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Article Summary: Twenty-two-year-old Thomas Edwin Keen, a Pennsylvania native, joined up with a group of diverse soldiers from Nebraska to fight on the Union side of the Civil War. He left behind twenty-three letters he wrote to family members between 1861 and 1864, providing a vivid description of his experiences as a private in the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry.

### Cataloging Information:

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Photographs / Images: "The Officers of Gen Prentiss's division planting the Stars and Stripes on the Summit of Pilot Knob, Missouri"; Brothers John and James Hutton, Co E First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry; "Field Operations in Missouri and Northern Arkansas"; "Fort Donelson"; "Gun-Boat attack on Fort Donelson"; Confederate earthworks at Fort Donelson National Battlefield; Brig Gen John M Thayer; "View of the town of Paducah, Kentucky"; First Lt William T Clarke; "Map of the Battle of Pittsburg Landing"; Lewis Wallace; View of steamers sunk by the Rebels; Jackson's monument at Memphis; Robert R Livingston; Brig Gen John W Davidson; Area of operations for the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry; Slaughter of the innocents, or how the Union troops did their foraging in Missouri; Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Pilot Knob; Thomas W Tipton; U S Mississippi gun boats being built at Carondelet; A Service Chronology of Company H, First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, 1861-64

In Camp At Belmont  
Missouri June 21st 1863

My Dear Sister

# "I Thought it my Duty to Go"

## The Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry

Edited by James E. Potter

### Introduction

During the American Civil War, a diverse group of soldiers from Nebraska followed the Union banner to Southern battlefields. Many of them were Nebraskans by association only, transplants from elsewhere who had lived in the Nebraska Territory only briefly. One such soldier was twenty-two-year-old Thomas Edwin Keen, a Pennsylvania native. Unlike most of the Nebraska troops, however, whose Civil War legacy is limited to their military service record or a line or two in postwar rosters, Keen will be remembered by a trove of twenty-three letters he wrote to family members between 1861 and 1864, describing his experiences as a private in the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry.

Keen's letters span the period from August 1861 to March 1864, when the First Nebraska served mostly in southern Missouri and eastern Arkansas, garrisoning small outposts or marching through the countryside in pursuit of guerrillas. As the letters reveal, companies of the First Nebraska also were detached for provost duty, or assigned to guard prisons, commissary stores, and naval yards. Although the regiment participated in the important Union victories at Fort Donelson and Shiloh in early 1862, those Tennessee battles marked its most significant combat against regular Confederate forces.

Keen's letters are rich with his observations on the life of the common soldier, including his feelings during battle, his less than flattering opinions of some

of his superior officers, and his own patriotic sentiments. They shed light on the day-to-day activities of the First Nebraska, reveal Keen's motivation for enlisting, and explain what helped him endure the hardships of campaigning. Keen analyzes why he believes the rebellion must be suppressed and discusses the soldiers' reaction to the employment of black troops, while at the same time revealing his own sympathy for the plight of African Americans. By contrast, his views on American Indians, the Irish, and Missouri civilians are much less charitable.

Keen also relates episodes of near mutiny by troops against incompetent and overbearing officers, and tells of a meleé between men of the First Nebraska and another Union regiment that brought death to several soldiers. He provides an interesting narrative of provost duty in St. Louis, including the banishment from the city of alleged Rebel sympathizers, whom he helped escort to Confederate territory.

Thomas Keen was born in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, on January 4, 1839. His parents were Lewis and Susannah (Armstrong) Keen. Little is known of his early life, but the letters reflect his having reaped the benefits of a good education. When Keen was a child, the family lived in Birmingham, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, but they moved to Pittsburgh sometime before the war. Keen had a sister, Mary Ann, who was the primary recipient of his wartime letters, as well as a sister named Sarah, and a brother, Lyman.<sup>1</sup>

Keen's letters often mention Ed Brown and other members of the Brown

family. James E. "Ed" Brown was born in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, in 1838, and his family moved to Pittsburgh when Brown was eight. Either there, or earlier in Huntingdon County, Brown and Keen became friends. Brown moved to Nebraska Territory in 1855 and claimed land in Wyoming Precinct, Otoe County. Whether Keen came west at the same time has not been determined, but he was living with Brown in Otoe County in 1860, where the census records him as a farm laborer. Also living in the household was Brown's mother, Silvina (mentioned in several of the letters). Although Keen notes in his first letter that "my crop amounted to little or nothing," there is no evidence that he had claimed land himself. Perhaps he was only sharecropping on Brown's preemption claim.<sup>2</sup>

When the Civil War commenced in the spring of 1861, Keen told his family that he did not plan to enlist. He changed his mind, however, in July and joined Company H, First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, which was then assembling in Omaha. At the time of his enlistment Keen was described as being five feet, eight inches tall, with brown eyes and dark hair, twenty-two years old, and a farmer. His term of enlistment was three years.

Like most of the Nebraska soldiers, Keen expected the regiment to remain in the territory for home defense, an expectation soon dashed when the First Nebraska was ordered south in late July. For the next three years Keen served with the regiment in Missouri, Tennessee, and Arkansas until his enlistment expired in July 1864 and he was dis-

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## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

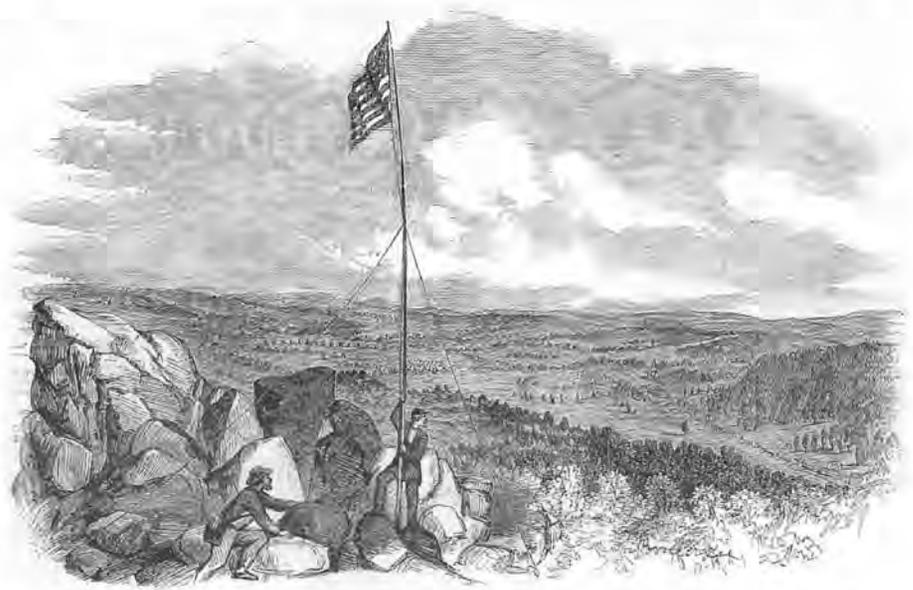
charged for disability on account of "chronic rheumatism." In early November 1863 Keen had become unfit for duty, and he spent the remainder of his enlistment in a St. Louis military hospital.

Following his discharge Keen returned to Pittsburgh. There is no evidence he ever visited Nebraska again. He spent at least part of his life employed as a carpenter and never married. In a wartime letter he alludes to what may have been a failed love affair. To his sister's suggestion that he marry after the war, Keen responded, "'A burnt child dreads the fire' so that ends that question."

As he reached his sixties Keen's health deteriorated and he moved into the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home at Erie, Pennsylvania. In 1898 he applied for and was granted a pension of \$8 per month on account of rheumatism of the lower limbs and feet, heart disease, and "general debility." The pension was increased to \$12 in 1907. Keen died December 7, 1908, at the American Oncologic Hospital in Philadelphia. He was sixty-nine years old. The immediate cause of death was given as lobar pneumonia. He was buried in the cemetery at the Erie Soldiers' and Sailors' Home.<sup>3</sup>

As historian James B. McPherson has pointed out, Civil War armies were the most literate that had ever fought a war up to that time, and unlike the situation with twentieth-century armies, the correspondence of Civil War soldiers was not censored.<sup>4</sup> Thousands of them wrote letters home or kept diaries. What distinguishes these personal writings from a considerable body of soldier correspondence appearing in hometown newspapers is that the personal accounts are usually more candid. The criticism of superior officers and of government policies evident in several of Keen's letters was not likely to be included if the soldier wrote with publication in mind. One First Nebraska soldier was arrested when a letter to his wife, critical of his officers, was published by an overzealous editor back home.<sup>5</sup>

Most of Keen's letters were written to his sister, Mary Ann ("My Dear Sister"),



"The officers of Gen. Prentiss's division planting the Stars and Stripes on the summit of Pilot Knob, Missouri." *Frank Leslie's Pictorial History of the War of 1861*, 8:120

a nurse at Seminary Hospital in Georgetown, D.C., while an occasional letter was addressed to his parents in Pittsburgh. Although the letters span the period from early in Keen's service in 1861 to near the time he was discharged in 1864, internal evidence confirms that he wrote several other letters to his family that have not survived. Nevertheless, the letters reproduced below are the largest group of personal letters from a member of the First Nebraska that have yet come to light and they bring new insight and understanding to Nebraska's modest but fascinating contribution to Civil War history.

### A note on editorial procedures

Thomas Keen was a literate and thoughtful writer, whose letters reflect an above average education. As with many writers of his day, however, his punctuation, paragraphing, and capitalization are erratic. He sometimes misspells words, though there is rarely doubt about what he means. Throughout the letters he refers to Gen. John W. Davidson as "Davison." Words in brackets have been added by the editor. Words enclosed by <> reflect where Keen repeated himself or substituted

different words. The editor has added punctuation and paragraphing to improve readability and has capitalized proper names, but has not corrected the spelling. The addresses on the envelopes, most of which accompany the letters, have not been reproduced.

Thomas E. Keen's letters were purchased by the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1999 with the assistance of John A. Burke of Ithaca, Nebraska, and with funding provided by private donations to the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation.

### The Letters

August 24, 1861

Camp Pilot Knob, Missouri

My Dear Sister, [Mary Ann Keen]

I have no doubt you will be surprised to receive a letter from me dated at this place. Early in the spring I wrote to you that I would not enlist but when the Nebraska regiment was sworn in, it lacked about 100 men of being full and the governor issued a proclamation requesting every man that could to enlist <that could> and so accordingly on the 19th of July I proceeded to Omaha and was sworn in along with some 8 others into

Company H, 1st Regiment Nebraska Volunteers.<sup>6</sup> As my crop amounted to little or nothing I thought it my duty to go and serve my country. But when I enlisted it was with the promise to not be taken <of> outside of the territory, but we were ordered to St. Jo., Missouri, to get our arms and from there to St. Louis and from there here. But Genl. Prentiss has promised us that we shall not be taken from here until we get our tents and uniforms and pay. We have not received a cent of pay from [the] government as yet, but we are expecting our pay & ec. daily and when we get them we will be ordered to move south immediately, I think.<sup>7</sup>

I would have written to you sooner, but I have been putting it off from day to day until now. I had no money to pay the postage and I couldn't borrow any in the company for I don't believe, to take the whole company together <there> officers and all, there is 50 cents in it and it is so with the whole regiment.

There is at present some 18,000 men in and around Pilot Knob and Secession prisoners are brought in daily. They are treated with humanity but what becomes of them I don't know. The forces here are under command of Generals Grant and Prentiss and are mostly Ills. and Iowa troops and were stationed at Cairo before coming here. We have plenty [to] eat for soldiers and are well contented so far as that part is concerned and we have good company officers.

There is plenty of fruit in the vicinity and we help ourselves. The weather at present is very hot, but is getting some cooler. I am well and hearty at present, but you must excuse [me] from writing any more at present as I don't know of anything more just know [now]. Please write to me soon and let me know all about home. Tell mother I could not stand back when my country stood in need of soldiers and if I should never return she will have the consolation of knowing that I have died in the defence of my country, but I will take care of myself and not run myself into any unnecessary danger. Give my love to Sarah

and Lyman<sup>8</sup> and father and mother and grammy[?] and all the rest and I remain your affectionate brother,

Thomas E. Keen

Direct your letter in this form

Thomas E. Keen

Co. H, 1st Regt. Nebraska Volunteers

Pilot Knob, Missouri

Please write soon & farewell.

Camp Pilot Knob

Sept. 9, 1861

My Dear Sister,

I received your kind letter 3 days ago and it gave me great pleasure to hear from you, it has been so long since I heard from you. I have not had very good health since I wrote to you last. When we first came down here we had no tents and had to camp in the brush with nothing to shelter us but our blankets and the sky, and the heavy dews and fogs of this country and standing guard in the rain several times gave me the ague and I had 4 pretty severe chills before I got it broke. It weakened me down considerable. I am not able for duty yet & have only been 3 or 4 days from the hospital. The hospital arrangements of our regiment is none of the best. The hospital consists of 3 large tents in which is some 30 patients. The steward is careless, the attendants are surly.<sup>9</sup> There is no women's kind hand to soothe the weary patient, nor is there enough beds. For what time I was there I had to lay on the ground with nothing to lay on but my blanket nor I did not get my medicine regular until I raised a fuss about it, so you see there is a vast difference between the one you describe and ours, but taken at an average there is better health in our regiment than any other.

We have received our uniform an[d] camp equipage and we do first rate now. Our uniform consists of a blue frock coat and blue pants and a high black hat looped up on one side with an eagle, a bugle in front, and an ostrich plume on one side. We present a gay appearance on parade. In addition we

received 2 shirts, 2 pr. drawers, 2 pr. woolen socks, blouse, overcoat, blanket, knapsack, canteen & ec. We are encamped in a valley surrounded on all sides by high hills. It puts me in mind of home. On one side is a high hill like Coal Hill only instead of being filled with coal, it is filled with iron ore, nearly pure iron on which is situated the famous "Pilot Knob." It rises some height above the top of the hill and a person can see all over Missouri nearly. It is used for a lookout for an enemy's approach. At the foot of the hill is a large furnace for smelting ore.

The Secessionists keep themselves pretty scarce about here. Our company was out 2 or 3 days ago after a band of them, but they were about 3 hours to late, they had mounted and were off south. They succeeded in capturing 3 men and one wagon and a span of horses. They let two men go and the one they brought in was the greenest specimen of humanity ever I saw. He was about 1/2 civilized. He had never seen a cannon and could neither read or write and he told us that he was told that the Union men were a thieving set. They hung all the men and murdered their women and children and plundered their property. He was surprised at the treatment he received at our hands. He said he expected to be hung right off. We took him and showed him a mounted 32 pounder cannon and he was struck almost dumb with astonishment at the sight of it. He is a sample of "Secesh" in this part of the country.

My dear sister, I think events are drawing to a crisis and this may be the last letter you will ever receive from me, for from recent events which has taken place in the northern part of this state, which I have no doubt you have heard of ere this, may place us in the field. It fairly makes my blood boil when I think of the feindish work on the Hanibal and St. Jo railroad that they have committed and the report in camp is that our captain is a prisoner in their hands.<sup>10</sup> If so and any harm befalls him, there will be a reconing some day with them, for

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there is not one of us but would fight until the death for him, for he is beloved like a father among us. We have all knelt with him <and> under the "Stars and Stripes" and sworn to defend it with the last drop of blood in our hearts. Where is the man that would stand back now and refuse to fight until death to defend the best country in the world? I for one am ready at any moment to lay down my life on the altar of my country if it is required, and if the Almighty sees fit to pass me through this war it is well and good. If not, I am ready to die a soldier's death in defense of it any moment against a mean and contemptible foe. They are worse than Mexicans and Indians. They sneak around and shoot our <prisoners> pickets. They won't meet us face to face like men or an honorable foe.

I wrote a letter home 2 days ago and promised to send my likeness home in my uniform and I will send it to <your> you also when we receive our pay and [I] am at a place where I can get it taken. We have not received any money from [the] government as yet. Your stamps came in good play and I am a thousand times obliged to you for them. Well, I have nothing more to write. I will close my letter and bid you an affectionate and brotherly farewell and I remain your loving brother,

T. E. Keen

P.S. Our first lieutenant will let you know if anything serious happens to me.<sup>11</sup>

E. Keen

Georgetown [Missouri]  
Jan. 25, 1862

My Dear Sister,

It has been some time since I have received your letter and I have not answered it until now. The reason I have for not writing is this. There is so much sickness in our regiment and so much duty it is on that account that I have hardly had time, and <an> another good reason is I have nothing to write about. There has been nothing of much importance <to> happened here since my last letter except the common occurrences



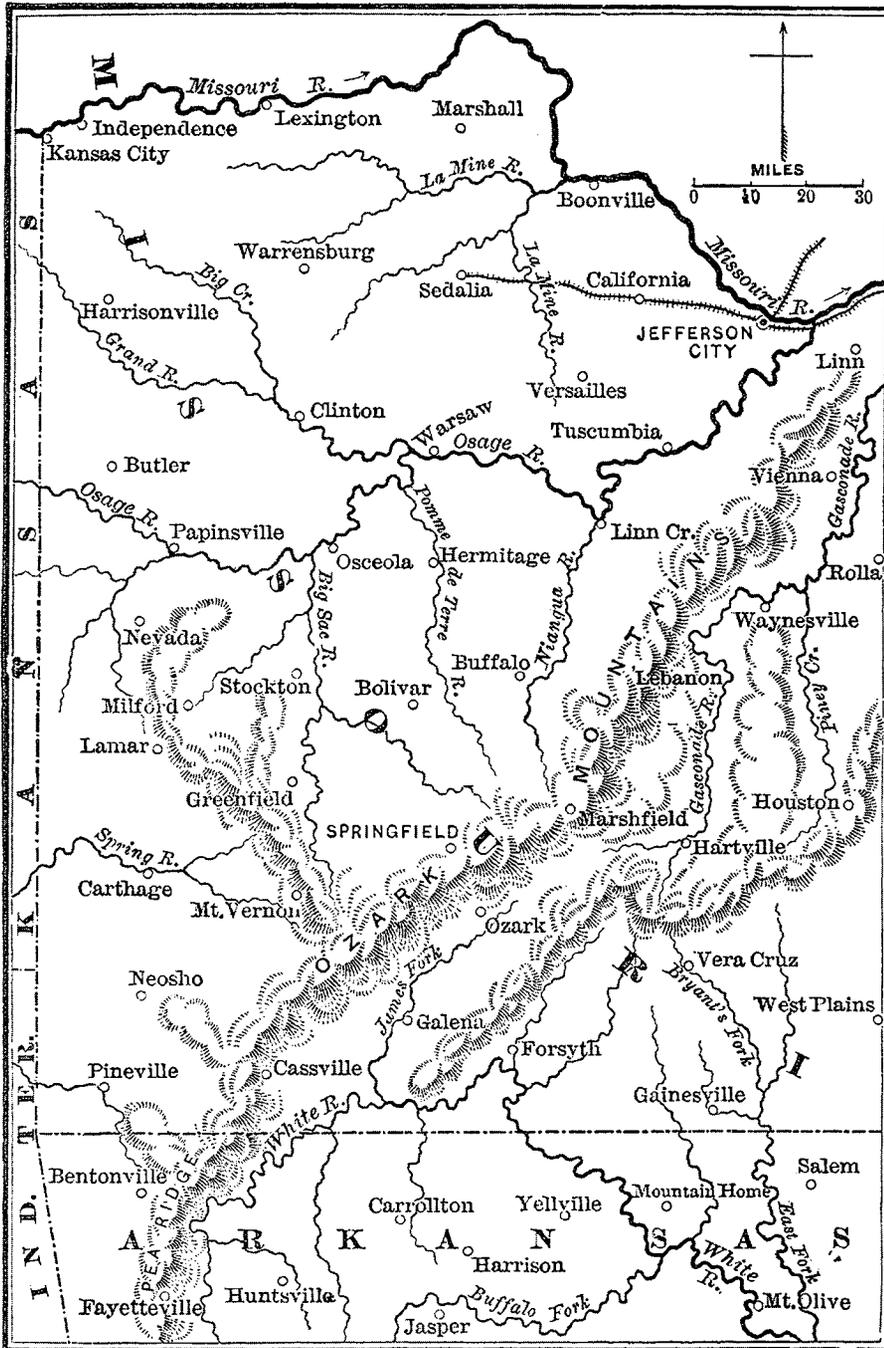
Brothers John (left) and James Hutton, Co. E, First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. They are wearing the uniforms described by Keen, including the Hardee hat. NSHS-RG2057-39,40

of war, except the death of a Major Marshall of Merrill's Cavalry. The way it occurred was this. A party of that cavalry under his command were sent out on a scout towards the west. They had broke up a Rebel camp and the major and two of his aids were in hot pursuit of two flying Rebels and the major having the best horse overtook one of them and after the Rebel saying he would surrender he fired on the major and shot him and mortally wounded him. The assassin was still pursued and shot and his carcass left where he was killed.<sup>12</sup>

At present I am not very well. I have some kind of intermittent fever that is prevalent in our regiment and in all the rest of the troops <in> around here.

