

Civil War Letters Synopses – 1861

(Written by John W. Dana)

From Boston, MA.

Nov. 25 To Father: Describes steamer trip from Portland, ME., Drum Corps played “Yankee Doodle”, Officers on Quarter deck sang psalms , Widespread sea sickness due to rough water, much humor throughout the letter, Writes of his day ashore and upcoming travel to Lowell to await the return of the “Constitution”.

From Camp Chase, Lowell, MA.

Nov. 28 To Father: Agrees to accept mittens and a sword, to be purchased by his uncle, Sgt. Majors all wear regulation swords (not straight) with leather scabbards, describes the late setup of camp, appeared in dress parade without sword.

Dec. 6 To Father: Has to wear a borrowed sword on duty, describes uncomfortable camp conditions, writes of the arrest of a drunken Lieutenant waiting for court martial, marched through city of Lowell.

Dec. 11 To Father: Col. Shepley in Boston to arrange deployment, “Constitution” has arrived in Boston, Regiment name changed to 1st Reg. N. England Division, Alludes to news from England regarding possible attack on Portland, possible deployment scenarios including return to Maine to guard the St. Lawrence Railroad, rumor of mass dissension of union soldiers in Augusta, Maine.

Civil War Letters Synopses – 1862

(Written by John W. Dana)

From Camp Chase, Lowell, MA.

Jan. 1 To Father: Is acting Adjutant while regular Adjutant and Colonel investigate Boston common for “Colors” ceremony, All packed and ready to deploy.

From on board the “Constitution”

Jan. 2 & Jan. 3 & Jan. 4 (Unaddressed) Describes arrival at Boston wharf in very cold conditions and being very hungry, feeling ill but maintaining busy schedule, lists extensive food choices on board, tells of shipboard pastimes, games, and activities.

Jan. 5 To Em (His sister): Describes the travel from Lowell to Boston and delayed boarding amid brutal cold, one drunken soldier fell overboard and drowned, writes of conditions aboard ship and continued running on the promenade deck in order to keep warm.

Jan. 5 & Jan. 6 & Jan. 7 & Jan. 8 (Unaddressed combined letter) Order issued forbidding gambling and drinking in the saloon, everyone singing and dancing to keep warm, Spirits high, Weather conditions discussed, favorable remarks concerning Colonel Shepley, tells of accident involving man overboard resulting in his leg amputation, writes of troop drills on deck, gun salute by British steamer was returned.

Jan. 8 To Dick (His brother): 2024 troops on board, steam pipes being installed to heat the hold, guards needed to repel “Irish women” in boats who approach to sell whiskey resulting in unruly drunkenness among some troops, describes activities and facilities on board, mentions several individuals by name, appreciates the map of Ship Island furnished him by his father.

Jan. 9 & Jan. 11 (Unaddressed combined letter) Details a humorous story about his long late night stroll on the promenade deck with 3 others and recounts the ensuing events, General Butler forbids any unauthorized mail delivery, talks about proposed deployment.

Jan. 11 & Jan. 12 & Jan. 14 & Jan. 15 & Jan. 16 (Unaddressed combined letter) Col. French's regiment detached to Fort Independence by the gun boat "Saxon", Maine regiment being detached to Camp Chase in Lowell, much confusion as Camp Chase orders remanded and conjecture that Fortress Monroe is the intended destination, again is sea sick, describes entertainment on board in the saloon, Fog delays arrival at Fortress Monroe, Whales sighted, describes the scene in the Chesapeake and Hampton Roads area of ships loaded for the "Burnside expedition", officer shot himself while shooting ducks, Rebels seen erecting fortifications at Sewall's Point.

Jan. 16 To Em (sister) Wrote in greater detail of the events discussed in the letter above, mentions steam frigate "Minnesota", he expects to go on to Ship Island, good description of the surrounding wartime conditions, fired upon the rebels without effect.

Jan. 19 To Father Ready for deployment at any time to yet undisclosed destination, steam frigate "Minnesota" dropped her top masts preparatory to shelling rebel batteries, a diversionary tactic to aid Burnside's attack at Norfolk.

