



“ I Am Already Quite a Texan ”

Albert J. Myer’s Letters from Texas, 1854-1856

Edited by David A. Clary

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Albert James Myer, best known as the father of the United States Army Signal Corps and of The United States Weather Service, began his military career in Texas in the 1850’s. Although his time there lasted only two and one-half years, 1854-1857, it was filled with interesting adventures. Moreover, Myer was blessed with a knack for witty and detailed observation that makes his letters to his prospective brother-in-law a remarkable and entertaining portrait of the Texas frontier of the eighteen-fifties. *[As well as giving insight to the man, whose later accomplishments included the Signal Corps and Weather Service]* Myer’s account of life in Texas makes a valuable companion to such better-known commentaries as that of Frederick Law Ohmstead.

That his Texas service was an adventure for Myer is reflected in the letters reproduced here, from the originals in the Myer Papers at the Library of Congress. Myer wrote them to James Walden of Hamburg, New York, the brother of his betrothed, Catherine Walden, whom he married on August 24, 1857. Undoubtedly, Myer wrote them to impress the lad and through him his sister. It is likely that in letter writing Myer found recreational relief from his duties as a surgeon. It seems understandable that he might wish diversion from his arguments with authority on raising the professional status of hospital stewards and his efforts to persuade the War Department to adopt his signal system. Neither of those subjects is mentioned in his letters to James Walden.

Myer’s letters from Texas are valuable on several counts. They represent a previously unpublished observation of the land and peoples of Texas, recorded by a keen, if opinionated, observer. Myer’s excellent illustrations provide a delightful perspective on odd details of military life. His two discourses on the life and times of the pack mule are at least minor classics.

The Texas letters also represent a rare body of personal material in the Myer Papers, most items of a personal nature having been deleted before the collection was donated to the Library of Congress. They are important therefore because of what they reflect in the character of Myer himself. The humor that pervades them seems not to have surfaced in his later career, at least not to any noteworthy extent in his official life. Even the letters to

his wife during the Civil War that have survived in his papers bear as much bitterness as factual news of his activities. All evidence seems to portray in Myer a man who was reserved and had difficulties in making friends. The many controversies in his career may have increased his introversion. Myer was a young man while he was in Texas, embarking on a new military career, and in the throes of courtship. Given such serious circumstances, he would be likely to reveal his lighter side chiefly to boys and animals.

Myer was a man of upper class pretensions and prejudices, and his letters are good barometers of the attitudes of the antebellum officer corps. The social distance between officer and enlisted man is implicit in Myer's account of army life, as is his low regard for Indians and Mexicans. Myer's abhorrence of the Rangers, and the Erie Canal drivers with whom he compares them, also makes eminently clear his class prejudice.

Only those letters that provide commentary on Myer's [time in] Texas are reproduced here. Deleted are those that briefly transmit a letter to be passed on to Catherine Walden ("Miss Kate"), report Myer's illness, or otherwise have little narrative substance. The whereabouts of Myer's letters to James Walden after May, 1856, if any existed, are unknown; they may have been caught in the culling of his papers that preceded their donation to the Library of Congress. The letters are reproduced with only such minor changes in paragraphing and punctuation as are needed to make them comprehensible.



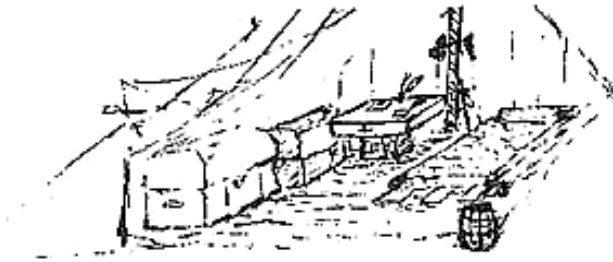
Texas, near Corpus Christi
Camp "Souta" November 15, 1851

My dear James:

I send you a very rough pen sketch of the tent from which I write. It is called a "Wall tent" and is such as officer's use. The men are housed in tents such as this of which there are sixty to contain 400 men. Of course officers occupy each, his own tent. It is made of thick canvas shaped like a small house: then a thing called 'a fly' made also of canvas is stretched over the top about six inches over the main tent. This renders the whole watertight. I tried to draw a picture, which you can understand. You see- or at least



I do- the "fly" on top: then the tent, the front of which is partially opened. It is fastened with ropes and "tent pins" which are driven into the earth. Each officer has a six-horse wagon to carry his tent, baggage, &c.



I draw aside my tent walls and allow you to glance at my tent as it stands. You can see my trunks; my table made by piling my boxes; the identical ink stand and ink pen with which I now write, my water cask, my mattress and my bed. When we reach the camp ground at night, the tents are pitched,

then two pieces of beam which we carry with us are laid upon the ground about six feet apart, upon these are laid three boards, then from a great sack is drawn my mattress, bed, clothes &c; these are arranged upon the planks. My trunks are moved in, my boxes piled to make the table, my candles lighted, a sward and loaded repeating pistol are at the head of my bed and I am ready to sleep. Between the poles of my tent a great strap is stretched on this I hang coats, looking glass, drinking gourds, bottles, pistol, &c, &c, and then I turn in and sleep soundly until morning when the "reveille" awakens me for duty- and breakfast! Before I sleep however I always read "my chapter" and think of- you. We have been in camp here on the prairie two days. I hear that we march tomorrow- but I think it doubtful.

2 p.m. We have just dined, having for dinner a wild goose which a young Lieut. Killed this a.m. and a bottle of champagne cider which the Captain's (commanding) wife sent us. I suppose it is not "drinking" to use it for it can hardly be called intoxicating. The little "married woman" concerning whom I wrote from the Middlesex and her husband are here living cozily enough. [*Lydia Spencer Lane and Lieut. William B. Lane*] Their tent is like mine but it is floored with boards and they have erected a French bedstead and filled the apartment with rocking chairs and divers effeminating appliances.



December 1st. I had written so far when I was called away and from that time to this I have been either unable on account of business or too weary to continue my narrative. My tent is pitched tonight as you see it on the first page and I am sitting at my table writing. We are nearing "Fort Duncan" now and I wish to have my letter in readiness to

send to you. Tomorrow we march twenty-two miles. We are here now in "Indian Country" and as you ride in the day time any brush may conceal an enemy and you sleep at night with your pistol at your pillow and your clothes ready to slip on at a moments warning.

But it is singular how soon one becomes accustomed to any change. We amuse ourselves as much and think as little of any danger when we gather around our campfire as we would in a city. It is true we load our arms more carefully and try the range of their bullets often but we think of that more of a trial of skill then as a preparation for danger. So one becomes used to think of expeditions only as offering chances for distraction and it is possible that the idea of personal risk is one of the last that enters the mind of an officer. I do not know for I have had little experience but I can conceive how one may learn to place so much confidence in their skill with weapons and their means of defense to think of an encounter as certain to result in victory.

I met a "Scouting Party" a few mornings since. Twenty fine soldiers and an officer. They came riding into our camp as if they were on a party of pleasure only their discipline was strict and their arms were ready for action. Officers of our army need no introduction. We sit down and talk. Tell and receive the news and part to meet again perhaps. We met this party again on the day following. They were in the saddle then with their guide and might be in battle in an hour. We chatted a few moments, shook hands, and then were off. We have not seen them again nor have they met us or for that matter heard of us. Then we came a day or two afterward to "Laredo" and when eight or ten miles from the city out came the officers hunting for us and inviting us to their quarters. They brought the ladies of our party oranges and such little presents as they thought would please them after their sea voyage and long deprivations- yet we had never met them before. There is something pleasing in this. It is well to know that wherever there are officers you have friends- the word means very little but they are friends as the world goes, polite when you are with them, ready to do you a favor one day, to forget you possibly the next.

We stayed at Laredo one day. If you will look at the map you will see Fort Duncan on the Rio Grande about one hundred and ten miles north of Fort McIntosh. Tonight we are forty less miles distant from Duncan, the point to which we were ordered from New York. We march tomorrow and on the next day. On the third we expect to be there. I shall be busy then as I was when we left the ship and perhaps I shall end this letter as I did the other with pencil. If I write to you often you must expect to receive all kinds of letters from me and it will hardly do for you to criticize either the style or appearance of such productions as are written under canvas with a keg for a chair and a box for a table. I am going now- Good night.

Rattlesnake Camp. Dec. 2, Saturday 10 p.m. We have had a long days march today and I am very tired but I must write a few lines before I retire. I am in my tent of course and writing from "the box." Perhaps you think our camp is strangely named. Rattlesnakes abound in this country. Today as I was riding along I heard a singular sound and turning around I saw within a few feet of me an enormous snake coiled and with his head raised threatening us, I shot him with my revolver. I have thought that his rattlers, which indicate an age of about fourteen years, might be a curiosity to you all both from their unusual size and their rarity. I send them therefore as proof of my own prowess and the

trophy of my victory. Indians are very proud of the rank, which will entitle them to wear an eagle's feather with the rattlers of a snake attached. If you will fasten a slight thread about the middle of this set and holding both ends make them vibrate rapidly you will hear the alarm his snakeship sounds when he remarks with Shakespeare "here's a coil!"

This is quite an exciting night. The wolves are howling around the camp as I write to you this evening we found near us the trail of hostile Indians. They must be near us now, but a sentry is pacing before my tent and we three two officers besides myself, have our tents pitched side by side, our revolvers are loaded and ready and I suppose we will sleep as you will- I sprang up rather suddenly as I wrote that word as three rifle shots were fired from the wood near my tent and I heard my sentry bring his musket from his shoulder. He is challenging now "Who comes there?" and a voice answers "Friend" so it is at least a well educated Indian if any! I believe I will go to bed now. This little alarm will make my sentry careful and he will watch well. Good Night.

Monday, Dec 4th, 1854, 15 m to 9 o'clock p.m.

Well: Here I am at Fort Duncan, Texas. The band has just been playing and I am getting ready to go to bed. I am in queer quarters here, writing this in what is called a grass house. There are two of us of the Medical Corps here. The gentleman with whom I am outranks me, he being a Captain [*George K. Wood*] in the staff while I am only a First Lieutenant. We arrived at this place at noon today. The mail leaves for the States on Thursday and I hope to have this letter ready to send to you at that time. I will do so unless something very extraordinary occurs to prevent it. There are few days on which I can mail a letter here, only once a week and the mail reaches us but weekly. It will be so long before I can hear from any of you. Please write me upon receipt of this letter for I may be so ordered that unless you do so I shall not receive your letter for a long, long time. Direct me at Fort Duncan, via San Antonio, Texas. The letter should be carefully addressed and well sealed; when these points are attended to letters come as regularly and safely to this post as any place in the U.S. Officers tell me that they send in them the most valuable articles with safety.

I cannot say how long I shall remain here. This is said to be one of the best posts in Texas but an expedition has been organized to act against the Indians far up the country and I think if I can I shall go with it. In that case I shall be in the field for months and shall see some pretty active service. Another officer of the Medical Corps is ordered but I think he does not wish to go. He has seen enough of field duty and then I believe there is a lady in the case and he would like to go further down into the country where he can be near her. It is a very natural feeling with him I presume, but for my own part it matters now very little with me whether there is at my post one lady or a dozen. You know I wrote to you that my ambition of being a "ladies' man" is quieted I hope forever. Devotion to the sex may be very well, in its way, but it seems to me that it would be more properly due to the individual, so much for the moralizing. The sentry is calling "Half past 9 o'clock, and all is well" I must be up at daylight, so Good Night!

Wednesday Dec. 6th, 1854

The mail came up to day. There were no orders for me so I am on duty at the post. I had hoped it to be otherwise but there are many who would think themselves fortunate in my situation. There is a great scarcity of quarters here. Orders were issued from the

Department long ago that this Post, be broken up so soon as another location could be found. Meanwhile no buildings of a permanent nature were to be erected. Since then some months have elapsed. Detachment after Detachment has been ordered here until we are living in some of the most singularly styled houses you can imagine. It is amusing to see how ingenious one becomes in the matter of comforts. Some of the most uncomfortable looking houses you will find lit up snugly and so cozy that you almost envy their possessors.

My long letter draws towards its close. You can gain a tolerably good idea of my trip from its pages. When I tell you that the whole journey from the seacoast has been made over a prairie over whose surface the eye ranges unattracted by anything of natural beauty; when you know that these hundred square leagues of land produce nothing but grass- now all withered- and bushes whose entire structure seems to be of thorns, when in addition to this you have heard that even water fails you and that unless you would drink that fluid from the same mud hole which mules and men have defiled you must carry your supply in your keg. When lastly you remember that the march is made in an Indian Country and that you ride every day and sleep every night ready to be called into action at a moments notice, you have all the data necessary for the keen perception of the beauties of the trip. Yet I liked the excitement, and have grown strong by the exercise. I am already quite a Texan and carry my "revolver" with an air, which would astonish you. I will tell you more of my situation, my plans and prospects in my next.

