



Figure 1: A cover franked with pair of Confederate local prints (Scott CSA 7), dispatched from Gettysburg General Hospital via the rare Baltimore smuggled-mail route. It is impossible to identify as such without the original letter.

Gettysburg Prisoner-of-War Mail Sent by Baltimore Smuggled-Mail Route

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

The Baltimore smuggled-mail route is rather well known, but identified uses are extremely rare. The subject cover and accompanying original prisoner-of-war letter are an example of this uncommon covert route as evidenced by the writer's mailing instructions, as well as the fact that there are no examined markings or routings on the cover.

On its face, Figure 1 reveals a mundane-looking envelope franked with a pair of Confederate local prints (Scott CSA 7; CSA Catalog 7-R), which are tied to the cover by an indistinct circular datestamp. It is addressed to Mrs. Dr. C. Martin, Pittsylvania C.H., Virginia. The two-page letter is shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Without the letter, the cover would be of modest value. But with the original contents, it becomes a rarity with an historic backstory. This is the only letter I've ever seen from the man who led the famed 53rd Virginia Regiment, which mainly fought with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

As noted by Steve Walske and Scott Trepel in their *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War*,¹ "By

their nature, such covert letters carry no identifiable markings and entered the mails only after they crossed the lines."

The letter is headed "General Hospital, Gettysburg, Pa. Sept 10th 1863." Of specific interest to postal historians are the writer's instructions to: "Send my letters underground to Miss Mary A. Weimer care of Col. J.C. McConnell, No. 70 Lexington Street, Baltimore, Md."

The letter is signed, "Your affectionate & devoted Son, R W Martin." A young Lt. Col. Rawley White Martin is shown in a Confederate uniform in Figure 4. A cabinet card of him in the 1870s is displayed in Figure 5; it was made by photographer G.W. Davis of Richmond. Figure 6 is a formal oil portrait of Martin courtesy of the Pittsylvania County Courthouse in Chatham, Virginia.

In the letter, Martin says, in part:

"They say I am a gritty fellow because in none of my manipulations of my leg dressings or anything I have complained...I was firm and decided and

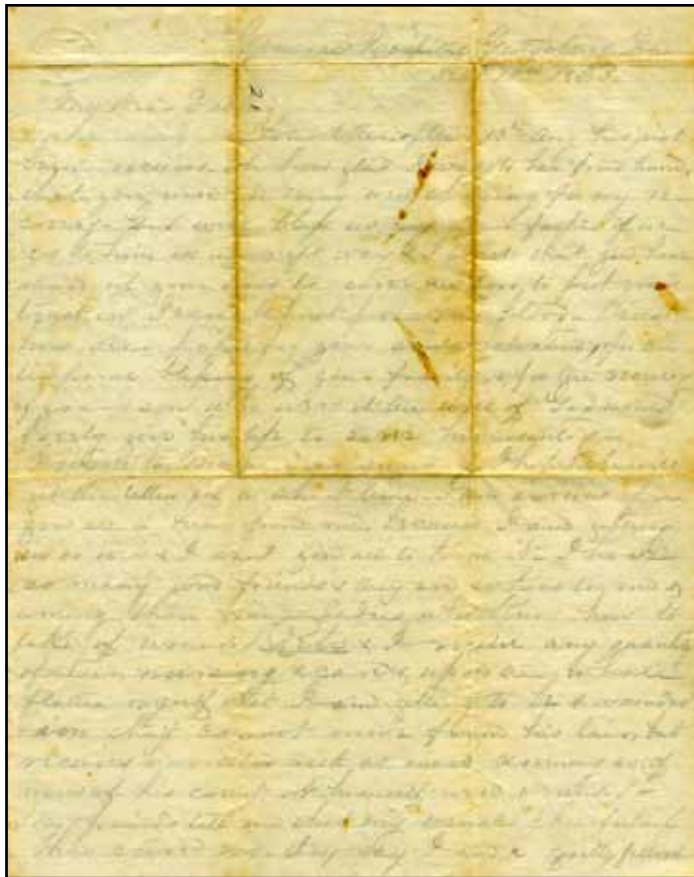


Figure 2: Page 1 of the letter from captured Gettysburg combatant, Lt. Col. (Dr.) Rawley White Martin, headed "General Hospital, Gettysburg, Pa. Sept 10th 1863."

determined to let the enemy know that although my life was despaired of by the surgeons, I would be true to my God and my Country."