Since we have been here there has been an average of 3 died weekly. What is the cause I do not know unless it is the treatment they receive at the hospital. Very few men ever come out of our hospitals alive if they are very sick unless he has an iron constitution.<sup>13</sup> It has been a long time since I have heard from Browns.<sup>14</sup>

Our regiment is well quartered here in this place and well fed, well clothed, and pretty well treated for soldiers, when we are well. I wrote a letter home on yesterday. I have heard nothing of my 5 dollars as yet. I am very much afraid it has been lost. We get the St. Louis papers daily, in fact the same night of the morning they are issued there, so we keep pretty well posted on



"Field Operations in Missouri and Northern Arkansas." M. F. Force, *From Fort Henry to Corinth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), 3

the ways of the world. You wrote me that you sent me an illustrated paper. I have never received it and do not send me any more for they never get through

the adjutant's office. As we can buy them here, it is only a loss to you. The weather here has been very cold for some time and very disagreeable, but yesterday and

today it has been very pleasant overhead, but very sloppy underfoot.

I was very much surprised to hear that you had seen "Adam Reinvehl."<sup>15</sup> Ah, well do I recollect the times that are gone, from the first time we stopped at their house until they left there (Pittsburgh). You say Adam wore spectacles and unless he has wore out his eyes with study he has no use for them, but something may have happened to his eyes that renders them necessary.

Since we have been here our company has been quartered in a large church except for 8 of us, the orderly sergeant, the 3rd duty sergeant, 3 corporals, my "bunky" and myself, and the 5th duty sergeant. We occupy an old printing office. The way I got in here was this. We had been with the (my bunk) 3rd sergeant's squad ever since we enlisted, in camp and in quarters, and when we came here he refused to separate from us. He is a no. 1 fellow.<sup>16</sup> Well, as I know of nothing more to write I will close my letter and I remain ever your brother,

Thomas E. Keen

P.S. please answer soon and direct as usual.

February 18, '62

Fort Henry, Tennessee

My Dear Parents,

I received your letter and package on my arrival in St. Louis for which I am much obliged for to you. It was not for want of material that I did not write oftener, but for want of something to write about. I suppose you will be surprised <you> to receive a letter from me from this place. We left Georgetown on the 3rd of this month and after a 5 days march we got to Jefferson City, where we took the cars for St. Louis and arrived there for the 3rd time. On Sunday we got on the boats for Paducah. We staid 1 day in that place and left for here. After we got here we were ordered back to go up the Cumberland river to help take Fort Donelson, a strong hold situated there and indeed it was one. We got there on the night of the 12 [13]

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inst. and staid there all night about 4 miles south [north] of the fort. We left the boat on the next morning for the field and laid on our arms all night and the next day we advanced still nearer the fort and about noon, whilst supporting a battery, for the first time during the war our regiment came into action. 4 regiments of <Secesh> Rebels and one regiment of cavalry charged on the battery to take it and they got up within 200 yards of us when we gave them a terrible fire from the battery and from our regiment. For  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour we kept up a steady fire on them when they retreated in confusion to their breastworks.

On Sunday morning they surrendered. After 3 days hard fighting we were victorious. Upwards of 12,000 men stacked their arms as prisoners. We got over 100 peices of cannon, about 3 million \$ worth of property in horses, provision[s], ammunition ec. ec. I cannot give you the number of killed and wounded on each side as I have not heard any estimate of them, but it was very large. After staying in Fort Donelson 1 night we marched to this place. We had 3 killed and 10 wounded in our regiment. I think we will leave this place in the morning for Alabama up the Tennessee river. I cannot give you the <practic> particulars of the battle to-night as I am tired and weary and it is late in the night and I only write to let you know where I am <well> and that I am well, but I escaped very narrowly. A bullet went through my overcoat cape and a ball and 3 buckshot through my coat-tail and cut my pants in two places. The taking of these two places are glorious victorys on our side.<sup>17</sup> Please excuse haste and write soon, and I remain ever your son,

Thomas E. Keen

P.S. At present we live in the cabins the Rebels built for their quarters.

E. Keen

Fort Henry, Feb. 22, '62

My Dear Sister,

I suppose you will be surprised to receive a letter from me dated at this

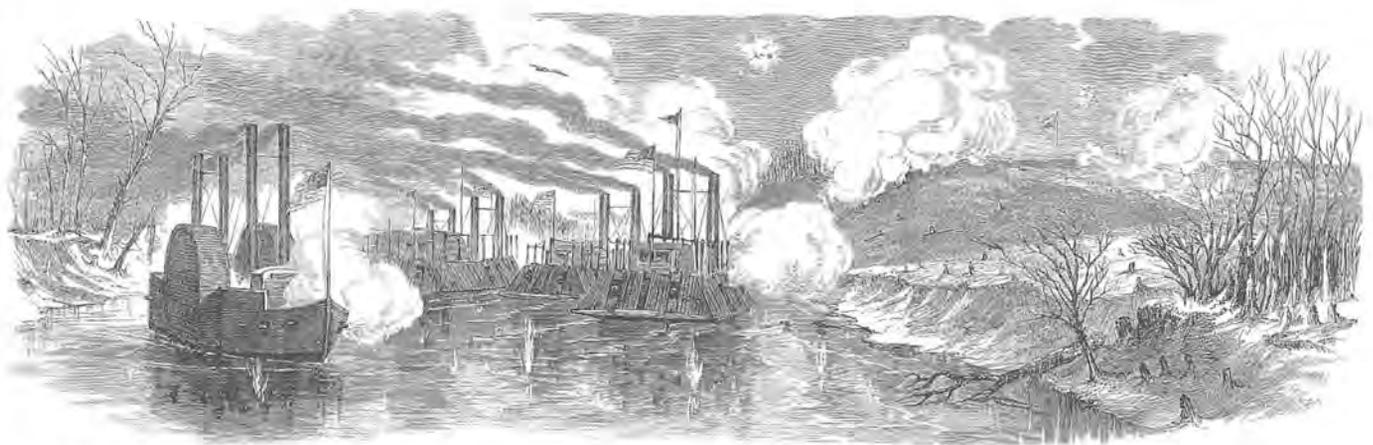


"Fort Donelson." Force, *From Fort Henry to Corinth*, 35

place. We left Georgetown on the 3rd inst. and for 5 days we marched through the mud and snow and at night we slept on our tents instead of under them. I was not very well when we left that place, but as I had nothing to carry the march done me good. We got into Jefferson City on Saturday where we took the cars for St. Louis where we arrived for the 3rd time during the war on Sunday. We staid there all day and took the boat at night for this place. When we got <here> to Paducah we were joined by 9 other transports and <and>

with 3 gun boats we proceeded up the Tennessee river to this place. When we got here we found we could not go across the country to Fort Donelson by land as was intended, so we were ordered to put back and go up the Cumberland. We staid here about an hour and on the next day we started for Fort Donelson.

We got within 4 miles of the fort on the night of the 13th. We staid on the boat all that night and on the next day we took our blankets and two days rations in our haversacks and left our



"Gun-Boat attack on Fort Donelson." *Harper's Pictorial History of the Great Rebellion* (1866), 1:233

knapsacks on the boat and started out, this time to fight. We marched out to the battle ground slowly and took up our position assigned to us and kept it all day and slept on our arms all night. Next morning [we were] ordered to advance and take up another position, which we did several times.

About noon we were ordered to support Smith[s] Chicago battery.<sup>18</sup> We had hardly taken up our position on the right wing when 4 regiments of Rebels and one of their cavalry charged in column on our battery and our center to try and cut their way out. They got up within 200 yards of us before we fired a shot when our battery opened on them and we got orders to fire and for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour we kept up a terrible fire on them when they retreated in confusion to their intrenchments, leaving about 300 of their men killed and wounded on the field. Although we were subjected to fire from one of there batterys and there fire, we only had 4 killed and 10 wounded in our regiment. We all laid or kneeled down during the fight, which I think saved many of our lives. The 76th Ohio regiment, which was stationed in our rear as a reserve, got so excited that they commenced firing without orders and their bullits ranged from the height of our heads to forty feet in the air and that placed us between two fires and it is a great wonder to me that they did not

kill  $\frac{1}{2}$  of us, for they were only about 60 yards in our rear.<sup>19</sup>

The next morning we <we> were advanced still nearer the fortifacations and as we were taking up our position, we got the news of the surrender of the fort and as the news passed along the lines, cheer after cheer went up from the almost worn out men. One poor fellow that was shot in the leg which was fractured and two men was leading from the field, took of [ ] his hat and gave 3 as hearty cheers for the Union as anybody. We marched into the fort after 3 days of hard fighting, victorious, and of all the sights ever I saw or read of this beat it, I will not attempt to describe all I saw for I cannot. Dead and wounded men lay in every direction inside and out of the fort and horses blown to peices by bombs, cannon knocked over, clothing scattered and trampled under foot, tents all cut to peices by grape shot, arms and amunition piled up in every direction. For three days our gun boats and field artillery poured a terrible fire into the fortifications and made it to hot for them to stay there.

We got between 12 and 15 thousand prisoners, 18,000 stand of arms, over 100 peices of cannon, 65 of which were larg[e] seige guns, the rest were field peices, a large number of horses, a great many tents, ec. ec. 5,000 of them escaped under Floyd the night before they

surrendered.<sup>20</sup> They had log cabins enough built to accomadate 10,000 men in which our men were quartered in right away. The Secesh were sent off down the river. I did not get to go into the main fortification. They had breast works for three miles around on a high ridge and it was a natural position for a fortification they had. The trees and brush were all cut down for 200 yards in front of the breast works and all interlaced so as to make it almost impossible to charge over and the country around it is all hills an [d] ravines thickly covered with timber and oak scrubs and brush and was very muddy. We staid there all night and then started for here across the country. It took us 2 days to march 12 miles it was so muddy.

When we got here we were quartered in the cabins the Secesh had built for their men where we still are, under orders to march in an hour's notice. They are very comfortable things built of logs and chinked and daubed with mud, good tight roofs, and big open fire places. There is 12 of us in a squad stays in the one I am in. There has been a good deal of rain since we have been here and at present while I am writing it is <very> raining very hard. I will not try to describe this place to you for I suppose you have read all about it in the papers before this. Well, as I do not know of anything more to write about

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and as there is such a noise in the cabin I will close my letter.

And I remain ever your brother,  
Thomas E. Keen

I have wrote a letter home pretty nigh the same as this.<sup>21</sup>

Crups [Crump's] Landing  
Hardin Co., Tenn.  
March 25, '62

My Dear Sister,

I am in receipt of two letters from you, one I received on my arrival at Savannah in this state, the other since I have been here. I would have written sooner, but I have [had] so little chances of writing since we left Fort Henry. We left Fort Henry on the 7th inst. and proceeded up the river slowly to this place and we are now in the very heart of the Southern states, being only 18 miles distant from the Miss. and Allabama lines. We are in camp here and have been for several days and I expect you will soon hear of stirring news from this part of the country. We have a large force here under command of General Smith.<sup>22</sup>

The Rebels are concentrating large forces along the line of railroad leading from Memphis to the southeastern cities. There is a large force at Corinth in Mississippi 25 miles from [here] and our picets [pickets] are within 6 miles of each other. There is a great many pressed Union men in their army from this state and they escape as fast as they can and come into our lines for protection. At present there is some eighty-five or more here and they report the fact that the Rebels have to keep a strong guard over a good many of their men to keep them from deserting. I have just seen an account of Burnside's victories in the southeast. I think they were great victories.<sup>23</sup> I hope this war will soon be at an end and I think things are tending that way pretty fast and nobody wishes for an end worse than I do. Although I will help to crush this rebellion with my life if ne[ce]ssary, I would like to see the end of it.

My health at present is pretty good and is improving, but when we left the boats before Fort Donelson I was very weak and debilitated from my then re-

cent illness of Georgetown, but I did not complain but marched out to battle with my comrades and it is a wonder to me how I stood the three days of exposure in the state I was in, for the weather was bitter cold and we had nothing to eat but hard bread and raw bacon. I can think of nothing but the excitement of the occasion that kept me up, for after the surrender and the excitement died away in a manner, I could hardly stand up, and to go to the hospital is pretty nigh sure death, at least to our regimental hospital.

I was not wounded or harmed in battle by the enemy bullits but I had some very narrow escapes. A rifle bullet passed through my over coat cape, a musket ball and 3 buck shot went through my <coat> over coat tail cutting my pants in two places, another went between me and my next file, grazing my elbow and tore the eagle of [f] his hat. Another struck the third file below me and shot his ram rod away. The man next to him had his gun ruined by a bullet striking his gun right below the muzzle and bursted his gun. Another was struck by a ball right above the left eye and wounded him pretty bad. I was surprised at my coolness and the coolness of my comrades during the battle. Although the Rebel sharpshooters commenced firing into us as we were taking our position, we took our position without any confusion and I shot at several men with as cool an aim as though they were stumps.

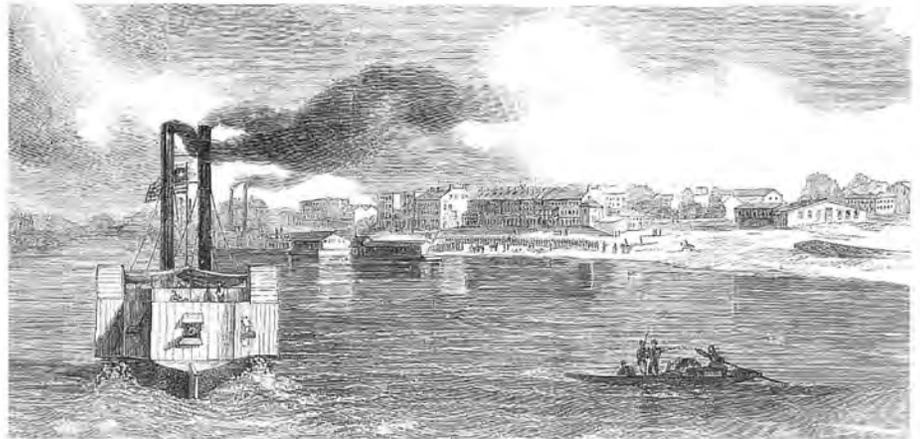
You ask some questions which I should have informed you of before. Our colonel[']s name is John M. Thayer but our lieut. col. is in command at present. My capt. [']s name is George F. Kenedy, but he is not with us and has not been since we left Georgetown. He was court-martialed for something or other. Our 1st lieut[']s name is Lyman M. Sawyer, our 2nd [lieutenant's] name is W. T. Clarke.<sup>24</sup> We are in the 4th [Third] division under Gen. Lew Wallace of Indiana.<sup>25</sup> Our capt. was taken prisoner last sumer, but escaped and was tried for something connected



Confederate earthworks at Fort Donelson National Battlefield as they appear today.  
Photo by James E. Potter



Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer. NSHS-RG2720-1A



"View of the town of Paducah, Kentucky, at the confluence of the rivers Ohio and Tennessee, the northeast terminus of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad." *Leslie's Pictorial History*, 10:149

with [the] Warsaw affair.<sup>26</sup> I was enlisted on the 3rd day of July 1861 for 3 years unless sooner discharged.

At present I am well and doing duty with [the] comp. We have comp. drill every morning and battallion drill in the afternoon. Our drilling ground is a large cotton field. Well, as I know of nothing more to write about and as it is nearly time for drill I must close my letter.

And I remain ever your loving brother,  
Thomas E. Keen  
Please answer soon.

Paducah, May 3, 1862

My Dear Sister,

Why do you not write to me? Have you not received my letters or are you so busy and have you no time to write me a few lines? I have written you two letters and I have also written two home and as yet I have not received any answer. I have been looking <of> and expecting a letter from you or from home anxiously for some time. I have been here ever since the battle of Pittsburg Landing on detached service.<sup>27</sup> I was sent here to be instructed in signaling and have been here nearly a month. I like the business first rate. I have nothing of interest to write you. I was in the bloody battle of Pittsburg <and escaped> on Monday the 7th ultimo and escaped unharmed and unhurt. I am

well and hearty at present and have been so for some time. Please answer soon for I am anxious to hear from you. The Ohio river is very high at this place with a prospect of becoming higher. The days are getting pretty warm. There is a great many sick and wounded soldiers in the hospital at this place. They are well <taken> cared for. Nothing more now.

And I remain ever your brother,  
Thomas E. Keen

Direct your letters thus.  
Thomas E. Keen  
In care of Lieut. J. B. Ludwick  
Signal Officer  
Paducah, K.Y.

Signal Corps  
Paducah, May 11, 1862

My Dear Sister,

I received your long looked for letter on yesterday and I was glad to hear from you once more. I had almost began to despair of hearing from you.

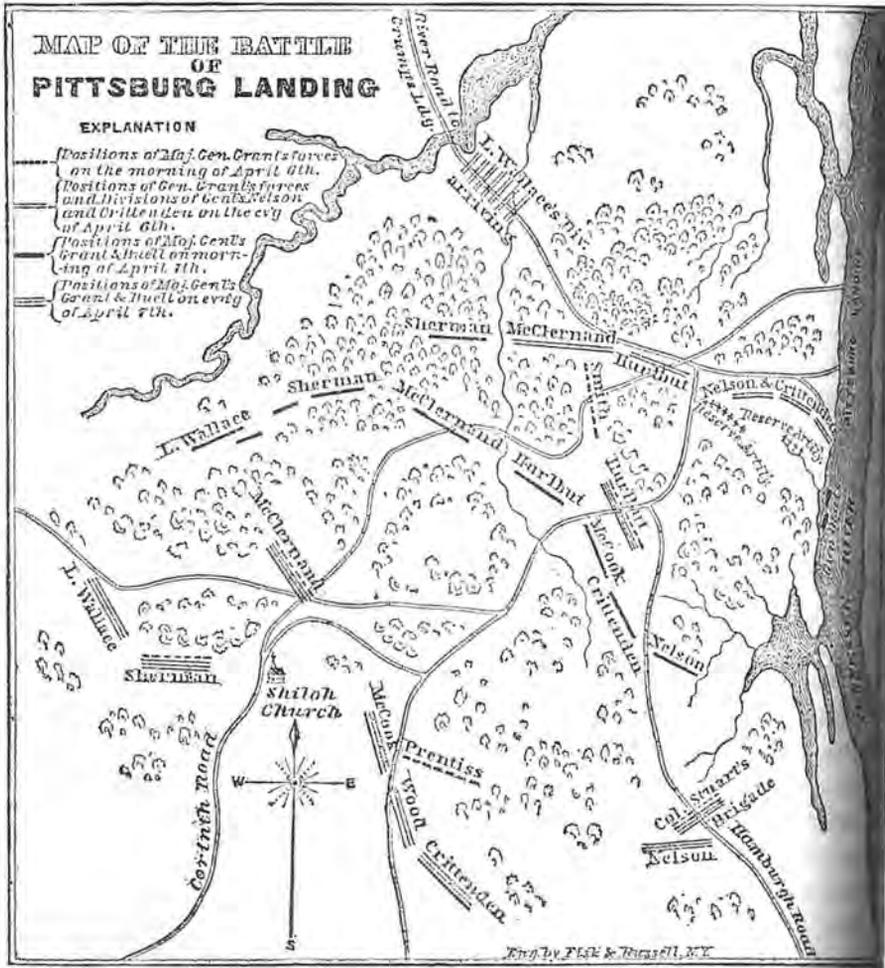
It is very hot here today and I expect it will be hotter here after while. I do not think we will be here very much longer as we are looking for our horses to arrive here from St. Louis tonight and then in a short time we will be off (we are mounted the same as cavalry) to the seat of war. I do not know where or to what part I will be sent. I expect to go



First Lt. William T. Clarke. Courtesy of Steve Speakman

with Lieut. Clark of our company though, and I will have a pretty easy time. It will be much easier on me than to carry a musket and harness of a soldier, although I don't think the danger will be any less.

I cannot hardly describe my feelings to you which I experienced on the morning after the battle of the 7th ult. [Shiloh] after I had went over the ground on which I had fought over on the day previous, and I wondered how it ever happened that so many of us escaped with our lives, unharmed. But



"Map of the Battle of Pittsburg Landing." John S. C. Abbott, *History of the Civil War in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Henry Bill, 1863-66), 2:204

one thing is certain, we hugged the ground mighty close sometimes and we took every advantage we could. When we would get an order to advance on a battery of Rebels we would go double quick for a while and as quick as we saw the flash and smoke from their guns, we would drop as quick as though we had all been shot and their canister and shell would go over us and do us no harm <they> and then we would get up and still advance until we would get up to the infantry supporting the battery and then we had it hot and heavy for a while. During the battle I never once thought of danger to myself, but a kind of wild excitement seized me and my

comrades and we would rush forward with a yell amongst the storm of leaden hail as though we were immortal and could not be killed or hurt and our regiment never gave back once. Although I seen men fall all around me I never once thought of any danger to myself, but afterwards when I seen how the trees were barked and the brush was cut down by the bullets I was astonished and surprised.

