

Letters Home

By Karen E. Livsey and the Fenton History Center staff

Holidays are the special times when people often think of home, their family and friends whether they are faraway or just around the corner. We are beginning to accumulate letters from soldiers in the Fenton History Center collection. We have some from the Civil War and World War II. Looking through these letters we find references to holidays, especially Christmas.

The Civil War letters may mention Christmas or New Years Day, however, unlike in the 20th century, the soldiers did not share Christmas dinner with the whole Company. The soldiers were sometimes able to purchase a special food or drink for the holiday, such as oysters or a cake or pie. They would share it with their tent mates.

World War II letters mention the turkey dinners the Army furnished for all the men at Thanksgiving and Christmas. In our collection are many letters sent home by Pfc. (later Sgt.) Charles J. Frederick of Falconer and letters by Pfc. Gordon Erickson of Jamestown. The letters sent from overseas are on onionskin paper and in airmail envelopes. Some



were V-Mail. Those sent from within the United States are in regular envelopes and on regular paper.

Pfc. Erickson wrote from Fort H. G. Wright, New York on December 24, 1942:

...Thank you so much fro the X'mas present. The tie & handkerchiefs will come in handy, the nuts & candy will soon be gone and Allan-that shoe brush was just what I was going to buy. I bet you-Mother-you spent a lot of time & sugar making that swell candy....Well the old chimes are ringing outside now. The P.X. quite[sic] selling stuff (beer, ice cream, sandwiches[sic]) at 6:30 I understand so I believe everybody is in their tent. I seen some big turkeys in our messhall tonight. Some feed tomorrow. I know were going to get cigarets (probably one pk.). I'll let you know what we have & get....

In a letter dated Jan. 31, 1944 which makes reference to New Years eve, so was it really December 31, 1944? Pfc. Erickson wrote from Columbia, South Carolina: "Dear Dad, Al & Lal, Here it is New Year's Eve and expect to spend a quiet night here in the barracks. Today's been warm. Just like Spring. Went to the movie this P. M. and saw a ice skating show. Tomorrow's another work day for the Army, although we're not doing much work these days. Just putting in our time.... I received a X'mas card from Carl "Hotdog" Wennerstrom yesterday from France. It just said 'Merry X'mas' on it."

From Pfc. Erickson "Nov. 19, 1944-...I expect we'll be having Thanksgiving Day off and a big turkey feed. Thursday will be my third Thanksgiving in the Army. Today makes two years in the Army for me. It sure seems a long time ago since I left for Fort Niagara...."

From Pfc. Charles J. Frederick of Falconer-

“New Guinea, December 9, 1943, Dear Mom, ...I sent you a money order of seventy-five (\$75) the other day and I hope that you will get it in time for Xmas. I would have like to send it you sooner but could not get my money so that I could send it to you and tell you what to do for presents for the others in the family. I hope that you will do the best under the circumstances and that everyone will be satisfied. If I were anywhere near home and could have did it myself you know that I have been capable of always getting everyone something good for Xmas.”

“December 25, 1943, New Guinea

Dear Mother, Here it is Xmas out here and it sure was a hot day. As you know we work every day out here so I had to work till five tonight. The day was quite quiet everyone was happy that it was Xmas, but just didn't seem like it to me because I kind of miss the snow and all the excitement that goes on. We had a wonderful Xmas dinner: Turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes, radishes, cake raisin bread & plenty butter, fruit cocktail and ice cold tea, oh yes plenty gravy. I ate so much I hardly ate any supper.”

The next year he sends on November 29, 1944: Dear Mother, ...I'm enclosing a money order and also some pictures in this letter. With the money order, I hope you get some thing good for yourself for Xmas and hope it gets to you before time. I really can't send anything else to you and hope that this will do.”

“25 December 1944

Dear Mother,... Today we had a swell Xmas dinner, turkey, dressing, cranberries, potatoes, peas, lemon pie, bread & butter. I also had a can of beer with it, not bad.”

Letters, like diaries, are wonderful sources for the historical nuggets that bring history “up close and personal.” Our collection does not have letters or diaries from the Spanish-American War, World War I, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam War or any of the more recent areas of conflict. As many World War II veterans are downsizing their homes and Vietnam veterans are entering their retirement years, please consider donating your family letters, or copies of the letters, to the Fenton collection to benefit future generations. How else would we be able to follow Pfc. C. J. Frederick and Pfc. G. Erickson through two years of holidays while they served our nation?