From Camp Shepley

Jan. 26 To Father Pitched tents on shore substituting the lack of tent pegs by using bayonets, sticks, and boughs, heavy rain and floods, outbreak of measles, shortage of rations, regular flags of truce to exchange prisoners and carry letters, mentions Col. Shepley, Lt. Col. Kimball, Major Hastings, Adjutant Webb, and General Butler.

From Camp Constitution, Ship Island

Feb. 1 To Father Col. Shepley had meeting with new Secretary of War Stanton, deployment to Ship Island pending the loading of coal and provisions, poor weather conditions delay deployment, humorous story of coping with a leaky tent.

Feb. 13 To Mother Unidentified large war steamer sighted and avoided, very uncomfortable heat and weather conditions, discovered by rebels resulting in defensive actions, two soldiers died from pneumonia and were buried in the sand.

Feb. 14 To Em (sister) Ship departure delayed by poor weather, interesting story about efforts to free an old Mississippi flat boat from its' stranded position ashore, 3 men seriously injured in the process including one who is critical, brief minor skirmishes with several rebel steamers, gun boat "New London" mentioned, description of funeral service for a Massachusetts soldier, tells about effort to salvage a sinking Union gun boat, suspected small pox victim set ashore, collision by another schooner, Several fish species and large turtle sighted and named.

Feb. 21 To Father ship "Black Princess" set to sail for Boston, Strong wind and heavy rain, 3 Union soldiers deserted including a nephew of Jeff Davis, the rebel gun boat "Magnolia" captured in Mississippi river blockade towed in by gun boat "South Carolina", Arrival of schooner with fruit for sale, made a makeshift bedstead out of scrap lumber, soldier injured by falling barrel of beef, disparaging remarks given about General Phelps.

Mar. 7 & Mar. 9 & Mar. 11 (Combined letter to father) Rumors that Col. Dow on the way with the Maine 13th regiment, speculation about imminent deployment, several officers went to Horn Island to purchase cattle and, after delay, were towed back by the gun boat “New London”, comparison of events at Ship Island with imagined events at home, arrival of steamers “Fulton” and “North American” with reinforcements, news of gallant charge by Major E.A. Kimball at Roanoke, 2 men wounded in skirmish with rebels, the Maine 1st battery arrived on the ship “Idaho”, Capt. M.R. Fessenden to be court martialled for drunkenness on duty.

Mar. 14 To Father Finally received pay (\$60) and sent it all home to repay loans previously received, More reinforcements have arrived, Brigade drill conducted daily.

Mar. 30 To sister Em Lengthy discussion about home, much building initiated by arrival of General Butler, identifies several officers who received promotions, anticipates deployment to Lake Ponchartrain in New Orleans.

Apr. 4 & Apr. 5 combined letter to Father Very lengthy letter filled with descriptive accounts of various actions, Union General, under flag of truce, fired on by rebels prompting counter attack by Union troops, discusses ship movements with gun boat “New London” capturing a rebel steamer carrying 1100 troops, Union troops assigned with cavalry to acquire some cattle, 150 head stampeded after widespread shooting by Cavalry troops, 50 – 60 carcasses prepared and loaded on to schooner, an ox was killed for dinner, detailed account of patrol and skirmishes and encounters with various types of snakes, difficulties experienced, one rebel soldier captured, rebel steamer captured, near Biloxi, loaded with weapons, uniforms, and all manner of “plunder”, discovery of rebel camp which had been hurriedly abandoned by 800 rebel soldiers, three Union soldiers, bathing in the surf, pulled out to sea by the undertow, bodies not recovered.

Apr. 25 To Mother rebel sand batteries destroyed following the destruction of Fort Jackson (exploded magazine blew up fort) 2000 rebel soldiers killed also, they were prisoners for having Union sympathies, frigate “Pensacola” mentioned, 8 Union regiments now quartered on the island, difficulties with mosquitoes, 12 Union soldiers arrested, describes extensive city-scale building on the island, Col. McClusky being tried for drunkenness, Capt. Fessenden court martialed, cashiered, and planning to become a sutler, humorous story about pilfered whiskey and the ensuing result, derogatory remarks about General Butler, was able to purchase sword, sash, belt, and equipment for \$20.

