

Appendix A - The Letters

Sister Mary Jean Dorcy was at one time in possession of the letters from John Dorcy to his wife, Mary Ellen. The letters are now in possession of Clara June (Dorcy) Gallamore of Roach, MO. Sister Mary Jean transcribed them and copies of them were made into a small booklet which was distributed to many members of the family. The following is an introduction to the letters taken from the booklet.

The Man Behind the Letters

by: Sister Mary Jean Dorcy (born: Frances Emma Dorcy)

John Dorcy was born in County Tipperary in 1833 and emigrated to America about the middle of the century. His father, sister Sally and two brothers--Pat and Cornelius (?) came to this country with him and they settled in an Irish colony in Emmett, Michigan. At least one of the brothers later returned to Ireland to live.

After Gettysburg the whole Northern Army was on the verge of disintegrating because the time for which the men had enlisted was up. Attractive bounties were offered for enlisting or re-enlisting. Many men with families volunteered believing that the bounties would care for their families. In common with many other young Irishmen to whom fighting a war on their feet was unthinkable, John enlisted in the Michigan Cavalry.

He was at this time just thirty years old and he had a wife and four young children. His wife did not want him to enlist and his sister Sally was loudly scornful of the whole project. "You'll just go down there and get drunk a few times," she said, "and then come home and tell tall stories about what you and the boys did down there. Those poor Rebs can't put up a decent fight; there isn't any war. You should stay home with the family; Mary needs you." To which he insisted that it was a real war, and everyone would have to fight. The day he came to say goodbye to Sally she was ironing and she was so angry with him that she would not even turn around. "Well then Sally, goodbye--" he said and she called saucily over her shoulder, "Goodbye then Jack. Don't get shot in the back."

After going unscathed through two years of heavy fighting, including the Wilderness and Cedar Creek--"27 regular engagements, "by his own count--John Dorcy was to make his rendezvous with death at Appomattox.

The cavalry charges were planned on a pattern of alternates-- 1,3,5,7 etc. would charge until they ran into a line of entrenched bayonets or engaged in hand-to-hand fighting; they would discharge their one shot, use the sabre, and whirl the horse to recharge as numbers 2,4,6,8 etc. moved up to replace them, while they reloaded to charge again. For the two years of battle, Garrett Puffer had ridden on one side of him and Silas(?) on the other. As they wheeled their horses to retire, they would check to see if the other two were all right.

On the morning of April 9th, as the war ground slowly to a stop, word reached Company B, Michigan Cavalry by means of the bugle that called all the signals. The inseparable three had already charged and were too far forward to hear the bugles sound "cease fire". Wheeling his horse to retire, John Dorcy fell sideways in the saddle and Garrett Puffer saw him as he rode up. He had been shot in the back of the head and the

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horse brought him back dead from the charge. Around them the bugles were sounding the end of the war and the men went wild with joy. The armistice was just a few minutes too late to save the life of the young man who hung dead in the saddle, his life finished at the age of 32.

To her dying day, Sally wept bitterly for her saucy farewell to the brother she loved.

As far as anyone can determine, John Dorcy is buried where he fell at Appomattox. His records are very likely there in the office of records, and quite likely his name is misspelled since he himself did not write it and others always misspelled it. He is not buried at Arlington.

About The Letters

by Sister Mary Jean Dorcy

Mary Ellen Carroll Dorcy was born in Rhodden, near Montreal, Canada, on July 15, 1837. She came to Emmett, Michigan, when she was nine years old. She died in Pueblo, Colorado, May 22, 1906, and is buried there in Roselawn Cemetery.

When her husband was killed on the 9th of April, 1865, she was a young mother of four small children. For the remaining years of her life these letters, along with a fading blue uniform with its cavalry sabre and powder horn, neck kerchief and shot pouch, were all the relics she had of those few short and bitter years of war which took her young husband from his family. There may have been more letters: it is impossible to tell now. Creased and fading and worn with re-reading, this is all that we have left of them.

It was not practical to photostat the letters for several reasons. The main reason, of course, is that the ink is so faded now that a good copy would be extremely hard to get. In spots it has faded so badly that it is no longer possible to read some words, or parts of words.

It is also quite unlikely that the letters are in John Dorcy's own handwriting. There are at least six different scripts in evidence, and the name is spelled four different ways, indicating that it was not a signature. It is obvious that John Dorcy followed the custom of most soldiers to whom packing an ink bottle off to war would be a needless nuisance--simply dictated his letters to one of several men attached to his Regiment who did this as a way to keep themselves in pin money. In copying the letters an effort has been made to preserve the spelling and punctuation--or lack of same--just as it is. One of the scribes uses the old fashioned terminal s made like an f; as, for example, in the word "succefs".

