

Letter From Norton, O. W. written Friday, February 6th, 1863

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Soldier: Norton, O. W.

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Location: Stoneman Station, Va.,

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Subjects: Camp Life, Commanders, Comrades, Daily Life, Eastern Theater, Family, Patriotism, Politics, Rumors

Dear E. :—

Wicks' golden opinions of "Little Norton" may do very well to repeat at home. Perhaps he thinks, as he has said so much for me, I should return the compliment and praise him up to the skies. I can't see the point. I don't thank anybody to say that I have done more than I agreed to do, more than a soldier's duty, and if any one says I have not done my duty, send him to me to say it. I don't know what Wicks saw me do at Malvern Hill. I didn't see him at all in the fight. I was under the impression that he was "taken with a sunstroke" just before the fight commenced. At Bull Run the boys say he did "fight like the devil."

I don't care anything about what he told you of my smoking. I could have told you that long ago if I had thought you cared anything about it. You all knew when I left home that I used tobacco some, and Mother and L. particularly urged me to quit it. I wouldn't make any promises about it and continued to smoke, but a year ago last Christmas I did quit, and then I wrote home and told all about it. Well, not the first one said so much as "I'm glad," or advised me to stick to it. I waited a month or so and heard nothing, and then I thought if that was all you cared about it, if it made no difference to any of you, it didn't to me, so I went at it again. If Wicks had told you that I chewed two pounds of plug a week and a pound of opium, drank gin and gambled, would you have believed him? Well, if it makes any difference to you I will just say for your comfort that I don't.

I am glad to hear that Wicks is looking so well. The boys who saw him in Alexandria said there was nothing left of him but his mustache. If I get down so low as that, I would not be much to load down an ambulance or a hog-car, would I ?

No, siree, I wouldn't take a discharge now if I could get it. You need not trouble yourself about that. If I did want one, I fancy (pardon my vanity) I could play off on the doctors and get it, but I don't want it, and I would kick a man that would offer me one. As to being the "captain's friend" I don't see the point. I despise him too much for that. Personally I have no fault to find. He has always treated me well, perhaps favored me some, but I am not the friend of the man who always has the piles or something of the sort when a fight is coming off. At Hanover Court House he couldn't keep up, at Games' Mill he lay behind a tree and laughed while the men fell all round him. At Malvern he shouted retreat and ran like a greyhound and got shot in the back with a three-cornered something.

Last summer at Fredericksburg when we expected a fight he was too weak to march, and we didn't see him again till after Antietam. At this last at Fredericksburg he did go

in and acted something like a man, the first and last time he has done so. When we moved last, expecting another battle, he couldn't go, he had the piles. Should I be the "captain's friend"? I don't know that he has but one in the company, and he is a sort of sucker. Mrs. A. is a woman, a true woman. I respect her very much, and so does every man in the company. Nothing but that respect for her feelings prevents the company from complaining of him and having him cashiered for cowardice.

I think some of my letters must have been lost. Did you never get the one that told of Henry's watch being lost? I felt so bad about that. I would have bought a dozen rather than lost that. I kept it till we got to Antietam, waiting for a chance to send it by express, but finally after getting Mary's permission, sent it by mail, and it was never heard from. I took all the precautions I could to make it safe, did it up in a little box like an ambrotype, but the last I heard it had not arrived, and if it had, they would have told me.

I wrote you in my last how our march terminated. Did Wicks tell you anything about camp lice? I do not know that I have ever said a word about them in all my letters, but they are so plenty here that they are the subject of half the standing jokes and bans mots in camp. I presume you never saw one. They are the soldier's pest. I never saw one till we got to Yorktown. They resemble head lice in appearance, but not in habits. They don't go near the hair, but stay in the clothes, shirt and drawers. There is no way to get rid of them, but to scald them out. They will hide in the seams and nit in every hiding place possible. Cold water won't faze them. They multiply like locusts and they will fat on "onguentum." At the time we left the Peninsula they were plenty, and until we got to Antietam, more than a month, no one had a chance to wash his clothes in hot water. I do not believe there was a man in our brigade, officer, private or nigger, but was lousy. They grow to enormous size and are the most cunning and most impudent of all things that live. During the late snow storm the boys, for want of something else to do, made sleds of their jaw bones, and slid down the bank of the railroad. The other night after supper I was sitting by the fire smoking a cigar, when I felt something twitch at my pants' leg. I looked down and there was one of the "crumbs" with a straw in his mouth, standing on his hind legs and working his claws round like a crab on a fish line. I gave a kick at him, but he dodged it and sticking up his cigar squeaked out, "Give me a light." I woke up the other night and found a regiment of them going through the manual of arms on my back. Just as I woke the colonel gave the command "charge bayonets," and the way they let drive at my sirloin was a proof of their capacity. Any one of them can throw himself into a hollow square and bite at the four corners.

I would be willing to let them have what blood and meat they wanted to eat, but the devils amuse themselves nights by biting out chunks and throwing them away. Well, this is a pretty lousy leaf, ain't it? Most likely the next one will be something different if it is not. Joe (my housemaid) is sitting by the fire picking his teeth with a bayonet and swearing at the beef. He says it is a pity it was killed, it was tough enough to stand many a long march yet. Well, it is tough. When Burnside got stuck in the mud, the artillery harness all broke, and the only way they could get the guns out was for the men to cut their rations of beef into strips, and make tugs out of them.

Who goes there?" There is, and much matter of fact, too. You see a good portrait of our "Little Dan" (General But-

terfield), too. If I ever get home I'll show you the bugle
he took out of my hand to "sound the charge" at Bull Run.
I'm proud to see him now Chief of Hooker's Staff. "
The army stuck in the mud" is just as good as illustrated
papers can make it. The road that looks like a river
is mud, not water. In front of the barn you see a "caisson,"
or ammunition wagon. The officers .on the jaded horses,
the coffee pots and pails on the muskets, in fact the tout
ensemble of the picture is first rate. The literary part of ,
the paper I don't think so much of, but the pictures are
good. Keep it to show me when I come home. "Ould
Graaly" is a decided hit.