

The Civil War Letters of Tillman Valentine, Third US Colored Troops

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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

The Civil War Letters of Tillman Valentine, Third US Colored Troops

TILLMAN VALENTINE WAS TWENTY-SEVEN years old when he enlisted with the Third US Colored Infantry on June 30, 1863. Standing five feet four inches tall, with black hair, gray eyes, and a yellow complexion, the mulatto laborer from Chester County, Pennsylvania, bade farewell to his wife of seven years, Annie, and his children, Elijah (born February 13, 1858), Clara (born February 4, 1860), and Ida (born August 11, 1861). Tillman gave Annie “an affectionate good bye” that morning, as one longtime family friend remembered. The couple did not know it yet, but Annie was pregnant with their fourth child, Samuel, who would be born on March 3, 1864.¹

Valentine’s enlistment was part of a wave of recruitment of black soldiers in Pennsylvania during the summer of 1863. Prominent public figures such as Pennsylvania’s Republican governor Andrew G. Curtin, abolitionists Lucretia Mott and Anna Dickinson, and Congressman William D. Kelley all made broad appeals to the black men of the Keystone State to enlist. On July 6, 1863, Frederick Douglass proclaimed: “Young men of Philadelphia, you are without excuse. The hour has arrived, and your place is in the Union Army. Remember that the musket—the United States

We thank the editor and reviewers for their helpful comments; Sean A. Scott of Christopher Newport University for his assistance in deciphering a few very difficult words; and Valentine descendant Linda Rodolico for filling in a few gaps in the family history.

¹ Regimental Descriptive Book, Third USCT, Company B, vol. 1 of 7, RG 94 (Records of the Adjutant General’s Office), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (hereafter NARA); Deposition A (Annie E. Valentine), Sept. 24, 1896, and Deposition E (Elizabeth Timm), Sept. 26, 1896, both in Tillman Valentine’s pension file, NARA (unless otherwise noted, all affidavits, depositions, postwar correspondence, and other pension records cited below come from Valentine’s pension file); James Elton Johnson, “A History of Camp William Penn and Its Black Troops in the Civil War, 1863–1865” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999), 78.

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Cabinet card of Tillman Valentine in Grand Army of the Republic dress. Image courtesy of eBay.

musket with its bayonet of steel—is better than all mere parchment guarantees of liberty.”²

To accommodate the influx of new recruits, the federal government established Camp William Penn, the first and largest federal training ground for black soldiers in the North, about ten miles north of downtown Philadelphia. In naming the camp after the founder of Pennsylvania, Maj. George L. Stearns quipped, “The Quakers wince, but I tell them it is established on peace principles; that is, to conquer a lasting peace.”³

Eleven regiments of United States Colored Troops (USCT) trained at Camp William Penn between 1863 and 1865. Not all Philadelphians

² David I. Harrower and Thomas J. Wiecek, eds., *A Spectacle for Men and Angels: A Documentary Narrative of Camp William Penn and the Raising of Colored Regiments in Pennsylvania* (West Conshohocken, PA, 2013), 152. For further information on the black recruitment drives in Philadelphia, see J. Matthew Gallman, “In Your Hands That Musket Means Liberty: African American Soldiers and the Battle of Olustee,” in Gallman, *Northerners at War: Reflections on the Civil War Home Front* (Kent, OH, 2010), 237–47; and Timothy J. Orr, “Cities at War: Union Army Mobilization in the Urban Northeast, 1861–1865” (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2010), 416–19, 462–67, 557–58.

³ George L. Stearns to Mary Elizabeth Preston Stearns, July 12, 1863, quoted in Harrower and Wiecek, *Spectacle for Men and Angels*, 154.

were pleased with the project. Two days after Douglass's rousing speech in July 1863, Sidney George Fisher recorded in his diary, "The orators claim equality for the Negro race, the right of suffrage, &c. All this is as absurd as it is dangerous."⁴

The Third USCT was the first regiment to train at Camp William Penn. Most of the recruits were free blacks and former slaves from Pennsylvania and other nearby states. Local newspapers tracked their progress, but the regiment made national news when it was not permitted to parade through the streets of Philadelphia on its way to the front, as all white regiments had done. In Boston, William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* reprinted an article from the leading black newspaper in Philadelphia, the *Christian Recorder*. "This has been a source of grievous disappointment to a great many, both colored and white," wrote the editors. "There has been no reason given as yet for this outrage upon the feelings of our people, many of whom would thus have seen their relatives and friends probably for the last time in this world. Truly there is fearful responsibility resting somewhere." Of course, all knew the reason that the soldiers had not been permitted to parade through the city. Col. Louis Wagner, the commander of the camp, vowed that such a slight would not happen again to other regiments that trained under his supervision.⁵

