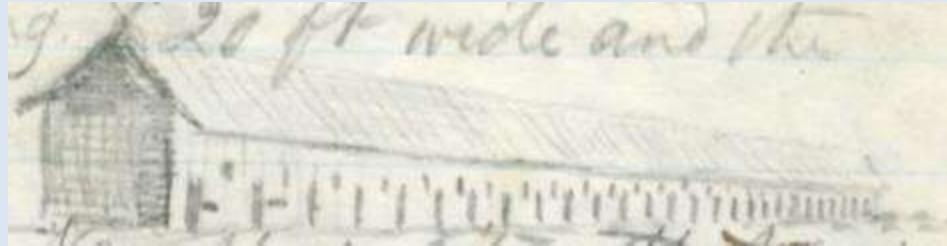
The camp at New-Dorp is situated about five miles from the Clifton or Vanderbilt Landing, and can be reached by the Staten Island cars. It is situated in a pleasant part of the island, and in all respects superior to any camp yet located there, and the condition is excellent. The hospitals are kept in the

Camp New-Dorp and Sprague Barracks, Staten Island. *New York Times* (1857-1922); Jul 29, 1863; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, The New York Times, pg. 8.



Portion of New York City and Vicinity Rail Map, 1860. Retrieved from brooklynrail.net

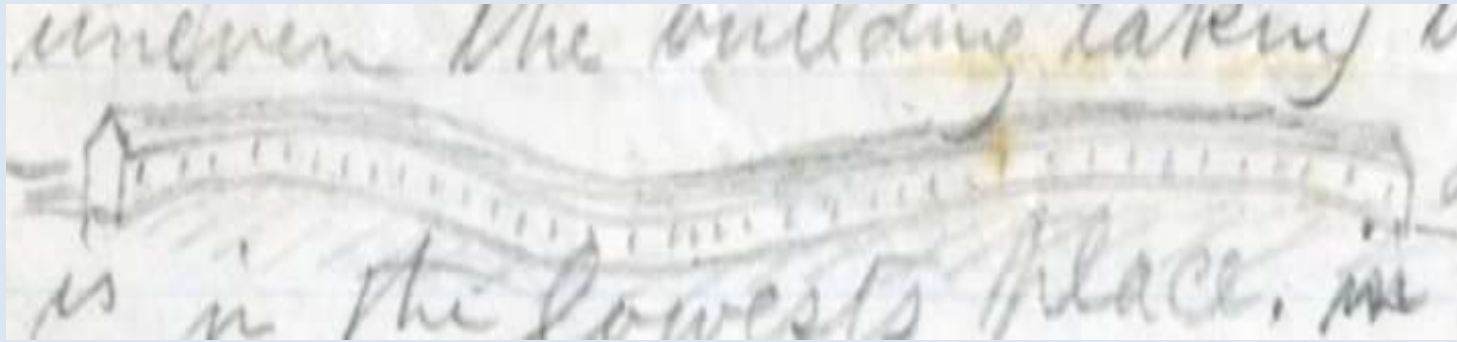
Camp Sprague, Staten Island



Walter N. Hart. Letter to mother dated September 17, 1863 from camp on Staten Island. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Walter describes the barracks as being a quarter mile long and twenty feet wide. They were single room structures constructed of rough pine board. There was no furniture but one stationary table. No beds were provided so the soldiers slept on blankets on the floor and used spare clothing for pillows.

Camp Sprague, Staten Island



Walter N. Hart. Letter to brother Edmund dated September 19, 1863 from Camp Sprague, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

In a letter to his brother Edmund, Walter wrote that the barracks were built upon uneven ground and *"the building taking their shape thus...In wet weather there is a large pond in front of our door."*

Walter N. Hart. Letter to brother Edmund dated September 19, 1863 from Camp Sprague, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Camp Sprague, Staten Island

Swearing and Rum

“The sin of swearing is very common among the officers even to many highest in command of the Army. Such men I say are not fit to command. If I had the power I would have every man who swore put in the guard house. I don’t see how the Union Army can hope for success when it is so wicked.”

Walter N. Hart. Letter to sister Mary dated September 21, 1863 from Camp Sprague, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

“They have some curious mode of punishment here. All yesterday morning there was a poor old woman tied to one of the cannons with a string of whiskey bottles strung around her neck. She had been caught selling rum to the soldiers.”

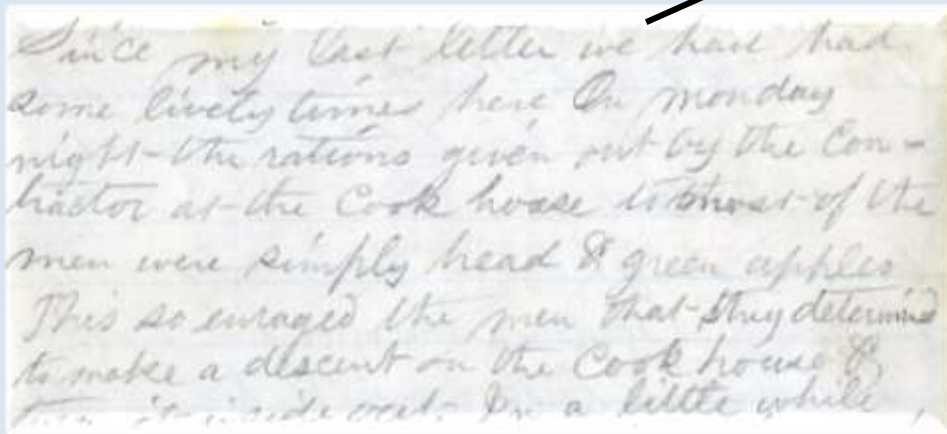
Walter N. Hart. Letter to sister Mary dated September 21, 1863 from Camp Sprague, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Camp Sprague, Staten Island

“Grub is coming so they cry so I must jump for my share.”

Walter N. Hart. Letter to brother Edmund dated September 19, 1863 from Camp Sprague, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Riot at the Cook house!

A photograph of a handwritten letter snippet on aged, yellowed paper. The text is written in cursive and matches the text in the adjacent callout box. A black line points from the text in the callout box to this image.

Since my last letter we have had some lively times here. On Monday night the rations given out by the contractor at the Cook house to most of the men were simply bread & green apples. This so enraged the men that they determined to make a descent on the Cook house & turn it inside out. In a little while,

“Since my last letter we have had some lively times here. On Monday night the rations given out by the contractor at the Cook house to most of the men were simply bread and green apples. This so enraged the men that they determined to make a descent on the Cook house and turn it inside out.”

Walter N. Hart. Letter to mother dated September 2, 1863 from Camp Sprague, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Camp Sprague, Staten Island

Ration Contractors

With respect to bread and water for dinner and supper:
“regular prisoners’ fare you see and for which we may thank the contractors most of whom I consider the greatest villains in this country.”

Walter N. Hart. Letter to brother Edmund on September 25, 1863 from Sprague Barracks, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

“...if contractors furnished good coffee it would be all right but the coffee is a miserable compound of peas, chicory and sweetened with molasses.”

Walter N. Hart. Letter to brother Edmund on September 25, 1863 from Sprague Barracks, Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

18th NY Cavalry on the Move

“The cause I suppose of our hurried departure is owing to the movements of Lee in Va. We will not of course go on the battle field. Our destination will be some of the numerous fortifications around Washington thus giving the garrisons means of reinforcing Meads army.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated October 17, 1863 from Staten Island.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

The regiment:

- Departs Vanderbilts Landing, Staten Island;
- Sails to South Amboy, New Jersey;
- Takes the railroad to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania;
- Arrives Philadelphia at midnight; and
- Receives supper at the Volunteers Relief Saloon.



WASH'G DEPARTMENT, S.W. COR. WASHINGTON AVE. & SWANSON ST.



UNION VOLUNTEER REFRESHMENT SALOON, S.W. COR. WASHINGTON AVE. & SWANSON ST. PHILA.



