

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 27
Number 4 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 27,
Issue 4

Article 6

1948

A Connecticut Yankee after Olustee: Letters from the front

Vaughn D. Bornet



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Bornet, Vaughn D. (1948) "A Connecticut Yankee after Olustee: Letters from the front," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 27: No. 4, Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol27/iss4/6>

A CONNECTICUT YANKEE AFTER OLUSTEE

edited by VAUGHN D. BORNET

Camp near Jacksonville, Fla.⁵⁶

Feb. 29th, 1864.

My own dear Lina:—

. . . We are having a little time to rest, not having done anything since last Saturday, except come out on inspection yesterday, and inspection and muster today. Our tents have been sent for, and we shall soon have a shelter again. We have been now over three weeks without any shelter, sleeping out doors through rain and storm; but I have stood it all remarkably well.

We have never had such a time before in this department, and I hope may not again soon, for it is *wearing* to us all. Marching forty miles and fighting five hours within twenty hours, is something that we can't stand very often. A few more such battles would use up a good share of us.

I understand our total loss is 1700 killed wounded and missing; one *third* of our whole force. The loss of the 7th Conn. is 79. But very likely you have seen a full account of the battle in the papers, and know more about it than I do. Thankful am I that I am among the two thirds that came off with a whole skin. How long we shall wait I don't know; but I guess some time, for they don't like the idea of getting under the fire of our gunboats, and they don't feel *particular* about giving our Spencer rifles a chance to play on them from behind breastworks; so I guess we shall rest in peace unless we go out after them, and I hardly think we shall do that at present.

I sent you a letter the other day, but I don't know a thing I wrote. I guess it was a queer letter, for I was so tired and in so much of a hurry, expecting every minute to be called on for something, that I don't suppose I wrote anything so that you could read it. Well, it will let you know that I am still *alive*, and that is the main object of my letters. . . .

56. The first half of this series of letters by Private Milton M. Woodford, Seventh Connecticut Volunteers, USA, appeared in the last issue of this *Quarterly* under the title "A Connecticut Yankee Fights at Olustee."

Sat. March 5th

I have been waiting and waiting to get the mail that came with the "Veterans";⁵⁷ but *they* have not come yet from the Head [Hilton Head, S. C.], and Major Sanford has the mail. Well, I sha'n't wait any longer; but if I can have time, shall finish up this and send it along. I am afraid you will be disappointed sometimes by not getting letters from me every time a steamer arrives at N. Y.; but I am busy, *busy* all the time. It is guard, picket, fatigue, police, or some kind of duty all the time, and I don't find time to write between the hours of duty. . . . I don't know how long we are going to be so busy, but I hope we may have a little more time one of these days. I suppose Gen. Seymour will have us drill every day as soon as we can get a place cleared up. Well, it is all [over] inside of six months. Just six months from *today* my time will be out, and I shall be with you as soon after as possible.

Sunday Morning

Last night we fell into line and marched down to the city to receive the Veterans; but when we got there found they had not come; but the boat that *did* come brought a mail, and in it a letter for me. I suppose Major Sanford has the mail that came with him yet. I don't know what good it does him to keep it back when he might just as well have sent it along. May it do him *lots of good*. You see I am inclined to find fault. I should not be a real *soldier* if I didn't, more or less. I am glad to hear from you again, and glad the children are getting better. If you had such weather as we have here, you would all feel better. Peach trees are in full bloom. People are planting corn, and in the city they get early garden sauce,⁵⁸ such as green peas and the like from St. Augustine, every day.

There is not much land under cultivation just about here, or there would be plenty of it *here*. This is a rich

57. Enlistees who accepted the army's offer of a leave if they would reenlist for a three year period.

58. A colloquial and dialectic expression for "garden vegetables eaten with meat."

country naturally, and the place to make money in times of peace for all of going *West*,⁵⁹ if people only knew it. A good many are finding it out though, and when the war is over, very many Northern men will move *South*; but I hardly think I shall be one of the number. Give me *old Connecticut* for a *home*.

You say you have heard of fighting down here. If they call Col. Henry's skirmish a *fight*, I don't know what they *will* say about the battle of Olustee. I hope my last letter will go straight through, for you will hear of the battle and will worry yourself sick about me, I am afraid.