Remember Me to your Mother. Good Bye.

Yrs. Ever Truly,

Albert J. Myer

Fort Duncan, Texas, Jan. 3rd, 1855

My dear James:

I think that you have never seen such houses as those in which the officers of the army stationed at this post are living. The present position of Fort Duncan is reported by the Engineers as untenable, consequently sooner or later it must be given up. Under these circumstances, the War Department refuses to build quarters while at the same time they order here a whole regiment. It is amusing.

Many of the officers have with them their wives. These are well provided for. Government furnishes a canvas house. They cover the whole outer side of this with a kind of thatch. It never rains here: of coarse the houses are dry. The thatch guards against the rays of the sun, so they are tolerably cool. Individual tastes dictate the interior arrangements. Some of the ladies drape their canvas walls with red and white. The floors are carpeted. The furniture is convenient. There are books, musical instruments &c. The time of the inmates is almost entirely at their own disposal and thus here, on the far frontier of Texas, in what are merely tents are gathered around us most of the conveniences, many of the luxuries of civilized life. We are a community by ourselves. We are shut out from the world but the command numbers is hundreds. We have our own "old men and maidens, our young men and lovers." If we suffer from inconveniences we see others bearing them; from their patience we learn our own.

I am favored as I belong to no regiment or company but claim my rank on the General Staff. There are many little points in which I have the advantage. Company officers are building their own houses. The whole command is interested in building one for me. They are working on it now and it is wonderful for a post like this, it is to be of stone. I may send you a sketch of it. It will be very nice I dare say but I shall be lonely. All the better perhaps, at this time of my life for I have much to learn and much to do. I arrived at this place on the 4th of December. It will be tomorrow the 4th of January, I am still unsettled, and I write this letter as I wrote the last from the quarters of the senior medical officer at the post, until my house is finished I have none of my own.

7 p.m. We have just taken Tea in the mess-tent and as I write this a dozen young officers are sitting around the room, smoking, lounging, joking about the dance, which is to take place on the other side of the Rio Grande in Mexico tonight, for they are on quite intimate terms with the Senoritas and one can cross the river in a few minutes, trying to get up all kinds of arrangements for amusements &c.

The incessant clatter of their tongues together with several hundreds of questions, which it pleases, the gentlemen to ask me tend rather to interfere with the completion of this epistle. There is to be a grand bull-fight on the other side tonight and this with other inducements is urged as a reason why I should go. I had rather write to Hamburg [*New York*] however, and shall remain home. At noon tomorrow the mail leaves for the states; there will be no other for a week. I must finish this letter and in it I shall try to give you some idea of the Rio Grande section of Texas.

At the time of the annexation of Texas the whole of the country lying between the rivers Nueces and Rio Grande were in dispute. [*From before the end of the Texas Revolution, Mexico recognized that the Nueces River was historically the border of Texas from the rest of the country. However, the Republic of Texas claimed the Rio Grande as its border with Mexico, citing the Treaty of Velasco signed by Mexican President Santa Anna who agreed to the Rio Grande border after losing the Battle of San Jacinto. This dispute continued after the annexation of Texas, and was one of the causes of the Mexican-American War. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the dispute, with Mexico recognizing the Rio Grande as its northern border.*] Those who knew most of its capacities and who wished well the United States hoped they would never acquire it. John Q. Adams recommended wisely that it should always be neutral, a line of division between the U.S. and Mexico. I have described to you our march through it. I cannot describe such clumps of brambles (they call them "chaparral"), such pigmy trees- about the size of lilac bushes- such remarkable "cacti"- every variety from the "Turks Head" to the "Strawberry" as you encounter at every turn. But among all the prevailing over all, growing often as thickly as the "Boneset"- (you remember I tried to gather some- along the Hamburg Road), you see the "Prickly Pear." Not as you know it at the North, a few round, sickly leaves but here a bushy cactus rough with its thousand thorns and higher than your horse's head. Perhaps you have seen in green-houses the "Century Plant", for so some style the "Maguey" with its fleshy leaves some three or four foot long. You can gather it here at any time and the Mexicans will roast its roots and try to persuade you in spite of your own teeth and tongue that it is good to eat.

Very possibly as you sit reading this letter, the snow is falling in Hamburg and it is not by any means probable that you will see dusty roads again until the summer. I write in the midst of dust. The whole earth is parched and every little breeze drives in the clouds. There will be no snow in Texas; it is almost never seen. There has been no rain; the last good shower I witnessed near you. Sometimes there are queer rings around the moon and the morning dawns cloudy. Now, you think, comes the rain, but by noon the sun is shining and at night you see it setting in the same clear sky that has been over you for weeks before. So nothing grows in western Texas. There are no plantations, none can ever be. But the climate is delightful. As I remember Buffalo, there were weeks of stormy weather; it is pleasant here for months. Night is peculiarly beautiful. In the clear atmosphere over these boundless plains a thousand stars elsewhere-unseen shine twinkling, but when the moon is full you see the glory of a Texas evening. The air is mild and the mellow beams pour down so richly, you realize the meaning of a "flood of light." That is a "boarding-school-girl's sentence." I hope it is expressive.

When I say nothing grows in Texas I mean, of course, no articles of produce. Our lumber comes five hundred miles, our corn a thousand. But there are everywhere those bushes and brambles, those cacti, and little trees. There are many little flowers also and a variety of grasses. It is pleasant to walk along in January and pick wild verbenas or perhaps a stray violet. Wild cattle find enough to eat and sometimes you come upon a herd of "mustangs," "a thousand horse and none to ride." You can own them for the catching, fine little ponies such as Miss W. [*Catherine Walden*] should ride, "little dears" as ladies would call them but perfect little vixens as I know.- 3 p.m. Thursday Jan. 4th, 1855. I was going to write you a long letter but just now an express rider come in from Corpus Christi and I am ordered far up the country. Three hundred mile they tell me. I must go. I have to get everything ready and to start perhaps today. I feel rather lonely for I must go most of the way alone with an escort. Think of me when you get this as journeying over more of these prairies and going anew to a post where all are strangers. I hope I shall have a pleasant time. You must write me once a month or I shall get but little news from Hamburg. I am going now to make my preparations. Good By.

Saturday night, Jan. 6th, 1855. You see I felt sadly about leaving this post. And others tell me, by way of very pretty compliment, that they feel sad too. I am ready now. My trucks are packed. I have loaded my pistols, cleaned my rifle (I have a "Sharp's rifle" you can load and fire five times in a minute), and seen that my saddle and horse are in order, packed my mess chest and on Monday, they tell me, I march. I know more about my new post now. It will be long before your letters can reach me- that is if you have written already. They will come to this post and then be re-mailed to me at Fort Davis. My address will be "Fort Davis, (via San Antonio & Fort Clark), Texas." Letters to officers ultimately reach them. They may travel, as they will; it is often so important that despatches should be forwarded that more than ordinary care is taken than none should fail. I should like to hear from you once a month, at least. You can hardly imagine how a letter carries one back to the writer or how really grateful we are at their reception when we are cut off so from home. I used to laugh at long letters, I do so yet when they are simply for "form's sake" or upon business, but I have been reading the advertisements, even of a Buffalo paper, to glean some items of news. I thought that by chance I might

learn something of those whom I am interested. Everyone seems to have more friends than I- they certainly get more letters.

Sunday. Jan 7th. I resume my letter this morning. I think I shall send you a kind of journal while I am on my way up in the same manner as upon my march from Corpus Christi. I think I shall mail this letter from Fort Clark, the first post at which I stop. After that I suppose it will be "notes from under canvas" and the "box table" will come in play again. I cannot tell you how large my escort will be. We shall all be heavily armed, however, and I think the march will be pleasant. You remember I told you in one of my letters of an expedition about to move up the country. It was intended I should go with it as I desired but the order failed to reach me until too late. I presume I shall be in command of the party. I shall if it is my escort. I speak of course of those who go up with me. Today I am writing letters, saying "good by" &c. You would smile to see my mess chest with my coffee pots, frying pans, &c, my stores of hard bread, ham &c, all the apparatus for house keeping.

10 a.m. I have changed my mind half a dozen times in regard to this letter. I sit down and write for a few moments then I think of something that must be attended to and away I go. I have commenced and recommenced a dozen paragraphs.

Tuesday. Jan 9th. You see above that I am writing to you at intervals just as I can seize an opportunity. On Sunday I expect to leave at daylight on Monday. I should have gone alone then, that is the only officer, with an escort of ten men, or twelve, on a march through a country filled with the fiercest savage warriors that the Army has ever encountered. True I have made every preparation and expected if I had been attacked not only to defend myself but also to punish my assailants. Yet the anticipation of so long a march to be made alone, for you know in the service a soldier is no company for his officer, was not agreeable.

Sunday evening came and I went to make my formal application for my escort and wagons. It is strange and I cannot help thinking it is almost an answer to some prayer for my welfare for it seems providential; but the Quartermaster, the officer who has charge of the movement of trains, begged me to stay. His wife was sick and they are all kind enough here to make quite a pet of me professionally and to say they prefer my services. If I would consent to stay, he said, they would fit me out with tents, wagons & soldiers to my hearts content. "I should fare as comfortably on the road as in my own house" &c. &c. So I stayed; still I was busy with my preparations and still I expected to go alone, when, today, comes a train from Corpus Christi and they tell me two officers both young, like myself are going on the very same march I suppose to the same destination. I have not seen them yet, but I am confident that three of us together, with the escort we carry, would make a hard battle if need be. You must not expect to hear of my winning a brevet on any "well fought field," however, for I presume our force would terrify by its appearance alone any number of warriors. We look upon the trip as a kind of pleasure excursion with simply a "spice" of danger.

I think I shall sketch my tent for you on this march and let you see how much it improves in comforts. My friends are so interested in my welfare it can hardly fail to do so. A grey-headed Colonel is just saying, "Carry plenty of Lard," while a Captain & Lieut. Are

forming plans for a camp table. I have a little beauty of a horse. I have named him "Pink" after my former friend and dogmatical acquaintance of that name. My pony resembles him in on respect- he loves his master. If it was possible for me to forget you all, otherwise, I shall think of you, now, fifty times a day, as I sit in my saddle, and talk to "Pinkie."

Wednesday Morning. In twenty-four hours from this time my letter will probably be speeding towards you by mail while I shall be moving further away. I have seen my traveling companions. I can hardly form an opinion from so slight of an acquaintance but I think we shall make the time pass pleasantly. If you traced my former march, upon the map, to Fort Duncan, you can follow me now. My first day's journey carries me to Fort Clark, and then my coarse is towards El Paso. I stop at a post where names are given with little meaning. It is called "Fort Davis" but there is as yet no sign of the "Fort." It is a military village without fortifications. Major Simonson's Expedition of which you have, possibly, [heard] some mention, is to operate in that vicinity. I am ordered to join it if I encounter it upon the way. My order was so late in reaching me that it is almost impossible.

I have been over to the post office for the mail is just in. There is no letter for me. I have made up my packages to send by return mail. I am about to close this letter and then I shall feel that I have said "Good-by" for another month. I am writing to you now with my doors & windows thrown open and today is one of those hazy days, which you see in May. I was used to Southern winters but after spending the last at the North, it seems strange to see no snow and stranger still to start on a journey over dusty roads. Tomorrow night I shall be in my tent; or sitting by my campfire, in front, I shall be thinking of you all in Hamburg and wondering with many fancy dreams when I shall see home once more and when I shall see you. Very possibly my sentry will wonder, also, what can be the thought of "the officer" and should I favor him such a promenade around the fire as I am used to take in "thinking moods" at home it will be his unexpressed opinion "there is something wrong about the gentleman to walk like a guard when he might be in his berth."

Remember me with all kind wishes to the members of your family. I think of your Mother often, and I think of one who is gone. I wear his memento but as such I shall never need it. How a thought carries me back to the days we were together and how the same thought tells of scenes never to be repeated. To all again Good-by. My man stands by me to close my trunk. I seal up my letters and wishing for you and myself "God Speed" I go.

Yrs. ever & truly
Albert J. Myer

Fort Davis, Texas. Feb. 14th 1855.

My dear James:

I have flattered myself that since my announcement of a certainly long, and possibly dangerous, march about to be undertaken some of my friends may have felt a pleasing anxiety for my welfare. I say pleasing anxiety- pleasing to myself, I mean for it is not

pleasing to think that wherever fortune may carry you there are some to care for your safety. I must dissipate it now however for here I am at Fort Davis, Texas, most unromantically safe. As we anticipated we had a glorious march. My horse "Pinkie" comes out of it in fine condition, and, doubtless, with lasting reminiscences of very many quiet conversations in which he and master indulged upon the road. I have had no opportunity for asking his opinion in regard to Fort Davis, but I have concluded from the way in which he lays his ears back and winks at me when I approach his manger that he finds here plenty of food for reflection.

