

H.M. Misemer's Letter
to Martha Misemer

July 24, 1864

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For English 618: Research Methods in English
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Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English degree program at Western Carolina University (WCU). The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship.
 - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
 - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
 - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
 - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
 - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
 - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
 - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources.

Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources.

If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Brian Gastle (bgastle@wcu.edu).

INTRODUCTION TO THE DOCUMENT

This document is a transcription of a letter written July 24, 1864 and sent by Henry M. Misemer, also known as H. M. Misemer, to his wife Martha J. Misemer. Misemer was from East Tennessee, specifically Monroe County. Prior to the American Civil War, he was a farmer, and his land was valued at \$1000. During the civil war he served in the Union's 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary in Company F. He was a Trumpeter, Private, and Corporal. East Tennesseans, like Misemer, did not align themselves with the Confederacy and instead opposed a receding from the Union. Slavery had been all but abolished in East Tennessee, with most of its residents being too poor to afford slaves. Misemer and Margaret J. Brown married on January 25th, 1855. They had one daughter together, Mary E. Misemer. Margaret would die in August 1857. Martha J. Bogart was married to H. M. Misemer on February 2nd, 1859. They had 3 children together, these were Charles F. Misemer, Margaret E. Misemer, and Laura C. Misemer. The East Tennessee community was largely devout Christians, due in some part to the sizable Quaker community that moved there in the early 19th century.

This letter was written outside of Decatur, Alabama when the Union was having difficulty properly distributing its soldiers and resources to its soldiers. The Tennessee Calvary attempted to re-organize itself, and the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th regiments of the Tennessee Calvary were merged in April. Misemer's family seemed to struggle financially, so in his letters he addresses their finances and how he will take care of their family. When Misemer is not discussing his family's finances he writes about some of the daily activities he partakes in within the camp, his thoughts on where he is and what is doing, his encounters with some of his friends in the camp (Like Lee and Harvey), and how he badly misses his family.

One of the most notable pieces of information about Misemer is that he was tragically killed in the Sultana disaster a little under a year after this letter was written. The Steamboat ferry, Sultana, exploded in April of 1865 killing nearly all on board. Not long after this letter was written Misemer was captured by the Confederacy and made a prisoner of war. He was sent to Cahaba Prison. He was released from prison when he was on the Sultana. The Sultana disaster would end up killing most of the 3rd regiment of the Tennessee Calvary. Misemer, his brothers, and most of his friends in the company unfortunately never got to see their families. The Sultana Disaster continues to be one of the largest maritime disasters.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

This document was written on thin paper that has yellowed over time. Despite the paper's age, it has been preserved well. These letters were the last correspondence from Misemer to his wife Martha, so she took special care to not damage them in any way. The paper has been folded three times.

When Misemer incorrectly writes a word he often marks it out with his pen. Some of these mark-ups have faded over time from what may be water damage, but I have done my best to decipher what these mark-ups are. If you look closely at these markings, you can generally tell what was originally written. I have chosen to indicate these marked-through words like ~~this~~. Misemer sometimes adds words above the line. I have indicated this throughout the letter ^{like this}.

Misemer generally can have somewhat legible handwriting but many times he will forget to dot his "I"s, or he will try to make an "S" too small which can make it resemble both a "P" or a "G" depending on the situation. Misemer also uses little punctuation in his letters. He does use it occasionally when abbreviating someone's name, you can find this when he says, "G. W. Maxwell", but other than this, punctuation is not often found in his letters. It is uncertain how much education Misemer received as a farmer in rural Tennessee, which may explain why his writing is generally quite legible but spelling and punctuation are inconsistent.

The occasional changes in the darkness of the ink and the varying moods he seems to shift between suggest that he starts a letter and throughout the day as he thinks of other things to say he adds them to the letter.

This transcription is a diplomatic edition, meaning that I have transcribed the document as closely to the original as I can. Any grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, or syntactical issues have been preserved.

