

# THANK GOD *for* MICHIGAN



Company C of the 24th Michigan Infantry  
Regiment of the Iron Brigade

J. Michael Joslin, SUVCW



*Ralph Terry enlisted in Company C of the 24th Michigan Infantry Regiment in 1862. The regiment was soon assigned to the most famous unit in the Union Army - the Iron Brigade. The 24th Michigan needed to prove itself, and did so at Fredericksburg, earning them the coveted "black hats", but would later pay for them in blood at Gettysburg, and numerous other battles. Thank God for Michigan is the story of Ralph Terry's experiences.*

# Thank God for Michigan

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# **Thank God for Michigan**

**J. Michael Joslin**

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ISBN 978-1-62646-633-3

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2013

First Edition

# Chapter 1

## Michigan Responds

At the beginning of 1862, the Union Army was not accepting any enlistments, but then in April, a battle was fought in Tennessee, at a place called Shiloh. Many a good man died there, both Union and Confederate. Then, somewhere near Richmond, Virginia, a lot more Union soldiers were lost in what became known as the Seven Days battles. Many more were lost due to disease.

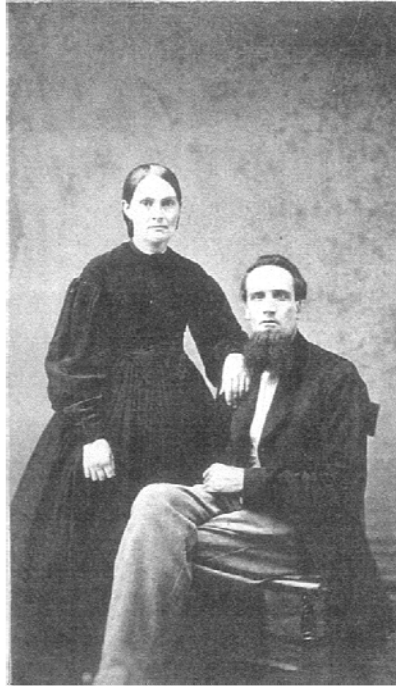
So, near the end of June, President Lincoln called for 300,000 more men, asking Michigan to provide six regiments.

In the western end of Wayne County, Michigan, are the small farming communities of Plymouth, Canton, Nankin, Livonia, and Salem.

In late July of 1862, the people of this area first heard of plans to form a company which would become a part of the newly formed 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry Regiment.

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Ralph and Lizzie

It had been a hot July day, but earlier rain showers had cooled the evening air. The air smelled fresh, as it often did after rain showers. The sky was a deep blue, clear except for clouds that remained after the earlier rain. Some were wispy, some like cotton balls. Such a beautiful and restful sight as this, made it difficult to comprehend that much of the country, many miles south of here, was in the agony of a bloody, ferocious civil war.

Sitting on the front porch, enjoying the fresh, cool air, and the colors of the oncoming sunset, were 30 year old Ralph Terry, and his 31 year old wife, Elizabeth. They had been married for only 2 years, and she was expecting their first child.

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The war was very much on the minds of the people of this area. Much of the news had been very discouraging, with many battles lost, and many a good man lost in these battles.

A few weeks prior to President Lincoln's call for more men, Lizzie, with a look of concern on her face, asked Ralph, "If this war continues much longer, they are going to need more men. You wouldn't leave me to go fight in this thing, would you?"

Ralph hadn't expected this question from her, so he sat and thought carefully before answering. "Many of the fellers around these parts have been talking a lot about wanting to do their part. To be honest, a part of me wants to go and fight. After all, my grandfather, Parshall Terry, fought in the Revolution that made our country what it is, but another part has been thinkin' that I really don't care a whole lot whether or not them people down south want to secede and become their own country. If that's what they want to do, then let 'em!"

"But Ralph," Lizzie asked, "what about all those slaves? Isn't slavery wrong?"

