

Burr Collection Letters

Guide to the Eugene Kincade Burr Archival Collection (Pvt., 3rd Battery, Wis. Light Infantry (1861-1862)

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository

Civil War Museum, Resource Center Kenosha, Wisconsin

Language of Material

Material in English

Abstract

This collection consists of 23 letters mostly written by Eugene K. Burr to his father from 3 Union military camps during his enlistment in the Union Army from 1861-1862.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Use Restrictions

No photocopying please

Preferred Citation

(Identification of item), The Eugene Kincade Burr (3rd Battery, Wisconsin Light Artillery) Letters Collection, The Civil War Museum, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Provenance

The Eugene Kincaid Burr Collection was donated to the Kenosha Civil War Museum by the Civil War Institute, Carroll University
The collection transcriptions were compiled by Jean Harper Neuman, 2005

Processing Information

Processed by Frederick J. (Rick) Holtz, 2011

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

With a farmer father who also served as a traveling minister and was constantly away from home, Eugene Burr's young life while growing up in rural Grant County, Wisconsin was full of demanding physical work in helping his mother and siblings manage several poor family farms. The family moved several times to improve their hard lives. Like many boys his age young Eugene longed to get away from daily repetitive farm chores. The outbreak of the Civil War gave him just that opportunity. In October, 1861 young Burr enlisted in the 3rd Battery of the 1st Wisconsin Light Artillery. Burr's letters define his limited elementary schooling. They reveal the ongoing daily training camp life with his longing to "see the elephant". Burr describes his daily duties and the familiar sights and sounds of soldiers drilling in artillery skills, marching and cheering. As the days turned to weeks and months Burr becomes impatient to get his "blue suit" and see action. He mentions numerous times his ability or inability to send promised pay home to his struggling family. His impatience

is further noted in the always ongoing change of orders, the uncertainty of the direction of his commanders and the uncooperative elements of both weather and geography he must endure. His letters describe his continuous discomfort in living in the field that ultimately affect his illnesses and short life span. Burr's expresses joy upon hearing of "any news" from his relatives. He gives eyewitness descriptions of things he has never seen, like so many freed slaves. In his final letters we read of Burr's attempts to reach home in hopes that his health will improve. Like so many hundreds of thousands of Civil War soldiers on both sides, Burr's death from disease in 1862 in a far away Kentucky camp was a tragic as if he had died in combat.

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

The Eugene Kincade Burr Letter Collection consists of 23 letters. Letters # 1-3 were written at Camp Utley, Racine, Wisconsin (Oct, 6 and Jan. 1, 1862). Letter # 3 of Jan. 8th and #4 of Jan. 18nd came from Nashville..Letter # 5 (1/22/1862 came from Camp Utley in Racine, Wis. Letter #6 (Jan. 27, 1862 came from Camp Irving in Louisville, Ky.) Letter 7 was written from Camp Irving (Ky. Feb. 14th, 1862). Letter #8 was written from Camp Smith, Feb. 24th, 1862. Letter #9 was written Mar, 6th, 1862 from Camp Irving (Ky.) Letter # 10 came from Nashville, Tenn., Mar. 12th, 1862. Letter #11 was by an unknown writer as the last page is missing and was recorded on Mar. 28, 1862 near Culpepper, Va. Letter #12 was from Camp Brownlow in Nashville, Tenn. Letter #13 originated from Savannah, Tenn. and was written on April 12, 1862. Letter #14 camp from Pittsburgh Landing, Tenn. on May 14th, 1862. Letter #14 was written near the Shiloh, Tenn. Battlefield on May 18th, 1862. Letter #16 came from Corinth, Ms., May 25th, 1862. Letter #17 -18 were both written from Paducha, Ky., June 28th, 1862. Letter #19 was written by Eugene's father from Azatalan, Wis., July 4, 1862. Letter #20 was also written by Eugene's father to his son dated July 7th, 1862 from Jefferson, Wis. Letter #21 was a reply letter written by Capt. Drury (Eugene's C.O.) to his father dated July 21, 1862. Letter #22 was a brief note written by Surgeon J.D. Sanderson who cared for Eugene dated July, 7th, 1862. Finally Letter #23 was written from Battle Creek, Tenn. by A. Spaar to Eugene's father on July 21, 1862. Document #24 is a copy of Pvt. Eugene Burr's Enlistment Record..

COLLECTION LIST

Letter Doc. #1 of 24: Dated Oct. 6th, 1861, Wis. Location not mentioned) Eugene Burr describe to his father his first experience in army camp, living with large unknown groups of men, "strangers" sharing the duties of marching, drilling and dining together. Burr anticipates that day when he will finally get his blue uniform and travel soon to see Long Island, N. Y.

