

## George F. Wait Collection Letters

Guide to George F. Waite Archival Collection, Company D, 32<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers

### DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

#### Repository

Civil War Museum, Resource Center Kenosha, Wisconsin

#### Language of Material

Material in English

#### Abstract

This collection consists of 44 documents, a majority of which are letters written home to family. The final document is a newspaper article on George's great-great grandson, Jerry Waite of Land O' Lakes, Wisconsin, entitled, "Wait is walking in ancestor's footsteps". Jerry Wait is responsible for receiving and preserving his great-great grandfather's letters of correspondence to family members and also researching George Waite's military/geographical journey as a Union soldier during the Civil War. The letter documents found are not addressed to any specific family member at the time they were written but are quite detailed in nature giving the events and conditions the young George F. Waite experienced in wartime.

### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

#### Use Restrictions

No photocopying please

#### Preferred Citation

(Identification of item), The George F. Wait Letters Collection, Company D., 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Wisconsin Volunteers, The Civil War Museum, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

#### Provenance

#### Processing Information

Processed by Frederick J. (Rick) Holtz, 2012

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

George F. Wait enlisted in the Union Army on August 21, 1862. He enlisted into Company D of the Thirty Second Wisconsin Infantry from Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He was mustered out of service on June 12, 1865. The 32<sup>nd</sup> left Wisconsin on October 30, 1862, and proceeded to Memphis, Tennessee, and was assigned to General William T. Sherman's command. General Sherman's troops were engaged in operations in southwestern Tennessee and Northern Mississippi before advancing on to the Battle of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Private Wait took part in many of the following engagements;

Moscow, Tennessee, La Fayette, Tennessee, Marion, Mississippi, Courtland Road, Alabama, Courtland Alabama, The Seige of Atlanta, Georgia, Jonesboro, Georgia, Lovejoy's Station, Georgia, Little Lgeechee River, Georgia, Harrison's Field, Georgia, The Siege of Savannah, Georgia, River's Bridge, South Carolina, Binnaker's Bridge, South Carolina, Orangeburg, South Carolina, Cheraw, South Carolina, Fayetteville, North Carolina, and Bentonville, North Carolina.

#### COLLECTION LIST:

Doc.# 1 of 44: "Certificate of Service Official Record" mentions George Wait's enlistment date and mustering out date as well as the engagements the 32<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin Regiment participated in.

Kindly note: No information is given as to who in the family Mr. Wait's letters were specifically addressed to.

Doc.#2 of 44: from Atlanta, Georgia, dated, November 13, 1864.  
Mentions the daily routine of guard duty, inspection and making 2 pairs of boots.

Doc.#3 of 44: dated, November 14, 1864.  
We find out that Mr. Wait is a cobbler by trade and made 10 pairs of boots earning a wage of \$6.75 and working until 8 P.M. so the "orders would be ready by daylight".

Doc.#4 of 44: dated, November 15, 1864.  
Marched 15 miles that day and could see the city of Atlanta all in flames. Pitched camp at 2 AM.

Doc.#5 of 44: dated, November 16, 1864.  
Doesn't know where they are marching to and got a late start. Troops and wagons passing all the time and the hearing of constant heavy artillery.  
Marched 15-20 miles today and did not make camp until 2 AM. Very tired.

Doc.#6 of 44: Morning of November 17, 1864.  
Have marched a mile and are awaiting for the movement of a train.  
Got to camp at sundown and feet am very tired with sore feet. Recorded that a train guard stole his knapsack.

