

**CIVIL WAR LETTERS FROM TENNESSEE:  
DRURY F. DRYDEN, 19th INDEPENDENT BATTERY, OHIO LIGHT ARTILLERY, U.S.A.**

Submitted by Gene Dryden

This letter, headed "On the Ohio River," was difficult to transcribe, written aboard an obviously shaky boat. Note that it was dated Jan. 19/'64 and that he was hoping his unit might be heading into Ohio near his (and Gettie's) home. However, orders obviously did not follow his hopes, for the next letter was written in Knoxville, TN, many miles south of Ohio, only 12 days after this one:

On the Ohio River  
Jan. 19/'64

Dear Gettie:

We are going to the east, very likely to S---army. They say mail will go from Evansville, Ind., so I thought I would drop you a line. Yours of the N. Years came to hand the night we started. I don't know whether we will go up the river to Pittsburg or by C. I don't like to go by C., so near home and right by yourself, for we can't stop, and I would not to appear to you as I am in this rough garb of a private--don't laugh, for a good deal, as we have said, depends on our first meeting (from now). You know young ladies' heroes: one (not roughly clad) as pictured in air castles. If we do go that way and I knew that I should see no one but G. (Gettie) I would drop off never minding the military consequences. Your last (letter) was so good. Can't answer now--am in a cabin where are many, doing everything. Our boat is the Hosana--this will go by rail, so you will have it ahead of us. Write immediately via Cin. (Cincinnati) and I may get it before we get through. We, or some say, we will stop at Louisville, and if we stop for mail at Cin. I would have it there. Gettie, don't get your imagination drawn out too far; don't think for sure we will



DRURY F. DRYDEN  
19th Independent Battery  
Ohio Light Artillery

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come for I don't think we will, have to live as I do or have to later, what pleasure comes and bid farewell to the rest in a happy mood. If I should stop and you not fancy the soldier--oh dear! Well, I don't think he would come back from his eastern campaign. Shall not write to S. K. after hearing from you last. The boat jumps so can't write--don't know as you can read it--if not, excuse Drury's. We may stop a week or two in Lou. (Louisville). What will mother do if I go through Ohio and can't see her. But good by from your constant Drury.

Knoxville Jan. 31st/64

Dear Friend Gettie:

Your welcome letter came to hand a week ago. I had just written you so did not write until now. Only a week though but I always write as soon as rec'd unless I have a good reason for not doing so. I suppose you are having cold weather at home now. Oh, how I could enjoy a good sleigh ride - a fast horse and merry bells, all would "suffer" under my hands. But it is not for me and so I must be content at present and make a soldier's rough life as pleasant as possible.

I am thankful for the good health which I enjoy. One of the boys who came with me, Lu Bradford's cousin is quite unwell and will, I think, get a furlough. You can imagine how one feels to have a friend get sick here- one, too, who would not have come if I had not. It pleased me to think that H said we were on one half rations as if but for a short time. We have been so ever since we came to Tenn., and more than three-fourths of the time on quarter, and half of the time on just what we happened to get. Such little things as soap we never get, and one who never soldiered can form no idea how useful that little article is. I wish I knew how far I have traveled for it - there is none to buy anywhere. I believe every soldier will want a washing machine!

Some of our boys start for Ky. today with horses. No horses are to be kept here this winter on account of forage. You ask me for a description of some of the scenes I have passed through in my career as a soldier so I shall commence wherever my mind bids me to. Remember, I am no writer or story teller. Most people have an idea that in the very place they have always lived there is full as nice dwellings, more beautiful landscapes, rivers and in fact as a whole it is the nicest place God has seen fit to put on the globe, but as one passes through these he will easily see the difference. As we came in sight of the Cumberland one beautiful morning after a long and weary march I could not help but think that this was one of the best of Nature's works. We were winding our way down a long and rough hill. The sun was just rising. As it first came in sight a broad stream, clear as a crystal - the bottom of the stream was stony and covered with minerals of all colors. The sun, striking it, gave it a sight beautiful to look upon. There the high rugged banks, towering up hundreds of feet, the pines on and between the rocks, some were, while others covered with moss. Then the pure stream pouring down over the rugged rocks. Large birds could be seen sailing among tall pines and above them. Away off and up on a point of rock I could see some two or three ladies watching us as we forded the stream. They were so high up that they looked like little children. How such a sight puts one in

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mind of friends at home - he thinks, "What if that should be a sister or mother or some other dear friend whom he would like to see." You know, soldiers like to have a friend to think of in their lonesome hours (sometimes they will think perhaps the friend has forgotten them in the gay society at home) and then they think "How foolish I was to waste my thoughts in vain - it would have been better had I cast it aside in the first place."