John Dorcy plainly had no delusions of glory and no thought of being a hero. He makes no dramatic remarks about freeing the slaves or saving the Union. At the same time, there is no rancor in his remarks about the Rebs, and you can see the farming man's regrets for the burned crops and the devastated peach orchards.

He is young and healthy and yet his wife is apparently clucking about his health in every letter; so he makes a point of reassuring her in every letter. He grumbles about the same things that men always grumble about in the armies of the world; slow pay, dust,

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heat, and--above all--no letters at mail call. He is a man with a citizen's job to do and he is doing it without any back-talk; but he is lonely for his family and starved for news--any news at all, even about the cow.

There is even a typical army shenanigan of trying to engineer a furlough, and the failure of his best-laid plans to get home for a visit.

He never did see his family again, and two weeks after the date of the last letter we have, he died as the bugles were blowing to sound the end of the war.

The Letters of John Dorcy to his Wife Mary Ellen (Carroll) Dorcy

letter # [1]

Kalamazoo Feb 18th '64

Dear Wife

It is with pleasure that I write you these few lines to let you no that I am well and hope that these few lines will find you and the children the same. I this day send you forty dollars by express you need not look for me home at present for we are under marching orders and have to leave next monday for Washington.

Give my respects to father and all enquiring friends. Write to me as soon as you get this and let me no how you get along with your bonds and your assistance from the town. Direct your letter to John Dorcy, first Mich. Cav Kalamazoo, Mich.

John Dorcy

letter # [2]

Head Quarters
1st Mich Cavalry
Camp Stoneman, Maryland
March 7th, 1864

Dear Wife,

Its with peasure i sit myself down to let you know how i am getting along and also let me know how yourself and children are getting along.

Dear Wife i am enjoying the best of health so far and i like the service very well. Dear Wife i havent got any state bounty yet but i expect to get it next pay day. Dear Wife let me know if you got them forty dollars i sent you from Kalimazoo. i sent it in care of Edward your brother. And also let me know if you got them bonds, let me know in regard to how you are getting for supplies.

Dear Wife i write to you from Kalimazoo and i havent got any letter yet. Dear Wife keep up good courage for i think war will be over this summer without fail. Dear Wife, send me half a dollars worth of Postage stamps in your next letter for you cant get them every time you want them. Direct your letter as follows: John Dorcy, Company B 1st Mich. Vetrin Vol. Cavalry, Washington, D.C.

*I remain your Affectionate husband
John Dorcy*

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letter # [3]

Camp 1st Mich Cav
May 3, /64

My Dear Wife,

Ever ready to drop you a line I improve on opportunity that now present. As of so doing find enclosed a certified certificate for the state bounty due Me. You can tel Edward have it to colect for you. If it is not rite let me now as soon as convenient, Write soon render my kindest regards to all our mutual Friends. Subscribe my self your ever affectionate and devoted husband

Jno. Dorcy

letter # [4]

Camp of the 1st Mich. Cav.
Near Hanover Court House
June 6, 1864

Dear Wife,

I will drop you a few lines to let you know That i am well and hope This will find you the same. i have seen some hard ship Since i rote to you last but has escaped so far yet. Now when you write you tell me if you got my Assignment if you write in your next. i have not drawn no army pay since i left Michigan and dont think i will until this Campaign is over i have worried a good deal about your health and in not hearing from you. Now when you write agin give me all the particulars and write as often as you can.

No more at present, In haste goodby, your husband John Dorsey

letter # [5]

Camp near Jones Ford Chickahominy June

23/64

Dear Wife,

I am happy to inform you that your kind letter dated the 26th of last month was reseived by me a few Days ago. I was happy to be informed that you and the rest of the famillie are enjoying good health. I am also in good health notwithstanding that the lead and iron has wistled rather close to my ears more or less for the last 6 weeks. I cant tell you how mad Craven is. I saw him on the 9 of this month but have not heard anything of him since Dunk Buchanon was wounded slightly, I saw him that day. I have not much chance nor time to write to Day but will give you a full account of our marches and fights as soon as we get a little rest. Hoping soon to hear from you again I bring my letter to a close with a hearty wish for your welfare.