- Doc.#7 of 44: dated, November 18, 1864.  
Substituted sweet potatoes for breakfast as bread is all gone.  
Feet are still very sore, and we are marching toward Macon.  
Have reached the Ocmulgee River around noon noting a large cotton factory.  
Now laying a pontoon across the river.  
By evening we are on the east side of the river helping wagons up a steep hill while the rain is heavy and it is already dark.  
Tired and wet by 8PM.  
Ate sorghum molasses that was not very good.
- Doc.#8 of 44: dated, November 19, 1864.  
Encamped in a sugar cane field and slept between rows getting wet.  
Drew rations last evening receiving 8 crackers for 5 days.  
Came through Monticello today.
- Doc.#9 of 44: dated, November 20, 1864.  
Did picket duty last night.  
Had fresh port and sweet potatoes for breakfast. Much rain.  
Expect to be close to Macon today.  
Have come over some of the worst roads.  
Camped at Hillsborough today with plenty of pork and potatoes for supper.
- Doc.#10 of 44: dated, November 21, 1864.  
Solid rain all night long and ate fried pork and potatoes for breakfast.  
Raining like hell all the time and it is cold too.  
Marching. 1 PM sitting now in the mud and rain. Shall freeze if they don't start soon.  
Had to cut open one of my boots to give my toes more room now as the mud gets in from all the marching.  
Finally got to camp at dark with cold wet clothes. Has rained most of the day, and we are encamped in thick fine woods which is most comfortable and offers protection.
- Doc.#11 of 44: dated, November 22, 1864.  
Had a cold last night but slept good.  
Many of the boys have thrown away their overcoats and blankets, but I kept mine.  
We've marched 7 miles today and are not going to Macon after all.  
Heard heavy firing towards Macon today. Its very cold for this country.

- Doc. #12 of 44: dated, November 23, 1864.  
Had another very cold night. Went to bed at 8 PM and then had to get up to go burn a railroad for 2 hours.  
Since then we have been lying about which is very pleasant  
Went out later and burned another railroad.  
Upon returning we came through a swamp in the darkness reaching our camp around 9 PM. Not near as cold as last night.
- Doc.#13 of 44: dated, November 24, 1864.  
Not near as cold as the night before, more comfortable now.  
Beating drums awoke us at 6AM.  
Very thick smoke caused us to get on the wrong road.  
Heard this morning Macon was taken by our boys.  
Noon now, we are destroying another railroad.  
It is more pleasant where we are now and warmer too and we have a good campground.  
Killed a nice fat hog and are enjoying some good pork.  
Have come 8 miles today and presently guarding a pontoon train since noon.  
Have had my supper and am retiring at 8 PM as we have to be up at 3AM.
- Doc.#14 of 44: dated, November 25, 1864.  
Had a good nights rest and enjoyed plenty of pork and potatoes at supper.  
Started before sunrise with orders to drive cattle today.  
We take all the cattle we can find and drive them along to eat.  
Had a hard days work going 15 miles and am very tired.  
the regiment has gone with the platoon train. When it turns dark we have to stop driving cattle and set up camp.  
It was a pleasant day overall.
- Doc.#15 of 44: dated, November 26, 1864.  
Started at sunrise as the 25<sup>th</sup> Indiana relieved us.  
We are now at the Oconee River and got the bridge down by noon to cross here..  
Orders are to march 7 miles tonight and I don't feel much like it.  
Only got through 2 miles. A kettle of pork is boiling for my supper, and I am ready to go to bed now.  
Heard today that our forces fought the rebs 12 miles from Macon.
- Doc.#16 of 44: dated, November 27, 1864.  
Had a good nights rest. Its not daylight yet and is quite warm.  
Halted again about 10 miles from the river.

Are camped in a graveyard and it is not noon yet. May stay here for the night.

Doc.#17 of 44: dated, November 28, 1864.  
Had another good nights rest and the morning is warm.  
Seems as if it will rain.  
Are about half way between Atlanta and Savannah.  
I note the fine timber. We've had good molasses and find large vats of it on some plantations.  
We destroy all we don't want.  
Marching is pleasant as the roads here are "first rate".  
There is talk that the Rebs may make a stand at the river, but we have to many men for them to stop us long.  
Every night there are millions of campfires and a good deal of smoke.  
The country seems to be well supplied with everything.  
We have picked up large droves of cattle.  
I don't like them very well but they are better than nothing to lengthen out our hard tack.  
Marched 20 miles today to our next camp but no pork to eat.  
Am boiling 2 geese for tomorrow.

