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Griswold Family Letters
1862-1879
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Summary

- Main entry:** Griswold family
- Title:** Griswold Family Letters, 1862-1879
- Size:** .2 linear feet (1 box)
- Source:** Anonymous gift, September 2004
- Abstract:** The letters document the military experiences of Charles and Joel Griswold of Guilford, Connecticut with the 15th Connecticut Infantry and Charles' service with the 29th Connecticut Infantry (Colored) during the Civil War. They include accounts of the Battle of Fredericksburg, camp life and operations at Portsmouth, Newport News and Suffolk, Virginia and New Bern, North Carolina, siege operations against Petersburg and Richmond, and post-war service in Brownsville, Texas. The letters are addressed to their sister Mary.
- Access:** Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.
- Preferred citation:** Griswold Family Letters, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Biographical note

Charles and Joel Griswold were two of the nine children of Joel Griswold (1796-1879) and Mary ("Polly") Bartlett Griswold (1801-1876) of Guilford, Connecticut. Three of the Griswold sons served in the Union army during the Civil War. Charles and Joel enlisted in Company E, 15th Connecticut Infantry in 1862. Edward served in the 1st Independent Battery, Connecticut Light Artillery.

In January 1864 Charles (1841-1921) was commissioned as Captain of Company B, 29th Connecticut Infantry (Colored), an African-American regiment. The 29th Conn. Vols. fought in the area of Beaufort, South Carolina and Richmond, Virginia in 1864 and were camped in Brownsville, Texas at the war's end in 1865. Charles married Mary E. Griswold in 1864. She joined him in Texas in August of 1865.

Joel (1836-1892) fought with Company E of the 15th Connecticut Infantry and experienced the yellow fever outbreak at camp in New Bern in the summer of 1864. He was captured on March 8, 1865 at the Battle of Wyse Fork and paroled on March 26. Joel remained with the 15th Conn. Vols. until mustered out on June 27, 1865.

In June of 1862 Joel married Margaret Casey, who died in March of 1863. He later married Carrie S. Walter.

Scope and content note

Charles and Joel Griswold's letters to their sister, Mary Griswold, describe routine experiences of Civil War soldiers including guard and picket duty, drills, weather conditions, and camp food. The letters begin in 1862 and continue through the end of the conflict in 1865. The last letter in the collection dates from 1879, and is written by Charles from Guilford, Connecticut. Transcriptions of the letters are included in the collection.

Joel's letters document his service with the 15th Conn. Vols., from Camp Chase, Arlington Heights, Virginia, 1862 until his eventual discharge in 1865 while camped in Kinston, North Carolina. Joel served in Company E of the 15th Conn. Vols., and his letters offer detailed descriptions of camp life. At some point in early 1863, Joel fell ill and received medical attention at Finley Hospital, Ward No. 2 in Washington D.C. After leaving the hospital, he served as guard of captured confederate soldiers. In May 1863, Joel describes the captured troops, "I went down to the City yesterday to see the prisoners come in. There was about 2 thousand come in, and of all the looking objects that I ever see they beat all. All sorts of uniforms on you could think of, hardly two that was dressed alike." In September 1863, Joel left Washington, D.C. to rejoin the 15th Conn. Vols. in Portsmouth, Virginia where he stayed until January of 1864. In the summer of 1864, Joel and the 15th departed for New Bern, NC, a site under Union control since Ambrose Burnside's Carolina campaigns of 1862. Union soldiers at New Bern suffered in the hot weather conditions in 1864, and experienced a massive outbreak of yellow fever. Joel writes his sister from New Bern in June, 1864, "There is quite a good many sick in the Regt. now. We are having awful hot weather here now. Such weather I never saw before." Joel further sketched life at New Bern in a letter on July, "As for what we have to eat, we don't get any more than we want. We live mostly on salt pork and pork. We draw one barrel of potatoes every ten days and about 2 or 3 messes of beans in the ten days." The yellow fever outbreak reached its peak between August and October in New Bern. Joel wrote in October, "Over 1200 have died with this disease since it broke out. We have lost between 50 and 60 in our Regt., and there is some in the Hosp. now that will probably die." The 15th Conn. Vols. was involved with battles at Kinston, NC. Joel's last letter in the collection is dated May 17th, 1865.

Charles' first letter to Mary in August 1862 described his arrival at Camp Chase, Virginia. In a letter dated December 16th, 1862 Charles sent a long account of his experience in the Battle of Fredericksburg. Charles reported picket duty in January 1863 near Fredericksburg, Virginia to his sister, "We were on picket yesterday directly opposite the City, could hear the Rebs shout in their frolics and see them snowball, could hear their bands play." His letters often describe action in the field at Newport News and Suffolk, Virginia in 1863. After fighting with the 15th Conn. Vols. through the end of 1863, Charles' desire for promotion led him to Washington, D.C. in January 1864. He wrote Mary from the capital, "Therefore I went to Wash., made an application to the A. Gen. for permission to appear before Gen. Casey's Board composed of Brigadiers and Colonels. They examine persons desiring commissions in Negro Regts." Charles received his promotion and reported to Annapolis, Maryland where he was to pick up equipment for his regiment. The 29th Conn. Vols. reported to Union camps in Beaufort, S.C and remained there until June 1864. In the fall and winter of 1864, Charles' letters are composed from the field before Petersburg and Richmond, VA. He described the fighting in detail, "The first intimation we had of the Reb pickets was a volley from them behind piles of logs. This fire was directed at my Co., as it was but few yards from their line and almost every shot made a mark. Two of my men instantly fell down shot through the head." The 29th Conn. Vols. was the first regiment to enter Richmond after its surrender. The letters from 1865 indicate the slowing down of the war as the 29th awaited orders. In the summer of 1865, the 29th Conn. Vols. guarded prisoners at Point Lookout, Maryland. By August of 1865, Charles' regiment was stationed in Brownsville, Texas where it participated in the final stages of war. His wife, Mary E. Griswold joined him in Texas and penned some letters to her sister-in-law in Connecticut. She described her life in Texas, "I did not think I should ever be so much of a soldier as to drink out of a canteen, but we keep our water cool in that way, and I like it quite well, so we can get used to anything." Charles' final letter from Texas is dated September 18, 1865.

Arrangement note

Letters are arranged chronologically

Container list

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	1862 (13 letters)
	2	1862 (Transcriptions)
	3	1863 (42 letters)
	4	1863 (Transcriptions)
	5	1864 (36 letters)
	6	1864 (Transcriptions)
	7	1865, 1879
		9 letters, including two letters from Mary E. (Mrs. Charles) Griswold to Mary Griswold and a broadside of the poem "Longstreet's Retreat."
8		1865, 1879 (Transcriptions)