I am surprised to hear that Lyman is on his way down here. I supposed he would stay there till his time was up. I have had but one letter from him since I came away. I presume he is with the "Vets"; if so, I shall probably see him today. I am anxious to have the boat come up, for I want to see him if he is with them. All of my New Britain chums are gone, and I feel almost *lonesome* sometimes.

Afternoon

The "Vets" have come, and we have escorted them to camp; but Lyman is not with them. I was in hopes to see him, but shall have to wait.

The boys are looking very well, but I guess have had a good deal of a *time* since they went away. I don't envy them their prospects of three years service. We have now quite a respectable regiment in regard to *size*, and if we ever get another so fair a sight of the rebels as we did at Olustee, we will make them fear us more than they do now, and they dread us now more than any other regiment in this department.

I hope you have not had any false reports about who was killed or wounded. I see there are some incorrect reports in some of the papers. You will know by my letter that I am safe. I hope you have it by this time.

59. The popular "Go west, young man" slogan coupled with the romantic lure of gold and silver strikes in the Far West must have made westward migration a popular subject for casual discussion among Union soldiers.

I have just received your letter of the 13th, the one Major Sanford has had a week or so. . . .

You say you hear that the 7th are *mounted*. We were *all mounted* by three times our number of Rebs at Olustee, but further than that I know nothing of the 7th being mounted, although we have heard we *were* to be; I hardly think we shall, and for my part, hope we *sha'n't*, for I don't care to learn the drill just for six months. If I was a "Vet", [I] should think more of it. . . .

Tell Carrie, I guess the *snakes* won't bite Papa, for he has seen but *one live* one since he came to Florida. Love and kisses for the little darlings, and very much to yourself and all, from

Milton.

Camp near Jacksonville, Fla.
Mar. 11th, 1864

My own dear Lina:—

. . . We are all anxious to get news from the North, as we have rumors of the movements of troops in other departments. We hope to hear of success *somewhere* if we are not so fortunate.

I hear that there is to be an *investigation* of the circumstances in relation to the battle of *Olustee*; I hope it will be *thorough*. . . .

We are still at Jacksonville, and I think will be in this vicinity for some time; but there is no knowing what minute we may take wing.

Last Sunday we had our tents brought out to us, and we put them up and slept in them *two nights*. Tuesday we took them down and stowed them away in a building down in the city. The officers' tents are left standing, as *they* don't *like* the idea of lying out doors through a rain storm, nor sitting in the sun when it doesn't rain. It has rained like a flood for thirty-six hours, and the man who can keep dry is a lucky boy. I am told the reason of our tents being taken away is, that we are to have *shelter tents* sometime.

I wish I could draw a correct picture of our camp, but I can't nor describe it either, and won't *try*. I don't

know as I care to give you any idea of it, come to think; for you would *imagine* it worse than it really is. It is nothing to be a soldier when one *gets used to it*.

Sunday, 13th

When I had written so far the other day, I heard my name called; went out to answer to it, and was presented with a letter from the Chief Commissary, saying that I could obtain my *ration money* by calling at his office. Our Lieut. very kindly gave me a pass to the city and I went down, and found that the "red tape" was finally unwound, and the money was paid without further ceremony. The amount was \$25.60. I will inclose \$20.00 in this for you. It may come in *handy to have* in the *house*. I don't know when pay-day will come, and don't know as I shall get more than *two months* pay when it does; but *hope* to get the *back pay*. It will be good when it *does* come at least.

After I got the money, I took advantage of the time that still remained to me before my pass ran out, to visit the grave-yard where Edgar M. Woodford [Quartermaster Serjeant], Seventh Connecticut Volunteer Regiment] was buried. The burying ground is in sad condition, the fences all torn down around the entire lot; and those that stood around the *small* lots. Any thing that will *burn* is apt to suffer when soldiers are encamped near.

I found Cousin Edgar's grave with a board at the head, with his name and the date of his death. His wife and family would feel sad indeed if they knew just how the place looks.

It made me feel sad and home-sick to pass through the streets, now deserted by their former owners, and see what *war* has done for this once beautiful place [Jacksonville]. What would our Northern places be if Jeff should succeed in invading the Northern states! If anything that I have done has tended to keep him away, I am amply rewarded for all that I have done within the last three years; and were it not that I owe a duty to

my *family* as well as to the *country* I presume I should not leave the army till the war is over. I *hope* the war *may* be ended by the time my time is out. At any rate I shall consider that I have done all that duty requires of me, and return home with a consciousness of having done all that can reasonably be required.

