Excerpts from the Letters of

ELISHA FRANKLIN PAXTON

BRIGADIER-GENERAL, C.S.A.

Composed of His Letters from Camp and Field While
an Officer in the Confederate Army, with an
Introductory and Connecting Narrative
Collected and Arranged by His Son,
John Gallatin Paxton

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FOREWARD

In this preliminary note are set forth the nature and purpose of this volume. Although printed, it is not published, and is intended only for distribution among General Paxton's family, friends, and comrades.

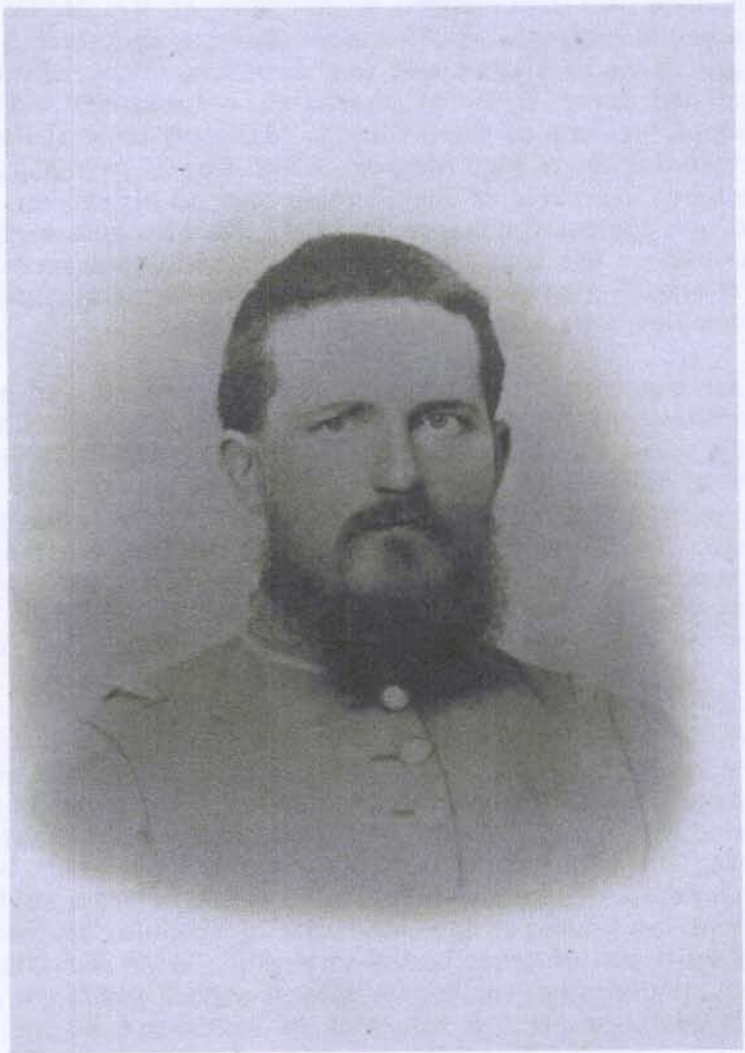
It is entitled "Memoir and Memorials." The Memoir is a sketch of General Paxton's life contained in the first chapter and in the subsequent narrative connecting the letters. The Memorials are the letters themselves. The book consists mainly of these letters, and it is to perpetuate them and thereby set forth the character of the writer that this book is printed.

General Paxton's career as a soldier, honorable though it was, would not justify its publication. His letters, written without reserve to the loved wife at home, not only show what manner of man he was and how he thought and felt while an actor in these trying times, but also are representative of his comrades, of whom he was one of the highest types. These letters thus originating are a true mirror of the writer, revealing his real qualities and characteristics with photographic accuracy. Showing as they do rare qualities of both mind and soul, they explain why he and his comrades were able so long to defend themselves against great odds. They also show how firmly was fixed in the mind of this man, a scholar and a lawyer, partly educated in the North, the belief that his State was sovereign and his first duty was to her. These letters are the material of which history is made. To the descendants of General Paxton they should be a stimulus to honorable lives and brave deeds. To his comrades in arms they recall, with sadness perhaps, the scenes through which they so honorably passed. To his son, the writer of these lines, he is not even a memory - a tale that is told, that is all. At the knee of his widowed mother, he first learned to revere the name and virtues of his sire, and these letters, coming into his hands after manhood, brought to him a keener appreciation of those virtues. Ancestral pride is only good so far as it perpetuates the ancestral virtues. May these letters serve to do this and

teach the descendants of this young soldier, who so freely gave his life for his fatherland, that they spring from another Bayard, a chevalier sans peur et sans reproche.

J.G.P.

Independence, Missouri
September, 1905



General Elisha Franklin Paxton: Grandson of "Soldier John" Grigsby's daughter, Rachel Grigsby McNutt. (Photograph courtesy of General Paxton's grandson, Matthew W. Paxton, of Lexington, Virginia.)

MEMOIR

Elisha Franklin Paxton was born March 4, 1828, in Rockbridge County, Virginia, the son of Elisha Paxton and Margaret McNutt. His grandfather, William Paxton, came to Rockbridge in its earliest settlement about the year 1745. He was a man of character and substance and commanded a company at the battle of Yorktown. Margaret McNutt was the daughter of Alexander McNutt and Rachel Grigsby. She was one of a family of eight sisters and four brothers, many of whom possessed marked intelligence and great force of character. Alexander Gallatin McNutt, Governor of Mississippi, was one of the brothers. Margaret McNutt Paxton possessed the family characteristics to a high degree. She was a granddaughter of John Grigsby, whose sobriquet was "Soldier John," going back to his service under Admiral Vernon in his expedition against Cartagena in 1741. He also commanded a company in the Revolutionary War. His soldierly qualities were stamped on his descendants, four of whom were brigadier-generals in the Confederate army, and many others were officers of lower rank who followed the stars and bars.

The Paxtons are descended from a soldier under Cromwell who emigrated with his Presbyterian comrades to the north of Ireland. As members of a hostile and and alien race their life there was one of conflict. Later they bitterly resented the action of the crown in compelling them to pay tithes for the support of the English Church, and largely on this account emigrated to America. Men, like plants, take on certain characteristics from the soil in which they live, the air they breathe and other physical surroundings. These militant churchmen found an appropriate home for the development of their sterling virtues in the beautiful valleys lying between the Blue Ridge and the Alleghanies - the Paxtons in the rough but fertile lands of Rockbridge.

Here, on a beautiful spot in the foothills of the Blue Ridge, Frank Paxton first saw the light. There in his childhood he imbibed that love of freedom and devotion to duty which had marked his ancestors. As a boy he manifested unusual vigor of intellect. He attended the classical school of his cousin James H. Paxton, and at the age of fifteen entered the junior class at Washington College, where he received his degree of A.B. in two years. He then went to Yale, where he graduated in two years, and afterward took the law course at the University of Virginia. He was five feet ten inches high, heavily built and of great bodily strength. As an indication both of his physical and soldierly qualities he was known both at school and in the army as "Bull" Paxton. Dr. John B. Minor wrote the following of his course at the University of Virginia:

> Gen. E. F. Paxton, who fell at the battle of Chancellorsville, in May, 1863, was a student of law here, and a graduate in the Law Department of the University in 1849. As a student, none of his contemporaries acquitted themselves more satisfactorily, and in point of conduct, he was entirely exemplary. I think he could then have been not more than twenty-one years of age, but I have retained a lively recollection of him during the intervening period of forty-three years, so that whilst, after so great a lapse of time, I cannot recall particulars, he left on my mind an impression of unusual merit and a conviction that if he lived, he was

destined not only to achieve eminence, but what in my estimation is far better, to attain to distinguished usefulness.