Letter Doc. #2 of 24: Dated Jan. 1, 1862 from Camp Utley, Racine
A letter from Eugene to his father. This enlightens Eugene that his father has also enlisted and he questions his dad about his pay. The son expresses his concern over the variety of travel expenses that the Army is charging him for. Eugene seems to have made an arrangement with his

dad to send a certain portion of his pay home per month to help his struggling family.

Letter Doc. #3 of 24: Written on Jan. 8th, 1862 from Nashville, Tenn. Eugene states that he has a “gift of beech nuts, a local nutritious food source” he has kept in his pockets but has not of yet sent them home. He remains unsure on just how long he will remain in Nashville.

Letter Doc. #4 of 24: Dated Jan. 18th, 1862 (Location unknown as to where Eugene's regiment is encamped)

Names Mentioned:

- . Louisville/1st Battery

Noteworthy:

- . Mention of going to his first battlefield experience
- . Mention of receiving pay
- . Mention of shooting practice
- . Mention of relatives writing

Letter Doc. #5 of 24: From Eugene to his father Dated Jan. 22, 1862 from Camp Utley, Racine, Wis.

Names Mentioned

- . Baltimore, Kentucky

Noteworthy:

- . Mentions that Burr expects to see fighting soon
- . Mentions receiving his “enlistment certificate”
- . Mentions a fire in Racine put out by soldiers and of the city afraid of soldiers looting for food.

Letter Doc. #6 of 24: From Eugene to his father dated Jan. 27th, 1862 from Camp Irving, Louisville, Ky.

Names Mentioned

- . “Dixie”, Michigan Southern Railroad,
Francisville, Ind., Wabash River
Bloomington, Ind., New Albany, Louisville,
Ohio River

Noteworthy:

- . Mention of his journey by train from Chicago to Louisville
- . Mention of great numbers of artillery and horses
- . Mention of seeing his first slave
- . Mention of his personal discomforts of the conditions of travel and marching sickness

Letter Doc. #7 of 24: From Eugene to his father from Camp Irving, Louisville, Ky.

Names Mentioned

“Tennessee Journal” and “Cincinnati Commercial” newspapers
“Bowling Green”, General Buell, General Brickner
“darkies”, “Had the Hen”, and “See the elephant”.

Noteworthy:

- . “ Burr discusses the refining and improving of our battery firing skills”
- . Comments on the technology and cost of “The Tennessee Waterworks”
- . Notes the huge slave population and raises the question of their being freed and their possible futures after the war ends.

Letter Doc. #8 of 24: A letter from Eugene to his brother from Camp Smith dated Feb. 24, 1862

Names Mentioned:

“12 pound Howitzer, “Bowling Green”, “Ft. Donaldson”,
“34 pounders”, “Killed Old Satan”

Noteworthy:

- . Been assigned to one of the 12lb. Howitzers
- . Commentary that “most all slave owners seem rich”.
- . Rules are strict and passes are needed to go anywhere
- . Weather and mud hamper travel and equipment movement
- . Comments that he gets few letters from relatives and little news of his family

Letter Doc. #9 of 24: From Eugene to his father written from Camp Irving and dated Mar. 6, 1862

Names Mentioned:

Gen. Buell, 34 pound “rifled” guns, Nashville

Noteworthy:

- . Mentions general discontent of soldiers light guns being taken away and exchanged for 34 pound rifled guns
- . issue of new uniforms
- . a promise by commanders that soldiers would see “action” if they complied to take and use “the big guns”
- . Eugene repeats to his father what he also wrote to his brother (getting over his deafness)
- . mentions that “mules haul everything!”
- . mentions the behavior of a drunken soldier

Letter Doc. #10 of 24, Eugene to his father while on a boat transport near Nashville, Tenn., dated Mar. 12, 1862

Names Mentioned:

“Ft Donnelson”, “rebels”, “Cumberland”, gunboat, “Secesh”, Desert

Noteworthy:

- . Mention of “Bullets so thick”, “we picked them up to carry home”.
- . Describes property including a bridge that rebels destroyed
- . Mentions “our troops are getting shot at at night from their windows:
- . Comments that “the rebels were deceived and tricked into service”.

Letter Doc. #11 of 24 (writer is unknown as the last page is missing. Written Mar. 28th, 1862 with the 7th Reg. Volunteers somewhere near Culpepper, Va. Letter is addressed to “Cousin Frank and Folks @ P. in general

Names Mentioned:

. “Picket”

Noteworthy:

- . Interested even happy to hear of the birth of a baby calf at home
- . Happy to get relative mail
- . Wants more mail more often from relatives

Letter Doc. #12 of 24. From Camp Brownlow in Nashville dated Mar. 28th, 1862 Eugene writes to his father

Noteworthy:

- . Mentions that this letter will be sent home with a fellow soldier, a Charles Winget “in hopes you will get it”.
- . Comments on the great number of rebel prisoners taken after a major battle.
- . Mentions a “trick” played by rebel soldiers on the citizens of Nashville to get supplies.
- . Notes stories told by Negroes about their masters.
- . Asks relatives to “write soon and often”. In return Eugene will send home “souvenirs”.