In the afternoon I was detailed for picket duty. I only came off picket twenty-four hours before, but it takes about half the company every day. Had a very pleasant time, no rain and a very comfortable night; no Rebs came to disturb us. One man thought he was in danger; he saw a man approaching on horseback and fired at him. The ball did not take effect, and the supposed enemy proved to be the Major in command of the picket, who was going around to visit his men.

I have seen something the last two nights on picket that I never saw before. I have heard of "Jack-o-lanterns" and "Will-o-the-wisps", but I never expected to see them, and never *did* till the nights I speak of. It is a kind of phosphorescent light that rises from the swamps,⁶⁰ and looks like the light of a lantern. Sometimes it moves slowly, as though it was carried by some person; then again, it goes swiftly, and clear up into the tops of the trees. The first one I saw went so swiftly that I knew at once that it could not be carried by a man, otherwise I should have called the attention of the officer to it. Since then I find that others have seen a number. I would rather see them than rebels.

Lyman and I are tent mates. You may say "I thought your tents were taken away"; so they are: but "gump"⁶¹ comes in play in the army sometimes. We have some stakes driven into the ground with poles across, and a piece of old canvas spread over, which keeps off the sun, and with the aid of rubber blankets, *some* of the rain. There are five of us in our "shbang" (that is the soldier's name for such kind of houses) all good, steady fellows; how different it seems from camping in *Camp*

60. The light of "will-o'-the-wisp (*ipnis fatuus*) is due to phosphorescent gas and its movement to air currents. It seems to have been a favorite subject for novelists.

61. Gumption: Common sense.

Parole. Nowhere that I have been do I find so steady a set of men, take them as a whole, as the *old* members of Co. A, 7th C.V.

I conclude by what I hear, that soldiers have not gained a very enviable reputation by what was seen of the "Veterans" while they were home. People who do not know, and who do not stop to think, may think that all are alike. The innocent always suffer for the guilty, and always will, I suppose; but *you* know of *some* soldiers who are not like *some* who have just been home.

Well, I must wind up this rambling letter. I am ashamed of my letters lately. I can't get time to write but a few minutes at a time, and then I am more or less confused; but you must make allowances. I know you will. . . .

The time is fast passing away, and soon I shall see you if we are spared. Pray for me Lina, that I may be kept from evil and protected from danger. . . . I am as ever, your own

Milton.

Camp near Jacksonville, Fla.
March 17th, 1864.

My own dear wife:—

. . . We have been busy all day, and now I am sitting on the ground with three others, around a short piece of candle that gives a dim light and that will not last long, trying to talk to you. O if I could talk to you Lina. . . .

By the last mail we got papers with accounts of the battle of Olustee, but had I not been an eye witness, I should not be able to get much of an idea of it from the papers. Some cut Gen. Seymour pretty hard. I hope some one will cut him hard enough to get him out of this department. He has led more men to death, and accomplished less in so doing than all the generals in the department beside. The troops here consider him their enemy. He gives them no rest, while in camp, and when he goes into battle he seems to be entirely indifferent

to the loss of the men. This is rather hard talk I know, but it appears true to me. I am glad of one thing; he won't be likely to have force enough to make another advance at present,⁶² and perhaps a better general can be found by and by. If the Rebs think best to attack us here, let them come; they will be likely to find different work than when they had us in their trap at Olustee.

Thursday 24th

. . . Last Friday we went out on picket and stayed three days, and in the three days I slept about six hours. We never had so severe picket duty as now. Gen. Seymour, the "soldier killer" is trying to make up for his carelessness at Olustee by excess of caution now. It may be all very well for him, but it is death to soldiers.

We were favored by having very fine weather until the last day in the afternoon, when it began to rain, and it did rain just as though it had a certain amount of raining to do and only a limited time to do it in. Consequence— before we were relieved we were wet to the skin and the rain still pouring. I pitied the darkies who came out to relieve us, for it bid fair to be as foul weather for them as it had been fair for us. We came in and found everything wet. All the other regiments here have shelter tents but ours, but we have to get along as best we can.⁶³ If Gen. Seymour could hear all that is said about him, and the wishes for his not-very-welfare, he would be either sorry or mad, I don't know which.