In late August 1863, the Third reached Morris Island, South Carolina, where it performed manual labor during the siege against Fort Wagner. During this siege, the regiment lost six men who were killed and another twelve who were wounded. Among these casualties was Tillman Valentine, who suffered an injury to his left leg, which was crushed when, in Valentine's words, "a solled [solid] shot from fort matery [Moultrie] struck and dismounted" a cannon he was mounting. He later recalled, "Every thing were sumwhat confused and not thinking I caught holde of a Lever that were prop[p]ing another Big Gun and jerked it away the Gun turned over on my Left Leg Crushing it in to the soft sand which prevented it from being broken but it was badly crushed [and] I were taken to my tent and excused from duty."⁶

⁴ Sidney George Fisher, diary entry for July 8, 1863, in *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Civil War Diary of Sidney George Fisher*, ed. Jonathan W. White (New York, 2007), 198.

⁵ Harrower and Wieckowski, *Spectacle for Men and Angels*, 196–98; John F. Fannin, "The Jacksonville Mutiny of 1865," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 88 (2010): 370; *Christian Recorder*, Aug. 8, 1863; *Liberator*, Aug. 28, 1863.

⁶ Declaration for an Original Invalid Pension, Feb. 23, 1889; Tillman Valentine to James Tanner, May 23, 1889. The records provided by the War Department to the pension office stated that the "records of this office furnish no evidence of disability." See statement of June 22, 1889.

The men of the Third dug trenches closer and closer to the enemy works—all while under fire—until the Confederates finally abandoned Forts Wagner and Gregg on September 6. Cpl. Henry Harmon of Company B described the harrowing work his regiment had accomplished in a letter to the *Christian Recorder*. The Third, along with two other black regiments, had “with spades and shovels dug up to the very parapet of the rebel fort under a heavy fire of grape and canister shell.” For Harmon, this grueling manual labor was as important and as honorable as actual fighting in combat. “In those trenches our men distinguished themselves for bravery and coolness, which required more nerve than the exciting bayonet charge,” he wrote. “And, sir,” he continued, “I am proud to say that I am a member of the 3d United States Colored Troops, and I hope that I am not considered boasting when I say so.” Harmon reminded his readers that many black soldiers had suffered and died in the effort: “When you hear of a white family that has lost father, husband, or brother, you can say of the colored man, we too have borne our share of the burden. We too have suffered and died in defense of that starry banner which floats only over free men.”⁷

Following the capture of Fort Wagner, the men of the Third spent less time “as diggers and sappers and miners,” to quote Corporal Harmon, and more time drilling and honing their martial skills. In February 1864, the regiment was sent further south to Florida, where it garrisoned forts near Jacksonville, Fernandina, and along the St. Johns River. The men participated in expeditions throughout the area in search of contrabands to set free and rebel property to destroy. On one such occasion in March 1865, a group of soldiers from the Third, seven black civilians, and one white member of the 107th Ohio Infantry conducted an expedition up the St. Johns River, “rowing by night, and hiding in the swamps by day.” Under the command of Sgt. Maj. Henry James of the Third, this small force “rescued 91 negroes from slavery, captured 4 white prisoners, 2 wagons, and 24 horses and mules; destroyed a sugar mill and a distillery, which were used by the rebel Government, together with their stocks of sugar and liquor, and burned the bridge over the Oclawaha River.”⁸

⁷ Edwin S. Redkey, ed., *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (New York, 1992), 34–36; Fannin, “Jacksonville Mutiny,” 372.

⁸ Redkey, *Grand Army of Black Men*, 36–37; Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861–5*, vol. 5 (Harrisburg, 1871), 925–26; William A. Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862–1867* (Washington, DC, 2011), 62–64, 83–85, 87; *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the War of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 47, part 3 (Washington, DC, 1895), 190.

While returning to Jacksonville, the expeditionary force was attacked by a band of Confederate cavalry that numbered more than fifty. After “a brisk fight” they drove off the attacking rebels, suffering six casualties: two dead and four wounded. The colonel of the Third, Benjamin C. Tilghman, praised the actions of his men: “I think that this expedition, planned and executed by colored Soldiers and civilians, reflects great credit upon the parties engaged in it,” he wrote, “and I respectfully suggest that some public recognition of it, would have a good effect upon the troops.” Maj. Gen. Quincy A. Gillmore agreed, declaring, “This expedition, planned and executed by colored men under the command of a colored non-commissioned officer, reflects great credit upon the brave participants and their leader. The major general commanding thanks these courageous soldiers and scouts, and holds up their conduct to their comrades in arms as an example worthy of emulation.” One African American man was similarly proud of his regiment’s achievements, claiming that the raid was “proof” that “a colored man with proper training can command among his fellows and succeed where others have failed.”⁹