Apr. 30 To Father use of alcohol is prolific, particularly among the officers, new outbreak of dysentery, coping with intense heat, mosquitoes, and flies, mention of the “Monitor” and the “Merrimac”, provides an outline of the daily routine.

May 3 To Mother packed, loaded, and ready to deploy on the captured steamer “Tennessee”, expect to go up the Mississippi to Memphis, regiments to deploy are the 12th Maine, 8th Vermont, and 13th Connecticut, four companies and two gun boats traveling to Fort Pike. **(included with this letter is a detailed sketch and narrative overview of the layout on Ship Island)**

From New Orleans, LA.

May 7. To Sister Em provides a detailed journal of his voyage on the steamer “Tennessee” from Ship Island to New Orleans, mentions the brig “Yankee Blade”, many ships sighted, including the sunken rebel ship “Manassas”, cannonball fired at them from Fort St. Phillips, rough travel, much seasickness, sights of many splendid plantations with their negro quarters, mostly women seen working the fields, Yankees cheered for, in passing, provides report losing value to National Treasury notes.

May 23. To Dick (his brother) Col. Shepley acting as Mayor and Commandant of New Orleans, hot weather and intolerable mosquitoes, no pay since March 1st, writes of home.

May 25. To Em (his sister) Lieutenant Phillips (Co. B Commander) was replaced for being drunk and for insulting local New Orleans women, unflattering description of Lt. Miffin (replacement for Lt. Phillips), writes of several arrests and measures taken to improve company behavior, revealing statement that the writer (John) is only 18 years old and in command of 40 – 50 men.

Jun. 13 To Father oppressive heat and mosquitoes, no pay since February (\$21/month), promoted to Signal Service due to exemplary service, brief discussion about training for his new position, names 4 officers who resigned due to ill health.

Jun. 24 To Brother gives an interesting and detailed account, written with a bit of humor, of his duties, equipment, and training on a typical day, great difficulties with insects.

Jun. 24 To Aunt Demring (sp ???) Signal Corps. Makeup is 9 officers with 3 privates for each officer, signaled with torches last night, New Orleans citizenry are more docile now, jealousy of his success, by fellow officers, because of his youth.

Jun. 26 To Em (his sister) passed the final exam for the Signal Corps., 4 officers of 9 failed, rec'd. two months back pay as Sgt.-Major (\$42), still waiting for his increase as 2nd. Lieutenant.

Jul. 5 To Father was a subdued celebration of the 4th of July, existence of disentary has resulted in protective precautions, conflicting speculation in camp regarding the war's end, discusses various means being used to get dismissed and sent home.

Jul. 15 To Father Heavy rain and flooding in the streets with oppressive heat, talk of home.

Aug. 16 To Father after setting up a signal station in Carrolton he describes his difficult efforts to get medical treatment for typhoid fever.

Aug. 31 To Mother writes of his treatment and recovery effort in his battle with typhoid fever, expecting an attack by Confederate General Van Dorn anytime, talks of specific ties between some of his peers and folks back home.

Sep. 4 & Sep. 8 To Father (combined letter) disappointment that General Butler is being removed, weather getting cooler (90 degrees in the shade), Writes of the cheap local provisions, thanks for coat sent to him from home, mentions two mail steamers “Roanoke” and “Tradewinds”.

Sep. 12 To Father Spent much time at Lake Ponchatrain for R.& R., writes of his dental treatment for ulcerated and broken teeth, “Sesesh” gleeful of rumors from rebel sources that Cincinnati was taken and Washington was being evacuated, Federal are doubtful, Col. Kimball is unjustly critical of McClellan, Pope, and other generals.

Sep. 19 To Father mentions steamer “Matanzas”, is on light duty, signal station has been erected 20-30 feet above a tree top.

Sep. 29 To Em (his sister) three or four cavalry companies raised in New Orleans and horses are being confiscated from the locals, only those who have sworn allegiance to the union is compensated, many officers living in splendid furnished houses appropriated from the locals, his successful protest regarding the discrepancy between officer’s and enlistees mess, unruly and shameful behavior by some officers is described, Anxious to receive news of battles in Maryland, rues the removal of General Pope, General Sherman has taken command of the troops at Carrolton, General Arnold now commanding troops in the city and at Algiers, LA.

