1991 Accession:
Civil War Letters
of
Edgar A. Phelps,
1861-1864
CIVIL WAR LETTERS
OF
EDGAR A. PHELPS
EDGAR A. PHELPS

Edgar A. Phelps was born 8 March, 1838, the son of Norman A. Phelps and Mary Ann Young, Dexter, Michigan. He was a brother of George H. Phelps.

He was a sergeant in Co. E, 20, was wounded in the battle of Spottsylvania, 12 May, 1864 and died in Washington D.C. 4 June, 1864, aged 26 years, 2 months and 27 days.

He is buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery, Dexter, Washtenaw Co., Michigan and his tomb is inscribed with the following poem:

"Sleep on dear Edgar and take thy rest
We feel assured that thou art blest
And soon our work here will be o'er
Then we shall meet to part no more."
Address care, Killers,

Delivered Flanland Comp. N
First Regt. Maine Infantry

Washington, D.C. 1861.


My dear Miss Phelps, I thought that you would like to hear from me, so I take this opportunity to inform you that I am well at present. I am encamped in Company H, 1st Iowa at Camp Lee. I have met Col. Charles Giddings, commander of the 1st. He is a man of different character from any one of these officers except his relations. His name is associated with all. We are at present stationed about one mile from the city of Washington, at our camp held the last night of the holiday.

Yours sincerely,
[Signature]
There is now a camp in front of us, about one hundred yards from the fort. They say that it is almost an impossibility to capture it. Through the enemy's entrenchments, in sight of here these days, the enemy most of the time have been driven away. But they are still there, their degradations and plunder in our guards as they are along their duty. They first of all every day, as well as they may, try for it by being shot by our guards.
reach. There is more exaggerated in the about the daily about one hundred and eighty thousand soldiers. So far, so good, so that it is almost an impossibility to capture it. Although the enemy is almost in sight of him. Three days ago, the enemy are assembled in sight of the but they have been driven away. But they, the still committing, their degradation by shooting our guards as they are doing their duty on their posts. At every day, no matter whether they are shot by our pikets.
who are sending my Brother As in the same tent that I am and so is two other from the same place. So you see I am not amongst strangers but several others I am amongst I would like to know will you have got another letter from the same place and what for as Letters he is, you will have to expect wrote for the same. I have known here it please but there matters of mine can only and shared letters. He is an officer and you must address your letters to 8th N.C. Company 4th Light Fourth Infantry and it will come to me and

Dow & M. Harek
who are writing in the world
my brother is in the same tin
that I am and so is two other
from the same place, so you
see I am not amongst strangers
but I have got acquainted
I would like to know if
you have got another letter
he is you will have to open
and what for a letter
you will have to open
and what for a letter
I have to write it in the dark so I don't
know how it looks but no
matters if it is in only
or not I will come to you and
Deloss will have
you must address
your letters to
Company 38th light infantry
and will come to me and
Deloss N. Hard
Dear Uncle,

I suppose you are yet digging into work as hard as ever but I guess you can spend time to read a few lines so I will write. We are all well at present and having considerable of fun but are getting as lazy as we can be. We have to drill seven or eight hours a day when we are not marching. We are now about fifteen miles north of Washington. While we were encamped there we lost one man from Company A. He was shot right through the heart by someone outside of the encampment. They arrested two men that owned a corn field near and I think that it can be proved that one shot him.

We shall stay here a few days until we get our tents. We have not had any yet. We're getting as tough as bears. We sleep out doors and don't catch a bit of cold but it went pretty tough night before last for it rained all night and we got damped a little. You better believe. Troops are moving north as fast as possible. Three brigades passed by here today among which were the Michigan first, fourth and sixteenth regiments. I saw all the Dexter boys in the fourth. They look tough as bears and seemed to feel well. Tip Jeffords is senior captain and was acting as major. All the companies looked pretty small. Not more than quarter as large as ours. They were going to join Burnside where we expect to go when we leave here.

We are now in a very good farming country. The corn looks well as far as stalks are concerned but the ears are minus for they have been visited too much by the soldiers. For ten or twelve miles around Washington there are no fences or crops, no pigs or chickens. There were a few around here when we came here but they will not last long I think. It is not safe now for a rooster to crow for he is sure to be found. The most of the inhabitants here are unionists. On the road from here to Washington the timber is cut down and all looks desolate. They make no distinction but cut down the trees night in a man's dooryard and let them lay there. I don't know whether you can read what I have
written on not for I have to sit on the ground and use my gun stock for a table. You must write as soon as you receive this. I have not heard from home yet. We have a mail every day while we are here. We may stay here a week or more or not more than two days. It is time to go on dress parade and I must stop.

I remain your nephew
E. A. Phelps

We left our knapsacks in Washington for we had so much marching we could not carry them.

Excuse the dirt on this sheet.
as you do now. I am from home yet, & have been
out of town for six or eight days. There is much about the life of a colonist.
Two days of it to be mention.
I am sure from Philadelphia,

g. A. Philips
Dear uncle,

I suppose you are not doing any work as usual as we but I guess you can spend some time to read a few lines so I will write.

We are all well at present and spending considerable of fun and are getting as lazy as we can be. We do drill four or eight hours a day when we are not marching. We are now about fifteen miles north of Washington.

