

U.S. Mail Steamer

23d December 1858/855

My dear mother:

Bob who was with me when we embarked at Fort Monroe has no doubt informed you of everything pertaining to our departure.

I felt exceedingly anxious for you to come down although I would not say I wanted you to come--I was satisfied however that it was better you did not come. It was hard enough to part with Bob. I could not have borne to have said good bye to all I love.

After Bob left me I walked on down to the bridge where Nannie once accompanied me and when I returned to the hotel found all the gentlemen and ladies whom we used to have at Old Point assembled with the artillery band to go aboard the steamer and take ^{leave} ~~care~~ of the regiment. We got underway about 6 o'clock in the afternoon and with the exception of the first three days, during which time the sea was very rough and we were all sea sick, have had a pleasurable voyage. The sea for the last five days has been almost as smooth as the Chesapeake the night Nannie went to the Point with me--moonlight nights and mild weather as each day we approached nearer the region of eternal summer, an excellent band of music assembled, all in perfect harmony, have contributed to cheer and soothe the saddened hearts of the outward bound. Many have brought with them and seem to care for, but some of us have left everything behind and will always look ~~backward~~ back, whatever may be before them. No one has left more to love than I have and I fear that ~~nothing~~ useless as I have been to you all now will be more sadly missed--Nannie and Bob will miss me most although the ~~rest~~ rest love me just as much. But I must stop acting in this childish way. I believe I am more of a baby about leaving home now than when really young in years. Do not think that I am unhappy or dissatisfied--except the fact of leaving home, everything in my present life is agreeable. I no doubt induced you to think that Col. Wright would prove an objectionable commander. He did commit a great error in the beginning but I think it was only an error in judgment of which he is sorry and ashamed.

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and desirous of atoning for.

The examination of the officers to which all without any distraction were subjected has been made, I do not exactly know with what ^(?) but I was able to answer correctly all the questions propounded to me.

Major Lugenbeel has just asked me in passing who I was writing to and requests to be remembered to you. I am beginning to like him.

We arrived at Aspinwall this afternoon and the ship is lying off about four miles from shore. We land tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock and proceeded at once by railroad 47 miles to Panama on the Pacific where we immediately ~~we~~ embarked ~~on the~~ on the steamer Oregon, leaving behind at Panama to follow after by regular mail steamer three companies, C D and H. I have seen few scenes more beautiful than that presented in the approach to Aspinwall. ^{The} coun ry may possibly not bear a close inspection but seen from the sea with its green moun ains ranges rising as it seems from the water's edge it is very beautiful. ^{The} sun was just setting as we came up within a quarter of a mile of the town and immediately after the full moon rose. I need not tell you that we are in the midst of summer.

When I arrive at San Francisco which will be I hope on the ~~8th or 9th or 10th~~ 8th or 9th or 10th of the next month, I will write again and to Henry, Bob and Kate as well as to the two houses in Mc Cullock??

Steamship Oregon

My dear mother:

Panama Bay, Christmas Morning
After lying out at sea the night of 23rd to a oid the malaria which I believe infects the isthmus at all seasons we landed at 9 o'clock yesterday morning and took the cars for Panama.

Aspinwall as I supposed, derives all its beauty from the enchantment of distance. The houses are of ^(?) all new, rough and slightly build of wood and inhabited by a mo grel population of Americans, Negroes, Indians and Spaniards.

I was agreeably surprised at the fine condition of the rail road and cars. We made the trip across the Isthmus in four hours It was altoge-

and desirous of atoning for.

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without a speck of dust) The great destroyer of comfort in our own railway travelling.) We embarked immediately from the cars, on arriving at Panama by means of barges and a small steamboat--our ship lying about three miles from the town near a clump of little islands. Panama unlike Aspinwall is an ancient ~~wood~~ city with an old history rich with stirring events of the times of the buccaneers. It has been a place of great wealth and commercial importance. The harbor is formed by a group of islands varying in size from one to 15 ~~to~~ ^{to} 220 acres rising steep from the water like the port of Watson's island to the height of our hills. The mainland, crescent shaped at the beach, consists as far as it can be seen in every direction of irregular mountain chains and knobs, every spot of earth green with richest foliage.