Upon his admission to the bar, he spent several years in the prosecution of land claims in the State of Ohio and resided there. He was successful in this enterprise and made some money. In 1854 he opened a law office in Lexington, Va., and married Miss Elizabeth White, the daughter of Matthew White of Lexington. This union was a most happy one and there were born of it four children, three of whom survived him - Matthew W. Paxton of Lexington, Va., the writer (John Gallatin Paxton), and Frank Paxton of San Saba County, Texas.

Frank Paxton at once took a high rank in his profession and engaged in important business enterprises, among others becoming the president of the first bank in Rockbridge. His strength of character was shown by the fact that at this time, when the drinking of whiskey was a universal custom, he abstained altogether from its use, and continued to do so until his death. In 1860 failing eyesight compelled him to abandon his profession and he purchased a beautiful estate near Lexington, known as Thorn Hill.

In this beautiful home with wife and babes, the drum tap of '61 found him. It is needless to say that he had been taking an active part in the political events leading up to this. He was a man of intense feeling, when aroused, and had early adopted the view of the Constitution of the United States, which came to him from his fathers. To him the right of secession was as clear as the right of trial by jury. The State was sovereign and in the hot blood of his youth he believed the time had come to secede. So the war in which he entered was for the defense of his home and fireside and against an invading foe. It was as righteous to him as that waged by the Greeks at Thermopylae and his life, if needs be, must be cheerfully surrendered in such a cause. In the contest in Rockbridge County over the election of delegates to the secession convention he took an active part in favor of the secession candidates. His great moral courage was conspicuous at the meeting held in Lexington, where he again and again attempted to overcome the large majority opposed to him. He was unsuccessful in this, and Rockbridge sent Union delegates to Richmond.

He had no special military training and entered the service as first lieutenant of the Rockbridge Rifles, and afterwards a part of the 27th Virginia Regiment, Stonewall Brigade. With this company, at the first call for troops in April, 1861, he marched to the front.

The pomp and circumstances of glorious war were present when on that bright spring morning his company and several others, with colors flying and martial music, took up the line of march from Lexington to Harper's Ferry. His young wife, with sad forebodings, wept until her handkerchief was wet with tears. In their last fond embrace he took this from her hand and as a reminder of her love carried it on many a bloody battlefield.

He wrote to his wife weekly and these letters, which well show the man and the times, make up substantially the subsequent chapters of this volume. They are edited only by omitting parts too personal to be of general interest.

MEMORIALS

New Market, April 21, 1861

I reached here this morning in good health and in spirits as good as could be expected, considering the bloody prospect ahead and the sad hearts left at home. It is bad enough. I have no time to think of my business at home. My duties now for my State require every energy of mind and body which I can devote to them. Do just as you please. If you think proper stay in town and leave all matters and keys on the farm in charge of John Fitzgerald.

Harper's Ferry, April 25, 1861

We reached this place on Tuesday morning. Instead of being fatigued, I was rather improved by the trip. Here we have all the comforts which we could expect, good food and comfortable quarters, better then generally falls to a soldier's lot. I have enough to occupy every moment of my time in preparing the company for the service which we may expect to see before long. They have much to learn before they can be relied on for efficiency. I regret that my eyes are no better as it is necessary for me to read much for my own preparation. Try, Love, to make yourself contented and happy. I would not like to think that I was forgotten by dear wife and little ones at home, but it would give me a lighter heart to think that they appreciated the necessity of my absence, and the high importance of a faithful discharge of my present duties. My eyes will not enable me to write more without risk of injury to them.

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Harper's Ferry, May 18, 1961

My wife, I have no sweeter word than this to call the dear little woman at home, with whom my happiest reminiscences of the past and fondest hopes of the future have ever been associated. (You speak of dreams; I had one of you, that we were married again, and thought we had a very nice time of it.) We have moved from our station in the mountain back to town. Here we have very pleasant quarters, in which I think it likely we will remain until we have a battle. When this will be, it is impossible to say, but is not expected immediately. I received the green flannel shirt and put it on for the first time today. It is very comfortable and valued the more because made by the hands of my dear wife. Present my kind regards to John (the gardener) and hand him the enclosed order on Wm. White. Present my kindest regards to Jack, Jane, and Phebe (slaves). Kiss the children for me, and for yourself take a husband's best love.

Martinsburg, May 24, 1861

After mentioning it in your letter, you add in a postscript, "Don't forget to tell me where your books are." I told you in my last letter, but wish I had not. Really, Love, I do not wish you to be annoyed with my business. I wish you to be very happy, and this I know you cannot be if you undertake to harass yourself with my business. Go out home occasionally and see how matters are going on, but do not trouble yourself any further. So, Love, if any one calls on you about my matters, tell them my instructions to you were to have nothing to do with them. Write no more about business, but about my dear wife and little ones, if you wish to make your letters interesting.

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Camp Stephens, near Martinsburg, June 30, 1861

I wrote to you last Monday, and immediately was ordered off on another expedition, in which I have been engaged the greater part of the past week. I was in charge of a small force engaged in destroying a bridge some ten miles from our camp on the railroad. It was a rather dangerous expedition, but I have become so much accustomed to the prospect of danger that it excites no alarm. I thought when we left Winchester that we certainly would have had a battle in a very few days; but two weeks have elapsed, and there is, I think, less reason to expect one now than there has been heretofore. The enemy is encamped on the opposite side of the Potomac some ten miles from here, but, I am satisfied, in less force than we have in this vicinity. Under such circumstances, if we get a fight we shall have to cross the river and make the attack. Our picket-guards occasionally come in contact, and the other day one of the Augusta Cavalry was severely wounded. I hope you are having good success as a farmer; so, if I should be left behind when the war is over, you may be able to take care of yourself. You think, Love, I write very indifferently about it. As to the danger to myself, I am free to confess that I feel perhaps too indifferent. Not so as to the separation from loved wife and little ones at home. I never knew what you were worth to me until this war began and the terrible feeling came upon me that I had pressed you to my bosom, perhaps, for the last time. I always keep upon my person the handkerchief which I took from your hand whem we separated. It was bathed in tears which that sad moment brought to the eyes of my darling. I will continue to wear it. It may yet serve as a bandage to staunch a wound with. I keep one of your letters, which may serve to indicate who I am, where may be found the fond wife who mourns my death. May neither be ever needed to serve such a purpose! Enclosed I send a letter from James Edmonson to his grandmother. Say to Mrs. Chapin that she may rely upon my acting the part of comrade and friend to George. Kiss the children for me, and for yourself accept all that a fond lover and husband can offer.

Near Winchester, July 8, 1961

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It is now nearly three months since I left home, and I hardly know how the time has passed. All I know is that if I do my duty, I have but little leisure. I am used to the hardships of the service, and feel that I have the health and strength to bear any fatigue or exposure. Sometimes, as I lie upon the ground, my face to the sky, I think of Matthew's little verse, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," and my mind wanders back to the wife and little ones at home. Bless you! If I ever return, the wish which lies nearest to my heart is for your happiness. And now, my darling, again good-bye. Kiss little Matthew and Galla for me, and tell them Papa sends it. Give my love to Pa and Rachel, and for yourself accept all that a fond husband can give.

