

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
January 4, 1863

Dear Brother and Sister:

I received your letter dated December 13 and was glad to hear from it that you were all well yet. We are also all well. You asked if the fort lay on the river. It does. It lays along the bank of the river for about two and one half miles then it extends back about one half mile. There are cannons planted all along on the breast works. In the river banks there are also cannons planted. You asked about the caliber of the guns. We have – 4 – 6 – 10 – 24 – and 36 – 48 – 64 – and 124 pounders but they are generally 48 and 64 pounders. There are two mounds in the fort. One bearing on the river; the other inland. Each one consisting of 4 guns. The weather is very fine for this time of the year being warm. It rained very hard last night for about 4 hours. The rain was just pouring down. We had a very dull time here Christmas and New Years having no fun at all. I wished myself home many times that week, but as wishing does no good we have to do the best *we* can. I rather think you spend your time better. Our 2nd Lt. has come down to see us. He is nearly well, but I think he will go back again. Cpt. Curtis Blakeman and daughter are also here on a visit. We have good news from Vicksburg. Our forces have taken 4 lines of the enemies breast works and there is only one line of breastworks more to be taken when they have the town at our mercy. If they take Vicksburg, it will be a hard blow for the rebels. The news came to quarters yesterday that Bill and Ben Richards had deserted. They had been staying at the General Hospital in the city so the Captain went to town to see but could find out nothing about them. I guess they are about Edwardsville by this time. If you see anything of them there will it be to me in your next letter. There is also another fellow gone by the name of John O'Brien. I expected to hear of his running off long ago. I have not much more to say as Dolf wished to add a few lines.

Best respects to Grandfather and Uncle
so goodbye for this time

Your true brother

Otto E. Wolf

Best respects from Mr. Sidell. He is well.

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
January 20, 1863

Dear Brother and Sister:

I received your letter yesterday, January 19th and was glad to hear from it that you were all well. We are also well. [A break appears in the typed-transcript here.] that Bill Richards was coming down here which I hardly believe for he is reported here as a deserter. Ben Richards is also reported as a deserter. Is Ben also in Edwardsville? The 14th it rained very hard and towards night it turned cold and snowed all night and all of the next day till night. The snow was about 13 inches deep. Old settlers say that this was the hardest snow storm they had had for 20 years. I am now mail carrier for the company. I get up at half past 6 a.m. in the morning and take the mail up to headquarters which is about a mile from our quarters then at 10:00 a.m. I go up again and get the mail for the company. This is all I have to do the live long day. I have no drumming to do at all now and I do not drill on the guns any. I am always glad when I get a letter so that I have something to do answering them. You asked me if I had the measles very bad. I tell I had them about as bad as a person generally gets them. I wrote a letter to Julius Schrieve the other day. It was the first one since we left Camp Butler. I guess he will be mad with me for it but I had forgot him altogether. I am very sorry to hear that the smallpox are in Edwardsville. You had better take care that you do not catch them. They have been amongst us here but not in our Company. Write to me often and I will answer you. Tell Ed Wier to answer the letter I wrote to him. Am getting tired of waiting for an answer. My best respects to Ed Phillips. Tell him I should like to hear from him. I must close for Dolf wants to write a few lines also. Goodbye for this time.

From your affectionate brother

Otto E. Wolf

Best respects to Grandfather and Uncle.

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
February 22, 1863

Dear Mother:

It has been a long time since I wrote to you last. The reason of it was I kept writing to Theodore and I thought that he was almost the same. I have not received a letter from Theodore from over a month. The last letter I got from him was dated January 12. I answered it and have received none since. I do not see why he does not answer it. I always answer his the next day after I get them. We are well yet and hope that you are the same. We were out on a scout today before yesterday and had a very nice time of it.

