

Letter from Galusha Balch, Surgeon in the Civil War—

*I found this letter in the back of the **Genealogy of the Balch Families: England and America** by Galusha B. Balch, M.D., 1897, published by Eben Putnam, Salem, Massachusetts, and available online at:*

<https://archive.org/details/genealogyofbalch00balc>.

It is on the letterhead from Claferley Farm, Jerseys, Richmond, Mass., where my cousin Susan Lockwood and her family live now. There is no date on the letter. Susan and I are the granddaughters of Galusha Balch's daughter, Margaret Andrews Balch (6/1/1875-8/12/1954).

*Patricia Wheeler
Livermore, California
November 27, 2014*

It may be of interest to you to know some of the experiences I went through in the Civil War.

My first services were with the 98 New York infantry. With this regiment, I was in the Peninsula Campaign under McClellan. On the advance from Yorktown, I was ordered to collect the sick into General Hospital at Yorktown. I was then kept in Yorktown General Hospital. Among other duties I was assigned to loading vessels with sick to be brought North. Among other vessels I loaded the Steamer State of Maine with over 400. After loading her and sending my report to Medical Director Wheaton; and without a moment's warning I was ordered to take her to Baltimore which I did being the only Medical Officer. On arriving at Baltimore and reporting to Medical Director Simpson who asked me if I could not keep the men on board 24 hours longer, I told him I could provided he gave me Soft-Ino Coffee Shooger etc. He told me to make out my requisition which I did, and the rations were at the boat almost as soon as I could get there.

I found the good people of Baltimore were bringing and giving to the sick things to eat that would harm them. I therefore had to get a guard to keep them away. The only man I lost I found under his pillow a quantity of the food that had been given him.

I returned to Yorktown and was soon stricken with Typhoid Fever.

On McClellan's retreat, the Hospital was removed to Portsmouth Grove, R.I. and I with the other sick was moved to that Hospital. As a result of the Typhoid Fever, I was forced to resign.

On being out of the service for about a year, I returned as Assistant Surgeon of the 2nd Veteran Cavalry New York Volunteers. With this regiment I went to the Department of the Gulf. I was the only Medical Officer with the Regiment during the Red River Campaign. I rode and did duty with this Regiment when so sick and weak that I had to be helped on to my horse. On the retreat of Banks Army we were left at Morganza Bend, La. Here we were continuously scouting though Point Coupe [sic] Parish and as far south as Baton Rouge. We made one raid out from Port Hudson and brought the enemy down on us in force but we got back to the river and under the protection of the grain boats got on board of our transport safely.

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Another raid we made from Baton Rouge across Louisiana and Mississippi to Pascagoula Bay. I was the only Surgeon with the Regiment, for two weeks on this raid, in the month of December. I did not have a dry bit of clothing on me, sleeping on the ground every night. In the spring of 1865 we were put on board transport and taken to Pensacola, Fl. from which place we marched to Pollard, Ala. skirmishing all the way. Then we swung around to Fort Blakely, Ala. opposite Mobile. From this point we marched up through Alabama to Georgia line, when we received a courier stating that all the Rebels had surrendered east of Alabama.

We then turned back cutting bands of Johnnies and parolling them, until we reached Montgomery from which place we marched to Taladega, Ala. where we remained until November when we were mustered out.

When at Alexandria, La., my regiment was out on the skirmish line, I rode a little to the right of my regiment and was taken for a target. The first bullet passed over my horse's neck in front of me, the second under my feet. When on the retreat from Alexandria, I saw a shell coming directly at me; it however went just to one side of me. For two separate days from sunrise to sunset, I have been under Artillery fire shells bursting all around me. My hearing was impaired by the concussion of the bursting shells. I was almost knocked from my horse by the windage of one. One killed a man not six feet from me.