

Confederate Civil War Letters of John Newton Smith

Introduction

This is a collection of sixteen Civil War letters written between October 13, 1861 and July 27, 1863. The letters primarily concern John Newton Smith. He wrote eleven of the letters; seven to his wife, Eliza, and four to his parents-in-law. Two are to John and his brother, J. D., from their parents. On the back of one letter from John to Eliza is a letter from N. W. Lamons to his wife, Margaret. The other two letters are only fragments, one from Joseph Johnson (probably a brother of Eliza) to his "Brother and Sister" (could mean John and Eliza) and one from Eliza to John.

Only random bits of information are known about John Newton Smith. His parents' names were probably E. H. (possibly E. W.) and E. Smith (see page 19). He was born about sixteen miles from Alexandria, Alabama, in Calhoun County (see page 24). He had at least two brothers, one named J. D. who served with him in the war, and another named Thomas. He was married to Eliza A. Johnson, daughter of Richmond and Nancy Johnson, and they lived at least for awhile in the area around Chapel Hill and Slip-up, Alabama. They also lived awhile on Bank Street in Decatur, Alabama, while John worked on the construction of the railroad bridge over the Tennessee River. They had a daughter named Henryetta before the Civil War, and a son named Melvin Naverian, born during the Civil War. John named his son via the mail while in camp near Shelbyville, Tennessee, in a letter dated April 3, 1863.

Although there is no definite proof, it has been handed down by word-of-mouth that John died of smallpox in the last stages of the war. Eliza raised Henryetta and Melvin to adulthood, both married and had children, and today there are numerous descendants, mostly concentrated in and around Decatur, Alabama.

History of the Letters

Since the Civil War, the letters have been in the possession of Henryetta Smith Woodall (referred to as Sissy in the letters), the daughter of John Newton Smith and Eliza A. Johnson, and her descendants. Henryetta married John A. Woodall, and they lived in Shady Grove Community off the old Moulton road, near Decatur, Alabama. Here the letters stayed for many years, in a trunk. R. C. Woodall, youngest son of John and Henryetta, was given the letters when Henryetta died. When he died in October 1967, the letters were given to Mrs. Lucille Woodall Hines Hoover, Decatur, Alabama, the daughter of his brother, John Holland Woodall. Mrs. Hoover is the present possessor of the letters, and supplied the fore-going information.

An oddity of the history of the letters has been an ignorance of their existence by the descendants of Melvin Naverian Smith, the son of John Newton Smith and Eliza A. Johnson. Although John Newton Smith's name survives only via the posterity of Melvin

Naverian, no such descendant apparently has in many years, if at all until now, known that some of John's most intimate thoughts have been preserved, much less read them.

October 13, 1861.

Manassus [sic] Junction

Dear Brother and Sister,

After a long time I take my pen in hand and paper on my knee to drop you a few lines to let you know that I am well and I truly (the rest of the letter is not legible)

Joseph Johnson

April 27, 1862

Tishamingo County, Mississippi

Dear Wife,

It is with [illegible] that I drop you a few lines to inform you that I am tolerable well at this time, for which I am thankful to God for His kind mercies toward me and I hope when you get these few lines, they may find you enjoying the same blessing. I am just a getting up out of the mumps. I have not been able to drill in two weeks. I taken them this day, two weeks ago, and J. D. Smith taken them in a day or two afterwards. We are both getting about again. We are still at Corinth yet. Our cumpney [sic] split up and we was throd [sic] into Captain Trigs artillery this morning. The cumpney [sic] split up again. Thirty of our men went to another artillery. We still remain in Trigs cumpney [sic]. I have not seen John and Tom in two weeks, though. I heard from them today. Tom is well but John is sick. I did not learn what was the matter with him. There is a good many of the boys sick with direr hirus [sic]. Kirby is very sick. Jerry Davis is sick. James Kertes is sick. Eliza, I want you to do the best you can. I am uneasy about you. They say the yankees [sic] is at Decatur, and all around. You get you a gun and get in the cave, and go to shooting them. They say we are all bound for the war. I don't know. I am coming home whenever I can get the chance, if I have to wade through Yankees seven deep. I tell you that is sure, I am coming home some of these times. Tell Sissy Pa will come home some of these days. I want to see you very much, but I don't know when I will get that priviledge. [sic] I trust before long. If we never meet on earth again, let us meet in heaven, where we will meet our children. Though we have trials and troubles in this world, yet we have the promise laid down in the Bible, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted". I am among a heap of people, and some of the wickedest ones you ever saw. It almost makes the hair rise on my head, to hear them swearing. They are expecting a fight here before long. I don't know much about it, no way. One thing I know. I wish they would quit it and make peace. That would be glorious news to my ears. If I had some buttermilk to drink, I could write better, but I hant [sic] got none, so I will do the best I can. Save me some eggs. Give my respects