Manassas, July 23, 1861

My Darling: We spent Sunday last in the sacred work of achieving our nationality and independence. The work was nobly done, and it was the happiest day of my life, our wedding-day not excepted. I think the fight is over forever. I received a ball through my shirt-sleeves, slightly bruising my arm, and others, whistling "Yankee Doodle" round my head, made fourteen holes through the flag which I carried in the hottest of the fight. It is a miracle that I escaped with my life, so many falling dead around me. Buried two of our comrades on the field. God bless my country, my wife, and my little ones!

Manassas, August 3, 1861

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Since this much of my letter was written, Lewis has handed my your note of 25th ult. You say you are almost tempted, from my short and far between letters, to think that I do not love you as well as I ought. You are a mean sinner to think so. Just think how hard I fought at Manassas to make you the widow of a dead man or the wife of a live one, and this is all the return my darling wife makes for it. If I was near enough I would hug you to death for such meanness. In truth, Love, I may say that I never closed one of my short notes until my eyes began to smart. Sometimes I did not wish to write. When we were for some time on the eve of a battle I did not with to write lest you might be alarmed for my safety. Until the last month, when danger seemed so threatening, I think I have written once a week. But, Love, when you doubt my affection, you must look to the past, and if the doubt is not dispelled, I can't satisfy you, and you must continue in the delusion that the truest and steadiest feeling in my heart has even known - my love for you - has passed away.

I know, Love, you think I exposed myself too much in the battle. But for such conduct on the part of thousands, the day would have been lost, and our State would

now have been in the possession of our enemies. When I think of the result, and the terrible doom from which we are saved, I feel that I could have cheerfully yielded up my life, and have left my wife and little ones draped in mourning to have achieved it. Our future course must be the same, if we expect a like result.

Centreville, August 7, 1861

I have received from Gen. Jackson the appointment to act as his aid, and wish you to send my uniform coat and pants by Rollin, Kahle or some one of our men, whichever comes first. Switzer is just leaving, and I have not time to write more.

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Camp Harmon, September 1, 1861

I wish very much this war was over, and I could be with you again at our home. There you remember, Love, you used to read, last December, to me of the stirring events in South Carolina; but we never dreamed that such a struggle would result as that in which we are now engaged, that the husbands and fathers among our people would be called upon to leave wives and children at home to mourn their absence whilst mingling in such a scene of blood and carnage as that through which we passed on the 21st of July. But so it is. How little we know of the future and our destiny! Dark as the present is, I indulge the hope it may soon change, and I may be with you again, not for a short visit, but to stay. Whilst such is the fond hope, when I look within my heart I find an immovable purpose to remain until the struggle ends in the establishment of our independence. Can the fond love which I cherish for you and our dear little children be reconciled with such a purpose? If I know myself, such is the fact. But, Love, my eye hurts me. It is sad to think of it, and of reading for information and pleasure, unfits me for most kinds of business, and deprives me of the means of earning an independent support, which I feel I could do if I had my sight. The present is dark enough, but the future seems darker still, when I think of my return home, possibly made a bankrupt by the confiscation of my Ohio land, and then without means of earning a support or paying for my farm. I must not think of it now; it will be bad enough when it comes. I ought not to press my weak eye any farther. Kiss our dear little ones for me. Speak of me often to them. Never let them forget their "papa gone," who loves them so well.

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Camp near Fairfax C.H., September 22, 1861

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Yesterday I was down the road some ten miles, and, from a hill in the possession of our troops, had a good view of the dome of the Capitol, some five or six miles distant. The city was not visible in consequence of the intervening woods. We were very near, but it will cost us many gallant lives to open the way that short distance. I have no means of knowing, but do not think it probable the effort will be made very soon, if at all. I saw the sentinel of the enemy in the field below me, and about half a mile off, and not far on this side our own sentinels. They occasionally fire at each other. Mrs. Stuart, wife of the Colonel who has charge of our outpost, stays here with him. Whilst there looking at the Capitol I saw two of his little children playing as carelessly as if they were at home. A dangerous place, you will think, for women and children. Remember me to Fitzgerald and his wife, and say that I am very grateful for what they have done for me. And now, Love, I will bid you good-bye again. Kiss little Matthew and Galla for me.

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Camp near Fairfax C.H., October 13, 1861

I have received your last letter, and will devote an hour of this quiet Sabbath to giving you one in return for it. I am very sorry to hear that, having spared your team so long, they have called for it at last. I had hope they would let it alone in consideration of my absence from home in the service of the State, and consequently my inability to provide means of supplying its place, as others who have remained in the county can. It is nearly equivalent to a loss of our wheat crop, besides the great injury the horses must sustain in such a trip. For them I feel a sort of attachment, as for everything else at home, and should hate very much to see them injured.

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Centreville, Va., November 31, 1861

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The wind blows cold, Love, and as I write in my tent without fire, I will draw my letter to a close. Say to your father that the cloth is just suited to the purpose for which I need the coat this winter - out-of-door life in all sorts of weather. I have another message which I have thought for some time of sending him. It is this: the principal part of my estate consists of land in Ohio, the loss of which - and I have but little hope of anything else - breaks me. My other property, under the depreciation which the war is likely to produce, will not pay my debts. I think proper to communicate this, so that if he thinks proper to change his will, he can do so and

make such provision for you as he deems best. The future is dark enough, I am sure; but I shall go on here in a faithful discharge of my duties, trusting that it may some day be brighter.

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Camp near Winchester, November 17, 1861

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And now, Love, I will take leave of you. I sympathize deeply with you in your approaching illness, and hope for your safe and speedy recovery. Remember me kindly to your father, and say that I am very grateful for the assistance which he has given you in my absence.

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Martinsburg, December 9, 1861

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And now, Love, whilst I have been in the perils of minie-balls, I expect, when I get to Winchester, to receive a letter from somebody saying that you have been in worse perils, and that we have an addition to our small stock of children. The only special message I have is that its name may be yours or mine, just as you like. Whilst, Love, I have just been expressing my gratification at my good health, and my capacity for fatigue and exposure, I cannot help feeling this war is an uncertain life, and there is no telling that you and I may never see much of each other again. I shall try and get a leave of absence to go home this winter; but I suppose it will not be possible until after Christmas, as I think Col. Echols has the promise of a leave at that time, and it would not be proper for us both to be away at the same time.

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Unger's Store, December 10, 1861

I made application for leave of absnece, but was informed that I could not get it until Col. Echols returned, who has leave for twenty-five days and starts home this morning. It is to me a sad disappointment, but I must bear it as cheerfully as I can. You must do the same. You must make up your mind, too, Love, to stay at home. In the present state of our finances we must save all we can, and this, I feel sure, will be best done by your staying on the farm. I think, too, you will be as happy there as you could be elsewhere.

Winchester, December 12, 1861

Last Monday night I returned to our camp here, where I had the pleasure of reading the letters of Mary and Helen informing me that your troubles were all over, that we had another little boy in the crib, and that his mamma, as Mary happily expressed it, "Was doing as well as could be expected." I would have written them to express my gratification at the good news from home, but I had orders to leave again upon another expedition to the Potomac which afforded no time for writing a letter.