Doc.#18 of 44: dated, November 29, 1864.  
Very warm this morning. Think we will have rain before tonight.  
Am within 8 miles of the Ogeechee River and are waiting for a pontoon train to pass.  
Hope we will have an easier march than we did yesterday.  
We've marched 4 miles and it is near noon and is very warm and pleasant here.  
Watched a general wash his clothes. Other than his uniform, he looks like any of us.  
Heard today that Augusta was taken by our cavalry and our prisoners were released.  
Have a nice fat hog on our mule for supper.  
Each company is allowed to pack one mule.  
Have come 10 or 12 miles today while having to stop a good deal for the pioneers to fix the roads.

Doc. #19 of 44: dated, November 30, 1864.  
Ready for another start, is warm and pleasant.  
Expect to be crossing the river today.  
Still have some pork left over for today's dinner.  
The miles we have come through have been full of bad swamps.  
Comfortable marching with a good breezes. Crossed the river after dark.

Doc.#20 of 44: dated, December 1, 1864.

Find ourselves across the Ogeeche River this morning.  
Fog so thick you could cut it with a knife!  
Many men got lost through the night from the fog with lots  
of them running around in the fog looking for their regiments.  
Don't feel well this morning, so I am not at work.  
Marched out, tore up and burned a railroad in good style.  
Have destroyed it all the way from Atlanta. Its 95 miles to  
Savannah by railroad.  
Worked on the road until dark. Have a good campground.

Doc #21 of 44: dated, December 2, 1864.

Had a good nights rest and started at sunrise marching 8 miles.  
Quite warm today and I don't expect to march much further.  
The Plantations are large and there are lots of slaves on them  
and all the males have run off.  
We are now at Millen Station 53 miles from Augusta and 79  
miles from Savannah but there are no rebs here.  
We have had pleasant weather for marching but have much  
work to do in destroying all the tracks.

Doc.#22 of 44: dated, December 3, 1864.

Finding ourselves all right this morning after a good nights  
rest.  
We have got to work on the railroads again today.  
Quite warm here and looks like rain.  
Still in fine country and the smoke is so thick you cannot  
see more than 20 rods.  
Our foragers are getting captured. Expect they will have  
to travel in larger groups.  
Marching 5-8 miles a day and finding the buildings were  
the rebs kept many of our prisoners.  
Recently had a meal of boiled chickens for supper.  
Continue burning railroad ties and getting nearer to Savannah,  
Georgia. Rations tonight are hard tack and coffee.  
Pleasant and warm weather

Doc.#23 of 44: dated, December 4, 1864.

Traveled 6 miles and burnt one mile of railroad  
Used the same fire to boil potatoes and burn the railroad  
Very level country. Sixty five miles from Savannah now.

Doc.#24 of 44: dated,. December 5, 1864.

Will be late getting into camp today.  
Hardly think we'll find any rebs between here and Savannah.

We found the rebs and formed a line of skirmishers, and the rebs, with 2 good lines, left without firing any shots. We found 6 or 7 miles of "Johnnie's Work" and don't see why they had to make a stand here. Foraged lots today getting molasses, sugar, geese, pork, and beef. Since we camped, have heard nothing from the "Johnnies".

Doc.#25 of 44: To Pethina, dated. December 6, 1864.

While part of the company is foraging, I am at picket post. Have had poor water the last 3 days with only one canteen and a 6 quart pail to fetch water for the 5 of us. I later lost my canteen in a swamp. Had sweet potatoes, beef steak and coffee for supper. Shall have to go on sweet potatoes heavy for the next few days. Got 2 more geese today. Tired of writing.

Yours as ever,  
G. F. Wait

Doc.#26 of 44: dated, December 7, 1864.

Quite warm here and think there will be much rain today. I hear the "Johnnies" are 12 miles ahead. By sundown the rebs have fell the road full of trees. That is why we have only made 6 or 7 miles a day. We finally made it to camp for the night after marching through 5 miles of swamp.

Doc.#27 of 44: dated, December 8, 1864.

Up before daylight and hurried to eat a breakfast of sweet potatoes and beef. Was too hot to sleep. We have a pen full of old worn out mules. After a lot of marching we are still not in sight of the railroad and have to guess the distance. We are less than 50 miles from Savannah now. We see a lot of darkies and they look almost white. They don't look more than 3 years old. They say here that the Johnnies are leaving Savannah. We expect the road ahead is full of trees on a burnt bridge—other "deviltry" by the rebs.