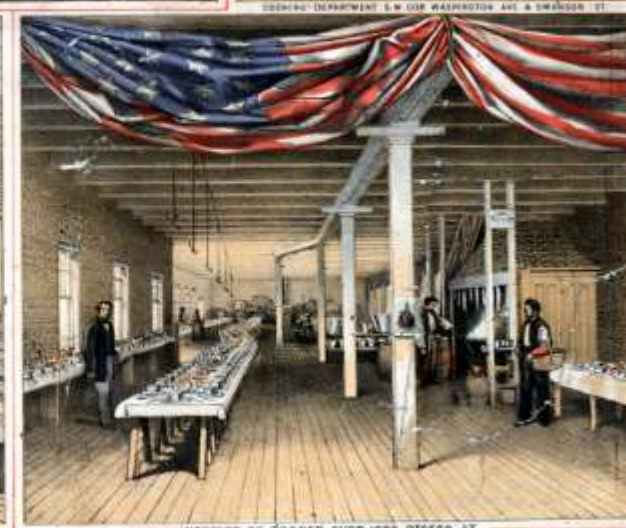
COOKING DEPARTMENT, S.W. COR. WASHINGTON AVE. & SWANSON ST.



COOPER SHOP VOLUNTEER REFRESHMENT SALOON, 1008 OTSEGO ST.



INTERIOR OF UNION VOLUNTEER REFRESHMENT SALOON, S.W. COR. WASHINGTON AVE. & SWANSON ST. PHILA.



INTERIOR OF COOPER SHOP, 1008 OTSEGO ST.

VIEW OF THE PHILADELPHIA VOLUNTEER REFRESHMENT SALOONS.

En Route to Camp Stoneman

The Regiment continues the journey –

...Wilmington, Delaware at daybreak,

...Baltimore, Maryland at noon,

...Washington, D.C. in the evening, and

Arrives Camp Stoneman the following day.

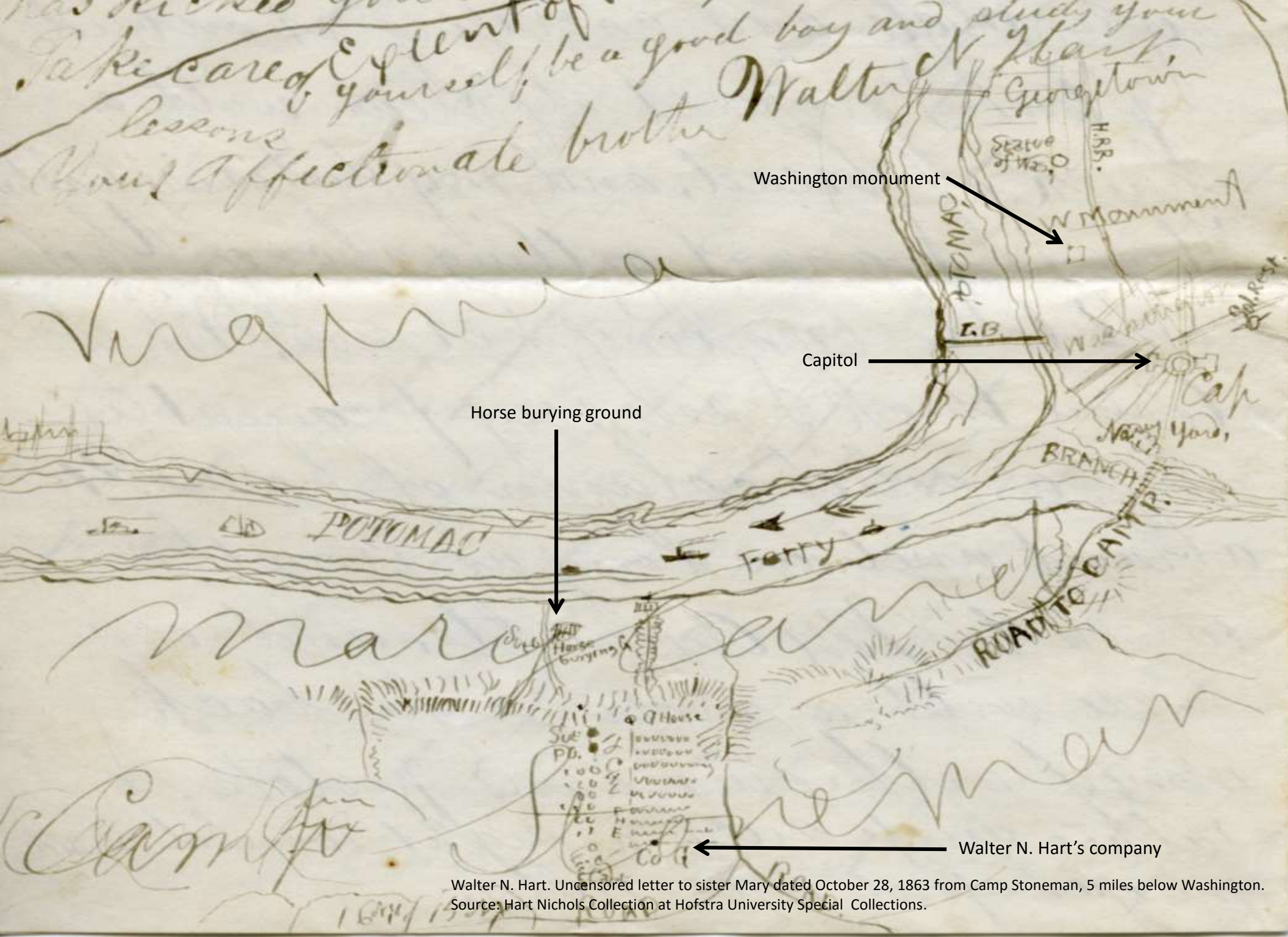
Cavalry Depot (Camp Stoneman) Giesboro, Maryland



Photographer: Andrew J. Russell. Cavalry Depot (Camp Stoneman), 1865.
Albumen print. Retrieved from Library of Congress



Photographer: Andrew J. Russell. Cavalry Depot (Camp Stoneman), 1861-65.
Albumen print. Retrieved from Library of Congress



Washington monument

Capitol

Horse burying ground

Walter N. Hart's company

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated October 28, 1863 from Camp Stoneman, 5 miles below Washington. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Stables at Camp Stoneman

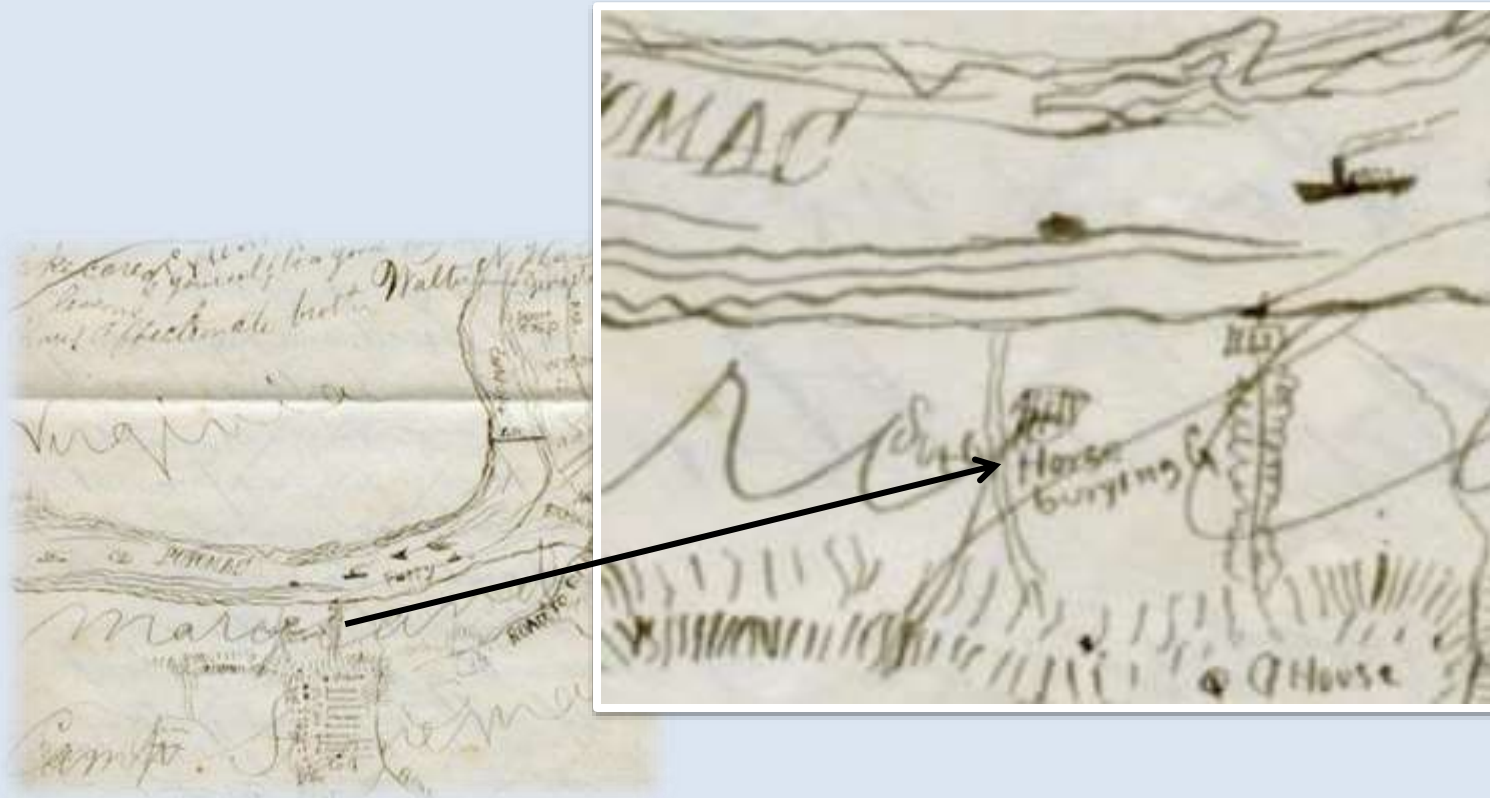
Walter writes his sister Mary and describes the vast number of stables at Camp Stoneman.

