

# “YOUR SONNY SILE...”

THE LETTERS OF  
CAPTAIN SILAS SOULE  
D COMPANY  
FIRST COLORADO VOLUNTEERS

## DOCUMENT NUMBER ONE:

ADDRESSED TO COL. JAS. B. ABBOTT,  
LAWRENCE, KANSAS

Dist. Ten, July 21st, '61

Old Friend,

You may thank your stars, Major, that you left this country when you did, for it is deader than it ever was, and has been ever since you left... The fact is Major, I am getting D--m sick of this God-forsaken place. There are very few lodes paying and but few mills running. I am still at work in the shop. I have carried it on myself for the last three months and have got so that I am quite a smith.... What is the show back there? Could I get a Leutenants commission in the army, or any thing of the kind? If I could, I would go back....

I don't think of any more that would interest you. Answer soon and direct to Missouri City, [Kansas].

Yours R.  
Sile

## DOCUMENT NUMBER TWO:

Camp Fillmore  
June 2nd, 1864

Dear Mother;

I know you are worrying about me because I have not written for so long, but I have been getting out of the notion of writing and have been busy for the last month fixing up my papers and just as I got them fixed, my office was swept away by the flood and I lost every thing I had; papers, letters, Clothing and all. Wasn't I in luck? Blessed are the poor because they have nothing to lose. I am now in command of my Company. A hundred brave warriors. Ain't I proud? I am on my way to Fort Lyon. I do not know where I shall go from there. I may go to fight Indians. If I do, I will write first so you can be worrying while I am gone. I received a letter from Em a short time ago. She told me that



you was going to stay a while in Bangor. I would send you some money in the mail, but am afraid to, as the Indians are bad along the road and may take the Coach. I will send some the first safe opportunity. One of my men was killed and two wounded in an Indian fight last week.

I don't know what more to write. There is nothing I know of that would interest you. I still suffer with pleasure. Give my love to all the folks and when you write let me know how you and the girls get along. If you need money &c. I have some claims in the mountains that I could have sold a few weeks ago for ten thousand dollars if I had been there. But if they are worth any thing, they are worth \$50,000.00. I think I can sell them for that much in a year from now if they work the mines as they have begun to, and they pay as well. Lewis Tappan sold some he had for \$500,000.00. Just half a million dollars. that was pretty good wasn't it? Who knows but we are rich. I own fifty mining Claims and there ought to be some good ones and if one of them is good, it is a fortune for any one. I will send you my photograph when I write again.

From your Sonny Sile

### **DOCUMENT NUMBER THREE:**

Fort Lyon  
June 17th, 1864

Dear Annie;

I have just received a letter from you and was very glad to hear from you. I am in command of my Company and like it very well. I have 94 men and get along very well with them. Fort Lyon is on the Arkansas River about 250 miles from Denver. I suppose you heard of the great flood we had in Denver. I was there. My office was in a large two story brick building. It was washed away and I did not save any thing, so you see I have been drove out as well as you. It was an awful flood. It took down churches and printing offices. In fact it washed away most a quarter of the city and drowned a number of men, women and children. We have had a good deal of rain this season. The Arkansas River is so high that it has come in the post and drove most of the Laundresses out. I don't know what I shall do this summer, but think we'll have some Indian fighting to do. Part of my Company had a fight with them a week or two ago. I lost 2 killed and 3 wounded. They killed about 20 Indians.

I have not been in any fight yet, but may have a chance soon. I don't know what to write that would interest you. I would send some money to you but am afraid the Indians will rob the Coach, but if you want money let me know and I will send some to you. I would like you to send some papers to me when you can. Em has not sent any for a long time. I got a letter from Mother last week or two ago and answered her. I have not had a letter from Will since he left Kansas. Give my love to all the folks. Tell them I would like to hear from them. I think I shall go to Maine to marry; so if you see any nice girls that want to be the wife of a Captain of a hundred Braves, tell them that I am the man they are looking for.