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Today I received Mary's letter of the 8th inst., from which I learn that you are improving, that the baby is doing well, which I am delighted to hear. I really sympathize with you, Love, in your lonely situation. You must be uncomfortable, lying all day and night in bed, though not suffering much with pain. In ten days more, I suppose, you will be able to sit up, and then in a week or so get about, attending to matters at home, as usual. I assure you that I reciprocate your wish for my return home, and heartily wish that I could consistently with my duty remain with you. If I can get a leave for only a few days, I will go before long to give a kiss and a greeting to the little fellow who has such strong claims upon my love and care. Active operations must soon cease, when there will be no reason why a short furlough should not be granted. The weather is already cold enough to make it uncomfortable in tents and such conveniences as we are able to provide. It would be intolerable if we were put upon the march with insufficient means which the men would have of making themselves comfortable.

I suppose by this time the hands have bene making considerable progress in getting up the corn crop, and hope they may be able to finish it before Christmas. For the hired hands clothing must be furnished before Christmas. Can you get Annie or you ma to call upon Wm. White and get the goods and have them made up? Give my love to Helen and Mary and say to them I am much indebted to them for their letters and wish them to continue to write until you are able. And now, Love, good-bye again. Give my love to your father, ma and Annie. A kiss to Matthew, Galla and the baby, and for yourself, dearest, my hearty wish for your speedy recovery.

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Winchester, December 22, 1861

We left here, on an expedition to the Potomac, on last Monday morning at seven o'clock, and returned again this evening. We lost one man, Josua Parks, killed by the enemy; and his body, I suppose, has by this time reached his friends in Lexington to whom it was sent for burial. Present my kind regard to Mrs. Parks, and say to her that I heartily sympathize in the sad bereavement which has fallen upon her. He was a brave and good man, universally esteemed and beloved by his comrades, and his loss is much deplored.

Whilst gone we slept without our tents four nights. I had plenty of blankets, and slept as sound as if I had been in quarters. I really could not have thought I could stand so much exposure with to little inconvenience. I think, if my health continues to improve under such outdoor life, I will soon be able to stand anything but ball and shell. I received Helen's letter, for which give her my thanks. I was delighted to hear that our baby is well and growing, and that you are improving rapidly. I am much gratified, too, at your pressing invitation to come home. I believe, Love, you must want to see me. It has been my purpose to ask for a furlough as soon as winter had fairly set in so as to render active operations impracticable. Today was very cold,- so cold that we all had to get off our horses and make the greater part of the march on foot. Tonight we have sleet and snow, which, I think, will pass for winter, especially as it now wants only three days of Christmas. So, Love, I shall ask for a furlough some time this week, and, if I can get it, will be off for home. And if you hear a loud rap at the door some night before long, you need not think robbers are breaking in, but that your own dear husband is coming home to see wife and little ones, dearer to him than everything else on earth. But, Love, you must not calculate with too much certainty on seeing me. If I can get the leave I will, but that is not a certainty.

I hope you all may have a happy Christmas, and wish I had the means of sending some nuts and candy for Matthew and Galla. Many who spent last Christmas with wife and children at home will be missing this time - perhaps to join the happy group in merry Christmas never again. But let us be hopeful - at least share the effort to merit fulfilment and fruition of the hopes we cherish so fondly. Now, dearest, good-bye till I see you again, or write. A kiss to the children as my Christmas gift.

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The military career of General Paxton during 1861, the period covered by the preceding letters, can be briefly recapitulated as follows: He had entered the service as first lieutenant of Rockbridge Rifles, 27th Virginia Regiment. At the battle of Manassas he had won the esteem of General Jackson by conspicuous gallantry on the field. As a result of this he was assigned to duty as aide to General Jackson, August 7, 1861. On September 28, 1861, he had an offer from Governor Letcher of a commission as major, but declined because if he had accepted it he would have been assigned to duty at Norfolk, and he did not wish to leave his brigade. On October 14, 1861, he received his commission as major of his own regiment. His intimate relations established as staff officer of General Jackson continued in his new position, and he was several times by him placed in charge of expeditions and assigned to various important duties detached from his regiment. That he then enjoyed the confidence and favor of General Jackson to a marked degree is shown by these appointments and by his letters.

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Unger's Store, January 12, 1862

Gov. John Letcher, Richmond, Va.

Dear Sir: My resignation, forwarded through the regular channel, will reach you in a few days. When it comes to hand you will treat it as withdrawn. I feel much aggrieved by my inability to get a furlough, and by an unjust discrimination made against me in withholding it, whilst granted to others. I have come to the conclusion that it is my duty as a citizen and a soldier to bear the grievance in patience, in the hope that hereafter I may be able to get such furlough as will save me the necessity of quitting the service.

Romney, January 19, 1862

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Since we left Winchester three weeks ago, we have indeed been making war upon the elements, and our men have stood an amount of hardship and exposure which I would not have thought was possible had I not witnessed it. In passing through it all, I have suffered but little, and my health is now as good as it ever was. Whilst this is true of myself, our ranks had been made thinner by disease since we left Winchester. Two battles would not have done us as much injury as hard weather and exposure have effected.

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Now, darling, just here the mail has come to hand, bringing your letter of the 15th inst. and the gratifying news that all are well at home. You say the sleet and snow were falling whilst you wrote, and you felt some anxiety lest I might be exposed to it. You were just about right. I left that morning at daybreak and marched in sleet and snow some fifteen miles to this place. When I got here the cape of my overcoat was a sheet of ice. If you have hard times, you may console yourself by knowing that I have hard times, too. I am amused with your fears of an inroad of the Yankees into Rockbridge. Their nearest force is about eighty miles from you, and if the roads in that section have not improved very much, they will have a hard road to travel. You all are easily scared. By the time you had been near the Yankees as long as I have, you would not be so easily frightened.

You must come to the conclusion which has forced itself upon me some time since. Bear the present in patience, and hope for the best. If it turns out bad, console ourselves with the reflection that it is no worse. We can see nothing of the future, and it is well for us we don't. I have but little idea today where I will sleep tonight, or what shall be doing tomorrow. Our business is all uncertainties. I have been in great danger only once since I have been in the service, yet I suppose I have thought a hundred times that we were on the eve of a battle which might terminate my life. Now, after all, Love, I think it best to trouble myself little with fears of danger, and to find happiness in the hope that you and I and our dear children will one

Elizabeth Hannah White Paxton: Wife of General Paxton

Thorn Hill: Home of General and Mrs. Elisha Franklin Paxton. Built by the Revolutionary soldier, John Bowyer the elder, it is said to be the first Greek Revival residence built west of the Blue Ridge. (Photographs courtesy of Matthew W. Paxton, grandson of Gen. Paxton.)

day live together again happily and in peace. It may be, dearest, this hope will never be realized, yet I will cherish it as my greatest source of happiness, to be abandoned only when my flowing blood and failing breath shall teach me that I have seen the last of earth. All may yet be well with us.

Winchester, January 26, 1862

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I don't think, Love, you would know me if you could see me just now. I think I am dirtier than I ever was before, and may be lousy besides. I have not changed clothes for two weeks, and my pants have a hole in each leg nearly big enough for a dog to creep through. I have been promising myself the luxury of soap and water all over and a change of clothes today, but the wind blows so hard and cold I really think I should freeze in the operation. I am afraid the dirt is striking in, as I am somewhat afflicted with the baby's complaint - a pain under the apron. I am not much afraid of it, however, as I succeeded in getting down a good dinner, which with me is generally a sign of pretty fair health. Now, Love, I will bid you good-bye, as it is very cold and uncomfortable writing, leaving the last side of my sheet unwritten.

January 27, 1862

Yesterday I concluded, after writing this, to come to town and get comfortable quarters, as I felt much inclined to chill. I slept pretty well last night, and this morning am not suffering any pain. I hope to be well in the course of a few days. Should I get worse, I will write tomorrow.