“Imagine a stable building considerably longer than from our house to Mr. Dubois’s with a row of small windows on each side and raised ventilating room along the peak. Then think of some 40 or 50 such together and you have some idea of what we call the Corral. To take charge of the immense no. of horses confined therein, Uncle Sam employs a goodly number of Ethiopians numbering some thousands.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated January 1, 1864 from Camp Stoneman.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Horses at Camp Stoneman

A hospital served injured horses arriving from the front. Outside the camp there was a burial ground for horses that did not survive.



“Numbers die every day. They are led to this spot tied in fives, one is then shot and falling he holds the rest which are each successively knocked in the head.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated November 12, 1863 from Camp Stoneman.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

USS Montauk on the Potomac

In a letter to his father, Walter describes seeing the monitor 'USS Montauk' as she sailed along the Potomac river for the Navy yard.

“She looked very much like a long half sunken log with a sheet iron stove in the middle.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to father dated November 7, 1863 from Camp Stoneman.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

USS Montauk (1862-1904) and USS Lehigh (1863-1904)



Photographer: unknown, c1902

Print. Retrieved from U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph.

Camp Stoneman

Drills

By December of 1863, the 18th NY Cavalry was fully kitted out and running drills twice a day.

“I enjoy it however and nothing pleases me more than to hear drill calls. But this running horses so is very dangerous to inexperienced riders and it is a wonder to me some of them don’t get their necks broke.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to father dated December 12, 1863 from Camp Stoneman, Md.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Cavalry kit consisted of:

Horse, Saddle, Bridle, Nose bag, Sabre, Pistol, Carabine,
Blankets of rubber and wool, Overcoat, Canteen and Haversack.

Camp Stoneman

Drills

“The regt. was drilled afoot by Col. Stryker on the Parade ground. It was very muddy and after marching around about half an hour the Col. halted the column and said ‘Well boys, I think we have had mud enough. You are dismissed.’”

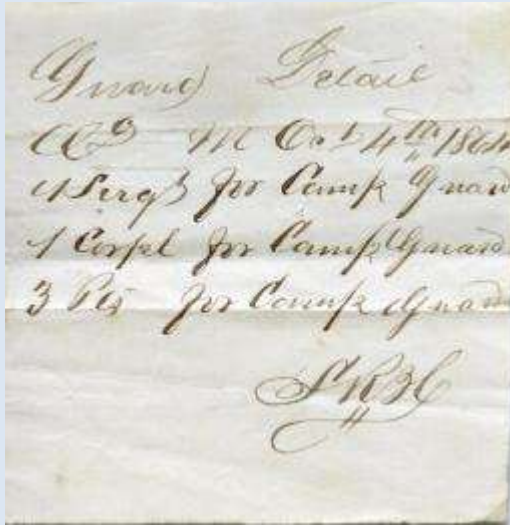
Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated January 12, 1864 from Giesboro Point or Camp Stoneman.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Photographer unknown, c1863 .
Lt. Col. Stephen W. Stryker. Retrieved
from NYS Military Museum

Camp Stoneman

Duties



Guard Detail
Co. G 4th Co. 1st Regt. 1864
1 Sergt for Camp Guard
1 Corp for Camp Guard
3 Priv for Camp Guard
S. H. H.

Walter N. Hart. Example of Guard detail.
Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated
October 6, 1864 from Thibadaux, Louisiana
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University
Special Collections.

Walter N. Hart was assigned to Captain Anthes as a clerk. When not recording Company G's payroll logs or keeping records, he was on guard duty.

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated November 19, 1863 from Camp Instruction. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

"I was on guard duty two days ago. We have a number of prisoners in the guard house some of which are made to stand on a barrel all day. It looks funny enough to see them in a row on top of these barrels. They are punished thus for desertion, drunkenness, etc."

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated November 19, 1863 from Camp Instruction.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Image from Hardtack and coffee, p152

Camp Stoneman

Living Quarters

Living quarters consisted of small army tents that housed three or four men.

Walter N. Hart's tent mates were Private Decker from Columbia County and Private Haskell from Albany.

They purchased a small \$4 stove from 'Sutters' to keep them warm.



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of tent. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated October 28, 1863 from Camp Stoneman, 5 miles below Washington.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

18th NY Cavalry Moves Out

In a letter home to his mother, Walter informed her his regiment was headed to Texas by way of Alexandria and New Orleans.

The voyage took nine days and five transports. The horses had to stand the entire trip and *“the way the men were treated and fared was shameful. The commissioned Officers and 1st Sergts. lived like princes aboard in their State rooms and saloons and feasting on everything which an army of cooks and stewards could devise to tickle their palates. The other soldiers were driven about like a lot of hogs. They had no accommodations provided to sleep except in the hold among a lot of hay oats water barrels.”*

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated February 28, 1864 from New Orleans.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Roughs, Pick Pockets and Gamblers

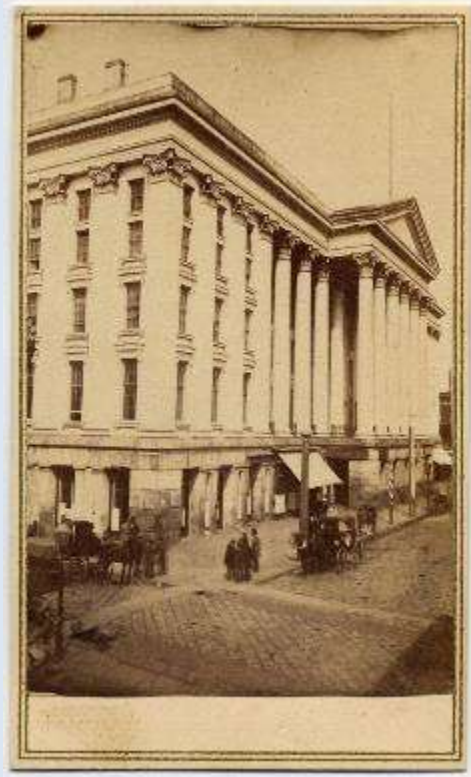
“The soldier’s stole terribly aboard. I lost my carbine, sabre, bridle blanket, overcoat, watering [illegible] and cup and many others lost in proportion but on inspection aboard the Col. told those who had not their equipment that they must steal others or pay for them.”

“You have no idea what a hard regiment this is. The majority is composed of roughs, pick pockets and gamblers. With one or two exception there is not ... a man equal to our society at home.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated February 28, 1864 from New Orleans.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Walter meets up with his brother Lieutenant Ambrose Burnham Hart at the St. Charles Hotel in March 1864. Ambrose was attached to the 128th New York Infantry.