Following the close of the war, the Third remained on duty in Florida throughout the summer and fall of 1865, in large measure to protect the freedmen and freedwomen who were congregating in Jacksonville. Occupation duty was difficult for the black troops for several reasons. First, resentful former Confederates abhorred the presence of black soldiers. On one occasion, a white Floridian at a train station near Olustee remarked that “all the niggers should be in [hell].” Twenty men from the regiment immediately pointed their guns at the offending civilian and one fired, “grazing the speaker’s cheek.”¹⁰ Second, the men of the Third had to contend with a strict new commanding officer and a set of commissioned officers who were inclined to use harsh corporal punishments for minor offenses. Finally, the enlisted men had to deal with the knowledge that many of their white officers were carousing with local black women. “We have a set of officers here,” reported one black soldier to the *Christian Recorder*, “who apparently think that their commissions are licenses to debauch and mingle with deluded freedwomen, under cover of darkness.”

⁹ Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 5:926; Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword*, 87; Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), 64.

¹⁰ Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York, 1990), 217; *Christian Recorder*, July 8, 1865; Fannin, “Jacksonville Mutiny,” 380–81.

Such conduct, this soldier concluded, “is loathsome in the extreme.” The relationship between the enlisted men and officers of the Third became increasingly antagonistic. To help pass the time and deal with their frustrations, many of the black soldiers turned to alcohol. The situation quickly became a powder keg.¹¹

On October 29, 1865, one of the most violent mutinies of the Civil War era erupted at Jacksonville. The spark was the harsh punishment of a black soldier who had stolen molasses from the unit kitchen. The culprit was stripped down to his waist and tied by the thumbs so that he could barely stand on his toes. Seeing this man being treated like a slave caused a furor among the men of the Third. A crowd of angry soldiers gathered, vowing to free the prisoner. One man shouted, “I never saw anything of this sort in Philadelphia. . . . Let’s take him down. We are not going to have any more tying men up by the thumbs.” Lt. Col. John L. Brower, the strict new regimental commander, fired three shots into the crowd, wounding an enlisted man. At that point a firefought broke out between the black men and their white officers.

After the dust had settled, fifteen men were arrested for mutiny; court-martial proceedings began two days later. Fourteen men went to trial, and within two weeks, thirteen had been convicted. Six of the men were executed, and several others received long sentences of imprisonment at hard labor (although all were released by January 1867).¹² This tragic incident took place two days before the regiment was scheduled to muster out.

After mustering out, the Third and several other black regiments paraded through the streets of Harrisburg on November 14, 1865, in an event hosted by the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League. One banner at the parade declared, “He Who Defends Freedom Is Worthy of All Its Franchises.”¹³ Several members of the Third, however, opted to remain in Florida. Former Virginia slave Josiah T. Walls, who mustered out as a sergeant, became a prominent figure in Florida politics, serving as a delegate to the state constitutional convention of 1868, a member of the state senate, and a member of Congress from 1871 to 1876.¹⁴ Tillman

¹¹ Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 92; Fannin, “Jacksonville Mutiny,” 376–77, 383–85.

¹² Fannin, “Jacksonville Mutiny,” 380–96; B. Kevin Bennett, “The Jacksonville Mutiny,” *Civil War History* 38 (1992): 39–50; Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 99–101.

¹³ Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 5:926; Samito, *Becoming American under Fire*, 141.

¹⁴ Daniel L. Schafer, *Thunder on the River: The Civil War in Northeast Florida* (Gainesville, FL, 2010), 275–78; Peter D. Klingman, *Josiah Walls: Florida’s Black Congressman of Reconstruction* (Gainesville, FL, 1976).

Valentine also chose to stay in Florida. In the postwar years, he served as a county register, found work as a carpenter and contractor in Jacksonville, and became involved in veterans and fraternal organizations, such as the Grand Army of the Republic and the Freemasons.¹⁵ Valentine remarried three times in Florida without ever divorcing his first wife, Annie, who remained back in Pennsylvania.