Your affectionate husband,
John Dorsey

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letter # [6] (probable)

City Point July 5th

My Own Dear Wife

Your of the 3rd of July came to hand in due fassion and was very glad to hear from you that you was well for your letter found me Enjoying good health and very good spirits. for I think that after passing through so many Seens of danger that I have cause to feel happy. Our last fight was at Traoillian* Station and it was indeed a Seen of blood Shedd. We were surrounded and the first day there was not a point of Compass that the rebs did not Charge up on and the shels and bullets Came from Evry direction but they could not stand the Custer brigade with those (sharp)* shooters and many others to numerous to mention. The weather is very warm and the roads are so dusty that it is very uncomfortable for marching but we are resting hear for a few days and it seems very good to sit in the shad. Probaly stay hear untill we get paid then I shal write as much as I can. I was very sorry to hear that Edward drove such a prise. I learned by the letter. Duke McKinsey wrote to Puffer that they are trying to (--?--) us out of our bounty and Duke thinks he can Collect it and you had better let him know the cirtificate if you do not Suckseed in getting it. And write to me the particulars about it as soon as you Can. I never was in better health in my life and I am fat as a pig and have not drank any liquor since I left Mich. I hope that the next letter that I write that I can write of the overthrow of Richmond. I hear they are going to open 140 guns on the strongest point in a few days. I shall come home this Fall if I can and I want to see you and the children but I never was in better Spirits. Take good care of yourself and the children. I would send you my picture but have too mutch hair on my face.

Give my respects to all the friends not forgetting our own family
John Dorsey

T.S. (P.S.?) direct your letter to the 1st Mich. Cav Co B Washington D.C.

* ?

* here there is an acute angle drawn; probably shorthand for "sharp"

letter # [7]

City Point, Va., Jul 21st 1864

My Dear Wife,

I write you these few lines to let you know that by the blessing of God I am still well and hearty. I received your last letter and answered it immediately, and I write to you this soon to let you know that I sent you \$55 by Adams Express company, also two pictures of myself which look natural as life of the way I appear now.

I was happy to learn that Edward has got a substitute. I got Cornelius letter but have no time to answer it just now, but will do so in a few days. If you see my father, tell him that I am well, and that I am going to send him five dollars for him and old Duke to drink (our) health down here, for we cant drink it down here.

Tell little Johnny that when his father comes home that I will bring him a little gun along with me.

Take good care of your self and the children for the war is soon coming to an end and I hope to be with you soon. Keep up good courage, write often and write soon as you get this and let me know if you have got the money.

No more at present. From your affectionate husband till death.

John Dorsey

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letter # [8] (probably)

Washington August 6th

Dear Wife,

I have just returned to this place yesterday and I thought I would pen a few lines to you. I havent had a letter from you since the 3rd of July although I have written twice to you. We expect to stay around hear and in Maryland the rest of the time this summer for the rebs are very troublesome about now. We had a very pleasant trip up the river And the place looks very natural but my letter this time will be very short but I am very (happy?) anyway to hear from you. Have you received that package of money and those pictures of mine. If you have please write and let me know but I will close for the time but write soon.

This from your husband

John Dorcy

letter # [9]

Shepherdstown, Va
Aug. 23/64

Dear Wife,

How long does it take for a letter to get to you and one to get an answer. It took the last one just one month. I am well and enjoying myself as well as possible. we had a fight the day before I got your last letter and I came out safe thank God. I received a letter from you and father the same day. I would like it if you would write oftener as it is all the comfort we poor soldiers have is a letter from home and it makes me lonesome when the mail comes and I dont have one. You probably saw an (account?) of Sheridan's Cavalry charge at Front Royal. We had a gay old time of it. We took 270 prisoners 34 commissioned officers and two stand of collors. Our company charged and we only had two horses killed not a man was hurt although lead came lively. in regard to those pictures not looking natural it cannot but be wondered at. I had rode 30 miles through the sun and had not got cooled off yet but when I get to Washington I will get some more taken. How did Edward get along with regard to the draft. How does the cow get along. We will probably get paid in two or three weeks. I want you to write often and give me all the news, so good by from your Husband

give my best respects to all enquiring friends from your affectionate husband

John Dorsey

letter # [10]

Sharpsburg, Maryland
Aug. 27th 1864

My Dear Wife,

Your kind letter of the 15th arrived safely on the 27th and I hasten to sieze the first opportunity to answer it. I am well and safe, although we have been in a very heavy fight since your letter came to hand. You can see by this that we are again out of Virginia; we crossed the Potomac the night before last at about five oclock after fighting nearly all day. I expect we will stay in this vicinity some time, watching the fords, and keeping the enemy from crossing the river. Garrett Puffer and myself still ride side by side; he is well.