The same here day before yesterday from Washington which we were encamped. There was lost one man from company A. He is sick and right through the heart by some one outside of the encampment.
We shall squeeze a little more out of the old bed we have now
had some 1/2 years, as long as we can keep it clean and
we sleep out doors and don't
pick a lot of old leaves and
make dust before last
night I came all night and
we got damp on old.  The
works are moving north a field
fast as possible.  The 1st brig.
pot by hand today among us
were the 2d, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th,
and 7th regiments to about
all the 1st of September.  The
7th 1/2 are not as large and
seemed to feel well.  He filled
as senior captain and was acting
as major all.  The 2d company
looked pretty cold for more,
than present is large and
The new ones are fine, from
Bristol, Bridgetown, Cornwell,
and others.
We are now in a very good family county. The corn do be well as is far as St. Louis is concerned but the there are many for they have been visited by the Indians. The distance to St. Louis is twelve miles south of Washington. There are no fences or cows, no pigs or chickens. There were a few around the winter. We have here, but they will not hold long. To shirt is not enough for a woman to arrow for she is used to the farm. The most of the Indians trade for deer meat. It is a road from St. Louis to Washington. The timber is cut down and all looks deserted. They make no distinction but cut them right in a man's door.
Camp near Harrodsburg Nov. 12th 1862

Dear Uncle,

At last we have got into Virginia and into the midst of rebellion. We have been near where we are now five days but have moved a little every day but one. There has been fighting upon our right and left every day since we have been here but it has been mostly artillery and cavalry fighting. We have got pretty well used to hearing the booming of cannon but have not seen much of it yet but expect every day when we shall see some of it. Day before yesterday there was a cavalry fight on our right eight or ten miles distant and we were ordered to march and we went back on the road that we came about a mile and orders came that we were not needed and we came back and encamped near the same place that we were before and yesterday we moved ahead about a mile and stopped. I think we will march today to Harrodsburg about six miles from here if we can get some hard tack. We are out now. At Harrodsburg where we were ten days ago the rebs day before yesterday captured twenty of our wagons loaded with provisions which makes us short of hard tacks. But we have plenty of other things, more meat than we can use. This morning we all made a solid meal on coffee and beef. I do not know whether they took any prisoners but the teamsters or not but if they did (to use a Maryland phrase) the boys that we left there sick will stand a right smart chance of being taken. I reckon Stuart's cavalry are trying to cut up dog with us but they are learning to skedaddle when Pleasonton comes upon them. They have had a skirmish most every day for the last two weeks and Pleasonton's cavalry has whipped Stuart's every time yet and I think that Stuart will soon get sick of it. The whole of the Ninth a new corps of which Kilox is in command is nearby together, and all the valleys around here are filled with troops. In our march here from Nolan's ferry, Md. we saw General Burnside most every day. He would either pass by us or we would meet him. I expect now since Burnside has the command of the Army of the Potomac we will be doing something that will count but I do not think we will have any very hard battles before we get to Richmond where we will give them Hail Columbia and make our winter quarters in the city. All of our boys that are here are well but we have left behind in different places thirty of our company that
were sick. Some are yet in Maryland and the remainder of the sick we left at Waterford, Va. The country here has not been cultivated this year except a little corn has been raised which we use as fast as we advance. We are having Indian summer here now. It is not as cold as it was one week ago. We have had one snow storm but the snow went off the next day. There was no frost last night and it looks as if it were going to have rain but I hope not until we get away from here for we are encamped on a low piece of ground. I received your letter when we were at Waterford but have been on the march ever since and have not had time before to write you. I hope you will not wait for me to write but write when you can. Give my regards to all the folks.

       Nephew

       E. A. Phelps

Yesterday I read Dr. Harrison's, Sarah Janes' and Uncle Benjamin's letters.
Dear Uncle,

I last we have gotten

W.T.

The last ten days we have been near active fighting. We have been in a little every day. There has been fighting every day - right and left every day since we have been here. Let it be, and well and early fighting we have got, for we will need it. Having the honor of command I have not been much of it yet. But expect every day we shall see some of it. I say after yesterday there was a strong fight on our right and two miles distant and beyond and a little further. March and we went back on the road but we came about a mile and a half came that was captured and the wagon back and the men helped me the wagon back. The wagon back. The wagon back. The wagon back.
about a mile on top of the hill, I was joined by Mr. D. Herriot. We then marched to the line of battle. I was informed that the British were near, but it was not until we arrived at the line of battle that we could see them. I joined Capt. Brown and our line extended to the left.

I was then ordered to take a position on the right flank. The British had a strong position on the hill, and we were under fire from their cannon. I do not know how the other men felt, but I was determined to hold our position.

By the time we had advanced a short distance, I could see a large British party of soldiers. I was told that we should advance and stand at a right angle to their line. When we reached the hill, the British opened fire. They were well armed and had many cannon.

I could see them clearly. They were determined to hold their position. I was told to advance and stand at a right angle to their line. When we reached the top of the hill, we were met by a British force. They were well armed and had many cannon.

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Fredricksburg, Va., Monday Dec. 15th, 1862

Dear folks,

We are now across the Rappahannock and are well. Last Wednesday we were ordered to draw three days rations and keep them on hand cooked and be ready to march at a moment's notice. That night the pontoon trains started and they tried to put down the bridges. They were not molestcd until about 5 o'clock Thursday morning. They were fired into by a force of infantry and were obliged to stop making the bridge. It was then that cannonading commenced. Our artillery played upon them until noon without ceasing a moment. We had 143 pieces of artillery playing at the same time. From twelve until one there was scarcely any fighting, and not as yet was the city disturbed, as it was not Burnside's intention to destroy the city. But these were sharp shooters placed in the buildings picking off our officers all the afternoon and he was obliged to destroy and we shelled the city until four o'clock and drove them out so that the seventh Michigan infantry crossed in a boat and took possession. And then they put down the bridges and that night our forces crossed over all night.

