



Sgt. William Henry Shelton

Near Sharpsburg Md
Sunday eve - Oct 19th 1862

Cousin Louise

You have an amazing odd way of writing your letters at easy stages. One would think that either you brought your note paper already dated and some more, or that your confidential clerk indicted your epistles and you signed them with a sort of explanation by way of certificate. Really this is getting to be a serious affair, and I am not yet advised whether to be offended with the fickleness of your pen or tickled with its fold attention. I am sure that an earnest opinion in either extreme would be offensive to a young lady of good sense; so I will continue to halt at a respectful distance between the two. There the writer has flattered us both - you in taste and me in discretion and the flattery sets well upon you but I have relied all my discretion in commencing

an essay when I meant only a letter.

So far I have approached in so distant a style that I am at a loss how to become immediately familiar. How to obviolate any necessity of drawing in skirts or saying off chains (figurative) just imagine that your father has been saying a few words of sobriety and is interrupted by John or Bill or Dick or some other light personage. —

(Enter Bill Loggins) — I have lived so long - so much - so fast, since I wrote you last that I am discouraged the moment I attempt to think or write of details. A minute account of anything is out of the question and to say any thing about Antietam would be either to simulate the style of the Tribune correspondent or to attempt to magnify an affair which I trust is already of ten times greater magnitude to you than to me. You look on from a distance and old associations set no jar - I see the more paltry details and what I have been taught to look at as a

wonderful thing, - a great battle - seems after all a very tame thing and only great in the estimation of those, who, in person, know nothing about it. Although, once I would have looked upon a person coming through such a battle, as the late fight here, as a parity, I am certain that I did only the commonest things. I slept on the ground, the easiest thing in the world to do, and got up early in the morning and went to firing guns, - no great feat - and because there were fifty thousand more doing the same thing, making a great clatter, people seem inclined to give each the credit for what only all accomplished - something wonderful. Battles like all other great things are only a great mass of simple.

Still I moralize - I can't help it to night - and in fact, my arguments branch off in so many different directions that I am in as deep despair as the mariner who failed to discover the source of the river because he couldn't sail up all its branches at the same voyage. Had you I better

Let this lofty style of mine go to wrick now.
While I am in the nautical line, and
write something to you instead of so much
to myself. Think I had! I received
your letter two days ago and dont intend
to apologise for delay in answering.
I thought it was about time as I was asent-
ing the mail and lo! your scrip. I am not
a Generals clerk as George used to be but
only a Captains and that is how I came
to be aserting mail. Capt R is chief
of Artillery in Gen Doubledays Division
and I have been with him for a couple
weeks. Plenty of writing, but very quiet
and withall a most agreeable change.
We get orders every day or two to be ready
to march at short notice - have had
such orders today - with cooked rations -
in the direction of Bakersville - but that
is all it amounts to and we still keep
from day to day at Sharpshoony.
All the time under marching orders, - all
the time looking the enemy in the face - and
all the time lying still. All is strange

The battle on the 17th was strange, quiet on
the 18th was odd and, inaction ever since
seems absolutely queer. We are done pay-
ing attention to marching orders. Still I
dont anticipate wintering in Maryland
We are going to leave old Sharpshoony
soon and this country dispeopled of any
green thing as by an army of locusts.

I dont care how soon - a soldiers dis-
likes to stay long in a place.

I am glad to hear that George has
left a diary - I hope to see it some
day. I think his tent mate, the Post
Master, has his belt. Sgt De Mott, of
our company, says he has it, and
that Geo left it with him with instruc-
tions to keep it until he called for it
If I come across him again I will
try and get it. I wish I had known
it before, for I have been twice to
Gen Greens Head Quarters, since

since we were here and he at Harpers
Ferry. That Post Master is the most
loquacious fellow you ever saw. You would
be first disgusted with his use of lay-
words and next amazed at his
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We have had no state fair nor equineted
here. —

I presume Sam saw Fred but if Fred
saw Sam he would take no trouble to
make himself known - that is his way.
I didnt know for certain that he had en-
listed until I found him at Washington.
I was a ragged uncombed object the
morning after we had returned from our
Shenandoah Campaign round by way of
Rappahannock & Bull run, when I met
him and you ought to have seen him stare.
He acted sensibly however and gave me
some good clothes. Nothing is hardship
after it is past and the fact that we used
to sleep on the ground in our jackets, so all

day with powder begrimed hands & faces,
and pick up bits of bacon in the grass &
forthwith pay an debt to the same, is
quite funny to remember but not so fun
to think of in the future.