The three companies which we are to leave behind until the arrival of the next steamer from New York, about four days, are already embarked on the Golden Age and will, I suppose, arrive at San Francisco two days behind us.

You should have no uneasiness for our safety on the voyage. This ocean is Pacific as its name imparts and our ship tight and strong.

Ever affectionately

J. J. Archer.

Steamship Oregon, Panama Bay
Christmas Day, 1855

My dear brother:

Bob

The news received ~~from~~ here from the Indian country sounds quite warlike. If in consequence of such news more regiments should be added permanently to the army and you should be able to obtain a commission as captain I think you would like the life with all its drawbacks better than any other. Should you enter the army as a captain you will of course be anxious to recruit your company as rapidly as possible. Let me advise you to take a lesson from what you know of my experience and while you are faithful to your duty as a recruiting officer, not to sacrifice anything important through an over zealous devotion to that thankless duty. Avail yourself of every opportunity to learn the tactics and as it can only be

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completely learned ^{by} practice combined with the study of the text book embrace the first occasion to leave your rendezvous for the depot where the recruits were sent to be drilled--commence drilling a squad yourself. In this way you will be able always to keep ahead of your company and it is the only way to acquire familiarity with the exact words of commands and the proper tone of voice and manners. I disliked extremely the order requiring me to go so soon to Old Point when my company was first organized and nearly as much did I dislike the order issued about two weeks after requiring company officers to drill a squad but I soon saw the advantage. Study geography, something about our form of government, for questions required in examinations. Hardie's rifle tactics is a good manual. Read Davis or Pike. I have a copy of Pike among my books at Nune's office opposite my old office at the Marshall building. I never felt a hotter July or August day at home than this is. It seems perfectly ridiculous to call it Christmas--that season in Maryland of sleighs and skates and big fires.

I begin to like Major Lugenbeel and to think my first opinion did him injustice. Your affectionate brother, J.J. Archer.

Christmas night

Our company baggage for which we have been waiting came across the isthmus today and has just come alongside in the small steamboat by means of which we embarked. We will not take it aboard until tomorrow morning and will not I suppose get under weigh until tomorrow afternoon--17 days are allowed for the trip to San Francisco where we hope to arrive by the 11th.

We were all invited to dinner today on board the Golden Age. As officer of the day I could not go ~~and~~ and consoled myself with the recollection of having been entertained at a 7 o'clock dinner there last ~~night~~ evening and with some of Mumm's best champagne which Col. Smith presented to the regiment on its departure from Old Point to keep Christmas with. Our accommodations are much inferior to what they

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We were all invited to dinner today on board the Golden Age. As officer of the day I could not go ~~too~~ and consoled myself with the recollection of having been entertained at a 7 o'clock dinner there last ~~night~~ evening and with some of Mumm's best champagne which Col. Smith presented to the regiment on its departure from Old Point to keep Christmas with. Our accommodations are much inferior to what they

were on the St. Louis. I have no place to write a letter(for instance) my portfolio resting on my lap--a good excuse for any want of neatness in my letter. The arrangements for the comfort of the soldiers are much worse, not only as regards their sleeping , it being understood that one half will always sleep on deck but the ship company does not supply their provisions properly although it is now eight o'clock at night one of the companies (Co. K) has not yet had its dinner and all of them have been on scant allowance.

I suppose however that we will be able to get everything to rights for tomorrow. Col. Wright ough tto, and I suppose will , refuse to go to sea until proper arrangements are made.

Yours affectionately J.J. Archer

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Yours affectionately J.J. Archer

Steamship Oregon at sea

Lat. 26 46 N Longitude 114 14 W

8th Jan, 1856

My dear mother:

I have ~~availled~~ availed myself of every possible means of sending a letter, to write home since I left Old Point but very much doubt whether you will receive them all. I wrote to you from Aspinwall to you and Bob from Panama and to you again from Acapulco when we touched for coal and water. The company's agent at Panama undertook to mail my letters posting them with the proper postage and at Acapulco I had to entrust my letter to the care of a gentleman whom I knew nothing about and who most likely neglected it. I am writing now in expectation of meeting the Golden Gate today on her way down and depend on the chances of our passing near enough to each other to throw my letter aboard. The captain says he expects to exchange newspapers with the Gate. We have had ~~a~~ smooth water since leaving Acapulco except for about 250 miles crossing the entrance to the gulf of California at the season there is always a strong current of wind blowing down the gulf which makes that part of the voyage rough and disagreeable to those whose health at sea depends upon smooth water.

