

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Memphis Tenn
Jan 2d 1864

Dear Parents

The old Year ended with rain, Sleet, Snow & wind, about as bad as any that I ever seen in the north & the weather ever since has been quite rough. It is colder now than any day last winter; there is a little snow on the ground just enough to make it disagreeable & sliprey. I am glad we got in from our late scouting expedition, before this cold weather set in.

I will write you a little about our experience on the last trip, for it undoubtedly will be of interest to you, to hear that we were in our first battle last sunday evening Dec 27 1863. Christmas was passing off quite merrily until about 12 M. when we received orders to be ready for a scouting expedition, and at 3 P.M. we marched for the Memphis and Charleston Depot¹ there to take the Cars for Moscow, Tenn.² The expedytion consisted of Companies "F", "E", "G", "K", and "R" of our Regiment and as many of the 89th Ind. Regiment, in all about 400 men. We arrived at Moscow, 9 P.M. There was a cold northwest wind blowing, and rain was beginning to fall. We were quartered under a rude Horseshed, which gave protection from the rain, but the wind had full play, and I must acknowledge that I have seen places where I would rather sleep than there. But we managed to pass that night, the next day and night, until 12 M. sunday Dec 27 when we received marching orders, for Lafayette, ten miles from Moscow. The news came that the rebel Genl. Forest was in possession of the place, and had burned the town. When we came within two miles of Lafayette a halt was made to await reinforcements from La Grange it consisted of 25th Indiana and 32d Wisconsin, commanded by Col. Morgan of the 32d Wis. We now moved forward our batalion³ taking the lead, and soon reached the place where our skirmishes, were already engaged. Our Batalion formed a line of battle previous to the charge, the 25th and 32d acted as a reserve.⁴ Our commander Major Henry of the 89th asked Col. Morgan to send one of his regiments in front because they were old and experienced troops, but he would not listen to him; I suppose he expected we would be whiped back and they would receive the honor of gaining the victory alone, but he was doomed to be disappointed if that was his intention, for we gave one loud yell and went forward. It was now getting quite dark so that it was difficult to distinguish our men from the enemy. But that did not seem to be an obstacle, the men were to eager for the fight, and in 30 minutes the enemy was routed and took to their heels. Our loss was but very small two killed and three wounded, one of our Company was killed. His name was Donaphon. The rebels lost between 35 and 40. This is from the best information I

¹ The Memphis and Charleston Depot must refer to the local depot on the Memphis and Charleston Railroad.

² Moscow, Tennessee is approximately 35 miles east of Memphis. La Grange is approximately 10 miles east of Moscow. Lafayette has not been identified.

³ Infantry regiments were not organized into Battalions (the proper spelling), but heavy artillery regiments had battalions consisting of four companies. Since Corporal Wolf's regiment had been serving as heavy artillery, possibly this is why the battalion designation is used. (Boatner, 612.)

⁴ The reserve force is held out of an action initially and is used to clinch a victory or exploit success. (Boatner, 34.)

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could get. We took 7 prisoners, one was wounded. The rebels engaged outnumbered us 4 to 1. We fought about 2000 with 300.⁵ One of the rebel prisoners said, you'ens fought like devils. It is the greatest wonder in the world that there were not more of us killed, for the bullet's flew as thick as hail. We had to suffer that night very much from cold; we were wet all over, the rain had been falling all afternoon and to top it off, marched through a Bayou, before the battle the water being neck deep. I do not believe that there was a dry stich of clothing on me. If ever persons suffered with cold it was our Batalion. But the worst was there was nothing to eat. We only had two rations of provissions with us when we started, and that was used up in the morning. The rebels did not do much damage, they tore up the up part of the rail road track and burned about 500 cords of wood, which saved us from freezing that night.

Thank god that we have been protected so far, in our dangerous undertaking. Let us pray that we may always be, until it is over.

Goodbye for the present.

I remain as ever Your affectionate Son

A.P. Wolf

⁵ The action above referred to has been classified as a skirmish so it is doubtful that 2,000 Confederates were actually involved. (Long, 442.)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Memphis Tenn
Jan 24, 1864

Dear Parents

I received your kind letter today, and will hasten to answer it for fear that I will not have time to do so tomorrow. You will be astonished to hear that our Regiment has positive Orders to leave Memphis in a day or two. Our destination is not known, but it is the general belief we are bound for Mobile, Alabama or Texas, for an expedition is fitted up for one of those points, and will be ready tomorrow or day after. We have been expecting these orders for some time, but our going was uncertain until today. I am not sorry that we have to leave this place, if I were certain that it would not increase your anxiety for our safety, and comfort. In fact I think I shall be well pleased with the change, it will give us a chance to see more of the Country than while we remain stationary. I have no doubt but what there will be many hardships to endure, but a strong heart and a good will for the cause that we are fighting, will endure almost any hardships. Besides, it is an evident fact that we did not enlist to play the gentleman in a blue uniform, but to be a soldier and be satisfied with a soldiers fare, let that be as miserable as it will, and God knows that it is sometimes very poor, especially on a march. If we go to Mobile, we will go to Vicksburg by water, and from there take it afoot the rest of the way. But if our destination is Texas, we will go up the Red River as far as it is navigable, then take it through the country. Our Division¹ consists of four Brigades, and each Brigade has four Regiments, and 1 Battery of Artillery, six pieces to make a Battery. This will make a formidable force, large enough to do some good fighting. You must not feel uneasy if you should not hear from us for some time for we may be so situated, that it would be impossible for letters to reach you. But rest assured that I will write as often as possible, and wish you to do the same. There will be more chances for your letters to come, than ours to go. Direct them as usual at Memphis or in the Field. I must now close for it is getting late. I have had too much writing to do today so you must excuse this short letter. I will now bid you good bye, with the wish that we may soon meet again when war & bloodshed, shall be no more. I shall always remember that I have kind & loving parents, Brothers and a sister who will welcome me home.

I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son.

A. P. Wolf

P. S. My friend Mr. Barbour sends his respects.

¹ Union divisions normally consisted of two or more brigades and brigades were made up of two or more regiments. (Boatner, 611.)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Vicksburg Miss
Jan 31st 1864

Dear Parents

From the heading of this you will see that we are not stationed at Mississippi but at that noted place Vicksburg. I cannot say much in favor of this place, there is little to be seen but soldiers and they are rough and dirty looking. I cannot blame them for it, for it is a bad place to keep clean. It would be useless for me to give you a description of the situation of Vicksburg. That you have read hundreds of times in the papers better than I could describe. I will say this much for it, that it must have been a beautiful place before the war, but it has suffered the effects of it to the greatest extent. We had a very pleasant trip from Memphis down, on the Steam Boat Sioux City, the weather was all that could be wished until we reached Vicksburg. Last night we had a rough time of it for we were hardly ashore when it began to rain. The color guard made a house with rubber Blankets which kept the most of the rain off. We slept as comfortable as three in a bed and three in the middle possibly could do. At about twelve our domicil came down on top of us, but we got it up again and got in to try to sleep and succeeded well until the morning when the drums roused us out for the second time.¹ One of the boys after considerable looking about found himself outside in the mud. I do not think we will remain here long. I think we will depart today or tomorrow. I understand we have a march for twenty days. Where to, is kept secret. This seems to be a very misterious movement altogether for no one knows our destination, not even our Colonel. I know this much we have some hard marching to do. I must now close for today. Give my love to all & keep a good share for yourself.

I remain as ever Your obedient Son

A P Wolf

¹ Drums as well as bugles were used to sound reveille, the signal to arise from sleep. There were some dozen drum calls, and a veteran regiment could maneuver by drumbeat alone. (Coggins, 20.)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Camp near Vicksburg Miss
February 2d 1864

Dear Parents

As we expect to leave this place early tomorrow morning I thought it right to inform you. Our destination is not known but the supposition is we are going from here to Big Black & then to Jackson, where there are some 3000 Rebels. But this is only the rumor. Yesterday we left Vicksburg for our present Camp which is about 3 miles from the river among the hills and fortification where General Grant and his brave men fought so hard. To look at the imence amount of earthworks, in the rear of Vicks. a person would almost think it impossible that so formidable a position could be taken. Our men dug trenches for miles in length so as to get in under the Rebel fortifications. There is not a hill near Vicks. that is not hollow. In some places our men were not more than three or four feet from the enemy.¹ But you know all about this. Ever since we left the Boat, field service has begun in earnest. The first night it rained almost all night. The second, we had a shower which blew down our tent and left us exposed to the storm for the rest of the night. I did not have a dry stich of clothing on me. All I could do was to grin & bear it. Yesterday & today I have had considerable of a cold which threw me into a slight fever. But I expect to be all right by tomorrow.

I must now close for today. I hope we will soon hear from you. But that is almost impossible if we go to Mobile. Goodbye.

I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son.

A. P. Wolf

¹ The Confederate forces in Vicksburg were under siege for six weeks, and about 29,000 men surrendered on July 4, 1863. (Long, 78-379.)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Jackson Miss
Feb 7th 1864

Dear Parents

Otto and I are well, our Regiment skirmished all day yesterday, there were 5 wounded and one killed out of our company his name Chas. Stuart from Collinsville. If you send any letters Direct 117th Reg 3d Brigade 3d Div 16th Army Corps Via Jackson Miss.

I have not time to write any more at present, for the train that is to be sent back leaves in a few minutes.