We left Fort Duncan on Jan. 11th. It was a pleasant day and we trotted quietly along reaching camp about four p.m. It was time soon for supper when the young officers who were with me [*Edson, Stewart and Green*] discovered to their horror and my amusement that they had started on a long march with nothing to eat! I laughed at them a little and then with the pride of an old campaigner- you know I had marched for a month before, I invited them to dine at my mess chest. A mess chest is so arranged that you can carry Plates, Cups, Cooking utensils, &c. on the road, while in camp you convert it, easily, into a table. We had a fine supper. In the evening we gathered around the campfire and sang songs, told stories, talked of mutual acquaintances far away and then turned in to sleep. You know I have a habit of reading in my Bible at night. I could not but think that night as, often, also, on the march how singularly it laid at the head of my bed while by its side protruded the handle of my revolver and a sword and loaded rifle were ready for my grasp. Day and night, in this country, one must be armed, even here in my quarters my pistol lies in its case loaded and capped for I cannot tell when I may be called upon to use it. I believe Miss Kate has a penchant for loaded pistols, a commendable one as I think: there are ladies here who are equally brave. A married lady told me last evening that she traveled here with her revolver and I presume as ready to use it as any man. I do not like warlike ladies but there are times when the sight of a pistol is useful.

We were moving next morning, early. Part of our train lagged behind while we knowing we were near Fort Clark entered the ambulance- a kind of carriage, and drove on rapidly. It was a sunny day and hot, we had talked for a time and were sleeping, sitting in our places, when we started at a loud explosion in our midst. First we looked at each other, half stunned, and then each clapped his hand on his belt pistols. We thought one must have gone off by accident. Hallo! Called a voice from outside Anybody Killed? Here, the hole! There sure enough close to the head of the officer who was sitting with me on the back seat, the side of the carriage was torn by a heavy charge of shot. A gun- our carriage was full- had slipped under his [*Green's*] arm and gone off by some jar of the wheels.

We arrived at Fort Clark at abt. 2 p.m. About 5 o.c. an Express came in with the news that the troops who had gone over the road we were to follow had killed a party of seven Indians and captured a little squaw. They came upon them one morning unexpected and the Indians fled into the tall cane and grass, which boarded the Pecos River. Fled, however not before the whites had fired at random into a crowd of Mexicans with whom the Comanche's were trading. One Mexican was killed on the spot and others were badly wounded. We met them on their way down as we left Fort Clark with an escort and I could not but pity one poor fellow who had ridden on horseback nearly 200 miles with his leg shattered fearfully by a musket ball. As the command came up, the Texas Rangers

and the Rifles spread themselves along the river and the grass was fired; as the flames drove each of his hiding places, fifty balls were placed in his body and so seven red-skins were massacred.

Had the Comanche in appropriate numbers surrounded a few whites, the affair would have been styled a diabolical murder; as it is, we must try to look upon it as an execution. In the worst sense of the word these tribes are savages. They are devils and the coldest blood must boil at the narration of the manner in which they have treated prisoners, who have fallen into their hands, not men, alone, taken with arms in their hands, for they can but die, but innocent women and children. Orders are now issued to the troops to take no prisoners, to spare no one, to listen to no terms for peace until the race is cowed by their punishment. You can form an idea of the state of the country through which we were to pass. The Express Escort brought with them lances, bows, arrows, and other articles taken from the Indians. We examined them with the curiosity of those who might be forced to encounter them.

We stayed at Fort Clark until Monday a.m. when with an ambulance, three wagons, and an escort of ten men we started on our journey once more. This time to go 335 miles through a wilderness in which there is not a habitation. On the first evening we camped at a beautiful stream. I had seen no running water before in Texas, and to hear it rushing over the little rocks and tumbling into basins carried me back to my home, in thought. Here to we saw beautiful fish, so they seemed at least, for I had seen none in fresh water, since I watched the in "Eighteen Mile Creek." [*Bordering Hamburg and Evans in New York*]

Running water, an occasional tree and a hilly country characterized the road over which we passed on our next days march. The hills among which we were riding were what is styled "truncated," abrupt upon the sides but perfectly flat upon the top, upon which you would often see a plain of an hundred acres. Toward evening the road began to wind over high hills, to plunge into ravines and to so writhe and twist itself that our progress became difficult. Suddenly we labored down a precipitous slope, turned a corner and the whole beauty of "Devils River" broke upon our vision. I was in advance on "Pinkie" and was so elated that I swung my hat and gave a cheer, scaring by that rational proceeding a flock of ducks, which would otherwise have contributed, to our supper. I couldn't help it. I have seen no such rocks since Niagara and no such river for months. Castellated rock rose on either side to the height of an hundred feet, from their foot, in places, a green as smooth as if cultivated extended to the waters edge, while among the hundred changing forms of cliffs were scattered little groves of trees. Part of the riverbed was dry, smooth & white as a marble floor for it was worn in solid rock. Over part, the water was flowing rapidly with a depth of about two feet. The pure bottom seen through purer water was singularly beautiful. We crossed the river and camped in a fine grove between high hills.

At daylight we were moving. Two men were seen in the distance, on close approach, found to be Texas Rangers on the march to join their company, which was with the Expedition above. Now, don't picture to yourself the Ranger, as you read of him in newspapers, the personification of the brave and reckless- wild perhaps, but with a redeeming trait of lofty chivalry, but let me describe the animal and trust that you may have little to do with them. I have some under my control and can speak from experience.

Rangers are rowdies, rowdies in dress, manner and feeling. Take one of the lowest Canal driver, dress him in ragged clothes- those he ordinarily wears, as you see him, are altogether too clean- put a rifle in his hand, a revolver & big bowie knife at his belt, utterly eradicate any little traces of civilization or refinement that may have by chance been acquired, then turn him loose, a lazy scoundrel in a country where little is known of, less cared for, the laws of God or man and you have the material for a Texas Mounted Ranger, an animal- perhaps I should say a brute- of whose class some hundreds are at present mustered into the service to fight Indians. There are exceptions. My invective is not meant for all.

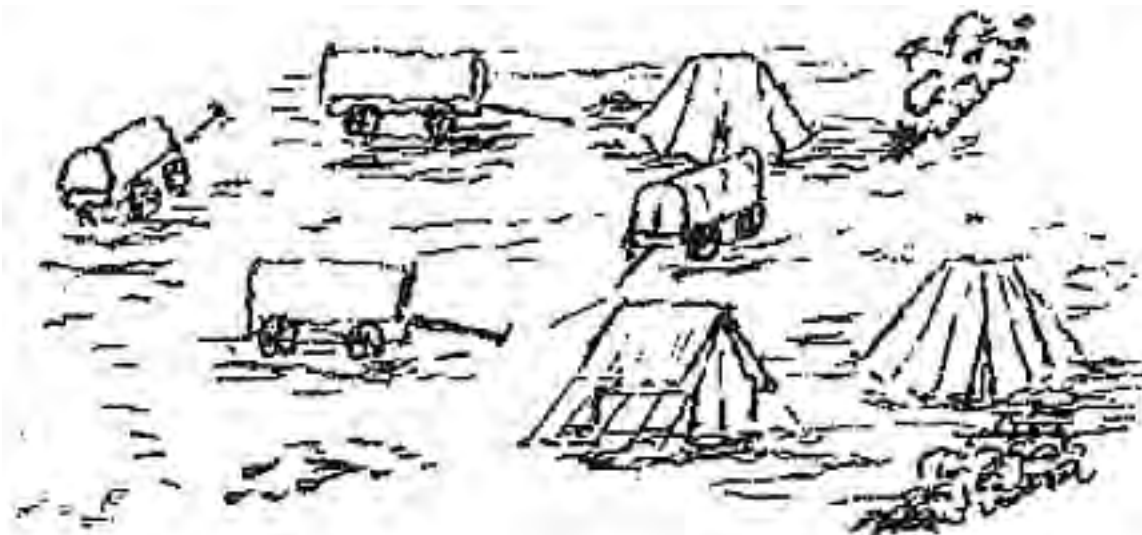
I have gone I see far from my narrative. Revenons à nos moutons- Rangers! [*Meaning of which is, in French: "Let's return to our sheep" or "Let's get back to the subject"*] They came up presently with a long yarn about seeking twelve Indians at midnight. They described very graphically how "We hollered and they hollered." As far as we could comprehend both sides were badly scared; both sides ran. It was nothing but two Rangers scaring twelve. The twelve discharged in the disgrace were going down the road and met the two coming up. The two brought letters from an officer at Fort Clark that they were to join our escort- we had just started when we hear a great noise on the other side of the river, and saw an escort scamper down the bank, then came a carriage- ambulance. More expresses sent after us. This was a Mexican Guide and a little boy who had been five years a prisoner with the "Comanche" now sent on as a guide to aid in tracking Indians.

This was the last we heard from Fort Clark, we were now sixty miles from that post and adding daily to the distance. We were in the Indian Country where the white man goes now ready always to fight; for he knows that spying eyes are ever upon him and savage war parties ready to strike at the first negligence. So we ride all day with arms in our hands, shooting now and then at deer or antelope that cross our path- sometimes marking a bird or trying the range of a rifle at four hundred yards. Flocks of deer and antelope raise their heads, look at us for an instant, and rush crazy away into the distance, going as far as the eye can mark them at the same sweeping gait that carried them out of danger in the first twenty bounds. We cannot blame them, for although we flatter ourselves that our appearance is "killing" it may not be attractive to the deer! For my own part I should expect the most daring of my lady acquaintances, meeting me, by chance, in my prairie costume to vanish, rendering heaven with shrieks and "galloping"- ladies can't run in terror.

Danger comes openly on the prairies; there are no trees to hide a foe, and the savages of this country fight on horseback. In battle they gallop around you, throwing themselves out of the saddle and hanging over the horse's side keeping the body of the horse between the enemy and themselves, while only the foot is seen clinging to the saddle. It requires skill to do this alone, but in addition; these warriors manage to keep arrows flying from under their horses' necks with a degree of certainty and rapidity that is disagreeable to contemplate.

At night we encamp with our wagons forming a square. The wall tent is mine. In the one by its side two young officers, my companions, have their quarters. The fire in front is that of which we cook our meals. The tent in the rear belongs to our escorts. In case of attack, our plan is to fight from the inside of the square. Here our horses are fastened at

night, for the Indians “stampede” them if possible. The smell of an Indian drives an American horse frantic. The Indians sometimes will dash into the herd, at a gallop,

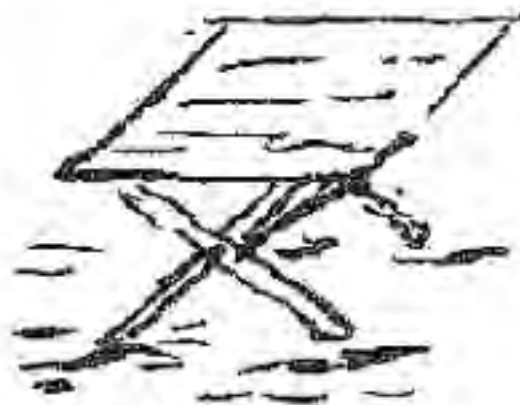


yelling and brandishing their shields and lances. It is enough if one succeeds in entering your square. Every horse and mule- each wagon is drawn by six mules- will tug desperately as his halter, if it breaks he goes thundering off and as many as can do so will follow him. Then the Indians pursue them, leaving you on the plain. They will ride the horses or eat them, as they chance to fancy. But our party with recent additions numbers about twenty and we think unless taken by surprise by fearful odds that we can whip the nation.

So we sleep peacefully while a sentry stands guard. In the night we get up and walk around to see that everything is safe and the guard alert. Sometimes we talk with the soldier for a while or sit musing by the fire. Or we creep into our tent and stretching on our cot think of those we left behind us, with mingled sadness and pleasure until we grow drowsy, sleepy, and dream of all kinds of things. I am luxurious on this march. I sleep no more upon the ground, unless we are to make a forced march in the morning, but I carry a



little cot that rolls up in this style and is so easily tossed into a wagon, but expanded makes a comfortable bedstead. I have a table also the top of which separates from the standards and both close on hinges until it is a miracle of compactness. It is a



very valuable table, where no other can be had, and a romantic young officer, just emerging from the chicken-hood of cadetship, very deeply in love, and so little fit to be

so that he must tell one all his experience, until I am more tired of his affection than I hope his charmer will ever be, sits at it long after I am asleep writing epistles of fearful longitude- longer than this- to his Dulcinea.