We have scarcely been out of sight of land for the last seven days--keeping most of the time near enough to distinguish the character of the vegetation. Our voyage thus far has been a much more pleasant one than I had expected. . Our sitting room or rather the substitute for it is the upper deck under an awning. The weather continues warm enough to wear ~~seasoning~~ summer clothing during the day although for the last two days a cloak has been found very comfortable at night. The band is with us and plays every evening.

We are running at an average rate of 200 miles a day (during the past 24 hours we made 225 miles* and expect to reach San Francisco Saturday (12 Jan.) I believe I misdated my letter from Acapulco Dec 2nd 55 instead of 2nd January 1856. I do not think you will receive it howe-

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ever as the postage stamp was only 3 cts whereas a 10 cent stamp is required and the consul to whom it was sent to be mailed, is as I happen to know one of the meanest of the mean and not ~~likely~~ likely to incur the great expense of making up the difference. With love to all

J.J. Archer

Steamship Oregon at Sea

Lat 35 17 N Long. 121 45 W

12 O'clock A.M. 11 Jan 1856

My dear mother:

We expect to reach San Francisco about 10 o'clock tomorrow morning but as it is not certain whether we will remain in California all winter or only a few days or only a few hours, just long enough to take on coal and water to continue the voyage to the Columbia river and as in the latter event I should possibly have no time to write I am writing my letter now. The Golden Gate by which I hoped to send the enclosed letter dated Jan 8 met us at night and not nearer than six miles. The change of temperature as we enter the higher latitudes is felt each day since leaving the tropics and before we reach the Columbia will be felt severely, the more especially as the Oregon has no fires except for her galleys (cooking house) and boilers. There are no means of warming the cabins so that we must depend entirely on keeping well wrapped up--I understand that it is the same on all the steamers between San Francisco and Panama and it does not seem ...to have fires although at this season they would make things a little more comfortable.

I anticipate some pleasure on meeting Oliver Thomas in San Francisco and Tilton in Washington territory. I received a letter of congratulations from Tilton when I was first appointed in which he expressed the hope that I would be stationed near him. I little expected then how soon we were likely to meet. Then we expected to march out on the plains by the way of St. Louis and the Yellow-Stone Rivers and that possibly we would find ourselves on the Pacific coast in two or three years.

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9 o'clock PM ...I had scarcely begun to write before I was interrupted by having to leave the table on account of preparations for dinner and now when I attempt to resume my letter the ship is rolling so much that I can hardly write. There has been a cold, drizzling rain all day until about two hours ago and since the clouds have cleared away we have had a stiff breeze from the south with a heavy sea. It is the first time that a rough sea has not made me sick and I begin to hope that I have at last got seasoned to it. [Capt. Winder's wife]

Mrs. Winder has suffered very much from sea sickness; nothing but to go back to the eastern shore of Maryland, she says, can ever induce her to go to sea again. The soldiers are made much more comfortable than I had supposed they could be. The bunks prepared for them at Panama were sufficient for only one third of the men, the rest were expected to and they did sleep on deck as long as we were in the tropics but since we have entered a colder climate, standees as they are called, a kind of ; ...for their tiers of mattresses, have been put every night between decks sufficient to accommodate all who are not on guard.

San Francisco

16 Jan 1856

We arrived at San Francisco on the 12th. I went ashore immediately to find Oliver who I found at his office. He seemed perfectly delighted to see me and we have been together all the time that I have been able to spend on shore.

I hoped to have written you a long letter from this place but ~~have~~ leave for Ft. Vancouver within three hours and only knew we were going a half hour ago. . We had counted on at least a day's notice. The Golden Age arrived last evening and I have received Nannie's and Mary's letters-- never let a mail pass without sending me a word from home . I will always write by every opportunity but that will not be every California mail that goes east.

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Introductory notes:

Fort Monroe U.S. Mail steamer, St Louis, Dec. 23, 1855

To Panama, steamship, Oregon in Panama Bay Christmas morning...
mongrel population.

Railroad cars transported across the isthmus in four hours. Boarded the Oregon in Panama bay, taken out by barge. Steamboat three miles from town near a clump of islands.