Our regiment crossed early in the morning. We remained on the dock all day and were not disturbed until about four o'clock a battery opened up on us with shell and grapeshot all day down behind the bank and then the shells flew both ways for about half an hour like hail. Four of our regiment were wounded but none killed. One of the second was killed. After dark we moved down the river about half a mile where we remained until Saturday night. After dark when we moved up on the hill about half a mile to support the pickets. We stayed there until just before daylight and moved back behind the hill where we were and ate our breakfast and the whole division marched down to the dock and lay there all day and came back here last night along the bank of the river.

Friday and Saturday the shells flew over our heads all day and there was infantry the most of the time not over a half a mile off. Yesterday and
this morning there was not much fighting just here but there were some heavy fighting upon the right and left. Saturday our forces made seven charges upon their rifle pits but with no success. Their banks were so high we could not get in. After they reached the 7th New Jersey went in and one company came out with 17. The fourth Mich. have had a pretty hard place in the advance but are now relieved and are now in town. Company K had three wounded but I do not know any of them. As near as I can judge we have gained nothing yet but have lost a great number killed and wounded. There was one of the fourth here just now. He says that they are very strongly fortified and we can never drive them out unless we charge on them in a mass.

You need not worry about us. I guess that we will come out all right.

E. A. Phelps
Dutchburg. Monday Dec 1st

Dear folks,

We are now seated in the large, comfortable library where we were invited to tea.

All day we hunted and kept them up and cooked and be such as we can. It appeared at a prompt visits that night the postman brought letters and papers. We were put to bed and said good night.

Next morning the same people came as usual to see if we had any more news. They were all very kind to us.

Then we went and commenced our letterplay after the post had been sent. We have written several.

Pray for us until we have a reply.
Time from bed, the next morning, was 9 o'clock, at which hour I was called, and told that the Seaburg, a ship of about 200 tons, had been burned at the wharf by the Loyalists. I went to the wharf, and found the vessel in flames. The crew, consisting of about 20 men, had fled, and the vessel was tottering to pieces. I went on board, and endeavored to extinguish the fire, but it was too late. The vessel was a valuable one, and the loss was estimated at about $10,000.
The lines are not clear enough to transcribe accurately. If you can provide a clearer image or additional context, I'd be happy to help further.
SECTION II
EDGAR A. PHELPS

Edgar A. Phelps was the son of Norman and Mary Ann (Young) Phelps of Deqter, Michigan.

He enlisted in Company D, Twentieth Michigan Volunteer Infantry, August 18, 1862 at Ann Arbor for three years at the age of 22 years.

He earned the rank of Corporal December 25, 1862 and Sergeant November 31, 1863.

He died June 4, 1864 in Carvers Hospital, Washington, D. C. of wounds received in action May 12, 1864. (Battle of Spotsylvania Court House)

He is buried in National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia.

EDGAR A. PHELPS LETTERS

written to his aunt:

ADALINE PHELPS LYON
Milford, Michigan

have been copied by:
the great-great-grand-daughter of Adaline Phelps Lyon:

JANET LYON HOLM
6724 Balmoral Terrace
Waterford, Michigan 48095

In copying from the original letters, some of the words were difficult to read and it became necessary to guess as to what word was intended. If a guess was made, the word or words have been underlined on the typewritten copy. In a few instances it was not even possible to guess, and a blank space indicates omitted words!

Not being very knowledgeable about the Civil War, it's likely that I have made other errors in my copying that may be obvious to the history student. I would appreciate hearing what they are, so that they may be corrected.

Janet L. Holm
Summer 1985
Civil War Service Record
of
EDGAR A. PHELPS

Edgar A. Phelps, Scio. Enlisted in Company D, Twenty-First Michigan Volunteer Infantry, August 18, 1862 at Ann Arbor, for three years, age 22.


Died June 4, 1864, in Carvers Hospital, Washington, D.C. of wounds received in action May 12, 1864. (Battle of Spotsylvania Court-house).


Alfred E. Phelps

Alfred E. Phelps, Scio. Enlisted in Company D, Twenty-First Michigan Volunteer Infantry, August 18, 1862 at Ann Arbor, for three years, age 19.

Discharged on Surgeon's certificate of disability at Falmouth, Va. January 12, 1863

Record Attested To By

R. R. Russell, Michigan Regimental Round Table

Courtesy of Rochester News, Inc., Rochester, Michigan
VOLUNTEER ENLISTMENT.

STATE OF MICHIGAN, TOWN OF Ann Arbor
COUNTY OF Washtenaw

I, E. A. Phelps, born in Dear born in Dear
in the State of Michigan, aged 22 years,
and by occupation a farmer,
do hereby acknowledge to have volunteered this seventh day of August, 1862,
to serve as a Soldier in the Army of the United States of America, for the period of THREE YEARS, unless sooner discharged by proper authority: Do also agree to accept such bounty, pay, rations, and clothing, as are, or may be, established by law for volunteers. And I, E. A. Phelps, do solemnly swear, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whomever; and that I will observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles of War.

Sworn and subscribed to, at Ann Arbor, this seventh day of August, 1862.

Before me,

[Signature]

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have carefully examined the above named volunteer, according to the General Regulations of the Army, and that in my opinion he is free from all bodily defects and mental imfirmity, which would, in any way, disqualify him from performing the duties of a soldier.

[Signature]
EXAMINING SURGEON.

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have minutely inspected the Volunteer, previously to his enlistment, and that he was entirely sober when enlisted; that, to the best of my judgment and belief, he is of lawful age; and that, in accepting him as duly qualified to perform the duties of an able-bodied soldier, I have strictly observed the Regulations which govern the recruiting service. This soldier has gray eyes, black hair, dark complexion, is 6 feet 1 inch high.

[Signature]

20th Regiment of Michigan Volunteers, (Infantry.)