* * * *

For several days he continued ill at Winchester, and this perhaps hastened the granting of the greatly desired furlough. His next letter shows that he remained at home until February 24, 1862, having been there perhaps twenty days. This was his first visit home since entering the service.

* * * *

Mount Jackson, March 19, 1862

* * * *

The time passes very dull with me, as I have nothing to do, the Colonel and Lieut.-Col. of the regiment both being here and doing what little there is to be done.

Some days ago I met with your sister Martha, who had come down to the camp to see Mr. Williamson. She was much alarmed at the expected approach of the enemy, and in doubt what to do. My advice to her was to remain at home if they came, letting everything go on as usual. They would take such of her property as they needed, but, I believed, would do no further injury. Their policy, so far as I can learn, has been, in Winchester and the counties which they occupy, to conciliate the people. I doubt not it will be their principle everywhere. I am glad they indicate their purpose to carry on the war on the principles of civilized warfare, as it exempts the women and children left at home by our soldiers from the savage barbarities of their vengeance. If the fate of war brings my own home within their lines, it will be some consolation to know that you, my darling wife, and our dear little children are not subjected to insult and injury at the hands of the invaders. Whilst their occupancy may deprive me of the fond letters of a loving wife, giving the glad news that all are well at home, which is now my greatest source of happiness, I shall be comforted by the hope and belief that they are left to enjoy uninterrupted the necessary comforts of life. Whilst it is a sad thought to give up one's home to the enemy, with many of us it is destined to be a necessity which will contribute more than all other causes to the ultimate achievement of our independence. It is utterly impossible to defend every section.

* * * *

Near Winchester (Kernstown), March 23, 1862

We have had a severe fight today and are pretty badly whipped. I am uninjured.

Mount Jackson, Wednesday, March 26, 1862

The robins on the trees around me sing merrily this morning, as if this part of the world was enjoying its usual quiet, and the soldiers are laughing and talking as cheerfully as if apprehension of danger and alarm for the future was the last of their thoughts. Since last Thursday, when we started towards Winchester, we have had exciting times. We were engaged on Sunday in a fiercer struggle, more obstinately maintained on our side, then that at Manassas last July. The battle between the infantry, the artillery having been engaged in firing some time before, commenced about five o'clock and ended about six o'clock, when our line gave way and retreated in disorder to our wagons, about four miles from the battlefield. Our loss in killed, wounded and missing, I suppose, may reach 400. Col. Echols had his arm broken. The next morning after the battle we left in good order about ten o'clock, and came some seven miles in this direction, where we encamped and cooked dinner. Before we left the enemy appeared with their cannon, and as we were leaving commenced firing upon us. One of their shells burst in our regiment, killing four and wounding several more. We came that night - Monday - to Woodstock, and on yesterday came here, some ten miles farther. We keep some artillery and cavalry in our rear, close to the lines of the enemy, who check his advance and keep us advised of what is going on. We remain on our encampment with wagons packed and everything in order to move until the afternoon, when we move back. To you this would seem exciting, yet the soldiers sit around in squads, laughing and talking as if they enjoyed the sport. I think

it likely, if the enemy advances, we will retreat up towards Staunton. His force which we engaged at Winchester was some 15,000, according to the best estimate we can get of it, whilst ours did not exceed 4,000. I think we will not venture on a battle against such odds, but will wait for reenforcements and continue to retire if we are pressed. You may be certain to hear from me if I get out safe from another engagement.

* * * *

Friday, May 16, 1862

I don't know where to date my letter. We left Highland yesterday, and are now on the road to Harrisonburg, seven or eight miles from the Augusta line. We have had three days' rain, and still a cloudy sky threatening more rain. The road is now very bad, and as every wagon which passes makes it deeper, it will soon be impassable. The weather is worse upon us than last winter. Then the ground was frozen and we had the satisfaction at least of being dry - having dry clothes and dry blankets. But now everything is wet and we have no tents. It has had no happy effect upon my health. Yesterday I left the brigade to stay in a house a few days, but think I shall join it again tomorrow.

We had constant expectation of a fight while we were in Pendleton. We supposed Jackson would certainly make the attack on the morning after we reached Franklin, and every one was surprised when we turned to march in this direction. No one ever knows where he is going or what his plans are. I suppose his destination now is the Valley, where he will consolidate with Ewell and move towards Winchester. But at present, I think, he will be disposed to give his troops a week's rest. They need it badly, as they have been marching for nearly three weeks since they left their last encampment.

We have not yet had an election in our regiment for field officers, and I feel more unsettled than ever before. I am not sure that I will be elected, and not sure that I will not. If I were elected by a mere majority, and knew that I did not have the goodwill of a large portion of my regiment, I am not sure that I would want the place. I have been absent from the regiment on detached service of one kind and another, and when with them I have always been disposed to be rather rigid. The two causes combined have not given me a strong hold upon their affections. So you see I am rather perplexed with doubts - don't know which end of the road to take, if either. Whatever be the result, I trust I shall do nothing to forfeit the good opinion of my friends; and if I return home, it will be for reasons which now and hereafter shall meet the approval of my judgment. I wish heartily the election was over and I knew my destiny.

The election was soon after this held under what was known as the "Disorganization Act" of the Confederate Congress, and Major Paxton, with many other officers whose strict and wholesome discipline was not relished by their men, failed to be reelected. He was thus relieved from any further obligation to continue in the

service, but his heart was too much in the cause to permit him to abandon the army at such a time. He accepted a place on the staff of his old commander, General Jackson, as a volunteer aide without pay, and in this capacity took part in the seven days' fight before Richmond. After a brief visit to his home, on July 22, 1862, he returned to the army to resume his position as volunteer aide on Jackson's staff.

* * * *

Fairfax C.H., September 1, 1862

My Darling Wife: I have only time to say that we were fighting on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and that I am well. The last was a very severe battle and in large force. The enemy was badly routed. His force consisted of the armies of McClellan and Pope united. Ever yours.

* * * *

General Paxton had just taken an active part in the battle which has since been known as the battle of Second Manassas when the characteristic note was written. The report of General Jackson upon these battles makes mention of him as follows: "In the prompt transmission of orders (Cedar Mountain) great assistance was received from Maj. E. F. Paxton, Acting Asst. Adj.-Gen'l. . . . . Desiring to avoid delay, I directed my Acting Asst. Adj.-Genl. to order Jackson's Division forward." "In the transmission of orders (2nd Manassas) I was greatly assisted during the expedition by the following members of my staff: Col. A. Smart, Asst. Insp. Genl.' Maj. E. F. Paxton, Acting Asst. Adj.-Genl."