Rawley White Martin

"High-Water Mark of the Confederacy"

Lt. Col. (Dr.) Rawley White Martin (1835-1912)

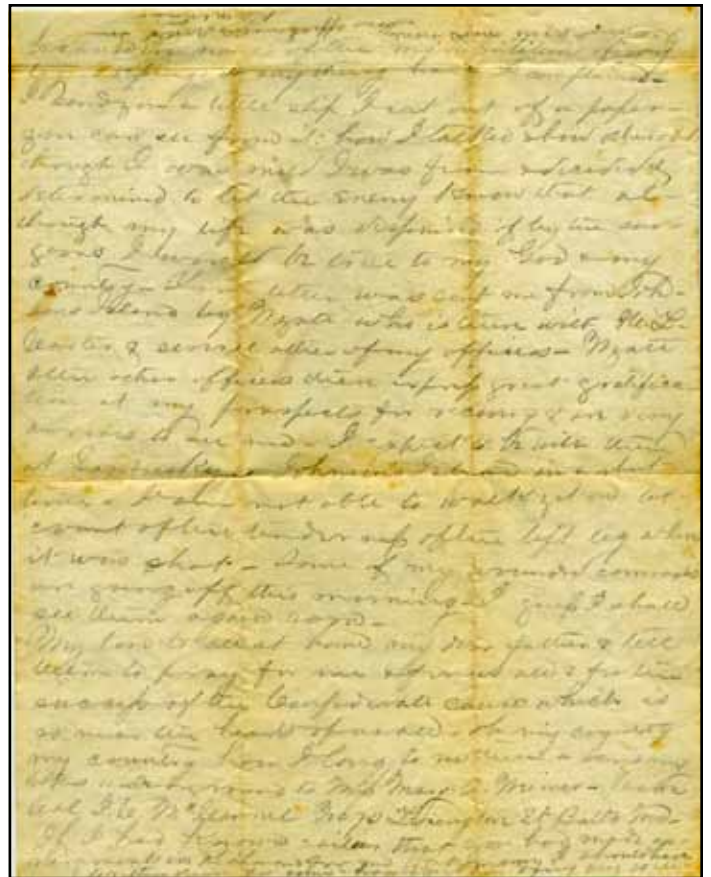


Figure 3: Page 2 of the letter from Lt. Col. (Dr.) Rawley White Martin, instructing his parents to "send my letters underground... ."

is a name well recognized by Civil War history buffs, whether postal historians or not. Martin led the 53rd Virginia Infantry in the ill-fated Pickett's Charge, including Company I of the Chatham Greys, who were carrying the regimental colors. It was General Robert E. Lee's hope this battle would end the war. It did not.

This engagement is referred to by historians as



Figure 4: Young Lt. Col. Rawley White Martin in a Confederate uniform.



Figure 5: An 1870s cabinet card of Martin by G.W. Davis of Richmond.



Figure 6: A formal oil portrait of Martin. (Pittsylvania County Courthouse, Chatham, Virginia)



Figure 7: An Edwin Forbes oil painting of Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863, painted from a position on the Confederate line looking toward the Union lines. (Library of Congress)

the high-water mark of the Confederacy. Gen. Lewis A. Armistead (1817-1863), Martin, and a few from Company I were the only Confederates to make it beyond the stone wall at "the Angle" on Cemetery Hill. All of them were captured, wounded or killed. The more descriptive designation "Bloody Angle" became common at battlefield commemorative events after the war.