Oct. 2 To Brother Dick provides lengthy advice and encouragement to Dick to associate with better friends, writes of 2 “Sesesh” guns that he has obtained for souvenirs, attended court martial against one of the flagmen for disobeying orders.

Oct. 11 To Mother General Sherman has replaced General Phelps at Carrolton, General Weitzel in command of a reserve brigade and awaiting orders, there is limited entertainment in the city but the city is still lively, steamer “Leeres” was blown up on Lake Pontchartrain killing one officer and six men.

Oct. 21 To Father Hurriedly written on eve of deployment, enclosed \$100 to help at home, has acquired a “first rate” horse.

Nov. 4 To Mother interesting and descriptive account of his “expedition” on the gun boat “Kineo” (which was built at Cape Elizabeth, Maine,) up the Mississippi with General Weitzel and troops, march along Bayou LaFourche, shots exchanged killing a rebel captain, confiscation of poultry and livestock for food, two union scouts shot and many rebels discovered, ensuing battle with artillery and infantry, Union losses greater than rebel losses but rebels “skedaddled”, bivouacked at Thibodeaux awaiting more fighting.

From Camp near Thibodeaux

Nov. 6 To Em (his sister) Troop train delayed by rebel damages, track needs re-laying and bridge must be rebuilt, fired upon by rebel guerillas, promotion to 2nd Lieutenant, writes about the local ladies and bivouac conditions.

Civil War Letters Synopses – 1863

(Written by John W. Dana)

From Thibodeaux, LA.

Jan. 4 To Brother introductory remarks about home, awaiting orders to follow the 13th Connecticut and 8th New Hampshire regiments to Baton Rouge, speech by Jefferson Davis at Jackson, Miss. admonished Vicksburg and Port Hudson to be held at all costs, loss would open up the Mississippi river, Both sides gathering for a fierce battle and causing great concern among the troops.

Jan. 11 To Em (his sister) ordered to join Weitzel's brigade at Berwick's Bay facing the enemy, encounter with the iron clad "Cotton", following a day's fighting, retreating rebels forced to set fire to the "Cotton", Union Commodore Buchanan killed by rebel sharpshooters, returned to Thibodeaux.

Feb. 15 To Father rainy conditions with flooding, sugar speculation is happening everywhere, discusses various Personnel actions among the officers, officers must buy their own horses

From Brashear City, LA.

Feb. 28 To Em now encamped at Berwick's Bay, compares tactical advantages to other potential camp sites, Confederate troops seen every day across the river, must establish signal station under protection of a picket, writes about avoiding being shot by a rebel captain at the battle of Georgia Landing, union gun boat snagged in river and sunk.

Mar. 14 To Mother under rebel flags of truce a woman as well as a man & wife and their 2 children, allowed to return home behind Union lines General Banks and troops moving up to Port Hudson for battle, writes disparagingly about "Secessionists in the north, mention of the Conscription Act, talks of recreational horse jumps at the camp.

From Bayou Boeuf, LA.

Mar. 28 & Mar. 29 (combined letter to father) explains the organization of the Signal Corps as it complies with the newly enacted bill establishing same, fearful of being cut off if rebels destroy railroad bridge, “Queen of the West” and other gun boats were captured by rebels, Union gun boat “Diana” went up Bayou Teche to fight, gun boat “Calhoun” assisted but ran aground, the “Diana” was been captured and every officer on board was killed after heavy fighting, out of 250 – 300 men, remainder of those on board (10 – 12) were captured, Union troops massacred but rebel losses were heavy, mentions Admiral Farragut’s flag ship “Hartford” successfully “ran the batteries” at Port Hudson, has taken to smoking as a defense against mosquito menace, healthy drinking water is scarce.

Mar. 30 To Aunt recounts the highlights of General Weitzel’s “expedition”, describes camp conditions, inquires about numerous people at home, brother Dick was appointed as a mid-shipman in the Naval academy at Newport, Rhode Island.

From Opelousas, LA.