On the Cumberland mountains one can see some very beautiful scenes. I recollect one day when the column halted for a rest, I rode off into the woods to see what I could see. I came first to a steep bank and after riding down as far as I could I hitched my horse and walked down till I came to a bank which I could not go down. It was a hollow without any outlet visible. From where I stood it was but a short distance across to the other bank but out of this hole tall pines grew with their tops at my feet. How I wondered what was down there and how I longed to see what I knew no human eye had seen. In many places in the mountains the land would seem to have been cleared of large trees and grown up with young cedars and pines - some of the most beautiful places for a villa - almost as if it were made on purpose. Then at night I would dream of some cottage in some wild mountain glen and of something more beautiful to preside over it. Soldiers will dream! I wish I could paint some of the scenes before me now. I am on or in the steeple of the highest building in Knoxville College, can see the whole town and Holston River, hills, mountains and peaks, camps and almost everything imaginable. Well, I have been scribbling away here, must stop. How it looks I must conclude I was never much of a writer. If I should ever send this and you should ever get it, I hope you will excuse this and me also.

I am in my old place for writing - it rains a little, blots the paper but 'tis a soldier's letter and they are always blotted. Our section which was in a fort by itself had to come to the Battery so we are now in the college - on college hill, the highest in town. There is one thing nice about it - there is one of the largest libraries in the state in this building, mostly old books. A great many are carried away by the soldiers. I should like some myself.

I am glad that I am not state guard, or that I am not soldiering at home when you speak of soldiers freezing at camp there, then to be a private among one's friends on duty too.

We have had beautiful weather all this month, but expect some bad soon in return. You ask what I have been about since I wrote last - building quarters, building forts, etc. Oh, yes, New Year's Day I went with some others to a dinner at a house where I had been to get some clothes made, and now comes the story. There was a young lady whom we had all said was the prettiest we had seen in Tenn., but all at once she (it is true) took a chew of tobacco and then a smoke which is the most filthy of all.

I get papers from the North so see how things go--the Bazaar is one of the things which will do any amount of good. You speak of the dancing season and sleigh rides. Do you like to dance?

Yes, Gettie, I had thought it was leap year, but one so far away that it won't do me any good, I am afraid. I have always said that I would not go home 'til

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the war was over, but don't know but I would go if I could now. When I go I would like to know that I was free. These short furloughs seem worse than nothing. You will find this a dull letter; have no news, nothing to write about. Write often - you don't know how much good it does one to get letters from friends at home.

Yours as ever, Dru

Postmark: Chattanooga, Ten.  
May 9, '64

Red Clay, Ga. May 5th/64

Dear Friend Gettie:

Here I am and you are so far away from where I was when I wrote last, but so goes war, one day here, another there and another some where else. I have had no letter from you since writing you last but thought I would write, as you say, as often as I can, whether I get any from you or not. I hope you will do so too--won't you, Gettie! Just for a soldier if no other reason, although I hope you have better reasons.

We left K. (Knoxville) on the 27th, carried our "bugs" (gear) as soldiers term things, the first day but have not since, so we had to leave out things, or a good many of them; overcoats which we went without all winter and drew in the spring and had to leave again so soon. We have been through a beautiful country since we came from Knoxville, Lenoir between Knoxville and Loudon is the most beautiful place I ever saw; such scenery and just now when spring has opened with all its beauty. Sweetwater is a very nice village, also Cleveland, quite a large village where we were to stop but came straight through. Chattanooga is the junction of the ET&V (East Tennessee & Virginia) and ET&Ga. (East Tennessee & Georgia) railroad. We came to Cleveland on that line (we follow the track) and from Cleveland we came to this place on the Ga. road. You cannot imagine how this road looks--it is here that Sherman tore up the tracks when following Longstreet to Knoxville last winter. It is a complete wreck the whole way. A large number of men are at work and will soon have it done to this place. We are moving on Dalton (Ga.) from Cleveland while another large force goes from Chattanooga. We are with the Army of the Cumberland now instead of the Ohio. We shall not have as good a time here as when we were with a smaller army. So many clear the country of everything, so we shall have to rely on rations. I suppose that it will soon be so we cannot send any mail. I had supposed that we could not yesterday or I would have written you--yet if the mail is not stopped both ways I hope you will write just as often as if you received from me. If you don't, Gettie, I shall do something desperate--you don't know how much good they do a poor fellow. We stopped over one Sunday on our march, only that was at Charleston (Tenn.) the other side of Cleveland. Arrived here yesterday, will be off soon--expect to leave any hour, are just over the line-Ga and Ten. I expected a letter from you before this time but suppose something has detained it. I want one more from Gettie before the mail is stopped. I have but very little time to write--could write a good deal but the mail is going out in a few minutes and I want

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this to go. We will have some hard fighting to do soon. If I should be left behind, remember Drew (Drury). If I knew Gettie better I should know better or more to say. We did very fast marching which was very hard on the infantry--some died. Gen. Judah commands our Division--don't like him very well. I heard that the militia at home is coming out; it does me good--hope they will have to as I know some who might have been where I am better than I. Gettie, please excuse this bunch of blunders written in such a hurry, and remember who remains as ever your friend,

Drury

Direct to: 2nd Div. 23rd AC via Chattanooga, Tenn.

