"if I was there I could tell you A good bit more": The Civil War Letters of Private Jackson Davis

Edited by Steven D. Zink

On April 14, 1861, Confederate arms forced the surrender of Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and signaled the opening of the Civil War. News of the surrender brought an immediate transformation in northern opinion. Months of passivity gave way to a profound commitment to preserve the Union. Almost immediately companies of troops formed in cities and hamlets in the North. Washington County, nestled in the rolling hills of south-central Indiana, was no exception. The county responded with a company of soldiers within a week. Before the initial enthusiasm flagged and the proclaimed brevity of the conflict was belied by escalation of the term of enlistment from three months to three years, nearly three more complete companies volunteered for service.

After the initial flurry of excitement, volunteering lagged. Not until mid-1862 did substantial numbers of enlistments resume. Both the anticipated use of the draft and the promise of a handsome bounty to each volunteer may have spurred this new wave of enlistment in southern Indiana, but the proximity of the war may also have been a factor. By late July, 1862, Confederate General Kirby Smith was advancing rapidly through central Kentucky. The farther north Smith drew, the more anxious the residents of Washington County became. In early August an estimated five thousand people attended a war rally at the county seat, Salem. Those in attendance listened to prominent citizens give stirring speeches on behalf of the Union and heard local military officers plead for volunteers. Shortly thereafter four companies of men formed in various places across the county. The first group to report to the organization point—Camp Noble in New Albany, Floyd County—became B Company of the 66th Regiment of Indiana Infantry volunteers. Jackson Davis, the author of the letters that follow, was a member of that company.2

Davis and B Company saw action almost immediately upon enlisting. Arriving at Camp Noble—across the Ohio River from Louisville, Kentucky—the 66th Regiment was mustered into federal service on August 19, 1862. Later that same day the men broke camp for Lexington, Kentucky, to head off the northern advance of General Smith. Most of the troops had been in camp less than ten days, and all were without adequate military training or sufficient equipment. On August 30 the 66th, along with other regiments from Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky, was soundly defeated at the Battle of Richmond, twenty-five miles south of Lexington. The 66th Regiment suffered heavy losses. One hundred seventy men were killed or wounded, and most members of the ill-prepared regiment were captured.3 Although Davis escaped without wounds, he, according to Captain Jasper Rodman, suffered from "the fatigue, and worry incident to the forced march prior to the battle and to the fatigue of the battle.... He took at that time a severe cold and hoarseness from which he never recovered so long as I knew him." It was on "account of his feeble health" that Rodman assigned Davis to the ambulance corps, where he served throughout the remainder of the war.4

Born in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, on March 10, 1829, Davis was thirty-three years old at the time he enlisted. He was a slender five feet, nine inches tall, was fair com-

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2 Ibid., 520, 807.  

lected, and had gray eyes and brown hair. Little is known about Davis's early years, but he must have acquired some rudimentary schooling before he began working for Beezey Baynes, a prosperous landowner in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Even less is known about the early life of Elizabeth Gaffey Davis, the recipient of the Davis letters. She was two years Davis's elder and had arrived in the United States in 1847 after fleeing from famine-stricken Ireland. Elizabeth settled in Pennsylvania and, like Jackson Davis, worked for Baynes, where the two probably first met. It is unclear whether or not she was literate. If she was, she was barely so, and it is possible that a neighbor wrote the letters to her husband for her during the war.

After 1850 the outlines of both Jackson's and Elizabeth's lives become clearer. On February 27, 1851, Jackson Davis and Elizabeth Gaffey were married at St. Patrick's Church in Norristown, Pennsylvania. A daughter, Mary, was born in December, 1851, and a son, John, in 1854. During these years the Davises continued to work for and remain closely associated with Baynes. The ties between the two families were so strong that when Baynes sold his Pennsylvania properties in 1855 and moved west to Washington County, Indiana, Jackson, Elizabeth Gaffey Davis

6 History of Lawrence, Orange, and Washington Counties, 854; U.S. Seventh Census, 1850, population schedules for Gwynedd Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, roll 806, p. 75.
7 This information was supplied by Mrs. Mabel Lloyd, Washington County, Indiana. See also U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, population schedules of Washington Township, Washington County, Indiana, National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, roll 306, p. 235.
8 U.S., Seventh Census, population schedules for Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, p. 75.
9 The Pennsylvania census of 1850 and "Widow's Application for a Pension" indicate that Elizabeth Gaffey Davis was illiterate. The Indiana census of 1860, however, recorded that she possessed some degree of literacy. In addition, internal evidence in the Jackson Davis letters does not suggest that someone else wrote Elizabeth's letters to her husband for her. "Declaration for Widow's Army Pension," U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, population schedules for Washington County, Indiana, p. 235; U.S., Seventh Census, population schedules for Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, p. 75.
10 Notarized letter of Assistant Pastor James C. Monahan, St. Patrick's Church, Norristown, Pennsylvania, April 24, 1883, in reference to "Widow's Application for a Pension."
11 Birth dates were taken from gravemakers located in Highland Friends Cemetery, Washington County, Indiana, and were confirmed by the "Declaration for Widow's Army Pension."
Elizabeth, and their two children accompanied him.\textsuperscript{13} Within a year of the move west, Davis purchased a small section of land from his former employer, and he and his young family began farming for themselves. Soon the Davis family grew to six in number with the birth of another son, William, in 1856 and a second daughter, Caroline, in 1860.\textsuperscript{13}