"I reckon slavery is wrong," Ralph responded. "We ain't got any of them darkies around these parts. Never even met one before. What I don't understand is we farmers here in the north work our own farms, with our own two hands and strong backs. The nearest thing we have to slaves is the livestock we use to pull our plows and wagons, and get us to and from places we need to be, but most of us treat them animals with kindness, and respect them for the work they do for us. When we do need help, we hire someone and pay them what the work is worth, or we neighbors help each other to get the job done. Them Southern farmers, I guess, are lazy or weak, or just scared

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to get their hands dirty. Instead of paying for help, they use slaves so they don't have to pay. I've heard stories that they treat them darkies something horrible. Anyhow, I am concerned that, if I sign up and go away to war, what would become of our farm? Lizzie, you can't do it yourself, being with child like you are. I just can't see how I could leave."

Lizzie wanted to believe he would not enlist, but somehow sensed that this was not his final answer.

\*

In mid-July, a big rally was held at Campus Martius in Detroit. There was a lot of patriotic talk and grand speeches. Some Southern sympathizers spread a rumor suggesting there was going to be a draft. This caused the formation of an angry mob, who attempted to bring harm to the speakers. Wayne County Sheriff, Mark Flanigan, Judge Henry Morrow, and others, held off the mob until they dispersed. What the mob attempted to do, failed. Recruiting and donations of money and supplies continued with even more enthusiasm.

\*

A week after Ralph and Elizabeth had their conversation about the war they hitched up the wagon and went into downtown Plymouth for supplies. Ralph dropped Lizzie at Dr. Merriman's office for a check-up. After her appointment, she would walk to Butler's Dry Goods and await Ralph there. Ralph continued on to Conner's Hardware.

As he headed to Conner's, he noticed a large gathering in front of Charlie Root's saloon. He was curious, but continued on. He only needed a small keg of nails, and a new blade for his bucksaw. As he



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was looking over the bucksaw blades, Michael Conner walked over and stood beside him.

“Hello, Ralph. How’ve you been?”

“Fair to middlin’, Mike. How about you?”

“Couldn’t be better, Ralph, couldn’t be better. How’s that wife of yours?”

“Lizzie’s fine. She went to see the doc for a check-up.”

“You hoping for a boy, Ralph?”

“Well, I think every man wishes for a boy, especially us farmers. Don’t have to hire farm hands. If it’s a girl, I’ll love her just the same. When she’s growed enough, she can help Lizzie, and who knows, if she is a sturdy enough girl, she might work as hard as a boy.”

“So, Ralph, you planning to join up like the others?”

“Join what?”

“You ain’t heard the latest news? They’re getting ready to form a regiment in Detroit, mostly Wayne County men.”

“Yeah, I heard. That must be why there is a lot of excitement outside of Charlie Root’s,” Ralph concluded.

“Well, what’s got them all riled up is the news that, beginning of August 5<sup>th</sup>, they will be enlisting 100 men from our area to form a company for the new regiment.” Mike explained.

Ralph continued looking over the bucksaw blades, checking for the sharpest, not remarking on what Mike Conner had just told him.

“Well?”

“Well what?” Ralph knew what Mike was asking, but really didn’t want to answer, nor did he have an answer. Deep within him, he had hoped that this day would not come, that they would not be needed.

“I best be gettin’ over to Butler’s. Lizzie will be waitin’ for me.” He left Mike standing without an answer. Mike understood.

Ralph loaded his purchases into the wagon and led the team down Main Street. The men were still gathered outside the saloon. The beer and whiskey were flowing and the men were getting louder. Out of all the noise, Ralph heard a familiar voice shout out. It was that of his brother-in-law, Jim Seely.

“Hey Ralph, get over here!” shouted Jim. “Did ya hear the news?”

“Yes, Jim, Mike Conner told me.”

“Ain’t it glorious, Ralph? At last we are going to get into this war! We’re gonna whip some Reb asses!” Jim said confidently.

“Come over here and have a beer with us,” called out Augustus Pomeroy.

“Now, Auggie, you know I don’t partake in such things,” answered Ralph.

“But this here is one special occasion,” explained Augustus.

“Perhaps, but I ain’t about to start such bad habits now, even for this.”

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“You gonna join?” asked Jim.

“I ain’t gave much thought to it. I doubt your sister would be too happy if I did. I’ll have to think and pray on it. Anyhow, I best be gettin’ on to Butler’s. Lizzie must be there by now, and thinkin’ I got lost.”