[Signature]
RECRUITING OFFICER.
DECLARATION OF RECRUIT.

I, E. C. Phelps, desiring to VOLUNTEER as a Soldier in the Army of the United States, for the term of THREE YEARS, Do declare, that I am twenty-two years and four months of age; that I have never been discharged from the United States service on account of disability or by sentence of a court-martial, or by order before the expiration of a term of enlistment; and I know of no impediment to my serving honestly and faithfully as a soldier for three years.

Witness: Enos Beetsby.

Given at New Harford the second day of August, 1862.

CONSENT IN CASE OF MINOR.

I, Do certify, that I am the father of the said , is years of age; and I hereby freely give my consent to his volunteering as a Soldier in the Army of the United States, for the period of three years.

Given at , the day of ,

Witness:
CASUALTY SHEET.

Name: Edgar A. Phelps
Rank: Sergeant
Company: G
Regiment: 20
Arm: Infantry
State: Mich.
Nature of Casualty: Death

CAUSE OF CASUALTY—(NAME OF DISEASE, &c.)

BY WHOM DISCHARGED.

FROM WHAT SOURCE THIS INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED.

WASHINGTON D. C.

DATE OF DISCHARGE, DEATH, &c.
14 June 1864

PLACE OF DISCHARGE, DEATH, &c.
Capote Hosp. D. C.

REMARKS.

By whom certified.

L. H. Varnum

(Seal)
Carroll  U. S. Army General Hospital,

June 4, 1864

Commanding Officer G Company,
20th Regt. Iowa Vol.

I have to inform you that Edgar Phelps of your Company, died in this hospital on the 4th day of June 1864.

Exhaustion from discharge from an extensive abscess in the back caused by a gun shot wound.

I enclose his description list, with pay and clothing account, and inventory of his effects.

Very respectfully yours, Gq.

[Signature]

In Charge of General Hospital.
**RECORD OF DEATH AND INTERMENT.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and number of person interred</th>
<th>Edgar A. Phelps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number and locality of the grave</td>
<td>Ward 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital number of the deceased</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regiment, rank, and company</td>
<td>Sgt. Co. G 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence before enlistment</td>
<td>DeWitt Mich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjugal condition, (and if married, the residence of the widow)</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause of death</td>
<td>Pneumonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of the deceased</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativity</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References and remarks</td>
<td>Relative Norman Phelps, P.O. DeWitt Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of death and burial</td>
<td>June 4, 1864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Duplicates sent to the Adjutant General of the United States Army, and to the Sexton of the Cemetery.

Memoranda:

- of Effects
- $50 paid out to Adair 1865
- Order to pay to Adair 1865
- Paid to Adair 1865
- Requested to pay to Adair 1865
I certify, on honor, that Obediah A. Phillips, a Sol't of 
Corps, 1st A. R. Batter Company D of the 2d Regiment of Infantry 
Volunteers, of the State of Michigan, born in Saug 
State of Michigan, aged 19 years; 5 feet 8 inches high; Dark complexion, 
eyes, Black hair, and by occupation a Farmer, who joined for service 
and was enrolled (see Note 9) on the 1st day of August, 1864, in R.R. 
by C. C. Berndt, for the period of Three years, and mustered into 
the service of the United States on the 1st day of August, 1864, at 
Jackson, Mich., by Capt. W. W. Gray; and having served 
HONESTLY AND FAITHFULLY with his Company to the present date, is now entitled to a 
DISCHARGE by reason of 

The said Obediah A. Phillips was last paid by Paymaster 
May 25th, 1864, to include the 24 day of May, 1864, and 
has pay due him from that time to the present date; he is entitled to pay and subsistence for 
TRAVELING to place of enrollment, and whatever other allowances are authorized to volunteer 
soldiers, drafted men, or militia, so discharged. He has received from the United States CLOTHING 
amounting to $21.50 dollars, since the 1st day of August, 
1864, when his clothing account was last settled. He has received from the United States 
$21.50 dollars advanced Bounty. 

There is to be subtracted from him, an account of the State of , or other 
authority, for amount, so received on enrolling service, $150 dollars, and 
for other stoppages, viz: 

150 dollars.

He has been furnished with TRANSPORTATION in kind from the place of his discharge to 
his place of enrollment, up to the 
186 

He is indebted to 

186 dollars.

He is indebted to 

186 dollars.

Given in duplicate, Near Berrien In, this 13 day 
of January, 1864.

[Signature]

[Signature]

Commanding Company.
Letter #1
Ann Arbor, Michigan
13 Jan. 1862

Letter #2
Camp Jackson
25 Aug. 1862

Letter #3
3 miles N. of Harpers Ferry
9 Oct. 1862

Letter #4
Lebanon, Ky.
21 April 1863

Letter #5
Camp Snyder's Bluff, Mississippi
20 June 1863

Letter #6
Camp near Snyder's Bluff
25 July 1863

Letter #7
Knoxville, Tennessee
5 Oct. 1863

Letter #8
Blaine's Crossroads, E. Tenn.
26 Dec. 1863
# CHRONOLOGY

#1 LETTER, dated January 13, 1862; Ann Arbor, Michigan
Edgar is a student at the University of Michigan.

August 18, 1862 - Edgar enlists, along with his brother Alfred, at Ann Arbor.

#2 LETTER, dated August 25, 1862; Camp Jackson

#3 LETTER, dated October 9, 1862; 3 miles north of Harper's Ferry
He writes about marching from Washington to Virginia - beyond Alexandria, back to Washington, through Sharpsburg to Harper's Ferry - over Maryland heights.

December 25, 1862 - Earned rank of Corporal.

