

69 Dearborn Street

Chicago Feb. 25, 1904

E. B. Stevens

South Fork

North Carolina

Dear Bro.

Your last letter after your arrival home from WASHINGTON HOSPITAL received – I have no later news.

Since that time I have tried to put in shape the enclosed papers of the Privates' notes but have been handicapped by the many complaints incident to old age and the northern winter months.

Have several more ideas, soon as I can place them in shape, if not unpleasant reading, will forward them to you. Hope this will find you in better condition than ourselves. Altho' I do not complain as long as the door of the little shop is kept open.

Yours,

S.C. Stevens

Leaving the gun in the hands of the sergeant, and the horses in the care of the guard, and thinking I had done enough that day, and tired out with my duties; now in company with Jewett, my partner, we bough and found a quiet place to sleep. There was a small cleared space large enough to spread our blankets on the ground in the bushes to the right, and rear of the guns, a little below the brow of the hill from where the guns were still stationed. This position we had held all day as a battery, with the exception of the time that our gun had been to the river notwithstanding the desperate efforts of the enemy all day and at all points to dislodge us.

From Jewett, I learned that near by, toward where our feet would be, at the edge of the bushes our two comrades lay, Wiley, who thumbed the piece, and Finney, at the time he was sponging the gun, both fell that day. One solid shot from the rebel guns killed both at the same moment. Here they were buried side by side, with their army blankets wrapped about them. It is a mournful fact that these comrades of ours, who were buried here were the first to establish this part of the field, the burying ground of the battlefield. I now understand, that this is part of the ground selected by the government, and occupied and known as the graveyard of the Battlefield of Stone River.

The bodies of our men were taken up, and buried in Rosehill according to the agreement of the Chicago Board of Trade, after the battery was mustered out of the service, and lasting peace had been declared throughout the country. Several disasters and changes to our men all along the line, secured soon after our gun was taken off the field in the morning. The cannoneers of our gun were detailed to replace those who were killed or disabled on the other guns. When the detail was made Jewett went forward and took Finney's place, withdrawing at the command "load" the ramrod still sticking in the mouth of the piece, where it had remained when Finney was struck down—Jewett described his sensations and feelings in taking the place and position of the dead man, a model soldier, and the picture was not inviting nor pleasant.

To sum up at this hour—with our gun out of the fight, Adams, Stagg, Griffin, Bloom, Howard, Wiley-Finney, Camberg and Carver, killed or wounded, the possible success of holding the position longer seemed impossible. The enemy in the meantime had taken the advantage of the lull on our firing line; having at this hour advanced and strengthened their position by a full and fresh brigade of Infantry in our front. They marched on to the field on regular order with music and battle flag flying; spurred on with a Rebel yell, opened up and renewed their tactics of the morning. With our range of their front and the knowledge we had gained of the ground in the morning and the full view of the brigade in motion; our guns opened on their ranks with an appalling effect, and a deadly execution.

Constant and rapid fire was kept up, from this commanding position and our pieces swept again and again the rebel line of attack; This was about four o'clock in the afternoon, when the rebels made their last final charge and fierce encounter of the day. They met with an overwhelming, sad and deadly repulse, and this closed the fight of the day.

And as subsequent events disclosed, in that sweeping tide of battle—the end of the fight on the right wing of the Army of the Cumberland, at Stone River.

It was our brother S.H. who made the suggestion although it was Robinsons' duty, and business to look after the interest of the first section; and the idea was acted on at once; to overhaul and by measurements of the old gun carriage axle left on the field; the one we passed in coming into position in the morning, would fit our gun. The blacksmith I had brought along, and the other artificers were put to work taking off our old broken and twisted axle-tree and replacing with the captured one to take its place.

This work was ascertained could be neatly and successfully completed by the artizans, with aid of such few tools as they had at hand.

By my persistence and boldness in moving the gun from the rear, to the front and S.H.s timely suggestion acted upon; it was made possible to place our gun in its old position, at the post of honor, late that night, ready for action in the morning.

There was on a certain time a little city; a great king came and fought against it, with big battering rams, and there was found a poor wise man in it, by his wisdom, who delevered the city. "Yet no man remembered that same poor man:"

I had a bottle of brandy, given me by Mrs. S.H. which was in my pack saddle, and I remarked to Jewett, at this hour of retiring, having had no supper, we should drink the contents of the flask before lying down, as possibly we might not want it on the morrow.