So goodbye.

Yours most affectionately

A. P. Wolf

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

In Camp near Canton Miss
Feb 26th 1864

Dear Parents

As you will see by my penmanship, that I am writing under a difficulty by a very poor light. I did not expect to have an opportunity to send a letter from here, ten minutes ago, & had it not been for an expedition from here to Vicksburg I should not send this. We have had a very hard time since we left Vicksburg. Living on quarter rations almost all the time, I know not if we will have more. Today we drew 3/4 of a ration which has to last us ten days if not more. This is easily endured as long as we keep good health which thank god we have had so far.

Every day we have had several skirmishes with the enemy. On the fifth we skirmished all day. Our regiment being in the advance. We had two killed and seven wounded some mortally. I know not how they are getting along as we left them at Jackson Miss. The last gun that was fired by the enemy on that day killed one of our corporals by the name of Stuart from Collinsville. I think although I say it myself that we have as good a fighting regiment as is in the field. Our cavalry took 20 prisoners and one gun (cannon).¹

The only trouble our officers had was to keep the men back. Our regt. and the 2d Ills. drove two brigades of rebels all day.

I must now close, Otto & I are well & god grant that you may be the same. We expect to go to Yazoo City soon, if we do I can give you a better description of our doings. Till then good bye Give my love to all, but save a good share for yourself.

From your Affectionate Son

Adolph

¹ On February 5, 1864 Union troops under the command of Gen. William T. Sherman skirmished continually for eighteen miles before marching into Jackson, Mississippi. Possibly this is the skirmish to which Corporal Wolf refers. (Long, 461.)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

On St. Thos. E. Tuft
Near Mouth of Red River
March 7th 1864

Dear Parents.

As you will see by the heading of this, we are on another expedition but our destination is not known yet. I suppose it will up Red River, we have had a pleasant trip so far. The weather is fine. We expect hard fighting this time.

I have not got time to write more at present Good Bye
From Your Son

A P Wolf

P.S. We received your last letter

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort De Russy Louisiana
March 15th 1864

Dear Parents

You see that we are now hundreds of miles from Vicksburg or any of our forces. We are now on the Red River. But we did not arrive at this point without fighting our way. Yesterday the rebels made the best stand, that we have met with since we have been out. It was at Ft. DeRusia, one of the best Forts that I ever saw and with a force of 5000 it would have been impossible for us to take it, but as it was they only had about 300 men at the time of our attack. But I must give those 300 credit. They fought bravely. They were as brave as their confederates that deserted them were cowardly. 5000 of Texas troops left about three hours before we got there. I understood that they were tired of fighting and wanted to go home so they thought that this was a favorable opportunity to Desert and so they did it. The cannonading was very heavy for about one hour when General A. J. Smith thought it too slow a war and ordered a charge and consequently the Fort was in our possession in about half an hour.¹ Our regiment was not in the charge, therefore we cannot claim much honor, but we did our duty and that is all that is required.²

I have not got time to write more at present so Good Bye
From your Obedient Son

A. P. W.

I had to write this in great haste explicit hereafter. I will try to be more

Read this Letter to Grandfather & give him my love. I would like to write to him, but it is too hard for me to make my self understood in german. Tell Fritz to write to me soon or I shall be angry with him. I feel very thankful for Matildas letter & will write a whole one for especial benefit as soon as I can find time until then she must be satisfied with reading your letters.

Now Good Bye

¹ The Battle of Fort De Russy, Louisiana, was the first engagement in the Red River Campaign of March–May 1864 in the American Civil War.

² Confederate General E. Kirby Smith, who was in command of all Confederate forces West of the Mississippi River, states that Fort De Russy was built to protect the Red River from Union gun-boats and that Union General A. J. Smith advanced so quickly taking the fort in reverse that Confederate troops could not be concentrated to protect it. Nothing is said about the desertion of 5,000 Texas troops. (Yoseloff, vol. IV, 369.)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Boices Landing, Red River
Above Alexandria La/April 1st/64

Dear Parents

We are again many miles from Gods Country, in the heart of Rebeldom, and penetrating still farther. We are now nearing the only stronghold of the rebels, of any consequence they have in the West. That is Shrevesport, Louisiana. If we can judge by the different reports it is my opinion that it will be a hard place to take, and many a precious life lost. But we cannot expect anything better as long as men stand and shoot at each other. I will not dwell upon this subject, for there would be little use in sadening our, hearts, about things that we cannot change. I will tell you a little about our trip. So far it has been a very pleasant one with a few exceptions, and had we been (obliterated).¹ We have had an easy time, in comparison with cur late march through Mississippi. All our marching, would not amount to more than 100 miles, and that was through a beautiful country thickly settled. Our rout lay along the banks of some stream where those beautifull plantations are situated, upon which the South boasts so much. And well can they boast, for I never saw a more beautiful farming country, and were I not so much prejudiced against the South, I would be tempted, if possible, to make this my future home. So far we have had but little opposition, and our march has been rather a brisk one. But still there has been two little skirmishes, one at Ft. DeRussy, and one near this place. At the Fort we captured about 260 prisoners 7 pieces of Artillery, a large lot of small arms and Amunition. Near this place we captured 240 prisoners 7 pieces of artillery and some small arms.

[Transcription of this particular letter appears to end abruptly, implying that some of the missive is missing. (See footnote below.) At the bottom of the second page of transcription there is the beginning of another letter that may actually be a continuation of the letter above, appended at a later date.]

¹ Transcriber's note, indicating that the original letter has been damaged beyond reading?

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Grand Ecore La¹
April 18th 1864

Dear Parents

We received your kind letter of March 17 a few days ago and would have answered it sooner but our Brigade was sent up the river to save our fleet of transports from capture by the rebels and did not return until a day or two ago.² When we arrived in Camp I was so tired and worn out that it was nearly impossible for me to commit my thoughts to paper, so I put it off until today.

Since my last letter we have had a very hard time. Our Corps fought one of the hardest battles that have been fought during the war, that is for the length of time it lasted. On the 7th of this month we left Grand Ecore for Shreveport. Banks's rear having left the day before. After a march of 15 miles through mud and rain we camped for the night, the rain not ceasing until near midnight. The next morning early found us again on our way. About 2 p.m. heavy firing was heard in front, but apparently some twenty miles off. I know that there was hard fighting going on, for the cannons roared fearfully. It was not long before an order came from Gen A. J. Smith to quicken our pace. He said if there was fighting to be done, he wanted to have a hand in it. We poor soldiers were to be pitied, nearly tired out, but still a double quick of about 7 miles before there could be any rest for us. Otto and I managed to get in about as near right as any of them but there were others that did not stay it so well, that we had to leave by the roadside, entirely give out. I have always managed to keep my place so far although I marched under severe difficulties. After we got into camp the news reached us that Banks met with a serious defeat, he lost 24 pieces of Artillery 4000 men and 80 wagons loaded with Commissary Stores and Ordnance, his army was completely routed and demoralized, which proved to be true for they retreated some 19 miles during the night, and did not stop until they were safely in our rear. All attempts to rally them proved fruitless. We were left to enjoy a night's sleep such sleep as a soldier enjoys the eve before a battle. At two in the morning the long roll was beaten, we jumped up and prepared a hasty breakfast, then were ordered to the front, for the enemy had moved up so as to give us battle early in the morning, and it was not long before the pickets opened fire, which was kept up until two P.M. at short intervals, then there was a pause which we all knew was the calm before the storm, sure enough it proved to be so. Our regiment was detached from the Brigade and sent out on picket, to the extreme left of our line of battle. The firing now commenced to be very heavy on the left center. Our regt was sent to cover the left flank to protect a flank movement of the enemy, which was thought would certainly happen. The battle now raged fearfully and for a while the tide turned against us for our whole left flank had to give way. But old Gen A. J. knew a thing or two and got his Guerillas in the rear of the enemy and so exposed them to a cross fire which they could not stand long, for as charge after charge was made they soon gave way. All this while our Regiment had to stand within 300 yards of the battlefield but

¹ Grand Ecore is on the Red River approximately eight miles north of Natchitoches, in Natchitoches Parish.

² In reference to saving "our fleet of transports", the boats were attacked on their way down river by Confederates on the banks of the Red River, but the boats did get through. It is probably this to which Corporal Wolf refers in the first paragraph of his letter. (Yoseloff, volume IV, , 357.)

