

# Letter From Scott, James written Saturday, December 20th, 1862

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Soldier: Scott, James

Allegiance: Union

Unit/Service Branch: 23rd Infantry

Date Written: Saturday, December 20th, 1862

Location: Memphis, Tenn.

Correspondence Type: Letter

Subjects: Bushwhackers, Camp Life, Civilians, Commanders, Comrades, Daily Life, Desertion, Family, Friends, Guerillas, Home, Ne

First Brigade, First Division, Right Wing Army of Tenn.

Dear Sister,

Yours of the 10th came to hand yesterday and I was glad to hear from you. I suppose you will be surprised to receive a letter dated at this place. Well I am some what surprised my self for I was sure that we would have been on our way down the river by this time, for we were ordered to pack up our knapsacks and have everything in readiness to start on the 18th for a point on the Arkansas side about 25 miles above Vicksburg, but from all appearances now, I think we will not go for a few days, but we are getting ready for a big move some where, and we are going by water for the boats are coming in all the time, and I think that it means us. I think you have an early winter in Wis. We never think of winter here, the birds singing every morning just like they do there in May. Except when it rains, I never saw pleasanter weather in my life. The boys found a lot of sweet potatoes and they were not froze any so they confiscated all they could carry home conveniently and they go very well. All we lack is some fresh butter to eat with them. There was considerable rejoicing in camp a few days ago. The report got out that we was going to be paid off but alas it proved a false alarm, but we are getting so accustomed to false reports that we do not mind them much any more. The report is that there is paymaster now in Memphis and that some of the Regiment are getting paid off today, but I have made up my mind to believe nothing that I hear and not much that I see.

On board the steamer Ohio Bell, Sunday Dec. 21/62

I wrote you on the 20th that we were still in Memphis and that from all appearances I thought we would be likely to stay. Well I was not alone in thinking so for all of our officers thought so too, but it proved just as correct an any of our camp calculations for about three o'clock the order came to strike tents, so at the tap of the drum, down went our house and we soon had our tents and cooking things loaded and on the way for the river, but owing to the scarcity of teams and the extra amount of Quartermaster stores, the teams had to make three trips to the river and the time being very short they did not get back for their third load till after dark, and there we were standing around in groups without our tents, but worst of all without our regular rations for all our grub went out the first load, so about 7 o'clock we were formed in line to leave and marched about ½ mile when were met by a dispatch that our boat had not come, so we were ordered back to our old quarters to spend one more night on the sacred soil of Tenn. Without our tents, but the night was very pleasant so we did not suffer any from cold. It did not make much difference with me for I was on guard, so at 5 o'clock the old drum called us forth and we started for the river on empty stomachs, but we did not suffer much on that account. ½ hours march brought us into Fort Pickering, a very strong place for earthworks just on the banks of the river and at the lower end of town, so as quick as we got started round, we sent a squad down to the landing and brought up a barrel of crackers and about 100 pounds of boiled beef, and had our regular coffee. I saw guns and ammunition enough properly used to kill all rebels in secession. I almost hated to leave our old camp for we had stayed so long and had things fixed up so nice and comfortable, but we can't stay more than two or three weeks at the most in one place. I believe we do more traveling than any Regiment that ever left Wis. And it just suits me for we get to see more. Now I will try and give you a brief account of our expedition and starting out of port we got on board the John H. Dickey, a large side wheel boat, but found that we were crowded rather much for comfort so there was two companies, B & G were put onboard the Ohio Bell, a very good boat of average size. The expedition is commanded by Gen. Sherman or the land force at any rate, and when complete will consist 80,000 men. 60,000 leaves here and 20,000 meet us at Helena. I never saw a more splendid sight in my life then when the boats pulled out from shore. The Commodore's boat backed out into the stream with a large black flag with a white center floating from the flag staff and the stars and stripes floating at the stern, and just as she got headed out she fired a gun from her bow and then all the rest of the boats rang three bells and commenced backing out, one large gun boat just ahead of the flag boat, and all follow, and now as I write sitting on the hurricane roof, I can count sixteen boats, and I certainly think it the grandest sight I ever saw. We have left five of our company at Memphis, J.A. Hall, John Doyle, J.W. Haughawout, J.B. Montgomery, E.F. Stauch. Hall, Doyle & Haughawout I guess will be discharged and I hope Haughawout in particular will get his for he is the greatest old maid of a fellow I ever saw in my life. He is all the time whining about something and he has never done any duty to amount to anything. The most he has done was to write lies home about the officers and the way he was treated. I saw an editorial in the Darlington paper of Dec. 13th about him & Thomas Dunphy