Monday night it just poured, and in the morning we were about as well soaked as would have been necessary if we had been "salt horse". By the way— we shall be as near that as anything unless we have a change of

62. Brig. Gen. Seymour was nevertheless very anxious to advance when and if he could assemble sufficient men and material. Seymour to Chief of Staff, Dept. of the South. Mar. 14, 1864, *Off. Rec.*, Series I, Vol. XXXV, Part II, 18; same to same, Mar. 17, 1864, *Ibid.*, 22.

63. Private Woodford's miserable living conditions at this time, it would seem, should be kept in mind when reading his strictures against his commanding officer. But there is general agreement that Gen. Seymour was responsible for the Federal defeat at Olustee.

diet soon. Have had nothing but salt meat since we came here. We all got up wishing "Old Seymour" all sorts of wet lodgings, and some, *warm* ones. . . .

Yesterday morning it cleared off, but the wind blew cold, and today is a real Conn. March day. Tomorrow may be hot enough to roast an egg.

While we were out on picket, the rebel cavalry came down on our out-post cavalry pickets and drove them in as far as our line of infantry pickets, but did not think proper to come any further, but were in turn driven two miles beyond our former line of outposts.

Tuesday night two secesh⁶⁴ river steamers were brought down the river. They were captured above here by our gunboats which run up the river a hundred miles or more. . . .

This afternoon we shall have to move our camp, which is the fifth time we have moved camp since we came here. We don't move far, only just enough so that every man must pull down his little shanty, and build it up again, or else sleep out doors entirely. Well, it's all inside of six months.

Our regiment is larger now than it ever was before. Two squads of recruits have arrived lately, and we now number 1080 men. There is some talk of taking out the old members who did not re-enlist and forming a separate battalion of them, perhaps put them into heavy artillery. I think it would be a good idea, but there may be nothing in the report. I think the danger of an attack is over, from the fact that the officers begin to "put on airs".

An order was read on dress parade last night to the effect that we must always salute an officer when we meet one, whether on duty or not. Of course we expect to obey orders; but it is the office, not the officer that we intend to salute.⁶⁵ An order from Gen. Seymour was read, congratulating the troops on their heroic

64. Confederate.

65. A correct interpretation of military etiquette, as American privates and seamen have usually been quick to discover and declaim!

conduct in the late battle; said the repulse was neither a disaster nor a disgrace. The miserable old traitor! I cant find words to express my contempt, so will stop.⁶⁶ With love, love, *love*,

Your own
Milton.

In the woods near Jacksonville,. Fla.
March 27th, 1864.

Dear Lina:—

Wonder how and where you are today. I am on picket, watching Rebs. Came out last night to stay three days, and if it don't rain, expect to have a very comfortable time. For some reason we are having it easier than the last time I was out, for we are on duty two hours and off four hours. When they allow us that, I prefer picket to camp duty (although it is rather more dangerous) for we get rid of a good deal of the unnecessary ceremony and red tape that we have to observe in camp. On picket we are not required to salute any officer, whether on duty or not. To be sure, some officers try to put on style on picket, but they make very little headway with the old soldiers. We know that we are only required by the regulations to do our duty, and we think we know what that is, as well as some can tell us.

We are stationed about a mile outside of our camp. Other regiments' line of pickets meet ours on each side, and the whole form a line from the river below the town to the river above, and so close are we together that a cat could hardly get through without being seen or heard.

Outside of us are the mounted men posted on the different roads, and wherever a force of the enemy would be likely to try to come down. I think Jacksonville is pretty safe, at any rate Mr. Reb better not try to take it with a *small* army. What a pity we could not have

66. General Orders, No. 13, Hdqtrs. Dist of Fla., Mar. 10, 1864, signed by R. M. Hall by order of Brig. Gen. Seymour, told the troops: "In your repulse there was perhaps misfortune, but neither disaster nor disgrace, and every officer and soldier may forever remember with just pride that he fought at Olustee." *Off. Rec.*, Series I, Vol. XXXV, Part I, 297-8.

had a man to command here who had just a little caution about him, before that battle was fought. We held all at that time that was worth holding in this vicinity, that is Baldwin and the rail-road from here there, besides thousands of dollars worth of resin and turpentine that might have been brought off in a very few days, but which was burned in the retreat; then we could have saved some of the cattle that run in the woods; people who were so inclined could have come into our lines; and some of the objects of the movement into Florida might have been realized; but some one wanted to get glory or something else, and so every thing must be risky (and lost) that he might get fame. Well, he has got his name up, but I don't envy him. Ninety-nine persons out of every hundred in this department would shout for joy if he should be removed. His congratulatory orders, praising the men for their "heroic daring and unflinching courage" in the late battle, does not soft-soap them in the least. They think of the remark he made when the men were nearly worn out with hard marching, sore-footed and hungry. One of his officers ventured to ask if he was not marching the men harder than they could stand it. "No", he said, "this is just what I want; I shall get rid of the poor trash, and get at the cream of the army".