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could not partake in the fight, the bullets whistling about us but did no harm. The field was a hard contested one, sometimes the enemy driving our troops and then we would drive them. After our men drove them 3 miles from the field they stopped and camped for it was getting too dark to follow them up any farther. Now comes the saddest part of my story which will be a shame and a blot in the military history of Gen Banks. Gen Smith commenced gathering up the wounded that were left on the field and provided for them as best he knew how, and thought they would bury the dead in the morning. But what was his surprise, as well as ours upon learning that we were to get up and retreat early in the morning. He (Gen Smith) begged leave to stay one day so as to bury the dead and take care of the wounded, but it was not granted. He then asked 4 hours, but that was also refused him. He received for answer that he (Banks) would draw off his forces during the night and did not care what Smith would do. Under these circumstances what could Gen Smith do with his handful of worn out men but retreat. They say that he cried like a child.³ It is true that Gen Smith's forces fought the battle on the 9th without any assistance from Banks except 1 Brigade and 50 pieces of Artillery. The brigade of Banks men run the first charge so he derived but little benefit from them. We had 8000 men in the fight.⁴ The rebel forces were estimated at from 24000 to 28000.⁵ This we have from rebel prisoners and estimate of our generals. Banks has (obliterated)⁶ opinion of Smith's men now than he used to.⁷ When we started from Alexandria he said that he did not want Smith's men to have anything to do with the taking of Shreveport. He said they were nothing but a set of Guerillas, and we have gone by that name ever since, after the battle of Pleasant Hill, (the name of the place where we had the battle) Banks acknowledged that he owed the safety of his army to Smith and his troops.⁸ The rebels said after the first hour's fight they knew that they had a different enemy to cope with than the day before. They call Banks their commissary.⁹ It is true our men fought like demons. When the battle commenced Gen Smith took off his hat and said, now boys fight for me and the union and they did fight.¹⁰

³ Referring to the removal of the wounded, Union Gen. A. J. Smith does not say that he "cried like a child", but he does definitely say that when he asked permission to bury his dead and provide for his wounded "the order to move was made peremptory". (*Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Volume 34, Part I, 309.)

⁴ The defeat of Union Gen. Banks' forces referred to in the letter of Corporal Wolf is known as the Battle of Sabine Cross-roads. The Battle of Pleasant Hill which followed was brought about when Union Generals A. J. Smith and William H. Emory covered the retreat of Gen. Banks. (Yoseloff, volume IV, 354-355.)

⁵ Corporal Wolf has over, estimated the Confederate forces; they did not number over 13,000. (Yoseloff, volume IV, 368.)

⁶ Transcribers note, indicating that the original manuscript is unreadable.

⁷ Confederate General E. Kirby Smith says of the Battle of Pleasant Hill that his command was so disorganized that had Union Gen. Banks followed up his success vigorously he would have had but little opposition to his advance on Shreveport. However, Banks retreated "converting a victory which he might have claimed into a defeat". (Yoseloff, volume IV, , 372.)

⁸ Gen. Smith does say that Gen. Banks said to him on the battlefield, "Go bless you, general; you have saved the army". (*Official Records*, Series I, Volume 34, Part I, 309.)

⁹ Gen. Banks was called by the Confederates "Commissary" Banks because on May 25, 1862 in Virginia he was so decisively defeated by Confederate General Thomas ("Stonewall") Jackson and lost such a wealth of his quartermaster stores that the Confederates jocularly thought of him as their supply department. (Foote, volume II, 435.)

¹⁰ To top off the fiasco of the Red River Campaign, as the boats came down river it was found that the water level had fallen more than six feet, that at one point there was but three feet four inches of water and

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117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Gen Smith is in my estimation one of our best Generals.
I will now close with the best wishes for your welfare.
Otto and I are getting along quite well.
Please write soon & often. I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

We expect to go to Vicksburg soon.

I hear that there will be a little more time so I can explain. Our expedition consists of about 10000 Infantry but very little Artillery and cavalry. 19 gunboats and twenty transports, whenever near a Fort the, Infantry Art and Cav, make a circuit around attack from the land side and the Gunboats from the River. But our G boats were of very little use this time for they did not come up before it was taken. I must now quit. Good Bye.

that the gun boats needed at least seven feet. With real genius and skill, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Bailey of the 4th Wisconsin Regiment constructed a series of dams that raised the water level sufficiently to extricate the boats. However, Gen. A. J. Smith's troops embarked for Vicksburg on May 22, 1864, two weeks after the opening of the Atlanta campaign in which they were to have taken part, and the whole Red River Campaign raised "a great and bitter crop of quarrels", Gen. A. J. Smith departing "more in anger than in sorrow". (Yoseloff, volume IV, , 358-361.)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Natchitoches¹ La. April (date
obliterated) 1864

Since I wrote the above, we have gone something near 100 miles up Red River. We are now within three days march of Shreveport,² & are only waiting for General Bank's³ forces to catch up with us, to make another move forward, which move will likely be Shreveport. I have great confidence in success, for there will be a very large force concentrated something near 40,000, the whole to be under the immediate command of General Banks, in whom I have great confidence.⁴ I think this is one of the most important movements, that has been made in this part of the Country, and if crowned with success will aid not a little in bringing this war to a close. Let us pray that we may return victorious, and I think we shall, for when I look at the material we have, to do the work with, it leaves one beyond a doubt.⁵ Plenty of Artillery, a large fleet of gunboats, some 18,000 Cavalry, 30,000 Infantry, and what is more, cheerful hearts, and willing hands can only succeed. Perhaps you would like to know, to what part of the army our Regiment belongs. It is the 3d Brigade 3d Division 16th Army Corps. Part of the 16th & part of the 17th Corps, are on this expedition Commanded by A. J. Smith.⁶ Our Division Commander is Brig. Gen. Maurers.⁷ Brigade Commander is our venerable Col. R. H. Moore. Speaking of the Colonel, I cannot but say a few words in his favor. For my part I like him better than any Colonel, that I have seen on this expedition, and if I mistake not, will make his mark. I am very anxious to hear from you, for it has been some time since we received your last letter. It was the day before we left Vicksburg. It is true, it was a good long one, and fear that it will have to last us a long while.⁸

Please write long letters, when you do write for there is no telling how long we have to wait until we receive them. You did not mention of receiving any of my letters that I wrote to you after leaving Vicksburg. I can assure you that not a single opportunity

¹ The proper spelling is "Natchitoches".

² The proper spelling is "Shreveport".

³ Union General Nathaniel P. Banks was a so-called "political General", a former member of Congress, former Governor of Massachusetts and a good Republican. (Catton, 198.)

⁴ The total force under the command of Gen. Banks was slightly over 31,000 of which the marching column consisted of a little less than 26,000. (Yoseloff, volume IV, 367.)

⁵ Corporal Wolf is writing about what is called the Red River Campaign. The Red River empties into the Mississippi River and when followed towards its source forms part of the Northern border of Texas and runs into the panhandle. The Federal government wanted "to restore the flag in Texas", and a combined naval and military movement by the Red River was indicated. Union Generals Grant and Banks both thought that a movement against Mobile, Alabama was more important than the one against Texas. (Yoseloff, volume IV, 345.)

⁶ Union General A. J. (Andrew Jackson) Smith, born in 1815, was graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1838, and served on the frontier and in the Mexican War before the Civil War. He was said to be popular with his men, and he certainly was with Corporal Wolf. (Boatner, 768.)

⁷ Union Brigadier General Joseph A. Mower was in command of the First and Third Divisions (not "Mauers") as Corporal Wolf spells the name. (Yoseloff, volume IV, 367.)

⁸ The troops under the command of Gen. A. J. Smith were more or less on loan from Union General William T. Sherman, and, if Shreveport was not taken by April 25, 1864, they were to be returned to Vicksburg by May 10, 1864 to take part in the campaign against Atlanta, Georgia. (Yoseloff, volume IV, 350.)

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passed without my sending one. I have even got up, after going to sleep, and wrote letters by the light of a Campfire for fear that there would not be time in the morning. I wish that you would state the date and place of letters that you receive from me so I can see if any were lost. I must now close for the mail will leave in a few minutes. I hope soon to hear from you and good news too. Give my love to all at home. But keep a good share for yourselves. I remain as ever your Affectionate Son

A P Wolf

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Vicksburg Miss
May 24th, 1864

Dear Parents

At last to our great joy we are once more in Vicksburg with a whole skin and in good health. I have not the time to spare to give you a Record of events, at present, but let it suffice you to know that Otto and I are so far safe. Our destination from this place is not known, for certain, but it is generally believed to be either Little Rock, Ark. Memphis Tenn, Columbus, KY The Army of the Cumberland or Potomac.

I wrote a long letter o Fritz the other day. Mailed at Alexandria which I fear has been lost. If he has received it, let me know.

Direct your letters as usual. Write soon.

Give my love to all, but keep a good share for yourselves.

I remain as ever. Your Affectionate Son.

A. P. Wolf

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Memphis Tenn
June 15th. 1864

Dear Parents

You must excuse this short & hasty note. The reason I send it, is, we expect to leave early in the morning, so I thought it proper to let you know that we are once more at our old stand. The place seems a second home to us, and it looks quite natural. We arrived here on the 9th, but I deferred writing until we should get our Camp fixed up. But we were not destined to remain long in idleness. The day after we got into Camp, orders came to be ready to go on a three days march, with a notice of one-half hour. We came back late last night and this evening, we received orders to be ready to move at a moment's warning tomorrow. Our destination is not known. I don't think we will be gone long, so do not be uneasy on our account. I suppose you have heard of the late unsuccessful expedition under Gen Sturgis, it was a worse affair than that of Banks. The men that were out say that it was a perfect slaughter pen.¹ But I will tell you more, when I can find out something definite. I wish it had been our old Gen Grey Beard, as we call Smith. I think he would have given Forest a chastizing.² But they can't all be like him (Gen Smith.)

I received Mothers kind letter yesterday which I shall answer as soon as possible. Give my love to all at home.

