

H.M. Misemer's Letter to Martha Misemer

July 13, 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 13, 1864 and sent by Henry M. Misemer, also known as H. M. Misemer, to his wife Martha J. Misemer. Misemer was from Monroe County east Tennessee. 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]

Decatur Alabama July 13th 64

Martha J. Misemer

My own Dear wife again I address
you for it is allways a pleasure
to me ^{to} address one I love and you
know that I love you more than
all other being on Earth and
you are the only one who has a
right to claim my affetions all
I could ask in return is your und-
ivided love and I am sure I have
it I and all The Boys are
well and here in camp. Lee
Harry, G. W. Maxwell and my
self tents together ^{nearly} all our comp-
-any are like brothers we sometimes
quarl a little but it is just
like a family quar^el soon soon forgotten
I got a letter from you the same
day Billie Maxwell started home

two while ^{at} Athens one ~~By~~
By hand and one by mail and
yesterday a few lines in G Well's
letter I wrote one at Athens and
will write every week if we
are stoped long Enough at a place
we started last Sunday on a two
days a scout and caught one reb
Capt- and ten privates, no boddy
hurt ^{all} though they shot at us
~~le-~~ often we surrounded one
picket ¹ post and captuerd evrey
man on it Lee Harry and my
self run around their post they
hollowed ² at us to halt and shot
at us But as Jim Hanner ³ says

¹ A picket is a small set of soldiers that are found around the perimeter of a camp, who stand guard watching for the approach of enemy soldiers, it can also refer to a group of soldiers that have been sent out of the camp to accomplish a specific task. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

² To "holler" at someone is to "...cry out loud, to shout; to complain. In a fight: to give up, to cry 'enough'." (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

³ The "Jim" Misemer refers to is most likely James A. Hanner. James was a Sergeant in the 55th regiment of the Tennessee Infantry in the Confederacy. In a will that can be found online, it appears that James lived in Sumner County, Tennessee. The members of the 55th regiment came from this county and the surrounding counties in Tennessee (National Park Service). The connection to Misemer is unknown but it possible that the two were friends at one point if Misemer is quoting him saying "We paid no tentch". ("Tentch" most likely means "Attention" in this context)

we just went on and paid
no tentch til we got around
them and fired at them a few
times when they all surrenderd
and begged like Lawyers there
was a Captain and four privates
on the post.

you seem to be distresst about
us coming down here I don't thin^k
you need to be alarmed we are in
no more danger here than at
Nashville we are camped 4 miles
above decater ⁴ on the North side
of Tennessee River there is no Rebs
near here only Guerrilers⁵ and
they are not verry dangerous
Well Martha I dont know how
to manage about a house for your
hand to live in unless you can
get Miss Beasely to let him stay
where he is and tend your land
you perhaps can rent the house

⁴ 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*).

⁵ Though mis-spelled, Misemer is likely referring to Guerilla warfare here. Guerrilla warfare is "...carried on by small bodies of men acting independently". (*Oxford English Dictionary*) East Tennessee, where Misemer is from "...was the site of particularly intense fighting between unionist and secessionists partisans...Though the rest of the state overwhelmingly supported separation, loyalists refuse to accept Confederate rule. They defied Confederate officials, assaulted Southern troops, evaded conscription, and War taxes, and intimidated and drove out secessionists. The Confederate government responded with increasing repression and local secessionists fought back against Unionist violence. This guerrilla warfare quickly spread to every County in East Tennessee as well as neighboring regions..." (*War at Every Door : Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence*).

for a reasonable price if you do
get it have it in the contract
for him to get his fire wood off
of her land Martha you need
not fret about me being out of
money I drew thirty two
dollars yesterday The Government

[MS page 4]

now payes Privates 16 dol per month
Corporals 18, Sergents 20 and
Orderly Sergents 24 dollars per month ⁶
I will draw 36 dollars ever
two months after this provided we
are stationed at the time draw
-ing if you need any money dont
be backward about asking for it
five dollars is as much as I care about
at a time. I can get money at any