TRANSCRIPTION

[MS page 1]

July 24th 64

Decatur Ala sund^{ay} morning

My Dear Wife

I received a letter from you last night and was glad to hear from you once more but I am always sorry to hear of you being in troubel but I don't want you to conseal your troubels from me¹. I want to know all, so that I can sympathise with and pray for you I always think of you either in prayer trouble or pleasure I have no troubels about any thing only you and my childr -en² I know you think a soldier has a hard time, in this you are mistaken I see a much easier time here than

¹ Union supporting women in southern states, who were often poorer than their Confederate peers, were often heavily criticized and shunned by their communities. They found it extremely challenging and at times nigh impossible to survive. It wasn't uncommon for them to experience Confederate violence, "Poor white women... and their families were more to experience state violence. Confederate soldiers murdered Nancy Franklin's Three Sons before her eyes following a raid in January 1863 by local people looking for salt. In the North Carolina Piedmont Phoebe Crook notified Governor Vance that "militia soldiers preyed on women who were in no fix to leav [their] homes and [on] others who have little suckling infants no more than two months old" (*The Women's Fight*).

² Women of status in southern states felt that attempting to meet the needs of poor families, was hurting the Confederacy. "They also blamed poor women of low morale...and for urging men to abandon the fight" (*The Women's Fight*).

I every did at home as far as work
and hardship is concerned it is true I have
to go at the command of others but
I have got used to that and dont care
as much as I did at first and when I

[MS page 2]

have done what I have bin commanded
to do I have nothing in my mind
and if I had no wife nor children
I would rather be in the army
than any where else But I have a
wife and am proud to own her any
where and O how I long to clasp
the in my arms press the to my
haveing bosom thank the for thy
many kindnesses and disclose to thee³
the secret thoughts of my heart
But I believe that it is by the providen
-ce of God that we have bin parted
and I try to submit to his will but
O how hard it is to be parted thus
I am glad to hear that you love God
above all Earthly things I think I
do the same and wish I could say so
with a certainty but earth has strong
ties for me O that I could with
the right feeling sing the song
that says

³ In this context “thee” means “As the object of a preposition” (Oxford English Dictionary). It appears that Misemer realized that he was spelling it incorrectly, because in the previous sentence the “the”s are used in a context where “thee” is more appropriate.

[MS page 3]

The dearest Idol I have known
What e'er that Idol be
Help me to tear it from my breast
And worship only thee ⁴

I have received three letters from you
since leaving Nashville one at Athens
and two here ^(the last dated July 10th) I wrote to you once
at Ath & this is two here I will write
ever week while we are stationed on a
march I cant write Well we are cam
-ped about four miles above Decatur
Alabama⁵ on the rail road from Chat
-tanooga to Decatur two companys of
the regiment is at Athens Alabama
one at Huntsville Ala the rest are
here Huntsville is about twenty miles
East of here we were orderd up there last

⁴ This is an excerpt from William Crowper's hymn "Walking With God" that can be found in the book *Olney Hymns*. *Olney Hymns* was a popular book of hymns written by John Newton and William Crowper. The most famous hymn from this book is Amazing Grace which continues to be sung in some protestant churches. Misemer recounts this excerpt from the original hymn word for word except for the third line which reads in the original as: "Help me to tear it from thy throne" (*Olney Hymns*). This change could be due to there being various versions of the hymn being sung, or Misemer may have forgotten how the line ended.

⁵ Decatur is a city in Northern Alabama, it is found on the banks of the Tennessee River. The 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary was moved to Decatur because "Lieutenant Colonel Thornburg resigned in June 1864 at the command of the regiment devolved on major (later Lieutenant Colonel) John E. Minnis. At this time the division was transferred to Brigadier General R. S. Granger's District of Northern Alabama with headquarters at Decatur. The regiment frequently broken up into its attachments, operated in this area until the last of September 1864" (*Tennesseans in the Civil War*).

week with 100 rounds of cartridge to the man
to defend the Town it was reported that
Gen Roddy⁶ (Rebel⁷) had crossed Tenn
River with 2800 men and was marching
on Huntsville we got there about 7. ock
in the morning going the most of the

[MS page 4]

way after night and found them all
scared out of thier witts but it turne^d
out to be all fuss and no Roddy
we stayed one day and night and march
-ed back I tell this to you in order that
you may form some idea of the foolish
orders an army receives and foolish
marches they make ⁸ This is a beau

⁶ The "Gen Roddy" Misemer is referring to is Philip Dale Roddey. Phillip Edward began his service in the Alabama Confederacy as a Colonel and ended his service as a Brigadier General. During the writing of this letter Phillip was "...attached to Maj. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry division, fighting in northeast Mississippi at the Battle of Brice's Crossroads in June and during the Atlanta Campaign in July" (Encyclopedia of Alabama).