Situated on his own farm, surrounded by family and friends, Davis could have scarcely imagined before April, 1861, that he would be unable to live out the rest of his life in relative tranquility. In little more than a year, however, Davis’s future was full of uncertainty. By late 1862 he was instructing his wife on how to run the farm, lecturing the children on their behavior, and inquiring about neighbors and friends from a distance of several hundred miles. As was probably true of many soldiers, Davis was not particularly concerned with the tactics of war. Troop movements interested him only insofar as they affected him personally, and he did not ponder, in his letters at least, why he was fighting or what victory or defeat might bring. From the moment he left his farm in mid-August, 1862, through his march with General William T. Sherman from Atlanta to the sea, to the disbandment of the 66th Regiment in Washington, D.C., in June, 1865, Davis was concerned about the situation at home. All of his worries and instructions had to be conveyed by a most awkward means—the writing of letters. Davis’s frustration with this means of communication is often evident; yet, his vivid phonetic prose provides an interesting and informative account of a soldier’s preoccupation with life at home and in camp.

One of the first letters that Davis wrote to his wife was sent from Camp Sullivan in Indianapolis several months after the Battle of Richmond. The few troops in the 66th who had escaped the debacle in Kentucky and those who had been captured, then paroled, eventually made their way back to New Albany. Since most of the troops were from nearby communities, they were granted short furloughs during this regimental reorganization period, which lasted from mid-September to mid-November, 1862.\textsuperscript{14} Davis himself returned to Salem at least once during the two months. While at home he consulted Harvey D. Henderson, a local physician. Henderson found Davis suffering from hoarseness and an inflammation of the bronchial tubes. Davis attributed his illness to “exposure” at the Battle of Richmond. Henderson treated him, and Davis returned to the regiment in New Albany.\textsuperscript{15} In November, 1862, the 66th marched to Indianapolis, where the regiment rearmed and those soldiers who had been captured and released at Richmond were officially declared exchanged.\textsuperscript{16} Still in the Hoosier capital in December, Jackson wrote to Elizabeth about one ever-present problem—money.

Dec 9th 1862
Camp Sullivan\textsuperscript{17}

Dear wife: I receive your letter tow or three days ago wich pleas me to hear from you. I am weel at present and hope this will find you all the same. tel John that am very much oblig to him for that twenty five cents he sent to me. give him some [money] and say nothn about whot it is four. I was glad to git a few lines from mary. tel her to write a few lines when ever you write. I would like to come home but I cant. we would leave hear to day but I think they cannt git the cars [railroad cars], but we will go soon. I think we will go mimphis for provost gards this winter and meby longer. cyrus bunday has inlsted in the regulars and severl more.\textsuperscript{18} I will inclose thirty dollars in this letter four you and you can use it as you think best. I was pad 35 dollars and got whot I lent out. and tel Beezon that petar sas he cant pay him now but will the nex pay day and that will be the last of this month or the first of next.\textsuperscript{19} thare is a grat meny sick here. I wold sent it [the letter and money]

\textsuperscript{13} History of Lawrence, Orange, and Washington Counties, 854.
\textsuperscript{14} “Declaration for Widow’s Army Pension.”
\textsuperscript{16} With the exceptions here indicated the Jackson Davis letters have been followed as closely as possible in this transcription. Spacing of headings and closings has been standardized. Since Davis used no end punctuation to designate sentences, periods have been inserted at what seemed to be logical breaks in order to make the letters more easily read and understood. Bracketed explanations and/or corrections have been added when it was felt that confusion might result from Davis’s incorrect spellings.
\textsuperscript{17} Cyrus T. Bundy of Salem transferred to the 166th United States Infantry on December 1, 1862, as did several other men from Washington County who originally were in Davis’s regiment. Report of the Adjutant General, VI, 56.
\textsuperscript{18} Peter Naugle, & Company, 66th Regiment, was a neighbor and good friend of Davis. This information was supplied by Mrs. Mabel Lloyd, Washington County. See also U.S., Eighth Census, population schedules for Washington County, p. 235.
with the minister but he woned [wanted] pay for it and I thought he was paid enof.20 he git about 100 dollars a month.21 ne more at present. my love to you all. your husband