Frederick, Md., Sunday, September 7, 1862

Your two last letters came to hand yesterday, and I was indeed very happy to hear from you. The date of my letter will surprise you. You would have thought it hardly possible that the fortunes of war should have so turned in our favor that this quiet Sabbath would find us here quietly encamped beyond the limits of our own Confederacy. It has cost us much of our best blood and much hardship, but it is a magnificent result, which, I trust, will secure our recognition in Europe, and be a step at least towards peace with our enemies. We left the Rappahannock two weeks ago tomorrow, and such a week as the first was has no parallel in the war. Two days' severe march brought us about fifty miles to Manassas. That night we had an engagement with the enemy, in which the place was captured and some prisoners. The next day there was another battle, in which Mr. Newman was wounded. That night - Wednesday - we evacuated the place and took up our position adjoining the old battleground, and that evening we had another severe engagement, in which Maj.-Gen. Ewell was severely wounded and our loss very heavy. The next day - Friday - we were attacked by the enemy in much larger force, but we repulsed the enemy and at night both armies occupied about the same ground. We expected the battle to be

renewed the next morning. The enemy had time to collect his whole force, Pope and McClellan combined, and we had brought up all we had on this side of the Rappahannock. For a while, the lines were unusually quiet, but after a while the picket-firing began to increase, and soon the whole line was engaged. The assault upon our line was very severe, and for a while the tide of battle seemed to turn against us; but our men stubbornly resisted the assault, and soon the enemy's line gave way, flying in confusion, our artillery playing upon them as they retreated. Our lines were then pushed forward, and by night the enemy was driven from every position. It was a splendid victory, partly fought on the same ground with the battle of Manassas last year. We sustained a very heavy loss, but how much I have no idea. The next day we moved towards Fairfax C.H. The next - Monday - we had another severe engagement. Tuesday we spent at rest and in cooking. Wednesday we started in this direction, and reached here early on yesterday, without meeting any further obstruction. What next - where do we go - and what is to be done? We will probably know by the end of next week what our General means to do with us. I think it likely we will not stay here, and that this time next week will find us either in Pennsylvania or Baltimore.

I heartily wish with you that the war was over and we were all at home again. But our success depends upon the pertinacity with which we stick to the fight. I think it may not last through another winter. I spend but little time now thinking about business on the farm. I trust it all to you. My duties here are onerous and responsible, occupying my time and mind so completely that I have but little opportunity to think of much else. Not enough, however, to keep me from thinking of dear wife and little ones left at home, and fondly hoping that the day may soon come when I will be with them. It may never come. My fate may be that of many others. Whatever the future may have in store for me, I trust that I am prepared to meet it with becoming resignation.

And now, darling, I will take leave of you. Think of me often, and believe me, with much love, ever yours.

* * * *

The office which General Paxton held at this time was that of Acting Assistant Adjutant-General on Jackson's staff. The following letter from General Jackson shows the esteem which he was at this time held by that officer.

Headquarters V. District

September 23, 1862

General: I respectfully recommend that Maj. E. F. Paxton be appointed Brigadier-General and assigned to the command of the brigade lately under Brigadier-General C. L. Winder. Last year he was major of the 27th Regt. of the brigade and ranked all the officers at present in the brigade, except three. Upon the reorganization of the Volunteer Regiment, Major Paxton was not retained. As he served under me in the

line, and at various times I assigned important duties to him, and as for several months he has been my A. A. A. General, my opportunities for judging of his qualifications have been remarkably good; and there is no officer under the grade proposed whom I can recommend with such confidence for promotion to a Brigadier-Generalcy.

I am, General, your obt. servant,

T. J. Jackson,
Major-General

To Genl. S. Cooper,
Adjt. & Insp.-Gen'l C. S. A.

* * * *

Berryville, Clark Co., November 2, 1862

* * * *

I am glad to feel, darling, that although I have been writing to you for nearly eighteen months, and this has been the substitute for our once fond intercourse, I feel when I write now that I miss you none the less than I did when this cruel war first placed the barrier of separation between us. I hope as fondly as ever that the day may soon come when we will live in peace and quiet together. Eight years ago today, Love, we began our married life, very happy and full of hope for the future. Thus far it has been made of sunshine and shadow, joy and sorrow, strangely intermingled. The darker shade of life has for a long time predominated; may we not hope for a change of fortune ere long?

Camp near Port Royal, November 9, 1862

The day before yesterday we had a snow, and the weather is now quite cold. Winter seems to have set in, and it finds us sadly prepared for it. A large number of our soldiers are entirely barefooted, and very many without blankets. Living in the open air, without tents and with a very small supply of axes to cut wood for fires, there is much suffering. Those of our people who are living at home in comfort have no conception of the hardships which our soldiers are enduring. And I think they manifest very little interest in it. They are disposed to get rich from the troubles of the country, and exact from the Government the highest prices for everything needed for the army. I trust the Government will soon take the matter in hand, fix its own prices, and take what it wants for the army.

* * * *

So you growl about Sunday letters. They are written on that day because all work in the army is suspended on that day and I always have leisure then. They are not interesting, you say. I am sorry for it. It is because I have but little to write about that would interest you. They always tell you I am alive and doing well. Isn't that always interesting intelligence?

* * * *

You speak of the army as my idol, but you never were more mistaken. I had a good deal rather live in a house than a tent, though I can bear the change, as there is no helping it. I had a good deal rather be with you and the children than with my idol, the army, your opinion to the contrary notwithstanding. And now, Growler, good-bye.

P.S. Since that was written, I have received an order conferring upon me the title of Brigadier-General and assigning me to the command of Jackson's old brigade. I made no application for it, and if I had consulted my own inclination should have been disposed to remain in my present position.

Camp near Guiney's Depot, December 7, 1862

We have a quiet Sunday today. Everything in camp stopped except the axes, which run all night and all day, Sunday included. With the soldiers it is, "Keep the axes going or freeze." They are the substitutes for tents, blankets, shoes, and everything once regarded as necessary for comfort. The misfortune is that even axes are scarce; the army is short of everything, and I fear soon to be destitute of everything. Yet the men are cheerful and seem to be contented. It seems strange, but, thanks to God for changing their natures, they bear in patience now what they once would have regarded as beyond human endurance. Whilst I write, I expect you are sitting in our pew at church, my place by your side filled by little Matthew,- bless the dear boy!- listening to a sermon from Parson White on covetousness, avarice and such kindred inventions of Satan. I wish him success, but I fear he will hardly be able to convince ----- that leather can be too high, or that it is not the will of God for poor soldiers to go barefooted. God seems to have consigned one-half of our people to death at the hands of the enemy, and the other half to affluence and wealth realized by preying upon the necessities of those who are thus sacrificed. The extortioners at home are our worst enemies. If our soldiers had their sympathies, their assistance in providing the necessary means of sustaining the army, they might bear the hardships and do the work before them, feeling that it was a common undertaking for the benefit of us all and sustained by us all. But it seems like a revolution to make those rich who stay at home, and those poor who do their duty in the army.

* * * *

Camp Winder, Caroline Co., Va., January 1, 1863

I have not heard from you since the battle. Since then we have had a quiet time and everything looks like rest for some time to come. The men are fixing up their shanties for the winter. They seem happy and contented. It is sad to look back on the year just closed. We have suffered much; many good men have gone to their long home. Our loss has been 1220 in killed and wounded - more men than we could turn out for a fight today. Out of the fifteen field offficers elected last spring, five have been killed and six others wounded, leaving only four that have escaped unhurt. In these losses are many whom we were always accustomed to regard as our best men. I published today an order naming our camp, which gives some facts of our history, and I send you a copy of it.

How are the matters at home? In the excitement of active work, I have too much to do to harass myself with idle dreams of home; but now since we are at rest I cannot keep my mind from it. I feel there is nothing which I would not give to be with you for an hour or a day. I could have gone home and have spent a couple of weeks when I received my appointment, before taking command; but I really thought the brigade was sadly in need of a commander, and that it was my duty to stay. Now I am fixed and must apply for leave just as any private in the ranks. I know it would not improve my standing with my superior officers to ask for a leave, but still I feel very much tempted to do it. If the snow falls deep, and we have such severe weather as to preclude the possibility of active work, my homesick malady may get the better of me. I would like to see you, Matthew, Galla and the baby. Have the children forgotten me? It seems so long since I saw them.