Postmark: Nashville, Tenn.  
July 30 '64

In the field two weeks from Atlanta July 21st 1864  
Dear Friend Gettie:

Yours of the 9th of July came to hand on the 17th. I was very glad to rec'v it. Yours came in the morning and on the march towards night I rec'd three more from O. (Ohio), one from mother, one from Susan (sister) and one from E.F. Since that time I have had several papers from Hattie. If I could have mail that way all the time I should not have time to get the blues. I have not had time to write before since rec'g those. We have been on the march all the time. We took Decatur (Ga.) day before yesterday. Our section of our battery did the shelling and drove the Rebs from the place. We found a good deal to eat--large potatoes, beets, tomatoes and things too numerous to mention. A large building filled with coffee boilers which were issued to our Div. It was laughable to see (before the guard was put on) boys going down the streets covered with tin ware like loads of hay. The Rebs burned two wagon trains, some ambulances and depot. We are two miles south of Decatur. The country looks good deal better here than it has. I never saw such a place for berries--one gathers them up like apples--pick them up from the ground. We are all most tired of such things. We are not in position now. Came here last night. The Rebs have made a stand. The line is just ahead of us. Cannon roar and musket rattle for miles each way. They did not expect us to come this way. By coming this way, you see, we cut the railroad at Decatur, ties torn up for a long way. Decatur was quite a nice little place. It would please you to hear the ladies talk here. Everybody has been told that we would rob them and were savages of the worst kind. We see some quite decent looking women; have a great deal better than those back of here. I feel sorry for the women and children in such a country, scared almost to death, and no place to go. Tis not an uncommon thing to see a young woman (35) years old with two or fifteen and sometimes more children.

I had to laugh to think where you said John Jennings looked a lot like me. You rode on the fourth (4th) in B's large wagon--weren't the springs rather stiff? How strange it would seem to have a day pass when we could not hear a cannon roar, as you say of the fourth. Lucritia Wright thought I was mean about not writing to E.F. Do you think that I was? You know why I did not well enough. She did not know what kind of a girl you are, did she? Gettie,

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where did you hear that I was coming home this fall on furlough? There never has been but about half a dozen home from the Battery, and at that rate I think I shall stand a poor chance as two years are nearly gone. Do you think it would make the last year shorter if I should go to, that is, those at home? You don't know how well I would like to see faces there. I hope we shall have some rest after Atlanta is taken. I suppose the raid is over at Bal. (?) It would be fun for us to see the quiet cabins at home. I get scared once in a while. Well, I must close--write often--any letter from you is a letter from Gettie. Excuse this written in haste for the present.

Good bye, yours as ever,  
Drury

Tis too warm to write so excuse the paper.

Drury F. Dryden, a Union private in the Civil War, received a commendation from his commanding general for his skill and bravery and was made a corporal. He was in the army three years, and his letters to his school teacher sweetheart in Columbus, Ohio and his diary writings reflect his growing disillusionment with war. After the war he married his sweetheart, Gettie Goss. Their grandson, Gene Dryden, lives in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

Some of the letters are in the possession of Dryden's cousin, Mrs. Harold Doerr who lives near San Diego, California. She also has Drury's field glasses, canteen, binoculars and a diary. Some of the items below are from that diary; others are excerpts from the letters she has.

From one letter:

"I am sitting on an old log in the sun, and wind blows my paper. We have shelled the Rebs all day. Our guns (artillery) are sunk into the ground on a hill, in plain sight of their breastworks (a defensive position or trench). I am a gunner, the man who sights and points the gun and so, sends the fatal missile. I put a shell through a large house which they use inside their works."

From another letter:

"I hope, Gettie, that you will never see a field of battle. One who has not, cannot form the least idea of what it is like. Today there was an ambulance train a mile long. Among the rebel wounded I saw boys whom I pitied very much. Handsome boys. We gave them water, cover, and made them pillows."

From another letter:

"A lady said to us when we were leaving Nashville, 'Boys, are you going out to fight this morning?' We said yes and kept on with our work. She said it was awful to do and tried to make us see her side. But of course we could not afford to talk like that. That day might have been our last, but I have been thinking she was right.":

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