The Lieutenant Co1 got permission to take five companies of the Regiment out on a scout. We started the 19th about noon. Got on the boat and went up the river about a mile above town where we stopped for the night and camped for the night. The Companies landed and marched about one half mile and camped. They left a guard on the boat and I was one of these but instead of guarding we laid down and slept all night. The next day about noon we started again for the boat and went over to the Arkansas side. Here we landed and marched about 3 miles and surrounded a house of a widow who had two sons in one of the guerrilla bands. One of them being a Captain. Our officer went in to the house and searched it thoroughly to see if anybody was held in it but they did not find anybody while they were searching the house. We were killing her chickens and wondering in general when we were about ready to start our Lt. told us to break open the smokehouse while he went away so as not to see us destroy it. Well we broke it open and got all the hams we wanted. She had a very large supply of meat on hand having over a wagon load. I had a large ham, five partridges and a lot of sweet potatoes. I did not get any chickens for could not kill any for they were too fast for me. One of our boys went to a nigger shanty and found a cage of partridges containing about 30. He brought them out and we killed them. He gave me five of them. We made a very good haul. Our MIFS got two hams and a lot of potatoes. I am willing to go out twice a week. General Logan's Division went down the river today. There were over 9 or 10 boatloads of them. I do not know of any more to write about. I guess our Captain will tell us all about us.

Did Grandfather receive my letter? Tell Theodore to write me for sure.

From your loving son
Otto Wolf

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
March 1863

Dear Brother:

I received your letter yesterday and was glad to hear that you were all well yet but was sorry to hear that you got hurt but I hope that you will get over it soon. We are also well yet. Thomas Springer has been here for about a week. He came down to get his brother who was pretty sick in the hospital. Day before yesterday we changed our quarters. The Regiment is now together again. We tore down our shanty but we were not allowed to build it up again but we used our planks to make floors for our tents, bunks and cook shields the tents. We got out our what they call wedge tents. There are three in a tent. Dolf, Sidell and me stay together. We live very comfortable. We had two more to die about two weeks ago. Their names were James Leoman and Joseph Heddes died only one day apart. Leoman died so easy that those who slept in the same shanty with him did not know it till the next morning. He had the consumption. The other man died from the effects of the measles. We have not gotten a letter from Mother or Father for nearly two months. I do not know the reason of it. I guess the letters get lost. I am almost sure that you would write. You wanted to know why we did not get all of our pay the time we were paid off. Well I do not know the reason of it. I think it was the pay master's fault. I guess that he wanted to handle the money some time longer. There is no knowing when we will get paid off again or I would have sent some of the money to you.

The Captain got here safe but he did not bring any packages from home as we expected he would. I wish you would ask Will Putnam why he don't write to me. Tell him that I wrote the last letter to him, and I would like for him to answer it. I wrote to Ben Richards also, and he has not answered me yet. Tell him to write to me. What was the reason Ed and Fred Phillips left home? Tell Ed to write to me. We got a letter from Fritz the other day. He was well and hard at work. I am sorry to hear that Tommy Cubine died and so suddenly too. Well this is about all I know for this time.

Give my best respects to Mattie Putnam and Annie Boyd. Best respects to Grandfather and Uncle.

From your affectionate brother

Otto E Wolf

Accept this token of my love. This is to carry postage currency in.

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
April 6, 1863

Dear Brother:

I received your letter dated March 25th day before yesterday and was glad to hear from it that you were all well yet. We are also well. I would have answered your letter yesterday but I was cook. That is a job that I always dread when my day comes. I congratulate Mother on her birthday and hope that she will live to enjoy many more happy years. We received Father's letter the 2nd and Dolf will answer that in a few days. I will now tell you what I have to do.