We crossed the river Pecos, where the Indian affair took place, one day at noon. We saw the burned grass, a freshly made grave but no other sign of occurrence. I rode over the spot. It was in this vicinity that we had reason to expect our attack. Two day before we had met a train and had heard that fifty Indians were near us. It was natural to suppose that the Comanche were burning to revenge the death of their warriors. We camped that night as usual, by the side of a fine pond whose banks, like those of the river Pecos, close to it, were covered with a dense growth of cane or grass, to the extent of some hundred acres. It was as high as your head. Our tents stood on a rise of ground at a little distance and here the ground was clear, covered only by a dry grass some six inches long.

I was 'turning in' for the night, for everything seemed quite, when I heard an exclamation, quick footsteps, a kind of alarm, and then a young officer comes rushing to my tent front with, "Turn out! Turn out! There are Indians around us." How I jerk on my coat, for in its pockets are my cartridges. How I don't wait for vests or neck kerchiefs, and how I appear, presently, very much awake, scrambling out of my tent, with my pistol belt half bucked and my rifle in my hand, you can imagine. There were the soldiers mustered at our tent, with their arms in their hands and that singular expression of anxiety and firmness, which I suppose, is always seen in troops about to engage. Some tightened their belts, some looked once more at the gun-cap to be sure of its fire, the moon was shining palely, and I could not help a thought of the romance of the scene as we clustered at the wagons, for their defense.

There was somewhat of amusement also. A couple of Mexicans with true "greaser" courage were gabbling horrible Spanish and vociferating "vamos." The little "Comanche" boy had gathered a bow, and an arrow of his own manufacture and was wriggling into all kinds of impracticable ambuscades, about a wagon wheel. One young cadet was out with his double-barreled gun and visions of great distinction, while your obedient servant was practicing a kind of fatherly supervision and flattering himself that he looked vastly cool and collect. There was time in all the excitement for a kind thought of "Hamburg."

A sentry reported that attracted by the alarm of a horse he had looked over the bank and saw, near the high grass, a figure, man or beast he could not say. He called. No answer. He threw a stone and the figure fled, like a man, burying itself in the reeds. He was an old Indian fighter. He thought it was an Indian. Three men were sent, at once, as we heard this narrative, to the spot. Near the point of disappearance stood something. Who's There? No Answer. Who is there? No answer. Ready! Aim! Fire!! Three loads of buckshot wound fearfully at a stump!

It seem that there are grounds for alarm, however, the word is given "Fire on the Prairie!" Oh! It was glorious to see the red brands hurled into the clustering reeds. First a sparkle and a flickering light, then a flame with a slight crackle, then a rush and a roar, a torrent of fire with dark clouds of smoke rolls toward heaven while the broad glow of the conflagration lights up, for miles around, hills and plain, and near us a tree, bush, and

stone, with the vividness of noon day. We stand for a while with guns in our hands but we see nothing. Then we leave our sentry, very certain to keep awake, and go into our tents and lie down to sleep, but first I read my chapter and make a note and wonder, as I lay dosing, if others are thinking of me as I think of them, alone, in my tent, on this wild prairie.

All that night the fire rages, and I awaking see it shining through the walls of canvas, and look out to enjoy its beauty. Its hum comes to be a kind of lullaby, but the flame and its reflection, the broad wavering light, and the solemn grandeur of the scene, at night, are enchanting and I wish that some of you could be with me a moment to enjoy it and then, far away where I know you are safe. Then I see the sentinel pacing restlessly, never standing long in one place, for that might expose him to a shot, and so I go to bed again and sleeping, dressed, rest until morning. Then we march and an old guide goes seeking about the burned district and finds the trail of Indians, very few however, leaving it. Then we march on day after day.

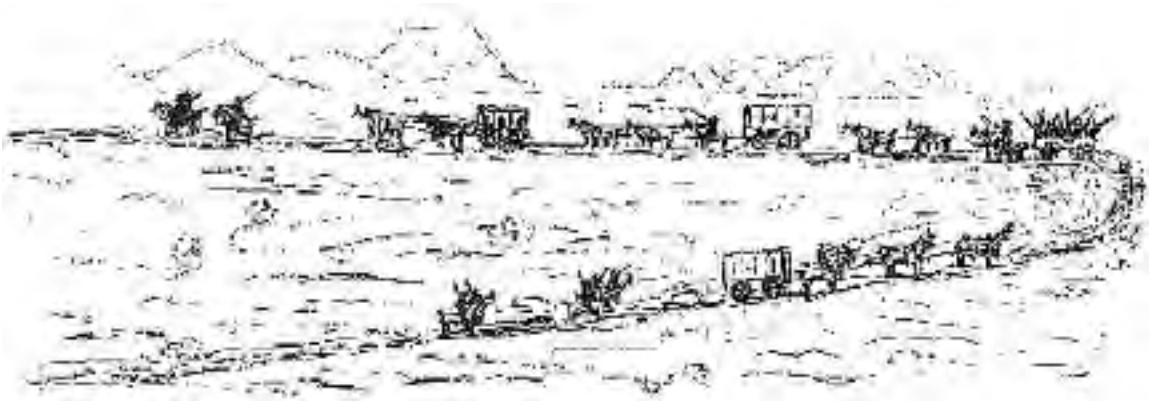
I could fill pages with our adventures. One day as we stop at noon "a smoke" rises from a hill a mile or two away and a guide points his rifle at it and says "Los Indios" are signaling to gather their comrades. We care very little for this, and, at night, when we camp, we set the prairie on fire again. They may see that we do not intend to conceal ourselves. Then on other days we pass large graves on the roadside and they tell us with hushed voices how the Indians killed seven here and so they are buried; and here another party fought; and here another was attacked, but after all these Indians do not like to risk their lives when there is little to gain and we think they would hesitate long before they attack us.

At last one bright Sunday we come through a most romantic valley and reach Fort Davis. Fort Davis lies in a valley. The site is much more pleasant than that at Duncan. I am supreme here, in my own department, and of course I like that. I have as fine a position as a young officer can ask for, for I belong to no regiment, but to the whole Army hence, there is no jealousy, but all can be kind to me. The climate is delightful. There is no rain, no cloudy weather, no snow, and no mud. The climate of this part of Texas is probably the finest in the world. I am in comfortable quarters. I have my books, some old acquaintances or associates, no one who can interfere with my sovereign pleasure and I should be thankful.

Feb. 14th, 1855. Today is Valentines Day. I am so happy for I have my Valentines, a letter from you and from Aunt. It has taken forty days to reach me but if you have written others they will follow each other in their order. You say that you are pleased with my pen and ink sketches and thank me for my very interesting descriptions. This is all very courteous and complementary, but my dear James, are you not disposed to be ironical? Remember that the "end is not yet"- not even of this letter- and think how under the stimulus of flattery I may prolong those to come, indefinitely. I am glad however if I have contributed anything to your pleasure. I wish I could tell you half of the strange new scenes that are opened to me by my Army life. Sometime I will write you about the Indians. I expect to go out on an Expedition in the vicinity of the post, for pleasure, and will describe my trip. I was out the other day on a botanical excursion. I took with me an escort of ten men, all mounted and heavily armed. You should have seen me at the head

of my command as I lead them up ravines and over hills where no white man has ever trod. We were out all day but we saw no Indians. I accomplished my purpose without any danger and the next day sent a party to bring in the plants I had searched for. I must say good-bye now. A thousand thanks for your kind letter. I am back with you again; as I read it- of course I am happy. Present my respects to your Mother; I have something to thank her for also. Good by.

Yours ever and truly
Albert J. Myer



[P.S.] You might like my “pen and ink sketches” of our mode of life, James, and so I send you one, our train as we marched across the prairie. You may select for me wither of the tree gentlemen in advance whom you may fancy. The four-horse carryall in front is the “ambulance” for us to ride in when we tire of the saddle. Next comes the baggage wagon, one of the U.S. Army wagons, the another wagon- our escort men have taken off the top and sit perched up with their muskets, riding like princes, quite a novelty for them. In the last wagon is my tent, my cot and table, trunks and mess-chest, precious wagon, for it carries dinner. Some riflemen bring up the rear.

My address is “Fort Davis, via San Antonio & Fort Clark, Texas.

March 7th, 5 p.m. I am just closing this; an express starts tomorrow, by which I send it. Good-by. *[Written across the top of this letter is: “March 12. The express did not go”]*

[In 1861 Harpers Weekly published this sketch, by a Government Draughtsman of pre-civil war Fort Davis. A wagon train can be seen entering the fort’s valley area, as Myer may have experienced it.]



March 4th, 1855

My dear James,

As my letters to you are so very much longer than my notes to Miss Kate you must without feeling slighted, let me write to her twice as often. She will tell you I dare say if there is anything you care about knowing. I am writing to you another letter now. Be careful about flattering me or my illuminations will become stupendous. I have hundreds of incidents to tell you, and I am delighted to think that an evening at Hamburg may pass more pleasantly for their perusal. Think what a pleasure it must be for me to hear from you all also. It makes more than one evening happy. I shall write to you at length in a fortnight or less. I do not wish you to worry yourself about equaling my letters in length. I know how tired you must be often and how differently you are situated. But write to me often and let me know everything that interests you. Remember me to the members of your family and think of me as

You Sincere Friend

Albert J. Myer

March 12th, 1855. I send you what I regard as a very great curiosity, the, probably, original potato! It was found here in a wild Ravine a few days since and I am currently engaged in the investigation. If it is indigenous to this soil and I think tradition says that before Raleigh discovered its uses it had been brought from Spanish America, it is a remarkable discovery. The Savans of all Europe have been trying to pierce the mystery, which has enveloped its origin and to ascertain the localities and the forms in which it primarily appears. I wish you would plant these- those I send are full size- and see what can be made of them by culture.

It has been advanced as the cause of the "Potato Rot" which is now raging that since the time of Raleigh there has been no original germs, but the whole family of the root has been propagated from "eyes" of those first planted- thus the vivifying principle has become extinct and the race is about to disappear by the natural laws of decay. It is certain that in this case the germ is entirely distinct from that of those you are using. If these are not from the original stock, their ancestors have lived in a different soil, different climate, and under different influences from any now in the U.S. if they improve you may have seed the products of which will be exempt from the tendency of disease. You must plant them at a distance from any of the common variety or, they may be fructified, by those you are using and next year the variety would be a cross between the common potato and this. Be careful in your management of them for they are very rare. I would not expose them to any risk. Now is not this a long talk to be made over small potatoes? Good-by.

Remember that they have not yet been tried and be careful about eating any you may raise until you have tested them.

March 13th I have been out again today and have more reason to think they are indigenous. It is doubtful still however. AJM.

[See: The American Journal of Science and Arts Vol. XXII- November 1856, Page 284, III. -Botany and Zoology "Wild Potatoes in New Mexico and Western Texas"]

Fort Davis, Texas, March 17th to April 4th, 1855

My dear James:

You would regard the mail that will carry this letter some hundreds of miles on its way to you as a very singular establishment. You know now after my very spirited sketch –or if you have an extremely powerful imagination what an ambulance drawn by four mules looks like. At the middle and at the end of the mouth an ambulance is started from this post; before it ride six armed men, their rifles carried at their saddle bows; they drive with them extra mules for some may die or be stolen by the Indians upon the road, then comes the vehicle itself; its driver is armed, and more men with more weapons are seated in it; here ride the precious mail bags –I have learned of late to look upon them as precious sometimes; behind spurs on a rear guard of several men. Now the order is “so many miles per day will be made by the mail” and away they scamper in a cloud of dust to penetrate the wilderness I have just passed to be seen no more by civilized beings until they reach Fort Clark in ten days time. How we hope for these mails, how we rejoice when one brings a letter for us and how dear every little mark of interest from those that are dear to us becomes you can not realize. Think how this letter has traveled to your hands with its guard of men who risk their lives if need be to defend it, and does it not gain value it might otherwise have wanted? I carried the mail myself when I came up. It is small and packed easily in my trunks.