Photographer unknown, n.d.
Print. *St. Charles Hotel*. Retrieved from
washingtonartillery.com

Ambrose Burnham Hart



Photographer unknown. *Ambrose Burnham Hart*, c1863
Courtesy of Linda T. Hubbard

In a letter to sister Louisa Abigail Hart, Walter writes that brother Ambrose *“expressed a wish to join the Cav. service but I hope he never will for he would stand a poor chance of coming home unhurt being so conspicuous on horseback.”*

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated April 12, 1864 at Grand Coteau Red River, near Natchitoches. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

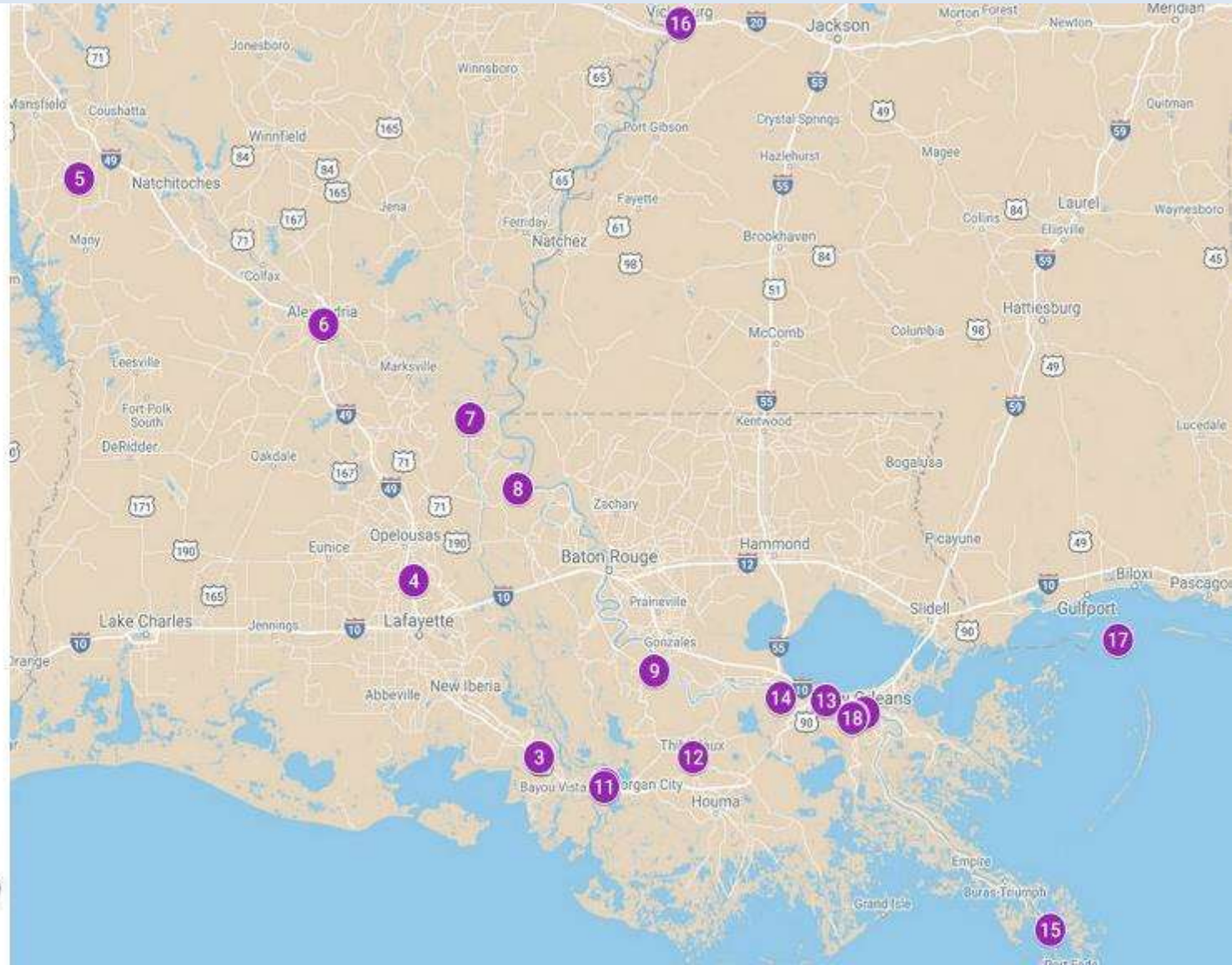
Walter writes to sister Mary Amelia Hart that *“Am. is a good and brave boy and I don’t doubt that you are all proud of him and anxious about him whilst he is campaigning in that dark bloody valley of the Shenandoah.”*

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated November 28, 1864 from Thibadaux, La.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Travels of the 18th New York Cavalry through Louisiana

1864-1865

- 1 #1 - New Orleans
- 2 #2 - Morgan City (Brashear City)
- 3 #3 - Franklin (2miles East-camp)
- 4 #4 - Grand Coteau (Red River)
- 5 #5 - Pleasant Hill (Battle area)
- 6 #6 - Alexandria, LA
- 7 #7 - Simmesport
- 8 #8 - Morganza
- 9 #9 - Donaldsonville
- 10 #10 - Carrollton
- 11 #11 - Berwick (18th NY Cav camp)
- 12 #12 - Thibodaux
- 13 #13 - Kenner (Kennerville)
- 14 #14 - Bonnet Carre
- 15 #15 - Pilottown
- 16 #16 - Vicksburg (Prisoner exchange)
- 17 #17 - Ship Island (Prisoner exchange)
- 18 #18 - Greenville (New Orleans)