I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

Write soon and often

¹ The "unsuccessful expedition" referred to was that of Union Gen. S. D. Sturgis with about 7,800 men who was sent out to destroy the cavalry of Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest. Forrest with about 3,500 men fought the Battle of Brice's Cross Roads in Northeastern Mississippi on June 10, 1864 and cost Gen. Sturgis about 2,200 in killed, wounded and captured together with 16 out of 18 guns and all 250 of his supply wagons. (Boatner, 85)

² Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest, born in 1821 in poverty, became a very wealthy businessman, including slave trading, in Memphis, Tennessee. Enlisting as a Private in the Confederate Army he raised a body of men and was commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel. He later became a General and, without military training, had a born military genius. Union General William T. Sherman said of him, "That devil Forrest must be hunted down and killed if it costs ten thousand lives and bankrupts the Federal treasury." Forrest is well known for his explanation of success in battle, "Get there first with the most men." (Boatner, 288-289)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Memphis Tenn
June 17th. 1864,

The order for another expedition, has to all appearances been countermanded, for the present, so we are allowed to enjoy a little rest, such as can be obtained in a Camp without suitable shelter; for you must remember that we are as yet without Tents, nothing but our Rubber Blankets to protect us from the frequent Rain Storms. But still we get a little of the much needed rest. We are not annoyed daily with the boom of cannon, and shriek of shells and still more disagreeable rattle of Musketry.

The troops in this command, are too much worn out to be taken on another expedition at present. They need at least two months rest in some good Camp, supplied with Tents. If a person can place any reliance in the rumors that are in circulation here, we will soon draw some Tents, and remain stationed at this place, during the hot Months. But I fear the News are too good to be true.

I will tell you a little about our trip from Vicksburg to Memphis. Our Regiment was quartered on Board the New Steamer Leviathan a very good and fast Boat. Things went quite smooth until we came near Greenville, where the Rebels had their Battery planted, for the annoyance of Transports. But the General played a different game on them. He had the troops to disembark and take the gentlemen in the rear. But they got wind of it and took to their heels before we could catch them. The rain poured down heavy all day, which made the road very bad. The ground in some places was so slipry we could with difficulty keep on our feet and at other times so sticky that many of the men lost their shoes, and had to take barefooted the rest of the way. The advance was led into a trap set by the enemy where we lost near 100 killed and wounded. The enemies loss is supposed to have been about the same. It was rather a sharp trick. The way it was, we were marching along the Bank of a lake in column by file four deep with the skirmish line the proper distance in advance, the Rebels not more than one mile in front of them. Here they masked a Battery on the opposite side of a Bayou, in some thick underbrush, and destroyed the bridge leading across the Bayou.¹ They allowed our skirmish line to come close up to their Battery, so they could rake our main column with grape and canister,² under the circumstances our line had to fall back, but not before they tried to charge the Battery; they were prevented from taking it, by the Bayou which they could not cross, before making a bridge. We were quartered in a pleasant little town that night, the name is Lakevilage. We marched about 15 Miles that day, I must acknowledge that I never was so tired, and strained after a days march, as that night. Our Brigade had the good fortune to be in the center so we did not come in for our share, of Rebel Grape and

¹ The skirmish referred to was probably at Greenville, Mississippi and probably on May 27, 1864. (Long, 510)

² "Grape and canister" was a catchy phrase used erroneously by non-artillery personnel since grape was used very little, if at all, by land forces by 1863, if not earlier. (Naisawald, 6) Canister were cast iron balls packed twenty-seven to a tin container (Coggins, 67), whereas grape consisted of nine shot held together by cast-iron plates. (Lord, 67) "The field artillery man's most lethal load was canister. The tin cylinders filled with iron shot or musket balls turned a cannon into a monster sawed-off shot-gun. Against troops in mass formation it was devastating; and it undoubtedly caused more casualties than all other artillery projectiles combined." (Coggins, 62)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

canister. I can't say that I am very sorry for it. The next day we reached the Boats without further molestation. After that we soon reached Memphis, but we were not destined to stay here long, before taking another short trip into the country. It did not last more than three days. We are now Camped in a pleasant grove, but still under Marching Orders.

I must add a little of the great political question, to top off with. I should like to know which is yours and father's favorite, A. Lincoln or John C. Fremont? I for my part am heart and hand for old Abe. He certainly is the most suitable man for the position. Besides I would think it one of the meanest actions that the people ever did to drop him at the present time. I hope you will all coincide with me in opinion this time.³

I must now close for it is getting dark. Good Bye & may god always protect you.

I remain as ever your Obedient Son

A. P. Wolf

³ Corporal Wolf's reference to Lincoln and Fremont was a question as to his parents' choice for President in the 1864 elections.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Camp Near Moscow Tenn
June 25th 1864

Dear Parents

I thought it better not to wait for an answer for my last three letters, but thought it dutiful, to keep you informed of our Movements, so as to prevent all unnecessary anxiety on our account.

You can see by the beading of this, that we have again changed our base of operations, from the banks of the Mississippi to the Interior of the State of Tennessee. As yet we are but about 40 Miles from. Memphis, on the Memphis and Charleston Rail Roads; But expect soon to press farther. That is if Forest is of the same opinion, and will not veto it. From what I can understand, Gen A. J. Smith is to take the offensive against Forest. I am certain they could not have chosen a more able man than our old Guerilla Chieftain. I am confident that if he gets a chance, he will learn Forest a lesson that he will remember to the last day of his life and one day over. If they ever meet, it will be a regular guerilla fight from the word go, For Smith has troops in his command that understand that mode of fighting as well as Forest, and still will have the advantage in an open field fight. But we must not forget that Forrest is a good general, as well as Brave and cruel. The Colored troops in this Dept have taken a solemn oath never to take prisoners, but kill them as fast as they can get hold of them. I do not blame them much for they have been treated shamefully, the last few Months.

Yesterday while coming out the train was fired into by a Company Guerillas. Our Brigade lost some 4 or 5 killed and ten or fifteen wounded. There was one man wounded out of our Regiment. It seemed to have been done with Buckshot or pistol the hole was too small for a Musket ball. The cars were going very fast at the time so I believe we did not do too much damage, and before the cars could be stopped, the rebels left, for parts unknown to us.

I am sorry we had to leave Memphis. For it is such a nice place to be Stationed. It seems to be a healthy place and the citizens seem more sociable, than any other place, that I have been to in the South.

I must now close for the mail leaves directly. Write soon and often and tell Fritz to answer my last or I shall give him fits. Give my love to all. But keep a good share for yourselves.

From Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

In haste

Note: The reference to the colored troops and their oath not to take prisoners is probably a reference to the Fort Pillow massacre. Fort Pillow was a Union fort in Tennessee built to protect navigation on the Mississippi River which was manned by 262 negroes and 295 white troops. It was taken by Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest on April 12, 1864 with approximately 231 Union soldiers killed and 100 wounded. Northern accounts maintain that the Federal troops surrendered and that the Rebels shot them in cold blood shouting "No quarter! Kill the damn niggers; shoot them down."¹

¹ Boatner, 295-296.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

La Grange Tenn
July 3d 1864

My Dear Mother

According to promise I will now answer your last letter, for fear that leisure hours will be too scarce, to admit of letter writing, after we leave our present Camp. From what I can learn, preparations are being made for a long march, perhaps of two or three Months, and perhaps only of a few days. The present state of the weather will hardly permit marching. It is entirely too hot. The other day when we marched from Moscow to LaGrange a distance of about 10 miles, men fell dead on the road, sun struck. Our regiment in our Brigade had 5 men die, and their Colonel is dead or will die before long. All with overheat. That was the first time, during all our marching that I stragled, and could not keep up with our Colonel, on his horse. I should have kept up this time but I was afraid of getting sick. If we march much I hope it will be done at night, for it is impossible, to get men to stand it in day time. Marching at night has its disadvantages it wears out men fast, because they cannot sleep in the heat of the day. I will now drop the subject, perhaps you can hear more in my next about it, for I expect to have some practical experience by that time. I will do it cheerfully if any advantage can be gained by it, and help to bring this cruel war to a speedy close. If possible before the next Presidential Inauguration, for my greatest wish, in that line, at present is, to let President Lincoln have the honor of bringing this rebellion to a close, for it rightly belongs to him. I hope he will be permitted to do so. At present I am not in the least uneasy about his reelection, especially if the soldiers are allowed to vote. I am confident that we will give him a vast majority, for he is the most popular, so far. Next to Lincoln comes George B. MacClellan. John C. Fremont is entirely laid in the shade for his ultra abolitionist sentiments do not take very well in the Army. I am sorry to see two such strong Lincolnites as Father and Grandfather turn bitterly against him, in my opinion, without just cause or provocation. I am anxious to learn why they do not like him, but fear at the same time, that I have so far provoked their ire, by my strongly advocating Lincoln sentiments that I stand a good chance to get a raking, in the next letter. I ask a favor of you dear mother; it is to take my part, and try to modify their anger, as much as possible if I am not able to convert them into the same belief. I do not blame them for voting for Fremont, if they do not like Mr. Lincoln But for my part, I can't see it. You thought it possible for us to get a furlough if we remained in Memphis. Well I can tell you the only chance there is for a furlough. It is simply to go as veterans, for the veteran furloughs are the only kind that can be had at present. In a few months our Regiment will be allowed the chance to veteran. Now I will leave it all to you, if you say for us to come home on furlough we will do so, if not we won't. You have plenty of time to consider the matter. Let us know in your next, for all I can guess the answer.

I wish I could be at home to help harvest, for Father must stand greatly in need of men, to work, but I don't think he wants many loafers, such as soldiers naturally are inclined to be.