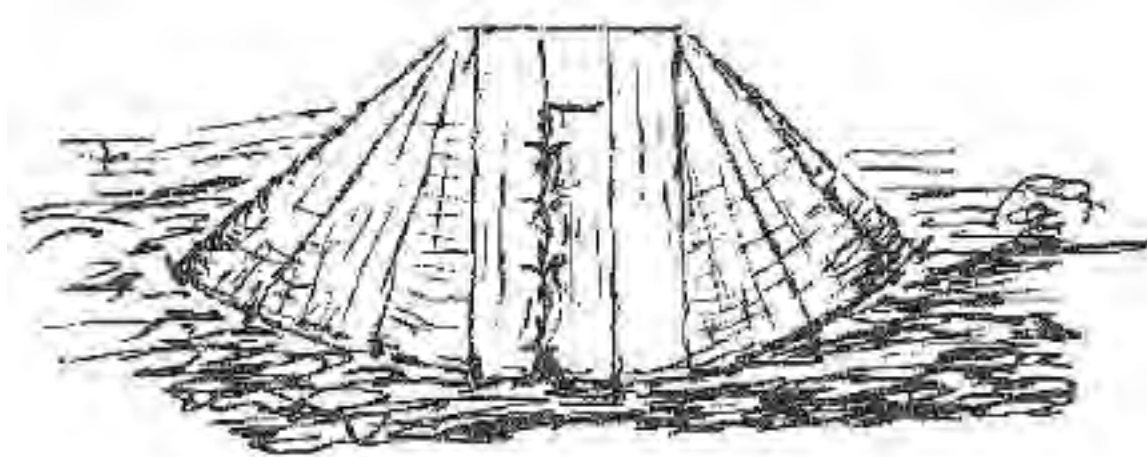
I have told you some of the scenes but there is one that will amuse you. One night we camped with care for we thought a large number of Indians were near us. It was forty-four miles from this spot to the nearest water, then thirty-six to the nearest spring, and this to be passed with loaded wagons. At two o'clock in the morning we were in the saddle, by daybreak we were miles upon the road; all day long we marched that weary march until we had been thirteen-hours in the saddle when we reached Howard Springs about 40 miles east of Pecos. I was so tired. This was formerly one of the most dangerous spots on the road and we had some fear that we might encounter Indians as we approached it. There were none however and after a hasty glance at the pond, which is called a spring and a curious inspection of a great Indian war trail -they have traveled so much over this spot that they have worn a track like a wood road- I made preparations to go to bed. I was going to have a splendid sleep. I had seen that my bed, table, and &c were arranged with more than usual care and was thinking what a glorious night it would be.

After dinner I went to bed and was soon sound asleep. I awoke suddenly some hours after; it was blowing a regular gale. I heard something crack and the canvas of my tent flapped noisily. I knew the tent could not stand it, but I wouldn't get up. Presently something snapped –there was a flapping- never mind; let it come; and I dozed again. I turned over in bed and wrapped myself in blankets. Just then came a great gust; there was a smash, a clatter of falling tent poles, and down it came! I was very much mixed up, for a minute, with about fifty yards of canvas, several poles, a rifle and loaded pistol, water buckets, candlesticks, matches, tables and bedsteads. I kicked, but two sheets and a coverlid had me wound up tight. I tried to walk but I tumbled over the footboard. I presume that a kitten in a bag scratches and kicks just about in the way I did to scramble

out of that tent. You would have laughed to see the gyrations I performed and to hear my exclamations in regard to the matter.

Out I came presently, hurried for a Sergeant to come and take care of my things, grappled for my carpetbag and pistol and crawled into the tent in which the two other officers were sleeping. This was of the French pattern –not so fine as mine, such as are used by the men- but they cannot be blown down. They are singular tents. Something like this: They are about fourteen feet in diameter. The French now in the Crimea make twenty or thirty men sleep in each, you can see from the form, that they must stand firmly.

Here I woke up the gentlemen. It was very dusty and as the wind roared past it drove in under the tent, between the “pins” you see in the sketch, real storms of dust. One youngster was on the floor. Puff came the dust and it had been “puffing” all night. He was fairly powdered with it. His bedclothes and his hair had gathered it until they were gray, while his face was striped like an Indian’s with war paint. How we did laugh, and calculate how long this tent would stand and talked to each other, with compliments as to our personal appearances. Finally, I found a corn sack, which I spread on the floor –the ground. I had my big Army coat –you remember its weight- so I rolled myself up like a mummy –eclipsed my head with three or four turns of the cape, stretched myself on my sack and was asleep in ten minutes. A man gets used to taking things coolly, after a little service in the Army.



We had a wild start in the morning. It was four o’clock and perfectly dark. The wind blew a hurricane. It was cold and the dust flew as on a fall day in Buffalo. It was very cold. The men had thrown some empty barrels in the fire and the flames rose a dozen feet. By their light you saw the men like Arabs with their guns and their great coats, their caps tied on with handkerchiefs, blankets folded over their shoulders &c, some shouting to mules and packing the tents &c. into wagons, some loading their arms by the fireside, some standing as if they kept watch. It was a strange scene as I have ever witnessed. My tent would not have fallen if it had been put up purposely to endure such a gale. But they are not of frequent occurrence and on the march you are apt to become careless.

Finally we were off. I was riding in the ambulance this morning for I was very tired. I could not stand it long; however, and in an hour or two I was again in the saddle with

Pinkie about buried in blankets &c. I had rigged upon him. An old Dragoon had taught me a way of riding comfortably, on a cold day, which I teach you for use on the Lake Shore. If you are to ride facing the wind place upon your saddle a blanket unfolded; let the edge of the blanket fall just behind the saddle; the other edge will reach nearly your horses ears. Now mount, of coarse your weight hold the blanket firmly to the saddle. Now reach forward and taking the front edge in your hands bring it back to your body and let it, as the blanket now folds back, hang behind your legs. You have thus blanket under your legs and over them. It will wrap up your feet also. The wind blowing against it will hold it in its place and you are perfectly protected. If you ride before the wind, one edge of the blanket should be at the pommel of the saddle; the other far behind it. Mount and fold it over your legs as before. Now, as you are before the wind, the harder it blows the more closely will your blanket enfold you. Try it. I will try to illustrate. Never mind the proportions of this "very valuable animal" but you see that his legs (I mean the riders), the most difficult part to shelter when in the saddle, are protected and will be more closely covered the harder the wind blows upon the blanket which shelters them. If it is as much comfort to you, even, as it already has been to me I shall be more than repaid for my "equestrian" performance.



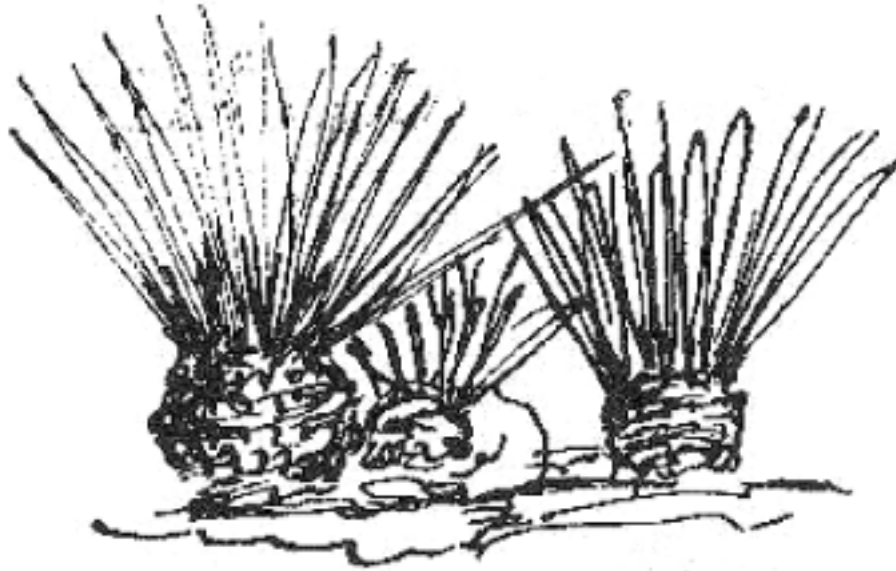
Thus equipped I rode along quite comfortably. We stopped for half an hour about noon. There was no dry wood; hardly a bush in sight, we had no fire.

Presently as we were sitting in the shelter of a great rock we saw the little Comanche scampering towards us. He said nothing but coming close to us selected a bunch of singular weeds, not fairly brushes, like this a variety of Palmetto I believe. It was green, the last thing almost you would have selected to kindle, but his savage knowledge taught him its uses. He rubbed a match, touched one of the plants and to our wonder up rushed a blaze like that from the driest pine. It crackled and snapped and roared with a perfect fury and in less than twenty seconds we had a famous fire. You see how one can learn. We would have frozen before we would have thought of using such an article but the boy was wiser. It is a singular provision of nature that where the plain seems utterly barren and there is not a branch or twig these plants flourish in the greatest abundance.

We reached a fine creek about four p.m. had a fine dinner and turned in to sleep early. Last summer there was a camp here to hold Indians in check. One day all the horses were grazing under charge of a small guard when the Indians came down upon them. The guards were not attacked but they dared offer no resistance and presently the officers in the camp were surprised to see the whole herd rushing past with a dozen Indians yelping like demons, pricking them with their lances and clattering their shields after them. Of coarse the troops turned out and they had a race -Infantry on foot after Indians on horseback. They were near enough, at one time, to fire and they did so. Injuring, they say, two warriors, very badly, but after a long race in the broiling sun they came back utterly

exhausted and the sixty horses were thenceforth missing. Was it not enough to vex a saint?

I am daily expecting a repetition of the amusement here. Our horses graze at some distance from the post, and on some fine day they will, probably, be stampeded. It is just possible that, thus, I may have an excursion among these hills and plains with the troops in search of them. The marches are generally very pleasant; you have a fine party, good grass and horses, and enough excitement to make it interesting. I find that I am writing a rambling letter. I have not time nor do I suppose that you wish for formal connectment. I write just as I would talk, changing from subject to subject and never aiming at rhetorical effect. When you want an oration I will send you one.



I rode comfortably all that day then, and slept that night, soundly, as I have told you. At this place one of the poles of my wall tent was found to be missing, left on the road, and henceforth, until I reached my post, I used a "French Tent." I used to take a kind of obstinate pleasure in putting up my tent so solidly that nothing could prostrate it and then lying in my bed listening to the gale shaking its canvas and whistling around its corners. At present I have not fully decided whether, in future campaigns, I shall adopt this style or not. On some marches we carry no tents.

Pack mules are allowed and we crowd on them blankets, teacups, pork, papers, potatoes, portfolios, &c. &c. We pack the animal -who kicks like a fury during the operation, very neatly. We pack him, and on our ponies ride gravely after him. Medical officers are regarded with envy for they have more mules to carry their stores. Yes, it is very fine; a bottle of Harvey Sauce will just fit along side the Prussic Acid; and salt goes very well in a Quinine bottle! Mustard and Blister Plaster stow very appropriately together and Miss Kate will tell you I ought always to carry Cayenne and Ginger! Well, we pack him and he grunts about his load and then makes up his mind to bear it. We have been marching all day and it is nearly dinnertime. Do you see that hill yonder? Why it is really precipice and the path goes up it as it would climb a stone wall! Now, for the scramble! For the best horse and the summit! See the men crawling up with their muskets and the mules clinging like flies to a ceiling. But what? A blunder, a misstep and a stumble, a clatter,

and a rush down –down goes a mule fifty feet! Head up! –Heels up! –Saddle up! –Legs up! A storm of big stones bouncing down the mountain and a cloud of dust. Poor thing! Dead; to a certainty! Not a bit of it. Muley picks himself up, kicks once to see if his legs are broken, yells twice out of spite, and lays his ears flat down on his neck and comes pattering up the hill as if driven by Jehu! Perhaps you will take a little Harvey Sauce with your dinner? It is fine, very fine, what there is left of it; but don't you think it is a little – just a little too much mixed with Prussic Acid! I can't say the salt has lost its flavor but did it never strike you that it and the next Quinine bottle are smashed into one! I do not object to mustard, but I think I should prefer it not mixed with Castor Oil! And if you will pardon the suggestion, I wouldn't eat the Cayenne with that arsenic! I give you a pretty fair idea of a "mule tumble." I say nothing about comminuted teacups, dislocated gridirons, and fractured coffee pots.

I am sure no young housekeeper even had as much trouble with her kitchen as I have. You ought to have seen me one day very sagely teaching my servant how to make bread! I knew about as much about it as you do! So I told him "First, mix a little flour with some water, then, take some Saleratus and mix with it." Well; he did so. Now I began to be ambitious for the mess looked very much like dough, and I thought I would have a "short cake." So I told him to take some lard and stir it up with the rest. Well; he did that and then he put it into a frying pan to bake it. Would you believe it; the thing wouldn't rise! But there it stayed, sulking and getting flatter and flatter until it settled right down in the pan and turned yellow! I looked at it and told the man to "poke a fork in it!" –I remembered the holes in crackers but it never stirred. Then I put coals on top of it; then it turned black outside, while the yellow within was beautifully variegated with spots! Then I tried to eat it, but couldn't. I have heard of soda biscuit, this was decidedly alkaline. I dare say very much like one- Heavy! I suppose it would run into bullets like lead! I gave up in disgust; from that day, to the present, I have never essayed bread making, but I do when marching succeed in a queer sort of wafer out of flour and water – or rather my man does- and it is good to eat.