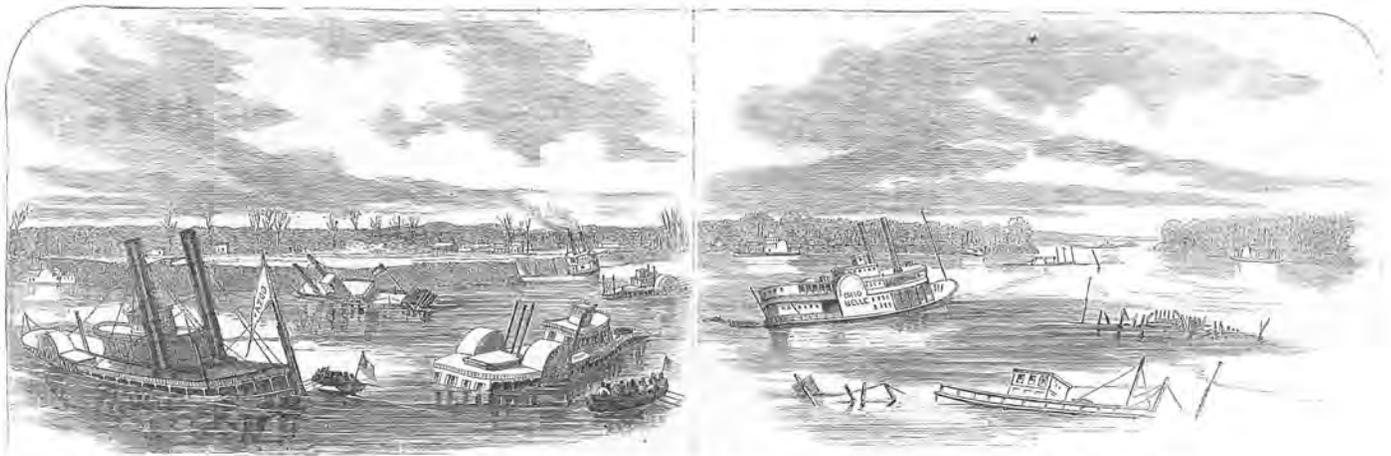
I will tell you why you never see our regiment hardly ever mentioned in the papers. We are a lone regiment being the only men from so far west and the states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio are so filled with notices of their own



"Lewis Wallace." *Harper's Pictorial History*, 1:235

troops, that they never think of Nebraska and as we have no body "to puff" us, we have to keep still. But if you can get Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace's report of Donelson and Pittsburg you will see our regiment very highly noticed.<sup>28</sup> We have the confidence and praise of our general and [the] territorial papers and that is enough for us. The territorial legislature sent us a note of thanks after the Donelson fight.

I would like to send you some "trophy" of the battle, but I have nothing of the kind but a canister shot about the size of a walnut which <we> penetrated my haversack and spoilt my tin cup and smashed my hard crackers for me. I took it out and have had it in my pocket ever since. It was nearly spent when it struck. If I could send it to you I would. I also have a nice little testament which I picked up inside the fortifications of Fort Donelson, which I will send to you as soon as I can raise money to pay the postage <we have> as I run a great risk of losing it and I would not like to lose it for a good deal. We have not had any pay for 4 months now and whether I will get any before I leave here is doubtful to say the least. If we do I will send you my likeness for I can get good ones taken here.



"View of steamers sunk by the Rebels between Island No. 10 and New Madrid. (Sketched by Alexander Simplot)." *Harper's Weekly*, May 3, 1862, 285

The news of the fall of New Orleans and the evacuation of Yorktown made me feel very much satisfied. I do not think the Rebels can hold out much longer.<sup>29</sup>

There is a good many hospitals in this place and [they] are superintended by a board of medical directors. In all that I have been in, the patients are well taken care of and well treated. In the St. Johns Hospital, which used to be a large seminary, everything is nice and clean, everything is in order. It has a nice yard in front and all around it and holds a good many patients. Paducah at present is the prettiest town ever I was in. There is so many nice yards and nice houses and shade trees. The streets are as level as floors and lined with shade trees along the sides. It used to be a heavy forest and in clearing it off for a town site, they left a row of large shade trees along on each side of the streets, which gives it a very beautiful appearance. I am well and hearty as usual.

And I remain ever your brother,  
Thomas E. Keen  
Please answer soon, answer soon.

Signal Camp, Paducah  
May 28, 1862

My Dear Sister,

I received both of your letters and I was glad to hear from you once more. I

have received all the letters that you sent me since I have been here, but they were so long coming, especially the first one, I got so impatient and it really seemed a longer time than it was. I received a letter from home this morning containing some stamps. < send > I have answered it today. I send you many thanks for the stamps that you have sent me. I would have had to [have] mailed my letters "soldiers letters" many a time if it had not been for the stamps that you have sent to me from time to time.<sup>30</sup>

I was paid off a few days ago and I have had my picture taken and will mail it with this letter.<sup>31</sup> Also that testament. I think the likeness is a very good one. I am well and hearty as usual at present. It is very hot here now. I have nothing of importance or interesting to communicate to you today. I do not know when we will leave here. We have our horses but no saddles. I think when we get them we will leave. I will let you know when we leave here

I am very glad you did not send me any money for I know you did not have it to spare. Well I must close.

And I remain ever your brother,  
Thomas Edwin Keen

Enclose[d] you will find the official report of our col. of the Battle of Pittsburg. [Not Enclosed]<sup>32</sup>

Camp near Helena, Arkansas  
Aug. 21st [1862]

My Dear Sister,

It is now over two months since I have written direct to you. The only reason I have to offer you for my neglect is that I thought you were at home, and as I have written home as often as practicable, I thought that would suffice. But I received a letter from you on yesterday dated July 11th and I hasten to answer it. So please excuse my neglect and expect better hereafter. I last wrote to you from Paducah, since when I have had an interesting journey from there here. Probably a short history of my travels would not be uninteresting to you.

After we left our camp at Paducah we proceeded to Columbus, Ky. by river. From there we went across the state of Tenn. on horse back, also a part of Kentucky, altogether a distance of 230 miles. We were ordered to report to General Halleck at Corinth [Mississippi].<sup>33</sup> After we had reported to him he ordered us to disband and to report to our respective regiments as soon as possible as the nature of the country would not admit <of> the use of signals. On our way across the state of Tenn. we passed through several beautiful southern towns amongst which was Trenton, Clinton, [and] Jackson. But Corinth I thought was the dirtiest, nastiest, stinkeneest town I

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

ever was in. I staid in Corinth about one week helping to wind up the business of the corps in turning over our horses and equipment to [the] government and then received transportation to my regiment. I proceeded to Columbus by rail and from there to Memphis by river, where I joined my comp. and regiment.

At Columbus I saw much that was interesting. It is a very strong fortification. On my way down the river I passed the celebrated Island No. 10 and I also saw several <of the > wrecks of the vessels that were sunk by the Rebels after the surrender of that place by them. On my arrival at Memphis I saw several of the Rebel gunboats that were captured in the battle before that town.<sup>31</sup> One of them was a steamship with masts and was quite a rakish looking vessel. She has been repaired and now lies before this place.

Memphis is a splendid place. There is many very beautiful residences in the city and I believe it is the prettiest city I ever was in. I found my regiment encamped in a fine grove right in the city. I went around and seen court square, which contains the bust and monument of Jackson. It is a beautiful ornament to

the city. I also saw many beautiful women in the city, high born Southern ladies I suppose they call themselves, but I thought that if some of them had had a little more good breeding and sense it would have become them better. I did not get acquainted with any of them as my stay there was short. I was glad to get back to my company and the kind welcome I received from my old comrades made me feel as though [I] had returned home from a long absence. Three days after my arrival there we were ordered down here, where we have been ever since. We have a fine, shady, healthy camp here and good water and plenty of it.

I forgot to say that on my arrival back to Columbus I found your letter containing your picture. I think you have either changed a great deal or else it is a poor picture, which is it? I am glad you were pleased with my picture. You wanted a piece of my hair. I would have sent it at the time, but I had just had it cut a few days before so close to my head I could not get any long enough to send.

The weather is very hot down here but I stand it very well but it makes me sweat a good deal. We have lots of nice

shade trees and I keep out of the sun as much as possible. I expected to find the mosquitoes very bad down here, but I have been most agreeably dissatisfied in that respect as they are not as bad here as they are in Nebraska. I am as well and hearty as usual and the health of the regiment is better now than I have ever known it to be since we have been in the service.<sup>35</sup> There is lots of green corn and sweet potatoes in this vicinity, but I don't eat much of either as they are very unhealthy at this season of the year so far south. We can get plenty of fruit from the sutlers by paying a good round price for it. We can get anything we want from them for money.

Since I have been here I have seen John Brown several times. He is in command of a mortar boat and has done good service at Columbus, Island No. 10, Fort Pillow, and Vicksburg.<sup>36</sup> While at the latter place he was taken down with a slow fever but has since recovered. He told me that Ed has gone to Pikes Peak and that Lizzie is engaged to be married to a school teacher in Nebraska and his father has enlisted and gone to war. I have not heard from home since I left Paducah and I am



"Jackson's monument at Memphis." *Harper's Pictorial History*, 1:305

anxious to hear from there. I have written from every place where I have stopped, but as yet I have received no answer.

I am glad to hear that the gov. is taking such vigorous steps towards suppressing the rebellion and I hope it will be crushed before long. It is now about 14 months since I have enlisted and in that time I have seen soldiering in all its forms. I have made many hard marches and suffered many hardships and privations and exposure, but I have done it [as] cheerfully as possible. I have seen men <die> suffer and die in all manner of ways. I have seen my comrades that went out in the beginning full of health and life die all around me, some by disease some by the bullets of the enemy. I have stared death in the face several times, but as yet I am not discouraged.

I heartily reiterate your wish of being close enough to you so as you could send me a box of "goodies," but if you have them to spare give them to some other soldier and believe me there is nothing encourages a soldier more than such small attentions. It makes him feel that he is rem[em]bered at home. I am much pleased with your description of the kind treatment [of] the poor wounded in the battles before Richmond.<sup>37</sup> What a difference between that and the treatment of the wounded of Shiloh. There many of our wounded laid for days in tents and on the river bank for days without hardly anything to eat or drink, their wounds undressed and uncared for. The sanitary committees of Ills. and Ohio found them in a horrible condition, both friend and foe. They soon had things fixed a little different. Really, if it was not for those kind and good sanitary committees, the sick soldiers of the west would fare badly. I expect our regiment will soon be filled out to its original number. Several recruiting officers have gone up to Nebraska for the purpose of recruiting. Please write soon and when you write, direct your letters as of yore to Co. H, 1st Regt. Nebraska Volunteers, Cairo, Ills.

An unfortunate occurrence happened about one week ago between

our regiment and the 58th Ohio. It came about in this way. At the battle of Shiloh they were in our brigade and were our support of <the> our reg. on the left and while we were receiving and returning a very hot fire from the enemy they fell back and were about to retreat and leave us in the lurch. We repulsed the enemy and the 58th then rallied and came up again and since then our boys have been quarrelling and accusing them of cowardice on every occasion. About a week ago some two or three of our boys came past their regiment <drunk and> drunk and commenced abusing them and instead of arresting them as they should have done, they fell on them and gave them an unmerciful beating. As soon as they came up to camp some 60 of our boys went down to the camp of the 58th and commenced to fighting them with clubs, pistols and knives being used on both sides. They fought for an hour or more. Our boys pitched in to the whole regiment and paid no respect to officers or men. There was 4 of the 58th killed and 9 severely wounded besides any amount of black eyes. There was one man very badly wounded of our regiment and a good many severely, but none killed. It was a deplorable affair. Since then we have been put in different brigades.<sup>38</sup> Well, I don't know of anything more to write about I will close. The health of the troops here is good. We are under command of Genl. Curtis and are in the Army of the South West.<sup>39</sup> Well, no more.

And I remain ever your loving brother,  
Thomas Edwin Keen

P.S. I forgot to state that our first lieutenant and captain are both very sick.

E. Keen

Camp near Helena, Arkansas  
Sept. 27, 1862

My Dear Sister,

I received your kind and welcome letter a day or two ago. I had anxiously looked for it for some time. I was afraid my letter had not reached you and then again I thought, as was the case, that

you were very busy on account of the recently hard fought battles in Virginia. I think some of the generals will have a fearful reckoning some time to account for, for the sacrifices of life they have made for nothing else than jealousy and hate. If they did want to sacrifice a good general as they did Pope, I think they might have spared the men. Although the men enlisted to be sacrificed if necessary, I do not think they wanted to be sacrificed by treachery and hate.<sup>40</sup>

I am sorry to hear that your nice hospital has been taken for officers for as you say, they have the wherewith to procure attendance [attendants] and etc. that the private soldier has not and I think that if there is any chance to alleviate the sufferings of soldiers the private ought to have the preference. I have seen so much heartlessness, deceit, and abuse between officers and men that I cannot have that respect for them which is supposed to be due them.

I have not been well since I last wrote to you. About two weeks ago I was taken with a low fever so prevalent in this climate, but by taking heavy doses of quinine and calomel and other stuff I broke the fever. The fever is very weakening and debilitating in its effects upon the system. I had not quite got the fever broke when the flux [dysentery] broke out in our regiment and I was attacked with it and the two together weakened me down considerable, but I have got rid of both diseases and I am recovering rapidly now and I think in a short time I will be able for duty again. There has been a good deal of sickness in our regiment lately and at present one half of it is on the sick list with the same diseases that I had. There has been very heavy rains lately. I think that has been the cause of so much sickness. Our lieutenant col. is very sick and several other of our officers also. The lieutenant col. has gone home on sick leave. Our first surgeon has died since we have been here, but his <death> loss was little regretted. He was a hard hearted wretch and nobody regretted it, in fact I never knew of a man's death so little regretted as was his.<sup>41</sup>

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

I see by the papers that victory has one more returned to our cause and the eastern horizon begins to look brighter now. The loss of life and the sufferings must be terrible.<sup>42</sup> I suppose you have seen the account of the dreadful explosion at the Allegheny arsenal. It must have been a fearful thing. <The> A responsibility must rest upon somebody for its <occasion> occurrence. I wrote home before I was taken sick, but as yet I have received no answer, but I am expecting one every day.

I think it will not be long before the "Army of the Southwest" will again be on the move. Extensive preparations have been and are being made for the fall campaign, but in what direction we will go I have no idea. In case anything serious should happen to me I have made preparations a long time ago for your speedy knowledge of it. I do not know of anything more of importance that I can communicate to you so I will close my letter with my love to you.

And I remain ever your brother,  
Thomas Edwin Keen

Camp Chase,  
South East Missouri  
Jan. 7, 1863

My Dear Parents and Brother,

I received your letter of the 19th some time ago while I was on the march to this place. I also received 3 dispatches and two other papers for which I am much obliged for. I have traveled around quite considerable since I wrote to you from Patterson last.<sup>43</sup> We were ordered to go to the Black river, where we arrived after two day's march. We staid there some eight days and after we had gathered a quantity of corn, we were ordered to destroy what we could not take with us and to go back to Patterson. We had good roads going out to Black river, but it rained 5 out of eight days continually while we were in camp there and it put the roads in a horrible condition. We were in camp right on the river bank and the river commenced rising very rapidly and we had to pull down our tents and go up on the hills in a hurry. It



**Robert R. Livingston, commander of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry during much of Keen's term of service.** NSHS-RG3323:1-1

raised so fast that we did not get time to get all of our mules out of the road and some four or five got drowned. We had quite a lively time for a while. The river is very swift and <and> when anything got out in the current it was a goner. Some of the boys lost their knapsacks. I got every thing of mine out safe. We started back to Patterson, the creeks

were all up, and the roads were about 6 inches deep of mud, which made it very hard marching. We had to wade most all of the creeks and I thought that there was one about every 1/2 mile, but it was the same creek we had been following all the time and we had to wade it about every 1/2 mile it was so crooked.

We arrived in Patterson about noon of the third day, wet and tired and hungry, but 1/2 a day and a night's good rest and a good strong cup of coffee set us ready for the road again. We started again the next morning for this place. There is a little town here about the size of Patterson called Vanburen. It is about 60 miles from Patterson and after five days of hard marching we arrived here. The road run along creeks, which we had to wade as usual, and over mountains and through swamps and some places we had to go through mud knee deep. The first night our wagons did not get in until 11 o'clock <at night> and we had to go without our supper and after marching all day that was not very pleasant.

The next night they did not get in until 2 o'clock and before we started we filled our haversacks with provisions and took our overcoats <and a — and our blankets> and one blanket and an India rubber blanket and put our knapsacks in the wagons and started. Our officers wanted us to carry them and in fact gave us preemptory orders to take them out of the wagons and carry them. We told them we would not do it, that we had carried them until our shoulders were sore and we could carry them no farther through the mud. We started and after we had marched about 5 miles Genl. Davison came up and seen our regiment without our knapsacks.<sup>44</sup> He went up to our col. and wanted to know the reason of it. Col. told him we would not carry them. He said he would see if we would not. He ordered a halt and called up our company officers and told them to march us back to the wagons and to get our knapsacks and when they came back and ordered us back, we told them we would not go and we told them to go and tell Genl. Davison <and tell> that we

would stack our arms and would not stir a foot before we would carry them and we did not. He got very angry and <threaten> threatened to bring up the rest of his division to force us to go back. We told him to fetch <it> them along and to try it if he wanted a nice little fight on his hands. He then went off as mad as a wet hen and ordered all the men away from the wagons up to the regiment and told the teamsters that if their wagons upset to throw every knapsack out of the wagons.

We started on and did not see our wagons for four days. They were scattered all along the road from here clear back to Patterson. We were wet from our waist down all the time. At night we built big fires out of pine knots and cut pine branches for beds so we got some rest at night, but it made a good many of the men sick and when we got here we were all wore out with fatigue. We got in here the night before Christmas and on Christmas day I had about two thirds of a hard cracker, a peice of fat pork, and a quart cup of coffee for my breakfast and that was all I had that day to enjoy myself on for Christmas.

In the afternoon a chap and myself went out about two miles from camp and coming across a two year old steer, we shot him and skinned him and took our haversacks full and hid the rest in the brush and went back to camp and told the rest of the boys where the rest of it was and in a few hours it would have done you good to see the chunks of beef standing around the fire roasting, and before ten o'clock at night we eat up all of that ox but the bones, so you may think were hungry. About 11 o'clock at night our wagons commenced to come in and we got some coffee. We had a great time of it all together. It was the worst march we have ever made.

We are encamped now close to a beautiful stream called Current river. The water is <close> clear as chrystal. It has a very rapid current also. I stood the trip as well as anyone. I was afraid once that my old friend, the ague, was coming back again but when I got <ahold> hold of my knapsack I fixed up some of

Pap's mixture and took it. I am now as well and hearty as ever I was in my life. I have a splendid appetite and can destroy as many of Uncle Sam's rations as any man.



Brig. Gen. John W. Davidson. Arthur Marchand Collection, U.S. Army Military History Institute

Since we have been here one of our forage <wagon> train[s] was attacked by the guerillas. They captured 7 wagons and 34 men, they wounded 5 of our men and we killed two and wounded 6 of them. There was about 500 of them. They got off with their booty. We sent a large cavalry force after them, but they traveled to fast and got away. All trains that go out now are well escorted by a large force of infantry.

We have plenty of duty to do. <We have had splendid> We have had splendid winter weather here lately, the finest almost ever I saw and the mud is nearly all dried up. We came through a great pine country coming here, more pine

than I ever saw before, all yellow pine and very full of pitch. There is lots of it around here. We use the branches for beds and they make first rate ones. It is a very wild country. Some of the soldiers have shot some bear. I know of two being shot. There is lots of deer around through these mountains and some of our pickets have seen and shot at panthers. It is almost unsettled and what settlers there are are of the poorest class. The men are all away, they either belong to the numerous guerilla parties that infest this <place> state or are in the Southern army and there is from six to eight children in every house of all ages and I never saw such poverty. It was worse than ever I saw in Nebraska or any other place.

I have no idea when we will leave this place, nor I have no idea what we were ever brought to this place for. We have had no pay no[w] for four months and I don't know when we will be paid or I don't care much. I don't know of any thing else to write about so I will close. Direct your letters as usual to headquarters in St. Louis always while I am in this state.