to all the old neighbors. I must bring my letter to a close, saying good bye for awhile. I want to hear from you very bad, but I don't know when that will be. There is no mail. I have to send this letter by hand by the politeing [sic] of Mr. Wilhite.

A few lines to Mr. Johnson:

These lines leave me tolerable well. I hope these lines may find you all well. I want you to take care of Eliza and Henryetta till I come, and don't let the yankees [sic] come there. Take Tige and your gun and go to work. I wish I was there to help you, though I guess I will get to show my hand here before long. So good bye for awhile. J. D. Smith sends his best love and compliments to you all and says tell the children hody,[sic], and more especially, the gals.

J. N. Smith to Eliza A. Smith and

Richmond Johnson and family and all

(This letter was on the back of the previous letter dated April 27, 1862)

Dear Wife,

I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well at this time, and hope these lines may find you and the children well and doing well. I don't know as I have any more news to write than J. N. Smith has wrote. I am here in camp. I am cannonader. I know how to drill with the cannons pretty well. Our company is all for to smash some of the boys here, some there and some yonder, and I expect we will be throwed into another company. Old Humphrey is gone to yankeedom, [sic] I hope, for he is worse than one. I hope it wont [sic] be long till I will get to come home. I want to see you very bad. Do the best you can till I come home. If I never am permitted to come home, I will say to you to do the best you can. Try to raise the children up right. But I believe that I will come home and enjoy your company again. Peggy, I wont [sic] you to kiss Nancy Jane and Mary Martha for me, and Newte says for you to kiss Eliza for him, and tell Eliza to kiss you for me. Pap to write to if the mail starts again. If the mail would run from here there I could do a heap better if I could hear from you. It would be great satisfaction to me, but I hope we will meet again. Me and J. N. and J. D. Smith, Milt Smith and Jake Ed Lamons, John Haket, and John McClary and Mark Kirby is all together. Ki Kieby is gone to the hospital. So I close by saying good bye for awhile.

N. W. Lamons to Margaret J. Lamons

January 10, 1863

State of Tennessee, Lincklon [sic] City

In camp at a little place called Mulberry, 38 miles from Huntsville, stationed only for a few days.