About 5 o'clock in the morning I get up and beat for roll call. Then at fifteen minutes before 8 beat the first call for Guard Mounting. Then at 8 the second call. I forgot to say that at 6 and one half I beat for Battalion drill. Then from 9 til 11 we go out to practice. In the afternoon. At 5 o'clock we have dress parade. At sundown beat for roll call and at 8 in the evening tattoo* at fifteen minutes after taps. This for all the lights to be put out in camp. So you see that I have something to do too. We have the worst music of any Regiment in the fort. The reason of it is that we have been out of practice so long and then we have not got any fifers. Ever since Ben Richards left we have not got good music. Ben was the only fifer that was any account in the whole lot. The 49th Illinois is camped out here about 12 miles. Syrus Danniels came in to see us. He is fat and hardy as a buck. He is Orderly. I believe he will make a good Orderly. I got a letter from Will Putnam the same day I got yours. I have not received any letter from Julius Schreve for over two months. I wrote the last one to him and do not know the reason he don't answer it. There is some talk of us being paid off tomorrow or next day. I do not know how true it is. We have drawn new guns Endfield rifles. This is as good a gun as there is out.

How is Bruno getting along? Is he getting well and Putzy? Well this is about all I can think of at present so you must excuse me for this time. I am glad that you got a premium that's right. Study right hard and be a good boy.

Best respects to Grandfather and Uncle

From your affectionate brother

Otto E. Wolf

* *Tattoo* was sounded soon after dark to assemble the soldiers for a final roll call before they went to their quarters. The day ended about 9 pm with taps. [Transcriber's note.]

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
April 25, 1863

Dear Mother:

As it is evening now I do not think that I could employ my time any better than by writing to you to let you know how we get along. We are well yet and hope that you are the same. I ought to have wrote to you sometime back but I thought that I would wait till I got an answer to your last letter to Theodore. Since I last wrote to you we have been paid off. I received \$48.00. Dolf will send it home the first chance he gets. I have also had my pictures taken. I will send these too. These were not taken very well but I have some taken again to see if they will be any better. I will now tell you what I do and how we pass the time off of an evening. In the morning the cannon fires at about half past four; then we get up and beat reveille for roll call; then breakfast of coffee, bread and ham; then beat for Battalion drill. We go outside of the fort to drill. The musicians go out too and while the Regiment drills we practice. Then at 8 o'clock we have guard mounting. After guard mounting we have to go to garrison guard mounting. This takes us till about 10 o'clock. Then at noon we have dinner of coffee, bread, meat, beans, potatoes, rice and hominy. So you see we live pretty well. Then we have nothing to do until a little before 5 when we beat for dress parade. Maybe you do not know what dress parade is so I will explain.

The Regiment is drawn up in line of battle. The officers are all in a line before their Companies then they open order "To The Rear" and the Colonel stands about 50 paces before the center of the Regiment. There he gives the order "Parade Rest"; then the musicians goes down before the Regiment playing a slow tune going down and a fast one coming back. Then the Adjutant goes to the center of the Regiment and gives the command "First Sergeants to the Front and Center March". Then they have to report the number of men present; then he dismisses them. Then he salutes the Colonel; then says "Parade is Dismissed". At this command all the commissioned officers go to the center and then march out to where the Colonel stands. Then if the Colonel has anything to say to them why he says it, and if not they salute him and then march off to their quarters. We generally eat supper before dress parade at 6. The cannon fires for retreat; then we beat again for roll call at 8 in the evening. We beat tattoo at fifteen minutes after taps for fires and lights to be put out.

My paper is pretty near out so I will have to close. Tell Matilda not to be sorry of my not writing about her. If I do not mention her in every letter, I still think about her. Be a good girl and study right hard.

Best respects to Grandfather and Uncle.

Your loving son,

Otto E. Wolf

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
May 9, 1863

Dear Mother:

I received your letter today and were very glad to hear from it that you were well yet. We are also well. Dolf has had the fever for the last few days but he is over it now. I wrote a letter to Theodore April 6 but have not received an answer to it yet. I don't know why he does not write. I wish he would do like I do for just as soon as I get a letter from home, I'll sit down and answer it. He don't know how glad it makes me when I get a letter from home or he would write oftner. We also got Matilda's letter. I was very glad to see a few lines from her. Tell her to be a good girl and to learn right hard so that she can be a good scholar by the time I get home. I was very much surprised to hear that Britty Brown was going to be married. That event I thought was far off but as it is I wish her much joy and hope that she will enjoy many happy years of wedded life. I wish Mrs. Brown a happy journey. I have some news for Uncle for his dear friend Girth paid us a visit. I did not see him but Dolf did. This was about a week ago. He said he was bound for Vicksburgh. The weather is very hot down here now. It has been pretty cold about a week ago. I have been in swimming twice this year.