Sile

### **DOCUMENT NUMBER FOUR:**

Fort Lyon, C.T.  
July 16th, 1864

Dear Annie;

I just received a letter from you and was kinder glad to hear from you... I am in Fort Lyon on the Arkansas River. There are five Companies here besides one section of battery and the Regt'l Band. I have a good Company and get along first rate. Yesterday at Dress parade the Major Comdg Post had orders read to the Battallion complementing my Company on their military appearance and discipline, referring to them as an example for the troops at the Post. So you see I get along very well. I am the same boy, Annie, as I used for to be; in fact I imagine that I am only 17 years old. We have been expecting to be ordered into the field for the last month and are still expecting to go on an

Indian campaign, I think I will like it better than laying at this Post, for it is as hot as Blazes and the mosquitos are very numerous and they have got in the habit of biting....

You and Mother write for me to be a Christian and not be wild &c., but the Army don't improve a fellow much in that respect and you know I never was much of a Christian, and am naturally wild, but I have seen so much of the world and are not much changed. I think there is not much danger of my spoiling -- our Col. is a Methodist Preacher and whenever he sees me drinking, gambling, stealing, or murdering he says, he will write to Mother or my sister Annie, so I have to go straight... I send you ... [a photograph] of mine taken rough without my uniform. Does it look like me? I have my hair shaved so close now that I look like a penitentiary bird. I have a sure thing that the Indians cannot get my scalp.

Your &c,  
Sile

### **DOCUMENT NUMBER FIVE:**

Fort Lyon, C.T.  
July 28th, 1864

Dear Mother;

...We have sent five Co.s after Indians, and left three Co.s at this Post. I expect Major Wynkoop will go to Denver in a day or two. If he does, I shall be in command of the Post. Won't I put on Style? I suppose you think I spend a good deal of money, but when you consider that it costs sixty dollars for a coat, twenty for a pr. of pants, sixteen for a pr. of boots, ten for a hat, and six and a half apiece for shirts, it counts up and you know a Captain has to wear good clothes. I had a birthday on the 26th, I suppose you know. I am 26 years old, most old enough to marry, ain't it? Well it is late and the mosquitos are troublesome. I guess I will close. I went to a show to-night and saw a man turn his joints out of shape for a dollar, so you see we are quite civilized in this country.

Give my love to everybody and tell them that I should be glad to hear from them. Don't fret if you don't hear from me once a year, for if I get killed you will hear of it soon enough....

Your Sonny Sile

### **DOCUMENT NUMBER SIX:**

Fort Lyon, C.T.  
Aug. 15th, 1864

Dear Annie,

I have just received a letter from you and hasten to answer it before I forget it. I am still at Fort Lyon and perhaps you had better direct your next here. I presume I shall be here some time yet. We have considerable trouble with the Indians -- they would like to scalp us all. We have been chasing them for two weeks, but only killed two. It is hard to get into a fight with them, they scatter so....

Yours &c.  
Sile

Fort Lyon, C.T.  
Oct. 30th, '64

## DOCUMENT NUMBER SEVEN:

Dear Annie;

I am still at Fort Lyon. Have been to Denver once since I came down here, but only stopped a week...

We have had considerable trouble with the Indians this Summer, but they are quite peaceable at present. There are about three thousand here within a mile of the Post who have come in for the purpose of making peace. I do not know what we shall do, but I think Government will not make peace with them. If that is the case, we shall have some fighting to do this winter. I am not in a very good humor to write this evening, for the wind blows and it is cold and I can hardly see the lines on the paper...Write me all that you can think of interest on your next.

Yours &c.

