4. A Southern Girl Records Her Brothers' Eagerness to Fight, 1861–1862

May 15 [1861]: My Brother [William] started at daybreak this morning for New Orleans. He goes as far as Vicksburg on horseback. He is wild to be off to Virginia. He so fears that the fighting will be over before he can get there that he has decided to give up the plan of raising a company and going out as Captain. He has about fifty men on his rolls and they and Uncle Bo have empowered him to sign their names as members of any company he may select. Mamma regrets so that My

Brother would not wait and complete his commission. He could get his complement of men in two weeks, and having been educated at a military school gives him a great advantage at this time. And we think there will be fighting for many days yet.

May 25: My Brother returned this evening. He did not succeed in joining the Monticello Guards from Carroll Parish. They had gone up the river, but he joined the Jeff Davis Guards at Vicksburg and was elected 3rd lieutenant. It is an Irish company officered by Americans. It was raised by Dr. Buckner and Capt. Manlove, and if My Brother had seen either of them on his way to New Orleans, they would have given him the captaincy. Tom Manlove is a captain. Uncle Bo cannot join it as a private, as the association would not be pleasant; and he is so disappointed not to be with My Brother. He hopes to get into the Volunteer Southerns, which will leave Vicksburg in a few days.

The Jeff Davis Guards leave for Richmond [Va.] on Monday, and so My Brother and Uncle Bo get off in the morning as early as possible. My Brother told us much of the soldiers he saw in New Orleans: the Zouaves, with their gay, Turkish trousers and jackets and odd drill; the Tiger Rifles, recruited from the very dregs of the City and commanded by a man who has served a term in the penitentiary; and the Perrit Guards, the gambler's company—to be admitted one must be able to cut, shuffle, and deal on the point of a bayonet.

My Brother is in extravagant spirits. He is so glad to get off, and then he saw Kate and I think they have made it up again. Uncle Bo is very sad for he so wanted for them both to be in the same company. Now they can only hope to be in the same regiment. I can see them go, for I feel I know they will return. The parting will be dreadful for Mamma. She so depends on My Brother, her oldest and best beloved. The boys are disinclined because they cannot go too.

May 26: Our two loved ones left us this morning, but we cannot think it a last farewell. My heart tells me they will come again. They go to bear all hardships, to brave all dangers, and to face death in every form, while we whom they go to protect are lapped safe in luxurious ease. But oh! the weary days of watching and waiting that stretch before us! We who stay behind may find it harder than they who go. They will have new scenes and constant excitement to buoy them up and the consciousness of duty done.

Mr. Catlin came over to tell them good-bye. My Brother explained everything to him and gave him a letter for the men Brother had been drilling. I hope they will not blame him.

Mamma fitted them out with everything she thought they could need. And their three horses were well loaded down. Wesley [a slave] went to wait on them and was very proud of the honor of being selected to “go to battle with Mars Will.” We hope he will do, though he has not been much about the house. Uncle Bo would not take a man for himself. He says a private has no business with a body servant, but if he changes his mind, a boy can be sent to him at any time.

Both will belong to infantry companies, and they will be fitted out with uniforms in Vicksburg. Brother Coley went with them as far as Vicksburg. They left so quickly that none of their friends knew in time to come over to say good-bye. Mr. Valentine will be sorry. He is such a friend of My Brother’s.
They said good-bye in the fairest, brightest of May mornings. Will they come again in the summer's heat, the autumn's grey, or the winter's cold?

Mr. Newton and the boys rode out to the river with them. As they rode away, out of the yard and through the quarters, all the house servants and fieldhands watched them go. And many a heartfelt “Good-bye, Marse William and Marse Bo—God bless you” went with them.

I hope we put up everything they need. We lined their heavy blankets with brown linen and put pockets at the top for soap, combs, brushes, handkerchiefs, etc. The linen is tied to the blankets with strong tapes so that it can be easily taken off and washed. And we impressed it on Wesley that he must keep everything clean and take the best care of both our soldiers as long as they are together. He promised faithfully to do his best. Mamma has been very brave and stood the separation better than I hoped.

March 1 [1862]: ... Another soldier is leaving our fireside. Brother Coley has joined Dr. Buckner’s cavalry company, and long before the month is over he will be on the field fighting to repel the invader. The first March winds find him safe in the haven of home. April will find him marching and counter-marching, weary and worn, and perhaps dead on the field of battle. He is full of life and hope, so interested in his company, and eager to be off. He says chains could not hold him at home. He has been riding ever since his return Wednesday trying to get the horses, subscriptions, and recruits for his company. Robert Norris goes with a sad foreboding heart to perform a dreaded duty. Brother Coley goes as a bridesgroom to his wedding with high hopes and gay anticipations. Robert’s is really the highest type of courage. He sees the danger but presses on. Brother Coley does not even think of it—just a glorious fight for fame and honor.

Sept. 24: ... Brother Walter goes on Monday to join Dr. Buckner’s company in Bolivar County [Miss.] and all are busy preparing him for the start. The house will be desolate indeed when he is really gone, following in the perilous paths his brothers are treading before him. If he would only wait until he is eighteen or until there is another requisition for troops, but “No, no, he cannot wait. The war must be over before he gets there, and he would feel disgraced forever if he had not fought in the good Cause.” So runs his logic. There are so many victories he fears even now peace may be proclaimed before he is enrolled as a soldier fighting with his brothers.

5. A Union Veteran Remembers
Military Drills and Farewells, 1909

These were days of somewhat dull camp routine. To young men entirely unused to restraint, they were insupportable, yet such experience was necessary to transform them into serviceable soldiers. From six or eight hours a day were spent in drill, the remaining time being devoted to the various incidents of camp life, such as roll-call.