Jackson Davis

I have not seen the calvery boys since I last wrote.22

[The following day the 66th Regiment left Indianapolis. Ultimately bound for garrison duty at Corinth, Mississippi, the 66th traveled by rail, via Terre Haute, Indiana, to Cairo, Illinois, where it proceeded down the Mississippi River to Columbus, Kentucky, arriving on December 12, 1862.23]

Columbus ky Dec 13th 1862

Dear wiff I am weell at present and hope thes few lines will find you all the same. we left indinopol on thenday the tenth and ware on the cares one day and two nights. and when we got[t] to Cairo we had to stay on the boat of the river about four hours and then we went on the boat and some of us had to go on the heracane deck and sleep til morning. I got purty coal before morning. I seen some nice very nice in illinoise and some wet and some very hily and rocks and some nice towns but the names of them I dont now. I seen plenty of chickens. we left Cairo in the morning and got heare about twelve ocklock and march about quarter of a mile back from the river and pick our tans. and that night it commence to rain. it raind all night and at it. the mud is shore deep. I was on gard yesterday coming down on the boat and on to day again. there is not meny more then half of the company fit fore duty.

20 The “minister” was Presbyterian chaplain Samuel Emmet Barr of Livonia, Washington County, Report of the Adjutant General, II, 607; History of Lawrence, Orange, and Washington Counties, 826.
21 Davis’s estimate was a slight exaggeration. Regiment chaplains received seventy dollars per month, but in contrast privates received only thirteen dollars per month in 1861 and only three dollars per month more by the end of the war. Francis Alfred Lord, “The Federal Volunteer Soldier in the American Civil War, 1861-1865” (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1948), 290, 508.
22 Davis was probably referring to the many Salen and Washington County residents who comprised Company E of the 5th Indiana Cavalry. Mustered into service in October, 1862, these men did not leave Indianapolis for the field until early December. Report of the Adjutant General, III, 108-11, VI, 462-65.
23 In this and other explanatory insertions between letters, information concerning the activities and movement of the 66th Indiana Regiment was taken from Report of the Adjutant General, II, 612-13.

columbus is not much of a town. I whent on the hill ware the rebels had fourteide. that is a cite oild think to luck [look] at that they could hold it against enny number of men.24 there is plenty canons about here and shot and shells. I can see on the other side the river ware the trees is shot off ware our men was. I [t]think it is ware the bellmount fight was.25 I dont thk i will be heare long. some says we are to go memphis and some to holy springe Miss.26 when you write tel me if you got the money that I sent from indinopolis. I sent thirty dollars in a letter. I wont you to send me a stamp in your letter four I have but one. I have tow or three sheets of paper yet. there is a good meny sick heare. I heare the small pox is hear. peter is well at present. I must stop at present. my love to you all. your husband

Jackson Davis

Dec 13 I now write you some more as the male close to soon for me yesterday. I was on gard and did not git at it soon anouf. I have ben on the rebels works again and seen more than I did yesterday but I cild not tel how thare made. it wold take severl sheets paper to write it on. thare is canons in all directions and shells. it is a very strong place. on top the forts can see miles over in missouri. one can look as far as the eye can see and looks as level as a floor. no boat a loud is to past heare with out stoping. than fire a cannon across the bow and fetch them in. it worme heare now quite a change to me it was up thare. we could do with out our overcoat very well now. I see more nigros heare than wites. thare is nigro rigament about one quarter of a mile from heare. your as ever Jackson Davis

24 Columbus was one of the last Confederate bastions in Kentucky. From atop the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, Confederate forces mounted nightly sorties against Union traffic until they were forced to evacuate the town and their fortifications on March 2, 1862. Union troops immediately occupied Columbus. Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. III, pp. 141, 152, Vol. VII, p. 246-37, 551-52.
25 Davis was correct. The engagement at Belmont, Missouri, was an unsuccessful attempt by Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant to dislodge the Confederates from their fortifications at Columbus. On November 7, 1861, Grant and two thousand troops temporarily captured the small town of Belmont, which was directly opposite the Confederate fortifications on the Mississippi River at Columbus. In only a few hours the deadly Confederate guns killed 120 Union troops and forced Grant to retreat. Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. VII, pp. 266-264.
[From Columbus, the 66th Regiment proceeded by rail to Corinth, Mississippi. There, Davis and the 66th remained until mid-August, 1863. Two letters written from Corinth have survived.]