“See you in the park on August 5<sup>th</sup>,” someone yelled. Ralph continued on down Main, again without responding.

\*

Ralph arrived at Butler’s Dry Goods, secured the team and wagon, and went inside. Lizzie was standing amongst a couple of women, wives of some of the men over at the saloon. She saw him enter, and he saw a look of concern on her face.

“I was wondering what became of you. You didn’t have that much to get at Conner’s, and you ain’t that much of a talker, so I know you didn’t get into a big discussion with Mr. Conner.”

“You’re right about that,” he answered. “I got waylaid by a mob in front of Root’s.”

“You don’t have to explain, dearest. I already know about them and what they’re celebrating.”

“Figures. You women folk are quicker with the gossip than a lady of the night with a cheap customer.”

One of the women Lizzie had been with was considered one of the town’s huffy old “battleaxes.” Upon hearing Ralph’s remark, she tilted her head back, stuck her nose in the air, and as she stormed off, uttered, “Well! I never!”

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“Well, Ralph, as usual you managed to make her mad again.”

“She just weren’t born with a sense of humor, is all. I pity her husband. Never figured how she snagged him to begin with.”

Ralph handed Mr. Butler a list of what supplies they needed. Two spools of thread, 6 yards of calico, 2 yards lace, 2 pair of stockings, 4 pounds coffee, 1 barrel of flour, 7 ½ pounds of sugar, 1 pound soda crackers, 1 jug of molasses, nutmeg, cinnamon, 1 can condensed milk, 1 gallon kerosene oil, and 1 pound of gunpowder.

“They asked if I was goin’ to sign up.”

“What did you tell them?”

“Nothin’.”

### **The Nail**

Every year, at harvest time, Plymouth would hold a fall festival in the park to celebrate the harvest. There were many festivities and games, but the most popular with the men was the turkey shoot.

There would not be a festival this year, as many of the men would be off to war, but during last year’s festival, once again Ralph Terry won the turkey shoot. Known for his shooting abilities with his Kentucky long rifle, he had won the past several years. Many of the men loved to bet on the event, but it became difficult to bet on it when they already knew who would win. If there were strangers at the festival they would be cajoled into betting on someone else, or to participate in the event and bet on themselves.

After awarding the prize to Ralph, one of the men, looking for something more exciting to wager on, came up with an idea. He found

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an old 16d cut nail lying on the ground, bent down, picked it up and held it up so all could see it.

“Hey fellers, I got an idea. Let’s see just how good Ralph is with that musket of his. How about I hammer this nail part way in that fence rail off yonder and we can all bet on whether or not Ralph can hit it!”

They all agreed the man had what sounded like a good plan, so he walked on down the road to the fence, picked up a rock off the ground and pounded the nail into the top of the rail about half an inch.

“Good God,” someone hollered. “I cain’t even see the nail. That’s got to be too far away!”

“Whattaya think, Ralph? Think you ought to get closer?”

“Nope,” Ralph said with a grin on his face. “That’s just fine right there. I gotta admit though, this one might just be too hard for me.”

Then the betting began in earnest. Someone was heard to say, “Did ya hear that? He don’t sound too sure he can hit it.” That just increased the betting against Ralph.

Ralph loaded his musket. He knelt down and picked up a pinch of loose dirt, held his hand up and let the dirt sprinkle down, checking for wind, then stood back up and waited for the betting to conclude. Most of the bets were against Ralph this time.

When the betting was complete, the men became silent. Only whispering could be heard discussing whether or not he could hit this all but invisible nail.

Ralph turned to a man next to him and asked, “You see that white-washed plank? How about pick it up, carry it down and lean it up agin that tree directly behind the nail so I’ll have a better idea where the nail is at?”

One of the men that heard that remarked, “Hear that? He needs that plank put behind it ‘cause he cain’t see the nail!” Another flurry of betting occurred.

After the plank was put in place, and betting completed, silence again returned. After rechecking for wind, Ralph stood sideways to the target and slowly raised his musket and then poured primer in the pan. He first half-cocked it and nestled the gun stock to his cheek, then full-cocked it. He took aim. To the men watching, it seemed an eternity, but in actuality, it was only a second until he squeezed the trigger.