I am quite proud of my reputation for keeping a good table. You would smile to hear me order what shall be my breakfast or my dinner and then to see me sitting solitary and alone eating it. I have a servant, who I think is attached to me, and he takes great pride in seeing that my quarters are more neatly kept and my table in better order than those of my fellow officers. By the way, I gave the men a great surprise yesterday by directing an extra allowance of 1 gallon of molasses to every 10 men. Wherever I went I could see them making cakes and lugging about bottles of it, and the salutes I received were remarkable. One "blue coat" held his cake and two molasses cups in one hand that he might touch his cap "to the D" with the other! I presume he was thinking "sweet things" about me!

I have never sent you a plan of the canvas house in which I am living. I could have another built but this is so comfortable and its interior is so cheerful and I am so lonely that I have not thought it worthwhile. It is about twenty-seven feet long, nine feet broad, and nine feet high. The carpet is matted upon a board floor. I think canvas the best building material in this climate. Dust cannot penetrate it. It is impervious to rain and it looks always white and clean. I send you one of my pen and ink sketches, I cannot say

that my plan is very ornamental, but it will give you an idea of my quarters. The small tent in front is my man's house so he is always within call. You will notice that I have a



brush fence around my pavilion and that, into one of the sides of my residence is built a stone chimney. There are no windows for there is no need of them; the front is generally open and if not, it is well lighted by the rays passing through the canvas. It is very tight and warm and I have often thought how cozy I am fixed.

I wish I could draw a plan of the interior, for I have three apartments, Big bedstead; trunks, table, dressing stand, &c. in the one farthest from the front. Writing table, curtained shelves, rocking chair, fireplace, chairs &c. in the middle room –which I am now writing; and in the front, a lounge with big pillows, my wash stand, apparatus for cooling water &c. &c. Then outside in front I have a kind of pavement on which I can place my chair and gather friends around me in the cool evenings. I have accommodated two guests and given each a separate apartment! At my meals my table is set in the middle room, I need but one thing to make my quarters luxurious. I think of others built; however, I propose to carpet them if I do, first with matting and over this to stretch canvas. I will send you my plans when they are fully concocted.

I am living so easily and in some things so luxuriously that I am afraid I shall be spoiled. But whenever I go out on a scout, I take it roughly as I have written to you of my marches. It is a splendid life to make one hardy and self-reliant. I cannot wonder at the fascination that surrounds it. In the field, there is a charm in danger even, and I cannot think a man sleeps less sweetly because he does so with his hand on a pistol. Camping, without tents, is very much like loading your white horse with everything you can pack on him, buckling on your pistol, taking your gun in your hand, riding “the pony” all day around Hamburg, stopping about four in the evening in the middle of one of your meadows, having your men build a fire with sticks and cook your dinner while you with a number of good fellows room about hunting –not getting too far off for there are Indians –or sit together chatting.

After dinner you have a quiet talk; and you are tired. You roll yourself up in six blankets, you put under your head a saddle or valise, and you lay your pistol belt, pistol and gun at your side, lie down, put your feet to the fire; look up at the stars, count them, think about them, wonder about them, muse of your own bright particular star; then you doze and

half awake mingle all things on the earth, under the earth or above it, and so sleep, while around you paces your sentinel, and sometimes you wake in the night and see him looming out above you against the sky as he peers into the darkness to guard from coming danger, or you miss him and jump suddenly on your feet to see if he has neglected his duty. Then you walk around the sleeping men and horses and perhaps from the shadow somewhere you catch the gleam of his musket, and you walk to him not unchallenged and find him standing still and cautious, always watchful. So you say a word or two and ask for the hour or go to "Pony" to see that he fares well where he is tied with a twenty-foot rope –a lariat – and is browsing on the short grass. Then you walk back to your fire, think again, and sleep again until daylight.

You are roused to breakfast and men are packing your blankets and saddling your pony and so taking gun and pistols again you mount and are once more on the march. I said it was like riding about Hamburg, but there are no trees, generally, no water sometimes and you carry it with you in kegs. I always take some for "Pinkie." Sometimes there is no wood but there are always rocks and deserts, often deer and antelope, and very rarely, Indians.

I must close this letter. The mail is backing up. I have made further investigations about the potatoes. They are wild and I think will rejuvenate the species. I have eaten some like them. They are very good. I wish I could see the expression of surprise when you open that letter. I presume you think I will send you a tree next. I do not think of it. I find that the Pueblo Indians procure them in the mountains and sell them at 12\$ per bushel in Chihuahua – pronounced Cheawahwah- you may hear more about them. If they prove useful I shall send you a small box of them. I am not conferring any favor upon you by doing so, so no thanks. I wish to see if they can be cultivated in the north and if they are not free from the decay now so prevalent. I am more interested in the matter than you can be. I think I must beg Miss Kate to take charge of one in a flowerpot. In return for her kindness, I will bring her any "infuriate" cactus that she prefers. There is a prospect of this post becoming very important. We hear that two companies of Rifles are on their way. It will make eleven companies here and plenty of society.

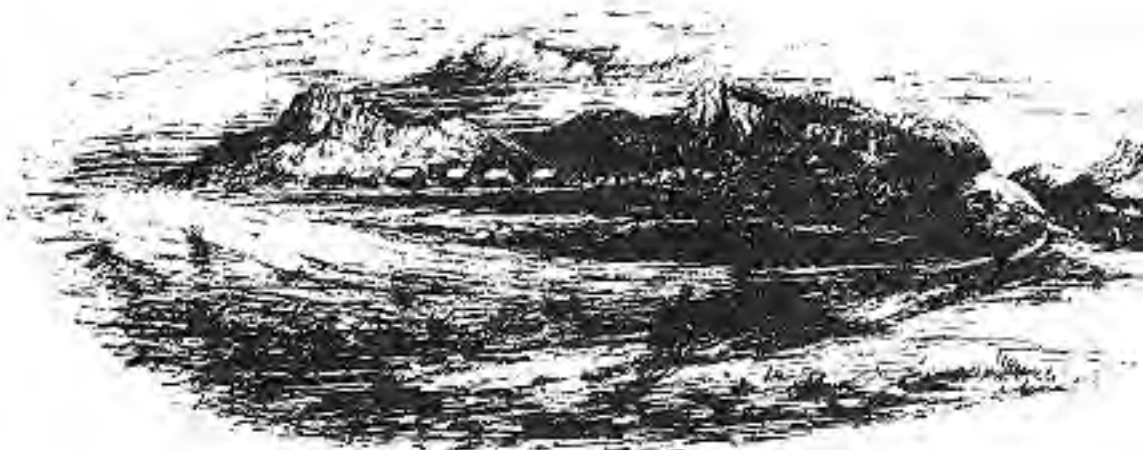
We are having some very pleasant rides on horseback about the country. There are some young brides here and we go out to escort them and their husbands when they wish to ride. All of the officers were their "revolvers" on these pleasure parties and I hope we would make a very safe defense in case of necessity. There is no danger however. We can ride six or eight miles and be in sight of the post all the time. We hear that four new regiments have been raised. There will be work on the prairies. Some think that the Mormons will be held in subjection by arms. There will be severe lightning should that be necessary.

Have you ascertained my locality yet on the map? I am about 80 miles from Presidio del Norte, or about 80 miles east of the Rio Grande, on the parallel of Chihuahua. I may go to El Paso this summer or even to Santa Fe. Should like to travel during all the time that must elapse before I can come home on leave.

I was surprised the other day to receive through an officer here a message of remembrance from a young lady who came on board the ship as we left N. Y. Harbor and

sailed with us until the pilot left, when she returned with a gentleman relative to the city. She was pretty and attractive. I had very little time to see her for I was busy. A Miss Fanny Laurence of New York, ask Miss Kate if she knows her, I was surprised because our acquaintance was only for twenty minutes, but she shook hands with us all to say good-by, and I think I know why she is so mindful of young officers in the Army. I very much suspect that the next time her cousin, an officer, sails from New York, Miss Fanny will sail with him. She is said to be very talented and witty. The sole reason that leads me to suppose Miss Kate might have met her. I must say Good-by now.

With every good wish, I remain your friend,
Albert J. Myer



P.S.- I send you a pen sketch of this post – you see it is not very inviting. The houses are those in which the men live. Ours are further in behind them, between the rocky mountains and invisible. I hope to see you in about – oh a long time. Keep this for me and I will explain it then-

[Shortly after this letter, Myer fell ill and by May seriously so. His letters to James are reduced to brief notes, saying little more than he is ailing. They are not included here. By June he was seeking a medical leave, but by the time it was authorized he was better, and withdrew the request.]

Fort Davis, July 6th, 1855

My dear James,

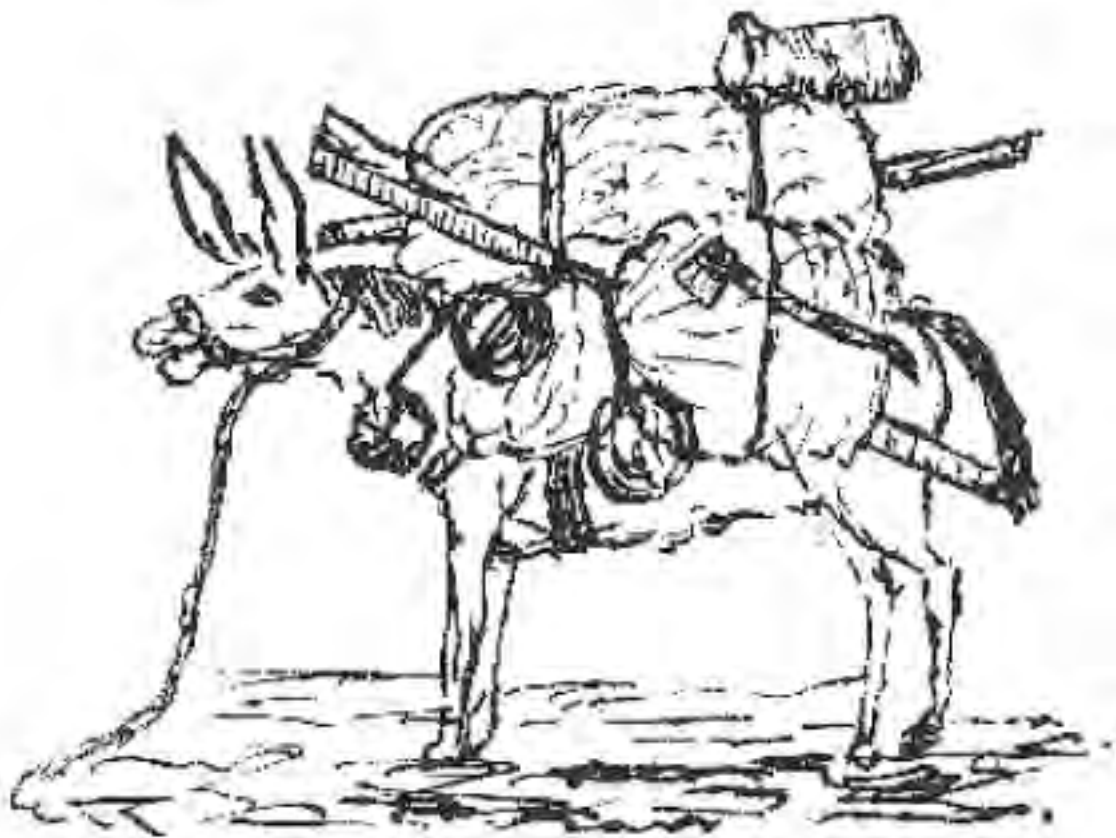
I do not yet write to you. But I intend to do so. I am not so sick now that I cannot write. I am not suffering any but am worried and alarmed by what has passed. I have gained flesh quite fast and sleep well. I am on duty as usual but very homesick and very “blue.” You do not know what it is to be sick away from home; I hope you never may. I shall try to take good care of myself now. I should like to hear from you. If I go to El Paso or indeed anywhere I mean to write to you a journal. The mountains are barren except for some scrub oak. We have fine mornings and evenings. The thermometer stands at 60. I am up at about 5 a.m. every day. Write to me. I want all the letters from home I can get. I am lonely and in low spirits; you must help to cheer me up.