January 12, 1863 - Alfred was discharged.

March 19, 1863 - They left Newport News, went by boat to Baltimore, by train to Parkersburg, by boat to Louisville, by train to Bardstown, and marched to Lebanon.

#4 LETTER, dated April 21, 1863; Lebanon, Kentucky

June 5, 1863 - left Lebanon, took train to Louisville, crossed river to Jeffersonville, took train to Seymour, Ind. changed cars - went on to Sandoval, Ill., changed again and went to Cairo, Ill. Sailed on the NEBRASKA down the Mississippi River to within sight of Vicksburg - stopping along the way 1 day in Memphis.

#5 LETTER, dated June 20, 1863; Snyder's Bluff, Mississippi

July 4, 1863 - Vicksburg surrendered in A. M.; in the afternoon they headed for Jackson - met rebs at Big Black River.

July 10, 1863 - Battle - north side of Jackson; fought 2 days and then were relieved and went to the rear for 48 hours. They were back to the front July 14 - 16.

July 17, 1863 - they left Jackson to tear up railroad.

July 18, 1863 - No rebs in sight - the Stars and Stripes were waving over State House in Jackson.

July 20, 1863 - they left Jackson for Snyder's Bluff, arriving there July 23.
CHRONOLOGY
Page 2

#6 LETTER, dated July 25, 1863; Camp near Snyder's Bluff, Mississippi

August 17, 1863 - Edgar left regiment at Nicholasville, Ky. and went home to Dexter, Michigan for a 2 week furlough.

First of September, 1863 - He rejoined his regiment at Crab Orchard, Ky. - about 30 miles from Nicholasville. During September they marched to Morristown, took the railroad to Greenville and then to Knoxville.

#7 LETTER, dated October 5, 1863; Knoxville, Tennessee

Following battle at Campbell’s Station, they retreated back to Knoxville - arriving there November 17, 1863. The rebs attacked on November 29.

November 31, 1863 - Edgar earned rank of Sergeant.

December 5, 1863 - reinforcements arrived and rebs skedaddled! They followed rebs to Morristown and after a cavalry fight at Bean Station, they fell back to Blane’s Cross Roads.

#8 LETTER, dated December 26, 1863; Blane’s Cross Roads, East Tennessee

May 12, 1864 - Wounded - gunshot wound in back - at Battle of Spotsylvania Court House.

June 4, 1864 - Died at Carvers Hospital in Washington, D. C.
Ann Arbor Jan. 13th, 1862

Dear Aunt,

I rec'd your letter with the utmost pleasure and was glad to hear that you were all well. Harrison was here last Friday and our folks were all well. I commenced going to school again last week after a vacation of two weeks which passed off before I had hardly time to turn around as it seemed, so you may know we had a good time. We intended to come up there during vacation but the roads were so bad we could not very well. Cousin Charles Phelps was down to our house and worked around there about three months and Harrison, Alfred, and Sarah Jane went home with him and had a visit with Uncle Edwin and Eli. They were all well and in good spirit. The boys enjoyed their visit very much as it was the first time that they had been there and everything was new to them. You said that Andrew had enlisted. I hope he will have a good time and do good service to his country. Harrison and Alfred had a great notion of enlisting in that regiment that Andrew has, but I guess they have got off from the notion of it now. I think there is not much need of them enlisting now as what enlistors we have are conquering the South as fast as could be expected. But if we get into war with England, which I am afraid we will yet for they seem to want to get into a fuss with us, we will all have to go and fight for our country. At any rate I know that I shall feel like leaving school and shouldering a musket in the defense of my country. I expect we will have a military school established here before long. They cannot find anyone to take charge of it. They have been trying to get a graduate from West Point but they are all engaged in war but I think they will obtain one before long.

Pork is selling at a very low price here. I have seen that of a good quality sold for twenty shilling per hundred but it has been three dollars most of the time. Our folks have not sold yet and I guess they will not for twenty shillings if they have to salt it down.

You must excuse me for not writing before. When I was at home I did not know but we were coming up there and since then I have been pretty busy as we had a lecture four nights last week to attend besides getting our lessons. Tell the girls and Alfred they must write me as I would be glad to receive a letter from them. Give my respects to all the folks. No more at present.

From your nephew,
Edgar A. Phelps

Write again if you please.

Camp Jackson Aug. 25th

Dear Aunt,

I thought that I would write you a few lines to let you know that I am well and hope you are enjoying the same blessing.

Alfred and I have enlisted and are at Jackson. We were home last week two days. Our folks were all very well then.

We have been encamping most two weeks and get along very well, full as well as we expected. We do not expect to stay here more than a week longer before we shall be moving for the seat of war. We have a very good company more than half of whom I am acquainted with. Our captain is
C. B. Grant, last principal of Ann Arbor Union School. Our regiment is now mustered in, equipped, and armed — ready for a start when we get better drilled.

Give my love to all my cousins and relatives. Tell them to write and I will try and write to them as often as I can. I expect Andrew has got through warring. If he has not I would like to have him with us. Our company is now full and we cannot take any more.

I hope you will write before we leave here. I will try and let you know where we make our headquarters. I think now that we shall go to Washington. No more at present.

From your nephew,
Edgar A. Phelps

If you see Mr. Ladd, give him my best respects.

Camp in the field 3 miles north of Harper's Ferry
Oct. 9th, 1862

Dear Aunt,

It is with pleasure that I turn my thoughts toward you in attempting to write you a few lines. We are well at present. I received a letter from home day before yesterday and they were all well. They wrote that Andrew had enlisted and I was surprised to hear it as I thought that he got enough of soldiering last winter by what he wrote to Henry. I am sorry that he is not with Alfred and I, but I suppose that he likes to ride better than go on foot.

