

# Life in camp

Walter Waightstill Lenoir to Selina Louisa Avery Lenoir, March 2, 1862, in the Lenoir Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## As you read...

Walter Waightstill Lenoir was born in 1823 into the wealthy Lenoir family. He attended the University of North Carolina and practiced law in North Carolina before the Civil War. Although Lenoir opposed slavery and disagreed with secession, he joined the Confederate army in January 1862. In September 1862, Lenoir was injured and his right leg was amputated. He returned to his family and moved to Haywood County, where he became a farmer. In 1883, he was elected as a representative to the North Carolina Assembly and served one term.

## QUESTION TO CONSIDER

1. What did Lenoir tell his mother about his diet and hygiene?
2. What do you think Lenoir included this information in a letter to his mother?
3. What is the tone of this letter? Is Lenoir upbeat? Content? Depressed? What do you think he was trying to accomplish with this letter?



Figure 1. This photograph of an encampment at Cumberland Landing, Virginia, was taken from a hill above the camp.

Camp Lee, S. C., Mch. 2d 1862

Dear Mother,

As I write so many letters home to let you all hear from me and brother Tom, I will commence by telling you something about myself and him. I continue in very fine health, with my digestion improved, and hardly ever deranged now, even by my hearty meals which are always somewhat in excess. But I enjoy Uriah's coarse corn bread & wheat bread & fried midling<sup>1</sup> & rice & potatoes, so much so that it is hard to stop when I have eat enough. We have been out of coffee for some time, but are doing very well without it, & have all become so fond of Yeopon tea<sup>2</sup> that we will continue to use it, although we have now got a new supply of coffee, at 75 cts per lb. I find the Yeopon so palatable & apparently wholesome that I would be glad to know that you had sent for a supply to Wilmington or Newberne. I have advised Mr Norwood by all means to order a bushel. I do not know that I am fattening any, but I am increasing in weight by the development of the muscles of my arms and legs, which are growing perceptibly larger & harder. All this fine progress which I am making as to my health, by becoming a soldier & adopting the life of the camps may of course be upset at any time by an attack of fever, if I escape safely from the other dangers of war. I am not, however, entirely negligent of my health. With the exception of eating too much, I am, I think, reasonably prudent in regulating my diet. I have my hair now trimmed quite short, without having caught cold by its loss, and I wash myself every morning to my waist carefully with cold water, including the whole of my head in the ablution; and then rub myself dry with a towel. And I wash my whole person at least once a week. I change my shirt, drawers, and socks but once a week, as soldiers can't afford to be fastidious about their wardrobe. I don't wear the cotton shirts that I brought, the [unclear] ones being quite sufficient to keep me warm in this mild climate, and I have very seldom

worn my great heavy overcoat, but my other clothing has not become oppressively warm, as I can leave off the coat or waistcoat or both in the warmest weather. My heavy jeans will soon, however, I suppose, be quite unsuitable for the climate here. I will try, though, if we still remain here to supply myself if necessary with something lighter. I am more cheerful and light hearted here than I could possibly be at home during the continuance of the war, and on the whole may be said to enjoy myself amazingly, all things considered. The worst of it is I am getting gray much too fast....

Your affectionate son  
Walter

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## Notes

1. "Middling" was the bacon or fatback cut from between the hams and shoulders of the hogs. It was typically not high-quality meat.
2. Yaupon tea, or Texas tea, is made from the leaves of the Yaupon holly, which is native to the American Southwest. Its leaves contain caffeine and was used as a substitute for coffee during the Civil War. With the Union blockade, imported coffee was difficult to find and very expensive.

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### Figure 1 (page 2)

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