Very truly and ever your friend,
Albert J. Myer

Monday- Aug. 13th, 1855

My dear James,

I am in a most happy mood today, for this a.m., I received all letters in answer to mine of May 26. I returned last evening from my mountain trip. Having had a pleasant week of it. You remember I wrote to you as we stated; the mules were at the door as I sealed your letter. It was a puzzle to pack the unfortunate animal destined for our transport. Tent Poles –you will readily perceive that stowing tent poles upon horseback is not the easiest matter imaginable. A pack saddle looks like a saw-buck fastened upon the animal like a saddle. To the arms of this saw buck are fastened all those sundry appliances used by “men of war” on their journeys. Imagine –but you can’t imagine- a mule buried in tents, blankets, pots, kettles, pans, pork, coffee, hard bread, sugar, jerked beef, &c. &c. How “Muley” objects in the most energetic manner to this proceeding; how she elevates her heels towards the skies in deprecation; how she runs side ways, bumps her head against the tent poles and how, by skillful maneuver, she often upsets the whole cargo to the



infinite wrath of the packers and the sad demolition of crockery you need not be told. Finally the expedition moves. In front rides your interesting friend looking like – like – like nothing you have ever seen. The black sombrero, which you may remember as worn by me at your place, occasionally, the gray coat, which I wore once or twice –when from a whim of my own I dressed as “democratically” as possible – a pair of soldiers pants, blue and coarse but so strong, and a huge pair of soldiers shoes with soles half an inch thick – you can say to Miss Kate that I have given up “pump soles” for mountain service

—mingle and confuse with belts for powder and shot, pistol belts, great gauntlets, and other trappings to form an “ensemble” more romantic than prepossessing in appearance. I am mounted on Pinkie, who imprudently essays to runaway with me, failing in that he snorts and capers and challenges the pack mule to combat to such a degree that that unfortunate and imposed upon animal is almost frantic; punished for this. Pinkie settles down quietly but now I can see by his wicked eye that he will “take it all out” in breaking his halter and tearing off into the prairie upon the very first opportunity —an exploit that is invariably followed by a sortie of all available forces for his capture. The two gentlemen, the other members of the party, are mounted one on a mule, one on horseback. Both carry their guns as I do, in front of me upon my saddle and both are like myself dressed more for utility than beauty.



There are to accompany us two soldiers, armed of course. One of them leads the pack mule. We are ready now and are to take the road. It is twenty miles nearly to our first campground. We are off about noon with a heavy thundercloud near us but we carry our waterproofs and do not dread it. I will give you an idea of the possession so far as I can. If by a powerful imagination you can fix these sketches as horses and mules and can dream that the bipeds by which they are bestridden are men you can have some idea of the formation.

Our journey was not as before over open prairie, -but between high hills some of which were covered with scattered trees, some topped by columnar rocks, while between others were valleys filled with the foliage of tangled brushes and vines. We were following the Limpia, a mountain stream, to its source and the beautiful brook was babbling near us. We are heavily armed, three of us carrying ‘revolvers’ for you must remember that these little pleasure parties have always this spice of romance, that you may be at any time attacked by a party of Indians. The fight thereupon to ensue is you know “to the death.” It would be better a hundred times to die in the battle than to be tortured as a prisoner. So you look at your gun as you swing into your saddle, see that your pistol is loose in its holster; feel that your buck shot are ready for service and then jog whistling off as contented as can be. You do not expect to have a fight but you have been so used to thinking of and preparing for it that you look upon it as a matter of indifference. It is not courage it is merely custom. I really think a man might become so used to battle that he could read or write quietly while it was raging. It is not strange that Russian officers give balls in Sebastopol when a Congreve Rocket may walk into their midst at any moment.

The thundercloud I spoke of came near in and our plan to escape a drenching was to spread my waterproof blanket over some bush or tree making an extempore tent. I suppose I should say “pro-tempore.” You must not criticize. The sun was setting as we

drew near the head of the canon –Spanish name for any valley. Here we left the road and hurried through dense woods to the sore tribulation of our pack mule and his leaders, toward the spot on which I had camped once before. In some places the ground was “boggy” and our animals sank to their knees but through this and over rocks and bushes we scrambled until with the last gleam of sunset we threw ourselves from our saddles beneath the trees of our resting place.

Arms are examined and placed under one tree, where they can be seized in a moment. Mules and horses unsaddled, wood is gathered, a fire kindled and our tents pitched. Then; for we are luxurious in our habits, we – myself and the two gentlemen- find sleeping on the ground too hard and therefore make up beds. The mode may be of use to you. We pick the ends of Pine branches from small trees and floor all our tent with them. Under our heads we place more of them than elsewhere, as our pillows, on this I spread a thick coverlet doubled. I have a pillow and I add my coat as bolster. I have two heavy blankets, joined at the bottoms, of coarse I can’t kick my feet out –these are placed upon the coverlet and my bed is ready. I should have mentioned that first upon the leaves is placed my bed sack, a thick canvas bag in which I carry bedding. Suppose it is to rain tonight. See how I guard against it. On the leaves I place half of a waterproof blanket, on this I make my bed, while the other half folded over the top, renders me as impervious as a turtle.



Meanwhile, the men have erected their house of boughs and as our camp each night is similar I must give you a pen “sketch” of it. I hope you will be able to comprehend the arrangement. Our mode of setting table partakes rather of the primitive. But the appetites with which we come to our repast enable us to overlook or rather look upon it as perfect. Our plates are of tin and our cooking in which we make unheard of experiments is done at the campfire. Our bill of fare consists of Rice, Hard Bread, beef, Pork, Coffee, Sugar, Molasses and I have of late learned how to carry eggs on mules without breaking – a discovery not lightly to be thought of – I pack them in the rice bags. I have learned also that an egg whipped up with water is an elegant substitute for cream. I mean is decidedly better in coffee than nothing.

Our tent you see is one of the small pattern, the only kind that can be carried upon mules. It is intended only to sleep in. The other beds - though not luxurious as mine, are spread by its side. Three sleeping together leave but little room for motion, it is pleasant; however, and at night or when rain comes we creep within and read as you see someone

reading by the fire or we lie and chat and form our plans for the morrow. The guns are in the tent then and our pistols lie at our pillows.

All night long guard must be kept. So we draw lots for the first watch and each turns out then in his turn and guards for an hour and a half the horses and his sleeping comrades. Horses I mention first for the Indians would greatly prefer to rob us of them possibly than to attack us. There is romance in this night watch alone, alone. Dark trees hang over you and a gloomy shade comes down from the mountains. Alone, even the post from which you came is twenty miles away. Alone, for you are in an Indian Country; all alone, you hear the deep breathing of those who sleep and you feel that you are the only waking intelligence in all the valley. The night wind moans through the trees; the faint gleams of the campfire are quenched close around you and you think too of those who are dear to you. Of those far away who are quietly slumbering and perhaps you think as I did how much more happily you would be guarding those slumbers. Then you think of life past, of life to come and of a distant future when you hope. But hist! There is a cracking branch in the wood and the animals snort and move uneasily. – So they dread the approach of an Indian –this may be it. Quick – step out of the firelight and crouch stealthily in the shade of the bush. Now handle your rifle; see that it is capped and its fire certain; feel for your pistol –all right –now go creeping into the woods for while you are sentry you must visit the animals to see they are safely tied by their halters. Here is one safe. Here is one missing! Look for him. Think always that the next bush may hold an Indian and you step toward it with gun ready. Something springs from the ground and your gun comes to its aim with a jerk. Something –precisely –it is the mule, which has been sleeping. You take a long breath, bring your rifle to a shoulder and march back to your fire. Yet you do not stand too much in its light for “many a man has been shot by the light of his fire.”

1 1/2 p.m. Aug. 14, 1855

I had intended to send you eight pages but the mail is in two days earlier than expected and leaving in an hour. I have only time to send a few lines to Miss Kate. I hope to continue this on the 26th. Please hand the enclosed to her.

Very truly Yr friend
Albert J. Myer

In camp Wild Rose Pass. Near Fort
Davis, Texas. Aug. 21, 1855.

I am writing to you from my tent. I am lying upon my coverlet upon the ground. It is raining a dull drizzling rain. Colonel Bomford [*Brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel- James Vory Bomford- a New York native*] is lying beside me reading aloud from the N.Y. Times and on a roll of blankets sits Lt. Taylor [*Brevet rank of Captain- Oliver Hazard Perry Taylor- a native of Rhode Island*], so much for our introduction. We reached this spot last evening on a scout after Indians. The rain commenced during the night and today is to be passed in camp. I wish you could see our tent. It is one of the small pattern and over its floor are strewn saddles, blankets, rifles, pistols, bags containing our rations &c. &c. under which latter head you will please to read – but Miss Kate is not supposed to do so – a bottle of whiskey! It is carried however more for emergencies than dissipation. It is a dull dreary day but I am in very good spirits. I expect to be put out for four or five days

and shall return to the post only a day or so before the mail leaves for the east. I write to you therefore that you may know of my present position and may realize some parts of my life. I had a sharp ride yesterday over these rocky hills and the most unromantic supper I made upon reaching camp was unlike, decidedly the diet of a decent convalescent. In the night I awoke and the rain was pattering upon the canvas wall above me. So I went to sleep. We have just been “trenching” our tent. That is digging a little trench around it to carry all the water that is shed from the canvas. This done we retreat to the interior and thence your humble servant will dare this letter. Perhaps you will form a tolerable idea from this sketch. I shall make no apologies for the rudeness of any of my representations. If I am successful in conveying to you some idea of the situation or scene my efforts at portrayal have accomplished their object.



Wednesday 4. p.m. Aug 22. In camp Head off Canon near Mitre Peak. I had just finished the above when the rain passed and the Colonel after an inspection of the clouds and a queer look at me –for I had told him I am sending his portrait home and I half believe he is bashful came in saying “Well; Dr., what do you think of it?” Of course I thought “Go Ahead” and consigning this letter to the folds of my coverlet –a place of deposit in which I carry almost anything – I rolled it up with my blankets –our tents were struck, horses saddled and we were off – we turned into a deep ravine where the work for our horses was more like climbing over piles of building stone than anything to which I can liken it, and striking an Indian trail followed it up, up until we had attained a great elevation when we found to our surprise a plain which entering the mountains formed a pass, through this it was that the Indians came when they “stampeded” the Rifles Horses –I wrote to you of this when I was sick – and through this they passed upon their retreat. The Rifles chased them with all the speed of rage, but they were not skillful trailers and in the many passes through the mountains soon lost the coarse. Rifles rode sixty miles between 11 a.m. and dark but in rain, their horses were seen no more.

Sometimes the trail is like a pathway through the grass of a meadow. You will follow it thus for miles then the Indians choose a spot from which many ravines branch out, or a plain too extensive to be minutely inspected and here they scatter. The pathway ceases; there is no mark, sometimes not even a vestige. Yet a mile or two from the spot on which you stand, your guide or scout fall in some lonely ravine once more upon the pathway, climbing now the side of a mountain or sinking into some unexpected dell, as plainly worn as ever. This is Indian Strategy. This is their constant desire to elude pursuit, a

custom almost invariable whether they alone are masters of the country or whether they fear the white man.

So when the sun was setting we came to the foot of a precipitous hill. The trail was missing but its course was plain along an empty valley. Somewhere about the top of this hill the guide said there was water and here we determined to encamp. So we scrambled up and reached a plateau near the summit. You would have thought no footstep of Indian had ever passed near it. There was no sign. We had a splendid view of dim, blue, distant hills for we were very high. Far away we could see a mountain, which lies back of the Post and watched the clouds resting upon its summit. We rode a little further and lo! A new ravine, a pass hitherto unknown opened before us while miles away we looked through it upon the plain on which the post stood and further yet in the canon -of which I sent you a sketch- the gleam of the white tents struck our eyes as we gazed directly into Fort Davis! This was a surprise for us. The information is valuable for we can by this ravine intersect the Indian trail near its center in any sortie in pursuit of them.

We camped in a ravine. There was water as the guide said. How he knew it was there is more than I can imagine. There was but one hole at the foot of a cliff and this no larger than a hogshead and half hidden by trees. One tent was pitched and the Colonel and I were stored away as before. I have profited by experience and this night I erected a "mosquito bar" to preserve me from the bites of the musical insect. You know we sleep on the ground. I made up my bed as usual when I went in quest of some long willow branches. I sharpened one end of these and thrusting it into the ground forced the other over to meet its fellow placed on the opposite side of the bed. I formed in this manner two arches and thus I slept. There: I don't think my worst enemy can accuse me of drawing flattering portraits of myself! – Of course I was in the tent.



Our undress for the night is assumed, when we are upon scouts, in the most rapid manner –simply, by pulling off our coats! The said coats, then adds to our pillow and our preparations are ended by placing rifle, pistol and knife where we can lay hold of them. In the night it began to rain. I slept on peacefully until a drop came "pop" in my face. I demurred a little and shifted my position when "pop" I was struck again; upon this with much grumbling I arose and spread my waterproof blanket over me. It may splash on that as long as it pleases and comfortable in that assurance I went to sleep.