There are a good many complaining. The weather is so warm. Anselmo Morris happened with a sad accident. Our captain's waiter was doing something with a pistol and it went off and hit Seth in the foot just above his toes and went lengthways of his foot. The Surgeon tried to get at the ball but could not and it remains in his foot.

We have had some pretty hard marches since we arrived at Washington. We went from here into Virginia a few miles beyond Alexandria and then back to Washington and, from there, up here by a round about way. We passed over the late battlegrounds and it looked very dismal. Sharpsburg, which is situated back of where the enemy stood at first is cut up very badly. There is scarcely a house but what has got from one to five holes through made by both shells and solid balls and the walls are marked badly by rifle balls. The citizens took refuge in their cellars and I understand no one of them were killed.

We are in Christ's brigade, Wilcox's division and Burnside's Corps. We are encamped at the foot of the Maryland heights on the west and South, mountains on the east. The sun rises about eight o'clock and sets about four here and from ten to twelve it is exceedingly warm. I think now that we shall go to South Carolina on an expedition but do not know for certain yet. All of Burnside's Corps is being collected together. Last Friday we had a grand review. All of Burnside's Corps here was reviewed by Old Abe, McClellan, and Burnside accompanied by many citizens and others. Tin colors body guards I suppose.
Yesterday we took fifteen rebels who were secreted in the woods about a mile from here. I suppose they were around as spies last week. 150 rebels pickets came into our lines and gave themselves up.

The country here is very mountainous. Day before yesterday we passed over the Maryland heights and it was the most tedious march that dead on the march. I suppose he died of fatigue.

No more at present. Give my love to all the folks up there and tell Alfred and the girls to write as I would be very glad to hear from them. Let me know where Andrew is and tell him to write to us and we will to him.

I remain your nephew,
Edgar A. Phelps

Direct to Washington D. C.
20th Mich. Inft. Do, Di,

Lebanon, Ky. April 21st, 1863

Dear Aunt,

I received a letter from you last night and was glad to hear that you were all well. I had been looking for a letter a long time and I began to think that you had written and it had not reached me. You said that the girls wrote immediately after you received mine. I have not received any from them. Our folks have written a good many that I never received. When we first came out we got our mail very irregularly until we were brigaded and many of our letters were lost. Yours was a long time getting to me because it took such a long circuit to get here. We left Newport News the 19th of March and were on the boat and cars ten days and nights. Just after we got on board the boat at Newport News it commenced storming and we lay at anchor near Fortress, Monroe three days as it was not safe to go out on the Chesapeake Bay. The waves ran so high and we were very heavy loaded and we were four days on that boat before we got to Baltimore and Ohio railroad and we went to Parkersburg, where we again took the boat and came down the Ohio River to Louisville where we stopped one day and then took cars and went to Bardstown where we encamped three days and then marched here to Lebanon.

There is some very good farming country between Baltimore and Harper's Ferry, but from there to Parkersburg it is very mountainous. The railroad follows the river except where the turns are so short as to make it unsafe for the cars. Then it is cut through the mountains. There are 42 tunnels between Harper's Ferry and Parkersburg the longest of which is 7/8 of a mile and from that they came down to 40 rods. The road is very crooked and we came very slow. From what I saw of Parkersburg I should judge that it was a very stirring place. We stopped there one night after we went on board the boat. The river there is very narrow so much so that one would not think it navigable but it is pretty deep and is navigable for very large boats - much larger than on Lake Erie. It is pretty wide when down as far as Louisville. We stopped at Cincinnati and partook of an excellent dinner prepared by the ladies of the city and we were received with great enthusiasm. May God bless the ladies of Cincinnati and all other ladies that will treat the soldiers as they did us.

What I have seen of Kentucky I like it first rate - much better than
Virginia. Wherever we have been in Virginia it is a complete waste. All the fences are destroyed and what few inhabitants that are left are almost destitute of food as they have not raised anything except a little corn since the war commenced and what inhabitants there are consists mostly of old folks, the rebels having forced most of the young men into the army. The most of them that are there are very ignorant. Around Newport News they are the most ignorant-set of people that I ever saw. There is not one man in ten that can read. All of the richest have moved to Richmond.

... evidently the last page of this letter has been lost - it ends here with no signature.

Snyder's Bluff, Miss.
June 20th, 1863

Dear Aunt,

I thought I would write you a few lines to let you know that I am well, and where I have at last landed. We are now at Snyder's Bluff on the Yazoo River in the rear of General Grant's army. We left Lebanon, Ky. two weeks ago yesterday and have been here two days. Our journey was pretty long but we all stood it first rate. We took the cars at Lebanon and went to Louisville, and crossed the river to Jeffersonville, and took the cars to Seymour, Ind. and then changed cars and went to Sandoval, Ill. where we again changed cars and went to Cairo. We stopped there two nights and one day and then embarked on the Nebraska and sailed down the Mississippi River to within sight of Vicksburg. We stopped every night on the way and also one day at Memphis.

We landed at the head of the canal that was cut across the neck of land in front of Vicksburg and part of our division crossed the river to Warrenton and then we were ordered back where we landed at first - where we again took the boat and sailed up the Yazoo River to this place.

We are here to prevent Johnson from reinforcing Pemberton. This is a very strong place. Gen. Grant drove out the rebels when he advanced to Vicksburg. The rebs left a good many guns after spiking them and burning the carriages. I think that we are sure of Vicksburg this time, although the rebels may hold out a good many days yet. Gen. Grant has them surrounded and all their supplies cut off, and all they have now to eat is meal made of peas, molasses, snake meat.