Apr. 30 To Sister reacts to news of their brother’s sickness and sudden death.

From New Orleans, LA.

May 15 To Mother is on furlough for a day, fighting is on the increase, sad about Dick’s death.

From Bayou Sara, LA. On the Mississippi

May 23 & May 24 (combined letter to Em (his sister)) very lengthy letter, describes his trip down the Red River to Brashear City on the tugboat “Union”, sighted Fort DeRussy, the fortifications of Butte a La Rose, and the sunken wreckage of the “Queen of the West”, boarded a train to New Orleans where he stayed at the St. Charles hotel, gives high opinion of Admiral Farragut, discusses wives he has met of the 75th New York regiment officers, was warned of guerillas on the Atchafalaya river by the crew of a cotton loaded barge, from a church tower sighted the masts of the ship “Richmond”, splendid news from General Grant at Vicksburg, expects the imminent fall of Port Hudson, vivid description, from a church tower, of the shelling of Port Hudson, writes of **Bayou** Sara having been captured by Commodore Porter of the Union clad “Essex”, disturbed by reports about the Union army in Virginia being “licked” but now hearing that the rebels are in retreat.

From camp near Port Hudson

Jun. 1 To Mother hard fight resulting in many losses including Capt. Hubbard, Lieutenant Wotnowski (sp ??), several colonels and other officers, In midst of battle a truce was requested by Union troops and granted by the rebels to bury the dead, rebels used the time to re-position themselves, advanced to a rebel fort and stopped in a ravine within speaking distance of the troops inside, found a suitable tree from which to signal over the fort to the “Richmond” below, Col. Ilsley wounded in head by shell fragment.

Jun. 5 To Em (sister) Lists several officers who have been killed or died of illness, Rebel deserters daily who report the fort being manned by a small force, descriptive writing of cannon volleys (10 inch Columbiads) back and forth, many landing unexploded near Union headquarters, very interesting accounts of two Union soldiers jumping over the rebel “works”, seizing enemy guns, and leaving them in front of Union lines to lure rebels for Union sharpshooters.

Jun. 6 To Aunt Deming written on the 14th day of the siege at Port Hudson, Union troops entrenched within 150 feet of rebel fort, when all Union forces were ordered to storm the fort, only General Weitzel and his troops complied at the appointed time, thus enabling the rebels to concentrate their resistance and bog Weitzel's troops down in a deep ravine, General Augur's attack was repelled with much more Union loss, an armistice, granted by the rebels allowed time to bury the Union dead, Confederates took advantage to re-position their troops and establish new cannon positions, shells dropping all around, still affected by brother Dick's death.

Jun. 13 To Em (sister) Booming of cannons is now commonplace, flag of truce by Union soldiers to demand rebels surrender, constant skirmishes to estimate enemy strength and position, provides a detailed account of Union attack on the enemy, enemy constantly bombarded by big guns and groups of enemy deserters coming in on a regular basis.

Jun. 18 To Father detailed description of Union attack on Port Hudson, fierce fighting (almost hand to hand) resulting in many wounded & killed, some casualties are named, tells of some failings of the officers, request for 1000 volunteers to storm the enemy, armistice called to bury the dead (150 Union soldiers).

From Headquarters – 19th Army Corps

Jun. 20 & Jun. 21 To sister relayed messages being delayed and garbled due to inefficient "9 months officers", large wagon train, accompanied by a regiment of cavalry and 2 artillery pieces, sent to get cotton for fortifications, 200 -300 rebel cavalry driven back from attack on wagon train, refutes details of a recent newspaper report.

Jun. 25 To father continuing to bombard Port Hudson, 6 signal stations used between headquarters and each ship "Richmond" and "Hartford", most signal stations are located in tree tops, transcribed garbled message is provided as an example of signaling inefficiencies by inferior officers.

Jun. 30 To Em (sister) describes Union troop maneuvering to gain tactical advantage at Port Hudson, interesting story of a Union flagman using a handkerchief to signal to Union troops from a window of a barn which overlooks the enemy, nearly 1000 Union volunteers ready to storm the enemy, 7 of 16 signalmen are sick with fever, rumor that Lee is to invade Pennsylvania, Col. Jerrard (sp ??) of the 22nd Maine was dishonorably dismissed for misconduct during battle.