The night was damp and cold,-- no campfires allowed.

We drank the brandy with our any apparent effect, and lay down-wrapped our blankets around us; our clothes, caps and boots intact.

Through the night we spooned, to keep ourselves warm, and wished for the morning, yet dreaded the approach of day.

At the early dawn the command was awakended, --with orders to get breakfast around a small show of camp fires, and as quickly as possible.

There was no new attack, like the early hams raid of, the previous morning on our forces. All was quiet along our line and the Rebels, where the contending forces are nearly matched, it was as though an unwritten law of the commanders, should be observed in the cessation of hostilities, while the rank and file could obtain necessary sleep, rest, and food for the struggle for success, either, by strategy, or by force of arms the coming day.

The vigilance of the guard about the guns was kept up continuously during the night, from fear of a sneak up, through the woods by a scouting party of the enemy, who knew the exact location of the battery; either to spike the guns, or turn them all loaded upon our armament in the rear.

The morning hours were taken up in refilling the caissons from the supply ammunition barn ordered up, on the field, from the rear.

In the general overhauling of the condition of the contents of the limbers of the guns, and the replenishing of each caisson, especial attention was given to the explosive shell, and the time fuse. I noticed then, and remember now, the many bright colored flannel bags, in which the powder was encased—a very seductive looking little pellet, how gingerly they were handled.

We remained at this post and held this position with half the guns sighted to the southwest, and the other half to the south east, covering with our right the scene of the yesterday's disasters, and our left guarding the old cotton field. A dense growth of wood and bushes intervened between our extreme right and our left. This heavy timber was a field of many a sharp-shooter, and from this position up a tree came so many of the minnie bullets, which harassed us yesterday and today. From this hidden position they fired at intervals at their leisure and could not be dislodged.

Not knowing in which direction the enemies line of attack for the day would be made upon us; in the event of either position being menaced, we were prepared for action. The day—the first of the New Year was quiet along the enemies front, possibly they had during the night withdrawn their forces from their left flank. Only a small show of a fight far away toward our left, where there was a desultory firing kept up during the day by the enemies guns engaged in a mild duel, with the guns of some Ohio Battery on our side—We could observe from where we lay on the ground beside our guns—the effect of the shots on either side—there was little damage done.

A feint as it were to engage our attention in the front, and the sharp shooters outlook on our movements, to cover the maneuvers by the enemy preparatory, to some new design on our front or flanks. According to orders we retired from this strategic point, which we had held so long with such distinguished bravery, over other competitors, and a loss unprecedented in a battery in action, of three men killed and eight wounded. We fell back a little after dark very quietly, with as little noise as possible, to a point about half way from the firing line, and our former camp, at the bend in the river. Here we went into camp. Although the sun shone out brightly most of the day—The weather after dark was cold, damp, a drizzling rain set in, with a threatening storm for the night.

We were allowed small camp fires/ Our suppers consisted of company stew or boiled fresh meat, without salt; this with hot coffee, and our hard bread made us a warm meal; not a very healthy diet. We were indebted to Emery the colored cook who followed our fortunes from Camp Douglas for the fresh meat. In coming with one of the forage wagons loaded with corn the day before, the fight, he succeeded in capturing and killing an animal, and threw it on one of the loaded wagons. This he accomplished almost by his own effort and by this means gave us one good warm meal of which at that time, we stood in so much need. It is a truthful fact this was the only substantial meal, unsatisfactory as unsalted food can be to the digestive organs, we had had during the four constant duty on the battlefield.

The ground where we were located was wet and considerably cut up by the march of the troops, and heavy gun carriages during the days of action, over this portion of the field—The location of my sleeping quarters assigned to Jewett and myself was beside the roadway, but pleasantly situated in front of the campfire. I went back toward our old camp, to obtain some of those famous pin boughs for our bed, but in the darkness could find none. So I turned toward, and down a small gully where I found as I afterward

learned, a plum tree, This fortunately had been cut partly in two at its base by a shell. Not having an axe, hatchet or knife, by considerable exertion in twisting I broke off the remaining portion of the trunk---I hauled the brush top, over the ground; up to the camping place, in front of the fire.

