

### THREE YANKEE SOLDIER-BROTHERS IN THE BATTLE OF CHATTANOOGA: THREE LETTERS

*Edited by* MERRILL PROUDFOOT AND STANLEY J. FOLMSBEE

The letters which follow were written by two of three brothers, one of whom was killed in the assault on Missionary Ridge, November 25, 1863, who were in William T. Sherman's Army of the Tennessee at the Battle of Chattanooga. The three brothers, of Scotch-Irish descent, were Aaron, Jacob, and James Vanscoy (or VanScoy), sons of William and Mary Vanscoy. They moved in 1847 with their parents from the section of Virginia which was to become West Virginia to White County, Indiana, while they were children. Aaron, sometime after his marriage in 1854 to Cassander Reed, moved on to Clarke County, Iowa. There he was joined by Jacob, who married Elnora Senseney in 1857.

When the war began Aaron, age 26, enlisted in Company B of the 6th Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiment in July, 1861. When Jacob, age 22, decided to enter the service in 1862, he took his wife and two small children back to Indiana and enlisted in the 12th Indiana Infantry, along with his 18-year-old brother James on August 14. The two regiments, although from different states, were in the same division of the same corps of the Army of the Tennessee and saw some service in Kentucky and in West Tennessee before participating in General U. S. Grant's capture of Vicksburg and Jackson, Mississippi, in July, 1863.<sup>1</sup>

After General William S. Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland was defeated at Chickamauga on September 19-20 and then besieged in Chattanooga by Braxton Bragg's Confederate troops, Grant was sent to Chattanooga to replace Rosecrans and was given command of the Division of the Mississippi. Sherman was given command of the Army of the Tennessee and sent to reinforce Grant. In Hugh Ewing's

<sup>1</sup> Information from an extensive genealogy of the Proudfoot and Vanscoy families compiled prior to 1915 by Hester Proudfoot Tedrow and Charles Fletcher Proudfoot, children of Cyrene Vanscoy Proudfoot, an elder sister of the three soldiers, and by Hester's daughter, Myrtle Tedrow Emberson. Copies are in the Library of Congress and other libraries.

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THE BATTLE  
MATTERS

J. FOLMSBEE  
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Missionary Ridge, November  
of the Tennessee  
of Scotch-Irish  
(or VanScoy), sons  
with their parents  
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Fourth Division of Frank P. Blair's Fifteenth Corps of that army were the three Vanscoy brothers when Sherman attacked the northern end of Missionary Ridge as a part of Grant's successful breaking of Bragg's siege of Chattanooga, followed by his driving of the Confederate troops down toward Atlanta in one of the most significant turning points in the history of the war.<sup>2</sup>

Two of the letters were written by Jacob Vanscoy before the army reached Chattanooga, and the other one by James after Jacob had been killed on Missionary Ridge. Both occasionally mention their brother Aaron. The letters reveal that Jacob and James were poorly educated, especially Jacob, who was not able to spell his older brother's name. Although the expressions of piety are stereotyped, nevertheless they appear to be quite genuine. Neither brother mentions the causes of the war or manifests any special hostility toward the enemy; yet their patriotism, especially Jacob's, is unswerving. The letters are quite revealing as to the problems, life, and emotions of the common soldier.

The originals of the letters, long treasured by the soldiers' mother, were passed on to her eldest daughter, Mrs. Cyrene Vanscoy Proudfoot, and are now in possession of Cyrene's grandson, Fay Millard Proudfoot of Osceola, Iowa. Xerox copies are in the Special Collections of the University of Tennessee Library. The letters have been reproduced as written, without any effort to correct spelling or punctuation.

grand junction tenn

february 25 = 1863

deare fother and mother<sup>3</sup> it is with the gratest pleser that I seat to let you know that we are well for which we are glad I was to see aron this morning he is beter he was seting up I think he will be abel for duty in a few days you need not be uneasy about him the helth of our redgment is not very good at this time there is about thirty in the hospitel there is some in camp that is Sick hampton johnson is in the hospitel he has bin for a long time he is geting beter there has twenty six of our redgment dyd since we left indianoplis fore [four] of our company one of them was taken up by one of his freinds that come after him and took him home there was too [two] taken up some time ago and the man got as far as memphis and stopt to stay over night he went to bed with seventy seven dolars and he was found ded next morning with his money taken and the too corps is there there [sic] o what will this world

<sup>2</sup> For good accounts of this battle see Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, *The Chattanooga Country* (New York, 1952), 231-51, and Fairfax Downey, *Storming the Gateway: Chattanooga, 1863* (New York, 1960), 136-98. In the appendix of the latter, 219-20, the corps, divisions, brigades, and regiments of the Army of the Tennessee, with their commanders, are listed.