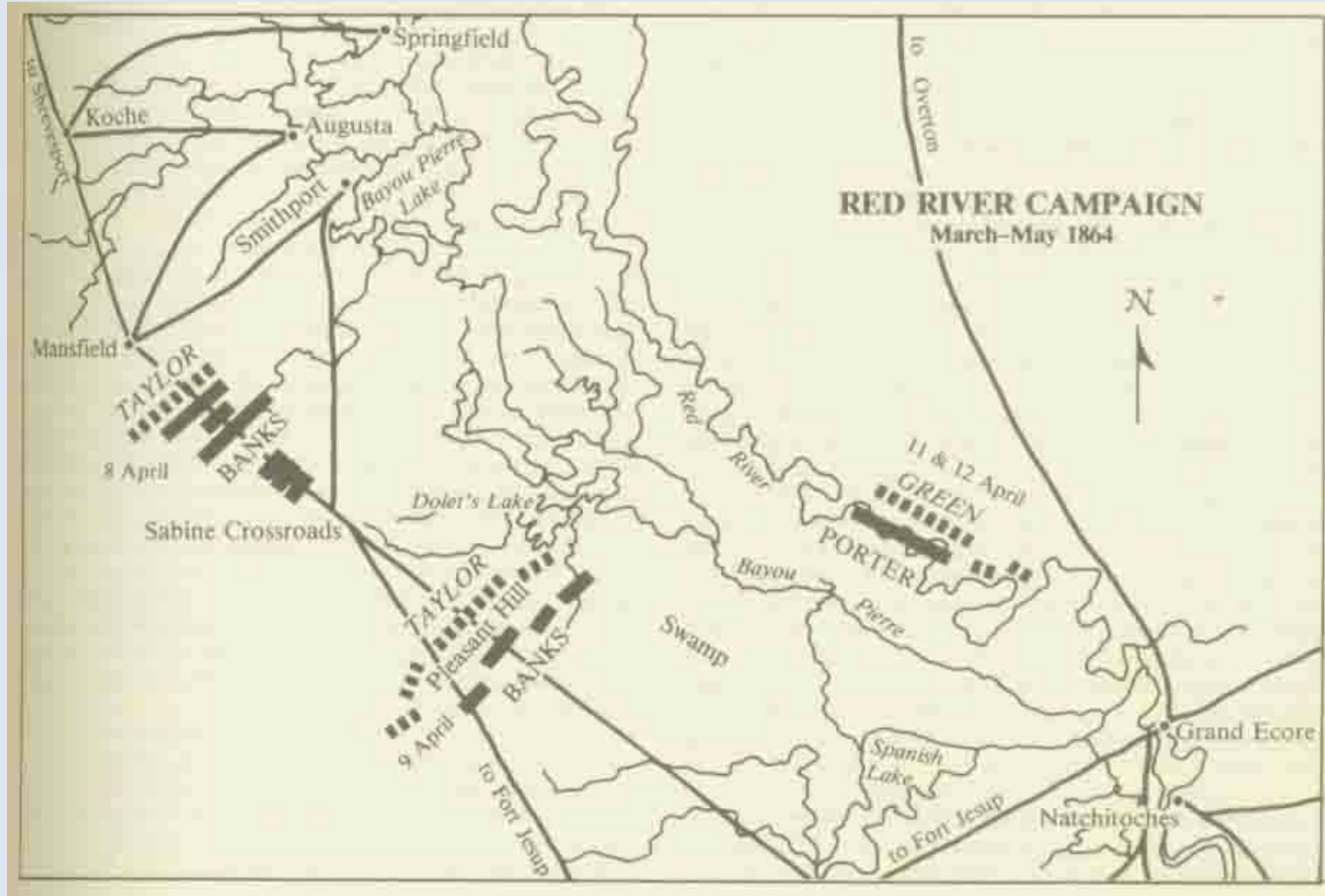
Military Engagements

Red River campaign

Walter wrote his sister Louisa Abigail Hart that General Banks planned to clear Louisiana of rebels and had a considerable force of 25,000 men. General Banks' destination was Shreveport. *"The force was divided in two parties' one going up the river in transports and the other including all the cavalry by land by way of Brasher City and Opelousas all the force meet at Alexandria. But now as the army pushes on for Shreveport they find the enemy in force at Pleasant Hill 25 miles out from Natchitoches are checked, defeated and retreated."*

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated April 12, 1864 from Grand Coteau Red River, near Natchitoches.
Source: Hat Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Military Engagements



Map from *Historical Time Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, p619

Military Engagements

“But let me tell you Lucy it is not so very pleasant to hear rife balls whistling and singing past your head...As our (G) co. came in from skirmishing and were crossing the open field in front of the batteries the enemy who had now advanced to the edge of the wood espired us and for a short time the balls flew about quite lively. Some of the balls struck the ground and trees about us, others passes over our heads and between us. One whizzed just in front of me, behind my horses head. When we shall see another fight I do not know but ere long I have no doubt as cavalry are liable to be called upon any day to dash off twenty or thirty miles after the enemy.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated April 12, 1864 from Grand Coteau Red River, near Natchitoches.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Military Engagements

Cane River

“During the last week or two our Co. has been almost constantly on the move night and day and skirmishing. I have been in six fights so far and am getting quite used to them. You probably heard of the battle of Cane River crossing. The Cavalry opened the fight in the morning skirmishing all the forenoon when the infantry came up and whipped the rebels in the P.M. The 128th made a gallant charge in this affair.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated May 7, 1864 from Alexandria, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

“The fact is this Expedition has been unsuccessful and our Army is now penned up in Alexandria and the fleet of gunboats unable to get down the river on account of the low water.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated May 7, 1864 from Alexandria, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections,

Military Engagements

“The rebels opened on us with grape canister and a shower of minie balls while we could not see them and after getting all mixed up in confusion and losing several men and horses retreated to our original skirmish line.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated May 7, 1864 from Alexandria, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

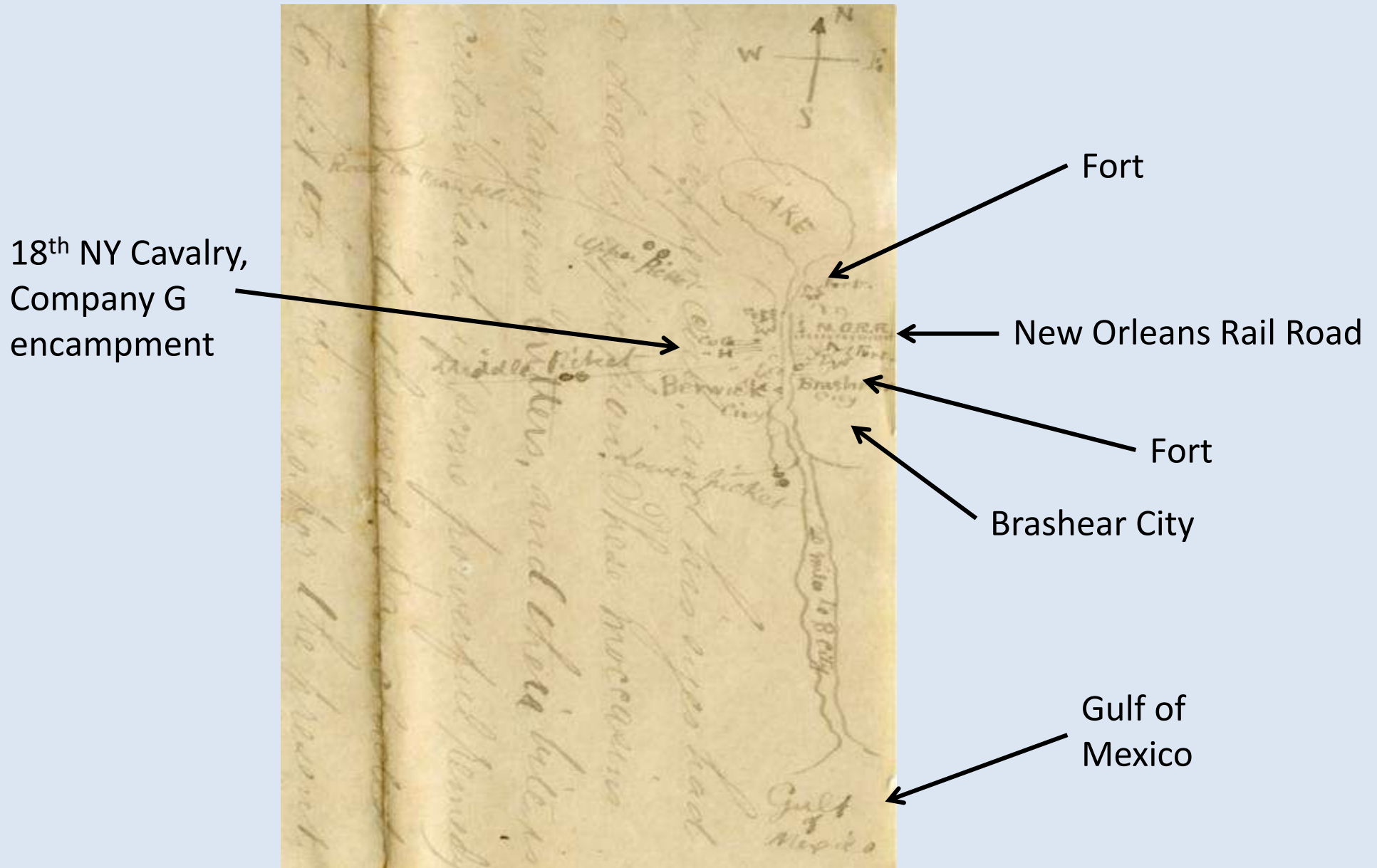
“Don’t you believe any more stories about the rebels not being well armed or fed, here at least their cavalry are armed with short breech loading rifles carrying a very heavy ball nearly twice the distance of our carbines and not requiring any caps. There infantry are armed as ours with good Springfield and Enfield rifles.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated May 7, 1864 from Alexandria, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Springfield Model 1863
Retrieved from wikipedia.org