Corinth Miss June 25th 1863

My Dear wife I now write A few lines to let you now that I am well and hope thes few lines will find you al the same. I was in hopes that I wold ben home before this but cold git of. I dont now when I can come. I think after vicksburg is token I can git A furlow. thare is no chance now. I hear bad news from india if it sow that the rebbes has made A raid thare and stole A good meny hoursems and mules and burnt a small town. I can hardly belive it is so. I wrot a letter to [several illegible words] and one to barrets. I dont now as I have eney more to say about it. I dont now what you will do with the wheat and grass. I was in hopes that I would be home to see it. I hope lizzye you can git some one to save it. if the hay is stack in the meddow meby I can git home after awile and git it in the barn. I wold rather do that than put it out to some one. I wold like to keep it al if I could four if [it] will come very good in winter to have plenty hay. some of the men hear think the war will be over in three month. we dont git much news from vicksburg now but every one thinks that grant will take it in side of three weeks. I hope it may be so. it was thought that we wold go thare awile but we ware the lucky ones that times. thare was tow brigades left hear to go thar. the caverly still brings in some prisinors every few days. they come in last sadar day and had A good meny hoursems Mules and cottles and carages and bugeys. I tuck the docketers over last sadar day to see the nigrow rigement git thar flag. thar was A big crod thar. it made the nigrow feel proud. thar was severl wites spok and

tow nigrows. they lookt firstrate. it is cald the first Alabama. there is A company of them in fourt philip along side of os with the seges [siege] guns. we move in our new house yesterday. it rained all day. we ware glad to git out of the old tens. all the rigement has houses now but one or tow of the officers and they soon will have. you must put up some curna[corrauts] for me. I will git home some time to eat them. when you rite me let me know if you have heard eney thing of william Baynes or eney of the rest of tham that whent from thar in that company. I wold like to hear from them. I am very glad that Mc cray is captain of our companey. he is worth half dozon rodmans. you can send your letters in care capt Mc cray now. I must now come to A close. if I was thare I could tel you A good bit more.

my love to you all from your husband

Jackson Davis
tel willey that he must not think hard that I wroto to John and not to him for I write to all. I wont him to be A good boy.

August 14th 1863

Corinth Miss

Dear wiff I will now write A few lines to let you now that I am well and hope this will find you all well. I dont now wether I will git home this time or not. they wont tel hough [who] is to go until the time comes. that will be about one week more. I have money to bring me home. I got the extra pay. I dont now when we will git enny more as the money that was for os was burnt coming down the river. it may be tow month yet.

27 Although there were a number of such raids during the war, Davis's reference must have been to the one led by Captain Thomas Hines. On June 17, 1863, Captain Hines and 150 Confederate troops crossed into Indiana to steal horses, destroy bridges, and disrupt rail service. During the raid they at least partially burned Valeene, a hamlet in Orange County. Early the following month Captain Hines joined forces with General John H. Morgan in a more well-known Confederate raid into Indiana. Report of the Adjutant General, 1, 161-62.

28 There were several families named Barret who lived near the Davis family. Notarized letter of Bridget Waterson, October 23, 1883, in reference to "Widow's Application for a Pension": U.S., Eighths Census, 1860, population schedules for Washington County, p. 233.


31 Davis probably refers to the burning of the steamboat Ruth six miles below Cairo, Illinois, on August 4, 1863. The ship was carrying $2,600,000 in United States government greenbacks to be used for the army payroll. St. Louis Missouri Republican, August 6, 1863; Ronald Horstman, "The Loss of Government Greenbacks on the Steamer Ruth," Missouri Historical Review, LXX (October, 1970), 87-89.
will soon be six month pay coming to us. If I do git off[?] this time I will wont some to bring me back again. I wold rather come this time to git Apleas and peaches. I wont something good to eate. I have got tird of pork for wonce. if we got hard bread I dont now what I shod do. we have light bred all sommer. the second leuteneant of the tenth Mo rigement shot the cornell of the same rigement the other day in town at the court room. the colonel had ben arrested and they were tring him when it hapined. I think they had some woords when it tock place. after he feel [fell] the leuteneant kept on shoutting [shouting] at him.32 A few morning ago there was A man got up and took his pocket nife and tride to kill one in the same mess. he cut him purty bad in three paces. they think he will git over it. this tuck place Compny A of our rigement. some think the one that don it was out of his head. I dont now what to tel you About seling the stok now. if I can git home soon meby I could buy some feed. I would like to keep them if I could git feed. I aume sorry to hear of fan being sick. I hope she got over it. I wold be very sorry if she shoud die. tuesday there was nineteen rebles come in here and give them selfs up. there is prisnors brought in every few days. the 113 ill rigement come here from vicksburg. they had A grate meny sick. I helpe to haul them to the post hospitall. they had the swom fiver. some times we have A good meny sick. I dont think thare is more than twenty or twenty five at one time in the hospitile and some that is not so bad in camp. piter Naugle is better. the wether is very worm hear now. we have some good showers every few days. it is nice wether for corn or eney thing that is growing. the citenz brings corn and potatoes and apples peaches chickory and umbrellas and heap of gardin truck to the picket lines to sold twice A week. I hope John and Willy is good boys and does what woor they can. tel them I wont them to [do] what ever thare is to do that I will soon be home and I wont to hear of them being good