On November 30, 1865, Valentine married Mary Ann Francis.¹⁶ It is unknown when or how this marriage terminated; however, court records indicate that Mary Ann was still living in Florida in the 1870s. On October 6, 1870, Valentine married Mary Susan Alford, who was about eighteen years old at the time. The couple had four children together before Mary died on November 24, 1880. About a year later, on October 27, 1881, Valentine took a fourth wife, Edith Keys (also referred to as Edith H. James in the pension records). No children resulted from this union. Tillman and Annie saw one another several times in Pennsylvania in the 1870s and 1880s, but by 1884, Annie said, the two “treated one another as strange[r]s.” Tillman died of pneumonia on March 12, 1895. Edith passed away a few months later, on June 13.¹⁷

Tillman’s death was announced in the West Chester newspapers, and his first wife, Annie, applied for his widow’s pension. By 1895, Annie had fallen on hard times. She had been earning only \$2.50 per week as a domestic servant, but, being “in extremely poor health” (one friend described her as “all crippled up with rheumatism”), she had become “unable to work.” As a result, she was “actually suffering for the necessaries of life.”¹⁸

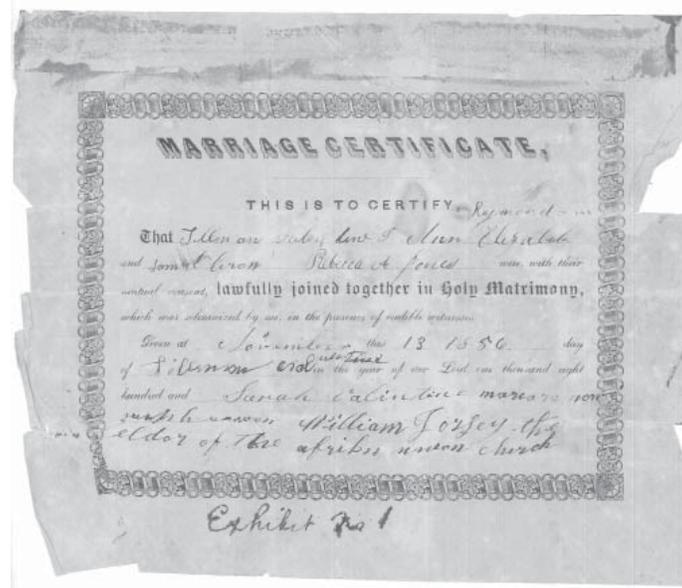
Edith, too, claimed a widow’s pension, but her request was denied on September 9, 1896, more than a year after her death. Edith’s death was a factor in the pension office’s decision to deny, but so too was its determi-

¹⁵ Tillman Valentine to James Tanner, May 23, 1889. On integration in the G.A.R., see Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011).

¹⁶ A scan of the original county record book containing a record of their marriage is available at the Alachua County Clerk of Court’s Marriage Records portal, <http://www.alachuaclerk.org/archive/Ancient/FrontPage.cfm?BID=238&PID=071&SN=&GN=> (accessed Mar. 18, 2015).

¹⁷ Edith H. (James) Valentine, Declaration for Widow’s Pension, Apr. 3, 1895; Deposition A (Annie E. Valentine), Sept. 24, 1896; Deposition B (Arthur W. Smith), Nov. 9, 1896. Mary was twenty-eight years old in the 1880 census.

¹⁸ *West Chester Daily Local News*, Mar. 13, 1895 (we thank Diane Rofini of the Chester County Historical Society for providing us with a copy of this article); General Affidavits of Annie E. Valentine, Aug. 12, 1895, and July 30, 1896; Deposition B (George R. Scott), Sept. 24, 1896. Annie died at the age of seventy on Dec. 3, 1912. A scan of her death certificate is available on Ancestry.com.



Marriage certificate of Tillman Valentine and Ann Elizabeth Raymond, Nov. 13, 1856. Valentine Tillman pension file, NARA.

nation that she was not Valentine's legal widow. In conducting its investigation, the pension office concluded that if Edith had been "married to the soldier the marriage was null and void, the soldier having a wife Annie E. living at the date of alleged marriage."¹⁹

The pension office instituted a special investigation into Annie's claim for Tillman's pension benefits. In support of her claim, Annie produced a marriage certificate from 1856 and affidavits from friends who testified that she and Tillman had "loved & cohabited as husband & wife" before he left for Camp William Penn in 1863. Moreover, the affidavits claimed that Tillman and Annie had never been divorced. As further evidence, Annie submitted three letters that Tillman had sent her during the war in which he addressed her as his wife and discussed his intentions to come home.

The letters that follow are the three letters that Annie submitted to the pension office in support of her claim. They remain in Tillman's pension file at the National Archives, along with Valentine and Annie's marriage

¹⁹Widow's pension claim, Sept. 9, 1896.

certificate and other supporting documentation. Private correspondence from an African American soldier to his wife is extraordinarily rare, in large measure because literacy rates among black soldiers were low. One white officer at Camp William Penn noted in 1864 that “very few” of the black recruits “can read or write hardly enough to” allow promotion to corporal or sergeant.²⁰ Valentine was one of those few who was literate enough to be promoted. A few days after he left his family, Valentine was appointed sergeant in Company B of the Third USCT, on July 4, 1863.²¹ His letters survive only because of the battle that arose between his two competing widows in 1895.