I must now close, perhaps in my next there will be more of interest.

Give my love to all but keep a good share for yourself. I remain as ever. Your Affectionate Son.

A. P. Wolf (write soon)

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

[Transcriber's notes: The prophesy of the writer of the letter was correct, the vote of the soldiers was heavily for Lincoln.¹ McClellan was nominated as the Democratic Presidential candidate² and Fremont by a third party, the Radical Democracy, although he withdrew from the race before the election.³

"To veteran" was a reference to the Veteran Volunteer Act passed early in 1864 which provided that any Union soldier who re-enlisted would have free transportation home, a month's furlough and a bounty of \$400.^{00 4}

¹ *The American Heritage Picture History of the Civil War*. 542.

² Catton, Bruce. *Never Call Retreat* (Doubleday & Co., inc. Garden City, N.Y., 1965), 382.

³ Catton, *Never Call Retreat*, 391.

⁴ Boatner, 539.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Memphis Tenn
July 25th 1864

Dear Parents

I am happy to inform you that we have once more arrived safe and sound in Memphis after a very hard march to Tupelo Miss. The distance was not so great as some of our Marches, but the heat was very oppressive; it seemed to be our greatest enemy. Yesterday we received your letter, dated July 17th and was happy to learn that the health of the family has been tolerable good this summer. Let us hope that it may always remain so. I am sorry that you dear father and mother, are compelled to work so hard in your old days. I wish it were possible that could be of some assistance to you, but that is utterly impossible at present. There is still one consolation for the Farmers, they will be fully paid for their labor this year. At the rate that produce is selling, Farmers cannot help but get rich in a few years.

I will give you a short account of our late expedition to Tupelo. I am not able to give you a lengthy account this time, for I am too tired and worn out to commit my thoughts to paper but will endeavor to do the best in my power. We left LaGrange on the 5th, Marched through to Pontotoc almost without opposition. Here we met with a considerable force in our front. It seems to have been Smith's intention to accomplish his end more with strategy than with fighting. We moved out on the road leading to Oakalona and camped one day evidently to rest his troops. And to strengthen the enemy still more in this belief, he held a bridge about a mile from Camp on the same road. The rebels thinking that we would certainly move out on this road, commenced fortifying on an advantageous position, awaiting an attack from our forces, but what must have been their mortification in the morning when, they found out that we gave them the slip & instead of going to Oakalona, we turned back & went to Tupelo. Now we had the rebels in our rear, & if they wanted to whip us, they had to do the attacking. When within five miles of Tupelo the fighting commenced in our rear. We formed our line on a very good position & awaited the onset. We did not have to wait long for on the 14th they commenced shelling our Camp at 6 o'clock in the morning, and lasted through the day at short intermissions. We as usual had to support a Battery. Our Regiment had six or seven wounded by shell, none killed. I will not give all the particulars of the fight for Otto wants to write a few lines today or tomorrow. I only wanted to let you know that we are well.

I seen Frank Springer the other day, the boys in the 140th are all well & send their respects. I wish Fritz would please write a few lines as soon as he can for I am anxious to hear from him.

I will now close this uninteresting letter.

Give my love to all at home but keep a fair share of it for yourselves.

I remain as ever

Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

Write soon

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Notes: The proper spelling is “Okolona”.

Union Gen. A. J. Smith had about 14,000 men under his command, and his object was to destroy the forces of Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest. At the Battle of Tupelo, fought on July 14, 1864 in Northeastern Mississippi, Gen. Smith achieved victory, but it was meaningless strategically since the next day he withdrew toward Memphis for the announced reason of short supplies, and Gen. Forrest was free again to roam.¹

The word “Battery” refers to a Battery of Artillery which in the Union Army was normally made up of six field guns,² and infantry troops were assigned the mission of close-in protection of artillery units from opposing infantry or cavalry.³ This is what Corporal Wolf means when says that they had to support a Battery.

¹ Long et al., 539.

² Naisawald, 7.

³ Boatner, 821.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Memphis Tenn
July 31st 1864

Dear Parents

We have been in Camp 8 days, but I fear that we will have to leave, before another week rolls round, God only knows where we will be ten days from this, perhaps hundreds of miles from here, Marching through a hot boiling Southern Sun, the Thermometer as high as 120 or 125 Degrees, with some fifty pounds strapped to our backs, making 15 to 20 miles per day. There may be some novelty in reading about these rough Marches, and the privations that Soldiers had to undergo during the present Rebellion, but when it comes to the reality of the thing, then novelty is played out. I suppose you thought the same a few weeks ago, when you were in the harvest field, swinging the Cradle from morning until late at night, Sundays not excepted. I doubt not that the work was equally as laborious, if not more so, than ours, but you must take into consideration our mode of living; while you sit down to the table, and eat a good meal, and plenty of it, we have to run after water, & wood, make a fire, cook a little coffee, when we have meat, we broil it on the coals, or put on a stick and hold it over the blaze, until it is burnt brown, After all these preperations are over, we take our seats at the table, (which is a very stationary one no danger of upsetting it) feel about the comers of our haversacks for our quarter Rations of Hard Tack, (for our allowance of Bread was limited to one quarter of a cracker to the meal.) You can imagine how such a sumptuous meal suits a hungry Stomach. After eating we lay down to sleep. While you can sleep in a good bed & in a house, we are on the bare ground, with nothing over us but a Rubber Blanket, and the blue sky for a house. By the time we get through with our work, it is between ten and eleven o'clock. Revellie is most always beat at 2 A.M., so there is not much time left for sleep. Now comes the work of getting Breakfast, which is only a repetition of the supper program. We Lincoln advocates should not be dissatisfied, with our lot because we had no business voting for old Abe in the first place, and as you say if he is reelected it will prolong the war four years longer. So we Soldiers, the greatest sufferers, should be very careful and not support such a man, at the next Presidential Election. But you see, I can't see it in that light, so I will be very apt to give him my vote and run the risk of serving another term of three years, if I should be fortunate enough to survive my present term of enlistment. But I have made up my mind not to Reenlist, before the expiration of the first three Years. It is true I should like to have the Vet Furlough well enough, but I can wait one year longer, and then take my own time at home. I should think you ought to be satisfied with Old Abe at present, for he has done just what you wished. He has made the 500,000 call, he only varies from your opinion, in giving fifty days time to those who would rather volunteer than be Drafted, I think that very considerate in him, for if I were at home I should like to have the chance to Volunteer, but If he would order a Draft without giving this chance, I would not be considered better than those that waited to be Drafted. This thing of Volunteering, I think, does not work as you say it does, so far it has not done much damage in the North, for the Copperheads are made up of more gas than fight. In the Army 200,000 Volunteers are worth more than 600,000 Drafted men. It has been tried to our sorrow. Take a volunteer Regiment & put them in a battle ten days after the organization, and they will make a better fight than Drafted men after one year's service.

You dear father must not give up to such gloomy thought as to believe that our Army

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

is making slow progress. You must remember that, they have come to a point where every inch of ground gained, by our men, has to be gained by hard fighting. So far I think our cause looks brighter and there is a better chance for a speedy peace than ever before. The greatest part of the Rebel Army is now concentrated at two points, and so closely hemmed, that it is almost impossible for them to get away. Gen Sherman has laid Siege, to Atlanta, I think he will take things easy until Reenforcements can reach him, which will be sent as soon as some of the last call can be organized. Then if I mistake not, he will make a clean sweep of it in that part of the country. As for Grant I think he is all side up, & knows what he is about. I will now close this uninteresting letter, answer soon & write long letters.

Give my love to all at home but keep a good share for yourself. I remain as ever.
Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

Tell Fritz to write soon

Notes: The Cradle referred to was an agricultural implement, a scythe with a frame projecting above to catch grain when cut so that it could be laid flat.¹

The draft did not actually bring in too many men, but it did stimulate recruiting.²

Drafted men were not the equal of the original volunteers, in most instances, but they certainly were not useless.³

When Corporal Wolf said that "Copperheads are made up of more gas than fight", meaning more talk than action, he was right. As an example, a plan in 1864 to organize a revolution with the aid of Copperheads to take Illinois, Indiana and Ohio out of the Union never took place "because the Copperheads wanted to vote against their government but had no intention of taking arms against it."⁴

The analysis of the military situation was accurate, General Grant's plan was that he go for General Robert E. Lee in Virginia, and that General Sherman go for General Johnston, at the time of the above writing in Atlanta.⁵

¹ Morris, 309.

² Ketchum, 485.

³ Catton, A Stillness at Appomattox, 30-31.

⁴ Catton, Never Call Retreat, 402.

⁵ Ketchum, 442.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Holly Springs Miss
Aug 7th 1864

Dear Parents

Again, We are on the move. It seems that we are destined to be knocked about from place to place, just as our Commander wills. I am, perfectly resigned to my fate as long as I can see that it benefits the common cause, and help to put down this rebellion, which I think is so far gone, that every victory of any magnitude will make three months difference in closing the war. Our men suffered severely on the last Raid, but they were content, and did not murmur for it come out successful. I have not the least doubt but that this one will be equally as successful if not more so than the last. I understand our route lay through a good Country for foraging. Besides this is the right time of the year for fruit, with which the country abounds. I hope though that our trip will be a short one, on account of the heat, which I dread as much the rebel bullets.