At first was the flash and smoke as the primer lit, immediately followed by a large flash from the muzzle and its loud report as the lead ball flew down range.

They all saw the white plank wobble and then fall to the ground. Silence again, as all who stood there could not tell if the nail had been hit.

“Well, I think we should all go and see,” suggested Ralph. They all followed him in a group, so closely massed that it was an almost comical sight seen from a distance. When they got a few feet from the rail, the men let out a gasp. The nail was no longer embedded in the rail.

Men, who no doubt had bet on Ralph, began patting him on the back, and much money grudgingly exchanged hands.

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A couple of men began looking on the ground on both sides of the fence, trying to find the nail, wanting to see where the lead hit the nail to see just how accurate Ralph was. As they were searching, finding nothing a young boy walked over and picked up the plank.

“Well, I’ll be! Hey, everyone! You gotta look at this,” he yelled, holding up the board.

One of the men searching for the nail shook his head and said, “We already know he hit the board. It’s the nail we want!”

The boy smiled. “Well then, you are gonna want to see this.”

They all formed a circle around the boy, and looked at the plank. There, lodged in the plank was the lead ball, but more remarkably, a few inches from it, was the nail, much worse for wear, a bit bent, but partially embedded in the board head first.

People back in the park, and throughout the town, could hear the cheers that followed. Ralph was carried back to the park on their shoulders. Several men offered him swigs from their jugs, but being a temperate man, he politely declined.

The story would be repeated often throughout the festival. It is well that this festival was this exciting as, for the next four years, there would not be a festival, and for some, never again.

**The Signin’**

Tuesday, August 5, 1862 –

A huge crowd assembled in the park in the center of Plymouth, and amid much fanfare and excitement, the enlisting began. Nearly the whole company was raised in just two hours.

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Ralph did not sign up that day, as he had yet to decide, and had other affairs to tend to. But he heard about the event. Jim Seely didn't sign up that day either, but would on Friday.

It was on Friday that Lizzie noticed Ralph sitting in his rocker on the front porch, obviously lost in deep thought. She knew her man well enough to recognize his thoughts were troubled ones. She sat down in her chair, but remained silent for several minutes, not wanting to disturb his thoughts. Besides, she was sure she knew what was troubling him. A decision was in the works, a decision that could affect both their lives for years to come.

At last, Ralph stood up and tapped his pipe on the outside of the porch railing, emptying it of its burnt tobacco. He turned and faced Lizzie.

"Lizzie, I've been doin' some thinkin'."

"I could see that," said Lizzie, stating the obvious.

Ralph felt a tightening in his belly, not sure how to break this news to Lizzie.

"Lizzie.....I, uh, well....."

"Ralph. I already know what you are struggling to tell me. You're going, aren't you?"

"I got to be honest, my darlin'. I don't know if I'm makin' the right decision." He had been looking into her eyes as he spoke, but now looked skyward. "God, forgive me if I'm wrong, goin' off to kill other men." He turned back to Lizzie. "I've been thinkin'" and prayin' on this for days now. I believe this is somethin' that needs to be done, and there are so many who believe in this cause. So, yes, I am gonna



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join. I just worry for you, our child, our home, and the farm. It'll soon be time for harvest too."

Lizzie bowed her head for a few moments. She then looked up at Ralph, stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him. She spoke softly, "I'm not happy with your decision, my dear husband, but I understand why you feel you need to do this. Tears ran down her cheeks and she buried her face in his shirt. "I can't stop you from doing this. I can't stop you from worrying about me and our child, but I'll be fine. Our parents will look after me. As for the farm....this is a farming community. We all help each other when we need to. Things will be fine."

He reached down and took her chin in his hand and tilted it up and then kissed her tenderly.

"Come... let's take a walk down to Tonquish Creek."

On Saturday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, Ralph signed up with Company C of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Over the next five days, Ralph put affairs in order and made arrangements to have Lizzie and the farm looked after.

**Sweet Sorrow**

Thursday afternoon, August 14, 1862 –

Ralph's 31<sup>st</sup> birthday was coming up on the 16<sup>th</sup>, but he would be leaving for Detroit with Company C in the morning and would be with the regiment on his birthday. It was decided by the family to celebrate his birthday this afternoon. They all agreed to not mention the war, but make it a joyful time, like any other birthday, but the tension was there, nevertheless.