Dear Wife,

It is with pleasure that I drop you a few lines to inform you that I am [illegible] time for which I am thankful to God for his kind mercies toward me and I do hope these few lines may find you all well and doing well. I have not very much news to write anymore than we have been a fighting again as usual. We spent our Christmas a fighting yankees. [sic] That is, we did not fight any a Christmas day, but we commenced the day after Christmas and we fought them eight days in succession. We fought them from Laverne to Murfreesboro, which is fifteen miles. When we got to Murfreesboro to the army we went around and got in behind them back at Laverne, cut off their wagon trains. We burnt up to two hundred wagons, cut out the mules from the wagons, and turned them loose seven hundred mules and taken four hundred prisoners. Colonel Morgan taken the prisoners out in the cedars and paroled them. The boys enjoyed the burning finally. Times was pretty hot by this time, and we left and went to a little place called Nolenville. [sic] There we burnt up some more wagons, placed mash with them again. We left there and come back to Murfreesboro and fought them on the left wing of Bragg's Army. The reason we fought them in so many places [illegible] belong to General Wheelar's [sic] Cavalry. Our artillery with him everywhere he goes [illegible] there is one section of our battery [illegible] with Wheelar [sic] move that are on the [illegible] somewhere. J. D. Smith is with them. I look for them in before long. The loss of the yankees [sic] at Murfreesboro was twenty thousand. Our loss was only five thousand killed, wounded and missing. Our army is moving somewhere but I don't know where. It may be from the corce [sic]. I have a [illegible] that we are going to Mississippi. If we do I am going to try mighty hard to come by home. That would be a good thing. I guess I come mighty close of this morning, but I was a little too late. I will tell you the joke. Our Commander is not with us now. He is off on the scout with Wheelar. [sic] The Lt. that is in command got drunk last night and told me he would give me the leave of absence for a few days, till I could come home. He said he would take all responsibility on his self, but I could not find nothing to make a light with. He said wait till morning and he would write the pass. This morning he did not take quite so much tea, and he was most too sober to write the pass. I came so nigh to getting off, I put on a bild [sic] shirt. The boys wants[sic] to go buy a quart and get him drunk again, but I am looking for our Captain today. I tell you, that if I had a got off I would of made old Barney [illegible] till I got home, but I was [illegible] I was dirty. I had been fighting eight days and had not had time to wash my hands, so there is no great loss, but there was some small profit. I got my neck washed by the operation. I will hush my foolishness, Liza. I want to see you mighty bad [illegible]. Tell Sissy Pa will come home some of these days. I want to hear from you so bad I don't know what to do. I want to know how you came out, whether all is well or not. I have wrote time again and have no answer. Grass brought me a letter from you is all the letter I've got from you since I left Corinth. You stated in your letter you would be confined in the middle of December. I tried to get off to come home then, but I could not get off. Oh, that I could only hear that all is well. That would be glorious news to me. Oh, that I can hear that I can see you. If I could only hear, it would be the most satisfaction in the world. Eliza, I have been in a great many close places. I have had bomb shells to burst all around me and yet I am spared. I thank God that He has preserved me so far. I

trust to Him for His future blessings. I am trying to live a Christian. I feel under obligation to my God the balance of my days for his kindness to me. We have been very lucky so far. We have had five horses killed and never lost a man. I must come to a close. I will write every chance I have.

Good bye,

J. N. Smith to Eliza A. Smith

January 10, 1863

Dear Father and Mother, Brothers and Sisters,

It is much pleasure that I drop you these few lines to inform you that I am well. Hoping these lines may find you all well. I have no need to write anymore than I have already wrote. I want to see you all mighty bad. I long to see the time come when I may be permitted to come home. I could tell you all a heap if I could see you, but I am deprived of that priviledge.[sic] It wont [sic] be long till I shall see you all. If I never do, I entreat [sic] you all to meet me in heaven. Since I saw you, God has saw fit to call two of your children from time to eternity, but thanks be to God, our loss is their gain. Let us live for God, that when he sees fit to call us from this life, that we may meet our children in heaven. I understand that I. G. Johnson had come home wounded. I did not know whether it was so or not. If he is there, tell him I want to see him mighty bad. Tell him to write to me if I can't get to come home. I would be glad if you could come up here. You can ride horse a day and half, for I never wanted to hear from home as bad in my life. Tell the gals hody [sic] for me. I saw Nat Lamons the other day. He was well. I saw John Haket. He was well. I heard from Marion Braswell. He was well. I saw James Griffin. He was well. I must go.