I expected a letter from some of you at home before leaving Memphis, but was sadly disappointed, I suppose you were all too busy at work, during the day, and too tired at night, for writing. I do not blame you, for writing so seldom, but you know how much pleasure it is for a man to get a letter from home, especially before leaving a place and expects to stay a long time. Otto wrote about those Overcoats in his last letter, if you can send them do so, even if we are not in Memphis, because they will be stored until we get there.

I must now close, for I have some beans on the fire, that require my attention, or they will be very apt to scorch.

Give my love to all at home but dont forget yourselves.

I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

Notes: In August, 1864, Union Gen. William T. Sherman had Union Gen. A. J. Smith and his troops go in pursuit of Confederate Gen. Nathan B. Forrest, and, although this expedition was not too successful, it did keep Forrest too busy to get into Tennessee to strike a blow against the long supply line of Gen. Sherman which might have pulled Sherman back from his campaign against Atlanta, Georgia.¹

Foraging was, by strict standards, stealing foodstuffs from the inhabitants of any given area, but, by Civil War standards, feeding oneself at the enemy's expense was legitimate, but looting and senseless destruction were frowned on.²

¹ Ketchum, 516-517.

² Coggins, 123.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

On Steamer Iatan
Sept 9th 1864

Dear Parents

You can see by the heading of this that we are on the move again. It is generally supposed, that we are bound for Shermans Army. I hope it is true, for I am heartily tired of chasing Forest all over Mississippi and Tennessee. There is no doubt that we will have harder fighting, at Atlanta than in Miss, But then we will not have those hard Marches, to make, without food or even water that is fit to drink. Besides a person might as well be shot at once, as be killed by degrees.

I wish I could receive a letter from Home before going so far away. Your last letter reached us at Abbyville Miss on the 8th of August I think. If you would write as soon as you receive this, the answer might possibly reach us, before we leave Cairo Illinois. It is very probable that we will stop there a few days. We expect to be paid off at that place which will take a few days at least. If I had known the day that we land there, I should have written for you to come down, to meet us, but that was impossible.

[Letter ends abruptly. The next letter appears to be a continuation this letter.]

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

[This letter appears to be a continuation of the previous letter.]

Sept 10th 1864 Cairo

Once more, thank God we can enjoy Illinois, soil and air. It feels quite different than Miss. or Tennessee air. We are camped near the City of Cairo, And will likely remain here a few days. Oh! how I would like to have permission to jump the cars & go to St. Louis. I don't think I would wait for Temples Buss, but pick up my Traps & start on the double quick for Edwardsville. I think I could march those 20 miles in about four hours, at least I feel like it just now.

If Fritz were down here in Jackson I would be tempted to take a French furlough, for a few days & pay him a visit.

Please don't forget to write as soon as possible, for I want to hear from you.

I must now close. Give my love to all at home but keep a good share for yourselves. I remain as Ever Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

P.S. Give my warm Regards to the Gillespies, & the rest of my town acquaintances. Mr. C. F. Springer sends his respects to you. I seen him at Memphis

Notes: The proper spelling is Abbeville".

"Temples Buss" has not been identified, but the 1860 St. Louis City Directory does list a James Temple as a conductor on the city railroad. This seems pretty far fetched though.

To march from St. Louis to Edwardsville was something of a flight of fancy since there was no bridge across the Mississippi River until the Eads Bridge was completed on July 4, 1874.¹

A "French furlough" (French leave) would be an unannounced departure, or, from an Army standpoint, an absence without leave.²

¹ Dena Lange and Marlin M. Ames, St. Louis: Child of the River, Parent of the West, (St. Louis, Missouri: Webster Publishing Company, 1939), 148.

² Morris, 526.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

St. Louis Mo Sept 24th/64

Dear Parents

I have a pass today to the City and am now at Mr. Schiffman. I expected to find Fritz here today but I am domed to be disappointed. We, (that is our Regt) are still at Jefferson Barracks, but our stay there is uncertain. I can get a pass whenever I please, to go to the City so if you want to come to see us let me know, and I will come to town, to meet you. If the Regt stays here during the fair, you can expect me over there for I shall try to get a Leave of Absence, if I can't I will come anyhow. I shall try to get a Detail as Clerk in some office, here in the City if such a thing is possible. But I fear it will be a difficult matter, as I am not acquainted with the officers here.

I must now close. Give my love to all, but keep a good share for yourselves.

I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

Note: Jefferson Barracks was a Union Army post a few miles South of St. Louis, Missouri.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Franklin Mo¹
Oct 2d 1864

Dear Parents

Since last I saw you our Regiment has been knocked about considerable. First we were sent to De Soto Mo. on the Iron Mountain R. R. where we laid 3 days. But not meeting with the Rebs, were sent back to Jefferson Barracks which place we reached on the 29th. We staid there until the night of 30th then put on the Cars and started for this or some other place on this Road. When we got within 2 miles of Franklin, we received information that the Rebels had already taken possession of the place. We got off the Cars & threw out a line then advanced cautiously toward town. The line had not advanced more than a quarter of a mile when they opened fire, rather brisk, but as soon as the main line came up the Rebs commenced falling back, and used their artillery with which they done some of the poorest shooting that I have ever seen, only one shot going through our line, striking one man on the breast, but it did not kill him. The skirmishing lasted about one hour when the Rebs left on a double quick. Citizens report the Rebel force from two to four thousand with two pieces of Artillery. If this is a true estimate of their force, they could have given us a sound thrashing for we did not have over one thousand men besides those who had to guard the train. The Rebs played Hob with the town, plundered every house burned the Rail Road Depot & other R R property & Government Stores. They completely cleaned out the Stores and Dwelling houses of every thing they contain and the most of what they did not want, they destroyed. But we must remember that it is no more than we have been doing for the last 7 months. Our loss will not amount to more than ten or twelve wounded there were no killed yesterday but I believe one died this morning from wounds. We will remain at Franklin a few days at least, if the Johnie Rebs will let us, which I am sure they will for they can't help themselves. We have now our whole Brigade here, with six pieces of Artillery and a Battalion of Cavalry some of the best in the service called Merrills Horse. Besides we could get some Militia. But they won't do to fight in a regular line of battle, they will do very well to keep down guerrillas & such like.

I must now close Give my love to all at home, & those inquiring friends.

I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son.

Adolph

P. S. I left a small Bill at Schiffmanns about \$6½ which I wish you would pay when you go to St. Louis. It is for a vest & repairing my watch.

¹ Now known as Pacific, Missouri.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Notes: Confederate General Sterling Price had served as a Brigadier General in the Mexican War, as Governor of Missouri and as Commander of the Missouri state troops in 1860 before joining the Confederacy.²

To commence what was later to be known as Price's Missouri Raid, on September 19, 1864 Price crossed into Missouri from Arkansas with about 12,000 men and fourteen pieces of artillery having taken command in South central Arkansas on August 29, 1864.³

On September 6, 1864 Union Gen. A. J. Smith was passing Cairo, Illinois with his troops on the way to join Union Gen. William T. Sherman when Union Gen. William S. Rosecrans, commanding the Department of Missouri, requested these troops, and they were ordered on September 9, 1864 to operate against Price. Gen. Smith stationed his men near St. Louis so that they could be moved readily by rail or river. On September 26, 1864 Smith was ordered to a point on the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad toward Pilot Knob so that the enemy could not get between him and St. Louis, and that is why he went to De Soto, Missouri.⁴ Price was repulsed at Pilot Knob (Fort Davidson) about seventy miles South of St. Louis on September 27, 1864 but then advanced toward St. Louis, his primary objective, although the presence of Gen. Smith deterred him from attacking the city.⁵

The action at Franklin, Missouri referred to in Corporal Wolf's letter was only a skirmish fought on October 1, 1864, and it is very doubtful that 2,000 to 4,000 Confederates were involved.⁶ Franklin is now known as Pacific, Missouri and was on the Southwest Branch Pacific Railroad where it branched off from the Pacific Railroad.⁷

"Merrill's Horse" was the 2nd Regiment Missouri Cavalry organized by Capt. Lewis Merrill at Benton Barracks, Missouri from September 3 to December 11, 1861.⁸

Corporal Wolf is somewhat overly critical of the militia (citizens of a State called to military service in case of emergency)⁹ since the Kansas Militia seem to have fought well at the Battle of Westport, a little South of Kansas City, Missouri, on October 23, 1864. Most of the Kansas militiamen wore civilian clothes with red badges pinned on to identify themselves as soldiers. The Battle of Westport was a defeat for Price who retreated South along the Kansas State line, and the biggest battle in the Civil War fought West of the Mississippi River, about 20,000 Federals against 9,000 Confederates.¹⁰

² Boatner, 669.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Official Records, Series I, Volume 41, Part I, page 307 *et seq.*

⁵ Boatner, 670.

⁶ Long, 577.

⁷ Thomas L. Snead, The Fight for Missouri (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1886), front piece map, and Battlefields of the Civil War Washington, D. C.: The National Geographic Society, 1961), atlas plate 14.

⁸ Frederick H. Dyer. Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, (Des Moines, Iowa: The Dyer Publishing Co., 1908), 1303.

⁹ Morris, 832.

¹⁰ Alexander D. Brown, "The Battle of Westport," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, Volume 4, Number 4 (July), 1966, 8, 11, 12, and 41-43.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Camp Near Harrisonville MO
Oct 28th 1864

Dear Parents.