And I remain ever yours,  
Thomas Edwin Keen

Camp at Arcadia, Missouri  
February 22, 1863

My Dear Sister,

It has now been over two months since I have written to you or have heard any tiding of you, but <I have> in that time I have traveled over a greater portion of South East Missouri and in that time I have suffered more hardships and privations than at any other time previous since my enlistment, but perhaps a history of my travels would be interesting to you.

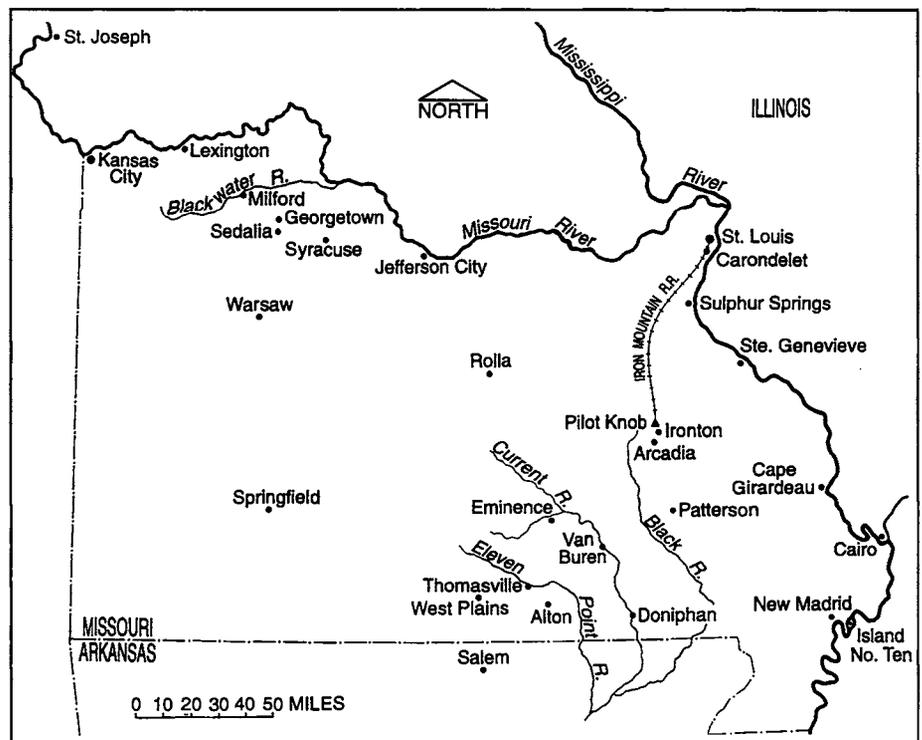
We left Patterson for Black river on the 8th of December last. We made the trip in two days. The weather was good and the roads were rough but solid and in good order and we had a pleasant time. We staid there 7 or 8 days and it rained for 5 days almost continually and the river became flooded in conse-

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

quence and we had quite a lively time in moving our camp upon higher ground (we were camped on the bank). We got everything out safe except two or three mules. The next day we received orders to destroy all the forage that we could not take away with us and return to Patterson. We started back and after two days and [a] half of hard muddy marching, we got back to Patterson. The creeks were up and the roads were in a horrible condition.

The next morning we were ordered to march to Van Buren, a point some 65 miles west of Patterson. We started at daylight and marched 15 miles that day through the mud. Our teams had great trouble getting up and many of [the] other regiments' teams did not come up, but were scattered all along the road stuck in the mud clear back to Patterson. The next morning we took our haversacks [as] full of provisions as we could carry them and started (we had our blankets also) <we had> and that was the last we saw of our wagons for four or five days. We arrived at Van Buren the day before Christmas and my breakfast on Christmas morning consisted of about two thirds of a hard cracker, a piece of fat pork, and a cup of coffee. I went out <two> about two miles from camp and I came across a two year old steer and shot him and filled my haversack full and went back to camp and told the rest of the boys w[h]ere to find the rest of it and in a short time it would have done you good to have seen the meat roasting over the fire, and in less than two hours we had eat all of the beef but the bones, so you may think we were hungry, but we had no supper the night before and but very little breakfast. The men were dissatisfied with General Davison for we had a slight difficulty with him on the road about our knapsacks.

We remained at Van Buren for some time and while we [were] there we were put upon  $\frac{2}{3}$  rations, which caused still more dissatisfaction among the men, for our rations had been scant enough before. On the night of the 9th



Area of operations for the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, August 1861–February 1862 and October 1862–November 1863. Map by Dell Darling

of Jan. we received orders to march and started the next morning <for> in the direction of a town called Doniphan. We marched one day and the same night we received orders to return to Van Buren. The next day we returned back to Van Buren, where we received orders to prepare for a march southwards, every man to carry his own personal baggage or lose it.

Two days afterwards we left Van Buren. The morning we started it was raining a steady, soaking rain and had been all the night before and the roads were in a horrible condition. Well, our wagons did not come in that night and about midnight it commenced snowing and as we had no tents, in the morning we found about 4 inches of snow on top of us. We did not march that day, but waited for our wagons to come up. It got very cold that day. The next morning we started at daylight as usual. The roads were frozen hard and we marched on without any interruption

until we reached a river called <the> "Eleven Points." On our way we passed through a small place called "Cold Springs." There is a spring runs out of the side of a high mountain large enough to turn a mill and the water is as cold as ice even in the middle of summer.

Well, we reached the river about noon on the 19th of January and after a short consultation between Gen. Davison and some other officers, he concluded to make a bridge of wagons, so accordingly we built fires and awaited the coming up of the wagons. They soon came up. The river where we were to cross was about 60 feet wide and very swift and the wagons were driven in and placed nearly side ways together in the stream and the teams were left hitched to the wagons. The bridge was soon completed and we commenced to cross. It took some time for our regiment to cross and by the time we had got across and picked out a camp it was nearly dark.

Well, we had hardly stacked our guns and got our things off and fires built when our adjutant came up and wanted every man to come down to the river for the mules were all <drowning> drowning. We started for the river tired as we were, for we had a hard march that day, as fast as we could and what a sight we saw there. There was 150 mules kicking, floundering, and splashing, Davison standing on the bank raving and swearing and cursing the teamsters and everything else in general. The teamsters were doing their best to extricate the mules when we got there. Somebody went and got a long rope from a battery and was tying it to the first wagon when Davison noticed it and wanted to know "who ordered it." We told him none of his business and we told him if he did not clear out we would throw him in amongst the mules. He raved a while and finally gave the order for Col. Livingston to take charge of us and to do the best he could. The mules had stood in the water, which was breast high, until their legs had become so benumbed with cold that they lost the use of them and the river was so swift that it swept them altogether in a mass against the wagons and you can well imagine what a confusion there was. Well, we tied the rope to the wagons and pulled them up the bank, mules and all, and in two or three hours we had all the wagons and mules all out of the river with the exceptions of three or four which got drowned. There was also one man got drowned.

The next morning we went on and that night we arrived at a small town called Alton. We found the town deserted by all except one or two families. We remained there for some time and our rations became still scarcer and while we were there, Gen. Davison ordered division drill every day and the dissatisfaction still increased among the men, for a great many were nearly barefooted for the country that we had been marching over was composed of fine flint rock and soon cut out the soles of our shoes very fast and although he was

aware of the fact, he disregarded it. The men insulted him at every opportunity and their threats of desertion and "shooting Davison" were loud and frequent and it was with great difficulty that we got enough to eat, and if it had not been for sly foraging parties after night out into the country at the risk of being taken prisoner, we would have suffered.

We remained at Alton for some time waiting for supplies when we received orders to march to "West Plains," a point some 60 miles west. The supply train that we had been waiting for had been obliged to go to that place so we were ordered there. Well, we started for there <and after> with about two days rations to go a distance of 60 miles and almost barefooted, but through somebody's carelessness we could do no better. Our spirits had been revived a little at the prospect of getting full rations when we arrived at "West Plains." We were obliged to forage a good deal along the road, for our rations had entirely given out and the night before we arrived in West Plains all we had to eat was a piece of fresh pork without salt and a little coffee.

Well, we reached West Plains about 10 o'clock of the 30th of January. The supply train got in about the same time. Our col. went immediately to see about some rations. He came back and told us that the supplies had not been turned over to the post quartermaster yet, but soon would be. Well, we waited patiently all day and night came, but no rations. The next morning we got a box of crackers for breakfast and Davison sent an order around to have inspection (it being Sunday) and "division drill." We were perfectly surprised that instead of getting something to eat we were ordered to drill just after coming off a long march and many of us with our bare feet on the ground. Well, every man whose shoes were bad went immediately upon the sick report and our surgeon excused all that went. Davison was very mad when he seen our reg. come on the ground. He asked our col. in a very insulting manner, "where the

rest of his men were?" He told him that they were not able to come out for want of shoes. He said he would see about it. That evening we were issued 5 days rations for to last us ten days and we also received orders to march to Salem in Arkansas. A large cavalry force had been sent forward to Batesville to reconnoitre and our brigade were ordered to support them (we also got 100 pairs of shoes instead [of] 450 that had been sent for). We talked the matter over in camp and concluded to stack our arms and not move a foot until we received full rations, but the report got out that we were going to Batesville and from there we were to go down White River and join Gen. Thayer at Helena and we concluded that we would undergo anything to get from under the command of Davison.

Well, we started the next morning at daylight as usual and in two days marching we reached Salem, a distance of 30 miles south of "West Plains." The night we got there it commenced snowing and it snowed all night and part of the next day and then turned very cold. That day our col. sent out to a tannery that was close to Salem and confiscated 11 sides of sole leather and issued it to the companies and told us to fix our shoes the best we could for a while for we would soon be where there would be plenty of shoes and rations. Well, in a short time every thing that would make or drive pegs was busy and by night we had our feet off the snow. Many of the men's feet were frost bitten and one or two were frozen. I got mine <were> slightly bitten.

Well, the next morning while we were sitting around a comfortable fire in our tent (we had just got done eating our breakfast) in pretty good spirits, the order came to "strike tents" and "load up." We were quite surprised, the order was unexpected, but our col. came and told us that he had just received orders but a few minutes before to return immediately to West Plains. We went to work sullenly and silently enough. The men's spirits went down below zero, but

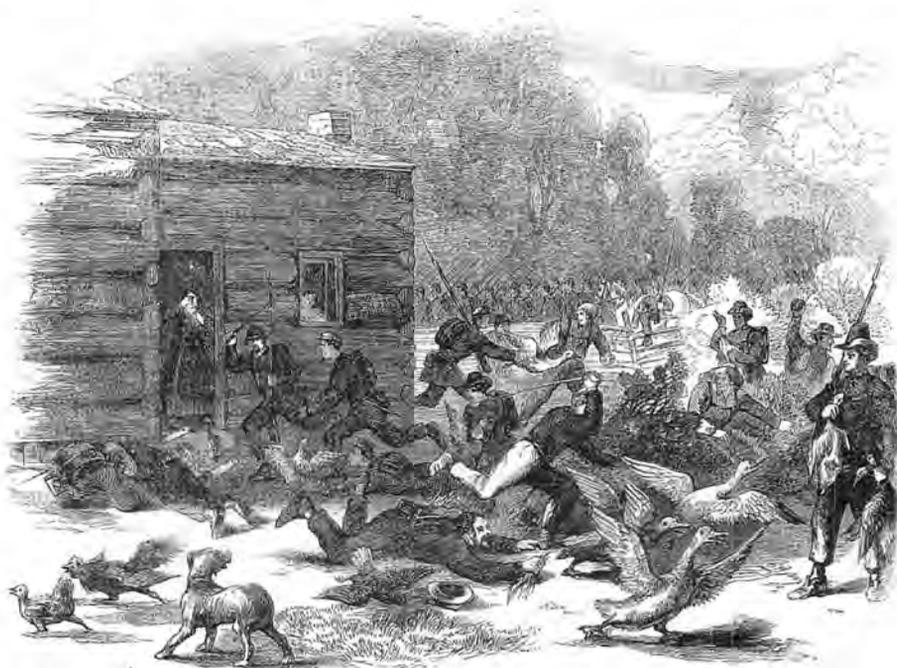
## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

in less than two hours we had our tents down and our wagons loaded up and we were on our road back through a deep snow to West Plains. We marched on sullenly and silently all day and at night we encamped three miles north of the Arkansas line in Missouri. The next day we were back in West Plains.

When we got there we found that Gen. Davison had issued (or rather Gen. Benton had taken them) full rations to the troops that had remained there and had loaded up the rest of <them> the rations and started farther north nearer the base of supplies.<sup>45</sup> He also left orders for Col. Livingston to follow him immediately with his brigade. He had not left us a single ration. And there we were, 105 miles from our nearest point of supplies and with little or no rations and a hard, muddy march of 67 or 70 miles north before us. If ever I saw an enraged set of officers and men it was there and then. Davison had left no word which road to take and our col. was left in doubt where to go to, but he finally concluded to proceed to a town called "Emminence" about 65 miles north. He also expected to overtake the supply train in a day or two.

Well, we started on our journey and the next day we reached a town called Thomasville, where we heard that the supply train was on another road some 20 miles west of us. Our col. said he would not march us 20 miles through the mud, but would forage his supplies of [f] the country. We done so and proceeded on to Eminence. We arrived there one day in advance of the train, but Davison had got there before us. He came and directed our col. where to encamp. As soon as the men seen him they commenced groaning and hooting at him so strong that he was obliged to retire and it was so throughout the whole brigade. The next day, the 13th of Feb., we drew 2 days full rations and we got our hungry craving stopped for once.

Gen. Davison left for St. Louis that day, but before he went he issued an order or rather a circular censuring both officers and men for their conduct on



"Slaughter of the innocents, or how the Union troops did their foraging in Missouri, a scene by Bessyville." *Leslie's Pictorial History*, 10:147

the line of march. One clause of his circular was this "that our conduct was a shame and a disgrace to the name of a Union soldier and the cause we were engaged in and if it was known abroad would bring a blush <of> of shame to the faces of our friends and relatives at home." It caused a great excitement in camp and no wonder. What kind of language was that for a general to use to his men that had just undergone what we had and I firmly believe that if Davison had been there <he would> he would have been shot, so enraged were the men at him for issuing such a circular. For my part I studied the matter over in my mind calmly and <reflec> and with reflection and reason and I came to this conclusion. That if the government that I have so willingly and promptly sustained for twenty months cannot place a better and more capable man over me to command me and attend to my proper wants than Gen. Davison, it cannot have my services and I would have left the army immediately, but the next day we received orders to

march to "Pilot Knob."

If our supplies had been cut off by any of the usual accidents of war I would not have thought anything about it, but with plenty of transportation and rations at Gen. Davison's command and his communications uninterrupted, I thought it was rather hard to be starved and treated as we were. That there was some flagrant outrages committed I will admit, but what better could he expect, to march an army of 10,000 men ill fed, ill clothed, and ill treated, through an enemy's [country] that abounds with and sustains numerous guerilla parties and then to issue strict orders against foraging. There was not much in the country, but we were bound to have some of it to eat in spite of orders and guards.

Well, we staid at Eminence 3 days and on the morning of the 16th Feb. we started with two thirds rations for Pilot Knob and we arrived here on the 21st (this is about 3 miles south). It commenced raining when we were about 8 miles from here and when we arrived we were obliged to camp in an open

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field right in the mud and now while I write, the mud is about 3 inches deep in our tent, but we tore down a board fence and took the boards to lay on.

Nearly every officer and man is off up in Pilot Knob today and they have went there with the express purpose of having a spree. We were paid off on the day before we left Emminence. We received four months pay so they have plenty of money and whiskey is plenty and I expect those of us that staid in camp will have a serious time of it.

Feb. 24. Just as I expected we have had an awful time since we have been here. I have been on duty constantly since the night of the 22nd trying to keep order in camp, for men and officers have been beastly drunk and quarrelling and fighting and raving around with loaded revolvers in their hands threatening to shoot anybody that interfered with them. Carousing and drinking has been the order of the day and night and yesterday, while I and some more of the guards were trying to quell a fight, a drunken officer <pitched> pitched in to me with a loaded revolver and struck me with the stock of it. I immediately knocked him down with the but of my gun and broke his jaw bone. I was arrested but was released this morning by our col., who said I had done no more than my duty.

I have no idea how long we will stay here, but the impression is that we will go to Vicksburg. At least I hope that by the time I write to you again we will be someplace from under the command of Gen. Davison. If we are not I will be very much tempted to leave the army, but I hope before long a new state of affairs will be inaugurated in this department, for I do not wish to attach any dishonor to my name that has thus far stood upon the rolls of my company untarnished.

The country that we have travelled over is a wild, mountainous country and is but poorly settled and what inhabitants and settlements there is are of the most squalid <character> and ignorant character except in "Howels Valley," which lies in the immediate vicinity of

"West Plains." It is a large, fertile, and beautiful valley and is well settled. But the rest of the country we came over is heavily timbered with pine and is rich with minerals of various kinds and I think if it was settled with an enterprising people it would be a rich country.

Our rout[e] from West Plains here was through a somewhat better country, but very little better settled <country>. Emminence is the county seat of Shannon County and has been so for 19 years and all the buildings it contains is an old log court house and a log jail. That is a specimen of this country.

If you will get a map of this state and trace the route from Pilot Knob to Patterson, from there to Van Buren, from Van Buren to Alton, from there to West Plains, from there to Salem in Arkansas, from Salem back to West Plains, from there to Emminence, and from Emminence here you will see that we have had a very circuitous route and we have accomplished nothing but the breaking up of a few guerilla parties, but we have been a good deal of expense to the government.

I have had very good health, <am> I am glad to state, with the exception of some bad colds and sore feet, and at the present time my health has never been better.

Well, I have written all I can think about. I will bring my somewhat long letter to a close. I have not written to Mrs. Brown yet concerning "that picture" for this reason. Our mail facilities has been so slim lately that I thought it would be of no use and another reason was I had no stamps or money to send to her until now. I will write to her as soon as I can now. Please answer soon and direct as usual to St. Louis. Please send this letter home for my time is so scarce, my writing facilities are so poor, and it will save me the trouble of writing another long letter.

And I remain ever your loving brother,

Thomas Edwin Keen

Answer soon.

Iron Mountain, Missouri  
March 6, 1863

My Dear Sister,

I received your letter dated Jan 28th. Since my arrival at this place it was the first I have received in some time from you. It was very welcome indeed. I also received the paper you sent me. It must <be very> have been very gratifying to the soldiers in Washington on Christmas. We left Arcadia and removed to this place some <time> days ago. I think we will leave here in a few days, but where we will go I have no idea. I also received your letter dated Feb. 22 on the same day I was writing a letter <from> to you. We had just such a storm there as you described and the weather has been very changeable ever since. Gen. Davison has left us and is in command of the department of St. Louis and Genl. Carr is in command of our division of which I am very glad and pleased.<sup>46</sup>

I have written to Ed Brown and as his mother is coming home to Pa. [Pennsylvania] this spring, I requested him to send those pictures home with her. I will write home and request them to send your picture to you, will that do?

As I am not well I will not write much and I wrote this in acknowledgement of your letters. I have taken a very severe cold and it has settled on my lungs and <I have and> I have an attack of pneumonia and the doctor says I must keep still. So you must excuse my brevity.

And I remain ever your brother,

Thomas Edwin Keen

Please answer soon and direct as usual. Please send me some stamps for the 2 [dollars?] enclosed as we cannot procure any here.