Valentine’s letters differ from those of other black soldiers that are often cited by historians. A number of black soldiers corresponded with hometown newspapers during the Civil War. These published letters typically offered polished accounts of troops’ movements and well-conceived statements of black soldiers’ sentiments on important political or social issues. Their content has been invaluable to historians, yet they must be read with the understanding that they were written for public consumption.²² Valentine’s letters, by contrast, offer an intimate, uncensored, often difficult to follow, and far less linear portrait of a black soldier’s wartime experiences. Valentine occasionally commented on the war, but more frequently he wrote about family dynamics and personal concerns.

Such private correspondence offers new insights into the experiences of black soldiers and their families during the Civil War.²³ For example, Valentine’s letters reveal a complex understanding of what “manhood” meant to black soldiers. Scholars who explore this topic often emphasize

²⁰ Arthur P. Morey to Cousin, Feb. 4, 1864, in *A War of the People: Vermont Civil War Letters*, ed. Jeffrey D. Marshall (Hanover, NH, 1999), 206. On literacy rates among black soldiers, see Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 72, 101, 178, 227–28; and Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*, ser. 2, *The Black Military Experience* (New York, 1982), 613.

²¹ On the role of black noncommissioned officers, see Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom’s Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (New York, 1998), 41–42.

²² For several examples, see Redkey, *Grand Army of Black Men*; and Eric L. Smith, ed., “The Civil War Letters of Quartermaster Sergeant John C. Brock, 43rd Regiment, United States Colored Troops,” in *Making and Remaking Pennsylvania’s Civil War*, ed. William A. Blair and William Pencak (University Park, PA, 2001), 141–63.

²³ Other examples of personal letters between spouses can be found in the various volumes of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland, as well as in Budge Weidman, “‘Dear Husband, Please Come Home’: Civil War Letters to Black Soldiers,” *Prologue* 35, no. 4 (2003): 60–67. Some of the correspondence in these collections might give a sense of what Annie’s letters to Tillman might have been like.

manhood's political and social meanings—that black men saw themselves as fighting for equality and the rights of citizenship, and that they desired to prove their masculinity. In his letters to the *New Bedford Mercury*, for example, James Henry Gooding of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry connected black soldiers' manhood to the issue of equal pay (black soldiers were initially paid three dollars less than white soldiers).²⁴ For Valentine, however, manhood entailed not only courage on the battlefield but also giving up bad habits, loving his wife, educating his family, and being financially responsible.

In transcribing Valentine's letters we have kept the text as close to the originals as possible. Valentine's spelling was generally phonetic but often inconsistent. We have retained his idiosyncrasies but on a few occasions have silently corrected his spelling for the sake of clarity. These corrections almost invariably involve his use of the letters "m," "n," and "r." In cursive, Valentine occasionally wrote an "r" when he clearly intended an "n," and an "n" when he clearly intended an "m." A few times he wrote a "d" when he intended a "g," or a "g" when he intended a "j" or a "y," all of which we also silently corrected. In other instances we have inserted words in brackets to ensure that readers understand his meaning. Words that could not be deciphered are either noted as illegible or followed by a bracketed question mark or a bracketed guess with a question mark.

Valentine's punctuation was virtually nonexistent. In the place of missing periods, we have inserted five blank spaces to denote where we believe there should be a break between sentences; three blank spaces denote where a comma should have been placed. Finally, a corner of the first and second pages of the second letter has been ripped off. We have inserted missing letters and words in brackets and italics when we were certain of the missing word or letters; in other cases, we have signified where words are missing with bracketed annotations.

²⁴Virginia M. Adams, ed., *On the Altar of Freedom: A Black Soldier's Civil War Letters from the Front* (Amherst, MA, 1991), 48–49, 82–83.