Forts at Berwick and Brashear

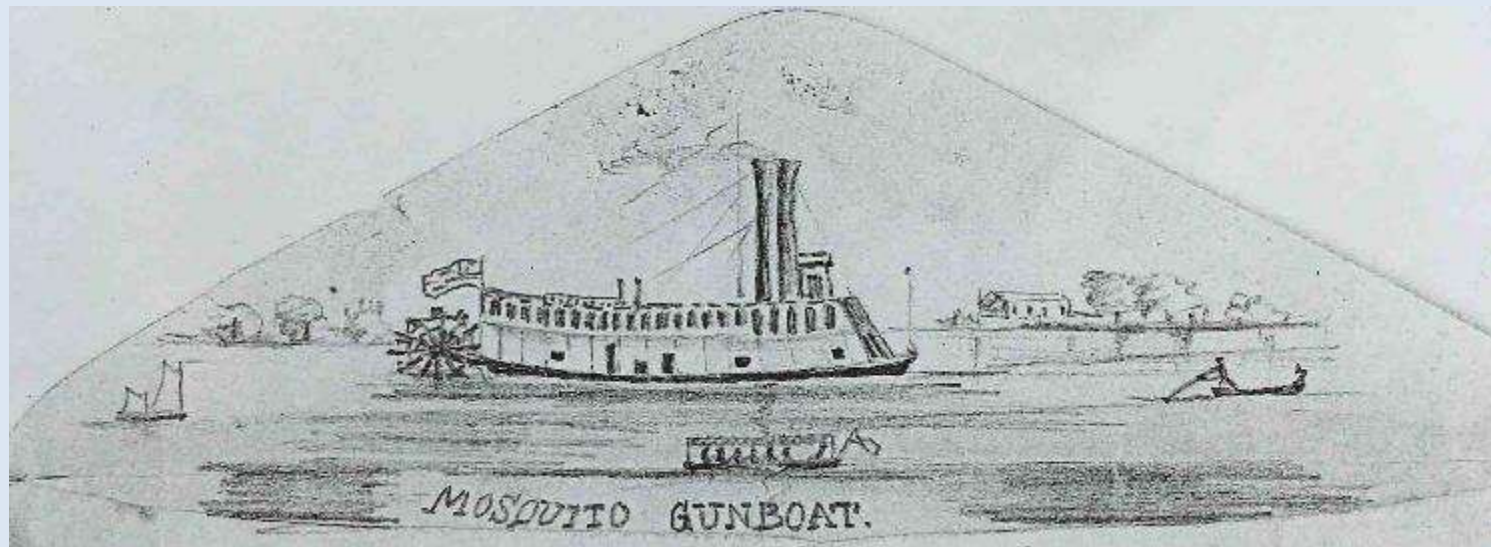


Walter N. Hart. Drawing of Map of Berwick and Brashear City. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated July 13, 1864 from Berwick, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Forts at Berwick and Brashear

Both forts were protected *“by a fleet of three Mosquito clad gunboats that [were] clad with inch iron plates pierced with loopholes for rifles. They also carry 5 or 6 guns apiece.”*

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated July 4, 1864 from Berwick, Western Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of Mosquito gunboat on envelope. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated July 4, 1864 from Berwick, Western Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Mosquito Gunboats



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of Mosquito gunboat. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated July 13, 1864 from Berwick, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections

“...clad with one inch thickness with iron to resist rifle balls, carries 7 guns heaviest at the bow. 3 of them exactly similar have lain here since the place was taken.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated July 13, 1864 from Berwick, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

93rd Regiment - Corps d'Afrique

The regiment is garrisoned at the fort in Berwick.

“These black soldiers look very neat and soldierly in their uniforms, are very precise and regular in their movement and drill and in respect to good manners and politeness are far ahead of our own white soldiers. Swearing is seldom heard among them and they are quiet obedient and respectful. Our men are in the best of terms with them, whole 5 months ago were very bitter towards them. At least half speak French having been owned by French planters.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated July 4, 1864 from Berwick, Western Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Fort Berwick Indian Mounds

Walter describes to his sisters Louisa Abigail and Elizabeth Emily curious mounds that were in Louisiana.

“In the centre of this fort is an old indian mound some 40 feet high. On this a couple of heavy guns have been mounted commanding the whole fort and over-looking the country for miles. It doubles the strength of the fort. These mounds are quite numerous in this part of the state and are I suppose a thousand years old.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated July 4, 1864 from Berwick, Western Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

“Near the upper post in the open field is a curious old indian mound. It is about 40 feet high with very steep sides which are covered with vines and bushes. This has been used as a cemetery by the people here and has six raised tombs on top made of brick. One of these tombs has been opened at one end so that the coffin can be seen inside very old and rotten. This mound is used as a picket post and the other day when I placed a man there he went to the coffin and taking off the lid took an old skull out and showed it to me.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated July 21, 1864 from Berwick Bay, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Ship Island – Prisoner Exchange

Verses written by a unidentified Confederate prisoner given to Walter N. Hart.

“Ship Island”

*I am a Rebel Soldier
A prisoner here confined
In thinking of the dear ones
Whom I have left behind.
The comforts of a happy home
A host of friends so dear
That I never did appreciate
Until I had landed here*

2nd

*Was it for crimes that I had done
That I am treated thus
A quarter of pound of old horse salt
A pint of yellow mush.
And if I say its not enough
I’m told to shut my mouth.
For that is plenty for a ‘Reb’
Who is fighting for the South.*

3rd

*Ship Island is an awful place
I’d have you understand
They starve a Rebel most to death
The guards are contraband
They dress in Yankee uniforms
Their face is black as tar,
And when we go to carry wood
They make us close up “Dar”*

4th

*And now they say we’ll be exchanged
And coon will go away
A memory set of men will be
Upon that happy day.
And when we get to Dixie Land
We’d like to have a brush
To make thirty ankles recollect
The old salt horse and mush.*

Louisiana Terrain

“All that part of Louisiana immediately around New Orleans is the most intensely level that it is possible for the mind to conceive. In fact, I have not seen a rise of ground three feet high (except formed by hand of man) (only in the state of Mississippi) for the last five months; Hempstead Plains for levelness is not to be compared to it.”

Ambrose B. Hart. Uncensored letter to aunt Louisa Adelia dated May 10, 1863 from Camp Parapet, Jefferson Parish, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

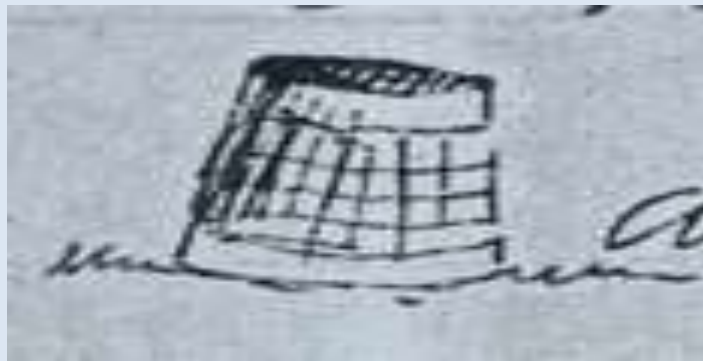
“...nearly the entire southern part of the state is covered by impenetrable swamps which are a dense growth of tall trees and traversed by a network of bayous. Most of these bayous are narrow deep with scarcely any current and navigable by steamboats for hundreds of miles. Alligators and snakes reptiles of all kinds are very plenty there...These moccasins are dangerous critters and their bite is certain death if some powerful remedy is not instantly used.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated July 13, 1864 from Berwick, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Louisiana Terrain

In a letter to younger brother William Hall Hart, Walter writes “...the whole state appears to be a level plain like Hempstead plains. The highest hill which I have seen during all my journeying was no greater than the descent below the house. The soil is very rich and great crops of sugar, cotton and corn are raised. Peaches also are very plenty, they are just ripening now. Strawberries were ripe the first of April and Blackberries are very plenty now. None of the houses have cellars on the contrary they are generally built on a foundation of short brick pillars. All the drinking water is obtained from huge tube or cisterns above ground which hold the rain water coming from the roofs of the buildings.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother William dated May 27, 1864 from Donaldsonville, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of cistern. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated July 21, 1864. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Louisiana Terrain

Mississippi River Inundation

“The Mississippi has been higher lately than for a number of years and there have been great fears of a creiruse or break in the levee...It is astonishing how much higher the surface of the river is from the country around the ground on one side is some 12 feet below the top of the levee while the water is only 2 or 3 feet below on the other.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated March 24, 1865 from Kennerville, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

In a letter to sister Elizabeth Emily, Walter describes traveling along the river on the steamer *Emma*, a stern wheeler. He remarked that the Mississippi inundated and flooded thousands of acres of rich land. People abandoned their homes though some remained living in the upper floors.

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated June 16, 1865 on the Red river.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Louisiana Plant Life

"I forgot to tell Aunty about the cactus here. It is very plenty and grows in every yard and garden and wild [illegible] the country to an immense size often eight or ten feet high with leaves 18 inches wide and several thick."