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I expect we will move soon so I must close. Give my respects to your brothers and all inquiring friends, and write often to your affectionate husband,

John Dorsey

letter # [11] (apparently Fall of 1864: no date)*

Camp near Culpepper

Dear Wife

I have not received a letter from you since last month 12th and I feel very anxious to hear from you so I have written too letters over the matter. Im strong and with regards to my health it is very good never was better. The weather is very fine peaches in blowm, fine feed for beasts but no (plowing?) over the country is (mowed?) to a perfect commons. But I think the war will close this Fall, we have a very large army section 135 thousand men in the Potomac and we have diserters from the rebs about every day. I have not much to say with regards to this part for It would take me my whole time to let you know and learn what I have seen and learned since I came into the army. It is a good school for any man I cannot say I am sorry. I wish you would write to me as soon as you reseive this and let me know how your health is and how the children is. And I am more anxious to hear how your health and my children than anything else. I would like you to write soon whether you got your money and with regards to bounty. Amd with regards to my starting bounty. I was mustered yesterday and I am going to try to get a certificate (--?--) and send it home for the pay we expect our pay this month and I will send some money to you. I wish to hear how the boys are, all friends, etc. So no more at present. Give my best to all neighbors and friends and share it yourself.

Write as often as you can I do not (hear?) now often.

N.B. Direct your letter to Washington, D.C., First Michigan Cav Company B. And I ever remain your sincere husband

John Dorsey

Virginia

to

*Mary Dorsey, Emmett, Sinclair County
Garrett Puffer, Silas and myself are together yet.*

*this may be from around the first of March, 1865; there is no way to tell. Peach trees were in bloom in April at Appomattox; there was also a "battle of the peach orchard" earlier in the war.

letter # [12]

*Camp 1st Mich Cav
Near Berryville, Va.
September 12th, 1864*

Dear Wife,

Its with pleasure I take the present oppertunity of writing you a few lines hoping to find you and the children enjoying the blessings of good health which leaves myself at present, thank God.

Dear Wife we are at present laying in camp about four miles from a littel place called Berryville doing picket. We haven't much fighting lately. i was in one fight since i wrote my last letter and came out all right. We are mustered for pay but i don't know how soon we will get it but i think we will get it before long and i will send you all i can spare.

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Dear Wife also let me know how the draft is going and if any of the boys is drafted from our town. Dear Wife if they only come down here and help us this war will soon end for sure. I suppose you have heard about General Sherman's great Victory in Georgy, the taking of Atlanta and 3 thousand prisoners. thats a big damper on the rebels, and also the taking of the Weldon R. Road at Petersburg. All the boys from Kenockee are all alive yet and in good health, for myself i was never in better health in my life, i am tougher than i ever was. Since i came soldiering i never missed a days duty since i have been in the Regiment i have been in 27 regular engagements this summer and held the field and slept on every night only once.

Dear Wife keep up good spirits. i am going to try hard this fall for a furlough to come home and see ye all this winter. No more at present. give my best respects to all your brothers and all enquiring friends. Also let me know in regard to my state bounty weather you have got it yet or not. Write soon and often.

I remain your affectionate husband Untill Death,
John Dorcy

HURRAH FOR LITTEL MCLELLAN!

letter # [13]

Camp 1st Mich Cav
Near Middletown, Va
October 24th 1864

Dear Wife,

I take the present oppertunity of writing you these few lines hoping to find you and the children enjoying the blessings of good health which leaves myself at Present thank god. Dear Wife its so long since i heard from you i almost think that i am not down here at all. i have been in another fight the 19th of this month and came out all right again thank god. we captured 49 pieces of Artillery and about 50000 prisoners we had very good Success and our Regt lost very heavy and (i tell) you this is no hear say i have seen it all every bit of the artillery.

Dear Wife its very strange that yu dont write to me oftener. i am very uneasy about you and the children all the time and i wish you would write oftener than you do and also tell the rest of the folks to write also let me know how things is getting along and what the news is. Give my best respects to all enquiring friends write soon

From your husband
John Dorcey
Co B 1st Mich Cav
Washington D.C.

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letter # [14]

Camp 1st Mich. Cav. Near Winchester, Va.
January 3rd 1865

Dear Wife,

I received your kind and ever welcome letter some time ago. And was happy to here you and the children were enjoying good health which leaves myself at present. Dear Wife i have nothing of any Importance to tell you. i have been in the Dismounted Camp for the last two months and i just got out to the Regt the other day. i am enjoying good health and never felt as well in my life.

Dear Wife we expect to get our pay some time this month and i will send you all i can spare. Also let me know in your next how much money you draw a month from the Supervisor. Also let me know if you keep your cow yet. Dear Wife i might acdently get a furlough and come home this winter but i think it is doubtful wheather i can come home or not. let me know if you reside in the same place or not.