We have followed a trail all day today. We struck it about half a mile from camp as plain as ever. We are tonight encamped at the head of canon containing water. I have been out on the hills looking for our course tomorrow. Dinner will soon be ready and I must say adieu.

Thursday- Aug 23. In Camp –near Mitre peak –We had a beautiful moonlight night last night and spent some time gazing at the stars through a powerful telescope we carry with us to see the Indians upon the distant hills. Early this morning we were in the saddle and all day long we have been riding over a vast plain, which we have found among the mountains. Sometimes we raced after antelope and at others we jogged quietly along talking. We are encamped now near a high mountain, which is plainly visible from the post. I expect to go in tomorrow. We came today to this spot at which the “rifles” camped after their fruitless pursuit of the Indians and we rode over the ground to see the vestiges of their stay. We wondered over the hills for a long time today. The guide, a Mexican, said there was water near us but on close examination said it was six miles off! A blunder: which has interfered with our plans. I am lying on my bed again as I write to you. I expect to finish this within the Fort.

Aug. 26. My Dear James: Here I am safe in Fort Davis. We climbed Mitre peak, which was thought to be inaccessible in the day after I wrote above. I may send you a full description. At present I must write to others who will claim some share of my attention.

Very truly Yr friend
Albert J. Myer

Fort Davis, Sept 6, 1855

My dear James:

I propose in my next epistle to give you further narrative of my “life and adventures.” In this I have only to ask you to hand the enclosed to Miss Kate.

I came very near revisiting Hamburg but for most doleful reasons. I am very thankful that there is no necessity for me to do so. Complimentary that! To the best of my recollection I never before required any great degree of compulsion to travel in that direction. However, after scaling Mitre Peak, before pronounced inaccessible, and after tearing around the country as I have been doing, I can hardly “certify on honor” –an officer’s oath, that I am either ill or require “leave” to recuperate. If there was not this obstacle I find another, equally grave, in the fact that coming now, I could not obtain another leave in a year or so and for reasons, which you know nothing about, I would greatly prefer to be with you then. [*Referring to his marriage to Catherine “Kate” Walden- of which no date was yet set*] I am going to get a Mexican bit such as they use for wild horses for you. It is a crude apparatus but you can hold an Elephant with one. It is different from any you have ever seen. Take good care of the potatoes. Please gather some at the proper time and leave one or two plants well hilled in the garden all winter, to see if they will stand the frost, or if this is too severe expose them as much as you do any potato. Keep the rest for seed. Notice if they have increased in size by this year’s culture. I want all the statistics

on the subject. I intend to report upon the matter. You will be likely to hear the result. If printed I will send you a copy.

Present my regards to your Mother and believe me ever,
Your friend
Albert J. Myer

Fort Davis. Sept 26th, 1855

My dear James:

I am still in fine health though a little wearied today. I have been up two nights in succession. I am sorry to hear that you have been ill, but the same letter brought me cheering accounts of your convalescence. I have but one advice; avoid Doctors and medicine. Both well enough in their way but to be trifled with. There is another Medical officer at the post now [*Dr. George Taylor*]. I think I shall get out into the woods soon again. Perhaps be ordered with the Rifles. We have a fine post now. Things are getting comfortable; we expect to have a fine store, a library, reading room, billiard room and bowling alley. We can surely amuse ourselves with such opportunities! However, about the time this place becomes desirable, I shall, I expect, be satisfying my longings for active service by marching in the field with the Rifles. Returning to this place about once a month, then off again, 'over the hills &c.'" I am in good spirits now and after a fashion contented, I can imagine however some additions to my happiness; for them I must look and hope. Our summer has been delightfully cool and we have many comforts unattainable in a different situation. We are on the summit of the ridge, which separates those waters, which, empty into the Atlantic, from those which, course to the Pacific. And we quite "look down" on all the rest of the union. Talk of occupying an elevated position in the world; we are as high as Republicans can go in this our country. Do not understand me as saying that we get "high" of our own accord. It is simply by order of Government. I make this apology from fear that Miss Kate may object to your correspondence with a gentleman of such dissipated habits that he is avowedly "high" while he is writing to you –worse and worse I admit that I have been drinking –what- I shall not tell you.

I have made an analysis of the potato and commence my paper upon it today. Present my regard to your mother and with every good wish for yourself believe that I remain,

Your friend,
Albert J. Myer

Fort Davis. Oct 16, 1855

My dear James:

I am ordered to Fort Clark. I cannot tell precisely at what time I shall start but I think within a month from date. I will write you so soon as I ascertain. I enclose a letter: favor me by handing it to Miss Kate. I hope to send you an account of my trip but my attempts latterly have been so interrupted that I have much fear that the narratives fail to interest you. I am pleased with the order sending me to Fort Clark. It carries me nearly four

hundred miles nearer you and it seems to me unlikely that I shall be again sent to so remote a post. I hear that an expedition against the Comanche Indians is on foot; very probably I shall be ordered to join it. Present my regards to your mother and accepting them yourself.

Believe me ever your friend
Albert J. Myer

Asst. Surg. U.S.A.

P.S. Don't laugh at the Signature, It is official and I did not intend to send it to you but I am so used to writing it that it is written, A.J.M.

Fort Davis, Texas. Nov. 6, 1855

I send enclosed a letter to Miss Kate. Be so kind as to hand it to her. I am still awaiting the arrival of the officer who is to relieve me and at any time you may receive a letter from some place that you have never heard of before. I have so arranged that all letters sent to me at Fort Clark will be forwarded to me if I am not there. You need therefore have no hesitation about writing as usual. I left you in my last journal very abruptly; I will resume as soon as I can. I think I shall write to you from my tent as I travel down the road toward Fort Clark. It will depend upon the rate at which I am marching. There was a "stampede" on the road a few days since. Indians carried off sixty-five mules and left the wagons in the midst of the prairie! Pleasant very, for the drivers! A day or two after, they attacked a small party and carried off all their animals. This looks like work and I shall travel with my eyes open. We can whip them in a fair fight, however, and they can't have "Pinkie" without a quarrel. I shall not be surprised if we meet the gentlemen but we shall assure them in the most polite manner that we do not desire their company. The way in which this is done upon the prairie is by pointing a rifle and occasionally by firing it. I do not think you need feel the slightest anxiety about my safety. I shall see the sentries posted myself and shall inspect them during the night. A little adventure might add to the pleasure. I shall be happy to hear from you at anytime and remain as of old.

Your friend
Albert J. Myer

Fort Duncan Feb. 21, 1856

My dear James:

With my usual haste and usual apologies about business &c. &c. I must again request you to favor me by handing the enclosed to Miss Kate. We hear here that you ate all buried in snow in Erie Co. and we almost expect you to emerge as a variety of Esquimaux after this bitter winter. It is very hot today and I write with windows and doors open and coat off. No expedition against the Comanche has been organized so I suppose I shall not have any chance to bring you bows, arrows, lances, &c. &c. I am very comfortably situated and very well. Good-by. Remember me to your mother and believe me ever

Yr. Friend
Albert J. Myer

Fort Duncan, Texas. April 1856

My dear James:

Please hand the enclosed to Miss Kate. I am pleased that you are interested in "Pinkie." I took an early occasion to convey to that dissipated animal the sentiments of regard which your letter announced whereupon he listened attentively, threw his head into the air, gave two distinct snorts and something like a growl and jumped sideways half across the road. All of which I understand as an equine mode of asserting that he, Pinkie, was the greatest horse in Texas: that he knew it too: and that he entirely deserved your compliment. Afterwards he said something about renewing to you the assurances of his distinguished consideration &c. but in an indistinct manner and as his attention was immediately after engrossed by an attempt to make two jumps while another was making one I really fear he forgot you. I think of riding this afternoon and will speak to him on the subject.

I have fine lettuce of my own raising. I have great hens and a rooster that whips creation. I have the finest coop, the finest fence and I think the coziest establishment at the post. That is pretty good bragging but come and see.

Yours ever and truly
Albert J. Myer

Fort Duncan. May 1st, 1856

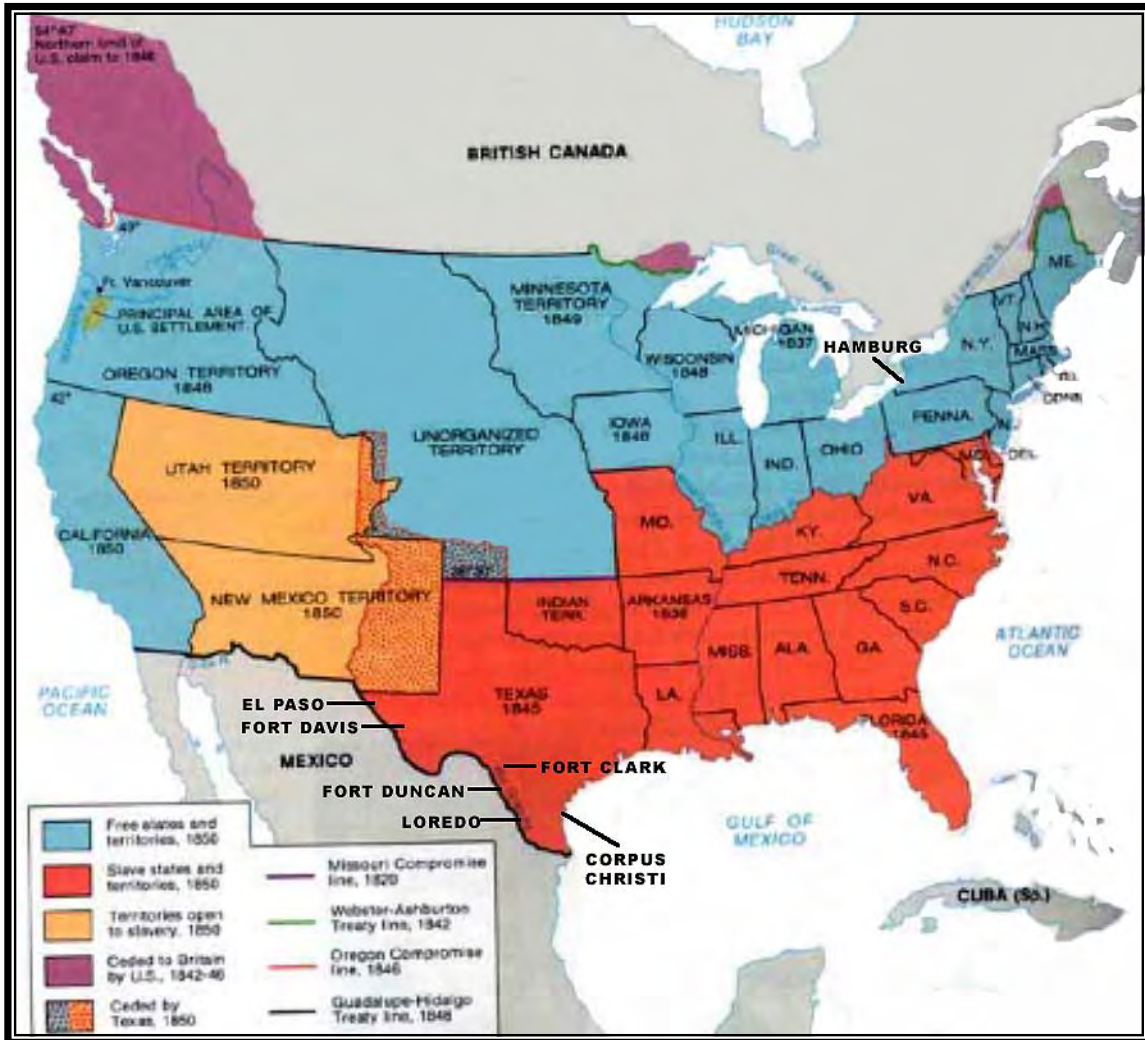
My dear James:

Terribly hurry: mail off in a few minutes; going fishing for Buffalo Fish tomorrow. Will you come along? Been to fort Clark since I wrote to you, had a fine time.

I think I will be able to send you some more potatoes please plant the seed "balls" of those you have, nip off the ends of the vines if they grow to luxuriantly.

Yours ever and truly
Albert J. Myer

[This is the last of the letters to James Walden in the Myer papers. What became of the others if there were any, is unknown. Myer settled into garrison life at Fort Duncan, carrying on his duties, raising chickens, gardening, touring the countryside, and generally enjoying himself. He recorded in his diary that while he was packing for his 60-day leave July 30, 1857, that he had been up all night at a celebration given him by the citizens of Eagle Pass. The last words he wrote in his diary in Texas were, "God has been kind to me and I trust I thank Him."]





Albert James Myer