Doc.#28 of 44: dated, December 9, 1864.

Up and ready for another move on Savannah.

Drew rations last night. Skirmishing is lively with cannon firing occasionally. Guess the Johnnies are busy today. A cannon ball struck our division quartermaster in the breast and killed him instantly. Got to stay here with no meat and potatoes tonight. But we shall get coffee for supper. We're only 8 miles from Savannah now and guess the Johnnies have left.

Three in our regiment were wounded today.

The rebs buried some torpedoes in the road and one exploded wounding 3 in the 1st cavalry, one very badly.

Can hear the heavy guns while the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15 corps are off there some place.

Doc.#29 of 44: dated, December 10, 1864.

Started at 8 AM and come 3 and one half miles, forming in line of battle. The Johnnies have already sent us their complements three times.

Expect we will have to march in a line the rest of the way.

I just saw one reb we captured and he told us that there were 50,000 men in Savannah. I think he lied. We don't believe they have 15,000 men.

There is considerable firing on the skirmish line and we are laying by a canal. They have just brought in a n \_\_\_\_\_ and he is so scared, he can hardly talk.

Have been laying by the canal for 4 hours and looks as though we will be through the night. There is canal on one side and swamp on the other.

The rebs have cut the levy to flood the swamp so we could not march through.

Have only quarter hard tack left and don't expect to draw any for two days.

Haven't had any chance to forage.

Doc.#30 of 44: dated, December 11, 1864.

I layed in the swamp and it rained all night yet heavy artillery firing continues into the morning.

Expect to move soon and suppose our advance will be up another line of works.

Not much firing on the skirmish line.

Rain has cleared off so we can dry our blankets.

They got soaked last night and I was drowned out by 3 AM.

Have had only little amounts of beef and popcorn. Our division is going to Fort Pulaski for rations but doubt if they will find any there.

Doc. #31 of 44: dated, December 12, 1864 (morning).  
Moved last night 4 miles to the rear while our corps is moving around to the right of the line.  
I saw Chris Hill and Ed Fretingburg last night and shook their hands as they were on the run.  
Its been very cold since last night and had to march with my overcoat today. I have had no hard tack for 2 days.  
Expect we will open communications with transports soon on the Ogeechee River at the mouth of the Savannah River.  
We are marching south now and it is pleasant but very cold.  
One of our company was struck by a spent ball yesterday.  
Have marched only 6 or 7 miles today and the 15<sup>th</sup> corps is ahead.  
Could not forage and have to live on fresh beef and some sweet potatoes that we eat raw.

Doc.#32 of 44: dated, December 13, 1864.  
We find ourselves at the crossing of 2 roads as troops and wagons are moving in all directions.  
I have been on a foraging expedition after leaving the Gulf Railroad.  
We have no communications with our fleets that crossed the river.  
After 8 PM we met another train of wagons coming out to forage. We heard that Fort McAlister was taken yesterday. That was the fort that cut us off from rations so I hope we will get some soon.

Doc. #33 of 44: dated, December 15, 1864.  
We got back to camp at 7 PM very tired and made corn coffee and fried mutton and went to bed.  
We did not sleep much.  
We heard that one division took Ft. McAlister in 15 minutes with the loss of 15 men killed and wounded. We also lost some when the fort was taken by the torpedoes the rebs had buried in the fort.  
Every time a torpedo exploded our men would fire on the prisoners and killed about 50 of them that way.  
Its been a month since we left Atlanta and have not changed my shirt once.  
Hope the mail will come soon.

Doc.#34 of 44: dated, December 16, 1864.  
Have been running my barbershop and made \$2.50  
By 9 PM we reached the Ogeechee River 5 miles from camp. Expect to cross in the morning.

Have not had rations in 5 or 6 days and had popcorn and coffee for supper. We were never so hard up for grub as we are now.  
Just received a letter from Ohio.