There was a man shot here two or three days ago. He was in the guard house. He jumped out of the window and started to run. The guard halted him but he did not stop so the guard fired at him and killed him dead on the spot. He was a deserter. That is the way they ought to do all of them rascals. Anybody that will desert from his Company ought to be shot. Our forces have done some good fighting on the Rappahannock. I think Hooker will clean them out there. I have got a picture of our 2nd Lt which I will send home. I wish you would take good care of it. I will now have to close for this time. Best respects to Grandfather. Mr. Sidel sends his best respects. Well goodbye for this time.

Your affectionate son

Otto E. Wolf

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
May 31, 1863

Dear Brother:

I received your letter the 25th of this month and would have written it sooner had I not been sick but I am well again. Dolf has also had the fever and chills but he is getting better fast. You say you wish we would not have this place. What are your reasons for that?

Now for my fault I would just as go from here to Vicksburg or to join Rosencranz is not for you do not know how disagreeable it is to be couped up in a fort like this and doing very heavy guard duty. The boys coming on every other day while other regiments are fighting the battles of their country winning laurels and having their names put in history as bully fighting regiment while ours is only fit for guarding forts. It is as General Loeman said in camp the other day, "You have a splendid Regiment but a poor Colonel. He is too much of a Granny for that office". We have had some glorious news from Grant's Army lately. The papers state that he has all the forts but one and that is the strongest. They are at work under mining it. That is a good plan if they don't surrender blow 'em up and make them. Then another thing they are in a starving condition. Grant has cut off their sources of supplies so that Vicksburg must fall. All they have to eat there is cornbread and not much of the material to make that out of. The Captain has been giving furloughs but I think he is going to stop giving them for one of our boys by the name of Charles Stout that got a furlough is a deserter. Captain got a letter from him today written at Detroit which states that the Captain need not expect him back again for he was bound for Canada. This same man was one of the biggest rebels in the Company, and I heard him make the threat last winter that if he ever got a furlough he would never come back again. Now just because one rascal deserted a 100 men innocent will have to suffer for it in not being allowed to go home, but if ever they catch the rascals they ought to hang him without a judge or jury and that's the way they ought that is mean enough to desert is not fit to live.

Two days ago five transports came up the river escorted by the gunboat BRAGG loaded with prisoners. They were taken in the vicinity of Vicksburg. There are boatloads of soldiers going past here nearly every day. While I am writing this there is a load of them going down there or two regiments to do every deserter. Anybody his country in the hour of need aboard.

We boys have a nice time fishing and swimming here. Fishing seems to be the rage here now for everybody that can scare up enough money to buy a trout line gets one and when not on guard are always found fishing. The weather is very warm here now but the nights are cool. This is one great source of enjoyment. The mosquitoes are getting mighty thick here now. The way we keep them from eating us up is when we go to bed we take some powder and light it in the tent and that drives them out.

Theodore when next you will tell me how many acres of wheat, corn, oats you have in and how crops look generally. I will send you the picture of our 1st Lt. C. W. Blake. I saw Sigh Daniels about three months ago and Johnny about two weeks ago. Saw Sappington today. I must now close for my paper is getting short. Best respects to Grandfather. Tell Matilda for me and tell her to be a good girl.