Jul. 4 To Father each day 10 – 12 rebel deserters come in with reports that as many as 15 enemy are buried each day from sickness, sun stroke is prevalent, fighting in extremely close proximities, captured Union signal officer manages to escape from capture, concer about 300 rebel cavalry lurking at the rear of Union forces.

Jul. 7 To Sister great news that Grant took Vicksburg on July 4, tells of camp celebration, writes about the capture of Union General Neal Dow as he recuperated from wounds at a plantation just inside enemy lines, 4000 rebel troops nearby, rumor of river blockade below Donaldson by rebels with about 30 cannons.

From Donaldsville, LA.

Jul. 15 To Father river has been blockaded, Port Hudson has surrendered to General Banks, brief description of inside of the rebel stronghold, skirmish with rebel guerillas resulting in 5 or 6 Union wounded, tactical mistakes being repeated, cowardly behavior by Col. Morgan exposed the Dudley brigade to attack by 800 rebel cavalry resulting in 200 Union dead, Col. Morgan under arrest.

Jul. 16 To Em (sister) quite lengthy letter filled with colorful descriptions of battles and troop movements, very descriptive details of the interior of the rebel fortifications at captured Port Hudson, General Weitzel is highly acclaimed, Union men and horses board steamer “Laurel Hill”, General Eaton visits from the steamer “Hartford”, captured rebel officers, who graduated from West Point, join the onboard celebration with free liquor and widespread drunkenness, 2000 troops on board fired upon from shore, one killed and five wounded, tactical mistakes being repeated, troops on both sides increasing and preparing for battle, mentions steamers “Hartford”, “Albatross”, and “Estrella” passing by on way to New Orleans, Port Hudson prisoners being paroled because of their brave defense, colorful description of battle at nearby bayou, much slaughter (350 Union dead) occasioned by cowardice and drunkenness of Col. Morgan, Mississippi River now open to river traffic, had tooth extracted based on game of “High-Low-Jack” jubilant of Lee’s defeat by Meade.

Jul. 18 To Sister many questions, comments, and encouragements about home and his sister, has been promised eventual furlough to Cincinnati by and with General Weitzel.

Jul. 20 To Father writes about asked to be Aide de Camp for General Grover, gleeful over this appointment as a reflection of his exemplary service, rumor of enemy retreat across Berwick Bay.

From New Orleans

Jul. 23 To Father on leave of absence for 7 days and hoping to get it extended for much more, seems hopeful, things are quiet for now.

Jul. 31 To Em (sister) has been detailed as Quartermaster and Ordnance Officer, lots of officers going home, many troops going to summer quarters in Carrollton, requests newspapers to keep informed about riots at home.

Aug. 5 To Father very busy , not optimistic about getting leave anytime soon, reorganization may result in his promotion to Captain, fierce heat and much rain could initiate fever outbreak, wants his sister to not feel guilty about her feelings of inadequately helping the cause.

Aug. 12 To Mother many questions and comments about home, connections between his peers and home, the severe heat is affecting any troop movements, fruits and vegetables arriving from St. Louis, end of letter is read with some difficulty.

Aug. 14 To Father mentions the steamer “Columbia”, disparaging comments about Captain Roe (sp ??), colorful description of the French market, New Orleans has become a Union leaning city with National music being played in the public square and American flags being displayed throughout the city, extreme heat coped with by staying still.

Aug. 24 To Mother very busy testing enlistees and transfer applicants, returned from Thibodeaux where he helped establish a signal/telegraph system, longs for the cool air and springwater of New England, officers return from home leave early disgusted by the “Copperheads” influence up north, writes about some of the political implications from the war.

Sep. 23/24 This letter from Mrs. L.M. Eaton, of Brunswick, Maine, and addressed to Mr. Dana (Father of John Dana) provides an excerpt from her husband’s letter to her. It describes a battle at Sabine Pass resulting in the loss of 300 Union men either killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. John W. Dana is presumed to be among the captured. There is also a telegram to O.A. Dana stating that “Your son is a prisoner – but not wounded”.