On my arrival I was made a subject of a remark from my company, other than Jewett, from whom I had encouragement, to know, "what I had there?" I assured them this bush would make a very desirable bed, when it was prepared, to sleep on in the event of rain during the night, we lopped off some of the branches and on these bushes we spread our blankets, we slept high and comparatively dry—our rubber blanket covering us from the disagreeableness of the turning water and mud beneath us.

This was the third night on the field; the day's ending of the first of the New Year. I am sorry I have attempted to write every detail of the action of the field, as they presented themselves to my view, or their knowledge came to my mind at the time or later on. I would prefer to skip the events of this

forenoon though to do so, I would not present the truthful account, I started out to write, taking the common soldiers standpoint of vision.

We moved out of our camping place in the morning and took up a position fronting the southeast, on a cleared space to our front—the edge of an open wood to our left, and the ground sloping to our rear. Here we were held in the early forenoon, a continuation of the feint of the previous day, by a severe bombardment from the enemies guns, till the captain in his excited condition, without orders fired into, and wounded several of our men belonging to a battery, who were defending the position on our front. it was my opinion then, at this period of the day's fight, and now, that the Captain imbibed too much of the contents of the canteen, he carried at his side, and also, I am confirmed in my judgement when I met him in the wood down in front, and to the right of the Battery, in regard to my instructions about bringing up the gun from the rear; that he was also at that time considerably under the influence of brandy.

We ceased firing on orders by a messenger from the front, and withdrew to the left and rear of this position, where we remained in readiness to move at the work "march".

In the afternoon, the enemy had amassed their troops, and moved forward their fighting forces, a solid formation, along the southern, the bend, and the eastern heights of Stone River, covering our entire left flank.

The old fashioned sure way of fighting was our mode of warfare, with so long a line of communication to our rear to keep open. We had a distinct right, centre and left to protect. With the rebels they simply recognized a right and left formation. By a simple maneuver on the field they easily shifted their line of battle, from left to right, or, executed a series of flanking attacks at ease.

Our movements were more sure and a safer progress in so stubborn a fight, as Stone River where, there were us reserves not engaged in the fight.

About four o'clock orders came to "mount" and to move by "column"; our route lay through the open woods on our left. We made this movement at a trot and then a gallop. After passing through the timber

and brush we came into a large open field, with trees and bush along the banks of the river in our front— where, a General acts on the defensive, our positions chosen by the General were strong ones.

We were assigned and occupied a position on this imposing situation, on the field, on the right of fifty four guns, massed along the banks of the west side of the river.

A little to our right and toward the front of our guns was an old deserted house. Our forces, and the enemy were engaged before we came on to the field. We came into position quickly and began our usual rapid fire. All the guns along the battle front fired shot, shell, grape and canister, while the infantry who supported us on the right, opened up with a continuous musketry practice along their line.

These missels hurtled through the air; carried along the banks and over the Stone River, and into the solid ranks of the advancing rebels. Or, in many an artillery duel such a one, as we were engaged in, with the Washington Artillery Company of New Orleans, in our immediate front across the river.

The shot and shell from the enemies guns fell on its banks, or else, from the post I occupied went far over our heads to the rear. Plainly, the enemy did not have the range of our position, like the fight of Wednesday, for, in this hail of shot and shell balls and bullets none took effect in our Battery. My gun was again out of order. This time it was dangerously hot from the rapid fire, Sergeant Deane was ready to excel in this engagement, and his replies to the enemies guns were given without a slack hand, by the amount of ammunition he threw into their ranks, and the battery of the New Orleans Company.

He was distracted at the thought of the silence of his piece, and the means of obtaining water from the river in the enemies front, to cool his gun. He finally obtained a bucketful for that purpose, at the old house to our front and right, The continuous firing ceased along our front, the attack was sustained and the enemy repulsed.

In the selection of this ground was the probable defeat of the attacking party, from the security of its position, and surroundings, and to this choice location was more than all else, and the amassing of so many guns made further advance by the enemy, an impossible feat, to march and to fight in the face of the mass of metal thrown into their ranks.

To the bravery of his artillerists, and position on the field is alone attributable the success of Stone Rivers, Friday's battle. This last efforts of the Rebels lasted about forty minutes, at an estimated loss to them, in that brief time of two thousand men.