32 On August 10, 1863, Colonel Florence M. Cornyn of the 10th Missouri Cavalry was on trial before a general court martial at Corinth, Mississippi. Lieutenant Colonel William D. Bowen of the same regiment was called to testify against Cornyn. At a recess the two men confronted each other. Cornyn hit Bowen in the face; Bowen responded with four shots from his revolver, mortally wounding Cornyn. Bowen was dismissed from the service two months later. St. Louis Missouri Republican, August 13, 17, 1863; Howard L. Conrad, ed., Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri: A Compendium of History and Biography for Ready Reference (6 vols., New York, 1901), II, 138. U.S. War Department, Official Register of the Volunteer Force of the United States for the Years 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865 (8 vols., Washington, 1865-1867), VII, 36.

boys and Mary to. I gest caroline dont do much. tel her to be A good giarl and keep me A kis. I must come to A close. I can tel you more when I see you. keep in good heps. my love to you all. your husband

Jackson Davis

[On August 18, Jackson Davis and the 66th Regiment left Corinth, Mississippi, for Tennessee. On October 11 Davis fought in a battle at Collierville, Tennessee (near Memphis). He describes the fighting in the following letter. He did not know at the time that on September 8 his youngest child, Caroline, had died of spotted fever.]

Collierville tenn
Oct 14th 1863

Dear wife I now write A few lines to let you now that I am alive and well and also piter Naugle. the rebles attacked os on sunday morning the 11th about ten oclock with four or five thousand troops and five peases canons. we had six company of or [our] rigement hear and about one hundred caverly. the rest of the caverly was out on a s[cout]. they drove in what picket they dident capture then sent in A flag truce to cirrender. the cornel told them if they got the place they wood have to fight for it.33 Just at that time general shearman [William Tecumseh Sherman] come up on train and the thirteenth rauglers [U.S. Infantry]. shearman told them that he never sirrenderd. then it commence. they open on os with five canons. we had no canons nothen but musket. they had got purty near all around os. we had A fort and rifel pits to git in. they got in the caverly camp and burnnt up every thing and tuck severl prisnors. they come up to the cars severl times and as often drove back. it lasted about four hours. I think thar was fourteen of ours and the rauglers kild on the field and a good meny wounded. some died sence. we have found some twenty or twentyfive dead rebles. they huuld of severl. I whent about one mile and half on the road that they went on after a wound man of ours and see ware they left tow at a house and hear of more sence that they left [at] other houses. they shot severl housres that was on the cars and five muels for os that was in the stable and shot the

33 The "cornel" was Colonel DeWitt C. Anthony of New Albany. Report of the Adjutant General, II, 607.
cornet[s] and wounded another that night about dark reinforcement [came]. I don't now how many. They had plenty canons. the next day they started on after them to the holy springs [Holly Springs, Mississippi] and there was some left there. I was at lagrange [Tennessee] on monday after noon. We could hear canons but we had not heard what they had done. They took four of company E men prisoners. They were on picket. The most that they got was on picket. I have lost the new horse that you sent me. the house that we stood in was burnt by orders of the captain. It stood the four, thought the rebels would git in and shoot [shoot] in the fort. and perty near everything we had was burnt and what was sent was stolen by the raulars [regulars], the night after the flight I coldest sleep. I was so sorry and heart and got over it. I asked all over. I hadn't time to write sooner. I expeck you will hear that I am safe by perey[s'] letter. my love to you all. from your husband

Jackson Davis

[After the engagement at Collierville, the 66th Regiment marched to Pulaski, Tennessee, arriving on November 11. There the regiment remained until spring.]

Pulaski Tenn  
December 23rd 1863

Dear wife I now take my pen in hand to let you now that I am well and hope thes few lines will find you all the same. I was out in the country yesterday foraging with doctor volies Captain bimbins and A gard of eight men. 34 we went about nine miles. we got nine hogs sweet potatoes, and others potatos chickens ducks turkeys and some butter and buney. they bought all but the hogs and then they Jayhaughed [jayhawked], thes things was for the officers. It is against orders to take eney thing without paying for it. some officers wodent leave or take things without pay and others wood. this is twice that I have ben out since we have ben hear. in about two weeks I will go again. I dont have to haul for the rigement now on. sunday was the last. the Adjutante [adjutant] stopt it. I haul one load beefe on sunday morning. sence then I have done nothen but take care of the mules until yesterday. the old rigement that goes out of

34 Davis refers to David Voyles, 66th Regiment, Martinsburg, Washington County; and Captain Felix C. Bivin, E Company, 66th Regiment, West Baden, Orange County. Ibid., II, 608, 610.

sirvis in the spring is the grate part of them reinlisten. they get thirty days furlow from now until the old term wode be out will go in with the new term. to day our officers is taken the names of all our regiment that is willing to reinlist. 35 I was down thare awile ago and I think the bigest part will go in. peters is one of them. the captain wonded me to put my name down but I wanted to think over it awile. I have no nochin going in A gine. if I was a single man I wode. they all think that time will be out as soon as if they hadent reinlisted wish I hope may be so.