Letter Doc. #13 of 24 from Eugene to his father from Savannah, Tenn., dated April 12th, 1862

Names Mentioned:

. “Buell”, gunboats, “Morgan's Cavalry”
10 pound “parrot guns”

Noteworthy:

- . Difficult roads during a 14 mile march
- . Men are very tired, have had little rations
- . "Rebels whipped us early, but we were reinforced"
- . Towns full of wounded, many dead rebels who we see are poorly dressed and supplied

Letter Doc. #14 of 24: from Eugene to his father dated May 14, 1862 from Pittsburgh Landing, Tenn.(Shiloh)

Names Mentioned:

- . "Bilious Fever", "The Cap.", stench discharge, "ready to die"

Noteworthy:

- . Eugene mentions "cold damp conditions", and "to weak to write"
- . Comments on the stench of the battlefield with the body parts of corpses "sticking out of the ground"
- . Expresses concern about sending a portion of his wages through the mail as he states .."Thee mail service is slow and old letters long written still sit."
- . Difficult to report on the health conditions of enlisted men he knows there.

Letter Doc. #15 of 24: (5 miles from Shiloh Battlefield, Shiloh, Tenn. dated May 18, 1862 from Eugene to his father.

Names Mentioned:

- . "Corinth", "skirmishing", "Bilious Fever" ambulance, filing of teeth

Noteworthy:

- . Is waiting to be "called up" as his Bilious Fever keeps him off guard duty.
- . Doesn't know the condition/location of "Chancey".
- . His illness keeps him disoriented and he doesn't know where he is situated geographically and how far he will go.
- . His food and drink provisions are few and poor. Some meat and crackers are all he gets.

Letter Doc. #16 of 24 written near Corinth, Miss., May 25, 1862 to father from Eugene

Noteworthy:

- . Glad to get recent letter
- . Unsure of where or when we are going
- . Lots of rain here, have slept in wet rags and blanket as promised supplies have not reached us.
- . We can see the enemies fortifications

Letter Doc. #17 of 24 written to his father from Paducha, Ky., dated Jun. 28th, 1862

Names Mentioned: "Negro", "Nashville", "Ft. Donnelson"

Noteworthy:

- . Our troops are helping Negroes escape across the river
- . Our troops have taken Nashville.

Letter Doc. #18 of 24 Unknown writer writes for Eugene who is too ill to write to his father on June, 28th, 1862 from Paducha, Ky.

Names Mentioned: "Descriptive Roll"

Noteworthy:

- . Eugene mentions that his health is not improving and he is not well enough to travel home
- . He has no money asking for the specific amount of \$14. "so I can get home".

Letter Doc. #19 of 24, a letter from Eugene's father to his son from Azatalan, Wis. Dated July 4, 1862.

Noteworthy:

- . Eugene's father expresses concern that he has not heard from his son
- . Eugene's father now has the expense money to get his son home.
- . He has written Capt. Drury, Eugene's commanding officer, "to discharge you"
- . Eugene's father assumes that his son is already on "furlow".

Letter Doc. #20 of 24, a letter from father to Eugene dated July, 7th, 1862 from Jefferson, Wis.

Noteworthy:

- . Father confirming to his son that requested travel home money has now been sent.

Letter Doc. #21 of 24, a letter written by John Galloway by order of Capt. Lucius Drury to Eugene's father from Battle Creek, Tenn. dated July 21, 1862.

Noteworthy:

- . This a reply from Capt. Drury as to father's request to have his son Eugene sent home from the war

as a result of his son's serious health conditions.

- . Capt. Drury's response includes his notifying Eugene's father that his death occurred "at the hospital".
- . Capt. Drury asks Eugene's father to "contact the War Dept. for any unpaid monies still owed for Eugene's service.

- . Capt. Drury supplies a way for relatives of missing/unknown soldiers whereabouts as to to who and where they should write to for information.

Letter Doc. #22 of 24: "An Inventory of Clothing/ other personal effects left behind by Eugene Burr by Surgeon J.D. Sanderson, dated July 7th, 1862

Noteworthy:

- . 12 items in general are accounted for but are not specifically named or identified for the surviving family relatives.

Letter Doc. #23 of 24: This is a 3 paragraph letter written by A. Spaar to Eugene Burr's father, dated July 21, 1862 from Battle Creek, Tenn.

Noteworthy:

- . The letter is officially informing Eugene's father of his son's death and includes monies that Pvt. Burr owed creditors as well as monies owed Pvt. Burr.
- . The letter also contains the whereabouts of Pvt. Eugene Burr's personal effects.
- . A PostScript at letter's end identifies the approximate geographic location of where Eugene Burr died.

Document #24 of #24: The U.S. Army Document of Pvt. Eugene Burr's enlistment