Sile

## DOCUMENT NUMBER EIGHT:

Fort Lyon, C.T.  
Dec. 18th, 1864

Dear Mother;

I received a letter from you tonight and you bet I was glad to hear from you. I ought to write oftener, but I am so lazy and have so little that would interest you that I neglect to write. I wrote to Annie and sent the letter by Mr. Gould who belongs in Brunswick I believe. He has served three years in my Regiment and is going to Bath. You will see him and he will tell you every thing you want to know. I have not received any letter from Will since he left Lawrence. I think I will write to him in the morning although I don't believe he will receive it, the mails are so irregular. I receive letters from Annie and Em quite often and endeavor to answer them as soon as possible. I still have hopes of going to Maine this winter, but may not until spring. We have had considerable trouble with Indians this fall. The day you wrote I was present at a Massacre of three hundred Indians mostly women and Children. It was a borrible scene and I would not let my Company fire. They were friendly and some of our soldiers were in their Camp at the time trading. It looked too hard for me to see little Children on their knees begging for their lives have their brains beat out like dogs. It was a Regiment of 100 days men who accomplished the noble deed. Some of the Indians fought when they saw no chance of escape and killed twelve and wounded forty of our men. I had on Horse shot. I have been on Indian scout for the last three weeks but don't think I will have much more at present. Tell Annie and Em that I am just beginning to receive papers from them for which I am very grateful. I give my love to every body and tell them that I would be glad to hear from them. I do not write near as often as I used to for I have so much to do to keep my Co. papers correct. I am responsible for fifty thousand dollars worth of Government property which must be attended to. I will write occasionally. Don't get worried for there is not the least danger in the world of my getting killed and as I am the most interested party you should not fret. I believe I will write a letter to Uncle Ben. Good night.

Your Sonny  
Sile

Jan.8th, 1865  
Fort Lyon, C.T.

## DOCUMENT NUMBER NINE:

Dear Mother;

I suppose you are anxious to hear from me. I should have written oftener if I had not been so busy fixing up my papers. Our Reg. has been mustered out. Their 3 years having expired, and all the officers are relieved from duty at this Post and I amongst the rest want to get my papers all square so if I go out I can start for the States right off but the officers think that I will be retained in the Veteran organization. At any rate I can if I wish and I have been thinking the matter over and believe it is best for if I go back I don't know of anything I could go at that would pay for I am too lazy to work you well know. The only chance would be to marry a rich widow. Do you think there is a good chance in Maine or will I find a richer one out west? I had applied for a leave of absence to go to Maine and just received answer from it saying that our Reg. was to be immediately reorganized so I will have to wait and may not see you until March. I suppose you have seen Av. Could I send a letter by him? He will tell you all about Killing Indians. I spent New Year's Day on the battle ground counting dead Indians. There were not as many killed as was reported. There was not more than one hundred and thirty killed but most of them were women and children and all of them scalped. I hope the authorities in Washington will investigate the killing of those Indians. I think they will be apt to hoist some of our high officials. I would not fire on the Indians with my Co. and the Col. said he would have me cashiered but he is out of the service before me and I think I stand better than he does in this great Indian fight. I am reforming in regard to my bad habits Mother, for I have left off chewing tobacco and smoking a pipe but will smoke cigars when I can get them. I don't drink, so you can see I'm getting quite respectable and will stand a chance of getting a wife when I go down east. I am going to write Will this evening. I have not written since he went south. I wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy New year. Wish I could send you a present, but our pay master died Christmas day and we have had no pay for 4 months. I am almost broke.

Your affectionate Son  
Sile

## DOCUMENT NUMBER TEN:

FROM THE DENVER CITY NEWS WE COPY THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF THE MURDER OF CAPTAIN SILAS S. SOULE...

Our city was thrown into a feverish excitement last evening by the assassination of Captain S.S. Soule of the Colorado First. The sad affair took place at half past ten o'clock and was evidently coolly and deliberately planned, and as systematically carried out.

For some time past the Captain has been in charge of the Provost Guard of the city and neighborhood and his duties in that capacity had, as a natural consequence, created many enemies. Threats against his life have been freely and frequently made -- so we are informed -- and no longer ago than yesterday he said he was expecting to be attacked.