* * * *

Camp Winder, March 15, 1863

I will devote a part of this quiet Sundy evening to a letter home. Our camp looks today like it was Sunday. We stop our usual work when Sunday comes, and, like Christian people, devote it to rest. Today I attended our church and listened to a very earnest and impressive sermon from one of our chaplains. He is one of the best men and best chaplains I ever knew. He devotes his whole time to his duties, and remains all the time with his regiment, sharing their wants and privations. I am sorry to say we have few such in the army. Many of them are frequently away, whilst others stay at houses in the neighborhood of the camp, coming occasionally to their regiments.

Today I had a visit from the father and mother of a poor fellow who has been tried by a court martial for cowardice. She was in great distress, and said it would be bad enough to have her boy shot by the enemy, but she did not think she could survive his being shot by our own men. I gave her what comfort I could, telling her his sentence had not been published and there was not means of knowing that he was sentenced to be shot; that if it turned out to be so when the sentence was published, she could petition the President for his pardon; that he was a good man and would pardon her son if it was not an aggravated case. I pitied her, she seemed so much distressed. I heartily wish this sad part of my duties were over. I have about twenty

of my men in close confinement, whose sentences have not been published, many of whom are condemned to death. It is for Gen'l Lee to determine what shall be done with them.

Whilst I write the sheet and hail are falling fast, accompanied by frequent claps of thunder, cold and chilly withal. Winter, it seems, will never end. Last week it was all the while a severe wind and freezing cold. I really don't care much now how long it lasts. I do not wish to move from here until spring is fairly opened. My men are comfortably fixed here, and when we move the huts must be left behind, and, besides this, most of the blankets sent off, as we have no wagons to haul them. My men, I fear, when we move will have to get along with such clothing and blankets as they can carry. Many of our horses have died this winter for want of forage, and those that remain are much reduced in flesh and strength.

I have received your miniature, reminding me of times when you and I were young; of happy hours spent, a long time ago, when I used to frequent your parlor in the hope that you might be what you now are, my darling wife. Then the present was overflowing with happiness, the future bright and beautiful. We have seen much of each other, much of life, its joys and sorrows, since, then, by the grave of our first child we have known together the deep sorrow of parting with those we love forever. In this long absence of two years, we have felt the sadness of a separation with such chance of its being forever as we did not dream of when we began life together. May God in his mercy soon bring us together in our dear home, never to separate again, to spend what of life is left to us in peace and happiness. Good-bye.

Camp Winder, March 22, 1863

I am grateful to you for the tender interest in my health manifested in your last letter, received some days since. For the last week I have felt better than I have before this winter. I have gotten a half-bushel of dried peaches from Richmond, and, living upon these for the most part, I have improved very much. I am so much pleased with the medicine that I think I shall send to Richmond and get another bushel. So, I think, you may give up your idea of a furlough.

It commenced snowing again on Thursday evening, and snowed or rained all day Friday and Saturday. Today the sun is shining brightly, the birds chirping, and some signs of spring again. I hope now we may have good weather, and that you may be able to make some speed with your farm work.

I had an unexpected visitor at my tent yesterday evening - Mr. Junkin of Falling Spring Church. I divided my bed with him, and did what I could to make him comfortable. He has special claims upon my hospitality as the pastor of my old church. It is associated in my mind with many loved friends who have now gone to their long homes, and from it I derived my earliest impressions of the church and the pastor. Twenty long years have passed since I used to go there to church. I have grown that much older, but I fear not much wiser or better. I remember and reverence the teachings of my venerable pastor, but have not made them the guide of my life as I ought to have done.

I laid aside my pencil and paper just here to go over and hear a sermon from Mr. Junkin. It was impressive and eloquent. When he alluded to our missing comrades of the past campaign, there was a solemn stillness, and many eyes moistened with tears. It is sad, indeed, to think now how many good men we have lost. Those upon whom we all looked as distinguished for purity of character as men, and for gallantry as soldiers, seem to have been the first victims. I never saw an audience more attentive than our soldiers are at church. The great mass of them are good men, who have not lost in the army the habits which they learned in their churches at home. I like to see those whose lives may be spared to return home without being contaminated with the vices of the army.

* * * *

No date, first page of letter being lost. Probably April 27, 1863

We had a snow here on Saturday night which continued yesterday morning and is now about gone. The roads are now in pretty good condition, and if the enemy wish to make the attack, there is, I think, no reason now for deferring it on account of the roads. But, darling, there is no telling when it will be. The future, ever a mystery, is more mysterious now than ever before. Our destiny is in the hands of God, infinite in his justice, goodness and mercy; and I feel that in such time as he may appoint he will give us the blessings of independence and peace. We are a wicked people, and the chastisement which we have suffered has not humbled and improved us as it ought. We have a just cause, but we do not deserve success if those who are here spend this time in blasphemy and wickedness, and those who are at home devote their energies to avarice and extortion. Fasting and prayer by such a people is blasphemy, and, if answered at all, will be by an infliction of God's wrath, not a dispensation of his mercy.

The future, as you say, darling, is dark enough. Though sound in health and strength, I feel that life to many of us hangs upon a slender thread. Whenever God wills it that mine pass from me, I feel that I can say in calm resignation, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." In this feeling I am prepared to go forward in the discharge of my duty, striving to make every act and thought of my life conform to his law, and trusting with implicit faith in the salvation promised through Christ. How I wish that I were better than I feel that I am; that when I close my eyes tonight I might feel certain that every thought, act and feeling of tomorrow would have its motive in love for God and its object in his glory! Well, so it is. Why is it we cannot feel sure that the sins of the past are never to be repeated? May God give me strength to be what I ought to be - to do what I ought to do! And now, darling, good-bye. When we meet again, I hope you will have a better husband - that your prayer and mine may be answered.

Telegram

May 3, 1863

The enemy was dislodged from all his positions around Chancellorsville and driven back towards the Rappahannock, over which he is now retreating. We have to thank Almighty God for a great victory. I regret to state that Gen'l Paxton was killed, Gen'l Jackson severely and Gen'l Heath and D. H. Hill slightly wounded.

(Signed) R. E. Lee,
Gen'l Commdg.

Letter from Henry K. Douglas to Mrs. Paxton

May 4, 1863

Madam: As the senior officer of Gen'l Paxton's staff, and a person with whom he was probably more intimate than with any one in the brigade, I deem it my duty, although a painful one, to notify you of the circumstances of his death. He fell yesterday morning while bravely leading his brigade into action, and lived only about an hour after receiving his wound. As soon as he was struck he lifted his hand to his breast-pocket. In that pocket I knew he kept his Bible and the picture of his wife, and his thoughts were at that moment of heaven and his home. Beloved and esteemed by officers and men, his loss is deeply mourned, and the brigade mingle their tears with those of his family relations.

I have from some time thought that the General expected that the first battle in which he led his brigade would be his last, and I had observed, and am satisfied from various conversations with him, that he was preparing his mind and soul for the occasion. It is a consolation to know that while he nobly did his duty in the field and camp without regard to personal consequences, he had been convinced that there was a home beyond this earth where the good would receive an eternal reward. For that home he had richly prepared himself, and, I confidently hope, is there now. Almost the last time I saw him, and just before the brigade moved forward into the fight, he was sitting behind his line of troops, and, amidst the din of artillery and the noise of shell bursting around him, he was calmly reading his Bible and there preparing himself like a Christian soldier for the contest.