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated September 25, 1864 from Thibadaux, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

"A kind of nut 'the Pecan' is nearly ripe now. They grow on trees similar to the hiccory."

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated September 25, 1864 from Thibadaux, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Walter N. Hart. Cotton specimen. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated October 6, 1864 from Thibadaux, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Louisiana Wild Life

When in Louisiana, Walter N. Hart reported seeing wild life that was unusual compared to animals found on Long Island. He saw alligators, chameleons, crawfish, grasshoppers that were big as mice, moccasin snakes, mosquitoes, and Turkey buzzards.

“Turkey buzzards take the place of crows at the north. They are constantly to be seen flapping lazily along in search of some dead carcass on which to make their gluttonous feast. These bald headed chaps of the colored persuasion which perhaps you have seen in your southern rips are very plenty all the way from Virginia south and are the tamest wild bird I ever saw.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated October 6, 1864 from Thibadaux, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

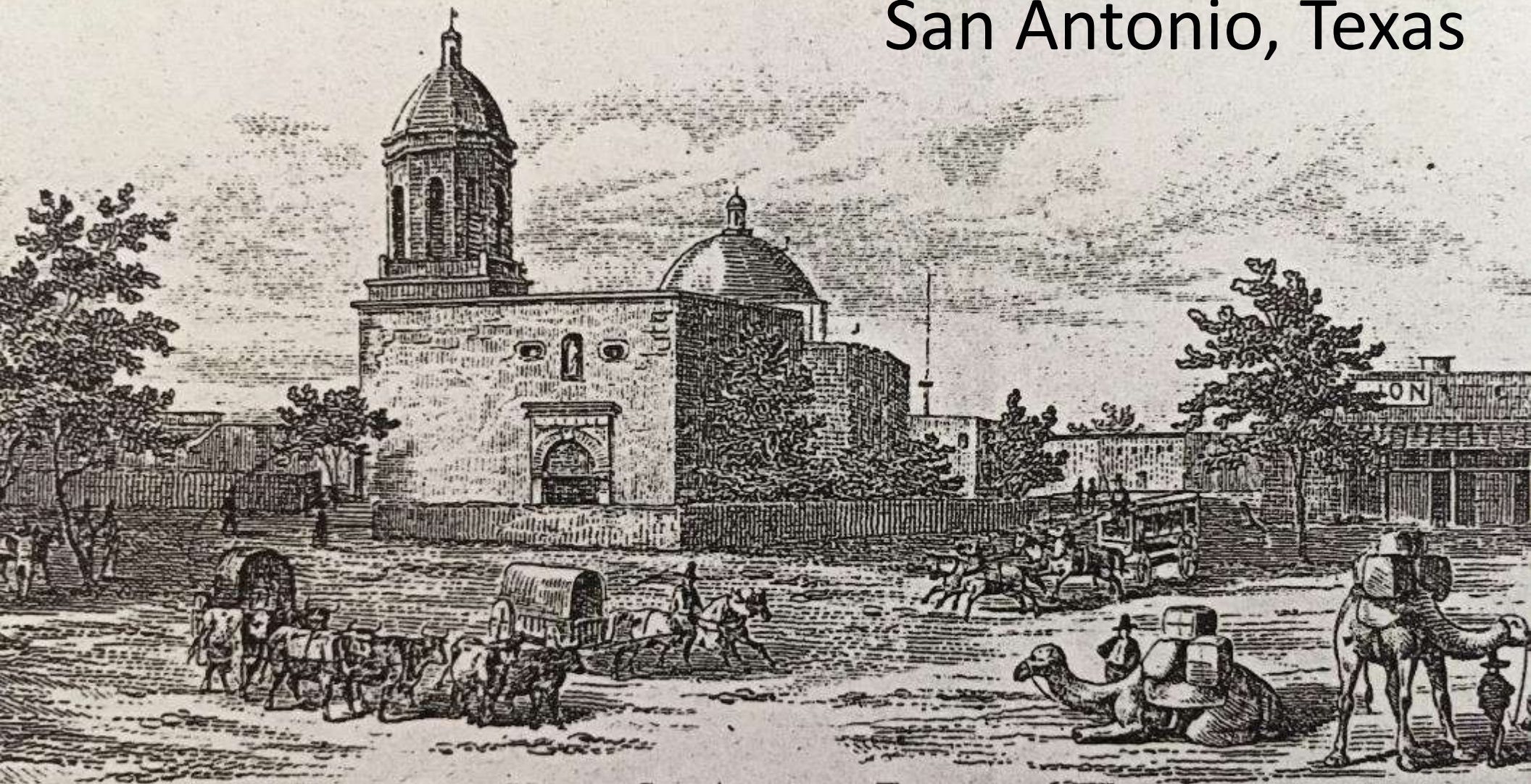


“I found some of the boys collected around a crawfish. These chaps are very plenty in Louisiana and live in the mud and are something like a lobster and about 5 inches long.”

Walter N. Hart. Drawing of crawfish. Uncensored letter to sister Louisa dated February 27, 1865 from Kennerville, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Walter N. Hart. Portion of stationery drawn by Erhard Pentenrieder.
Uncensored letter to his mother dated January 17, 1866 from San Antonio, Texas.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

San Antonio, Texas



Main Plaza San Antonio, Texas



Fall 1865-Spring 1866



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of Texas Star. Uncensored letter to brother William dated April 11, 1866 from San Antonio, Texas. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections

Duties

By November 1865, the 18th NY Cavalry participated in one last inspection and review by Generals Merritt and Gibb. Soon after, Walter was detached from his regiment and clerking with Major J. G. Butler at Division Head Quarters.

Change in Command

As the war wound down, some units were mustered out and the command of the cavalry in Texas was handed off to General George A. Custer.

Muster Out

On May 31, 1866, Walter was finally mustered out of service.



Photographer unknown. *Gen. George Armstrong Custer*, c1863. Print. Retrieved from civilwar.org

Native Americans

“A detachment of the regiment are at present out on the frontier near Fredericksburg, on indian scout. The Indians are very quiet now. Large numbers belonging to friendly tribes and who have been driven in by the Comanches are now encamped in the vicinity of San Antonio Almost every day sees some of them in camp. They are the humblest specimens of humanity I think I ever saw.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated December 3, 1864 from San Antonio, Texas.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

San Antonio Population

“Plaza every morning is filled with soldiers, wagon trains, negros and Mexicans wrapped in their striped ponchos with mules and jackasses loaded with country produce to sell and altogether presents quiet a lively scene.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated January 14, 1866 from San Antonio, Texas.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of native. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated February 7, 1866. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Texas Plant Life

In a letter to his Aunt Adelia Nichols, Walter remarked that the moss in Texas was a Spanish Moss. It was finer in texture and of a lighter green compared to that in Louisiana.

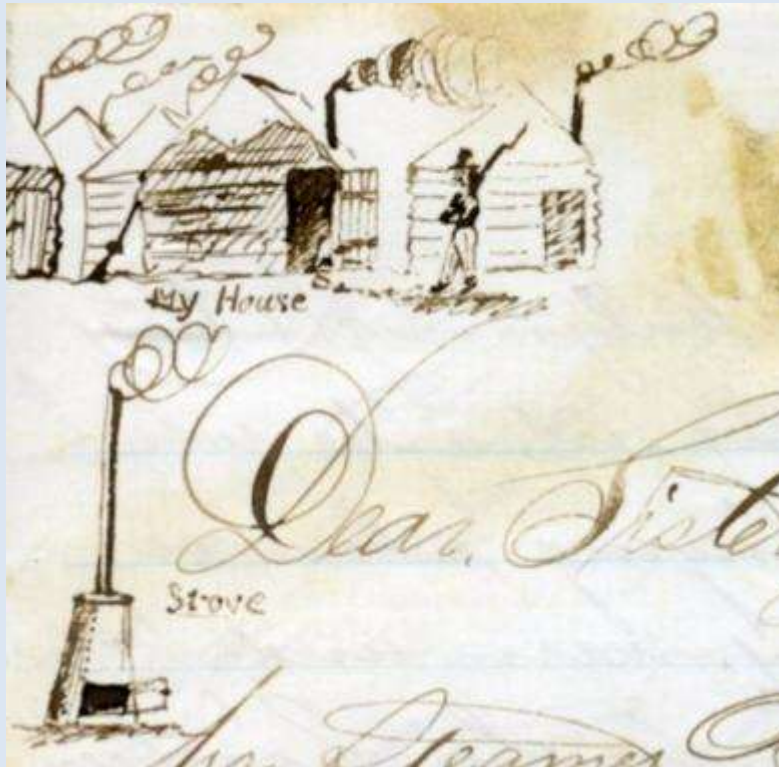
Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to aunt Louisa Adelia dated November 2, 1865 from Camp San Antonio Springs, Texas.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Texas Wild Life