Gen. Armistead died two days after the battle from wounds received that day. It is said that, when he led his men during Pickett's Charge, he fixed his hat on the point of his sword and urged his men forward with the words, "Remember what you are fighting for—your homes, your friends, your sweethearts!"²

After he fell, Armistead was taken to a federal field hospital, where he requested that his watch and other valuables be given to his friend Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock, who had faced him that day from the Union lines on Cemetery Ridge. Hancock could not meet with his friend before he died because he had just been wounded himself, a severe injury caused by a bullet striking the pommel of his saddle, entering his inner right thigh along with wood fragments and a large bent nail.³

Dr. Martin was seriously wounded and captured.⁴ He had been less severely wounded the year before at the battles of Seven Pines and Malvern Hill.

Martin was shot in both legs. A gunshot wound fractured the upper third of his right thigh (femur). He also sustained a gunshot wound to the left thigh and shell damage to the left foot. He was captured and treated at U.S. 2nd Division II Corps Hospital.

He was exchanged from Point Lookout, Maryland, on April 30, 1864, after stays in other prisons (West's Building Hospital and Fort McHenry, both in Baltimore).

The date July 3, 1863, instantly resonates with Civil War historians. Edwin Forbes' (1839-1895) oil painting memorialized the day, as shown in Figure 7, a Library of Congress print painted from a position on the Confederate line looking toward the Union lines at about 3 p.m.

Private John Haley, of the 17th Maine, although not engaged in the action that day, was on picket duty nearby and wrote in his journal:⁵

The dead lay everywhere, and although not a half day has passed since they died, the stench is so great that we can neither eat, drink, nor sleep. Decomposition commences as soon as life is extinct... The dead are frightfully smashed, which is not to be wondered at when we consider how they crowded up onto our guns, a mass of humanity, only to be hurled back an undistinguishable pile of mutilated flesh, rolling, and writhing in death.

An estimated 51,000 soldiers were killed, wounded, captured, or listed as missing after the Battle of Gettysburg.

Figure 8 shows a "Medical Descriptive List" detailing the 25-year old Martin's four wounds and their treatment. The document is dated at Camp Letterman General Hospital at Gettysburg, where he was admitted August 5, 1863.

MEDICAL DESCRIPTIVE LIST.

Ward *4*, *Bed 58*, *First Division* General Hospital at *Camp Letterman, Gettysburg*
 Name *R. W. Martin*, Age *25*, Rank *Private*, Co. *—*, Regiment *53rd*
 Disease or Injury *Injury right thigh, flesh and bone*
 Result, *of a shell*

Admission, *Aug. 5, 1863*
 Return to duty, *careful*
 Discharge from service, *—*
 Transfer to another Hospital, *—*
 Death, *—*

DATE OF (When attending Medical Officer) *B. F. Butcher, A. A. S.*

NOTE.—When a patient is first received into a General Hospital, the entries on this Descriptive List will be concurred. All important changes in his condition will be noted on it. (In lack) from time to time, by the Surgeon in charge of the Ward. When the patient has been wounded, the date and character of his wound will be noted, (in case of amputation, of any) and, where all, the words. In case of transfer, this list will be sent, through the Officer in charge of the transportation, or being one, by mail, to the Surgeon in charge of the Hospital receiving the patient. When this Medical History shall have been completed, by the cure, discharge, or death of the patient, it will, with the treatment and result, carefully noted, be transmitted directly to the Surgeon General.