Good bye,

J. N. Smith to Richmond Johnson and all

February 9, 1863

To J. N. Smith and J. D. Smith in the care of Captain Roberts, Arkansas Light Artillery, General Wheelars [sic] Command

It is with pleasure that I write to you to inform you that we are as well common. For while we are thankful to God for His mercies toward us we do earnestly hope these lines may find you both well. We received you [sic] letters dated 23rd December, which afforded us great satisfaction that you was both well and also much gratified to hear that you [illegible] that your prayers may be heard and answered and that you may be spared to come to the fond embrace of your friends at home and worship in your old sanctuary

again. May the Lord bless you and preserve you and may His grace sustain you is my prayer. We received a letter from Manda Smith that brought us the painful news that your brother Thomas was dead. He died at Oxford, Mississippi on October 27th. He died with the pneumonia fever. He was confined five days, but there is great comfort to his bereaved [illegible]

[rest of letter missing]

March 3, 1863

In camp near Shelbyville, Tennessee

Dear Wife,

It is with great pleasure that I drop you a few lines to inform you that I am well at this time, for which I am thankful to God for His mercies toward me, and I hope these few lines may find you well and doing well. I have no news to write. I am doing very well, considering everything. Brother Joseph is on the head of Yellow Creek. He got slightly wounded at Fort Donelson. I am a looking for him to come to the cumpney [sic] in a few days. I saw Will Johnson the other day. He is gone to the hospital. Eliza, I am uneasy about you. Tomorrow will be a year since I have been in the service and I have never received but two letters from you, and one of them I got last spring, and the other last fall. I have wrote forty, I know, to you and your father, and it looks like I can't get to hear a word from you. But I will still live in hope. If I die in despair, I can't see for my life what can be the reason of me not getting a letter. Everybody else can get letters but me. But I will still write every chance I get, still hoping to hear from you. If I just could hear from you, it would do me a thousand worth of good. I have some money I wish you had. Can't you get your Pap to come up here and get it and let me hear from you? Tell everybody hody [sic] for me. Tell Sissy for Pa. Oh, you don't know how bad I want to see you all. Tell your Pap he can ride here in [illegible] days. He can right across by Athens and from there to Fayetteville and from there to Shelbyville, and then take the Murfreesboro Pike and go six miles from Shelbyville, and he will find old Newte. I want you to write to me, and direct your [illegible] to Shelbyville, Tennessee, in the care of Captain Wiggins, Light Artillery, General Wheelar's [sic] Briggade [sic]. I want to see you very bad. I hope it wont[sic] be long before I will get to come home. I will say to you and all, if I never see you again on earth, I ask you to meet me in heaven. I know that a soldier has a bad chance. We are destitute of preaching, but I will say to you that I am still a trying to serve God. Live long, or die soon, I intend, God being my helper, to live and die a Christian. I desire and entrust in your prayers. Pray for your husband, that is exposed to a cold winter, and once in awhile, shot and shelled. Tell the neighbors to write to me. So I must quit for this time, for I have to get supper.

Good bye,

J. N. Smith to Eliza A. Smith and all. I want to hear from you soon.

April 3, 1863

In camp near Shelbyville, Tennessee

Dear Wife,

It is with great satisfaction that I seat myself to drop you a few lines to inform you that I am well at this time for which I am thankful to God for his mercies toward me and I hope these few lines may find you all well. I received your kind letter dated the 15th of March. You don't know how much good it done me to hear from that you one time more and to hear that you was all well and to hear of my fine son. I am proud to hear that all is right. I was mighty uneasy about it. You don't know how my mind is relieved. Take good care of him. I would like to see him [illegible] shore if he is like his Pa. He is a whopper. You wrote tome to send him a name. I don't know hardly what to name it. There is a good many names suggested to me by the boys. If you want to, you may call his name Melvin Naverian. If you don't like that you can name him and you will satisfy me. Tell Sissy that I guess somebody's neck would be hugged shore enough if I was to come home. Tell her to take good care of the baby. I want you to do the best you can. I have not heard from brother Joseph yet. I am uneasy about him. I am afraid the yankees [sic] has taken him a prisoner. I rode six days to get to him but the yankees [sic] chased us off and I had to come back to the command. If the yankees [sic] never got him, he will be up in a few days. He was not very bad hurt. If he [sic] had a not been so cold, we could have brought him to camp. I wish he would come up, for I want to see him. He was wounded in the foot at Fort Donelson and we had a blidst [sic]to save him in a house on account of the cold weather. I received a letter from the old man Smith last week. They was all well. I am in good health. I was weighed today. You can't guess how much I weigh. I was 176 pounds and as pretty as ever.