We had a report yesterday that a General had come to relieve him, and you should have heard the men cheer. The officers don't dare to say much, but they would rejoice as much as any of us. . . .

Milton.

Head Quarters Hawley's Brigade.
Jacksonville, Fla;
April 5th, 1864.

Dear Lina:—

I want to talk to you. Won't you come and sit down a little while? I wish you would. I am on guard at Col. Hawley's headquarters in the city. He lives in a nice cottage house just at the out edge of the place. It is a

very pleasant place, or was before the war. The streets around here are shaded by nice large trees, and the houses are neat and comfortable, very different from most of the houses I have seen South. The place reminds me of New Britain some, and still it doesn't look like it. I believe I should rather be in New Britain just now. Wonder how it would seem to get into a place where the people were not all soldiers. In five months from today I hope to be in such a place; or in a fair way to get there soon. Five months will soon pass away, but I get almost impatient thinking of it. What may take place between now and then, none of us can tell. I hope, and we all hope that the war may be brought to a close by that time. I shall be surprised if there is not some heavy fighting this Spring in some of the Departments.

I hope we may be successful. Great things are expected of General Grant.⁶⁷ I hope he may accomplish all and more than is expected of him; but I must say I have fears that he will not be able to.

I don't like the way our people have, of making a little god of a man when he is successful. I don't think any one man is going to save this country, not even General Grant. We are apt to trust the arm of flesh. We want more faith in God, and less of man worship. For my part, I am sick of hearing and reading so much of these great and good officers. In nine cases out of ten, if the truth were known, these very men are guilty of practices that would disgrace a private citizen or soldier. I do not know of an officer of any note in this Department who does not keep himself more or less soaked with liquor, if I have been rightly informed; and many of them I should not consider profitable companions at home; and some, I guess, would not care to have their families informed of their doings here.

So when I see a general, or any officer, puffed up so highly, I can't help but think that the man who wrote the piece did not really know what he was talking about.

67. Grant had been promoted by Lincoln to Lieut.-General and raised to command of the Union armies shortly before this time (Mar. 9, 1864).

Every thing is quiet here at present; three companies of our regiment are up the river somewhere; what they are doing I don't know. They have sent down ten prisoners and a large torpedo, which was intended to blow up another steamer, I suppose. Our folks have to keep a pretty sharp lookout for such things for it doesn't take long to put one down, and they are not very pleasant things to sail over. I think we shall have to move camp again soon. We have cleaned up the ground around our present camp very nicely, dug out all the stumps, built beautiful gothic houses⁶⁸ to live in, and, in fact, have got all ready to move again.

By the way, I must tell you about our houses. We have been expecting to have shelter tents for over a month; but for some reason they don't come. All the other "nigger" regiments have them, and we still live in hopes.

Perhaps you don't know what a shelter tent is. Well, it is a piece of cotton cloth six feet square, with buttons and button holes in three sides, so that it can button onto, or be buttoned onto one or more pieces like it.

It is intended for each man to have one piece, and when we want a tent, two men button their pieces together, drive down two crotches, put a pole across, spread the canvas over, and the tent is done. Three or four can put their tents together when they have time and are allowed to build up with boards or logs, and make a very comfortable place to sleep.

Our officers, ever mindful of the comfort of their men, but much more so of themselves and the appearance of the camp, gave orders. that as our tents were soon to be issued, the men must build frames to spread them on, and they must be all of one size and pattern so that there might be uniformity; and the covering that was intended for two men must cover four; and a pattern was made under the supervision of an officer. The size of the mansion is six feet long, by six and one half wide. The ridge pole is three feet from the floor and the eaves

68. Ironic exaggeration, of course.

six inches. Just take a couple of table cloths and hang them over a pole three feet high and bring the edges to the floor so that the space will be six feet wide, and see how much room there is.

In that space four men must put their arms and equipments, knapsacks, and all they own, then get in themselves if they can.

If four of our meanest officers were obliged to live in one of these holes this summer I would not say a word; but they each have a large wall tent to live in, plenty of room to turn round in and for air to circulate.