E. Keen

Cape Girardeau, Missouri,  
April 6, 1863

My Dear Sister,

I have received two letters from you <the one> since my arrival at this place. The one I received first was dated 14th <inst.> ult. I received one dated 6th <inst.> ult. in a short time afterwards. I would have written sooner, but I have

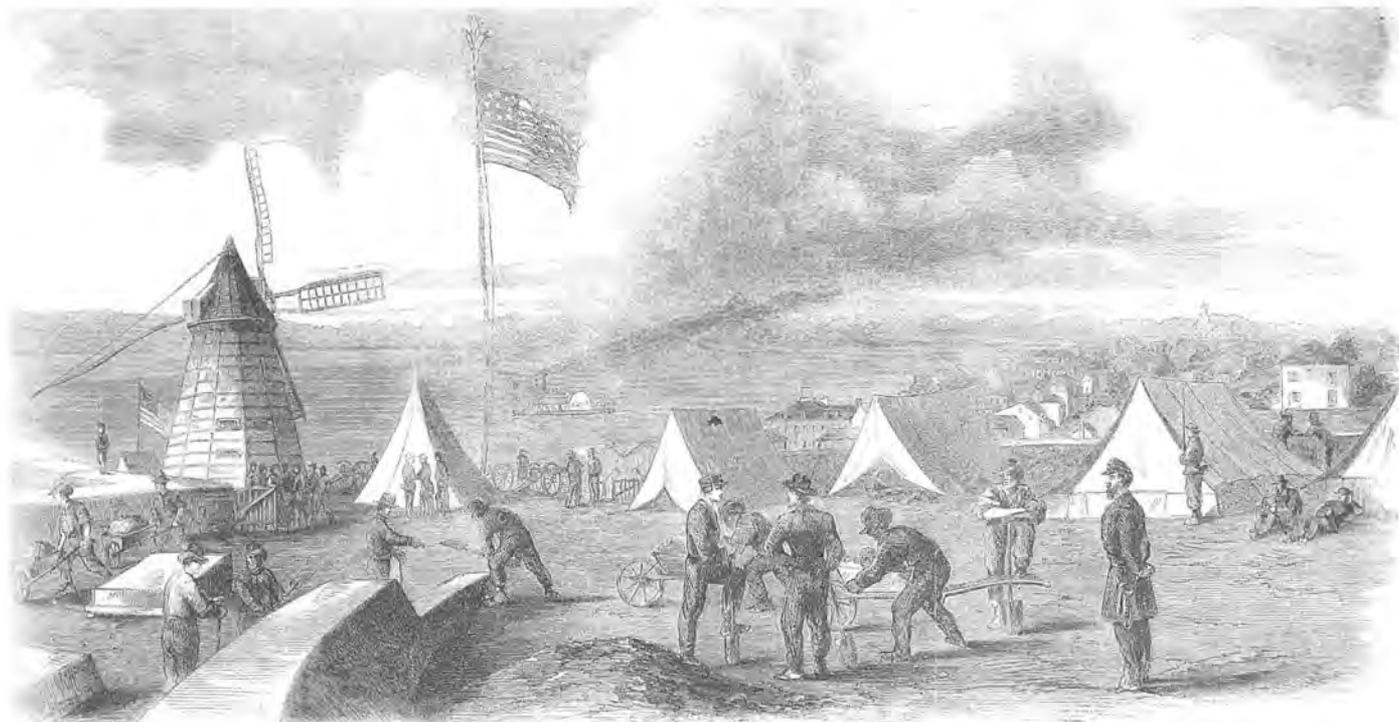
## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

been off on detail to St. Louis and I had no time. We left Iron Mountain about the 6 of March for St. Genevieve and as we had good plank and gravel roads all the way we had good marching. We arrived at St Genevieve about noon of the third day out. The distance is 42 miles. I was very glad to see the face of the old Mississippi River once more. It looked quite natural after an absence of five months. The country we marched through is one of the oldest settled <country> part[s] of Missouri and as the settlers were all French and Germans, their descendants have some beautiful and well cultivated farms. They were very hospitable and kind to us. It is also a very loyal part of Missouri. I have never seen any German settlements yet but what they were sound and loyal Union men. On our way we passed through a beautiful little town called Farmington. It was before the war a thriving town, but like all inland towns in this state, war has set its seal on it.

St. Genevieve is one of the oldest towns in the west and was a post long before St. Louis, but now it is a poor miserable, cramped up place about  $\frac{1}{2}$  as large as Birmingham [Pennsylvania]. We staid there encamped on the bank of the river nearly two days awaiting transportation for this place. We arrived here about the 14th of March and we have been here ever since and from all I can learn we will probably stay here for some time and I think that it is no more than right that we should have some rest after the campaign we have just been through. I do not think we will ever have another such a campaign again while we are in the service. This is a fine healthy place and has been and in fact is now quite an important point of operations in this state. There is some very nice buildings here, "and a great many beautiful young ladies." We are encamped in the outskirts of the town and we have a very nice camp. I was sent up to St. Louis as one of a guard with some

prisoners of war from this place. They were mostly guerillas and they was the dirtiest, ragged, ignorant, set of men ever I saw in my life. They know no more about the issues of the day or what they were fighting for than a babe.<sup>17</sup>

I was not very well when we left Iron Mountain, but the march done me some good and when we arrived at the river I was returned for duty although I was hardly fit for duty. Our medical department is very poorly managed and always has been. I had a severe cough and my lungs was very sore for some time after the pneumonia fever left me and I was afraid it would settle on my lungs and turn to consumption, but I have a good strong pair of lungs and a good constitution and by taking good care of myself I have finally overcome it and I now enjoy my usual good health. There has been so many cases of death from pneumonia in our regiment and in nearly every case if they would have had good attention I have no doubt they



"Cape Girardeau, Missouri, an important strategic position on the Mississippi River between Cairo and St. Louis."  
*Leslie's Pictorial History*, 10:147

would have recovered. I bought a bottle of "Ayers Cherry Pectoral" after I arrived here and it done me a great deal of good.

My dear sister, you need not give yourself any further uneasiness about my deserting the army and I am very glad I did not follow my former determination to leave, but at the time I formed that determination I was so mortified at the unjust censure we received after undergoing what was almost beyond human endurance that I was discouraged and disheartened. Even if I had left at that time it would have only been to enter some other branch of the service, but now we have as good treatment and good attention so far as good provision and clothing is concerned as any good soldier could wish for and I am now perfectly satisfied. So you may rest assured of my never leaving the army unless I can do so honorably or until my term of service expires.

When I enlisted I done so through a sense of duty I owed to my country. I had a good idea of a soldier's life. I did not enlist through impulse as many did, to repent at the first hardship that presented itself, but I done so through patriotism and I have never repented of that step yet and the light of that sense of duty and patriotism burns as bright today as when I first enlisted. But although it is true that no past services, however glorious, will keep from dishonor a man who meanly deserts his country and comrades in the hour of danger, yet such continued tyranny and abuse as I received from Gen. Davison last winter I never never will stand again and remain in the same army corps. It was, as you say, he could not use us up fast enough. If it had been to accomplish any important object we would have stood all our hardships and even more without one murmur. Physical danger and hardships I do not mind a bit if it <was> is a necessity, but I have seen so much unnecessary hardships and exposure and its effects, that sometimes it is very hard to stand.

I hope the war will be carried on with more vigor than it has been for

some time back. I think the time has come now for active measures both North and in our army south, for I think there is a great many traitors in the North and in my opinion they should be severely dealt with. For my part I despise them and I consider the men of the Southern army a far more honourable foe than they are and I believe I would sooner fight Northern traitors than Southern ones and I would warn them if there has to be old soldiers sent home this summer to lay the horrors of civil war at their doors, it will be a fearful reckoning for them for they will have no mercy shown them. I think the government has been to lenient to Southern sympathizers heretofore and allowed them to go too far in their expressions of sympathy and acts of a treasonable nature.

I think the rebellion is in its last agonies and I think a few vigorous and victorious blows <would soon> on our side would soon end it. I have heard a great many men say that if it was not for the "President's Proclamation" they would enlist "but they wasn't going to fight to free the niggers" and in every case I have found out that those persons were more or less tinctured with Southern sentiments and sympathies or else were to ignorant to understand the issues that were at stake between slavery and freedom. For my part I think that it is one of the best things that ever happened and if it had been issued at first and carried out promptly things would look different now to what it does.<sup>48</sup> Well, I can't think of any thing more to write about. I will close my letter.

And I remain ever your brother,  
Thomas E. Keen

Answer soon and direct as usual to  
St. Louis.

St. Louis, Mo.  
April 24, 1863

My Dear Sister,

I received a letter from you on yesterday dated April 6th in which you inform me that you have received no tidings from me for some time. I wrote a letter to you from Cape Girardeau about the

9th inst. in which I acknowledged the receipt of both your letters and also my reasons for not writing sooner, but I suppose ere this it has reached you. Since then my company has been detached from the regiment and sent to this place.<sup>49</sup> First we were sent to "Schofield Barracks," it being the place where all straggling and returning soldiers report for transportation to their respective regiments and also where all deserters that are captured are confined and from there are sent under guard to their regiments. Our duties were to see that the place was kept clean and orderly and to go as guards with deserters and other prisoners to all parts of the army.

We remained there some time and a few days ago we were taken from there and put upon provost guard duty right in the heart of the city. The regiment that had been doing that duty was ordered off to some other place and our company is now doing the duty that two large companies of that regt. was doing and it keeps us busy all the time day and night. We have been promised more help as soon as possible. I expect our regiment will be here in a few days to garrison this post and then <it> the duty will not be so hard on us.

The provost guards heretofore have been rather slack in enforcing the laws in this city, especially that in regards to selling intoxicating liquors to soldiers. But since we have been in command we have put quite a scare on the saloon keepers. We shut up five or six yesterday and arrested the proprietors and now while I am writing a guard has just been sent out to shut up some five or six more and also to arrest the proprietors.

There is so many cases of soldiers being lured into those infernal saloons, if I may use the words, and made drunk or drugged and unmercifully beaten or robbed in this city, that the authorities have determined to put a stop to it and consequently there has been an order issued making it the duty of every officer and guard to report the fact if he sees any person or persons selling liquor to soldiers. No difference where it



"Applying for passes at the office of the provost marshal at St. Louis. (Sketched by Alexander Simplot)." *Harper's Weekly*, January 18, 1862. 39

is, from the lowest rumhole to the gilded saloon, and I think it is perfectly right for there is plenty of Copperheads and Rebel sympathizers in this city that would murder a Union soldier on the least pretense, especially a drunken one.<sup>70</sup> But if we catch them we will show them no mercy. Our col. is also here on detached service. He is in command of the Invalid Detachments. He takes charge of all the convalescent soldiers that are discharged from the hospitals and organizes them into detachments and sends them to the different army corps to which they belong.

I have seen a good many such as you described. Here we have a different mode of dealing with such characters. They are put in irons and either kept in irons and close confinement, or else sent to some fortifications and put to work which I think is the better plan, for they all hate to work and it make[s]

them a little wary and cautious.<sup>71</sup> We are quartered on Washington Avenue between <6th & 7th> 5th and 6th, one of the finest streets in the city. We occupy a large, four-story brick house that was confiscated for that purpose by Genl. [John C.] Fremont when he was in command of this department. Our capt. is act. ast. provost marshal.<sup>72</sup> I am in good health just now. We get plenty to eat and wear now, the weather is delightful here now and has been so for some time back. I have not heard from home for some time, but I suppose it is on <my> account of my moving around, so I expect that there is some letters on the road for me some place. Well I must close.

And I remain ever your loving brother,

Thomas E. Keen

When you answer direct as usual to this place.

St. Louis, Missouri  
May 23, 1863

My Dear Sister,

I have received your letter of May 4. I would have received it sooner but being separated from my regiment, nearly all of [the] mail goes to the regiment and then back to us. I would have answered sooner, but I have just returned from a "pleasure excursion" to "Dixie," where I have been to escort some Northern "Rebs." But perhaps a history of the affair and trip would be interesting to you, so I will give you as full an account of it as I can.

Ever since this rebellion began this city has been infested with a set of Rebel sympathizers who have done every thing in their power to aid and abet the Rebels and as many of them were wealthy and influential citizens, of course they had a great deal of influ-

ence, and here lately when Genl. Price was in this state they were very bold and confident and insulted us soldiers whenever a good opportunity presented itself.<sup>53</sup> Let me relate to you a couple of the many instances that came under my own personal observation to show the feeling of hatred they entertain towards us and our cause.

While on guard in front of the provost marshal genl. office a short time ago, a well dressed and respectable looking woman (I will not call her a lady) came along carrying in her hand three nice roses in her hand, a red one, a white one, and another red one. She also had the same emblem in her bonnet. As she passed the sentinel on post, one of my comrades, she shook the flower[s] at him. He says to her, "Madame those are very nice, give me one." She turned around very indignantly and said "You dirty nast[y] brute of a soldier, how dare you insult a lady on the street in that manner." He laughed at her and she went off in high dudgeon. Another, a few days after while I was on the same post, three respectable looking women came along and when they were within a few yards of me one of them got off the pavement and walked around me, and as she done so she said to the others, "You may walk under that if you want to, I won't" (pointing up), meaning the large flag that hung out of the window over the pavement. I looked at her as contemptible as I could and she returned the look with interest.

But since old Price and Marmaduke and his theives have been driven from the state they have been more submissive. For some time back the military authorities here have been busy making out a list of disloyal citizens, male and female, and having them arrested for the purpose of having them sent beyond our lines, according to the instructions of the secretary of war [Edwin M. Stanton]. The men were confined in the military prisons and the women in a large brick house on Chestnut st. (the property of one of them) selected for that purpose. There was some three

hundred arrested in all, and when they found out that they had to go south for certain, many of them grew very repentant and offered bonds in a large amount for their future good behavior, but as many of them had been under bonds for a long time and failed to behave themselves their offers were not accepted. So their fate was sealed. Some thirty of the most prominent and wealthy Rebs were selected to lead the way, male and female, and my company was chosen to escort them beyond our lines. Among the female exiles was several secret Rebel mail agent[s] and the wives of several Southern officers now in the Southern army. The Rebel Genl. Frost's wife was among the number and a notorious she Reb by the name of Miss Lucie Nicolson. She is a "tarter," I tell you.<sup>54</sup>

Arrangements were made to start them <on> south on the 13th inst. and accordingly on that day we received orders to report to Col. [Franklin A.] Dick, the provost marshal genl. at 1 o'clock P.M. After we had reported and were awaiting further orders one of my comrades and myself <were> was sent around in an omnibus with an officer to the female prison to escort some five ladies down to the boat. After some delay the prisoners got into the bus and we along with them. While waiting until some baggage was being put on top of the bus, one of them proposed three cheers for "Jeff Davis." I told them [they] must not, and at that the one that sat next [to] me turned around and gathered up her dress in her hands so that it would not touch me and says "Sit farther away from me, I hate the very sight of Lincolnites." It made me mad and says I, "I return you your hate most cordially and emphatically." "O Ho," says she, "Where did you learn all those big words?" "Where you were was perhaps in civil society," says I. "Well, I don't think I am in very civil or decent society just now," says she. "No, you wouldn't be if us soldiers were out of here," says I. She looked at me very contemptible for an instant and turned

away her head and said, "Bah, you disgust me."

In a short time we arrived at the boat that was to convey them down the river. The rest of the prisoners arrived in a short time, and every thing being ready, at 5 P.M. <we backed> the boat backed out in the stream and soon St. Louis was left in the distance. It caused considerable excitement and an immense crowd collected on the levee to see them off. And beyond the waving of a few handkerchiefs, there was no disrespectful demonstrations made towards the government. Perhaps the line of Federal bayonets close by prevented them. A great thing are those "Fed" bayonets. The "Rebs" here have a holy horror of them.

I was one of the guards stationed in the cabin over them that night and I watched them close. To an outsider they appeared very gay and happy over their forced trip to Dixie, but by close observation I could see plainly that it was nearly all forced. I have seen to much of human nature and studied it to much to be very easily deceived by outside appearances, especially as thin as theirs was and their uneasiness and anxiety manifested itself more and more as we neared Memphis.

There was nothing important occurred on our way to Memphis and we arrived safely at that place on the <of> the 15th inst. When we left St. Louis, we thought our destination was Vicksburg, but on our arrival at Memphis, we found we were to take the cars there and proceed to Holly Springs in Mississippi, that place being the nearest Rebel point to our lines, where they were to be handed over to the tender mercies of Jeff Davis and his friends for whom they have done so much for. And so on the morning of the 16 we transferred our prisoners and baggage on board of the cars and at 8 A.M. we started.

When we arrived at La Grange, about 50 miles distant from Memphis, we found that the track was torn up between there and Holly Springs and we could go no further by the cars. The commander of that post furnished a cav-

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

ally escort and transportation for the prisoners, ambulances for the females, and army wagons for the men and baggage. We turned our prisoners over to the cavalry and they were soon aboard the ambulances and started for H.S., where I don't think they received a very warm reception.

I watched the train as far as I could see it and I wished from my heart that every Northern traitor was along with it and as I stood there and watched it disappearing from my sight I could not help reflecting what a vast difference there was in the treatment they were receiving from the hands of our humane government, and the treatment the poor persecuted Unionist of the South receives. They never had a large commodious steamer placed at their disposal with polite and complacent officers and soldiers to escort them beyond their lines. No, but they were driven from all they held dear upon earth by the sacred ties of kindred and home and their relations and associations, their homes desolated, plundered, pillaged, and destroyed by Southern soldiery and obliged to flee ignominiously as hunted felons at the peril of their lives to Northern protection and in many instances losing their lives in the attempt. At 2 P.M. we were aboard of the cars again and in a short time we were enroute for Memphis again. I have forgot to state that the prisoners were in charge of Major McKenny, A.D.C. to Genl. Curtis and a Captain Adams who went with them (in charge) to Holly Springs. Our captain was in charge of the escort (us) and came back with us.<sup>55</sup>

Adjutant Genl. Thomas was on the train on his return from Corinth and he stopped at every station where there was troops and made a speech to the soldiers explaining the policy of the president in arming the Negroes.<sup>56</sup> With one exception it was well received. When the subject was first introduced it met with a very hostile reception in our western army, but since it is better understood it is growing more and more in favor every day, especially among us

"old soldiers" (for my part I always was in favor of the measure). The opposition I allude to came from the 90th Ill., a regiment composed entirely of Irishmen, and I will say here that two thirds of the Copperheads and men who oppose the war and government in St. Louis are Irishmen. And for the life of me I cannot see why these men, many of <them> whom I can see no difference between them and an African, neither in an intellectual or moral point of view, except in color, should so strongly and bitterly oppose this measure. Their opposition astonished Genl. Thomas some, for it was the first outspoken opposition that he had met with in the west. The way it came out was this.

After he had got through speaking he proposed "Three cheers for the Union and the president" which were given with a good will. He then proposed "Three cheers for the prest. policy," but instead of cheers he heard groans and cries of "no wager & ec." He ordered the col. to point out the men who "refused to obey the orders of the prest." At this a sergeant stepped out and said he was willing to obey all orders of the prest. and his superior officers, but he was not in favor of arming the Negroes. Then another sergeant and several privates stepped out and said "that was their sentiments." That was all that would come out. The genl. sent them to the guard house and told the col. he would [give] them one week to make up their minds and then left. The poor Negro has but few friends in this department and I think that it is a shame and disgrace upon humanity to see the mute looks and appeals for sympathy and encouragement from this down trodden people so utterly disregarded by the white race and especially by the officers and soldiers of our armies.

We arrived in Memphis that evening and stayed there that night and on the next day we left for St. Louis. We arrived here safely on the morning of the 21st and immediately marched to our old quarters and resumed our duties.

I have had some queer duties to per-

form since I have been here and have seen some queer things. Our duty and authority takes us into every hole and corner of this city and as you say it is a great place to demoralize a soldier. <but> I have my faults and failings of course, but I don't think there is temptation enough in this city to lead me to do anything to disgrace myself or the uniform I wear, so you may rest assured I shall do nothing that would make you ashamed of me.

As to your request for me to go to church, I have been there twice and I promise you I will go whenever I am not prevented by my duties. The first church I went to I heard a kind of milk and water Copperhead <kind of> sermon so I concluded I would not go there again. It was called the M.E. Church South. I wish I could find a Lutheran church. I think I would feel more at home in one of them than in any other.