A few lines to Richmand [sic] and Nancy Johnson

These lines leave me harty,[sic] fat as a buck but I can't jump so high. I hope these lines may find you all well and doing well. I want to see you all mighty bad but I am in hopes it wont [sic] be long till I can see you all. So let us all do the best we can and if we never meet on this earth again let us meet in heaven where we will meet our children and friends who have gone before us. I am a trying to serve God in the best manner I can and I want to see all my friends serve Him. Our stay on earth is but short. Then how important it is for us to try to make our peace, calling, and election shore with God. If we never meet in this life, may we all meet in heaven is my prayer. I was very sorry to hear that you could not come up here for I want to see you mighty bad. Besides, I have one hundred dollars that I want Eliza [illegible]. I must close for want of room (running out of paper).

Good bye,

J. N. Smith to Eliza A. Smith and Richmond and Nancy Johnson

(also on top of an enclosed, blank piece of paper):

You wrote you had no paper. You can write back on this and in a hurry for I don't believe we'll stay here long. Direct your letters to Shelbyville, in the care of Capt. Wiggins, Martin's Brigade,[sic] Wheelars [sic] Command.

State of Alabama

Morgan County

May 10, 1863

Dear Husband,

It is with great pleasure that I seat myself down to let you know that we are all well. Hoping these few lines [rest of letter is missing]

April 19, 1863

Dear Children,

It is with pleasure that we write to you informing you that we are all well, for which we are truly thankful to God for his care over us and we sincerely hope these lines may reach you and find you both well. We have not heard from you in a long time. We are uneasy and long to hear from you. Our mail is regular now from Danville to Jasper and I think you might write often. If I knew where to write to, I would write often. I have wrote two letters to you since we read one from you. The connauccion [sic] is all. We heard from Morgan two or three weeks ago and they was all well. We merely write this letter by way of inquiring and are going to send it by W. Kernelus, belonging to the 28th Alabama Regiment. He says he is acquainted with your battalion. Times here is hard. Everything is scarce and high. Corn is worth three dollars a bushel. I am living at the widow Wilson's mill building and trying to make a crop, but it is with difficulty on account of the provisions. I am in hopes they will make peace soon. I am anxious to see you. We have not heard J. C. Smith for a long time. If you knew how bad we wanted to see you, you would write and come. Dear Children, I now say to you to live faithful and trust in God and His grace is sufficient to save. He locked the mouth of the lion and saved Daniel. He has promised to be with us in troubles and not forsake us. Let us trust then, and if we never see each other in life, let us try to meet in heaven, where parting is no more. A cause the bad paper and write as soon as you receive this.

Yours truly till death,

E. H. (possibly E. W.) and E. Smith o J. N. and J. D. Smith

June 22, 1863

In camp, Shelbyville, Tennessee

Dear Wife,

It is with great pleasure that I drop you a few lines to inform you that I am well at this time, for which I am thankful to God for His mercy toward me and I do hope that these few lines may find you all well and doing well. I have no need to write anymore, than we are ordered away from here. We will start in the morning. We have got three days rushing cooked [illegible] . I expect we will go to west Tennessee. Some thinks we will go to Mississippi. I don't know where we will go. I hope we wont [sic] go to Mississippi. I don't want to go there. I suppose we have gained a great victory in Virginny,[sic] and another in Louisiana, and one at Vicksburg. That is good news, if it is so. Eliza, I want you to do the best you can. I don't know when I will get to come home. I hope before long. I want to see you and the children very bad. I long to see the time come when I will be permitted to come home. I think I would be the happiest man on earth if I could be at home with you and the children, to stay there. But, I am willing to fight awhile longer, if we can gain our independence. I don't reckon it is worth your while to write to me till you hear from me again. I will write as quick as we settle down. I want you to take good care of my babies. Oh, you don't know how bad I want to see them. I have not heard from J. D. Yet. I am uneasy about him. I am afraid he is dead, or he would come in, or write to me. Tell all of the gals hody [sic] for me. I want you, when you write, write all the news you have. I saw Lee Winston yesterday. He was well. I must close in short. Still remaining your husband till death,