Some say growling does no good; I don't know as it does, but something has influenced our superiors to modify their plans a little, and we are allowed to have twenty-four huts in a company, which will leave only three in a hut.

That will be some better, especially as one half of the company will be on guard every night, and consequently not at home.

I can't quite see the policy of making a regiment lie out doors, or use their bedding for a covering for two months, when their tents are lying in a building within half a mile of them; but of course it is all right, for it is orders from our superior officers; and don't they always seek to promote the health and comfort of the men? Of course! (they don't!)

Well, here I am finding fault again. Can't help it; got so used to it comes natural. Guess you think so, don't you?

Col. Hawley is very pleasant to me always; but some of the boys don't like him at all. For my part, I don't see any reason to change my opinion of him yet. I suppose he would like to wear a star instead of the eagle; but I am selfish enough to hope he won't have it to wear before September, for I would rather he would command the regiment than any other man I know of.

He is not in immediate command now; but things are under his control, and will be as long as he is colonel.

Our present camp is in a very pleasant place, on a bluff on the bank of the river, which is quite wide at this place and very deep.

Vessels of the largest size can float here, much larger than can cross the bar at the mouth. The St. Johns is a fine river, and is navigable for over two hundred miles. The boys (those who can get off duty long enough) have fine times fishing; think I shall try my luck one of these days. They catch very large nice ones.

Alligators are plenty. Shall I send you one in a letter?

We also have scorpions, centipedes, rattle "snaix" etc. How should you like 'em? They are nothing when you get used to them; although it is not very pleasant, along at first, to feel a centipede crawling down the back of your neck, or up your trowsers leg. I used to dread them about as bad as I did the Rebs, but I don't mind them now, nor the Rebs either for that matter; I mean so long as they keep away; I shouldn't care to meet them again under the same circumstances as at Olustee, but if they should come down on us here I think we should give them all they could attend to.

O dear! I don't like this kind of guard duty. I would rather be watching Rebs. My duty here is to salute all officers according to their rank that pass my beat; and at night wake the Col. in case of an alarm. I am sick of so much ceremony that amounts to nothing.

. . . Will wind up this yarn and send it along I guess. wish I could get into the envelope and go with it. . . .

As ever, Milton.

On board the Steamer "Delaware",
St. John's River. Apr. 16, 1864.

Dear Lina:—

In my last letter I said I should like to take a trip to Pilatka. I had hardly finished writing when I had orders to pack my knapsack, black my shoes and fix up generally, and report for special duty at the Major's quarters. . .

When I arrived at the Major's I found that our party was to consist of ten men and a sergeant; our duty to go as guard for the steamer "Mary Benton" to Pilatka. We went on board, and for the first time since I have been in the service I really enjoyed a sail.⁶⁹ The "Mary Benton" is a trim little steamer, and her captain a very pleasant man. We had the whole to ourselves, not an officer to domineer over and make it unpleasant for us, and I enjoyed the sail up the river as I have enjoyed nothing for a long time. The weather was lovely and the scenery beautiful, not grand, for there are no hills and rocky cliffs, but the shore is thickly wooded, with now and then a house surrounded by orange trees, and all is green and fresh.

The river is very deep and wide, part of the way two and three miles, and part only about one mile wide. It is wider and straighter above Jacksonville than below, and the country is better. About twelve miles up we passed the wreck of the "Maple Leaf," the victim of a rebel torpedo.⁷⁰

You might think it rather risky navigating where such things are liable to be run into; but it is so seldom that one does any damage that it is thought no more of than danger from any other cause, although precautions are taken to avoid them. Gunboats patrol the river all the time, and it would not be particularly safe for a party to be caught putting down one of those machines.⁷¹

[Palatka]

Arrived at our destination about ten in the evening. The next morning (Wednesday) took a stroll through the place. I don't know what to tell you about the place. Some would say it is a rough looking place, but I think

69. The Confederates, however, deemed travel up the river from Jacksonville to Palatka "precarious" because of their success in laying mines in the channel. *Off. Rec.*, Series I. Vol. XXXV, Part I, 369.