Letters from Tillman Valentine to Annie Elizabeth Valentine

Morises island south Carolina

3 us col ard trupes Co B

December the 26 1863

my dear wife

i am very glad and thankful to god that i enjoy this opertunity of wrighting to you to let you know that i am very well and and i hope these few lians [lines] may find you the same i hope clara is better by this time you must not let her go out of dorse untill she is purfectly well i received your letter and it give me joy to think you are in good sparets [spirits] and more over that you have plenty to eate for sum times when i am away out on picket the furthest post out and the rebels is not far frum me i look up at the stars and ask god to bless you and take care of you i do not walk a poste but i am sirgent of the gard and have to go at the hed of my men or be called a coward so i will not give them a chance to call me that for in the grates [greatest] of danger i walk bold ly [boldly] at the hed of my men knowing that god is able and willen to to ancer [answer] my prayers which is for him to spear [spare] me to see my famly agane so my dear wife you must keepe in good sparets for the war will be over soon i think for the rebes is disurting every day and a coming over to our people yester day christmus morning there was a raped [rapid] firing aboute 10 miles from us and it is reported that the rebels was after four hundred prisners that got away frum them that morning and come to us but we cante tell how true it is yet but we hope it is so i want to see you and the little ones so bad that i donte know to wate litle [illegible word] o may must kiss oh ho kiss & kiss little girl²⁵ well you must give my love to father and mother and mary ann and joseph and tell them that nelson²⁶ is well and is big as

²⁵ Perhaps this is a song lyric. The illegible word in this sentence looks like it might be "peace." The "o" after the illegible word might be an "a."

²⁶ Nelson Hercules enlisted in Company B on June 30, 1863, and mustered out with the company on Oct. 31, 1865. The 1850 census shows Nelson living with his parents, Joseph and Mary Ann Hercules, in Pennsbury Township in Chester County; the 1860 census shows him living with a different family and working as a farm laborer in Pocopson Township, Chester County. In some records his name is spelled "Herless" or "Hurcules." Unless otherwise noted, all enlistment information in the notes comes from Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, vol. 5.

vince anderson²⁷ and he wears a greate tall hat that sum of the soldiers give him and is hard and hearty as a stone and a good soldier he never was in the gard house but once and that was for going to fight with a felow that throwed a bay net [bayonet] at him he run and nelce [nelson] after him and i lafed [laughed] at nelce for his eyes was so big the felow run in to the captins tent and nelce in after him the lieutenant cot [caught] them and put them in the garde house for a little time and took nelson out and kept the other one in a good while john barnes²⁸ is funey as ever his legs is [illegible word] as thick as ides [?] ²⁹ and he wears 3 shirts and 2 coats with out his overcote well lizy³⁰ would you like to see me i am as purty [pretty] as ever and way [weigh] just as much as i ever did i would like to see you and kiss you tell saley ritchson that hir [her] brother³¹ is here and well and i will tell him to wright to hir we canot tell how soon we will get payed off but we think it will come on next month our ful pay and then i will sende you sum money are you a going to sende me that potry [poetry] soon i want to see it i would like to see elijah does he talk about me and laff as much as ever well the lord knowes what is best but i think i will get safely back they say ann mareah Elbert³² has a little one and tanson johnson³³ to is it so dear wife i must close i think mebey [maybe] i will [get] to [come] home on furlow sum time next sumer if i live the wether is very colde here know [now] we had all Christmust for a holaw day [holiday] we played ball and run races and whealed wheal barows blinde folded and had a heepe of fun to it is a quear [queer] place here the water is all a round us and we can see the

²⁷ Probably Vincent Anderson, listed in the 1870 census as a sixty-five-year-old mulatto in West Chester, Pennsylvania, who had been born in Virginia and worked at a quarry.

²⁸ John Barnes of Company B mustered in on June 30, 1863, and was absent as a result of illness when the regiment mustered out. According to papers in Barnes's pension record, he had married Tillman's sister, Esther, in 1852.

²⁹ The word we have rendered here as "ides" looks similar to the word we interpreted as "ide" in the following letter. It may be that this word is the possessive form of the same name that appears in that later letter.

³⁰ Annie's middle name was Elizabeth.

³¹ Probably the sister of John Richson (sometimes Richardson), who enlisted as a private in Company B on June 30, 1863, and mustered out on Oct. 31, 1865.

³² This is possibly Anna M. Elbert, who, according to the 1860 census, was fifteen years old and lived in Kennett Township, Chester County. According to the 1870 census mortality schedule, she died of inflammation of the bowels in July 1869 at the age of twenty-four.

³³ The 1870 census lists a Tamsan Johnson, wife of Louis Johnson, living in Philadelphia with four children, including a seven-year-old boy named Benjamin—probably the child alluded to here. An 1875 Philadelphia city directory spells her name Tanson. Valentine appears to have originally written "tamson" but then crossed out part of the "m" to make it an "n." Louis and Tamsan Johnson were white.

rebs at work i think misses taylor is very clever to you and she is a good friend tell john that he shant loose nothing by what he does for you father does not seam to be much of a friend to you does he have you got that watch or the meet tell joseph that i think a little harde of him not wrighting to me for he can wright and i think he might have you herde any thing of milt litley [lately?] how is moth [mother?] give my love to all the people and all of it but a thimble full for yourself kiss the children for me no more god bless you all your loving husband