being left at Nicholasville in the hands of rebels and that if it had not been for rebel generosity they would have suffered. Now I know a little something about the way they were left there and about the way they were treated while there. When we started from Nicholasville Haughwout & Dunphey and John M. Garrison claimed to be sick and I guess Garrison was sick, but the others was not, but the Doctor got them all into the ambulances (we have only two) but when we were ready to start, the General issued an order that the ambulances should start empty for on a march a 100 miles he said there would be enough give out on the road to fill them up by the time we got to the end of the march, so all the sick were turned over to the Doctor of the hospital in Nicholasville for to be sent on after the Regiment as soon as they were able. It was the only thing that could be done under the circumstances, but Mr. Haughwout & Dunphey could not get enough to eat in the hospital for when one goes into the hospital they are dieted. They get light, easy to digest food and not enough for a well man to work on, so they slipped out into the country and went to begging for themselves and as the rules of the hospital was not very strict, they came back and forth just as they pleased, and whenever there was a squad making up to send to join the Regiment they would step out into the country and they kept on so three weeks until the head surgeon threatened to treat them as deserters, so they thought they had better stop the game and they started for the Reg. and came up with us at Memphis, both of them fatter and looking better then ever. I saw them in my life but still claiming to be sick the boys laughed Dunphey out of it so he has went to work and his duty as easy as any one and is always ready for his regular rations, but Haughwout was determined to work it out, so we left him in the General hospital at Memphis, and I guess he will get his discharge, and I hope he will for we are all tired of his whining. I should not have wrote anything about him if I had not seen that piece in the paper for everything he has wrote is false. Such letters are sure to create hard feelings against out officers and make some folks that our officers are to blame, but they are not for when a man reports himself sick, he is turned over to the Doctors and the company officers have nothing more to do with him, and besides that we have as good company officers as there is the Reg.

On board the Steamer Ohio Bell, Dec. 22nd/62

Monday morning finds us all well and tied up on the Mississippi side at a small town by the name of Friers Point. We passed Helena about 11 o'clock last night. I did not see it for I went to bed early in order to secure a state room for the trip. I do not know when we stopped here but I think it was about midnight. It was about sun rise when I got up this morning and when I went on the hurricane roof, I counted 48 steamboats and four gun boats laying on both sides of the river at this point, and several more came in since. There was about a Regiment of men thrown out for picket last night, and during the night there was a small band of guerrillas got inside the lines, and some of the boys got after them, and some of them took shelter in a house in town, right on the bank of the river, and they could not get them out, so the house was set on fire, some say by the order of the General, and some say not, but the house was burnt and several more with it, and the boys commenced to leave the boats by hundreds for the fire. The General ordered out a guard but they could not stop them for they were bound to see the fun. There was five or six prisoners taken and several documents of one kind and another. Found some of considerable importance. While the crowd was the largest and the excitement the highest, the boys pitched into a large store and helped themselves to what they could find and skedaddled back to the boat. Finally the old General got out a guard sufficient to get them turned back to the boats. There was some twelve or fifteen houses in the principal part of the town burnt. It is a very strong rebel hole. On the 18th of the month, as a boat was passing up the river from Helena to Memphis with sick and wounded soldiers, she was fired into by a band of guerrillas and three of our men were killed, so they landed and burned the town. There is not a single house left in the place. They got several prisoners. I believe the calculation is to clean the river out as we go. I should have liked to seen Memphis in ashes before we left there for I do not believe there is a Union man living in the city, but I suppose they do not want to destroy such places as Memphis when they know they can hold them, but I think the cheapest way to hold such places is to destroy them root and branch. I was told this morning by Lieut. Duncan that there is 120,000 men in this expedition, and that they are going to all get together at the mouth of a small river, I forget the name of it now, 25 or 30 miles above Vicksburg, and whether they land there or not is more than I can tell, but the general supposition is that we will keep on till we get to the Gulf, but we can't tell anything about where we go or what we will do for certain, but it don't cost anything to talk about where we are going and what we are going to do. The boys was all anxious to get some little things this morning to send home when they were in the store. I got some pink ribbon but had to divide it round so that I have got but a small piece to send, but it is a trophy of the first rebel town I saw on fire. Frank confiscated a nice linen coat that he intends sending to Wes. It will about fit him, but it may be some time before he will have a chance to send it. We got a lot of old papers and books of all kinds, enough to keep us reading the rest of this trip. This part of going to war is very pleasant. The weather is beautiful, so warm that we can go in our shirt sleeves all day. All the sand bars that we pass are covered with wild geese and ducks. It looks tempting to see so many and can't have a shot at them.

Tuesday morning, Dec. 23rd, 1862

This morning finds us all well and moving down the Mississippi at a good rate. We tied up last night just below the mouth of White River on the Arkansas side. We have had no adventures worthy of note since the burning of Friers Point. Yesterday morning we had a very pleasant days ride or at least we should have called it so if we had paid our own passage and was going on a pleasure trip instead of one of war, but the boys all seem to be determined to have a good time as long as they can for I never saw a jollier set of fellows together for any purpose than the crowd that is on this boat. We are not much crowded. There is not more than 400 men on this boat, two companies of our Reg., and one company of cavalry, so that we have the use of the cabins and state rooms. I am now seated at the cabin table with a number of others writing. I find it more convenient to draw up a chair to a table and write than to take my portfolio on my knee and sit down on the ground. The motion of the boat makes some crooked letters, but still I can work with comfort. I am getting a long letter wrote but when I will have a chance to mail it is something that remains in the

future, but I have nothing else to do so I may as write for it will keep me out of other mischief. I wish you all could have been here this morning to see the boats all move off from shore. The morning was fine and the sun rose bright and just after sun up the John Caroon, the boat that General Smith is on, fired the signal gun and all the boats rang three bells and shoved out into the river, and from the hurricane roof, I counted fifty two steamers all out in the stream turning their bows down stream. I think it is the grandest sight I ever saw. The boats are all white and all crowded with soldiers dressed in blue, and flags flying from every one of them.