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Thursday evening, August 14, 1862 –

Despite all the warlike and heroic boasting during the earlier festivities, Ralph, like many others of the newly formed Company C, were now home, alone with whatever family they had. Their demeanor changed to gentleness, their tone of voice became softer. Their conversations with their wives, and any other adults in the household, an idle banter, laced with nervous laughter. They gave much attention to any children they might have.

When darkness fell upon the Terry household, Ralph and Lizzie prepared for bed. Ralph sat quietly smoking his pipe in the corner of the bedroom, watching Lizzie while she bathed in the old galvanized tub. The bathwater glistened on her skin in the lantern light, making it appear even more smooth and soft than it already was. When she completed her bath, she pulled on a robe, her usual bedclothes that she normally wore to bed, left draped over a chair. She sat down before her vanity and began the process of brushing her long hair.

Most nights, Ralph wouldn't have paid a lot of attention to Lizzie's bedtime routine, but this night, he found his senses heightened. He found a need to burn into his memory everything about Lizzie, her long hair, the curves of her body, her beautiful face.

She turned, looked at him and smiled. She slowly walked over to her side of the bed, undid the sash of her robe and let it slide off her shoulders and fall to the floor. Although 5 months pregnant, she still appeared beautiful in his eyes. She lay down on top of the covers and invited him with her eyes. Ralph rose up from his chair, removed his clothing, and lay down beside her. She had that fresh fragrance of lilacs that he so loved. They laid there facing each other, staring deeply into each other's eyes for a very long time, entering each

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other's souls through their eyes. She finally reached out with one hand, ran her fingers through his hair, and then laid the palm of her hand on his cheek. He then reached out and did the same to her. He moved his fingers across her eyebrows and lightly touched her eyelashes, then he caressed her lips with his fingertips.

They moved closer to each other and gently kissed. As he did so, a tear came to the corner of one eye. He moved his face to the crook of her neck and discovered it lacking the scent of lilac, but rather only that scent that is Lizzie. As he inhaled this scent, he wondered to himself, "Will I be able to remember her scent while I am away?"

"Ralph," Lizzie whispered. "I love you so much, and I'm afraid."

"And I love you, Elizabeth, and I'm afraid too," he whispered back. He rarely called her by her formal name, but only at the most intimate moments did he call her Elizabeth.

"Blow out the lantern, Ralph." He did as she requested, and then she pulled his body tightly to hers. They quietly and slowly made love, not wanting the night to end, not wanting to sleep, but wanting to remain together in this most intimate fashion forever. There was little sleep to be had by either that night, as the coming events of the morning kept them from sleeping.

In the early morning, near sunrise, they laid there tightly wrapped in each other, staring closely into each other's eyes, an ache in each other's hearts so very painful. Many tears were shed from their eyes. "I love you," they said to each other countless times.

Finally, Ralph had to gently push away from her tight embrace, so strong that he feared hurting her as he did so.

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“It’s time, Elizabeth. We must get up, as we will be departing in a few hours.”

She pulled him back to her with an amazing strength for such a delicate woman.

“Please, dearest husband, one last time, and then I will fix you the best breakfast ever.”

### **The Parting**

Friday morning, August 15, 1862 -

After they finally arose from their bed, she handed Ralph clean clothing.

“Lizzie, I should wear what I wore yesterday. No doubt, once the regiment is formed, we will be issued uniforms. No need for clean clothing this day.”

“Ralph, please put on clean clothing,” she insisted. There is going to be many family and friends there to see you off, and I am sure much hugging to be done. I don’t want you to smell like a hard, sweaty day in the fields. Now, off with you to your morning necessities and then get dressed!”

He left the house, got the wagon ready, and hitched the horse to it. He wandered around the farm a bit, trying not to think of work that needed to be done. He went to the outhouse and then returned to the back porch, shaved, washed up at the basin, and finished dressing.