DATE.	TREATMENT.	DIET.	REMARKS AS TO CONDITION OF PATIENT, &c.
<i>July 4th</i>	<i>Smith's Anterior Splint applied to the right arm, leg, simple dressing to the wounds.</i>		<i>This officer was wounded July 5th 1863, having received four wounds. The first ball entering behind and below, the transverse antrum of the left femur, passing through the thigh, behind the femur into the limb of spine causing fracture of the right thigh, the ball splitting and lodging in the outer edge of the posterior external muscle (about one inch apart) like the Lancaster Major, of the right femur.</i>
<i>" 5</i>	<i>Piece of Ball exposed.</i>		<i>Third wound, Ball entered inside of the left leg, three inches below the joint, passing through the muscle, making its exit directly opposite.</i>
<i>" 6</i>	<i>Simple dressing.</i>		<i>Fourth wound caused by a small fragment of shell striking the outside of the left foot making a slight flesh wound.</i>
<i>" 10</i>	<i>Second piece of Ball removed. Anæsthesia at night.</i>		<i>Ball</i>
<i>" 15</i>	<i>Tonic & Stimulant.</i>		<i>Patient doing well, appears good, bowels regular, Biler good, sleep well.</i>
<i>20th</i>			
<i>25th</i>	<i>Stimulant.</i>		
<i>31st</i>			

Figure 8: A “Medical Descriptive List” dated at Camp Letterman General Hospital at Gettysburg, where Martin was admitted August 5, 1863. It provides details Martin’s four wounds and their treatment.

It is signed by the acting assistant surgeon, B.F. Butcher. I’m not really sure that’s the name I’d want for my surgeon!

Rawley White Martin was born to Dr. Chesley Martin and his wife, Rebecca White. His attended the University of Virginia for his undergraduate studies and received his medical degree from the University of New York in 1858.

Following the war, Dr. Martin practiced medicine in Chatham and Lynchburg, Virginia. He was president of the State Board of Health, president of the Medical Examining Board, president of the Medical Society of Virginia, and more.

Dr. Martin has been the subject of many articles and books; much more information about him is easily found online. His papers are housed as collection number 03402 in the Southern Historical Collection at

the Louis Round Wilson Special Collection Library at the University of North Carolina.⁶

An inscription on Dr. Martin’s graveyard memorial eulogizes him:

“Beloved physician, pure patriot and clean citizen, who gave to mankind the toil and toll of a busy life: Led the immortals “Over the Crest of Cemetery Ridge,” “Was faithful in all things, and in all things unafraid.” Beautiful “Friend of God” and humanity, raised by the strong arm. We who survive, salute thee.”

John C. McConnell

There is an equally interesting backstory for Union Col. John C. McConnell, through whom the Confederate (enemy) mail was being funneled. McConnell appears to have been a Baltimore native and many citizens of that city were sympathetic to the South.

According to military records, McConnell was a 48 year-old property agent when he enlisted at Baltimore May 10, 1861, as a captain in Company A, 1st Maryland Infantry.

He was discharged for promotion August 5, 1861, and commissioned as a colonel in Field & Staff, Maryland 3rd Infantry. The 3rd Regiment of Infantry, Maryland Volunteers, was composed of men from Baltimore and Williamsport, Maryland.

Col. John C. McConnell initially organized the company, yet was abruptly discharged February 18, 1862, more than a year before Gettysburg, as “unfit for the position of colonel.”⁷

On file at the National Archives & Records Administration, I found a March 6, 1862, letter from McConnell to Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan saying he has been unceremoniously deprived of his commission as colonel of the 3rd Maryland Regiment and he is fully prepared to disprove all charges. He asked to be reinstated so he could have a trial by court martial.

I could not easily find any further records pertaining to this. More research would doubtless be very interesting, should someone be up to the challenge.

It is interesting that McConnell facilitated mail delivery for captured enemy soldiers more than a year after being deprived of his commission. The smuggled mail provides historians with rare postal artifacts, as well as a captivating tale.