In the evening he and his wife were visiting at the house of a friend and returned home between nine and ten o'clock. Shortly after, a number of pistol shots were fired in the upper part of the city, evidently to decoy him out, and the Captain started to ascertain the cause. Passing along Lawrence Street, near F, and directly in front of the residence of Dr. Cunningham, he seems to have been met by the assassin, and the indications are that they both fired at the same instant, or so near together that the reports seemed simultaneous. Probably the Captain, expecting to be attacked, was in readiness, and when the other man presented his pistol, he did the same, but the intended assassin fired the instant soonest, but with the fatal effect. The ball entered the Captain's face at the point of the cheek bone, pressing backward and upward and lodging in the back part of the head. He

fell back dead appearing not to have moved a muscle after falling. The other man, from the indications, was wounded in the right hand or arm; how severely is not known. His pistol was dropped at his feet and he immediately started and ran towards the military camp in the upper part of the city, leaving a distinct trail of blood where he passed along. When the shots were fired they were standing about four feet apart, face to face.

Within less than a minute after the fatal shot, one of the Provost Guard and Mr. Ritter reached the spot. The Captain was already dead, and his murderer disappeared. They alarmed Dr. Cunningham, and a guard was sent for. A number of persons, soldiers and civilians, soon gathered around, and after a few minutes the body was removed to the building occupied by the officers of the headquarters of the District.

The excitement this morning, when the facts became generally known, was intense. Hundreds of citizens visited the scene of the tragedy, and it has formed the burden of conversation throughout the city all day. Patrols were dispatched in every direction, and it is hardly possible that he will escape more than for a day or two. Probably he will be overtaken to-day. Of his identity we shall at present refrain from speaking, though there is scarce a doubt but it is clearly known. The cause is said to have grown out of an arrest made by the Captain in the discharge of his duty as Provost Marshal.

Captain Soule was highly respected by his brother officers, and beloved by the men of his company. He was married in this city on the 1st inst., and consequently leaves a young wife to mourn his terrible and untimely fate. It is the hope of all that his murderer and his accomplices will be speedily brought to judgment, and a punishment meted out to them such as the base crime deserves.

## **DOCUMENT NUMBER ELEVEN:**

Rocky Mountain News April 27, 1865 Page 2 Col. 1

### **CAPTAIN SOULE'S FUNERAL**

The funeral of the late Capt. Silas S. Soule, Provost Marshal, took place yesterday noon, and was attended by an unusually large and respectable procession... An appropriate...discourse was delivered...by Rev. H.B. Hitchings, in which he referred with peculiar fitness to the deserved bravery of the deceased and his devotion to duty -- as well as on the crimsoned brows of the Apache Cañon, defending his country's banner, as on the streets of Denver, daring danger when disorder and the city's safety demanded his official interference....

As a military funeral, this was the finest we have ever seen in the country. The officers and soldiers, and Lt. Wilson's company, made an appearance of style and discipline most "military" indeed....

Deceased was about 27 years of age, descended from Irish parentage, but born in Chelsea, Mass. The family moved to Kansas, from which State the Captain immigrated to the territory in '59. His mother resides in Lawrence, Kansas...With her and his young widowed bride...we all sympathize in their sorrows.

## **DOCUMENT NUMBER TWELVE:**

Addressed:

To - Annie J. Soule [Silas Soule's sister]

From - her sister-in-law Hersa A. Coberly Soule [Silas Soule's widow]

Lawrence, Kansas August 6<sup>th</sup> 1865

My Darling Sister,

You see I am at last anchored at brother Wills. You are anxious to know, I have no doubt, how I like Kansas and the People and if I think Will looks like Silas. Well in the first place I think I will like the country first rate, but I cannot judge yet as I have not been here long enough, and it has been raining nearly ever since I came here but every thing has been done to make it pleasant for me, and I have enjoyed my self long very much.

