



Letters Home: Two Perspectives

Soldiers wrote home when they could, and their families waited anxiously for letters from them. Work with a partner to compose two letters that could have been written by each of the soldiers described below (these soldiers have been made up based on historical information about the Battle of Nashville and the regiments involved). Be sure to take note of the time indicated and the setting described. Also be sure to mention Fort Negley, shown in the photograph on the next page.

Date: December 8, 1864, about a week after the Battle of Franklin and a week before the Battle of Nashville **Time:** 3:30 p.m. **Place:** Nashville, Tennessee

Weather: Cold and icy

Confederate Soldier: Private James Campbell, age 25, of Paris, Tennessee, joined the 46th Tennessee Regiment in 1861. He is a veteran of numerous battles, including the horrific Battle of Franklin. Private Campbell is grieving over the death of his closest army buddies in that battle. He is weary of the war's death and destruction but still devoted to his remaining comrades. He and his fellow soldiers are camped outside of the city of Nashville, within sight of Fort Negley. They are not allowed to make fires at night because they are within the range of the fort's guns. He has not eaten all day, and has just a thin blanket to keep him warm, when he takes out paper and pen (given to him by a woman in Franklin as he left that city) to write to his parents.

Union Soldier: Private Benjamin Gray, age 27, of Gallatin, Tennessee, joined the 13th United States Colored Troops in 1863. A former slave, he has recently reached Nashville from Waverly, Tennessee, where he helped to complete the Nashville & Northwestern Railroad and then served on guard duty along the railroad. He is in awe of the size of Fort Negley and the other defenses around Nashville. Several of his comrades helped build Fort Negley before they joined the 13th. Private Gray has yet to see any combat, so he is a little nervous but also eager to do some actual fighting. To let his wife and children in Gallatin know that he is now in Nashville, he dictates a letter to them that one of his officers writes for him. The same officer is teaching Private Gray to read and write, when time permits.

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Nashville, Tennessee, from Fort Negley looking east, March 1864.
Photograph by George N. Barnard.

Courtesy of Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress,
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