Sirgen Tillman Valentine

keep your sparets up i think we will be hapy sum day

learn the children to read³⁴

§

Jackson ville Florida

April the 25/64

[*my*] ever-dear wife

[*with*] the gratest of plesure and loving [*gra*]titude i received your very welcom letter [*of*] the 10th and was very glad to here that [*yø*]u were moaved [moved] and getting along so well [*i*] received your presant the little brest pin [*a*]nd also elijas the buten [button] you donte know how i prise them when i go in battle they shall go with me and if you here of me being ded you may know that they are buried with me with out sum one strips me and takes them off of me for i love any little thing from home that peace of coluco [calico] ida sent me i lost it sum wheres and the childrens hair to i lost in my pocket book with one dolar but that is not much money i red the letter mary ann sent to nelson and i did not like it much because it had so much black garde in it he got henry jones³⁵

³⁴These two lines were written perpendicularly at the top of the first page of the letter but were clearly a postscript.

³⁵Probably Henry James, who enlisted as a private on June 30, 1863, and was promoted to sergeant major on July 12, 1863. James mustered out with the regiment on Oct. 31, 1865.

to reade it first and he had no buisness to just tell mary elbert³⁶ for me she neade not be so po ticlar [particular] about the letter stamperes for when i wright again the letter will be stamped they did sende me sum stamperes and i for got to put one on the letter however i will not trouble them any more just tell them to excuse me for not wrighting put ing stamperes on the ones i did sende and if they [illegible word]³⁷ i can sende the stamperes to the[m] agane dear wife you aske a very hearde [hard] thing when you aske for us to come home on forlow for we can not come it is in posable [impossible] your mother shall have her 4 dolars of corse tell her that i simpathi[z]e very much with her ~~that~~ well dear wife i must thin[k] of sum thing elce this paying of colard trupes is no³⁸ [missing word] they have concluded to give us our full pay [missing word] first of january but our friends wantes us to [missing words] our enlistment so they are trying to fix it to satesfaction[n] [missing word] the pay master is here at this time and is a going [missing word] i have not sined the pay role yet but i will sine it in [missing word] of an hour for i feal as you want money and cante do with [missing word] it is only 7 dolars per month and that we donte get clear [missing word] to this time but be in good hearte we will get it sune i will sende you 30 \$ in the next mail we will get payed on tomorrow i expect tell me if that will get you a new black dress and a bonet and pay 4 dolars rent i of times study about you and the children when i go to eate my ruff alonces [allowences] whether you have any thing or no or whether the little ones is looking up in your face asking for bred and you got none to give them elija uste to tell me sum times when i come home that you had nothing to eate you donte know how it hurt me but i trust your heardest [hardest] times is over you must tende the poste of ace [office] untill you get the money in 4 months we will get payed up all i expect i will be very car ful [careful] of my money and not spende one cent unnesurly [unnecessarily] so for i wante if i ever live to get home to live like a man and give over all low and mean habets this war has caused me to think in terly [entirely] diferent from what i did i feal my self a man and is if i ought to be a man and as if i ought to act as a man and the moste of all i wante you to teach the children good maners

³⁶ According to the 1860 census, Mary Elbert, thirty-six years old, lived in Kennett Township, Chester County.

³⁷ Possibly some form of "require" or "request."

³⁸ The end of this word is missing. It is probably either "not" or "now."

and try to im prove yourself and elevate your minde i know that [y]ou are a good wife for you have proved it and you have prayed for me to become diferent no one ever tolde me you had but i know you have for i feal as if you have so use all exsurtion [exertion] to [too] to teach the children to reade and wright and take the gratest pains with them you know how donte forget this but think of it always my dear wife you must tr[y] to make the best of your money you know how be very saving and if i live to get home we will live diferent for i am detir mand [determined] to elevate my minde you may pay your mother for the watch if you think you can speare [spare] it and if not you may tell her i will sende it to you for her sune for i will make it of of them sum how tell me if you get your mony that is your monthly pay yet and if you get any thing more for the babey tell me how joseph has that watch if he give you half of the pay [?]³⁹ or no or if he only keepest it for the 52 cts [cents] that is on it i want it for i want you to have one when i come home to father thought hearde [hard] of cutting you [your?] wood did he well if you have any thing to pay him let him have it for he is quear any how samuel⁴⁰ has gone from here their reige ment [regiment] left the state and i donte know where it went yet sum sayes they went to morises island agane tell ide [?]⁴¹ to be a good boy tell chaly [?] to be a good girl tell murey [?] to be good to you did not say any thing about little sam in your letter so i cant tell where he is give my love to joseph and mary ann and tell them that i will see to sending them nelsons money he sayed that he would sende them 25 or 30 dolars so you must tende the mail post tell them that nelson is living with me in my tente at this time and we have got the best tent in the company so my dear i must close take care of yourself and the children donte you think i am empruving in wrighting i have a copy that i wright in i will wright one lian good as i can

³⁹This word is unclear; it might be “pay,” “pig,” “peg,” or “fig” (short for figure?).