I send this to inform you that we are well although worn out with fatigue. We have marched near Three hundred miles after Price but as yet have not caught up with him, for all that we marched from 30 to 42 miles a day. I think that we will give up the affair soon, for it won't pay. This is the second day of our layover. We expect to get Rations from Lexington. If they reach us we will either start on our homeward march or go through to the Arkansas River. If to the latter I pity the poor Boys. I do not believe that there is a man in this Command but what is foot sore. It will not be our fault if Price escapes unhurt, for if short Rations & hard marching could catch him, he certainly could not get away.

I will tell you a little about the country that we passed over during our travels. From St. Louis to California is the poorest country that I have ever seen. Nothing but hills and Rock which made it awful hard to march over. But from California to this place there is some as good land as I have ever seen not excepting Illinois. Some of the most beautiful Prairies that can be found in the United States. There is but one objection that I can find & that is the scarcity of wood. I often thought if ever I wanted to buy land, that this is the place, I would come to get it. I also found a great change in the appearance of the Inhabitants as soon as we got out of the Hills & Rocks, especially among the Lady portion. I think this portion of the State can boast of having beautiful & patriotic Ladies. At every Vilage we were met by a delegation of young Ladies, waving Flags & singing patriotic songs. It is enough to make a man feel like fighting Rebels all his life, if only to hear those sweet creatures cheer you on. But I will this fanciful subject for fear it will not interest you as much as it did me, for I am single, But I notice it cheered the Married men & for a time made them forget blistered & bleeding feet, straighten up & march as if nothing was the matter. I must now close to be in time for the mail. Give my love to all at home.

I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son

A. P. Wolf

Notes: California, Missouri is about twenty-five miles West of the State Capital at Jefferson City, Missouri and in the central part of the state.

When Confederate Gen. Price decided not to risk an attack on St. Louis he decided to turn West toward Jefferson City, the State Capital, but he also decided that it was too strong to attack and continued on toward Kansas City gathering up artillery, arms, ammunition, horses, provisions, clothing and recruits as we went along until he had 500 wagons and 5,000 cattle.)¹ All of this time Union Gen. Smith's troops were in pursuit moving on a parallel course to the South of Price)² until they reached Independence, Missouri, about ten miles East of Kansas City, on October 23, 1864, the day the Battle of Westport was fought, and were then ordered to Hickman Mills, a little South of Westport, to intercept Price on his retreat, but they arrived there after both Confederate and Union forces had passed. By this time Gen. Smith's forces had run out of supplies and were ordered to Harrisonville, Missouri, about thirty miles South of Kansas City, to get provisions from Warrensburg, about thirty miles to the East of there.³

¹ *Civil War Times Illustrated*, July, 1966, 6 & 7.

² Boatner, 670.

³ Official Records, Series I, Volume 41, Part I, 307 et seq.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Columbia Mo.
Nov (date obliterated)

Dear Parents

Through the kindness of one of the Storekeepers, I have the opportunity of sending this to let you know that we are alive and kicking. I should like to give you a full description of our travels since we left Harrisonville Mo wherefrom I sent you the last letter, but my time will not admit of a lengthy detail, so you must wait until we have more spare time. When I tell you that we have marched 200 miles since I sent you the last letter, will be proof enough that we have not been idle. I hope you have received my last letter sent from Harrisonville.

I must now close

Give my love to all at home

I remain as ever

Your Affectionate Son

Adolph

Otto sends his love.

P. S. Please write soon and tell me about the Election.

Notes: While at Harrisonville, Gen. Smith's troops were, at the request of Union Gen. William R. Sherman and by order of the Union General in Chief U. S. Grant, ordered to move to the Mississippi River in the vicinity of St. Louis to embark and report to Union Gen. George H. Thomas at Nashville, Tennessee. When the above letter was written, Corporal Wolf was on his way East and about 120 miles West of St. Louis.¹

The election referred to was the Union Presidential election which took place on November 8, 1864 and which resulted in the re-election of President Abraham Lincoln.²

¹ Ibid.

² Long and Long, 594.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Nashville Tenn Dec 6th 1864

Dear Parents

We arrived at this place on the first of the Month, the same day that Thomas's Army fell back from Franklin after giving the Rebel Army under Hood a severe thrashing at that place. I must acknowledge that this place looks more like war than any that I have seen. For the last four days & nights we have been busy with Ax Spade & Pick throwing up Entrenchments. Our Works are now complete from River to River. The general supposition is that Hood will lay Siege to Nashville, he has formed his line about 2 miles from our outer works, but as yet has not shown any disposition to charge our line. Cannonading has been kept up rather regular on our side, day & night but seldom replied by the Johnnies. A continual skirmish of Musketry is kept up between the Pickets, without any serious damage to our side, only once in a while wounding a man or horse. The sharpshooters are kept busy picking off men at every opportunity, one of ours killed two Rebs at one shot the other day, the ball passing through the breast. I cannot imagine what the rebels idea is for laying Siege to this place. It is very neat impossible for them to bring a Battery to bear on any part of our line. They tried to plant a Battery day before yesterday when our Artillery opened on them so fast that it took two sets of horses, to get it away again, killing their horses And men as fast as they came up, they took the last piece away by hand. They tried to charge the left center of our line yesterday, but we slaughtered their men so fast that they were glad to fall back to their works, quicker than they came. Old pap Smith expressed himself in this way, I believe the damed fools are going to lay siege to this place. I understand that he is a going out with two Regts of Cavalry & some Artillery to set what the Johnnies are about. He don't place much confidence in the reports of the Scouts. I hope he will go out in front of our line, for then we can see all that is going on. He now has a larger command than usual. It consists of four Divisions, on the extreme Right. The 23d Corps on the left under Command of Stanley & the 4th Corps has the Center. I have not learned their Generals name, but think it is General Wood. Cannonading is very brisk this morning on our side, but have not heard the Rebels reply. Our Batteries are in such a position that they can bring from 30 to 40 pieces to bear on any point at the same time besides Infantry reinforcements can be brought from one place to another in a few minutes. For my part, I do not apprehend any danger for Nashville. It will be a sorry thing for the Rebs if they undertake to charge our works. Starving us out, will take many days.

I must now close, give my love to all at home, and other inquiring friends I remain as ever Your Affectionate Son

Adolph

P. S. Inclosed you will find a Photograph of A. J. Smith Please send yours as soon as possible.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Notes: On May 7, 1864 Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston with about 62,000 men was in Dalton in Northwestern Georgia when Union General William T. Sherman with about 100,000 men moved against him. By July 17, 1864, Gen. Johnston had been pushed South to Atlanta, Georgia, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis replaced him with Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood.¹

John Bell Hood was born in 1831 and was graduated the U. S. Military Academy in 1833. He served in garrison and on the frontier until in April, 1861 he resigned to join the Confederate Army. He loved to fight and his men would follow him at Brigade and Division level. His left arm had been crippled and he lost his right leg due to wounds,² but Jefferson Davis wanted a fighter when Hood was placed in charge of the troops at Atlanta. Hood, knowing that he was supposed to fight, brought his troops out of their fortifications several times, each time losing substantial numbers but not dislodging Gen. Sherman. Hood got his army out of the city, but Atlanta was occupied by Federal troops on September 2, 1864.³

Following this, Sherman and Hood sparred with each other, and then Sherman decided to turn East and make his famous March to the Sea. He virtually destroyed Atlanta and sent General George H. Thomas North to protect Nashville, Tennessee.⁴

George H. Thomas, born in 1816, was graduated from the U. S. Military Academy in 1840. He served in the Mexican War, on the frontier and taught at West Point. Although a Virginian, he stayed with the Union. He was nicknamed "The Rock of Chickamauga" for his superb defense in that battle.⁵

Confederate Gen. Hood, after the fall of Atlanta, decided to invade Tennessee and to move upon Union Gen. Sherman's communications.⁶ While Union Gen. George H. Thomas was drawing his army together, Union Gen. John M. Schofield was at Franklin, Tennessee, about fifteen miles South of Nashville, in an entrenched position when Gen. Hood attacked him on November 30, 1864. Gen. Hood was decisively repulsed, five of his subordinate generals were killed, and on December 1, 1864 Gen. Schofield's troops joined Union Gen. Thomas in Nashville. This is the "severe thrashing" to which Corporal Wolf refers.⁷

The works "complete from River to River" were fortifications in a semicircle South of Nashville and surrounding it with both flanks (ends of this line) resting on the Cumberland River.⁸

Confederate Gen. Hood himself said ". . . the only remaining chance of success in the campaign at this juncture, was to take position, intrench about Nashville, and await Thomas's attack, which, if handsomely repulsed, might afford us an opportunity to follow up our advantage on the spot, and enter the city on the heels of the enemy."⁹

"Johnny" or "Johnny Reb" was a Union nickname for the Confederate soldier.¹⁰

The 23rd Corps was commanded by Gen. John M. Schofield and the 4th Corps by Gen. David S. Stanley who, due to a was replaced by Gen. Thomas J. Wood on December 1, 1864.¹¹

¹ Boatner, 30 & 32.

² Ibid., 407-408.

³ Ketchum, 515-517.

⁴ Ibid., 546.

⁵ Boatner, 836.

⁶ Ketchum, 551.

⁷ Ibid., 552 and 554-555.