70. Sunk by torpedo, April 1, 1864, Maj. Gen. Patton Anderson, C.S.A., to Headquarters, May 14, 1864, *Ibid.*, 370.

71. The Confederate commanding officer hardly agreed with Private Woodford's optimism, needless to say. "A number of torpedoes," he bragged, had been planted by April 1 in the channel of the St. Johns River about 15 miles above Jacksonville. *Ibid.*, 369.

it is beautiful. If ever I get sick of Connecticut and want to find some quiet and lovely spot, I shall think of Pilatka. Art has done very little for the place, but Nature very much. There are but two or three houses that look like northern houses, the rest are of the southern style; but there are orange trees loaded with fruit, lemon trees, fig trees, great magnolias and trees of different kinds, the names of which I do not know, some of them fairly loaded with long grey moss that hangs like drapery from every limb, reminding me of pictures I have seen of fairy land. One or two places give evidence that they are owned by northern men: the houses are large and comfortable and painted; (Southerners whitewash their houses usually) and the grounds are laid out with taste. I wish you could see it. Such a place in Connecticut would be worth an independent fortune.

When we returned to the steamers (for there were four besides ours) we found that the object of the steamers going up was to take the troops away from that point, the white troops having been ordered North.⁷² Our boat was busy all day taking men, horses, mules, wagons, cannon and "sich", over the river and landing them on the other side to march down either to Jacksonville or St. Augustine.

I employed part of the time fishing. The river is full of fish and we caught some nice ones weighing from five to seven pounds. There are some kinds of fish that we choose to kill before handling much. One of them, a large moccasin snake, came swimming along and as he came alongside, the end of a rope hit him on the head and laid him out, and he was taken on board. He looked very much like a rattle snake. Their bite is if possible more poisonous. A man who has lived here says there is no antidote for their poison. He told me a colored girl of his was bitten by one and died almost instantly.

72. Palatka was abandoned by the Union forces, it seems, because the withdrawal of troops from the Dept. of the South for action in Virginia at that time made consolidation of the Union forces necessary. *Off. Rec.*, Series I, Vol. XXXV, Part II, 58.

All day Wednesday and Thursday the boats were busy taking in and discharging men and munitions of war. Just at night Thursday the four remaining regiments came on board the boat, the pickets were drawn in, and the Rebs followed so close that we could see them around the fires that had been built to burn some things that were not worth taking away, but which might have been of use to the Rebs. If they had some field pieces with them they might have done us some damage; but we moved off quietly and were soon out of sight.

We had on board two or three families of refugees, and such another miserable looking set! O dear! It beggars description. I pitied the poor creatures. They look as though they had been starved; had just clothes enough to cover them, southern homespun; their faces a sickly pale, and ignorance stamped on them as plainly as though written with pen or pencil.

I do pity the poor white people of the South, for it is very little real sympathy they get from either party. The Rebs conscript the men, and leave their families to starve; and our folks care little for them because their husbands are in the rebel army. . . .

We arrived at Jacksonville about noon Friday; went ashore and started for camp, when we were told our regiment had gone North two days before.⁷³ Well, here was a fix; the regiment two days on the way to Fortress Monroe, and eleven of us left here. Well, "Uncle Sam" is bound to take care of us somehow a while longer, so we give ourselves no uneasiness about it and let things take their course.

We reported to the Gen. Commanding, and after thinking awhile he gave us orders to report at Hilton Head [South Carolina]. . . . We then went on board the steamer Delaware and took lodgings outside, for privates are not allowed in the cabins, and the hold was altogether too dirty to suit me. In the night it rained. You may think it not very pleasant to Sleep out of doors

73. Special Orders No. 150, Hdqtrs. Dept. of the South, April 11, 1864, *Ibid.*, 48.

in the rain. So do I; but when you get used to it, why it is easy enough.

Got up this morning bright as a pewter sixpence, having had a good night's sleep in spite of the rain. Went ashore, got breakfast, washed, came on board and ate it; blacked shoes and then sat down to write. Perhaps you would like to know what "get breakfast" means. The way I get breakfast is to put some coffee and water into a cup and set onto a fire and boil it, then sweeten and wash down my hard tack with it. . . .

About ten o'clock every thing was ready, and we left the dock with the 47th N.Y. on board. The "Ben Deford" left just ahead of us with the 48th N.Y. and the "Dictator" followed with the 115th N.Y., all bound for Hilton Head.

A large propeller⁷⁴ had on board the 17th Conn. bound for St. Augustine. The day is fine, and we are having a very pleasant trip down the St. Johns. The boat shakes so I can't write decent. Hope you can read it! if you can't I'll read it for you in Sept.

Milton.

74. A screw propelled steamship.