⁶ Corporals enlisted in the Union may have had a more prestigious rank than Privates, but unlike the Confederacy, their base pay was the same which was \$13 a month. "...(For the Confederacy, in) June of '64...their pay was raised by \$7.00 a month, at which time they moved ahead of the Marines, though by then the Confederate dollar had declined to the point that \$18.00 was worth only about a dollar in gold. That same June the Union gave its enlisted men \$3.00 a month more, a sum that, if paid in greenbacks (the new paper currency created by the Union, named after its signature green ink on one side), was worth only about \$5.00 or \$6.00 in gold..." (*A Civil War Treasury*). It can be reasoned that Misemer either was ill-informed about the pay increase or lied to his wife Martha about how much he would be making so that she would not worry about their finances, this could be the more likely reason as this is a recurring theme throughout this letter.

time I want it, one man in the
company borrowed money and
loaned it to me when Mr Brient ⁷
was here without Interest (John
M. Givens was his name ⁸) he lives
in Monroe Tenn the same that told
about Melton having a wife
I have plenty of friends here in
the company I haveent an enemy
in the company that I know of
our company numbers 90 live men.⁹

⁷ The “Mr. Brient” Misemer is referring to is most likely Jacob P. Brient. Jacob began his service in the Union as a First Lieutenant in Company F of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary and ended his service as a Captain. Companies were under the command of a Captain or Captains, who were assisted in commanding the Company by a First Lieutenant and Second Lieutenant (*The Civil War Dictionary*). At the time of this letter being written Jacob was one of the two Captains of Misemer’s company, the other being Anderson F. Carson (*Tennesseans in the Civil War*).

⁸ John M. Givens began his service in the Union as a Commissary Sergeant of the 3rd Regiment of the Tennessee Calvary and ended his service as a Private. The Commissary Sergeant was responsible for cooking meals for soldiers and occasionally acquiring needed goods for the camp. John served in both Company B and Company F (National Park Service).

⁹ A Company was typically comprised of approximately 100 men (*The Civil War Dictionary*).

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.

Fisher Noel C. *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee 1860-1869*. p. 4. University of North Carolina Press. 1997.

This book details the events that took place in Tennessee that led to Guerrilla violence, how the Guerilla warfare was executed, and the effects this had on the communities within Tennessee.

Goodheart, Lawrence B. "Tennessee's Antislavery Movement Reconsidered: The Example of Elihu Embree." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1982, pp. 224–38. *JSTOR*.

This article details the effects of abolitionist movements within Tennessee.

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.

Ingle H. Larry. *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation*. 1st ed. University of Tennessee Press. 1986.

This book gives greater context to the conflicts happening within the Quaker community in the 19th century, why they were happening, and how they affected the communities they were in.

Kautz August. *The 1865 Customs of Service for Non-Commissioned Officers & Soldiers: A Handbook for the Rank and File of the Army*. Stackpole Books. 2001.

This book details the duties of officers and soldiers during the Civil War, and how these tasks were determined. This book also discusses if those duties changed and if they did, why that was the case.

Murphy Jim. *The Boys' War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk About the Civil War*. p. 16. Clarion Books. 1990.

This book goes into detail about the young boys who fought in the Civil War. It explains the reasoning behind why they joined the war, what they had to do in the war, and how it affected them.

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.

Nofi, A. Albert. *A Civil War Treasury: Being a Miscellany of Arms and Artillery, Facts and Figures, Legends and Lore, Muses and Minstrels, Personalities and People*. pp. 378-379. Perseus Books. 1992.

This book goes into detail about some of the details of the Civil War, specifically related to the financial states of the Confederacy and Union.

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.

TNGenWeb Cemetery Records *TNGenWeb Project*,
<https://www.tngenweb.org/cemeteries/index.html#!cm=1292980>.

This is the graveyard where William C. Maxwell was buried.