“The prairie around our camp is full of prairie wolves, rabbits, grey squirrels, wild pigeons, possums, cows, turkeys etc. Many raccoons, possums and squirrels have been tamed by the soldiers...Our cook has a very fine grey squirrel which he keeps in his blouse pocket having it secured to his button hole by a string around its neck. Occasionally it will come out and run about on his sides and shoulders as though perfectly at home taking refuge again in the pocket on appearance of danger!”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother William dated December 10, 1865 from San Antonio, Texas.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Living Quarters Louisiana & Texas



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of hut and stove. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated November 28, 1864 from Thibodaux, La. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

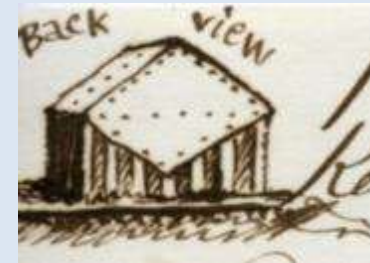


Walter N. Hart. Drawing of tent. Uncensored letter to brother William dated February 1, 1865 from Kennerville, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections

Living Quarters Louisiana & Texas



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of shelter tent. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated July 21, 1864 from Berwick Bay, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of hut. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated November 28, 1864. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Rations

6:30am Breakfast • 12:00pm Dinner • 5:30pm Supper

One or more of these items were served with exception of meat. Meat was not always available.

- Molasses
- Bread
- Hardtack
- Salt Pork
- Salt Beef
- Salt Horse
- Milk
- Water
- Coffee

Foraging

To supplement the rations, soldiers would forage for food. Walter regularly mentioned that he goes blackberry picking and sometimes finds peaches, plums, figs, oranges, onions, sweet potatoes, and pecans.

What was Hardtack?

Hardtack was a plain flour and water biscuit. For hungry soldiers it fell short for several reasons: they were difficult to chew; frequently were wet or moldy; and often infested with maggots and weevils.

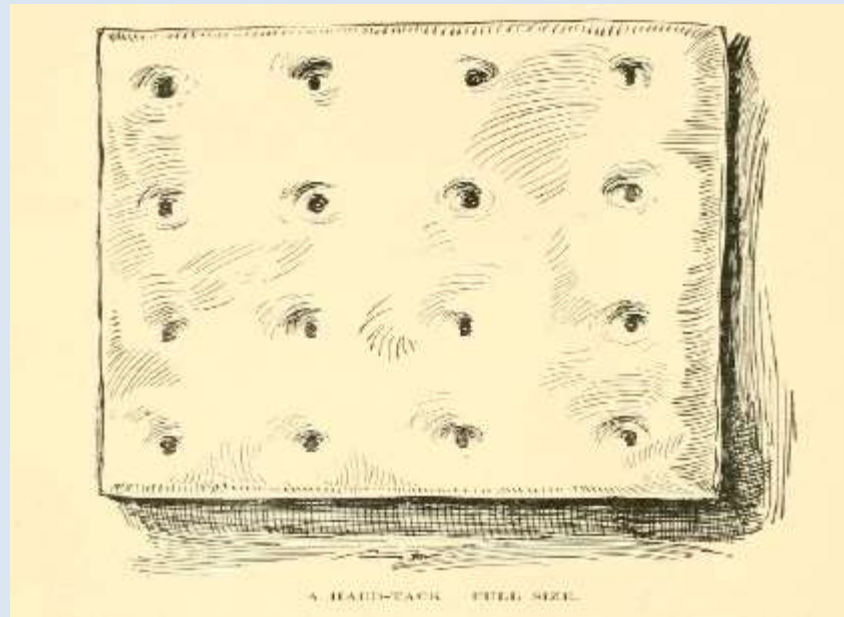


Image from *Hardtack and coffee*, p114

“You would laugh to see me cook dinner. First I put a cup of water on the fire and when it boils pour in a little coffee and sugar, then fry some pork in a tin and after soaking some hard tack in water fry it in the fat.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated May 7, 1864 from Alexandria., Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collections at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Cooking

Walter's idea of 'healthy' eating was a steady diet of:

- Sliced onions in vinegar,
- Johnny cakes, and
- Molasses.

"So I just went in and bought a frying pan, tin pail to mix batter in, and another for molasses, and bought a gallon of meal at 20¢, paper of soda, butter, etc. Now every evening I mix up an Indian cake with butter and old bread broken up and bake it in the morning in Co. H's cook stove oven. 20 minutes suffices and it come out as light, brown and delicious as any you ever eat Sunday morning at home."

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Ambrose dated October 5, 1864 from Thibadaux, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collections at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Texas Baked Possum!

"It was very fat and most delicious eating and tender as a young chicken."

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated November 28, 1865 from San Antonio, Texas.
Source: Hart Nichols Collections at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Health

Medicinal Pickles

“...pickles are given out to the men every few days to neutralize any evils which might result from eating too much pork [illegible] meat. They are very good and come in barrels and are composed of many kinds of vegetables and fruits.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Edmund dated July 13, 1864 from Berwick, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Water Supply

Sergeant Ambrose B. Hart observed that the ‘slops’ from the Cook house and the camp refuse were dumped into the Mississippi River. This was the same source of water they used for drinking and cooking.

Ambrose B. Hart. Uncensored letter to brother Walter dated April 3, 1863 from Camp Parapet, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collections at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Health

Water Supply

“This cistern water is the only water I drink here, and every morning I take my canteen to a house some distance off and fill it from a large cistern there. These cisterns are immense great tubs shaped thus...and are placed at the corners of the houses to catch the rain often reaching as high as the eaves.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated July 21, 1864 from Berwick Bay, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.



Walter N. Hart. Drawing of cistern. Uncensored letter to sister Elizabeth Emily dated July 21, 1864.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

“...the water is getting low in the tanks and full of – wiggles which you know exist in rain water after standing a few days. It is not very pleasant to contemplate that at every swallow from the canteen, one or more goes down ones gullet.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to mother dated October 12, 1864 from Thibadaux, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Health

“This is a healthy place for those who know how to take care of themselves. A soldier who confines himself to army grub and is prudent avoids eating green fruits and drinking too much water will generally be healthy, hearty and grow [illegible] But too many of the men are utterly reckless of their health and drink canteen after canteen of bay water besides eating quantities of cucumbers, melons, pies and beer and as a consequence are constantly suffering with pain, diarrhea, etc.”

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to his mother dated July 18, 1864 from Berwick City, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Military Funeral

In a letter to his mother, Walter describes a soldier's funeral procession.

"The slow measured tread and reversed guns of the soldiers low rattle of the drums and mournful wail of the dead march (Portuguese Hymn, I think) was solemn and impressive enough. If his parents or friends far away could have witnessed that scene, what grief would have been there."

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to his mother dated July 18, 1864 from Berwick City, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

Assassination of President Lincoln

"We have heard of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It had created the greatest [illegible] and sorrow. The city has been draped in mourning ever since the news arrived. The black soldiers particularly all wear crape on the left arm. They fell terrible about it. I hope it will not change peace prospects. I think the war is virtually over."

Walter N. Hart. Uncensored letter to sister Mary dated April 25, 1865 from Camp Distribution, New Orleans, Louisiana. Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

The Hart and Nichols Collection is located in the Special Collections Department at Hofstra University. It can be accessed by appointment. The Department is located in the Joan & Donald E. Axinn Library, Room 032. Please call (516) 463-6411 for an appointment or additional information.



Walter N. Hart. Drawing. Uncensored letter to mother dated December 21, 1864 from Thibodaux, Louisiana.
Source: Hart Nichols Collection at Hofstra University Special Collections.

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