December 25th 1863

I did not git to finish the letter the other day. I thought I wode have plenty time before the mail went out and put it of to the next day but had to go to colombia. three hundred and fifty men of our reidgement went to gerd a wagon train. we started the day before christmas and got back the day after. we had a very good time. one night it rain purty hard but we didn't mind that as we had good turnpike. it was a little sloppy but not [as] a dirt road wode be. I went along with doctor voiles to haul his things with the cornels teem. 36 I got Mary letter yesterday. she tells me you still have that pain in your brest. have you said eney thing to the doctork about it. if you dont do so. dont leave it enny longer. I hope wileys colle is better. I am weell. I was afraid when I had that pain at inoplis in my brest that it wode turn to something bad. we are fixt some thing better than we were when I wrote before. we have rail pens yet but have them coverd with bords and plastered with mud. I am going to put five dollars in this and shal send a present to Mary in a box. I wont you to git John and wiley something or give them the money if you think that wode do. the rail rode is not finish yet. I dont no when I shal git home but as soon as I can. keep in good hart. your husband Jackson Davis

my time is out when the three years is out twenty month more.

35 In mid-1863 the United States War Department initiated a program to reinlist troops while they were still in the field. Any soldier who had been in the field for nine months or more and whose term of service was to expire within ninety days (later increased to a year) could reinlist for an additional three-year term of service. In return the soldier received a month's pay in advance, a $402 bounty, and a promise of a thirty-day furlough in his home state before beginning his new term of service. Ibid., I, 26-31.
36 Davis is referring to Colonel DeWitt C. Anthony of the 66th Regiment. Ibid., II, 607.
Pulaski Tenn
January 18, 1864

Dear wife, I now write a few lines to let you know that I am well at present and hope these few lines will find you all in good health. I have got four letters from you this last week. Two of them was posted the fourth of January, these two came together and the others was wrote on chrismas day on the other posted the twenty-sixth December. The ones that was wrote first came last. Mary went to now if I can make out her writing. Some letters she wrote was purty hard but I blive I made out all buy going over them over and over. The last one was the best. That was very easy read, she must keep on and try to write every one a little letter [better], to mind and put the words together. She is going to school and can soon write a good letter. You want to no what I think your thinking about and I cant tel but I can see you are thinking about me the most of the time. You wonder if you will ever see me and thinking I nite be sick or laying out in the coal and rain. I have had it purty good. So far I havent been laid out in the rain yet. And I hope you will see me again and past many happy days together. It may seem long now but the time is coming. Nineteen months more will bring it if the war dont end before that time. You want me to tel you what to do and if you have dont things as I wish you to do. You have. I have nothn to say against eneny thing you have done. I cant tell you what to do but to take good care of your self and the children until I come back and dont worry about me. I will try and take good care of my self. I am sorry for charles Broocks. When I got your letters they said charles was no better. I began to think there was another some wares that had told what was the matter with him and sureeneof thar was four. When I got the letter that was wrote on chrismas day it tel me all about it. 37th. If thar is enny fence that you could do without take it to make up the rest with. I think that would be best. I jist that is no chance to git enny rails maid. Sence 1 last rest we have had some nice weather and some coal weather. To day is nice and warm. I seen them hauling ice that was four inches thick. I think it must be very coal up thar. I often think of you in that house. I now

37 Charles Brooks was a fellow Pennsylvania and a neighbor of Davis. Whatever "was the matter" with Brooks, it was not terminal. He did not die until December, 1867. Records of the Society of Friends in Indiana, Part 5, p. 124, U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, population schedules of Washington County, p. 248.

Civil War Letters of Jackson Davis

[On April 29, 1864, Davis and the 66th Regiment moved to Chattanooga in preparation for joining General William T. Sherman in the Georgia campaign. From May until September, 1864, Davis and his regiment saw continuous fighting as they fell into Union hands on September 2. On September 26 the 66th left East Point, just south of Atlanta, and traveled north by rail, arriving at Rome, Georgia, the following day.]