Sep. 30 This is an extract of a letter from General Shipley, in New Orleans, promising to provide news of John Dana as soon as possible. So far John is unhurt and may be in Huntsville, Texas. Position in Washington awaits John, once he has been recovered.

From Houston, Texas

Oct.4 To Father he is being moved to within 60 miles of Houston, discourages his father from writing due to uncertain delivery.

From New Orleans, LA.

Oct. 19 This is a letter from the Office of Signal Corps to John W. Dana's father. It forwarded John's last letter and discussed some of the events that occurred in the days surrounding the time frame of the letter.

Oct. 27 This is a letter from General Shepley, written on State of Louisiana letterhead, to John W. Dana's father. A recent letter, from John, was received through the post office and forwarded home. Still no knowledge of John's location. Expects word soon, once a foothold is established in Texas.

From Camp Grace, Texas

Oct. 27 To Father letter from John W. Dana assuring his good health, is quartered in barracks and awaiting an exchange of prisoners, all letters are screened through the Provost-Marshal's office.

Oct.27 To Friend provides news of his capture.

From Pass Carallo, Texas

Dec. 8 Dear Sir (John's father???) This letter was written by Col. L.M. Eaton. Letters are being mysteriously received from John W. Dana. Col. Eaton provides an informative and very colorful account of the Texas campaign, including troop movements, actions, and attitudes of the locals. Information from captured rebel officers indicated that Union prisoners in Houston were granted freedom of the city. An exchange of prisoners is expected soon. There is a rumor that the Houston prisoners have been relocated to Hempstead, Texas in anticipation of the Union advance.

From Camp Grace, Texas

Dec. 9 To Father short note from John. being moved to Tyler, Texas, he is in good health.

Civil War Letters Synopses – 1864

(Written by John W. Dana)

From Ford near Tyler, Texas

Jan. 12 To Father have been marched here from Camp Grace and are now living in log cabins, in good health.

Jan. 12 To Friend Writes of his condition and expresses doubt regarding arrangements for a prisoner exchange.

From New Orleans, LA.

Jan. 28 This short note was written to John W. Dana's father by Capt. L.M. Eaton. With it, he forwards a letter from John. Prospects for a prisoner exchange look doubtful.

Feb. 6 Written to John W. Dana's father by Capt. L.M. Eaton Just received two letters from John which were nearly 4 months old. Capt. Eaton had encountered a Mr. Stratton on the street and he reported John's good health. Mr. Stratton had also been a prisoner with John and had known him previously. He expects an exchange in the Spring.

From Matagorda Bay, Texas

Feb. 21 This letter was written to Oscar Dana (father of John W. Dana) from the Headquarters of U.S. Forces, Texas. acknowledges receipt of Oscar's letter concerning son John's status, unable to communicate with John yet but still trying, talks of Magruder threatening to imprison any truce flag bearer sent in, intends to engage the rebels in a few days.

From Camp Ford, Tyler, Texas

Mar. 4 To Father prisoners in the 19th Iowa and 26th Indiana regiments are to be exchanged and sent to Shreveport, hopeful that mail can be sent with those exchanged and passed on, is in good health and spirits, limited by confederate authorities on what he can write, encouraged by support by friends and family.

Apr. 15 Written to John W. Dana's father by Capt. L.M. Eaton A discussion with Lt. Reynolds of the gunboat "Sachem" reports John's good health. Lt. Reynolds was captured at Sabin Pass with John but escaped from Camp Ford about 20 days ago. He presented details about an escape system through a tunnel at the prison. A bloody, indecisive battle was fought near Shreveport, recently, which may have thwarted further escapes.

Apr. 23 Written to John W. Dana's father by Capt. L.M. Eaton forwards another letter from John.

From Farmington, Maine

July 15. Written to John W. Dana's father by Capt. L.M. Eaton who is traveling home encouraged that John will be part of a prisoner exchange very soon. Will plan a visit to Portland.

From New Orleans

Jul. 26 To Father from John is now safe and sound in New Orleans, ordered to report to camp at Carrollton.