Dr. Cox, A.D.C., has already departed with his body for home.

Letter from Henry K. Douglas to J. G. Paxton

Hagerstown, Md., Feb. 18, 1893

Yours of the 14th is received today. I knew your father very well. When he as on the staff of Gen'l Jackson, so was I; and for a time, when he commanded the Stonewall Brigade, I was the A.A.G. and A.I.G. of the brigade, in rank its senior staff officer. My relations with him were very close - indeed, confidential.

I had observed, during the winter of 1862-63, a growing seriousness on his part in every respect. There was nothing morbid about it, but he was much given to religious thought and conversation. He was a very regular reader of the Bible, and, I think, often talked with Gen'l Jackson on the same subject. He was thoroughly impressed with the conviction that he would die early in the opening campaign, and was determined to prepare for that fate.

In my letter to your mother, written the day after his death, I merely alluded to certain conversations which I will now explain more explicitly.

The night of the 2nd, Gen'l Paxton seemed - as we in fact all were - very much depressed at the wounding of Gen'l Jackson. Late that night, in the course of a conversation with me, your father quietly but with evident conviction expressed his belief that he would be killed the next day. He told me where in his office desk certain papers were tied up and labelled in regard to his business, and asked me to write to his wife immediately after his death. I was young and not given to seriousness then; but I was so impressed with his sadness and earnestness, and all gloom of the surroundings, that I did not leave him until after midnight.

The next morning we were astir very early. I found Gen'l Paxton sitting near a fence, in rear of his line, with his back against a tree, reading the Bible. He received me cheerfully. I had been with him but a few minutes when the order came for his brigade to move. He put the Bible in his breast-pocket, and directing me to take the left of the brigade, he moved off to the right of it. I never saw him again. I find, in looking at my brief diary of that day, that he had been killed for some time before I knew it, and that I was commanding the brigade by issuing orders in his name long after his death. When I knew of it, I informed Col. Funk, who immediately assumed command. I mentioned in the letter to your mother that he lived an hour after his wounding. Capt. Barton says this is an error, and it is probable he is correct. I was not with Gen'l Paxton when he was shot, and I suppose that what I stated in my letter was obtained from some one else. Capt. Barton was with the General. I find this in my notes: "I missed Gen'l Paxton and the rest of the staff; but as I missed part of the 2nd Regiment, I thought it and the General had become temporarily separated from the rest of the Brigade." I find in my notes of the 4th: "I wrote a letter to Mrs. Paxton concerning the death of the General." This is the letter a copy of which you sent me, and I am very glad to get it.

Gen'l Paxton was a unique character. He was a man of intense convictions and the courage of them. Kindhearted, he was often brusque to rudeness. He was conscientious in the discharge of his duties, and painstaking. He was of excellent judgment, slow and sure, and yet fond of dash in others. He was esteemed by the officers, beloved by the men, and respected by all. He was an excellent officer, a

faithful, brave and conscientious soldier. He had a keen sense of humor, well restrained, and often laughed at and condoned recklessness of which he did not approve. I think I must have tried him often; but if so, he never let me know it. I had his friendship, and in all his friendships he was staunch and true.

P.S. I find this in the account of my interview with Gen'l Jackson on Sunday evening, the 3rd: "He spoke feelingly of Gen'l Paxton and Capt. Boswell, both dead, and his eyes filled with tears as he mentioned their names. He asked me to tell him all about the movements of the old brigade. When I described to him its evolutions: how Gen'l Paxton was reading his Bible when the order came to advance; how he was shortly afterwards mortally wounded; how Gen'l Stuart led the brigade in person, shouting, "Charge, and remember Jackson!" etc., etc., his eyes lighted up with the fire of battle as he exclaimed, "It was just like them - just like them!"

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No. 309, P. 1006. Report of Gen. R. E. Lee, C. S. Army,
Comdg. Army of Northern Virginia. Sept. 21, 1863

Many valuable officers and men were killed or wounded in the faithful discharge of duty. Among the former, Brigadier-General Paxton fell while leading his brigade with conspicuous courage in the assault on the enemy's works at Chancellorsville. . . .

* * * *

Extracts from Diary of Margaret J. Preston

May 2nd, 1863. Hear today of a prospective battle in Culpepper; everybody is anxious.

Monday, 4th. . . . Cannon was distinctly heard by many persons yesterday; great anxiety prevails to hear the tidings; no mails today; we hear the Federal army has torn up some miles of railroad.

May 5th, 1863. Today brings news of a terrible battle; no particulars; only that General Frank Paxton is killed, Jackson and A. P. Hill wounded. Of the mothers in this town, almost all of them have sons in this battle; not one lays her head on her pillow this night sure that her sons are not slain.

This suspense must be awful. Mrs. Estill has four sons there; Mrs. Moore, two; Mrs. Graham, three; and so on. Yet not a word of special news, except that a copy of General Lee's telegram came, saying a decided victory, but at great cost. God pity the tortured hearts that will pant through this night! And the agony of the poor wife who has heard that her husband is really killed! I was told tonight that a few weeks ago General Paxton wrote to his wife, sending his will, with minute directions in regard to his property; telling her he had made a profession of religion; that he was expecting to be killed in the next battle and was resigned and willing to die.

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The life of the subject of this Memoir has been so well told, his character so manifested, by his letters, that no word of comment seems necessary. It is said that the thunder of the guns at Chancellorsville was heard in Lexington; certainly it was known that a battle was impending. When, therefore, the loving wife, who had so long in loneliness awaited his coming, saw her mother and her aged pastor drive to her door, she knew their errand and fainted at the sight.

She survived him long enough to implant in the hearts of his three sons a devotion to the memory of their scarcely remembered father which has been to them through life an inspiration. The growth of the man during the period in which these letters were written is the striking feature of them. With great natural courage and burning patriotism he went forth almost joyfully to the conflict. With growing seriousness he passed through the horrors of battle after battle, until we find him in that winter camp in the Wilderness. There his heart was filled with sadness unutterable as he saw about him all the miseries of war. He had in many battles looked death in the face without fear, but now it was death looking him in the face. His own soul-conflict was upon him, and with his other struggles he was wrestling with God. During the two years of service the youthful enthusiasm had vanished, and in its place had come herioc determination. The man who wrote those last letters would not have turned one hair's breadth from the path of duty to have saved his life. In that wilderness near Chancellorsville, on the night of May 2, 1863, there came to him his Gethsemane. To his trusted staff officer he says, "I shall die tomorrow." The night is spent in marching and countermarching, and daybreak finds him reading his Bible. This done, he gives the command that puts his brigade into action, and takes his place in the center of his brigade, in the line with his men, a position of as great danger as any in his command. Within a few minutes, at about seven o'clock, the death-summons came, and he fell to rise no more. It was not his to be with his men through their glorious charge and victory. A modest tombstone in the quiet graveyard at Lexington marks his resting-palce, and bears the simple inscription: "It is well with thee." If to be faithful unto death, to willingly lay down one's life for an ideal, entitles one to peace and rest in the great hereafter, then, Christian soldier, it is well with thee!

Editor's Note: Matthew W. Paxton of Lexington, Virginia, the grandson of General Paxton, adds that his grandmother continued to live at Thorn Hill until 1869 when it had to be sold to pay the General's debts. E. F. Paxton had been a promising young lawyer and had acquired considerable property, but he lost everything during the war. His wife died soon after leaving Thorn Hill.