Doc.#35 of 44: dated, December 17, 1864.  
No rations this morning, but had 3 ears of corn for the five of us for breakfast.  
Not a dam thing to eat today unless we are lucky enough to find a hog.  
This is the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> day since all we have had is coffee, salt, and a few bones of a beef creature that they had to kill to save its life.  
I don't believe there is a dam thing to eat within 20 miles of us.  
Why in the hell didn't the boats that came up with the mail fetch rations for us if there is any store ships at the coast?  
We are like a lot of old mules left to starve.  
No chance to write home, suppose they think I'm dead.  
Have been on the road now since day light not coming more than a mile or so through a rice swamp from the river. All are jammed with wagons of artillery, horses, and mules.  
Am tired and hungry with a bad headache.  
The country around here has been stripped of everything!  
We are 30 miles from Savannah.

Doc.#36 of 44: dated, December 18, 1864.  
Found plenty of potatoes last night and killed 11 head of cattle for the regiment. Don't know where they got them and we had more than we wanted.  
Its always that way, either feast or famine with the soldier!  
I ate so much last night I can hardly walk today and was afraid I would be sick today.

Doc.#37 of 44: dated. December 19, 1864.  
Had a very hard days march yesterday and came 20 miles. It was very hot! My feet were covered with all sores and blisters.  
It was so warm last night we did not need any blankets.  
The robins are singing as gayly as though it were spring!  
We are 45 miles from Savannah now and are finding plenty of everything to forage.  
Are tearing and burning the Gulf Railroad today.  
I have begun to want bread very much.  
Had rice and honey for supper last night and got lots of

honey yesterday.

There's any amount of rice here. They raise more rice than anything else in the country.

Our regiment tore up more than 1 and ½ miles of track today and we are 38 and ½ miles from Savannah now. My hands are very sore.

Doc.#38 of 44: dated, December 20, 1864.

Got back to camp after dark and ate chickens and potatoes for supper.

Have 2 Guinea hens for dinner tonight and a pail full of sweet potatoes. Its the best we can do at present.

This is the 12<sup>th</sup> day since we have drawn any hardtack. Haven't had any bread in awhile.

Doc.#39 of 44: dated, December 21, 1864.

Got 8 quarts of rice last night coming 8 miles into camp late. Have come to a bad road again and are waiting for the trains to wallow through.

This is the flatest country I ever saw.

We found plenty of hardtack.

We got a small ration of sugar and coffee so we have plenty now. Have got 10 more miles to go.

Doc.#40 of 44: dated, December 22, 1864.

Moved our camp 2 miles today. Cold and windy now.

Have to go on picket at 3 PM. Wrote a few lines home.

Doc.#41 of 44: dated, December 23, 1864.

Very cold last night and did not sleep much.

Awaiting our rations to come from camp.

Can hear they are exploding torpedoes in the river so they can get up to the city with the fleet.

We heard Richmond was taken and they are firing big guns on that account.

Doc. #42 of 44: dated, December 24, 1864.

We're all packed for another move and I am going into town. It froze last night and I got one letter from home dated, November 25<sup>th</sup>. We came 13 miles today and the town is full of troops.

I am tired of being around and I have layed still all of one day since we left Atlanta.

Doc.#43 of 44: dated, December 25, 1864 (morning).  
Finding ourselves all well this morning but rather cross  
because we can't get any rations.  
Got a little rice but no hardtack, coffee, or sugar.  
The boys are so mad because we're so hard up for rations.  
I don't know who is to blame for this.  
I shall try to write home but I have nothing to write on.  
Now Pethina, if you read all of this, you will do better  
than I can. I got a letter dated from you dated December  
5<sup>th</sup> and was glad to hear from you again.  
You say Alice still sucks her thumb. Can't you laugh  
her out of it? Think I could if I was there.

yours as ever, G.F. Wait

Doc.#44 of 44: A fairly recent newspaper article (newspaper name  
not identified, nor is there a date given for the article).  
The article describes Jerry Wait of Land O' Lakes,  
Wisconsin who is "walking in the footsteps of his  
great-great grandfather, George Wait" through  
historical research of letters written by his ancestor.

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