Here and at Bull Run were by us
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The Thursday before the Saturday fight
at Bull Run - and the artillery duels
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tonous than anything since. I had
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by the hour when the whole responsibility
rests on the battery and only two ways
lead out of a bad job - to silence the
opposing battery or to give up. I feel
for the Generals in their weight of respon-
sibility. The war looks bad - don't it.
I feel more certain of serving the full
term of my enlistment than I ever did
before. Oh!! how our newspapers do
lie. Bad as the rebel editors are ours

are not one whit better. They are fair
obstinate - perverse - you can't believe
what your own eyes have not seen.

Commend me to Sam, and my other
friends and give me another of
your letters as soon as it seems
good so to do.

Also toss this letter into the flames
or send it to the "Scientific American"
for I think it would shine - blaze in
either place.

That is remains uncut.

Very respectfully

Your Cousin

Wm. Army Shullow.

To
Miss J. A. W.

Near Sharpsburg, Maryland

Sunday Eve, October 19th 1862

Cousin Louise,

You have an amazing odd way of writing your letters at easy stages. One would think that either you bought your note paper already dated and some more or that your confidential clerk indicted your epistles and you signed them with a sort of explanation by way of certificate. Really this is getting to be a serious affair, and I am not yet advised whether to be offended with the fickleness of your pen or ticked with two fold attention. I am sure that an earnest opinion in either extreme would be offensive to a young lady of good sense, so I will continue to halt at a respectful distance between the two. There, the writer has flattered us both—you in taste and me in discretion—and the flattery sits well upon you but I have belied all my discretion in commencing an essay when I meant only a letter.

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I wish I had known it before, for I have been twice to Gen. [George Sears] Greene's Headquarters ² since we were here and he at Harper's Ferry. That Post Master is the most loquacious fellow you ever saw. You would be first disgusted with his use of large words and next amazed at his handling of them.

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Here and at Bull Run were by no means the warmest places we have been in. The Thursday [Battle of Brawner's Farm, August 28th] before the Saturday's fight at Bull Run, and the artillery duel along the Rappahannock, were more tedious than anything since. I had much rather be in a good battle than dodge the shells of an artillery duel by the hour where the whole responsibility rests on the battery and only two ways lead out of a bad job—to silence the opposing battery or to give up. I feel for the Generals in their weight of responsibility. The war looks bad, don't it. I feel more certainly of serving the full term of my enlistment than I ever did before.

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That tie remains uncut. Very respectfully your cousin, — Wm. Henry Shelton

To Miss L. A. W.

Bio of William Henry Shelton

the son of Joseph Carlos Shelton (1808-1878) and Mary Colt Taft (1811-1856). A biographical sketch for William reads, in part: “Born near Allen’s Hill in the town of West Bloomfield in Ontario County, New York, on September 4, 1840, He was mustered into service on November 5, 1861, as one of the original members of the 1st New York Light Artillery, Battery “L” —popularly known as Reynolds’ Battery

At the end of William’s enlistment he returned to Rochester, New York, where he assisted as a recruiter. Not long after he re-enlisted as a 2nd Lieutenant in Battery G of the 1st New York Light Artillery and entered the field just in time for the Battle of the Wilderness where he was wounded and taken prisoner. He spent the next nine months in Confederate prison camps before escaping back to Union lines. Nearly 25 years later, Shelton told the story of his capture, imprisonment and escape in an issue of the *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, complete with his own illustrations. William passed away in 1932.

¹ For a good description of Capt. John A. Reynolds and the role of his Battery at Antietam, see *Reynolds and his battery at Antietam*.

² Brigadier General George S. Green's 2nd Division of Mansfield's XII Corps had several three New York Infantry regiments (60th, 78th, and 102nd) and one artillery regiment (1st N. Y. Light, Battery M). The only unit recruiting from the vicinity of Rochester, New York was Battery M which is the unit I assume George served in. The Battery was known to be in the Harpers Valley vicinity immediately following the Battle of Antietam.