



# Quite Ready To Be Sent Somewhere: The Civil War Letters Of Aldace Freeman Walker

*Thomas Ledoux*

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Native Vermonter Aldace Freeman Walker, valedictorian of Middlebury College's Class of 1862, future lawyer and Chairman of the Board of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, gave his commencement speech in the uniform of a First Lieutenant, U.S. Volunteers, and promptly set off for war. After nearly a month of initial training in Brattleboro, Vermont, Walker's regiment, the Eleventh Vermont Infantry, arrived at the Seat of War in early September 1862. For the next twenty months Walker and his regiment occupied the forts in the northeastern quadrant of the Defenses of Washington, drilling socializing and fretting that the war might pass them by.

But in mid-May, 1864, as Lieut. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Potomac began the bloody Overland Campaign against Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, the Vermont "Heavies," as they came to be known, were called up to active campaigning, joined the famous "Old Vermont Brigade," in the Sixth Corps, and participated in every battle of that unit from Spotsylvania until the end of the war.

Walker's 288 letters to his parents and younger sister are regular, often long, and always lucid and opinionated, Historian Benjamin Franklin Cooling III, who has written extensively on the defenses of Washington during the Civil War, opined that "no better account of the 'life and times' of junior officers in the wartime defenses of Washington remains" than Walker's letters home.

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