We took an orderly carrying a message from Johnson to Pemberton stating that he could not raise over 10,000 men and advised Pemberton to cut his way out and come to him and for the past week Pemberton has made an attempt daily to break through our lines and has been checked every time, and in one instance he lost one line of rifle pits. It is reported that Pemberton offered to surrender if we would let out three generals and one citizen. It is reported that Jeff Davis is in the city. I can't say as to the truth of the reports but I have not much doubt that old Jeff is there. I think if he is there he finds it a pretty warm place for our men are shelling the city night and day from mortar boats above the city. Last night there was some of the heaviest firing
that I ever heard. There was a continual roar of cannons from three o'clock until after daylight this morning. I presume the rebels were trying to break out. I guess they will soon get sick of it and give up. Grant is so fortified that it is as hard for them to drive him as it is for his to enter their fortifications.

Off the right, along the river, there are only fifteen feet between our pickets and the rebel pickets and if a man shows his head above the bank he gets a ball put through it. In some instances they light shells and throw them over with their hands.

The weather is very warm here, but we have pretty cool nights. I have not heard from home since I left Kentucky. I wrote to you when I first went to Lebanon and have had no answer yet. I suppose Grandmother is at your house now. Sarah Jane wrote that she was going up there to stay a spell. You must write often - all of you. My love to all.

From your nephew,
Edgar A. Phelps

9th Army Corps
Via Cairo, Ill.

Camp near Snyder's Bluff, Mississippi
July 25th, 1863.

Dear Aunt,

I now take the opportunity of writing you a few lines. I received a letter from you yesterday and was glad to hear that you were all well. I also received one the day after I wrote you last. I am well, but pretty well wearied out. We have had a pretty hard jaunt since Vicksburg was taken. It was surrendered on the morning of the fourth of July and in the afternoon we started for Jackson. We met some rebels at Big Black River and they delayed us some. In crossing we had to make a bridge.

There was thirty of the 6th Iowa killed and wounded there. The 16th Corps went ahead and had daily skirmishes with the rear guard of Johnston's army. Friday the tenth the 9th Corps formed a line of battle on the north side of Jackson and skirmished all afternoon advancing our line one mile. In the morning of the 11th our division had orders to advance slowly and the 2nd Mich and 45 Miss were deployed as skirmishers and the rest of the division followed in the line of battle for support. We had not gone more than 40 rods before the skirmishers of the enemy opened fire upon our skirmishers and then there was break firing but the brave 2nd never faltered but advanced slowly all the while driving the enemy before them. We advanced that day 3/4 of a mile. About 11 o'clock the line of battle was moved to the right and the 2nd Mich., being on the left, were without support which was a fault in someone, I know not who. They, not knowing this, made a charge on the rifle pits of the enemy and alone, drove a whole brigade out of there. But as they were not supported they were forced back again. That day they lost 9 killed, 30 wounded, and 3 missing.
On the afternoon of the 11th the 9th Corps had orders not to advance any further until further orders. On the morning of the 12th we were relieved and went to the rear for 48 hours. And on the 14th, before daylight we took our old position in the front and held it until the 16th when we were again relieved. There was brisk firing all the while all along the line, but it was a good deal at random and there were but few hurt. On the morning of the 18th there was not a rob to be seen. They had all skedaddled and at 6 o'clock the Stars and Stripes were waving over the State House. If they had waited 24 hours longer General Sherman would have been in the rear of them and we would have had them surrounded as it was Gen. Grant's intention. Johnston was afraid to stand us although Jackson is a strong position and was well fortified and is making his way for Mobile with Sherman at his heels.

About noon of the 17th our brigade started from Jackson and went to (Brandon) on station and tore up 4 miles of railroad, burning the ties and bending the rails. Got back to Jackson on the evening of the 19th and on the 20th we started back and arrived here in our old camp the 23rd.

I expect we are now waiting for transports to take us back to Cairo. I think we are going back to Kentucky and we all shall be glad to get back as it is a great deal healthier there. The water is very poor and scarce here while it is good and plenty in Kentucky. We have lived on half rations ever since we left here but could get plenty of green corn and fresh meat. When we wanted meat we did not ask whose it was but took it where we could find it. There is a great many of peaches here but they are not wild as you read. They have all been planted. You wrote that you heard we had been hoeing corn. I have not seen any hoeing since we have been here. All we do is husk and boil it - which we have done ever since we have been here. It is too large now to eat. I have had some of the nicest and largest peaches here that I ever saw. Watermelons are pretty plenty on the road from here to Jackson and good ones too.

Seven of our regiment have died in this state and three were wounded at Jackson and there are a great many sick. It is so warm in the middle of the day that it is uncomfortable in the shade. We do not get much news here. We have only just got the details of the fight in Pennsylvania. We hear today that Charleston is taken. I hope it is true. I have not received a letter from home since the fourth of July. They were all well when that letter was written (23 of June).

We heard that Morgan was in Indiana. If he is I don't believe he will get back safe. Yesterday it was reported that Gen. Brag was in Kentucky. If he is I think it is because Gen. Rosecrans has driven him there and there is where he will capture him. I think the rebels are making their death struggle. They must give up soon. I presume by the time you get this we (shall) in Kentucky.

Tell the girls they must write. Give my love to Aunt House and family and to all inquiring friends and keep a good share yourself. Have you heard from Andrew? I feel sorry that he did not enlist in the 20th. No more at present.