<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of his mother apparently was an afterthought. Her name does not appear in the address on the envelope.

come to the wickedness of our nation is grate at this time and there must be a change before this war will close but I think that the peopel begins to see the one thing needful well fother I see the need of living in redines for deth at all times I see men falling nerly evry day but I think that I will get home safe but I cant tell but one thing surtin if I fall I expect to fall in sight of hevin I am far from home and in an enameys land I feel that I hav afreind that is [with us when] were in trubel and if we put our trust in him he will bring us off more than conker [conquerors] threw [through] him who has dyde for our sins and I thank him for praying parents and my prares is for y[ou] that as you nere the tomb you ma[y] feel that you are nering a ritche reward in heven [where] trubels never come but where we shal enjoy each other sosiety forever well I think if I due get home I will know how to appreciate the privleg that I once enjoyed but I dont feel dischouredg but I feel wiling to stay in defence of our country the first duty is for a soldier to discharge his duty to his god and then to his cuntry well as for war news I expect you know more about that than I due but I dont think that it can last longe the wether is worm here it is raining very hard at this time and we go on picket to day we hav not got our pay yet there is fore [four] months pay due us the last of this month well I must close for this time pray for yore children that we ma[y] make a famley in heven where parting will never come I wont you to write to me as soon as you get this no more at this time

I remain yore child Jacob to his mutch respected fother and mother will vanscoy mary vanscoy

Head Quarters, Co. D, 12th Regiment Indiana Vol. Inf.

Camp, Sherman Miss. Sept 18th, 1863<sup>4</sup>

Deare and affectionate sister it is with the greatest delight that I once more set down to write you a few lines to send by lieutenant price as he is going to start home in a day or too well we are well at this time and hop this may reach and find you in good helth I got a leter the other day from home which gave me mutch uneasyness tha wer sick but I hop tha are well by this time well I would try for a furlow but I dont think that I could get it and it dos cost 40 dolars and that is three months pay well I would like to see my family and freinds as well as any body but it cant be and that 40 dolars will do them more good than the pleasure of seeing me and I think that the time hant far off when we will get to come home to stay but we hant anxious for it to setel til it is seteld right we are still in good spirits wile the helth of the regt. is not very good at this time there has bin 14 died sinc we have bin here it has bin a litel over one month well I wont write mutch this time for I have bin writing so mutch to send I am geting tired and I dont know whether you can find the right run of this or not for it is riten every way I made a miss lick and rote on the rong page but it may be that you can find out by the numbers of the pages well I will close for this time write as soon as you get this and pray for me that we may live faithful and all meet where parting never come this is from yore brother Jacob V to Sarah little<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The stationery used had a printed letter-head, with blanks as shown here.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah was a sister, who had married Clark S. Little in 1849. The words "this is to Sarah" are at the bottom of the letter, but the envelope was addressed to Mr. Wm. Vanscoy, Brookston, White Co., Ind.

Athens Tennessee

Dec.....11th A.D. 1863

Dear Parents,

it is with a sad heart that I take my pencil in hand to let you know that Jacob is dead. You will doubtless think it strange of me not writing to you sooner as I suppose that you will hear of the Battle and probably of Jacobs death before this letter will reach you. But circumstances has been so it was impossible for me to send a letter. On the 24th of last month we (the 15th A.C.<sup>6</sup>) crossed the river above Chatanooga and advanced on the enemy,<sup>7</sup> driving them without much fighting until we drove them to Missionary ridge there we stoped for that day and early on the morning of the 25th we formed in line and advanced on them our Brigade on the extreme right of our Corps. We marched in line of Battle about a mile when we came to a fence which was at the edge of the woods, and in range of the rebels batteries on the ridge there we was ordered to ly down, and we lay there a short time when the rebels made a charge on our right down the hill then we was ordered forward right out in an open field where they had 16 pieces of artillery firing on us and also was exposed to their riflemen. Jacob and I clumb the fence together and marched up side by side and after we had advanced about 900 yards there was a musket ball struck Jacob in the left Breast passing square through him. He fell by my side.<sup>8</sup> I droped my gun and by the aid of another man, managed to get him back to a ditch which was close where he fell there he pitched into the ditch and the man that was helping me left me there and the ditch was so deep and narrow that I could not get him out and all I could do was to hold his head out of the water. there I remained 15 minutes the shot an shell tearing the ground up all around me and I could look and see the rebels charging one line after another down the hill on our boys who were about 200 yards ahead of me and there oh, my God what were my feelings. there lay my Dear Brother that I knew could not live long, and I did not know how soon our men would be repulsed and I would be forced to leave him to die on the Battle field. I saw some men close by. I hollowed at them and they came and assisted me in getting him off of the field to where I got him in an ambulance and took him to a Hospital. I felt to thank God when I arived at the Hospital, it was then nigh sundown I got some straw and laid him on, and after a long time I got a Surgeon to examine him and he told me that he must die, and it was about 15 minutes afterwards that the lord released him from his sufferings He died at 10 oclock and was wounded at noon, from the time that he was wounded he suffered intencely But thank *God* he died a Happy man. Shortly after he was wounded he told me, yet while he was on the field that he had to die I spoke to him about his soul and he did not seem at first to be satisfied to die but shortly the lord powerfully blessed him and he was enabled to shout although he suffered intencely. He took from his pocket a Testament and gave it to me and told me to read it and meet him in Glory. He also told me to tell his wife to train up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and meet him in Heaven. He then said Tell father and mother

<sup>6</sup> Army Corps.<sup>7</sup> James frequently used periods in the place of commas as well as in their customary usage.<sup>8</sup> According to a memo undoubtedly written by C. F. Proudfoot, in the Proudfoot-Vanscoy Genealogy, the place where Jacob was killed was "probably about one quarter mile to the left of the East Tennessee [and Georgia] Railroad [now the Southern Railway] and about one quarter mile from where the Railroad tunnel enters the Ridge."

shown here.