Rome Georgia
September 29, 1864

My Dear wife I am well and hope this will find you all the same. We have left below Atlanta on the twentysixth. We are

38 Corporal James O. Huston, B Company, 66th Regiment, of Saltillo, Washington County, was apparently home on furlough. He may, however, have also been on a mission of recruitment for the 66th Regiment. In late October, 1863, Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton, with the approval of the War Department, began his own program for enlisting recruits. Under the plan each regimental commander selected one noncommissioned officer or private from each company to be sent home to gain recruits. If the man selected recruited a certain stated number of men, he was eligible for a promotion. The many new men from Washington County received by B Company of the 66th Regiment during December, 1863, and January and February, 1864; the poverty of furloughs granted to able-bodied men; and the promotion of Corporal Huston in April, 1864, to second lieutenant of A Company, 66th Regiment, all suggest that Huston participated in the recruitment program and may explain his presence in Salem. Report of the Adjutant General, VI, 56, II, 608, I, 29-30.

39 Both Morton and the War Department recognized the need to keep as many experienced soldiers in the field as possible; consequently, their recruitment program included the promise of substantial bounties and furloughs to those regiments who could persuade three fourths of their veterans to reenlist for three years or the duration of the war. Contrary to Davis's belief, the 66th, a three-year regiment whose term of service was not up until 1865, apparently did not meet the requirement. Ibid., I, 23-33.
now sixty or seventy miles near home than we were, Rome is a nice place and purty nice looking country around hear. I dont expeck to write much now for I think I stand some chance to git home but mine I dont say that I am shure of it, dont kill the chicken before I come, it will be time when I git thar, it wont be long until I know, this next week will tel the tail.40 cris is well,41 peter was when we left eastpoint [Georgia]. now more at present. my love to you all. Jackson Davis

[Throughout October the 66th Regiment participated in operations against General John Bell Hood in northern Georgia and Alabama from its base of operations in Rome. Early in November Davis and the 66th rejoined Sherman's forces in Atlanta. On November 15 the troops began the "march to the sea," arriving near Savannah on December 10. On December 21 Union forces, including the 66th and twenty-six other Indiana regiments, occupied Savannah.]

January 21st 1865
Savannah Georgia

My Dear wife I have Just recived your letter of the fourth. I am very sorry to hear of you being sick. I hope you are well again before this. take good care of your self. dont worry about me for I am in good health and plenty to eat and ware, there is nothing like good health. it is over tow months since I got a letter from you. before this one the last I got was as we come

40 Davis's optimism about his chances of returning home may have reflected General William T. Sherman's tentative response to a letter that President Abraham Lincoln wrote to Sherman on September 19, 1864. In the letter Lincoln asked the general to allow as many Indiana troops under his command as he could spare to return home so that they might vote in the state election in October. Since the Indiana troops could not vote from the field, Lincoln believed that their return home would keep Indiana's Governor Morton in power and prevent Indiana from falling into Democratic hands. In the final analysis, however, Sherman was not left with a choice. In early October Confederate General John Bell Hood pressed so menacing that Sherman could only allow some of the Indiana troops under his command in Tennessee and Kentucky to go home to vote in the election. Lloyd Lewis, Sherman: Fighting Prophet (New York, 1932), 413-15; Emma Lou Thornbrough, Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880 (Indianapolis, 1965), 221; Kenneth M. Stamp, Indiana Politics during the Civil War (Indiana Historical Collections, Vol. XXXI; Indianapolis, 1949), 251-52.

41 "peter" probably refers to Christopher H. Naugle, brother of Peter and neighbor to the Davises in Washington County. Christopher Naugle was recruited into the service on January 26, 1864. Report of the Adjutant General, VI, 57; U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, population schedules of Washington County, p. 235.

through Atlanta. that has ben very littel mail come sence we have ben hear. we come into the town on the twenty first of last month. just one month to day. the rebles left agrate meny cannons. I dont now how meny. some says that was something over tow hundred and some says thar was over three hundred. we are camped about one mile from town and about tow from fort Jackson. hear is the first place that I ever seen stroong woroks. I have seen what they cavedl strowng but they ware nouthen to thers, thar is agod meny citizesns hear. it a very purty place arond about hear. we are some eighteen or twenty miles from the cost. tide water comes up hear. we can git plenty oysters. plenty ships comes hear now. day before yester-day we started to leave hear. we started in the morning and dident git more than three miles all and had to turn back to the old camp. it has ben raining ever sence. they cud not git along with the train. I dont think thar ever was a country that cold [could] beat this four swormps. it is all swormps. I dont now when we will leave now. I think we ware [to go] to charleston. some says we ware giont to cut some rail road. I think it will be severl days before we will tri it again. chris is not well for three or four days. he is about. peters well and looks better than I ever seen him. he is still at the hospitile. all three of os sent our money by express to Isreal Naugle in care of D. Lyons.42 from hear I dont think you mean whot you say about the money. you say your glad it los [lost]. I should be sorry and think you weede to. it may be thar by this time. if not soon will be, it is one hundred dollar bond. you will have to pay the frait an insurance on it. it was started December 29th. I dont think I will git a fourlow this spring but will soon after. the time is growin shourt now. some says we will start home in six months. I know we will in seven.43 I woud git my likeness to send to willie but it takes to much money. hear in a littel he shall see me and all the rest. I must come to a close. give respecks to all that inquires after me. my love to you all from your husband Jackson Davis

I think you had better direct differnt. direct this way.