⁴⁰Tillman’s younger brother, Samuel, enlisted as a private in Company B of the famous Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry on Mar. 3, 1863. He was promoted to corporal a week after enlisting and to sergeant on Dec. 6, 1863. Muster-out roll for the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, Company B, Feb. 28, 1865, NARA microfilm M1659 (Records of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Infantry Regiment [Colored], 1863–1865), available through Fold3.com. For a letter by Samuel, see Redkey, *Grand Army of Black Men*, 66–67.

⁴¹We do not think this word refers to his daughter, Ida, since he wants this person “to be a good boy.” See also note 29 above.

is this lian good or is it not this is not as well as i wright sumtimes but i
 think i have em proved sam heardy⁴² is very well jim is not very well
 they are calling fall in so i must go

i am back and have bin payed of [off] so i will sende it in this letter that
 will save me wrighting so much take care of it donte luse it well i must
 close by saying no more at presant but still remain your true husband

Sirg Tillman Valentine

god bless you good by

wright sune and tell me if this money came safe

Your aged father is gont to rest
 we his face weal no mor see
 but when we meete in hevens streetes
 O we shall hapy be

his body is low beneath the sod
 his solde [soul] is floen [floating] on hye
 disturbe him not but but let him rest
 let every tear be drye

by thy husband Sirg T Valentine

⁴² Samuel Hardy of Company H enlisted on July 18, 1863, and mustered out with the regiment on Oct. 31, 1865.

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Jackson ville Florida

Co B 3USCT

June the 14/64

Dear wife

with greate plesure i take this oper tunity of wrighting you a few lians to let you know that i am very well at this time i re ceived yor letter on the 13 and was very glad to here from you all and i am so glad to here all ways that the little ones are all well i am very lone sum at this time for i am not with the company know [now] i am at the ingearnear of ace [engineer office]⁴³ i have got 75 [?]⁴⁴ men under me that is i am acting as sirgent of the Line near cove [?]⁴⁵ away from my company in tarly [entirely] but let me be where i am thy god that i as able to save is able to save me give my love to mary ann and joseph tell them nelson is better but he has had a bad spell well dear anne you neade not think that i have any galls [girls] here for i have not any⁴⁶ all the boys has girsl [girls] but me amoste [almost] but i think to much of my little Children for that you asked me for sum more money of corse i will sende it to you as sune as i get pay ed a gane [paid again] they say we are a going to get our wright pay but i cante tell i do not spende it for any foolishness the calvery is wriding fast⁴⁷ this evening they say the rebels is coming with 1000 men to atact us dear wife donte forget to pray for me for nothing but the mursies of god can save me there is hundreds and thosands of men getting killed every day is dave moldon⁴⁸ in the armey or no they say he is gal

⁴³ According to his compiled military service record, Valentine went on detached service with the engineer corps on June 11, 1864.

⁴⁴ Possibly "15."

⁴⁵ This word may refer to a cove near Jacksonville, or it might be "core" for "corps."

⁴⁶ One of Valentine's comrades, William Walker of Company D, testified later during the pension dispute that Valentine "never appeared to have any woman while in [the] service. . . . He never spoke of leaving Annie, nor of their having any quarrel." See Deposition C (William Walker), Sept. 26, 1896.

⁴⁷ Possibly "past."

⁴⁸ According to the 1860 census, David Mouldin, thirty-five years old, was a farm laborer in Westtown, Chester County. He was a native of Pennsylvania.

[you?] has not ritten to me since i rote to you last did you get my ring i sente to you you must excuse all mistakes and bad wrighting i remember all them things you tolde me i wante to see you all bad but there is not worth while talking aboute it fore 2 years more i will be at home kiss all the children for me and sende me their likeness as sune as you can for i wante to see them very bad my love to pap and mama to my sisters and all give my love to all people that aske for me i know not i aske not the gilte of that hearte i only know that i love the [thee] wherever thou art⁴⁹ kiss little penney [?] for me well i must close no more at this time your afectant [affectionate] husband

Sirg Tillman Valentine

Christopher Newport University

JONATHAN W. WHITE, KATIE
FISHER, AND ELIZABETH WALL

⁴⁹ Here Valentine is quoting the poem "Come, Rest in This Bosom" by Thomas Moore.