The words "this is to  
dressed to Mr. Wm.

and all the Boys to meet me in heaven. He then wanted to see Aaron and I sent for him But he did not come until a few minutes after his death. I thank God he has gone to Heaven oh my Dear parents you have a son buried beneath the sod of Tennessee but He rests in Jesus. and will rise at the last day to meet us in Glory if we but prove faithfull. The next morning Aaron and I Buried him. nicely to what all soldiers that fell there was although we had no coffin we dug a Vault and lined it with boards and then enscribed his name on the tree that we buried him under.<sup>9</sup> and by this time the Regiment had passed and gone and I had to start in a hurrah [hurry] to overtake them which I did that night We Drove the rebels down to Ringold Georgia where after a pretty hard fight they was completely routed and then we was ordered to reinforc Burnside at Knoxville and we marched as far as Maryville which is 15 miles from Knoxville, where we heard that Burnside had routed Longstreet and we started back to Chatanooga to get supplies for we had been subsisting on the Country ever since the fight and now we have got back as far as this place which is about 50 miles from Chatanooga. and no rations yet We are doing tolerably well.<sup>10</sup> We are laying by today on account of the rebels burning a Bridge across the Hiwassee river. Well, my Dear parents I feel almost lost and without friends since the death of Jacob. but I hope that I shall be more faithfull now to my God and Country. Our Com. lost 2 killed and 7 wounded the Reg. lost about 100 killed and wounded it was an offal hard Battle as doubtless you have heard our Orderly sergeant was in the Battle of Shiloh and several other hard battles and he said that he never was in as hot a Battle as this was. I hope I shall never be called to witness another such a Battle. I have not had an opportunity of sending mail since the fight and have not now but I will write this letter and as soon as we get to Chatanooga I will send it as I know you will be uneasy about me. I dont know what to do with Jacobs things he lost nearly all of them on the battle field and I did to. What few things is left I will sell and send the money to his wife as soon as I can I will write her a letter and as soon as pay day I will send all money coming to him. I will collect all that is coming to him and send it by mail or express. You can inform her of the affair and I will write her a letter the first opportunity I have. We had our Captain badly wounded, that I have not herd from him since the fight also another man of the Company was seriously wounded in the left eye. Well father I will not write any more now and as soon as I can I will write a few more words and send this so no more at present.

Bridgeport Alabama Dec.....20th 1863

Dear patents I am now to where I can send mail again so I take my seat to write a few more lines. I know you think it strange in me not writing sooner but it has been impossible for me to do so Aaron said he wrot Jacobs wife a letter sever[al] days ago and probably you have got it. We laid over at Athens 21½ days. then marched to Chatanooga. and camped overnight on the battle field and early next morning we started for this place. So I had no chance to write there. We arrived here last night. all hungry and Naked nearly we have went over a month without any rations and without any clean clothes so you

<sup>9</sup> The spot where he was buried is now a part of the Chattanooga National Cemetery.

<sup>10</sup> For the Sherman effort to reinforce General Ambrose E. Burnside see Part II of Jesse Burt, "East Tennessee, Lincoln, and Sherman," printed in this issue of the *Publications*, and Harold S. Fink, "The East Tennessee Campaign and the Battle of Knoxville," *ibid.*, No. 29 (1957), 111-14.

see Aaron and I sent  
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 Battle of Knoxville,"

may know how we looked there was lots of the soldiers marched when the ground was froze in their bare feet. and nearly Naked for Clothing but we draw Clothing today I will not write much in this for I am in such a hurrah to send it out. I am keeping an account of all our march since we lay in lookout Valley. and I will send it to the boys and I will give a full detail of our fight I learn that we march soon from this place. I will write no more now My love to all good by James to his father and mother

[James S. Vanscoy]<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The Bridgeport section was in the nature of a postscript. James served until the end of the war and was mustered out at Washington, D. C., June 5, 1865, at the age of 21. The next year he married Lenora Compton, and they moved sometime between 1867 and 1872 to Iowa, probably not far from brother Aaron. James lived into his seventies.

Aaron resigned from the army in December, 1864, having lost his power of speech at Savannah, Georgia. He then had the rank of lieutenant. He went back to Iowa, eventually settled at Dunlap, in the western part of the state, but in 1886 he moved his family to Florida, where he died two years later of yellow fever. In Iowa he had become a Methodist minister, after recovering his voice; in Florida he combined that vocation with the "brick business." Proudfoot-Vanscoy Genealogy.