From your affectionate brother,

Otto E. Wolf

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
July 10, 1863

Dear Parents:

We received Fritz's last letter and were very sorry to hear from it that Mother was sick but I hope that by this time she had got well again. We are also all well. We had a very poor time here the 4th not being allowed to go out to town so we had to stay in the Fort all day. About 8 o'clock the Regiment fell in and marched down to headquarters where we passed in review before Colonel Murry of the 89th Indiana who is Commander of the Fort. He made us a short speech and then we marched back to Headquarter. This was the direst 4th I ever spent. On the 5th we received orders to pack up three days provisions in our haversack and take 100 rounds of cartridges and be ready to march to Helena. We got on the boat GENERAL ANDERSON about noon and went on down the river. We arrived at Helena about 9 o'clock. Got off the boat there and marched out to Fort Curtis which is about a mile from town where we lay all night on the ground with nothing but our rubber blankets. We were expected to be attacked the next morning but the enemy did not show themselves for they would have got licked worse than on the 4th. I got up and took a walk over the battlefield of the 4th. There you could see guns, cartridge boxes and haversacks and canteens laying all over the field of battle. There were graves there where there were from 30 to 40 thrown into one hole covered up. There was the awfulest stench that I ever smelled for the dead bodies had not all been buried. On the 6th, we got orders to make a reconaissance out on the Little Rock Road. Our force consisted of the 117th, 5th Kansas Calvary and 2 pcs of the 1st Missouri Battery. We went out about 6 miles and then halted. Joined up in line of battle and waited patiently for the Rebs. Our artillery took their places and the Calvary deployed a skirmishes and began firing on the rebel pickets. Then the cannon began shelling the woods. I began to think that we should have a little fight but I was very sadly disappointed for the Rebs run and our Calvary after them. The musicians were all back with the ambulances. The surgeon tied a white rag around our arms which is a sign for the enemy are not to shoot at us. About 4 o'clock it began to rain. When we turned about and marched back to town. Then we back to the boat. Slept on the boat all night and started for Memphis next morning about 8 a.m. and arrived here about sundown. I never enjoyed a trip any better in my life. I bursted my drum head yesterday. This makes three that I have bursted since we came down here. I guess I shall have to close for this time my paper is getting short. I should like to know the reason Theodore does not write for I have not received a letter from him for a month and a half. Those boys that were guarding prisoners up to Alton came back yesterday and we were greatly disappointed in not receiving a box from home.

Best respects to Grandfather and

From your affectionate son

Otto E. Wolf
Company F

Madison County Historical Museum and Archival Library,
Edwardsville, Illinois

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
July 12, 1863

Dear Brother:

I received your welcomed letter yesterday and was glad to hear from it that Mother was getting better again. God grant that she may get well soon. Dolf and myself can't complain as far as health is concerned so are all the rest of the boys. Our Captain has been pretty sick for the last few weeks but he is able to be about again. Lt. Blake came back a few days ago. He says he saw Father and had a talk with him. One of the boys that went up on that trip will never come back again. Poor fellow he was drowned up about Columbus. His name was John Frasier. The day we left here for Helena one of our boys by the name of Clark Ballard died here in the hospital. He died about 15 minutes before we went away. There were not men enough left here in the Company to bury him. This the 6th men we have lost since we have been in the service. This is comparatively a small number to what some of the companies have lost. You say that if we stay here until September Father will come down to see us. I guess we will stay here for I do not see any more chance of getting off now that there was three months ago so I am pretty sure that if Father comes down by that time we will get to see him.

I wish in the next letter you write me you would tell me how many acres of wheat, corn and oats we have this year for you do not know how much this interests me. How is Fritz getting along? Is he well yet? We have glorious good news here. Vicksburg is ours with 22,000 prisoners. Price caught one of the worse whippings that ever he had at Helena. Sherman is fighting at Ft. Hudson and that place can't hold out much longer. Rosecranz has driven Bragg out of Tennessee. Mead has captured a lot of men in the East and artillery, and if the rebellion can hold out much longer it beats my time. A great many of the boys think that they will get home before this time next year. Dolf was detailed about two weeks ago to guard prisoners up to Alton. He got up as far as the Irving Block where the prisoners were when General Hurlburt issued an order for them to go back to the Fort. If it had not been for that order he would have been home on the 4th. I tell you he felt mighty bad because he did not get to go. Mr. Sidel sends his best respects to the family. I think that I will have to close for this time for my paper is getting short. Best respects to Grandfather and Mr. Heusser. Tell me all about how you are getting along on the farm in your next letter.