Jul. 26 To Friend disgruntled that his furlough was disapproved by Col. A.F. Meyer but all the other exchanged prisoners are going home, has received orders to report to Capt. Ludwig a.s.a.p., expects to be placed on another gun boat to instruct General Service code.

Aug. 12 To Mother talks about his negro servant, describes current activities of several fellow officers, much talk of home, mentions “horse railroads”, hopes for promotion to captain.

Aug. 19 To Father paymaster has no money and no prospects for getting any, all officers are “broke”, corps officers are ordered to wear “mourning” for 30 days in memory of Lt. Morrill, who was killed at Petersburg.

From Norfolk, VA.

Sep. 3 This letter was written to John W. Dana and signed by General Shepley (it includes the original envelope). General Weitzel is delayed at home in Cincinnati recovering from illness.

From Washington, D.C.

Sep. 14 This letter was written to “my dear boy” (John Dana?) by L.M. Eaton. Brief note to stay in touch, encourages John to apply for a Captain’s position.

Sep. 29 To Father awaiting permission to tour the city of Washington on extended leave, Corps Chief wants to keep John as acting Signal Officer, expects to be sent to New Orleans soon.

Oct. 3 To Em (sister) general small talk and discussion about home.

Oct. 4 To Father 12th Maine has suffered much in Sheridan’s battles, Captain Phillips and Captain Thompson were killed, Capt. Lowell was severely wounded.

From New York

Oct. 8 To Father is on the way to New Orleans by way of New York on the steamer “George Cromwell”.

From New Orleans

Oct. 19 To Father arrived in New Orleans on the steamer “George Cromwell” captained by E.E. Vaill of Portland, Maine, needed to wear civilian clothes in the city of Washington to avoid the “patrols”, writes of his successful effort to avoid being under the command of Captain Ludwick, met two women on the steamer to whom he was attracted.

Nov. 4 & Nov. 9 (combined letter -to father) provides account of his session before a military commission to explain his overdue travel from Washington to New York to New Orleans, mentions his commission as a Captain, a Board of Survey fixes the blame for John’s capture on Capt. Roe (sp?) chief Signal officer, General Banks to replace General Canby in New Orleans, voted yesterday for Abraham Lincoln, was offered command of a regiment of rebel refugees but refused offer, prefers signal corps duty to garrison duty (guerilla warfare).

Nov. 11 to Em (sister) recently cast his first vote – for Abraham Lincoln, names several officers and friends who have been killed, describes his house and good living conditions in New Orleans, General Canby was wounded by rebel guerillas.

Nov. 18 To Father result of military commission was favorable, refused positions offered by Generals Weitzel and grover, repeated information provided in letter father on Nov. 4/9.

From New Orleans

Nov. 25 To Mother mentions “Copperheads”, has a new position as Quartermaster of the Signal Corps in the Military Division of west Mississippi, living “aristocratically” in a fine house, pleased with General weitzel, waiting for late pay for 3 months.

Nov. 25 To Father discusses the complications and difficulties of his mustering out plans.

Dec. 2 To Em (sister) mentions his driver is a negro named “Daniel”, Captain Eaton has arrived with his wife and children, provides a humorous description of the local “Secesh” ladies.

Dec. 9 To Em (sister) lengthy talk of home and questions about specific people there, provides humorous account of his “spill” from his buggy, a fair is to be held for benefits of orphans, fair is called the “Yankee Fair” because several tables will be manned by Union ladies.

Dec. 13 To Em (sister) includes much small talk, describes an interesting incident at the local charity fair in which Capt. Franklin’s wife was ordered to remove a Federal flag from her table, ensuing reaction by Union soldiers allowed her to keep the flag.

Dec. 15 To Mother is enjoying New Orleans, describes extravagant circus parade, expecting the arrival of General Banks, writes about Major Marston who is distraught due to a broken engagement to a “Secesh” lady whose “Secesh” parents objected to the engagement.

Dec. 23 To Mother tells of his dislike of Generals Banks and Canby, discusses potential officer re-assignments.

Dec. 23 To Father interesting comments regarding General Weitzel's threat to resign due to General Butler's wish for a "colored" regiment at Thibodeaux, writes about the unrequited love between Major Marston and a local "damsel".