42 Isreal Naugle was the father of the oft-mentioned Peter and Christopher Naugle. D. [Dawson] Lyon was a merchant and a man of "considerable fortune" in Salem. History of Lawrence, Orange, and Washington Counties, 867; U.S., Eighth Census, 1860, population schedules for Washington County, p. 235.

43 Davis's three-year term of service was to expire in August, 1865. Military Service Record of Jackson Davis, "Company Descriptive Book," B Company, 66th Regiment, Records of the Record and Pension Office, 1784-1917.
Davis 66th Ind Reg Co B
1st Brig 4th Div 15 A C
Via new york
I dont now wether it is wort wile to put savannah or georgia on or not.

[One week after the above letter, January 28, 1865, the 66th Regiment broke camp, and with the 15th Army Corps proceeded north through the interior of South Carolina and into North Carolina. Davis reached Goldsborough, North Carolina, on March 24, 1865.]

Goldsboro North Corlina
March 29 1865

My Dear wife it is a long time sence I last wrote to you at savannah. we have had a long march sence then and A hard one. we have waded through swampes and rivers. one morning about sun rise we waed through A river. it was very cold. it was cold enough to freeze the ground hard. when I had got in alittle ways I dident know wether to stop or go on but maid out to go ahead. when got over they stoped and maid up fiers to woor and dry by. I see in some papers that we march over high roulin land but I can tel them they know nothen about it. one or tow days we had some hills. we had more swampes and wors then we had through georgia. it was A harder march. colombia south Corlina was al burnt. it was the purtys town I have seen in the south. as Mrs Holdstin says it was A site to see. all the town on fire and every little bit to A grate flash of powder and hear the shells bursting. the wind blow hard that night wich burnt more houses than wode of ben burnt. 30th. the rail road was tour up and burnt. severl of our men was kiled thar by being bloud up. they git carless and dont see danger.44 thar was not much fighting coming through. part of our division had some right sharp fighting about twenty miles from hear one eaving and at night the rebles left and we came to town. I dont now how meny we had kiled. we had twenty five wounded. one died on the road coming to town. he belond to the battary. thar was A grate [deal of property burnt com]ing on the march. we got A good meny prisinos and nigres.

[On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House, and soon thereafter General Joseph Johnson surrendered to Sherman's forces in North Carolina. As an attendant in a hospital, Davis advanced through North Carolina and Virginia, via Richmond, toward Washington, D.C., where on June 3, 1865, he was mustered out of service as a member of the 66th Regiment.]

By late June, Davis was once again home, but the rigors of war had taken their toll. The respiratory condition first noticed by his physician, Harvey D. Henderson, upon Davis's return from the Battle of Richmond in September, 1862, had grown worse over the three years of his army service. In the years

44 On February 19, 1865, Union troops accidentally detonated a large quantity of captured Confederate ammunition as they were dumping it into the Saluda River. Sixteen soldiers were killed. Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XLVII, Part 1, p. 318.

45 On March 23, 1865, Generals Sherman and John M. Schofield rendezvousd at Goldsborough to rest and reequip their combined armies of nearly 90,000 men for the final march of the victorious Carolina campaign. Ibid., 29, 909-13, Part II, pp. 941-42.
after 1865 Henderson examined Davis on a number of occasions and prescribed drugs to alleviate the condition. A second
physician, Benjamin W. Tucker, examined Davis in June, 1870.
His diagnosis did not differ from Henderson's. Throughout the
summer of 1870 Davis's health deteriorated. On August 11
when Tucker visited the Davis home, he found Davis confined
to his bed. On October 14, 1870, Davis succumbed to "phthisis
pulmonalis." His wife and five children (he fathered two after
returning from the war) survived him. Davis was buried a
few miles from his home in a secluded hilltop glade, now com-
monly referred to as Highland Friends Cemetery. After his
nearly three years of disruptive and debilitating wartime serv-
vice, a more peaceful resting place could hardly be imagined.

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46 Notarized letter of physician Harvey D. Henderson, September 1, 1880.
47 Notarized letter of physician Benjamin W. Tucker, July 23, 1886, in
reference to "Widow's Application for a Pension."