Endnotes

1 Steven C. Walske and Scott R. Trepel, *Special Mail Routes of the American Civil War*, (Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2008). <https://www.civilwarphilatelicsociety.org/>

- 2 Lewis Armistead, American Battlefield Trust. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/lewis-armistead/>
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- 3 Winfield Scott Hancock, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winfield_Scott_Hancock/
Accessed March 5, 2021.
- 4 Henry H. Mitchell, Hell-and-High-Wart Hill. https://www.victorianvilla.com/sims-mitchell/local/hell-high-water_hill.html
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- 5 John Haley, "Remembering The Angle," American Battlefield Trust. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/remembering-angle/>
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- 6 Rawley White Martin, Rawley White Martin Papers, 1851-1927. <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/03401/>
Accessed March 5, 2021.
- 7 3rd Maryland Volunteer Infantry Regiment, The Civil War in the East. <https://civilwarintheeast.com/us-regiments-batteries/maryland/3rd-maryland/>
Accessed March 5, 2021.
(Patricia (Trish) Kaufmann, Lincoln, Delaware, was introduced to postal history in 1965 and quickly became engrossed in research and writing. She became a fulltime dealer in 1973, today specializing solely in Confederate States postal history. She enjoys hearing from readers and may be contacted by e-mail at: trishkauf@comcast.net)

James Conway Farley

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

On the cabinet card of Rawley White Martin, photographer G.W. Davis's address is recorded as 821 E. Broad Street in Richmond, Virginia.¹ Davis was listed at that address in the Richmond city directory from 1875-1877. He also had an office in Washington, D.C.

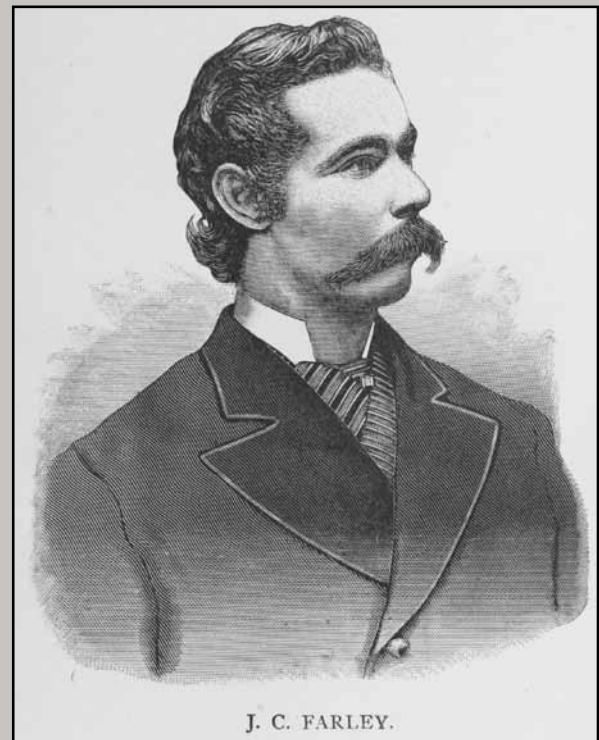
Davis hired a prominent black photographer, James Conway Farley (1854-1910?), at a time when that was unusual. He is said to have fired other employees who objected.¹ A handsome man, Farley is pictured at right in 1887.

Farley was the first African-American to achieve prominence in the photography industry. Born to slave parents in Prince Edward County, Virginia, he and his mother moved to Richmond in 1861 after his father died. Sources are unclear whether they were free at that point. He is known to have lived until at least 1910.

In 1872, he was hired as an apprentice at the chemical department of the C.R. Rees photography company in Richmond, where he quickly developed skill and a passion for photography.

G.W. Davis hired him in 1875. On the BlackPast website, Kelly Trsek described how, as the only black operator at the gallery, the four white operators were furious at his employment, his talent, and his success.

They threatened to leave the gallery unless Davis fired Farley. Farley offered to step down for the good of the gallery. Instead, Davis fired all four white operators and Farley stayed with Davis for twenty years until he opened his own business, the successful Jefferson Fine Art Gallery on Broad Street in Richmond, which boasted white and black clients alike.² His story is widely found on the Internet.



Endnotes

- 1 G.W. Davis, Cabinet Card Photographers. <http://cabinetcardphotographers.blogspot.com/2017/09/g-w-davis.html>
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- 2 Kelly Trsek, James Conway Farley (1854-1910?), BlackPast. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/farley-james-conway-1854-1910/>
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