From your affectionate brother,

Otto E. Wolf

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
July 23, 1863

Dear Parents:

As I have not received any answer to my last letter to you I now take this opportunity of writing again. I am still well but Adolf has been sick for the last two weeks. He has been sent to the hospital but is nearly well again only he is pretty weak. There is one of our boys detailed to go up to Alton with prisoners and by him I send this letter. His name is Henry Avard and I wish that by him you would send to us four checked shirts, two for Dolf and two for me, a hat for me. I want a black one with a broad rim for we are not allowed to wear any other than black ones. Some handkerchiefs and some cotton socks. It makes no difference how many of these for the more the better. The reason we send for these things is that we have to pay three prices for them here and after all they are no account. You can measure the hat by Ken Ovard because we both wear the same size. Since I last wrote to you we have been on another trip to Helena. We were gone three days and came back about one o'clock in the night. I saw Johnny Danniels today. He has just returned from home. He is well. Send us down some canned fruit for I believe they would help Dolf a great deal. There is some talk about a

All we lack now is the money. There is four months pay coming to us this time. Five Paymasters came down from the North yesterday to pay off the troops here. I will have to bring my letter to a close for Avard is about ready to start. How is Mother? Is she any better? I hope that she may get well soon.

My best respects to Grandfather and Mr. Hempster. Has Fritz gone down to the farm yet? Well goodby for this time.

From your affectionate son,
Otto E. Wolf Co. F 117 Regiment

Illinois Volunteers

P. S. Send me some chewing tobacco for I have to pay \$1.50 a lb. for it here and it is no account after all.

O. E. W.

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
July 23, 1863

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From your affectionate son,
Otto E. Wolf Co. F 117 Regiment

Illinois Volunteers

P. S. Send me some chewing tobacco for I have to pay \$1.50 a lb. for it here and it is no account after all.

O. E. W.

LETTERS OF PRIVATE OTTO WOLF
117th Illinois Volunteer Infantry

Fort Pickering, Tennessee
September 8, 1863

Dear Parents:

We received 4 welcomed letters and were glad to hear from it that you were still well. We are also well yet although I have been pretty sick for the last two months. I have been troubled with the fever and worst of all with the flu just as I got over the fever but thank the Lord I am well again. I did not think it worthwhile to write to you that I had been sick so as to cause you any unnecessary trouble about me.

Mr. Avard arrived here safe with the things you sent us for which we are very thankful. The fruit was good. None of it having spoiled and I tell you we had not ate anything that tasted as well in a long while. The clothing came very handy and the cherry bounce was excellent.

In the 25th of last month we were paid off. I received \$48.00 which is four month's pay. Our band are all going to buy new drums. For this purpose the Colonel is going to send two of us up to St. Louis to buy them, where we can get the instruments at half the price that we would have to pay for drums here. We have miserable music now for there is only one drum in the Regiment now that is no account. While I was sick one of the boys bursted my drum head so this is the fourth one that has been bursted in the last two months. That's going in pretty steep, isn't it?

I am so sorry that so many tomatoes and gooseberries are spoiling for want of someone to sell them. I just wish I had the tomatoes here for a bucket full like I used to sell at home for 30 cents would be worth at least \$2.00 here for tomatoes are very high. Such tomatoes as they sell here two for 5 cents I wouldn't look at at home.

Question Mark Jewell and William Barnsback sent our Company one barrel of dried peaches and because of and twenty cans of peaches preserved. This was very nice in them and the boys all think a great deal of them for it. I wish you would send us the picture of the whole family as soon as convenient for I would like to see our loved features once more if not in reality at least in a picture. Be sure and send them as soon as possible if you please.

Companies K and I have been sent over into Arkansas as guards to a railroad they are building from here south. I should not be much surprised if they ordered our whole Regiment for there to guard the railroad. There is no news that I can think about just now so I will have to close for this time. Best respects to Grandfather and Uncle. Well goodby for this time.

From your affectionate son,

Otto E. Wolf.