⁸ Yoseloff, volume IV, 434.

⁹ Ibid., 436.

¹⁰ Morris, 706.

¹¹ Yoseloff, volume IV, 456 and 472 and Boatner, 791.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Spring Hill Tenn Dec 20th
1864

Dear Brother

Thank God that after two days hard fighting we are still unhurt. It is really a miracle how men can go through a perfect Hailstorm of Bullets, Shell, Grape & Canister without a scratch. I can say that it was the worst place that I have ever been in. We may thank the smoke of the guns for many of our lives. It was so thick that the Rebs could not see to aim at us, most of the Balls went over our heads, making the straglers hunt their holes. I had no idea that Rebels were such cowards, they started to run before we got within sixty yards of the works, hundreds staying & shaking their white rags, & asking for quarters. But our Regt never noticed them, just passing them as if they were not there & followed up the retreating Army. We followed them until dark when the men had to stop for breath. I never was so near give out in my life. We had to charge nearly two miles on a run with a heavy load on our back & the mud shoemouth deep. I believe that I was among the first on the works. I could have taken 20 prisoners, if I had been so minded, for I was with those farthest advanced, But I thought there were plenty of Straglers to take care of them. I sometimes stopped to take the guns away but that was all. Once I came very near knocking a fellow down with my gun, there were two behind a tree & both had their guns loaded & cocked. I went up to them to take them, & one refused to give his up he held on to it. But when I looked at him, he seemed so frightened, that I thought he did not know what he was doing. I took pity on the poor wretch, and told him to give up his gun and I would not hurt him so he give it up.

All the prisoners that I seen were the worst frightened set of men that can be imagined, you have no idea, how they do look when first taken, just as if they knew that their cause was not right. Hoods Army cannot be fooled much longer, for the way we have been taking prisoners the last five days, proves clearly that they begin to open their eyes, & think for themselves. I think by this time the prisoners will amount to 10,000 or 12,000 and over seventy pieces of Artillery, & the small arms, I cannot make an estimate of. I can now distinctly hear cannonading about ten miles from here likely with the cavalry, Hoods rear Guard. I don't think that the Infantry will get another chance at him unless our cavalry can keep him from crossing the Tennessee River. I must now close for I am getting so cold that I can scarcely hold my pencil. Please write soon and often. I got Fathers and Mothers letter day before yesterday & will answer it soon.

Good Bye & may God protect you as he did us. Give my love to Parents and all others at home. I remain as ever Your Affectionate Bro

Dolph

Notes: The "two days hard fighting" referred to is the Battle of Nashville fought on December 15 and 16, 1864.¹

From December 1, 1864, Union Gen. George H. Thomas was getting his troops ready to attack Confederate Gen. Hood, and the Union General in Chief U. S. Grant became so impatient with the delay that he was going to remove Thomas from command if an attack was not made. On December 9th there was a storm of freezing rain, and the fields and roads were ice-bound making movement impossible. On December 14th the ice melted, and Gen. Thomas planned an attack for the next day.²

¹ Long and Long, 610-611.

² Yoseloff, Volume IV, 454-455.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Grape and canister have already been discussed. "Shell" was an artillery projectile containing a bursting charge of powder. Time fuzes were ignited by the flash of the gun's discharge but were often poor, and the bursting charge was rather small so that the cast-iron shell was not very well fragmented, and these projectiles were not, in general very effective.³

The reference to "the smoke of the guns" is based upon the fact that muskets, pistols and artillery were fired with black powder which, when ignited, gave off a dense smoke, not like the so-called "smokeless" powders of today. In a description of the Battle of Franklin it was said, "There was not a breath of wind, and the dense smoke settled down upon the field, so that, after the first assault it was impossible to see at any distance."⁴

In the Battle of Nashville, on the first day the Confederates were forced back but formed a new defensive line and when attacked the next day were forced to retreat.⁵

Corporal Wolf does not designate in his letter just which day he is describing, and they seem to have been somewhat condensed. Regarding the mud, on the first day Union Gen. Smith's troops advanced over muddy roads⁶ and on the second day over newly plowed or old corn fields which were wet and muddy.⁷

Regarding Gen. Smith's troops, a Union author said troops, a Union author said of them that they were "full of cheer and enterprise, and glad to be once more in the open field."⁸

Regarding the second day's battle, Confederate Gen. Hood said, "I beheld for the first and only time a Confederate army abandon the field in confusion."⁹

Regarding prisoners, on the first day's battle so large a mass of Confederate prisoners were seen heading toward the Union lines that a number of officers at Gen. Thomas' headquarters feared that the prisoners were Confederate reserves who had retaken their works.¹⁰

When Corporal Wolf says that the Confederate prisoners looked "as if they knew that their cause was not right" it was probably more wishful thinking than fact since a Union soldier taken prisoner in Virginia said that a soldier partly loses his self respect when his arms are taken from him.¹¹

Corporal Wolf overestimates the number of Confederate prisoners taken if he is just referring to the Battle of Nashville since Gen. Thomas reported that 4,462 were captured. But, on the other hand, Gen. Thomas stated that in the whole campaign 13,189 prisoners of war were taken.¹²

When Corporal Wolf wrote, he was at Spring Hill, Tennessee, about thirty miles South of Nashville.

³ Boatner, 738 and Coggins, 67.

⁴ Yoseloff, Volume IV, 453.

⁵ Long and Long, 610-611.

⁶ Boatner, 579.

⁷ Yoseloff, Volume IV, 461.

⁸ Ibid., 457.

⁹ Ibid., 437.

¹⁰ Yoseloff, Volume IV, 459.

¹¹ Ibid., Volume III, 431.

¹² Boatner, 582 and Yoseloff, Volume IV, 474.

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Camp in the Woods
Dec 25th 1864

Dear Parents

This being Christmas day I thought it would be right to let you know what we are doing. The first & of the most importance, know you that we are well, & have plenty to eat, but we must thank ourselves for that, it is Forage that we brought in late last night & earley this morning. I made up my mind for a fast today, not expecting to have a thing to eat but a few Crackers & Coffee. I will tell you of what our Forage consists. First, a half of a Hog, Fresh meat; Second about 25 lbs of side meat which had been salted three or four weeks. Third, two Hogsheads also salted, this is for 5 men. So you see that Famine has turned into a Feast. (Don't you wish you could share our Christmas fare with us.) We have plenty such as it is, but I know & hope you have more & a better variety. Thank God this will be our last Christmas in the Army. May it please God to have peace & quietude all over this unhappy country in a year from today. I think the prospect for Peace is much brighter now than ever. Our Armies have gained great Victories of late. I have not heard from Sherman of late, but it is rumored in Camp that he has gained a great Victory in taking Savannah. But I can say with certainty that the Army of the Cumberland has gained one of the brightest victories of the war, & A. J. Smith & his Corps are entitled to the greater portion. I do not say this because I belong to that Command, but it is justly due them. The papers may not give us credit, for all we did do, but our friends will know nevertheless. On the 16th our Division Captured 19 Pieces of Artillery & our Brigade gets credit for 8. I have not found out the exact number of Prisoners but think it will run up to nearly 1500 for the Division. Our loss was estimated at 320 killed and wounded. The killed were but few. Our Regt had four killed. Henry Wilder was one of the unfortunate. He had an arm shot off & died from the effects of the wound. It is nearly impossible for a Private to give a true account of every thing not even in this one Brig. I Just heard that our Brig. captured 12 Pieces of Artillery.

I must now close for my paper is coming to an end. Otto & I wish you all a Merry Christmas. May it be Merrier than ours, but I am satisfied. Kiss all for me & accept some for yourselves.

Good Bye
Dolph

LETTERS OF CORPORAL ADOLPHUS PHILLIP WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Notes: Ordinarily soldiers did their own cooking, and rather than build individual fires to cook over, soldiers formed little groups called messes. It is undoubtedly such a mess to which Corporal Wolf is referring when he says that the food which they had obtained was for five men.¹

Corporal Wolf's rumor was correct. Union General William T. Sherman and his troops occupied Savannah, Georgia on December 21, 1864.²

The Army of the Cumberland can be said to have disappeared after the fall of Atlanta, Georgia on September 2, 1864, but it had been commanded by Union Gen. George H. Thomas all during the Atlanta campaign, and Corporal Wolf is undoubtedly referring to the troops under the command of Gen. Thomas at the Battle of Nashville when he uses the designation "Army of the Cumberland."³

Corporal Wolf is right that the Battle of Nashville was "one of the brightest victories of the War." A Union writer said of it, and the battles that preceded it, that "the whole Northwest was saved from an invasion that, if Hood had succeeded, would have more than neutralized, Sherman's successes in Georgia and the Carolinas,"⁴ and a modern writer has said, "Thomas had won one of the decisive victories of the entire war."⁵

Corporal Wolf's statement that A. J. Smith and his Corps were entitled to the greater portion of the credit for the success at the Battle of Nashville is pardonable unit pride. Smith's Corps did perform very well, but it had plenty of help from the other troops engaged.⁶

¹ G. V. Rolph and Noel Clark, The Civil War Soldier (Washington, D. C.: Historical Impressions Co., 1961), 15.

² Long and Long, 613.

³ Boatner, 212-213.

⁴ Yoseloff, Volume IV, 464.

⁵ Catton, Never Call Retreat, 414.

⁶ Yoseloff, Volume IV, 457-464.