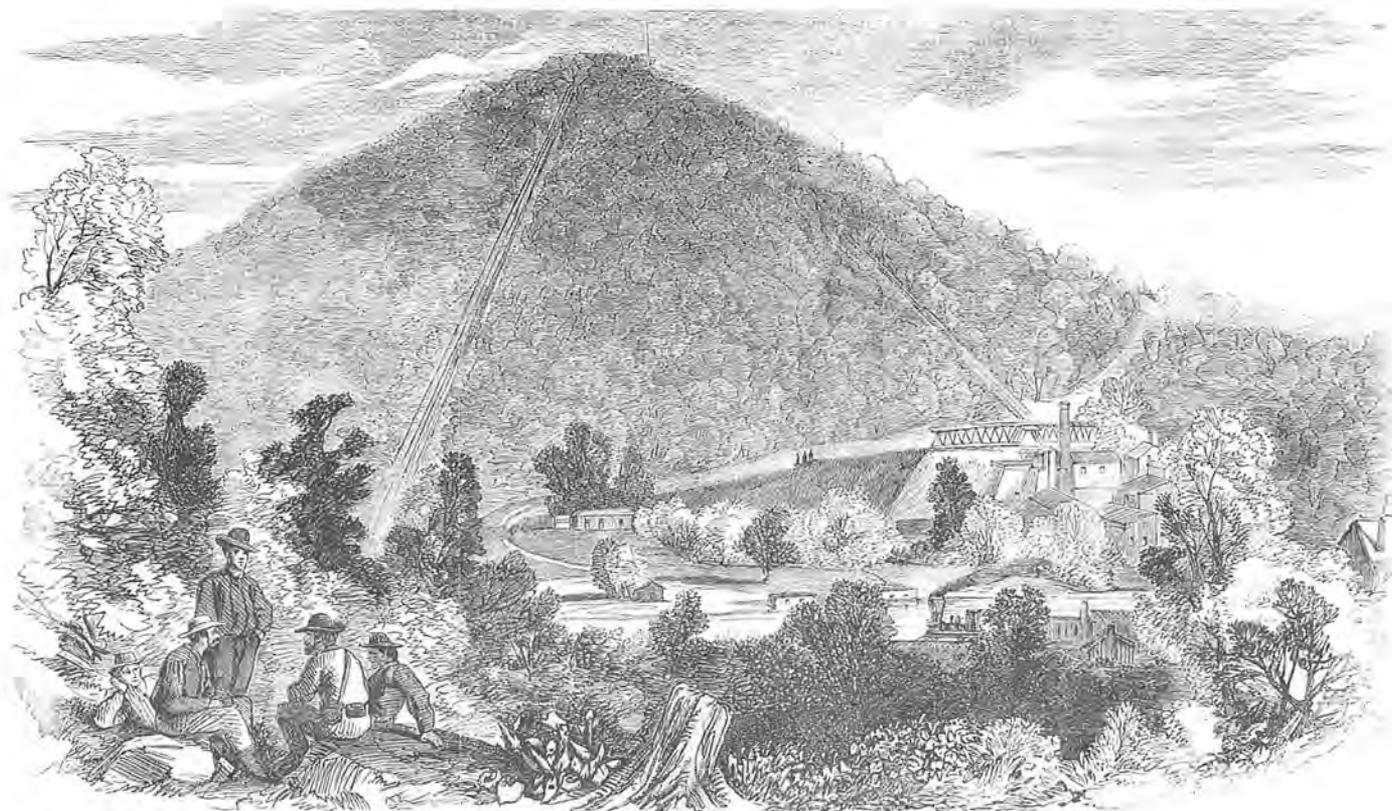
I will send you back that photograph as you request, but mind you send me another for in showing it to my comrades it has been my boast that it was the picture of my sister who has been a soldier as long as I have. Us western soldiers have great respect for you nurses. In all my wanderings, and I believe I have been in every hole occupied by our troops in the west, I have never seen but six lady nurses in hospitals. I have often wondered how you were employed and what salary you receive & ec., but as I thought it was none of my business I never asked.

I will send you my photograph just as soon as I get paid off again, but I will not promise to have it taken with musket & ec. for indeed nothing looks meaner than to see a picture of soldier bundled up with his accoutrements. I suppose you have an increase of patients since the late battles in Va. I will send you two Memphis papers with this letter. I received the papers you sent me.

And I remain ever your brother,

Thomas Edwin Keen

Write soon and direct as usual.



"Pilot Knob, the celebrated 'Iron Mountain' near Ironton, Missouri." *Leslie's Pictorial History*, 8:120

In Camp at Pilot Knob  
Missouri  
June 21st, 1863

My Dear Sister,

As you perceive by the dating of my letter I have left the city of St. Louis and am once more in the field. Our co. received orders on the 1st inst. to rejoin the regiment immediately at this point. The regiment had marched across the country from Cape Girardeau. So on the morning of the 2nd we proceeded to the depot of the Iron Mountain Rail Road and took the cars there for this place. We arrived here about noon of the same day. It was raining when we got here and had been raining for several days previous, which made it very muddy but we packed up and started off for camp in old style through "Missouri mud."

We found the camp in a poor place and the ground that was allotted to us

was a mere mud hole (quite a contrast between the nice quarters we had just left), but being used to making ourselves comfortable in the mud, we pitched our tents and went to work and by a free use of spades and shovels we cleared away the mud to some extent and by night we had things quite comfortable. We went and cut brush and had good dry beds at night. The next day <there> Genl. Vandiver's force left to join Genl. Grant at Vicksburg and while we were wondering whether we would have to go along, we received orders to march in an hour so we struck our tents and loaded our wagons and had formed in line and were ready to move in  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour from the time we received the order to march.<sup>57</sup> But while we were waiting for further orders the order for marching was countermanded and we were to stay here. So we marched to our present camp, being a far better location, and

put up our tents and we have remained in it ever since.

It rained for four or five days almost constantly after our arrival here and it made it so muddy we could hardly get around at all, but lately we have had some very fine weather and the mud is pretty well dried up. Our camp has a very good location for drainage, but it is in the centre of an old field and there is not a shade tree within three hundred yards of us, but we remedy that by building brush sheds which answers the place of the shade trees in a manner. I was not very sorry to leave the city for I had got tired of it, but we were so comfortably quartered there that I was sorry a little to leave on that account. But I feel far better being out where I can get the fresh air constantly. I don't believe I could live in a city again with any satisfaction.

We have drawn new tents since we have been here and we are to receive

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

new arms in a few days. When the requisition was made out for new tents and sent to Genl. Davison he proposed to our col. to issue those "shelter tents" or as we call them "dog tents" to us. "Well," says our col., "If you issue those things to my men the first march they start on they will either throw them away or will carry them until they get tired and then they will go off in the brush and camp and they will be scattered along the road from the time they start in the morning until they encamp at night, but if their tents are in the wagon they will come right up." Davison knew us of old so he "guessed he was right" so we got the Sibly tent.<sup>58</sup>

I have no idea how long we will stay here or where we will go when we leave here. There is a dozen rumors flying around as to our future destination, but I place no reliance upon any of them. But from all I can see and learn I think we are destined for and have the unpleasant prospect before us of another long campaign through south east Missouri and under old Davison too. I shall go along if we go, willingly, but not so much so as though we were under any other commander.

What a vast difference two years of "military occupation" has made in this place. When we first occupied this point it was a snug little village. Our regiment was the first regiment of Union troops that was ever here and I remember very well how frightened the "natives" were when we first arrived here on the 15th of August nearly two years ago, just a few days after the Battle of Wilson's Creek. At that time this country was swarming with Rebels in every direction and the people mistook us, as we had no uniforms, for "Secesh" troops, for at [that] time Genl. Hardee was advancing with a force from the south to occupy this point.<sup>59</sup> But we beat him and when he heard of our being here he stopped within 15 miles of here and staid there 4 or 5 days and by that time there was a considerable force here and he concluded to "skedaddle" farther off.

It was here we had our first experi-

ence with "picket duty" and I remember how close we watched every bush and old stump expecting every minute to see some "Reb" stick his head out from behind it and there was hardly a night but some unfortunate animal got shot by stirring around in the brush close to our sentinels, but we were new soldiers then.

The field that we are now camped in at that time was a nice pasture enclosed by a good "five board" fence and there was several nice shade trees in it. It used to be a nice place to drill, but now the shade trees are all gone, grass is all tramped out, and there is not one vestige of the fence remaining. It is so with other fields in the vicinity. The brush and timber has all been cleared off the sides of the hills and forts and breastworks have taken their places. This is an important point for military operations in this state and is now well fortified. There has been several large house[s] built by [the] government for storage & ec.

I was over the ground the other day where we first camped and where we sheltered ourselves from the weather by brush sheds <tents and>. We lived some three weeks in the brush before we got tents or uniforms and by the time we got our uniforms <we were> a good many of us were barefoot, and as I walked around the <depot> platform of the depot I could [not] help but smile as I seen a spot where I run a splinter in my foot nearly two years ago while on post over some commissary stores. I was barefoot at the time <but>. I had shoes but they were worse than none.

I have received your interesting letter of the 9th and also <picture> your picture. I think it is a splendid one and if it does not flatter you I do not think your age has destroyed your good looks a bit and by the by, our ages are crawling up towards that much dreaded point pretty fast <and>. I have about concluded to remain in "single blessedness." I may take a foolish notion to get married some time, but I doubt very much. How is it with you? I enclose a couple of pictures which I had taken <before> a few days before I left St. Louis, but they are

not a good picture in my opinion, although I had them taken by an artist that was recommended to me as being as good an artist as there was in the town. I engaged 1/2 doz. but I would only take three that I paid for in advance for they were not as good pictures as he promised to take for me. If ever I get another chance I will have some taken like yours.

I think that that extract you copied from the Atlantic Monthly is a splendid and sublime thought and the author is well worthy of praise for it. I see by the papers there is quite an excitement in the east on account of Lee's threatened invasion of Pa. There is a heavy expedition fitting out here for some place but I won't say where. I think it will start soon. Our captain is home on furlough and I hope he will never come back. He is a rank Copperhead and a traitor. He was run out of Iowa <for> for his Secesh principles two years ago but it is a long history of fraud and bribery in his getting command of our company over our other officers who are men of honor and principle. His name is <W. W. Ivory> Ivory and his home is in Westmoreland County, Pa. I will write you his whole history some time.<sup>60</sup>

I am enjoying excellent health at present writing, and I hope it will remain so. We are to have a sermon in camp tonight by our chaplain. Our chaplain is one of the best army chaplains I have ever seen. He is a kind, good man and a perfect gentleman, will do anything for a person. He has charge of our mail and he tends to it faithfully. I have great confidence in him. Well, dinner is nearly ready and I must close my letter.<sup>61</sup>

And I remain ever your loving brother,

Thomas Edwin Keen  
When you write direct as usual.

Pilot Knob, Missouri  
August 11, 1863

My Dear Sister,

I received your letter of the 24th ult. several days ago. I had been expecting it for several days, but the mail came into

camp day after day but no letter for me. I began to think there was something up. It was over a month from the time I had written before I received an answer from you. Now how is this, why do you not answer my letters more promptly? Is it for want of time or mere carelessness or want of inclination? I generally answer your letters soon after I receive them. I have often assured you that it is a great, a very great pleasure for me to get a letter from you. Now do try and be more prompt in writing to me, please.

We still remain at this post, but I don't know how much longer we will stay here. Rumor has it that we are to leave here as soon as Fort Davison is finished. Thursday the 6th inst. (Thanksgiving) was very well kept here.<sup>62</sup> All the stores was closed and in the morning we fell in and marched down to Ironton, about two miles below here. We had a hot, dusty march down, but after we were there we were fully paid for it by hearing a beautiful and patriotic speech from Genl. Fiske.<sup>63</sup> It was as good a speech as I have listened to for a long time. Genl. Fiske is in command of this district now. He is a noble looking man and what is more, he is a strong anti-slavery religious war <Democrat> man. A Democrat he says he was before the war, but he knows no party until the rebellion is crushed. I don't know how he would manage a march or a campaign, but I well know this much that he has more good sound common sense in five minutes than a regiment of such genls. as Davison ever had in their lives.

But about that "picture." You say you were "frightened at those hollow cheeks." Well, I can account for them. When I first went to St. Louis I took a notion to shave all my beard off, and previous to the time I had those pictures taken, I had been on duty almost constantly day and night for nearly three weeks. During all that time I don't believe I had one whole night's rest, and then I had just returned from that trip with those exiles and of course such constant duty reduced me considerably, and then I have lost some of my back

teeth chewing "hard tack" since I have been in the army so you see how that happens. I assure you I have been entirely rid of that cough for some time and at present I am nearly as fat and hearty as ever I was, so you need not be alarmed on that score.

I received a letter from Ed Brown a few days ago. He is out in the gold mines.<sup>64</sup> He says he is doing very well. He intends to stay there about a year to try and raise a stake and is then coming to Nebraska to get married. He is engaged to a Miss Bishop.<sup>65</sup> I am acquainted with her. She is a very nice, tidy young woman and will make Ed a good wife.

I received a letter from Lyman giving me an account of his experience in soldiering. I was considerably amused at it. He says he liked it well enough though, and would have went out for six months if it had not been for mother.<sup>66</sup> It also informed me of "that blessed baby[']s" existence. Sarah might have given it some other name or else left the Keen off, but I don't care. I hope she has recovered her health by this time.

You want to know what nickname I go by amongst my chums, whether it is Tom or Ed. Well, it is neither one or the other. I am known throughout the regt. and am called entirely by the "sharp sweet" name of "Pin." I don't recollect how I received it, but it was in Nebraska. Ed Brown started it and Sawyer, our former first lieut., knew me by that name several years previous. Kept calling me that name so it followed me into the army. Many times has that name been taken down by the sergeant of the guard and many times has "Private Pin, Co. H" been sent to the adjutant's office on the guard reports, but what's in a name?

When we received the news of the fall of Vicksburg and the defeat of Lee's army we had a "high old time."<sup>67</sup> It made me feel "glorious." We were at work on the fort when the recall sounded and immediately after, we heard the assembly sound. We wondered what was up, but we soon fell in line when our col. read us a dispatch he had just received announcing the good

news and on that account we might have a holiday. May be there was no cheering done about that time, and a wilder set of men I never saw during that day than we were. Since then I have been much pleased in reading the accounts of the way they used their "friends," the Copperheads. I wish they had got hold of every one of them. I don't think that Lee will try "invading Yankee soil" any more. Morgan did not make much by invading either.<sup>68</sup>

Truly you have been fortunate and blessed in regard to your health since you have been in the hospital and I think the hand of the Almighty has preserved your health for the merciful mission in which you are engaged <in>. May heaven bless you thus always is my earnest prayer.

Our chaplain's name is "Tipton." I don't know what denomination he belongs to. He used to be a lawyer in Nebraska and he used to preach at the same time. He was the means of exposing several frauds there and for it he received the name of "Tipton Slasher." He is a fine man and I like him.

So you advise me and really think I had better get married if I live to get out of the army. Well, I must beg leave to differ from you. "A burnt child dreads the fire" so that ends that question. And as for the idea of you getting married, ha ha, funny ain't it.

The weather is very warm here <just> now and it has been very dry for some time back, but there is now some indications of rain. The crops need rain badly.

I am beginning to think that the Southern Confederacy is nearly played out. A few more such vigorous campaigns as the one just ended and the boasting Cornfederacy will be amongst the names and things that were. What an intensely interesting history the history of this rebellion will be, but it will be an awfull one as the wicked secrets of the Southern despotism is exposed. Well I must close.

And I remain ever your loving brother,  
Thomas Edwin Keen  
Now Mary, please answer soon.

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

Camp Mary Bell  
Carondelet, Missouri  
Sept. 17, 1863

My Dearest Sister,

I have received your letter of the 3rd several days ago. My scolding I see has done you some good and of course you have my "pardon" if necessary for being more prompt than usual, but you may expect a lecture every time you procrastinate as long as you have done sometimes heretofore. Enclosed you will find a picture which I send you by way of contrast to that miserable "thing" I sent you some time ago. I have looked over all the photograph galleries in St. Louis, but in none of them could I find any pictures of the vignette style that could in any way compare with that one you sent me and I could not find any to suit me. So I thought I would have this one taken and send it. I will never have another photograph taken unless I can find some I like, for a poor one is the meanest looking thing there is.

We have left Pilot Knob since I last wrote to you. On the 30th of Aug. we received orders to be ready to move in an hour's notice. So we got ready. The next day about 1 P.M. we got the orders to strike tents and pack up and leave. We soon had our tents down and our wagons loaded and we fell in line and marched down to the depot of the Iron Mountain Railroad. When we got there we loaded our baggage on board the cars that were waiting for us and got on board ourselves and at 6 P.M. we started for, as we thought (as was reported) Kansas City. We arrived in St. Louis about midnight. I did not sleep any on the road up so after we stopped, I rolled myself in my blanket and laid down on the floor of the car and slept "sound as a brick" until daylight. I was on guard the night before so I was pretty sleepy.

Well at daybreak reveille sounded and we fell in line to go someplace. We soon found out we were going out to Camp Gamble, just on the outskirts of the city, 3 or 4 miles from the depot. We arrived there by "sunup," stacked arms, and staked off a camp and set down to

await for our wagons to come by so we could get something to eat. Well our wagons did not arrive until about 1 P.M. and by that time we were pretty hungry. We had filled our haversacks full before we left the Knob, but a soldier moving around can eat an "awful sight." After



Thomas W. Tipton. NSHS-RG2411-5631

we had got something to eat and were preparing to put up our tents, ther[e] came an order for Co. H to go down to Carondelet and relieve a company of the 10th Kansas that were stationed there guarding the navy yard at that place and take charge. At the same time some other <of our> companies of our regt. were ordered to go into the city and relieve the 10 K.V. that were guarding the military prisons there. So we loaded up again and started for here. We got here about sundown (distance 6 miles), reported, and took charge.

Camp Gamble is a beautiful camp. I believe it is the nicest camp ground I was ever on. It is in a beautiful grove <we> and at the time I did not like the idea of leaving it much, but now I am very well satisfied for we haven't near as

much duty and have nearly as nice a camping place. We are encamped on a bluff overlooking the river, a good part of the surrounding country, and the town of Carrondelet. The ground is a nice little grove and was formerly a school ground. There is a stone school house which we use for a kitchen and eating room and our duty is light. We have no post to stand in the daytime at all, only at night and then it is only a little over three hours. Although we are on every other night the duty is very light, the town is quiet, every thing is cheap. Vegetables are plenty and cheap <and plenty> and for soldiers we live "bully." All we have to do in the daytime is to clean up camp in the morning and drill about 1 1/2 hours in the afternoon. So you see we have a "good thing" as long as we stay here, but of course I have no idea how long that will be. We were first destined for Kansas City, but the 1st Kansas was sent there and we were kept to help garrison the Post of St. Louis. Our col. is in command of the post. The rest of the regiment has since moved into the city and are now quartered in "Scofield Barracks."

The draft will come off in St. Louis this month sometime I believe, and I would not be surprised if there was a "bit of a riot" on account of it, but I hope not. But there is so many Irish in St. Louis and they always start anything of that kind and you know that there has been several large riots here some years ago, but the "dimmychrats" had better not kick up a row here just now or they may get sick of it. The weather has been very hot and sultry for some time back in this section of the country and very unhealthy, but the nights are getting some cooler now, cool enough to keep away the mosquitoes so as we can get some sleep. Towards morning they are very plenty here.

Carrondelet is a nice, clean little place about the size of South Pitts. and it looks more like that place and puts me more in mind of it than any place ever I was in. There is several large "shops" here and to hear the whistles

blow and to see the hands stringing out morning noon and night it puts me <more> very much in mind of home.<sup>69</sup> It is right on the bank of the river too, and the houses are of the same style and the "natives" are nearly all "Dutch" also. Our col. is trying to fill up our regiment. He has got permission to send some recruiting officers to Nebraska, but I have no idea how they will succeed in getting recruits.

I received [a] letter from home on the same day I received yours, which was the first information I had that mother had been sick. I was glad to hear that she was well again. They are far more dillitory about writing to me at home than you are. I don't know what is the reason, I always answer their letters promptly. Speaking of Mrs. Brown, you say that they think at home that she is not broken down as much as mother. Well, I believe it, but if she has not been through hardships and privations and troubles to kill a dozen common women I don't know who has. Next to mother, I love and respect her for she was a kind mother to me while I was in Nebraska.<sup>70</sup> She does use some funny

expressions though, and I have seen more than one person amused at them. I would do anything I could for her. You ask why I think Sarah might have left Keen of[f] my nephew's name? Well, I'll tell you. I don't like to see a youngster have such a long name, not that I am ashamed of it [at] all. I would far rather see a plain name. It sounds nicer to me, but every body to their taste. Besides it stops a youngster's growth to learn such a long name? And as for the contrast you speak of, well perhaps so.

Our company is getting pretty small. We only have about 22 privates for duty now, the rest are all gone.<sup>71</sup> One of our sergeants has received a commission in the 4th U.S. Infy. colored troops. He was a fine fellow and I was sorry to see him leave us.<sup>72</sup> There was a good many non-commissioned officers and privates have applied for commissions in colored regiments, but as yet he has been the only one that has received a commission. You ask me why I don't try for promotion. Well, I'll tell you. You know or at least have a good idea that it is almost impossible for a soldier in the ranks without influential friends or

wealth or influences of any kind to use, to raise to a commissioned officer. Merit may do it sometimes, but very seldom. There is always to many "suckers" that are watching every opportunity to shirk their duty and get rid of carrying a musket. Of course I try to lighten my duty as much as possible, but shirk it never, and I would far rather, yes a thousand times rather, have the name of good soldier than an incompetent officer. The latter are a laughing stock of their brother officers and the men they command. We have several such in our regiment. It is not because I have not the ambition or experience enough, but when I see how useless it is to try I do not do it. I enlisted for the benefit of my country as [a] soldier in the ranks and not for office or pay and as a soldier I expect to remain in the ranks until <the> my time is up and perhaps longer if I live. I may rise to the position of a corporal or sergeant, but higher I do not expect to attain.<sup>73</sup>

Some time perhaps, I will tell you all about a little love scrape I have had since I enlisted but not now. The thing is not quite ended yet and I want to see how it will end and then I will tell you



"U.S. Mississippi gun-boats being built at Carondelet, near St. Louis, Missouri." *Harper's Weekly*, October 5, 1861, 630

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

all about it. There was a large fire in St. Louis on Sunday night. There was four large steamboats burnt at the wharf. We could see it from our camp. It was a grand and beautiful sight indeed. They were set on fire by some person. The boats were totally destroyed. I sent you a paper a few days ago containing an account of the U.S. Christian Commission. It supplies us soldiers with religious reading of all kinds and I suppose does some good. Well, as dinner is nearly ready I must close my long letter.