From your nephew,

Edgar A. Phelps

Please excuse pencil writing for I cannot get ink.
Knoxville, Tenn. Oct. 5th, 1863

Dear Aunt,

I now take the opportunity of writing you a few lines as I have a little time for letter writing. I am well and hope these lines will find you enjoying the same blessing. I have been home since I last wrote you. I found the folks all well and had a first rate visit although I did not stay but two weeks. I would have come up to your house but my time was so short that I could not. I have been back with my regiment just one month. I left the regiment at Nicholasville, Ky. and when I came I found it at Crab Orchard, about thirty miles from there. We have been on the march almost all the time since I got back. We are now at Knoxville, Tennessee and have marched all the way here except from Morristown about 40 miles east. We went east on the railroad as far as Greeneville and then back here. We now hold the railroad from Chatanooga to Bristol and there is no force of rebs in east Tennessee except around Chatanooga.

I am surprised to see the Union feeling expressed here. This part of the state is more loyal than Kentucky, and the right kind of loyalty too. They are enlisting very fast. There are a great many that have lived in the mountains for two years to save their lives as it was not safe for a Union man to stay here. I have talked with several citizens while tears have rolled down their cheeks telling how they have been used. Some have had their brothers and sons hung for nothing but expressing Union sentiment. Many have been shot attempting to go north and all of the young men fit for military duty that stayed at home were driven out at the point of the bayonet. But now they are all deserting the rebel army and enlisting in our ranks. There is not a day passes but there are some deserters come into our lines - sometimes twenty in a squad. Day before yesterday there was a regiment of Tennesseans mustered into the United States service that have enlisted at Knoxville within the last two weeks and it is just so all through this part of the state.

At Greenville, a small place on the railroad, there was one hundred enlisted in one day when I was there. There are a great many come in from North Carolina and enlist.

I do not know whether we shall stay here long or not. The rebel Gen. Johnston has been greatly reinforced and Rosecrans was obliged to fall back to Chatanooga. Rosecrans is now being reinforced and I think there will be a battle before long at Chatanooga. We may go there. I cannot tell.

I send my love to all. You must write as soon as you get this.

From your nephew,
Edgar A. Phelps

Direct to Company D 20th Mich Infty.
Via Cincinnati, Ohio
Blane's Cross Roads, East Tenn.
Dec. 26th, 1863

Dear Aunt,

I rec'd your letter dated Oct. 28th about six weeks ago, but as we have been all the since upon the move except what time we were surrounded by the enemy at Knoxville, I have had no chance until now of answering it. I am well at present. The regiment is very healthy now.

We built winter quarters at Lenoir expecting to winter there but the fortunes of war did not permit us to enjoy our houses but a short time. Our line of advanced pickets was along the Holsten River which Gen. Burnside intended to hold but Gen. Longstreet with a heavy force crossed the river at Loudon where we met him but were obliged to fall into our fortifications at Knoxville over thirty miles. On our way back he pressed us so hard that we were obliged to stop and give them battle at Campbell's Station where we held them from 11 o'clock A. M. until dark when we retreated back to Knoxville. At Campbell's Station our First Colonel Huntington Smith was killed. The loss of the whole regiment there in killed and wounded was 36. Of our company two were killed and one wounded. We arrived at Knoxville Nov. 17th at 4 o'clock A. M. and the next morning we were completely hemmed in. Our regiment was stationed in Fort (Sanders) also the 79th ___________, 29th Mass. attachment of the 100th Penn.

The enemy attacked our left ________ on the 17th and drove us into our fortification. Then the rebs did not attack any point until Sunday morning the 29th at daybreak. They massed three brigades in front of the fort during the night previous after driving in our skirmishers and as soon as they could see they charged on the fort. We were ready for them (as we lay on our arms all night expecting an attack) and we gave them volleys of musketry and grass and canister and the first brigade broke and ran just as they reached the fort and then they were met by another brigade and again rallied and give us another try and again broke and were again met by another brigade massed and a braver lot of men I never saw.

They came clear up to the fort (and there being a ditch in front) they got into the ditch and many climbed upon the fort 15 feet high and were shot off so fast that after trying over twenty minutes to get in, what there were left, surrendered.

After it was over there was a flag of truce out and there was an armistice of six hours to pick up the wounded and bury the dead. I went out where the dead and wounded were and such a sight I never saw and hope I shall never see again. There were two acres completely covered and in the moat in front of the fort they lay piled up — no, some places, three deep.

Our loss was very light — only ten killed and 25 wounded. They did not make another attack but fortified themselves very strongly intending to starve us out which they would have done had not reenforcements come to our relief.

Saturday night, Dec. 5th, after being attacked in their rear by our reenforcements they skedaddled leaving us again free men. They went to the east and we followed them as far as Morristown, 40 miles from Knoxville, and after a cavalry fight at Bean Station we fell back to Blane's Cross Roads and took our position to give them battle, but
they do not seem to care much about attacking us here as they have not made their appearance in our front yet. They have had several skirmishes on the right and one day our men took 2000 prisoners. Our brigade is on the extreme left. There has been some cannonading on the right today but I have not heard with what success.

It is getting dark and I will close hoping to hear from you soon. Our folks were all well the last I heard from them. Give my love to Aunt House and family.

I remain your nephew,

Edgar A. Phelps
Serg't Co. D
20th Mich. Inftrv

Note: The account written in this last letter matches closely the account in Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War.

Jas. Helm
they do not seem to care much about attacking us here as they have not made their appearance in our front yet. They have had several skirmishes on the right and one day our men took 2000 prisoners. Our brigade is on the extreme left. There has been some canoodling on the right today but I have not heard with what success.

It is getting dark and I will close hoping to hear from you soon. Our folks were all well the last I heard from them. Give my love to Aunt House and family.

I remain your nephew,

Edgar A. Phelps
Serg't Co. D
20th Mich. Infrty

Note: The account written in this last letter matches closely the account in Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War.

Jurat Holm