Alone for the time being, Lizzie gathered up his clothing he wore the day before, buried her nose in them and inhaled deeply. She smiled, then folded them and put them, unwashed in a trunk. This was

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her real motive for insisting he change into clean clothing. She hoped his scent would remain on his clothing from now until he would one day return to her – forever. She thought that, by doing so, whenever she got to missing him, she would open the trunk, pull out an article of his clothing, and smell his scent once again, perhaps alleviating the ache of loneliness. His clothing would remain in that trunk until his return at the end of the war. She had no inkling how long that would turn out to be.

When he returned to the house, they sat down to eat, but first, holding hands, Ralph said a blessing.

“Heavenly Father, give us grateful hearts for these blessings which we are about to receive, and help this food to the nourishment of our bodies and strengthen our spirit in Thee. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Then each said a separate prayer. She prayed he would safely return to her. He prayed that the Lord would look after her and their unborn child.

As they were finishing breakfast, family began arriving. First Ralph’s parents, Stevens and Sarah Terry arrived, with Ralph’s little sister, 11 year old Alwilde. Shortly after, Lizzie’s parents, Hector and Dorinda Seely arrived, as did Lizzie’s brother James, along with his wife, Catherine, and their four children, Miramani, Ada, Hattie, and James, Jr.

The men remained on the porch, smoking and drinking coffee. Ralph told them what work needs to be done on his farm. They assured Ralph that they would look after his farm, as well as Lizzie.

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“You and Jim just concern yourselves with what has to be done in this war, and look after one another and come back home, safe and sound,” demanded Stevens Terry. Hector Seely agreed.

The women all gathered inside with Lizzie, as she nervously washed the breakfast dishes and cookware. She twice dropped a pan on the floor. Although visibly upset, she tried valiantly to hold back her tears. Sarah and Dorinda hugged her tightly and comforted her as best they could.

“You know, every fiber of my body wants to scream out for him not to go, but I have to resist that urge, as it would only make leaving harder on him.”

Finally, Jim stuck his head in the door, “It’s time we headed to town.”

Lizzie wiped away her tears and pulled herself upright, not wanting her dear husband to see her sorrow and fear. They boarded two wagons and began the journey into Plymouth. Very little was spoken by any of them the entire trip.

As they arrived in Plymouth, and neared the park in the center of town, things were somber. It was a morning of heavy hearts, kisses, tears and long hugs goodbye.

“Well, looks as if we are about to leave,” Ralph observed.

First he shook hands with his father-in-law, and then his father. As he did so, his father pulled him tightly to him and gave him a fatherly hug.

“God protect you, son.”

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Next, he turned to his mother. She hugged him so tight he had to pull himself away.

“God bless you, my son. Please return safely to us. I love you.”

Ralph’s little sister, Alwilde, stood looking up at him with big, sad eyes. Ralph bent down, lifted her up in his arms, hugged her tightly and gave her a kiss on the cheek. As Alwilde tended to be somewhat of a tomboy, Ralph told her, “Alwilde, I leave the protection and welfare of our family to you, my little soldier. Be a brave soldier for me and the whole family.”

“I will, I promise,” she assured her big brother. Then she asked, “You will bring me back a present when you come back, won’t you?”

Ralph smiled. “Of course I will. I promise you that.”

Last was Lizzie. They stood looking at each other. She stood there in a dignified stance, determined that she would not cry. Ralph stepped forward and wrapped her in his arms.

“I love you, my dearest husband. You’re dearer to me than I thought. God go with you and keep you safe. I know deep in my heart that you will return to me, but fear that you will not be the same man that stands before me now. This war is bound to change you, but come back to me, nevertheless.”

“I will,” Ralph assured her, and then kissed her deeply.

Much the same ritual was done by James and the family.

Transport was provided with 4 horse team wagons. They boarded the wagons and finally departed. Their families stood waving as their

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men headed down the road, none wanting to leave until the men were out of sight.





*Ralph Terry enlisted in Company C of the 24th Michigan Infantry Regiment in 1862. The regiment was soon assigned to the most famous unit in the Union Army - the Iron Brigade. The 24th Michigan needed to prove itself, and did so at Fredericksburg, earning them the coveted "black hats", but would later pay for them in blood at Gettysburg, and numerous other battles. Thank God for Michigan is the story of Ralph Terry's experiences.*

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