

A Guide to the Otto Brothers Letters, 1865 SC 0014

Otto Brothers Letters

1865



Title Statement

A Guide to the Otto Brothers Letters, 1865 SC 0014

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

SC 0014

Unit Date

1865

Language

English .

Abstract

The Otto Brothers Letters consist of three letters from Jacob W. and Henry H. Otto to their friends and parents in Altoona, Pennsylvania, dated February 24, March 10, and March 18, 1865. They write to inform their loved ones of their condition while their regiment is stationed near Hancock Station, Virginia.

Creator

Otto, Jacob William, 1836-1865

source

Cohasco, Inc.

Extent

0.08 cubic feet 1 legal folder

Repository

James Madison University Libraries Special Collections

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection open to research. Researchers must register and agree to copyright and privacy laws before using this collection. Please contact Research Services staff before visiting the James Madison University Special Collections Library to use this collection.

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Acquisition Information

James Madison University Special Collections Library acquired this material at auction from Cohasco, Inc. in January 2016 and February 2017.

Preferred Citation

[identification of item], [box #, folder #], Otto Brothers Letters, 1865, SC 0014, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA.

Bio/Historical Note

In 1865, Privates Jacob William (1836-1865) and Henry H. Otto (1842-1910) were fresh recruits who served in Company C, 205th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment in General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Potomac. In late February 1865, the Otto brothers were encamped near Hancock Station, Virginia in the vicinity of Petersburg. They wrote letters home to their parents Henry Otto (d. 1872) and Margaret Hainley Otto (1815-1891) in Altoona, Pennsylvania in which they described the likelihood of Union victory and what they planned to do when they returned home. Grant's army faced General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, which was entrenched outside of Richmond and Petersburg (June 1864-March 1865). The formal Siege of Petersburg began in March 1865, and Lee abandoned Petersburg in April 1865. Henry was wounded at Fort Stedman on March 25, 1865 and after the conclusion of the war went on to reside in Altoona. Jacob was wounded on April 2, 1865 at Fort Sedgwick and died soon after.

Scope and Content

The Otto Brothers Letters consist of three letters from Jacob W. and Henry H. Otto to their friends and parents in Altoona, Pennsylvania, dated February 24, March 10, and March 18, 1865. The letters are written in the same hand, presumably by the brother with the neatest penmanship, though each letter is authored jointly by both brothers.

The February 24, 1865 letter is addressed to "My dear friends." In it the brothers mention that the "Johneys is diserting [sic] every nite more or less. They say they are in the maner [sic] of starving. They are massing their trupes [sic] on the left of Petersburg. They want to break through our lines. I think they will have enough to do if they try that." Additionally, they mention the news of Samuel Otto and Jacob Wilt's recent enlistment. The brothers end the letter by saying, "We are kept in idleness so if anything takes place we can be ready in a moments notice."

In the March 10 and March 18 letters, the brothers are writing home to their parents in Altoona, Pennsylvania. The letters describe the environment in which their regiment is camped in Hancock Station, Virginia. The brothers describe their various experiences in nearly becoming involved with a battle. They describe the thousands of deaths they witnessed and explain their desire to serve the Union proudly. They explain their belief that their deaths would be justified in support of the Union's cause, as well as their disdain and hatred for the rebellion of the southern states.

The Ottos also explain the conditions of their camp, describing the cold and muddy scenario and the inability

of both Union and Confederate troops to engage in combat. They also describe the constant stream of Confederate deserters which entered into their camp daily.

The Otto brothers conclude their letters with personal notes to friends and family remaining in Altoona, asking their parents to relay some information to others.

Related Material

Margaret B. Burruss Collection of Scott and Saufley Family Papers, 1786-1912, 1991, SC 0118, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Oliver H. Chalker Collection of Wommack Family Letters, 1864, SC 0102, Special Collections, Carrier Library, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Keywords

Soldiers -- Pennsylvania -- Correspondence
Virginia -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Correspondence
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Correspondence
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Regimental histories
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Campaigns
Petersburg (Va.) -- History -- Siege, 1864-1865
Letters (correspondence)
Cohasco, Inc.

Bibliography

Obituary for Henry H. Otto, *The Altoona Tribune*, February 1, 1910. Obituary for Margaret Hainley Otto, *The Altoona Mirror*, March 23, 1891.

Arrangement

Three letters housed in one legal folder.

Description of Subordinate Components

Otto Brothers Letters

Unit Date 1865

Mixed Materials [1000885757] 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Language English.