And I remain your loving brother,  
Thomas Edwin Keen

(Please answer soon and direct as usual.)

P.S. I forgot to say I am in excellent health just now. I feel better now in fact than I have for a long time.<sup>74</sup>

E. Keen

Hickory St. Hospital  
St. Louis, Mo., Jan. 19, 1864

My Dear Sister,

I have just received your letter. Long and anxious[ly] have I expected it, the first I have received from you since last September and I assure you it relieved me of a great deal of anxiety, for I had come to the conclusion that you were sick, for I received a letter from home a few days ago and Lyman wrote that they had not heard from you for six weeks and I thought surely something was wrong. But I am very glad to learn that such is not the case.

You say that you sent me a letter the same time you sent that "Harper." Well, I never received it and I can account for it in this way. The articles went to my regiment and were sent back to me from Rolla where my regiment was at that time and the letter must have got lost on the road back. When I first wrote to you from here I forgot to tell you to omit the regt. and company from the address and so I lost your letter, but I don't see how the magazine and paper came back and your letter not.

In regards to myself, I am very glad to be able to write to you that I am very much better than when I last wrote to

you, although I am still quite weak. I do not suffer much from pain. My knee still swells some and is weak and stiff, but I get better use of it every day. For over a month after I came here I done nothing but blister my knee and ankle with small blisters and they relieved me of pain, but for a while I suffered the most intense pain immaginable. Now I do not use anything, leaving nature to recruit alone. I am taking "Tinct. Ferri" or iron as it is commonly called, and I think it gives me some strength. I was not able to leave my ward until Christmas and on that day it was so nice and warm I managed to get to the front door, and I tell you after so long a confinement the fresh air smelt good [even] if it was in the city. Since then I have been out farther and this morning I walked around a square and I think in a short time I will be able to go to my regiment, where I am anxious to go for I am sick and tired of hospital life.

This is a post hospital and is not managed none of the best. I think it could be managed better. It is not my nature to complain, but I think so. Every person does pretty much as they please and I don't think that is quite right around a hospital, but I have learned in whatever state I am in, there with to be content. So I get along very well, especially when I contrast it with regimental hospitals and other hospitals that I have seen. We get plenty to eat of good common "grub" and the doctors are good and understand their business and one of them, Dr. Senter, is a perfect gentleman and I think that he is as good a doctor as ever felt a person's pulse. He is not an army doctor, but he is a citizen. I don't know how [he] happens to attend here. I tried to get a furlough from here but I could not for the reason that this was a post hospital and the surgeon in charge, Dr. <Wh> White [Frank W. White], told me that soldiers sick here were supposed to belong to regiments stationed at this post and he could not give furloughs for that reason. So I guess I will have to wait until my time expires before I get home if I live that long.

Jan. 20. I did not get to finish my letter on yesterday so I will finish it today. There is nothing, my dear sister, that I know of that you could do for me and I have no want that you could supply. My wants are few and as I have plenty of money are easily supplied, for in St. Louis a person can get anything they may want for money. I do not <get> buy any trash to eat such as sweet meats ec. and I use some little judgement in that respect. If I want any thing that I need I am able to go out now and get it. I don't think there is much danger of making myself sick by indiscretions, as many do that have been sick in hospital for a long time.

I have not been vaccinated since we first lived in Birmingham some 18 years ago. It took well at that time and I can very well recollect how it was. It was very large and inflamed and I recollect one evening father and mother was looking at it. Pap said it was "worth a dollar" and I thought it must be very valuable, for at that time a dollar was an immense sum of money in my mind. Ever since I have been in the army I have been in contact with the small pox and have never had the first symptoms of it. It has been in my regiment and company. Last summer three members of my company had it and they staid right in the co. until they were all broke out in blisters. One of them died a short time after he was removed. It spread into other companies and quite a number were sick with "Variola" and small pox. I have never thought it worth while to be vaccinated. There is a great [deal] of it in the city now and the small pox [hospital] is full of patients. It broke out in the 7th Minnesota stationed here and quite a number of them have died.

<They are> And there is a number of their men in the small pox hospital now.

It was all the fault of their officers. I'll tell you how. The quarter[s] they now occupy were previously occupied by a Negro regiment and some of them died with that disease right in the quarters and the Minnesota boys were put in there before it was renovated or aired

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and consequently, the first thing they knew, the small pox made its appearance and a number of valuable lives have been lost that by a little trouble might have been saved.

The recent “cold snap” here, and I guess it extended pretty generally over the North, was the “coldest ever known in this vicinity” so the papers stated. It caused a great deal of suffering amongst the poor, for coal went up to 35 and 40 cts. per bushel and wood at 11 and 12 dollars per cord and at those prices it was hard to keep warm. A large number had their limbs frost bitten. The water pipes through out the city were on a general “bust.” The weather has moderated greatly and I suppose those enormous prices for fuel have fallen to living prices. There was good sleighing for quite a while and I could here the bells in every direction. The river was froze up tight and is yet. All the passing to and fro between Ill. and Mo. was done on the ice. There was some accidents of course, but not many.

Since I have been here “Pap” sent me a receipt for the rheumatism. When I get a little stronger I intend to ask the surgeon to let me try it. I don’t think he will oppose it, it is a liniment and Pap says it has cured mother and you know she used to have it very bad.

I have received several letters from home since I wrote you last <from home> and in one of them Lyman wrote that Ed Brown had returned from the mines and the girl he intended to marry “refused him.” He axed her would she have him and she said “nix,” and so Ed gets reckless and exclaims with Byron, “O frailty, thy name is woman” and he says he intends to “go for a sogerman” and stand in front of the battle and die like a hero “boo-hoo hoo.” Poor Ed, “his bright visions of love” in a cottage and future happiness with plenty of blue eyes and curly heads and “sich,” like my own, has ended in smoke and amounts to “nix.” Alas, poor humans, you are doomed to many dissappointments.<sup>75</sup>

I never knew the girl that refused him very well, but I think she may go farther

and fare worse, for Ed is a good, honest, sober, industrious young man and that is not the case with all the young men on the frontier, I am sorry to say. Do you think it would be a good idea for me to reinlist? Well, as my letter is pretty long I guess I will stop writing. You must answer as soon as possible and not “procrastinate” and direct as last and omit the regt. and co.

And I remain your loving brother,  
Thomas Edwin Keen

Hickory St. Hospital  
St. Louis, Mo.,  
March 31 [1864]

My Dear Sister,

I received your letter of the 23rd several days ago. I had been expecting it for some time. It was quite welcome I assure you. I am still here yet, you perceive, but I am on duty now as “night watch.” I suppose you know very well what that is. I have been doing that duty now for nearly three weeks and so far I have stood it first rate. The very day that I was going to ask the surgeon to send me to my regiment the vaccancy occurred by the former night watch going into the kitchen as cook, and he asked me if I would not take his place and try it for a while. I studied <on it> the matter over and concluded to take the place and try it. So we went to the steward and I was detailed in his place and since, I am very glad I done so for it has been very cold, stormy weather nearly ever since, and I know if I had went out in the field at that time I would have been laid up again with rheumatism.

I find that doing duty around a hospital is not near so unpleasant as I had an idea it was. Anyhow, it is not near so tiresome as being a patient. I go to bed at 5 A.M. and generally sleep until noon and the afternoons I have to run around in if I want to.

I heard from my regiment a short time ago through a sergeant of my company that came through St. Louis on his way to receive a commission in a colored regt. and he came in to see me. He tells me that the regiment had nearly all

reenlisted and will go to Nebraska on furlough as soon as they can be relieved by General Steele, under whose command it is.<sup>76</sup> They would have been off some time ago, but they could not get relieved. I am looking for them every day now. They have been stationed in Batesvill, Ark. all winter and they have had a very hard time of it, for they were nearly all the time out scouting after guerillas and have had a number of fights with them this past winter and some of my old comrades have been killed and wounded by them.

What an immense amount of misery and unhappiness is comprehended in these two words “killed and wounded.” I could moralise on the subject for a week, but it always makes me feel bad to do so. My regiment has the name of being a terror to the guerillas, for they never take any prisoners of that kind. That guerilla warfare is a horrible business. Honourable warfare, if it can be called so, is bad enough, but when it comes for men to watch <one> from behind trees and bushes to shoot one another down in cold blood like wild beasts it is terrible to think of.<sup>77</sup>

I have a kind of an idea that if the regiment goes up to Nebraska on furlough and to recruit that it will not come down again for some time, but will be kept there to protect the frontier and emmigration across the plains. There is to be an expedition fitted out this summer against the Sioux Indians and it is likely that they will be included in it, but that is merely one of my own suppositions.<sup>78</sup>

I was quite surprised a few days ago by a visit from Ed Brown. He and some more Allegheny boys were on their way to the new gold mines of Idaho. I was quite glad to see Ed, the first time since I have been in the army. He looked as natural as ever, a second edition of the old man. He says that the old man has a notion of reenlisting. What do you think of that? I hope Ed will be more fortunate in Idaho than he was in Nebraska.

I seen an account in the papers of the fair that was being held in Washing-

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

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ton. There is one to be held here in May. There is very extensive preparations being made for it already. I expect it will be a grand affair.<sup>79</sup> I was quite amused at your account of those Indians drawing [?] those dolls. They will probably take good care of them and take them back to Minnesota where they will be a source of great amusement and wonder to their squaws and papooses, for it is not often they see such things. Lo the poor Indian. I have seen enough of the redskins to know that there is a good deal of mistaken sympathy thrown away upon them. In the Minnesota regiments stationed here there is a number of half breeds Chippeway Indians. They make pretty good soldiers and are apt scholars in all the evils and vices that hover around a soldiers' camp.

I recollect of reading an account of that soldier being found [dead?] with an ambrotype in his hand looking upon his children. I thought at the time I read it that it was an affecting incident. I am glad that the thing is being turned to some account for the benefit of his children in the manner you speak of.

I think as you do that our armies re-enlisting must be a damper to the hopes of the Rebs. I see by the paper that their leaders still stick to their old hobby of regaining their lost ground and again blockading the Mississippi river. How foolish. They certainly know better. I have been watching Grant's movements since he has been installed commander in chief of the U.S.A. with some interest, and I think that he is fixing for a grand and final campaign this summer and I have no idea but that it will be a successful one for the Union.

I think the coming presidential campaign will be an exciting one, but I have my doubts of Lincoln being reelected for there has been a great deal of opposition sprung up against him lately, more than you have any idea of, both in and out of the army. Why it is so I can't tell. In my opinion he is just the right man in the right place. I don't think that there is a man living that could or can manage the past and present affairs of the nation any better than he has and does. He had a hard and difficult matter to commence on, and I think he ought

to have the hand of finishing it up.

I am getting quite strong and hearty again and feel first rate. But I can still feel "whinges" of the rheumatism now and then. I suppose it will stick to me as long as I live. This hospital is full now, fuller than it has been at any time since I have been here, mostly fever cases, a good deal of remittent. I received a letter from home today and Lyman writes me that mother still has the rheumatism. I expect she has suffer[ed] a great deal with that confounded mean disease. He also wrote me about the astonishing high price of provisions in Pittsburg. I was quite surprised for provisions used to be quite cheap there. I thought they were dear enough in St. Louis, but according to Lyman's statements they are cheaper here than there. Well, I can think of nothing more to write.

And I remain ever your loving brother,

Thomas Edwin Keen  
Please write soon and direct as usual.  
E. Keen

**A Service Chronology of Company H, First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, 1861-64,  
with a calendar of Thomas Keen's letters<sup>1</sup>**

**1861**

July 3 Mustered in at Omaha  
 Aug. 8-15 By rail to Pilot Knob, Missouri, from St. Joseph and St. Louis  
**Aug. 24 Keen letter from Camp Pilot Knob, Missouri**  
**Sept. 9 Keen letter from Camp Pilot Knob, Missouri**  
 Sept. 21 Marched for Syracuse, Missouri  
 Oct. 21-Nov. 2 Marched to Springfield, Missouri, with Frémont's army  
 Nov. 9-22 Detached to guard government property at Warsaw, Missouri  
 Nov. 22-24 Rejoined the regiment at Sedalia, Missouri  
 Dec. 8 Went into winter quarters at Georgetown, Missouri  
 Dec. 15-27 Marched with expedition under Gen. John Pope to Warrensburg and Milford  
 Dec. 27-Feb. 2, 1862 In winter quarters at Georgetown, Missouri

**1862**

**Jan. 25 Keen letter from Georgetown, Missouri**  
 Feb. 2-9 Marched and traveled by rail to St. Louis, via Jefferson City  
 Feb. 9-11 By steamboat to Ft. Henry, Tennessee  
 Feb. 11-13 By steamboat to Ft. Donelson, Tennessee  
 Feb. 14 Marched to the battlefield of Ft. Donelson, Tennessee  
 Feb. 15 Engaged in battle against Confederate forces at Ft. Donelson  
 Feb. 17 Marched to Ft. Henry, Tennessee  
**Feb. 18 Keen letter from Ft. Henry, Tennessee**  
**Feb. 22 Keen letter from Ft. Henry, Tennessee**  
 Mar. 6-13 By steamboat to Crump's Landing, Tennessee  
**Mar. 25 Keen letter from Crump's Landing, Tennessee**  
 Apr. 6 Marched to the battlefield of Shiloh, Tennessee  
 Apr. 7 Engaged in battle against Confederate forces at Shiloh

*[From mid-April to mid-August, Keen was away from his company on detached service with the Signal Corps]*

**May 3 Keen letter from Paducah, Kentucky**  
**May 11 Keen letter from Paducah, Kentucky**  
 May 27-June 2 At Corinth, Mississippi  
**May 28 Keen letter from Paducah, Kentucky**  
 June 2-17 Marched to Memphis, Tennessee  
 July 24 By steamboat to Helena, Arkansas  
**Aug. 21 Keen letter from camp near Helena, Arkansas**  
 Sept. 2-24 By steamboat up the Mississippi River, returned to Helena  
**Sept. 27 Keen letter from camp near Helena, Arkansas**  
 Oct. 5-11 By steamboat to Sulphur Springs, Missouri  
 Oct. 26-30 Marched to Ironton, Missouri (Pilot Knob)  
 Nov. 2-4 Marched to Patterson, Missouri  
 Dec. 9-19 Marched to Reeves Station, Missouri, returned to Patterson  
 Dec. 21-24 Marched to Van Buren, Missouri

**1863**

**Jan. 7 Keen letter from Camp Chase, near Van Buren, Missouri**  
 Jan. 9-10 Marched to Doniphan, Missouri, returned to Van Buren  
 Jan. 14-16 Marched to Alton, Missouri

Jan 28-30 Marched to West Plains, Missouri  
 Feb. 1-2 Marched to Salem, Arkansas  
 Feb. 4-6 Marched to West Plains, Missouri  
 Feb. 6-8 Marched to Eminence, Missouri  
 Feb. 17-21 Marched to Arcadia, Missouri  
**Feb. 22 Keen letter from camp at Arcadia, Missouri**  
 Feb. 27 Marched to Ironton, Missouri (Pilot Knob)  
**Mar. 6 Keen letter from Ironton, Missouri**  
 Mar. 8-10 Marched to St. Genevieve, Missouri  
 Mar. 11-12 By steamboat to Cape Girardeau, Missouri  
**Apr. 6 Keen letter from Cape Girardeau, Missouri**  
 Apr. 11-12 By steamboat to St. Louis, Missouri, for provost guard duty  
**Apr. 24 Keen letter from St. Louis, Missouri**  
 May 13-21 Company detachment escorted banished civilians to Confederate lines near Holly Springs, Mississippi, returned to St. Louis  
**May 23 Keen letter from St. Louis, Missouri**  
 June 2 By rail to Pilot Knob, Missouri, rejoined the regiment  
**June 21 Keen letter from Pilot Knob, Missouri**  
**Aug. 11 Keen letter from Pilot Knob, Missouri**  
 Aug. 28 By rail to St. Louis, Missouri  
 Aug. 29-Oct.31 Detached to guard Union Iron Works at Carondelet, Missouri  
**Sept. 17 Keen letter from Camp Mary Bell, Carondelet, Missouri**  
 Oct. 31-Nov. 4 Marched to Camp Gamble, St. Louis, Missouri, rejoined the regiment  
 Nov. 5 First Nebraska designated as a cavalry regiment  
 Nov. 8 Keen entered a military hospital at St. Louis, suffering from chronic rheumatism  
 Nov. 30-Dec. 1 Marched to Rolla, Missouri  
 Dec. 10-25 Marched to Batesville, Arkansas

**1864**

**Jan. 19 Keen letter from Hickory Street Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri**  
 Jan. 23-30 Expedition against guerillas at Synamore, Arkansas  
 Feb. 11-20 Expedition to Pocahontas, Arkansas  
 Mar. 13-Apr. 4 Detached to guard steamboat gathering forage on White River  
**Mar. 31 Keen letter from Hickory Street Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri**  
 Apr. 5-16 Rejoined the regiment at Batesville, Arkansas.  
 Apr. 17-19 Marched to Jacksonport, Arkansas  
 Apr. 20 Engaged in a skirmish at Jacksonport, Arkansas  
 May 1-24 Detachments marched to Devalls Bluff and Black River  
 May 25-30 Detachments rejoined the regiment  
 May 30-June 10 At Devalls Bluff, Arkansas  
 June 10 Reenlisted veterans furloughed to Nebraska  
 July 9 Keen discharged from the service at St. Louis, Missouri

<sup>1</sup> The chronology is drawn from William W. Ivory, "History of Company H, First Nebraska Veteran Cavalry, July 3, 1861-Jan. 31, 1866," written at Ft. Sedgwick, Julesburg, Colorado Territory. Manuscript in RG 18, Records of the Nebraska Military Department, s.g. 1, s.7, Nebraska State Historical Society.

## Civil War Letters of Thomas Edwin Keen

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Keen death certificate, Pennsylvania Division of Vital Records; Thomas Keen pension file, National Archives and Records Administration, copies in possession of the editor.

<sup>2</sup> James E. Brown biography in Raymond E. Dale, "Otoe County Pioneers: A Biographical Dictionary," 10 vols. (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1961), 1:342–43; 1860 census of Otoe County, Nebraska Territory, Nebraska City Post Office, National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, Roll 665, copy at Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> The foregoing biographical information is drawn from the letters, Keen's pension file, and his death certificate.

<sup>4</sup> James B. McPherson, "A War That Never Goes Away," *American Heritage* 41 (March 1990): 42.

<sup>5</sup> In a Jan. 19, 1862, letter to his wife, Sgt. William A. Polock of Company C complained that regimental commander Col. John M. Thayer had ignored the wishes of the men when he appointed William Ivory to command the company. According to Polock, "Ivory is an unpopular man in the regiment and is, and always has been particularly obnoxious to our company." About seventy men of the company got up a petition asking Ivory not to come into the company. When Polock's letter was published in the *Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownville), word got back to the regiment and Polock was briefly placed under arrest. The editor apologized for publishing Polock's letter. *Nebraska Advertiser*, Feb. 6, Apr. 6, 1862.

<sup>6</sup> Keen's discharge papers in his pension file, and his following letter of Mar. 25, 1862, state that he was enlisted on July 3, 1861, perhaps at Nebraska City. Edgar S. Dudley, *Roster of Nebraska Volunteers from 1861 to 1869* (Hastings, Nebr.: Wigton and Evans, 1888), 98, indicates that Keen was mustered in at Omaha on July 20.

<sup>7</sup> There was some outrage in Nebraska Territory when the First Nebraska Infantry was ordered south. As Keen indicates, the regiment had been raised with a promise from the War Department that it would remain in the territory for home defense. *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1880–1901), s. 3, v. 1., 222–23 (hereafter cited as *OR*). Many of the soldiers, however, probably welcomed the opportunity to fight against the Confederacy.

Benjamin M. Prentiss (1819–1901) commanded troops in Missouri until the spring of 1862. He led the Sixth Division, Army of the Tennessee, during the first day of battle at Shiloh, Apr. 6, 1862. Prentiss's division held off repeated Confederate attacks on its position, known as the "Hornet's Nest," giving the Union Army a chance to rebuild its lines. The division finally surrendered. Stewart Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union* (New York: Facts on File, 1988), 322; Patricia L. Faust, ed., *His-*

*torical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 600–1.