Dear Edward i received your kind letter and was happy to here you were well and enjoying good health. We have very cold weather at present down here. We are in good quarters and enjoying ourselves. Edward you calculate we have some fun down here sometimes. Also let me know in your next letter what company Con is in so I can write t him, and also who John got married to. No more at present. Give my best respects to all Inquiring friends Write soon and oblige

John Dorcy

letter # [15]

Camp Russel
1st Mich Cavalry
Near Winchester, Va.
January 8th/65

Dear Wife,

I received your kind letter of the 26th of last month and was happy to here that you and the children were enjoying good health which leaves myself at present thank God.

Dear Wife we have been away from the Regt about two months and didnt have any chance to write to you untill now. I have just come to Regt about two weeks ago and I found a lot of letters from you and didnt have any chance to answer untill now.

Dear Wife we are at present in winter quarters and enjoying ourselves first rate. i expect a furlough in a couple of weeks to go home and see you all this winter if i can, but i will tell you better in my next letter. i am going to write regular every week and i want you to answer it promptly. we are dayly expecting our pay and i also expect my state bounty every day. no more at present. Give my best respects to all enquiring friends no more at present. write soon without fail,

From your affectionate husband,
John Dorcy

letter # [16] (probable)

Camp russel
Feburey the 18th

Dear Wife

I now take the Present oportunity of Writeing you A few lines hoping When you reseive them that the will find you and all the Children Enjoying

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good helth. I was Spekeing to the first luitenant of my Compeny to Day And he said that he wold Assist me in geting A Spechell furlough. If resieved i want you to Write in your next leter that you Are not expected to live and that you want that I should Come home Ann see to the children. I have maid up my mind to beight them ought of A furlough if Posible. All Sutch things as Sib Canchman can get a furlough in our regiment. I hent got paid yet but we Expect the pay master Every day. I got A leter from Patrick I expect A leter from Nele the nere (--?--). Well I hent much to Write this time Plese Write as soone as you reseive this make Nou Delay what Ever be Caus it Depends upon youer next leter whether I can come home ore Not. I will bring my leter to A close Nou more At present from youer Afectunate husbond. I send my love to you And the Children And give my best respects to all Enceiring frends.

Nou mor at Present from youer Afectunate husbond

John Dorcy

letter # [17]

Feb. the 26th/65

Dear Wife

I now take my pen in hand two in form you I am well at present and hope these few lins will find you in joyen the sam blessing. We ar under marchin orders we start at six oclock the morning and the prospax of giting a ferlo is out the questin we ar goin on a raid and solder isent supose to no wher is he a goin. We havent got no pay yet we hav sixmonth pay due us and not one sent hav we got yet. I want you to send me word whether you can git that hundred dollars bounty or not or whether you hav got it or not. I want you to keep up your corey (?--courage?) for this cruel war will sunn cum to a close. it is on its last legs and i want you two write as offen as you can and I will do the sam and you shel her from me ever chance I can git to write and you can write as offen as ons a week whether you git a letter from me or not. I havent no more time two write so I will bid you good by this from a true and fexnet (affectionate?) husben until deth God bless you and the Children.

John Dorcey

Outside in another hand: (Censor, perhaps)

John Dorcy, Excp

Michigan St. Clare Emmitt. SANATED

letter # [18]

Camp 1st Michigan Cavalry
White House Landing
March 24th 1865

Dear Wife,

I take the present Oppertunity of writing you these few lines hoping to find you and the children enjoying the blessing of good health which leaves myself at Present, thank God. Dear Wife, we broke up camp on the 27th of February and took up our line of march up the Valley and marched twenty days in succession every day without ever getting out of the Saddle and rode about 500 miles and tore up all the Railroads around Richmond and also the Richmond and Lynchburgh Canal and destroyed Millions worth of property i tell you we done a pile of damage. Dear wife when we arrived here i thought i would have a letter from you sure but i didnt receive any. Dear wife there is great talk about peace again its come to that old Jeff. Davis is leaving to General Lee and General Grant to Settlet the war and old Abraham

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Lincon says that he has got something to say about settling this war i tell you what it is that this thing is going to be setteled before three months is over. things never looked more favorable than they do now. Dear Wife we got our pay last night but i havent any chance to send you some money untill we get whare thare is a an Express office and also let me know in your next if you got them Hundred dollare on that bond or not. i received a letter from Pat and thay are all well in that Department. Dear Wife you need not look for me writing regular for we may be on the march all the time and i cant write regular but i will write as often as i can get a chance. but be sure you and write regular no more at Present. Give my best respects to all Inquiring friends write soon and oblige

*John Dorcy
Co. B. 1st Mich. Cavalry
Washington D.C*