The next troops are coming on the Golden Age.

In Panama bay Christmas day, 1855

Steamship Oregon.

Dear Brother Bob

The news received from the Indian country sounds quite warlike. Companies C, D and E are coming on the Golden Age, a ship with greater speed and will probably reach San Francisco shortly after we do.

"I begin to like Maj. Luginbeel.

Twelve days are allowed for the trip to San Francisco. We departed from Old Point, Company K ~~8800000~~ on the Oregon, has had no dinner yet aboard ship tonight and it is nearly 8.

San Francisco, Jan. 16, 1856

Arrived at San Francisco on the 12th. Dined with friends.

Still aboard the Oregon.

Fort Vancouver, W.T., Jan. 25, 1856

Dear Mother:

This is the first chance to write. We arrived on the 12th. Just before arriving we danced on deck by the light of the moon. Ladies seemed to enjoy it as much as at the fort.

Mount Hood is the highest peak in the U.S.

Fort Vancouver is no post after all. It is only a military post constructed of log houses for officers quarters at the head of

Lt. Wickliffe, Dr. Randolph and I dined yesterday at Van Ness', Mrs. Van Ness sent a carriage for us, to take us out. They live about three miles from the city. Mrs. Van Ness reminded me a good deal of Johnie Constable.

With love to all.

We are still aboard the Oregon which carries us up to the Columbia River. Write to me at San Francisco. Oliver will forward my letters.

Fort Vancouver
25th January, 1856

My dear mother:

This is the first opportunity of sending a letter since I wrote you from San Francisco. We left there on the 16th inst. by the Oregon, the same ship that brought us from Panama. Arrived safe at Ft. Vancouver on the evening of the 20th; our passage was generally rough but without storm and I had become sufficiently a sailor not to be sea-sick.

The only night when the sea was smooth enough for the purpose we had the band up on the hurricane deck and danced by the light of the moon--an agreeable substitute for fires to keep us warm. The ladies seemed to enjoy it quite as much as they did the ball at Ft. Monroe. We entered the Columbia river at 10 o'clock the morning of the 20th--a clear, mild day, warm enough to make it comfortable sitting on deck with overcoats--the scenery is very beautiful all the way up the river- it is studded with islands which are mostly covered with trees which I took for water birches and the shores of the river are high and steep and covered with fir trees. Mount Hood, the highest peak in the United States (11222) [corrected later by implication] covered with eternal snow became visible the day before we reached the mouth of the river and has been in full view ever since--it forms the principal ~~place~~ feature on our landscape now and is I think higher and more beautiful than the Orizaba or Popocatepetl of Mexico.

Fort Vancouver is no fort at all, it is only a military station

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Fort Vancouver is no fort at all, it is only a military station

consisting of a long row of log houses for officers quarters at the head of a slope about 150 feet above the river a quarter of a mile distant from it and quarters for three or four hundred men.

An officer from each company landed with a small working party on the next day after our arrival to attend to the landing of baggage and its safe transportation to the fort and to pitch tents--we had only time however to pitch just enough to stow away the rest of the property for the night. The next day the troops landed and encamped on the parade ground then covered with about two inches of snow which had fallen during the preceding night. The next night there was another fall of snow and although the first two nights at Vancouver were rather uncomfortable I could not get at my bedding except a woollen blanket and the India rubber blanket you sent me but which enabled me to get through the night very well. We have not got flooring for the tents and the weather has grown milder so that we are beginning to have a pretty good time in camp and tomorrow or next day I will be in nearly as good quarters as I had at Fort Monroe for these log houses rough as they seem on the outside are wainscotted within and painted. They have high ceilings and big fireplaces, half of one of these houses (two rooms) has been allotted to me but I expect to take a lieutenant or two in with me. Three weeks ago the ice on the river was eight inches thick but the cold weather is now thought to be over. We were very hospitably received by the officers of the post on our arrival and have since become permanent members of their mess, at least as permanent as our stop here. Two of the companies, H (Guthrie's) and D, under Lt. Col. Casey, go to Fort St. Elie on Puget Sound. I do not know whether we will remain here during the winter or not. Faxton, the architect, formerly a partner of Nelson is here on a short visit from San Francisco. With all my love for you and all of yours

Yours affectionately

J.J. Archer

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