J. N. Smith to Eliza A. Smith

A few lines to Mother Johnson:

These lines leave me well, and as well satisfied as a man can be, away from his family and friends. I hope these lines may find you all well. I want to see you very bad. I desire and intrust [sic] in your prayers. I am surrounded with temptations and privations on every hand, but I thank God that His grace is sufficient to sustain me. Mother, do keep down a fuss between Liza and Puss, if you can. May the Lord bless us all is my prayers.

Good bye,

J. N. Smith to Nancy Johnson

July 17, 1863

In camp, Trenton, Georgia

Dear Wife,

It is with great pleasure that I drop a few lines to inform you that I am well at this time, for which I am thankful to God for his kind mercies toward me and I hope these few lines may find you and the children well. After four days of hard riding, I landed at Trenton, Georgia. Here I came up with the command. I found the boys all well. They was all glad to see me. I am not with the part of the battery that I left at Huntsville. I missed it about Guntersville, and I crossed Sand Mountain and pushed through to Trenton. We aint [sic] a going to stay here but a few days. I don't know where we will go, but we will go somewhere to recruit. When we stop, I will write again and let you know where I am. When I got to the cumpney [sic] you may guess I did not have much money. I only paid three dollars a night and I only had fourteen dollars when I left home. I have got a nuf [sic] left to buy me a plug of tobacco. Hooray for me. I will live what time I do live. Do the best you can. I will write again, soon as we stop. Give my respects to J. E. Doyle and family. Tell them I got to my command safe and sound. Kiss my babies for me, and take care of yourself. So good bye for awhile,

J. N. Smith to Eliza A. Smith

July 27, 1863

Alexandria, Alabama

Dear Wife,

It is with great pleasure that I drop you a few lines to inform you that I am well at this time, for which I am thankful to God for His mercies toward me, and I do hope these few lines may find you and the children well. I have no news to write. After I got to Trenton, Georgia, I have taken the worse cold I believe I had in my life, but it is a getting better now. We left Trenton last Wednesday. We got to Alexandria last night. We are going to stay here two or three days to rest. I think from the way we are agoing,[sic] we will stop in Mississippi, and I had as soon go anywhere else. I don't know for certain where we will go. We had had a very warm march so far. We are a living on one third rations, and it goes pretty hard with the old men. But I am in hopes times will get better. Roseneares [sic] and potatoes is here. That will help a great deal. There is good crops everywhere I have been. I am at Alexandria, Alabama, sixteen miles from where I was born in Calhoun County. Eliza, it seems to me like I want to see you worse now than I did before I came home. It appears to me like I have been lost ever since I left home. I am somewhat out of heart. Everything looks gloomy and dismal. The Lord only knows what is to become of us. At the present, it looks like the enemy has got the upper hand of us, but I don't feel are whipped yet, although we have give up some important points. But that don't whip us yet. It will cause us to have to fight awhile longer. I will tell you my notion about this war. My notion is that we will never have peace as long as there is so much wickedness existing. The people is too unthankful. It looks like the people is almost given over to a reprobate mind. It appears to me like the people is almost ready to say, "Get you up Aaron, and make us a god, whom we may serve". I want you to write me as soon as you get this letter and let me know how you are, and whether you have moved or not, and all the news you

have, and how the children is, and when you heard from J. G. Johnson and whether you have heard from J. D., or not, and give me all the news you have and direct your letter to Alexandria, Alabama, Calhoun County, Wiggin's Battery, Martin's Brigade [sic], Wheeler's [sic] Calvery [sic] Command, direct to Alexandria, and if we are gone, the letter will follow us. Be shore and write. I will get the letter, and when we

[rest of letter is missing]