

HOG RIVER JOURNAL

Fighting for Freedom: Joseph O. Cross

Hog River Journal Spring 2004

www.hogriver.org

Joseph O. Cross of Griswold served in the Twenty-ninth (Colored) Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry during 1864 and 1865. Though African Americans had served in American conflicts since before the Revolution, the first large-scale recruitment occurred during the Civil War, and even then, was hotly contested. According to Diana Ross McCain, in the Connecticut Historical Commission's Connecticut's African-American Soldiers in the Civil War (2000), "Connecticut would take longer than her neighbor to the north [Massachusetts] to accept the idea of recruiting blacks." Recruiting began for the Twenty-ninth in the fall of 1863. Recruits came from throughout the state and from as far away as Hawaii, France and Spain according to McCain's research. The Twenty-ninth was mustered into service on March 8, 1864, fought in nine major battles, including the Siege of Petersburg. The regiment was discharged in Hartford on November 25, 1865. A second regiment, the Thirtieth, served from June 1864 to December 1865.

This letter, from Cross to his wife Abby, in the collection of John Motley. A number of Cross's letters are also in the collection of the Connecticut Historical Society (see the Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin 60, Summer/Fall 1995. [Editor's note: punctuation has been added and spelling standardized to facilitate readability.]

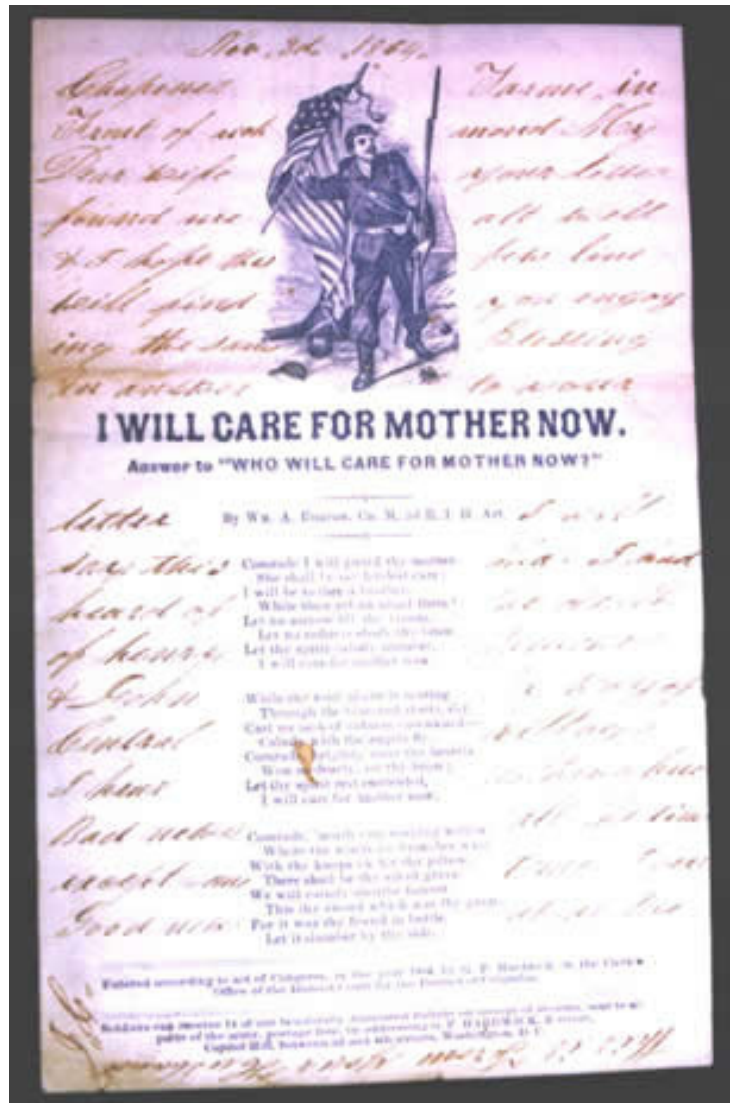


Photo: Thomas Denenberg

[Editor's note: punctuation has been added and spelling standardized to facilitate readability.]

Nov 3d, 1864

Chapin's Farm, Front of Richmond

My Dear Wife,

Your letter found me all well and I hope these few lines will find you enjoying the same blessings. .I hear nothing but bad news all the time except some times I hear good news about the war.

The "Johnnies" [Confederate soldiers] come over once in a while. Them that does come over are glad to get away. We had been called to go into battle October 27 th , our whole brigade. We fought 24 hours and then left. We drove the rebs back one mile to their breastworks and there they stood their ground. We took 3 prisoners. They hollered, "Don't shoot me, don't shoot me." We had our guns cocked and aimed, ready to fire at them. They threw down their arms and came in. They are afraid of the Coons. Abby, I sent you one 10 dollar check not long ago and you never wrote whether you received it or not. Now then, if you will inform me about it I shall be happy to hear about it. News of the Day: Amos Brewster got shot in the battle the other day in the foot. John Rogers had his leg blown off and Charles Hasard shot in the back and Henry Jackson shot dead. He belonged to Company C. We lost over one hundred killed and wounded. We lost more this time than we did before. Abby, I got paid off October 18 th . My pay for three months, \$71.25 cents and I bought 2 checks. One I sent home to you and the other I will send in this [letter.] Abby, I made up my mind to let you starve to death on the account of the news that I heard about you that came to me. I made up my mind if that was true that you might shirk the best way that you could. You have not written to me until now since August 24 and I did not know what it meant nor I don't know now. But anyhow, I will drop that. I want you to get a half a hog and half barrel of flour [supplies for his family for the winter] and then wait until I get paid off again. Now Abby, please to give my regards to all inquiring friends and receive a share yourself. Tell Jane that I have not heard from Horace for a long time but if he is as well as he was when I heard from him, he will be at home before long for they are giving furloughs at the hospital to them that are able to go home. Please tell me if you got that cotton that I sent you. Charles Pearce is well but ragged & [?]. .Oh, tell Aunt that I would like to have the pleasure to build up a fire for her but as to the bed, I should not know what that meant [as] I am so used to the ground.

From your husband,

Joseph O. Cross

Two first-person narratives exist on the activities of the Twenty-ninth: I. J. Hill's *A Sketch of the 29 th Regiment of Connecticut Colored Troops* , published in 1867, and A. H. Newton's *Out of the Briars, An Autobiography and Sketch of the Twenty-ninth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers* , published in 1910.