<sup>8</sup> Assumed to be Keen's sister and brother.

<sup>9</sup> The hospital steward was Edward Donovan, later to be second lieutenant, Company K. Dudley, *Roster*, 6–7.

<sup>10</sup> Guerrillas had fired into trains transporting Union troops across northern Missouri. Keen's captain, George F. Kenedy, was living at Florence, N.T., when he enlisted July 3, 1861, Dudley, *Roster*, 90. No documentation of Kenedy's capture has been found. In his letter of Mar. 25, 1862, Keen says Kenedy escaped. He was in command of his company in November 1861. See Kenedy report in *OR*, s. 1, v. 8, 376–77.

<sup>11</sup> Lyman Sawyer was a resident of Omaha when he enlisted July 3, 1861, Dudley, *Roster*, 90.

<sup>12</sup> This was likely Maj. George C. Marshall of the Second Missouri Cavalry (Union), also known as "Merrill's Horse" for its commander, Lewis Merrill. The *OR* contain Marshall's report of a scouting expedition through Saline County, Missouri, Dec. 2–12, 1861, in which the command was fired on several times (s. 1, v. 8, 34–36). Marshall, however, was unscathed in these encounters. Whether he was shot in a subsequent engagement prior to Keen's Jan. 25, 1862, letter is unknown.

<sup>13</sup> The *Missouri Democrat*, in an article about the First Nebraska's hospital at Georgetown, attributed the sickness to "typhoid pneumonia." The article described the hospital as neat and clean, and located in a Rebel's house. The article was reprinted in *Omaha Tri-Weekly Republican*, Jan. 15, 1862.

<sup>14</sup> A reference to the family with whom Keen had been living in Nebraska.

<sup>15</sup> Evidently a family friend.

<sup>16</sup> Keen never identifies this soldier by name.

<sup>17</sup> For a full account of the Battle of Fort Donelson, including reference to the First Nebraska's role, see Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987). Cooling's article, "The First Nebraska Infantry Regiment and the Battle of Fort Donelson," appeared in *Nebraska History* 45 (June 1964): 131–46.

<sup>18</sup> This was Battery A of the First Illinois Light Artillery, commanded by Lt. Peter Wood. Capt. James Smith had formerly commanded the battery. Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 177; J. N. Reece, comp., *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois* (Springfield, Ill.: 1901), 8:597–98.

<sup>19</sup> The official reports of division commander Gen. Lew Wallace and brigade commander Col. John M. Thayer are in *OR*, s. 1, v. 7, 236–40; 252–53.

<sup>20</sup> John B. Floyd (1806–63) was in overall command of Confederate forces at Fort Donelson. When the fall of the fort seemed imminent, Floyd

turned over his command, commandeered some steamboats to ferry his own troops across the Cumberland River, and abandoned the rest of the Confederates to their fate. Floyd was relieved of his commission by President Jefferson Davis on Mar. 11, 1862. Stewart Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Confederacy* (New York: Facts on File, 1988), 93; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 265.

<sup>21</sup> Although the letter to his parents was included in the Keen correspondence, it was in every material respect identical to this letter and has been omitted from publication.

<sup>22</sup> Charles F. Smith (1807–62) had been promoted major general of volunteers following the Battle of Fort Donelson and placed in charge of the Union advance up the Tennessee River that would lead to the Battle of Shiloh. On Apr. 2, Smith was forced to relinquish command when he injured his leg. The wound became infected and Smith died Apr. 25, 1862. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 375; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 694–95.

<sup>23</sup> Keen refers to the Roanoke and New Bern campaigns in North Carolina under command of Ambrose E. Burnside (1824–81), who was destined to fail miserably at Fredricksburg, Virginia, in December 1862 after being appointed to lead the Army of the Potomac. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 57–58; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 96–97.

<sup>24</sup> John M. Thayer (1820–1906), the original commander of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, had been promoted to brigade command. He served at Vicksburg, and commanded military districts in Arkansas. After the war he was elected one of Nebraska's first two U.S. senators and served as governor of Wyoming Territory, 1875–79, and governor of Nebraska, 1887–92. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 408–09; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 752–53.

Lt. Col. William D. McCord of Plattsmouth was in immediate command of the First Nebraska at the battles of Fort Donelson and Shiloh. He resigned his commission Apr. 22, 1862. William T. Clarke of Omaha was mustered into the regiment as a second lieutenant of Company H, and was commissioned first lieutenant on Jan. 9, 1863. Dudley, *Roster*, 4–5, 90–91.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis Wallace (1827–1905) commanded the third division of Grant's army at Fort Donelson and his generalship was instrumental in the federal victory. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 434–35; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 799; Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 177–80.

<sup>26</sup> This comment may relate to the destruction by fire of government stores at Warsaw, Missouri, in November 1861, while the town was under the jurisdiction of Capt. George F. Kenedy and Company H of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. Kenedy reported that the fire "was done and deliberately planned by the enemy," but admitted having taken steps to burn the stores anyhow, because not enough wagons were available to remove them as he had been ordered to do. Reading be-

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tween the lines, one could conclude that the fire may have been set deliberately or accidentally by the troops themselves, which would have been cause for Kenedy's appearance before a court-martial. Kenedy's report of the incident is in *OR*, s. 1, v. 8, 376-77. There are no extant Keen letters from the period of November 1861, though his allusion to "the Warsaw affair" in this letter suggests he may have previously mentioned it to his sister.

<sup>27</sup> This battle was also known as Shiloh. Pittsburg Landing was the steamboat landing on the Tennessee River near the battlefield.

<sup>28</sup> Wallace's division (including the First Nebraska) did not reach the battlefield until after the first day's fighting had ended. Wallace blamed bad roads and contradictory orders from General Grant, but his performance at Shiloh clouded his career and he saw little combat duty thereafter. He is best remembered for his postwar authorship of the novel, *Ben Hur*. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 434-35; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 799. Wallace's report of his division's role in the Battle of Shiloh is in *OR*, s. 1, v. 10, pt. 1, 169-74. His report of the Battle of Fort Donelson is cited in note 19.

<sup>29</sup> The Confederates evacuated Yorktown during the early stages of the Army of the Potomac's Peninsula Campaign against Richmond. The loss of New Orleans was a more severe blow to the South. Keen is overly optimistic about the war's duration.

<sup>30</sup> The July 22, 1861, act of Congress authorizing the raising of volunteers provided that soldiers' letters could be transmitted through the mails without prepayment of postage, which was to be collected from the recipients. *OR*, s. 3, v. 1, 383.

<sup>31</sup> Keen several times refers to having his photograph taken, but none is known to survive.

<sup>32</sup> The report by Lt. Col. William D. McCord can be found in *OR*, s. 1, v. 10, pt. 1, 197-98.

<sup>33</sup> Henry W. Halleck (1815-72) was then commander of the Department of the Mississippi, and would become commander-in-chief of the army in July 1862, serving in that capacity until March 1864. Halleck's advance on Corinth was so plodding that the Confederates made a leisurely withdrawal. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 172; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 332.

<sup>34</sup> The Confederate stronghold at Island No. 10 blocked the Mississippi River until it surrendered to Union naval and army forces on Apr. 8, 1862. Memphis surrendered on June 6, 1862, after a naval battle in which Union gunboats destroyed a Rebel fleet. Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 386, 486.

<sup>35</sup> This situation was soon to change. By September, correspondents writing to the Nebraska newspapers were reporting that many men of the First Nebraska had "the prevailing malaria of this region." G. H. T., Sept. 27, 1862, letter to *Nebraska Advertiser*, published Oct. 18, 1862. Reynald Noyes in an Oct. 1, 1862, letter noted that ten members of the regiment had died since they arrived in Helena. *Ibid.* Keen's Sept. 27, 1862, letter from Helena

also reports the reversal in the regiment's health.

<sup>36</sup> John Brown was evidently a relative of "Ed" Brown, with whom Keen had lived in Nebraska.

<sup>37</sup> These were the Seven Days Battles and others resulting from Gen. George B. McClellan's Peninsula Campaign against Richmond in the spring and summer of 1862.

<sup>38</sup> There is no mention of this incident in the history of the Fifty-eighth Ohio, which appears in Whitelaw Reid, *Ohio in the War*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin, 1868), 2:349-51. Brigade commander Gen. John M. Thayer's report of the Battle of Shiloh indicates that the Fifty-eighth Ohio and the First Nebraska both ran low on ammunition at about the same time and withdrew from the firing line to replenish their cartridge boxes. *OR*, s. 1, v. 10, pt. 1, 193-95.

<sup>39</sup> At this time Samuel R. Curtis (1805-66) commanded the Military District of Missouri in the Department of the Mississippi. He is perhaps best known as the victorious Union commander at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, Mar. 7-8, 1862. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 99; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 198-99.

<sup>40</sup> This reference is to the Second Battle of Bull Run, Aug. 29-30, 1862. Keen served under John Pope in Missouri in the fall of 1861, which may account for his opinion of the general.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Robert R. Livingston (1827-88) of Plattsmouth was promoted lieutenant colonel of the First Nebraska on Apr. 22, 1862, and colonel on Oct. 4, 1862. He was promoted bvt. brigadier general in 1865. Surgeon James H. Seymour of Omaha died Sept. 5, 1862. Dudley, *Roster*, 4-5; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, eds. *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, 5 vols. (Lincoln: Jacob North Co., 1906), 2:384.

<sup>42</sup> Keen refers here to the Sept. 17, 1862, Battle of Antietam.

<sup>43</sup> This statement confirms that some of the letters Keen wrote to his sister or parents are not included in the present collection.

<sup>44</sup> John W. Davidson (1824-81) commanded the Army of Southeast Missouri, Department of the Missouri, from October 1862 until February 23, 1863. After the war he commanded cavalry in the West, including the Second U.S. Cavalry and was lt. col. of the Tenth U.S. Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers). Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 105; Homer K. Davidson, *Black Jack Davidson: A Cavalry Commander on the Western Frontier* (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1974).

<sup>45</sup> William Plummer Benton (1828-67), commander of the first division, Army of Southeast Missouri, October 1862 to March 28, 1863. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Eugene Asa Carr (1830-1910) commanded a division in the Vicksburg campaign and later served in Arkansas. In July 1869 he led the Fifth U.S. Cavalry in defeating the Cheyenne Dog Sol-

diers at the Battle of Summit Springs in Colorado. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 67; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 115.

<sup>47</sup> Union soldiers' attitudes toward Missouri civilians and guerrillas are discussed by Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. 159-63.

<sup>48</sup> Keen is referring to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves in the Confederacy as of Jan. 1, 1863.

<sup>49</sup> Keen and his comrades missed the Battle of Cape Girardeau, Apr. 26, 1863, in which the First Nebraska played a role as Union forces turned back a Confederate raid led by Gen. John S. Marmaduke. For a review of this action, see Anne J. Bailey, "Texans Invade Missouri: The Cape Girardeau Raid, 1863," *Missouri Historical Review* 84 (January 1990): 166-87. The report of the action by Lt. Col. William Baumer of the First Nebraska is in *OR*, s. 1, v. 22, pt. 1, 267-70.

<sup>50</sup> Northern Democrats who advocated a more conciliatory attitude toward the South (Peace Democrats) were also called Copperheads because some wore copper pennies as identifying badges. Although most Peace Democrats supported the Union war effort, a minority was avowedly antiwar. Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 564-65.

<sup>51</sup> It is not clear to whom Keen is referring here. Perhaps he means slackers among the soldiers, a problem that plagued all the Civil War armies.

<sup>52</sup> John C. Frémont (1813-90), famous for his western explorations, was the first Republican candidate for president in 1856. Frémont's fame and political connections led to his appointment as commander of the Western Department in July 1861. Frémont proved inept as a military commander and Lincoln removed him Nov. 2, 1861, after the general had issued an independent emancipation proclamation. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 143-44; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 291. The captain is William W. Ivory.

<sup>53</sup> Sterling Price (1809-67) commanded the Missouri State Guard during the early part of the war and later commanded regular Confederate forces. He was at the Battle of Wilson's Creek and subsequently his troops captured the Union garrison at Lexington. He led a major raid into Missouri from Arkansas in late summer and fall of 1864. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Confederacy*, 231-32; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 601-3.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Marsh Frost (1823-1900), a New York native and Mexican War veteran living in St. Louis when the Civil War began, had been a former member of the Missouri Legislature and became a Confederate brigadier general. In 1863 he joined his wife in Canada after she was expelled from St. Louis. Frost was dropped from the Confederate rolls on Dec. 9, 1863. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Confederacy*, 97; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 293-94.

Correspondence relating to the expulsion of

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these civilians from St. Louis is found in *OR*, s. 2, v. 5, 320–21; 515, 537–39, 599–600, and 954. Capt. William Ivory, in a manuscript history of Company H, First Nebraska, mentioned that thirty-two men of the company formed the military escort for the banished civilians. The Confederate sympathizers included “Mrs. Gen. Frost, Mrs. Dr. Pallen, Miss Lucy Hutchison, Dr. Moses, Dan H. Donovan, Mr. Kennett, Hart family, and other well known citizens.” “History of Company H,” RG18, Nebraska Military Department, sg 1, s. 7, NSHS.

Mrs. Pallen was probably the wife of Montrose A. Pallen, who had been medical director for Gen. Earl Van Dorn’s Confederate Army of West Tennessee. Dr. Pallen was in Montreal, Canada, by December 1863, probably with his wife, from where he wrote Union officials about the treatment of Confederate prisoners of war. *OR*, s.1, v. 17, pt. 2, 900; s.2, v. 6, 718. Dr. Moses was S. Gratz Moses, a St. Louis physician who supported the Confederacy. Howard R. Conard, ed., *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri*, 6 vols. (New York: Louisville, St. Louis: The Southern History Co., 1901), 4:495.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Irving McKenny had been a first lieutenant in the Second Iowa Infantry, and was appointed additional aide-de-camp on Apr. 17, 1862. He later rose to the rank of brigadier general of volunteers. Frances B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1903), 672. Captain Adams has not been identified.

<sup>56</sup> Adj. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas (1804–75) did not get along with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and in March 1863 Thomas was assigned to duty in the West, where he was involved in raising black troops and conducting inspections. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 411; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 754.

<sup>57</sup> William Vandever (1817–93) commanded a brigade in the Army of the Tennessee, June and July 1863. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 426.

<sup>58</sup> On June 24, Company H was issued forty M. 1842 Springfield .69 cal. rifle-muskets. Ordnance Invoices, 1863, b. 1, s. 2, MS 129, Robert W. Livingston Papers, NSHS. The Sibley was a conical tent that could accommodate twenty soldiers and a stove. “Dog” or “pup” tents were more commonly used in the field.

<sup>59</sup> William J. Hardee (1815–73) commanded the Upper District of Arkansas, Department No. 2, July 22 to Oct. 1861 and led Confederate troops at Shiloh and in the 1864 Atlanta campaign. He is perhaps best known for his book of tactics and the Hardee hat, both developed before the war while he was in the U.S. Army. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Confederacy*, 119; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 338.

<sup>60</sup> William W. Ivory enlisted from Nebraska City. He was a Mexican War veteran who had served as register of the U.S. Land Office at Dakota City, N.T. and in the office of the surveyor general for Nebraska. Dale, “Otoe County Pioneers,” 5:1335–36.

Sgt. William Pollock’s letter of Jan. 19, 1862, published in the *Nebraska Advertiser*, Feb. 6, 1862, shows that Ivory had never been well-liked in the regiment (see note 5).

<sup>61</sup> Thomas W. Tipton (1817–99) of Brownville was a lawyer and Congregational minister. He served in the territorial legislature and as chaplain of the First Nebraska Regiment for the duration of the war. In 1867 Tipton, as a Republican, was elected one of Nebraska’s first two U.S. senators and was reelected to a full term in 1869. He later became a Democrat, running unsuccessfully for governor of Nebraska in 1880.

<sup>62</sup> Fort Davidson was an earthwork being built by the Union troops. President Lincoln had proclaimed Aug. 6 as a day of national Thanksgiving for the recent Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, and as a time to reflect upon wartime sacrifices. See the proclamation in *Nebraska Advertiser*, July 25, 1863.

<sup>63</sup> Clinton Bowen Fisk (1828–90) commanded the District of Southeastern Missouri. After the war he served as the assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau and founded Fisk University at Nashville. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 137; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 26.

<sup>64</sup> These are the Colorado gold fields. Keen’s Aug. 21, 1862, letter noted, “Ed has gone to Pikes Peak.”

<sup>65</sup> Brown married Julia E. Bishop, daughter of Rev. James and Julia (Allen) Bishop, on May 24, 1864. The couple had five children and remained in Otoe County until 1906, when they moved to Phelps County. Julia Bishop died at Wilcox, Nebraska, on Apr. 26, 1906. James E. Brown later lived with a son in Valentine, Nebraska, where he died Apr. 14, 1914. Dale, “Otoe County Pioneers,” 1:247, 342–43.

<sup>66</sup> This reference suggests that Lyman Keen had responded when Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin called out the militia upon news of the Confederate invasion of the North, which culminated with the Battle of Gettysburg, July 1–3, 1863. The term of service was only for the duration of the emergency.

<sup>67</sup> The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia under Gen. Robert E. Lee was defeated at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863. The Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg, on the Mississippi River, was surrendered on July 4.

<sup>68</sup> The reference to Copperheads may pertain to the banishment to Confederate territory of Ohio Copperhead Clement Vallandigham in May 1863. Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 775. Confederate Gen. John Hunt Morgan’s raid into Indiana and Ohio in July 1863 resulted in his capture, though he escaped from the Ohio State Penitentiary on Nov. 26. He was killed at Greenville, TN, Sept. 3 or 4, 1864. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Confederacy*, 203–04; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 510–11.

<sup>69</sup> According to his pension record, Keen lived in

Pittsburgh at 715 Carson Street, S.S. (South Side, i.e. that portion of the city lying south of the Monongahela and Ohio rivers), indicating that he had returned to the same area of town where he had lived before the war.

<sup>70</sup> As noted in the introduction, Keen lived with Ed Brown and his mother, Silvina, in Otoe County shortly before the war. Dale, “Otoe County Pioneers,” 1:342; 1860 census of Otoe County.

<sup>71</sup> A Civil War infantry company at full strength would have eighty-two privates.

<sup>72</sup> This was Thomas H. Price, who had been discharged on Sept. 24, 1863, to accept a commission as second lieutenant in the Fourth U.S. Colored Regiment. Dudley, *Roster*, 90–91.

<sup>73</sup> According to Dudley, *Roster*, 98–99, Keen had been appointed corporal on Oct. 14, 1862, and reduced to the ranks on Mar. 30, 1863, but no reason was given for his demotion.

<sup>74</sup> The outcome of the “love scrape” is unknown. There are no extant letters until Jan. 19, 1864, a period during which Keen evidently had an acute attack of rheumatism and was hospitalized.

<sup>75</sup> As indicated in note 65, Brown did marry Miss Bishop. Keen misattributes and slightly garbles the “frailty” quote, which is from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

<sup>76</sup> The soldier is possibly William P. Wiley, discharged from the regiment on Feb. 27, 1864, to accept a commission in the Sixty-fifth U.S. Colored Regiment, according to Dudley, *Roster*, 90–91. Frederick Steele (1819–68) commanded the Seventh Corps, Department of Arkansas, from Jan. 6 to Dec. 22, 1864, and led the capture of Little Rock. Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Union*, 388–89; Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 715. The First Nebraska veterans were furloughed on June 10, 1864.

<sup>77</sup> The best source on guerrilla warfare in Missouri is Fellman, *Inside War*.

<sup>78</sup> Alfred Sully (1821–79) led campaigns against the Sioux in Dakota Territory in 1863 and 1864. The latter expedition occupied four months and reached the Yellowstone River. Dan L. Thrapp, *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*, 3 vols. (1988, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 3:1388–89. The Second Nebraska Volunteer Cavalry accompanied the 1863 Sully Expedition. After its return to Nebraska in June 1864, The First Nebraska Veteran Cavalry guarded the Platte Valley overland route until being mustered out in 1866.

<sup>79</sup> This was the Mississippi Valley Sanitary Fair, which opened in St. Louis on May 17, 1864. Sanitary fairs were held in several cities in 1863–64 to help finance the work of the U.S. Sanitary Commission and its branches located in ten of the largest Northern cities. The commission had been organized by civilians in 1861 to help care for sick and wounded soldiers and aid their dependent families. The St. Louis fair raised more than half a million dollars to support the work of the Western Sanitary Commission. Faust, *Encyclopedia*, 656–57; Conard, *Encyclopedia of Missouri*, 4:415–16.