⁷ Despite Tennessee being in the South, most East Tennesseans strongly opposed the Confederacy. "In West and Middle Tennessee where the soil and climate were suitable for raising cotton, slave labor was very profitable. In East Tennessee the poor upland farms scarcely yielded a return to white labor. As the result of this difference, in natural conditions slavery flourished in West and Middle Tennessee, but in East Tennessee by 1860, it had become almost extinct except upon the rich plantations that bordered the Tennessee River. The efforts to form a Confederacy based upon slavery found therefore no support among the inhabitants of East Tennessee. Their interests and sympathy were with the free states of the North and they rejected by a vote of two to one every proposal looking toward separation" (*Disunion and Restoration in Tennessee*).

⁸ This letter was written prior to Ulysses S. Grant's plan to cripple the Confederacy was implemented. In July 1864, the Union was struggling to use its troops in an effective manner. The Union could barely maintain the land they had overtaken and keep control of the railroads they needed for supplies.

tiful and lovely Country the land
is level and very good and the water
water is pretty plenty and good.
I saw the largest and best spring
in Huntsville that I ever saw
any where the water is clear as
crystal as a cold as need be
Martha my officers and fellow
soldiers are very kind to me and
if you ever have a chance I know
you will thank them for it.
Lee⁹ is very kind to me he dont
sware but verry little, and, that, when mad

Misemer, and many other soldiers like him were stretched thin, trying to cover massive areas that they were not equipped to secure (*How the North Won*).

⁹ The "Lee" Misemer is referring to is more than likely Edward Lee. Edward began his service in the Union as a Sergeant and ended his service as a First Sergeant. There are multiple individuals who have the name Lee and could have been at the camp at this time. However, Edward is the only one who was in Company F of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary and had a high enough rank that it would not be irregular for Misemer to comment that they put their tents next to each other (National Park Service).

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancestry.com. *1860 United States Federal Census*.

These were the census records of H. M. Misemer and his family in 1860. It gave me information as to where Misemer lived, what he did for a living, and who his family was.

Boatner, Mark M. et al. *The Civil War Dictionary*. D. McKay. 1959.

This book discusses almost anything related to the civil war. It was a helpful resource to look into, if none of the books I had about the civil war had the information I was looking for this usually did.

Cowper, William, and John Newton. *Olney Hymns*. Maclaren.

This was the book that the poem that Misemer is quoting is originally from.

Encyclopedia of Alabama, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/>.

This website was used to find more information about General Roddey, and what he was doing in 1864.

Glymph Thavolia. *The Women's Fight : The Civil War's Battles for Home Freedom and Nation*. pp. 76-79. University of North Carolina Press. 2020.

This book discussed the hardships that women faced in the American Civil War when their husbands were away. It discusses the treatment towards specifically union supporting families in the south, something I have highlighted in this transcription.

Hattaway Herman and Archer Jones. *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War*. University of Illinois Press 1983.

This book explains the strengths and downfalls of the Union and Confederacy and the tactics the Union used to eventually win the war.

Neal John Randolph. *Disunion and Restoration in Tennessee*. Books for Libraries Press. 1971.

This book discusses the divisions that occurred within Tennessee, why they occurred, how the state eventually came back together.

National Park Service. *Soldier Details*. U.S. Department of the Interior. NPS.

This was used to obtain detailed records for all civil soldiers mentioned in this document.

OED Online, Oxford University Press.

This was used as a reference for terms that needed an explanation as to what they meant in the context of Misemer's letters.

Tennessee. *Tennesseans in the Civil War: A Military History of Confederate and Union Units with Available Rosters of Personnel*. pp. 324-326. Civil War Centennial Commission. 1952.

This book may have been one of the most helpful resources I was able to get my hands on. It details the movements and key individuals in all Confederate and Union Units from Tennessee.