I like Will and Mary very, very much, but I don't think Will is much like Silas he is not so full of fun but his eyes and hair are very much like My Silies' but I have no doubt but he is as good and I love him dearly, but oh dear Annie, no one can feel as I do, he was my future hope, and some time when I look at Will and I see the very same eyes, I think oh can it be, I want to throw my arms around his neck and say tis true you're with me yet my own dear Silie. The thought is almost madning to me sometimes and I go to my room and stay for hours and read to get it off my mind. Oh, I am afraid I shall make them unhappy. I would rather die than so. I think because it is my fate to be unhappy, it is not right that I should make others unhappy on my account. I like the Bensons very much and also Mrs. Percy. I have not got acquainted with anyone yet and consequently have nothing to write. I had a very pleasant trip across the Plains had no trouble with the Indians but once and then there was but one man killed and one wounded, we saw Millions of Buffalo, the train had to be stopped several times to let them pass. I came through with Maj. Wynkoop and his wife and Col. Tappan. They are of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment and good friends of Silies and mine. they had 40 soldiers as escort. we feared nothing and I suppose was feared by nothing.

I hope you and Mother have good health, mine never was better, I think this country will agree with me. When did you hear from Emmie and was she well? I am going to write to her in a few days, tell Mother to write me a long letter. I think I will be there this fall sure. I left my Mother and Sister in very good health. I have not heard from my Brothers for some time. When you see Mr. Gould (or Ec as I am used to calling him) give him my kindest regards. Mr. Cobb did not get quite through, he only got to Nebraski City, KT and there he forwarded my letter he was very kind. I have got such a horrible pen I can scarcely write at all but then I know my sister looks over my faults of so light a bearing as this don't you? Tea is ready and I will have to close.

Your Loving Sister,

Hersa C. Soule

I send you two of Silie's Photographs that were taken just before he was killed. They were not finished at that time.

Mary says you are going South to teach, and I see they are very much opposed to it, and in fact I would not go if I were you but come West in the Spring wouldn't you rather. I'm afraid I won't get to see you very soon if you go but do as you think best.

With much love to Mother,

I am your unworthy Sister

***[This final letter is from from Captain Silas Soule to his friend Major Edward (Ned) Wynkoop. It was only discovered a few years ago. The letter was written just four days before Silas' letter to his mother describing the same incident. The letter to Wynkoop is much more shocking in the details.]***

## **DOCUMENT NUMBER THIRTEEN:**

December 14, 1864

Dear Ned:

Two days after you left here with the 3rd Reg't. With a Battalion of the 1st arrived here, having moved so secretly that we were not aware of their approach of until they Pickets around the Post, allowing no one to pass out! They arrested Capt. Bent and John Vogle and placed guards around their houses. They then declared their intention to massacre the friendly Indians camped on Sand Creek. Major Anthony gave all information, and eagerly joined in with Chivington and Co. and ordered Lieut. Cramer with his whole Co. to join the command. As soon as I knew of their movement I was indignant as you would have been were you here and went to Cannon's room, where a number of officers of the 1st and 3rd were congregated and told them that any man who would take part in the murders, knowing the circumstances as we did, was a low lived cowardly s\_\_ of a b\_\_\_\_. Capt. Y. J. Johnson and Lt. Harding went to camp and reported to Chiv. Downing and the whole outfit what I had said, and you can bet hell was to pay in camp. Chiv and all hands swore they would hang me before they moved camp, but I stuck it out, and all the officers at the Post, except Anthony backed me. I was then ordered with my whole company to Major A- with 20 days rations. I told him I would not take part in their intended murder, but if they were going after the Sioux, Kiowas or any fighting Indians, I would go as far as any of them. We arrived at Black Kettle's and Left Hand's camp at daylight. Lieut. Wilson with Co.s "C", "E" & "G" were ordered to in advance to cut off their herd. He made a circle to the rear and formed a line 200 yds. From the village, and opened fire. Poor Old John Smith and Louderbeck ran out with white flags but they paid no attention to them, and they ran back to their tents. I refused to fire and swore that none but a coward would, for by this time hundreds of women and children were coming toward us and getting on their knees for mercy. Anthony shouted, "kill the s\_\_ of b\_\_\_\_s" Smith and Louderbeck came to our command although I am confident there were 200 shots fired at them, for I heard an officer say that Old Smith and any one who sympathized with the Indians, ought to be killed and now was a good time to do it. When the Indians found there was no hope for them they went for the Creek and got under the banks and some of the bucks got their bows and a few rifles and defended themselves as well as they could. The massacre lasted six or eight hours, and a good many Indians escaped. I tell you Ned it was hard to see little children on their knees have their brains beat out by men professing to be civilized. One squaw was wounded and a fellow took a hatchet to finish her, and he cut one arm off, and held the other with one hand and dashed the hatchet through her brain. One squaw with her two children, were on their knees, begging for their lives of a dozen soldiers, within ten feet of them all firing - when one succeeded in hitting the squaw in the thigh, when she took a knife and cut the throats of both children and then killed herself. One Old Squaw hung herself in the lodge - there was not enough room for her to hang and she held up her knees and choked herself to death. Some tried to escape on the Prairie, but most of them were run down by horsemen. I saw two Indians hold one of another's hands, chased until they were exhausted, when they kneeled down, and clasped each other around the neck and both were shot together. They were all scalped, and as high as half a dozen taken from one head. They were all horribly mutilated. One woman was cut open and a child taken out of her, and scalped.

White Antelope, War Bonnet and a number of others had Ears and Privates cut off. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ were cut out for trophies. You would think it impossible for white men to butcher and mutilate

human beings as they did there, but every word I have told you is the truth, which they do not deny. It was almost impossible to save any of them. Charly Autabee saved John Smith and Winser's squaw. I saved little Charley Bent. Geo. Bent was killed. Jack Smith was taken prisoner, and murdered the next day in his tent by one of the Denn's Co."E". I understand the man received a horse for doing the job. They were going to murder Charlie Bent, but I run him into the Fort. They were going to kill Old Uncle John Smith, but Lt. Cannon and the boys of Ft. Lyon interfered, and saved him. They would have murdered Old Bents family, if Col. Tappan had not taken the matter in hand. Cramer went up with twenty men, and they did not like to buck against so many of the 1<sup>st</sup>. Chivington has gone to Washington to be made General, I suppose, and get authority to raise a nine months Reg't to hunt Indians. He said Downing will have me cashiered if possible. If they do I want you to help me. I think they will try the same for Cramer for he has shot his mouth off a good deal, and did not shoot his pistol of in the Massacre. Joe has behaved first rate during the whole affair. Chivington reports five or six hundred killed, but there were not more than two hundred, about 140 women and children and 60 Bucks. A good many were out hunting buffalo. Our best Indians were killed. Black Kettle, One Eye, Minnemic. and Left Hand. Geo. Pierce of Co. "F" was killed trying to save John Smith. There was one other of the 1<sup>st</sup> killed and nine of the 3d all through their own fault. They would get up to the edge of the bank and look over, to get a shot at an Indian under them, and get an arrow put through them. When the women were killed the Bucks did not seem to try and get away, but fought desperately. Charly Autabee wished me to write all about it to you. He says he would have given anything if you could have been there.

I suppose Cramer has written to you, all the particulars, so I will write half. Your family is well. Billy Walker, Col. Tappan, Wilson (who was wounded in the arm) start for Denver in the morning. There is no news I can think of. I expect we will have a hell of a time with Indians this winter. We have 200 men at the Post – Anthony in command. I think he will be dismissed when the facts are known in Washington. Give my regards to any friends you come across, and write as soon as possible.

Yours &c