Nine o'clock A.M.

We have just passed the town of Napoleon. It is rather a nice looking place but not much business done in it at present. We heard yesterday that the rebels had a battery at this place but if they have they concluded to keep it quiet for we could see nothing stirring about the place but about a dozen women on the porch of the City Hotel, a small looking house on the bank of the river. We heard last night that Vicksburg had surrendered, but how the news came I know not, but I do not believe it, but I think they had better for they will surely have to cave this time for the 23rd is coming. There is fifty two gun boats going down besides a large force that is coming up from below. Last night while the sergeant of the picket was taking the relief round, he got outside of the line in the dark, and when the sentinel halted him he did not stop, and then the picket asked who came there and still he did not answer, so the picket told him if he did not speak he would shoot, and still he did not answer, so the picket fired and shot through the heart killing him instantly. There was two other men with the sergeant and they never spoke either, so the other men on the post cocked their guns to fire when one of them said you have shot Demsey, so they knew them as soon as he spoke, so that the sergeant might have saved his life if he had only spoke, for it was one of his own company that shot him. There is no blame attached to the man that shot him, for orders are to fire after halting twice if the person is coming from the outside.

Two o'clock, P.M.

We have just tied up on the Arkansas side for what purpose I do not know unless it is to give the cooks a chance to cook up a lot of provisions for we have a poor chance to cook on the boat. I see all the cooks are very busy on the shore. I believe I must bring my few lines to a close for this time for I have got about as much as my envelope will hold. I will commence another letter tomorrow. I saw General Sherman today. He is a young looking man, not good looking. The name of the place that we are at now is Gasters Landing. There is a few miserable old shanties and no business of any kind a doing. The scouts that we sent out when we landed has just brought in four bushwackers. They had three old rifles and one shot gun with the regular old fashion powder horns & shot pouches. They are certainly as hard looking cases as ever I saw. They were taken onboard the General's boat as soon as they were brought in so I do not know anything about what kind of a story they told.

Scott crams the last few sentences in the margin and does not sign the letter, but it appears from all indications to be complete by virtue of Scott's own comments: "I must bring my few lines to a close for this time for I have got about as much as my envelope will hold." This came from a small grouping of Scott's letters that we had, and we guarantee the ID. The included cover he addressed to his sister helps to further identify him.

[Also included are the following two letter fragments written and signed by James Scott:]

I received two letters yesterday for the first for two weeks. We have kept ahead of the mail all the time and I expect we will for awhile. There is no mail nearer than Falmouth. We have a chance this morning of sending this with the steamer so I have no time to write much news. We left John Haughawout in the hospital. He was very sick when we left and I have heard from him since. The health of the Reg. is good and I think will while we stay here. No more at present. Direct as usual.

James Scott

...Is working his cards. He wants a discharge and I guess he is bound to make it out before he gives it up. He is certainly the greatest old maid of a fellow I ever saw. He is fat and looks well, eats well, but still he can't do any duty. [appears to be talking about John Haughawout] Since I commenced writing the sun has come out and the snow is about all gone but the mud is about knee deep, but if it keeps clear for a day or two it will be dry. It is very warm and pleasant over head. I think from what you write about the prices of things in Wis., it must be hard work to make things come round. I am not troubled much about such things for everything is provided for us. We are just like the slaves in that respect. We have no care on our minds. Whatever our rations, are all fixed up for us, our clothing all ready for us when we want them. All we have to do is to eat, sleep and go out when the drum beats, and fix ourselves comfortable as the circumstances will admit. We have our tent fixed up better than we have for we had plenty of brick to fix it with so we built us up a nice brick fire place in one end of our tent so that if you saw how we are fixed you would say we was comfortable as any of a soldier been fixed. Frank and I has a good bunk. We have boards to sleep on so with some leaves and three good heavy blankets we sleep just as good as I did at home or any other place. Anyone can get along with this kind of living if they will only be content. For my part I am just as much at home here as any, but some folks make themselves miserable any place. We have plenty of fresh bread since we came here and I like better than the crackers and the quartermaster is building a bake oven so that we are going to bake our own bread, so I think from all appearance we are going to stay here for some time. Some say all winter, but I don't know or don't care much for I would just as be moving as not for then we see something new every day and the exercise is good for us for we have not exercised enough when we are in camp for our health. I have noticed all along that the boys health is better when

we were marching than when we were in camp. I believe I have nothing more to write at this time so I will close by sending my respects to you all. When you write direct to Memphis, Tenn. No more at present.

Yours truly,  
James Scott