

Letter from Colonel John W. Caldwell to Sarah Barclay Caldwell

Manchester Jany [sic] 7, 1863

Since writing the enclosed letter the battle of Murfreesboro has been fought. Through the mercy of God I have been spared harmless. Our Regt. Was posted on a hill overlooking Stone's [sic] River on the left of our right wing as a support to Cobb's battery and one other battery posted at same place. This position was the key to the battleground and we were ordered to hold it at all hazards. We threw up some rifle pits in the night. Shell grape and solid shot fell like hail. It was an awful place but through the mercy of God we lost but few men, only one killed and some twenty five wounded in Regt. None of my old company much hurt. Gabe Lewis slightly wounded in leg (flesh wound). We were ordered out in line of battle on Sunday morning 28th Dec. 1862. Our Regt. had a skirmish Monday evening and were shelled all day Tuesday. Wednesday we had a general engagement the loss of killed and wounded fearful. We were skirmishing constantly up to Saturday night the 4th January 1863. The right wing of the enemy was driven back four miles the right [sic] only three or four hundred yards. On Saturday night 4th Janyt [sic] 1863 we commenced retreating our Regt as usual covering the retreat. We arrived here today – this place is 28 miles from M. We held battleground for four days retreated because enemy was reinforced and we had no fresh troops. Our troops numbered thirty thousand infantry and artillery and three thousand cavalry. I know this is true because I was told so when plan of engagement was explained to officers of the Brigade Saturday night Dec. 27, 1862. Enemy's force estimated at fifty thousand. Our loss in killed and wounded and prisoners is five thousand. Enemy's loss is fifteen thousand of whom fifty one hundred are prisoners. We were compelled to leave the greater part of our wounded about twenty five hundred at M. They fell into the hands of the enemy. We had no way to move them. We had in our hospitals there about fifteen hundred wounded federals. We captured one Major General and two Brigadiers. The bodies of Maj Gens Sill and Davis fell into our hands and the former was buried at Murfreesboro by our folks. We captured forty one pieces of artillery and lost six. Our army has retreated safely our loss in property small. Our cavalry burned six hundred of the enemy's wagons and drove off three thousand mules and a large lot of cattle hogs etc. The battery we were supporting mowed down the enemy by hundreds. I saw one shot (a shell) that knocked down the colors and all the color company of a federal Regt. I regret to announce to you the death of Henry Hall. He was killed on Friday both legs torn off with shell. I could not get his body. Col Hanson Candy our brigade was killed on Friday evening. God grant that this bloody and destructive war may soon be brought to a close and peace once more bless our land. Oh how I want to see you my dear wife. Remember your promise dear Sallie. Dr. Byrne

Blake, Ryan Gilliam, Mark Perry McLean, are all well. Give my kindest regards to all. We sent heavy reinforcements to Mrfs [sic] before recent battle. The Yanks did not attempt to follow us Good bye my dear wife. May Heaven's richest blessings attend you and ours and friends and loved ones. I have not washed my face for two weeks until today. Kiss baby and receive a thousand for yourself.

J W C