When the order was given to "cease Firing", we also were ordered to "limber up". We left our companions in arms, and moved across the field in their rear, to the left, toward the bank of the river, to a point easy of access to the water front. We forded the stream at once. The water came to the edges of the cover of our limber, the ammunition chests of the guns and caissons. We gained the opposite shore in safety with our powder dry, at that hour it was toward night, threatening rain.

In the vicinity of this ford, Col. Joe Scott of the 19<sup>th</sup> Ills. Infantry was wounded, from the effect of the wounds he died after, I believe, coming back to Chicago.

We marched up the hill on the east shore of the river, and gained a position in advance of all other batteries-, occupying the ground where in the attack of the afternoon the New Orleans Company, planted their guns and threw shot and shell, point blank at us across the stream – In coming up the rivers bank, and at this part of the field, we came in contact with the dead, wounded, and dying soldiers of both sides.

The calls of the wounded were for water, and the groans of the dying were piteous—I could give them no assistance, nor leave my post of duty.

We retired from the post, greatly to our relief, without exchanging a shot, for there was no enemy in sight -- It was dark and began to rain, when we moved off the field, to the right, and wound along in our passage, under cover of the woods, following an old dirt road, on the sloping banks of the river in the direction of the ford. It was in these woods where many a fellow, friend or foe, in the darkness called to me, not to run over him, for he was wounded, and unable to move himself out of our track, I gave at their pleading cry, a wide sweep of the gun carriage, but in our onward tramp, I could not tell or make known to other drivers, at the various appeals for help along the road, in our return to the rear.

I fear many were crushed who were already badly wounded and killed perhaps by our guns and heavy caissons, in passing stumps and stones, in the noise and darkness of that rainy night.

We recrossed the river at the ford, and took up a long drive, to the rear of all our former locations on the eventful battleground.

For a camping place it was a safe retreat. The situation was in the ravine, the low ground, near where I had torn the plum tree from its stem, for my bedding the night before. This part of the field I remembered in passing to the rear, with the disabled gun was sparsely covered by a dismal growth of black timber and pine stumps, with ledges of rock cropping out toward the bank of the river out toward the bank of the river. In coming into camp the night was dark, and the hour was late, and the rain which began in a drizzle, when we left our post on the field, now continued to pour down in torrents, The ground was soaked in this flood. I lost my partner in the darkness—my blankets were wet, I lay down on the edge of our tarpaulin, thrown down on the rough ground near the gun. I have been on many a battle scene since – In latter campaigns, when fighting was constantly kept up all hours of the day and night—on the raid—on the scout—all night without sleep—in cold and wet—in snow and rain—with nothing to eat—nothing for days—I have anticipated in the narrative; but this my first severe experience, stands a sad reminder of first impressions, said to be lasting.

As far as my personal comfort was concerned that night, there was also the other thought. Of the surroundings. The additional dead, dying, and wounded left on the stormy field—The prisoners in the hands of the enemy. The dread disasters to our cause; the loss of the battle, The influence of these facts on the minds of the soldiery and with these vague ideas floating in ones mind, and worn with hunger, and the excitements of the day, lying in this gun covering, without a headrest was a more dreary night, in comparison, to Wednesday's when we wished for the day, yet dreaded its approach.

It was one of my cardinal points while in the service not to complain—I had taken the oath of office belonging to the soldier, and this trust I held sacred during the period of three years, and deemed it an unworthy act to find fault with the service and attendant hardships, which at the outset was expected to fall to the soldiers lot in the field; This night of all others would have been an exception, unless harnessed in with the right spirit of forbearance and endurance. S.H, that night slept or lay alongside, or curled up on the roots of an old pine stump, They were some protection from the wet beneath ones person, though not particularly soft. A much better bed, or resting place than where I lay. This was the eventful Friday night.

Saturday morning we moved back near by the ford, but not across the river, and went into camp at this point.

The command was worn with excitement, anxiety, marching, fighting, loss of sleep, the wet, cold and hunger during these historical days. Our supply wagons were well on their way toward Nashville in their mad rush to get back to the rear. This abandonment left us without camp equipage, and much needed rations of all kinds.

Our squad raised the wet tarpaulin, on which we had assayed to sleep the previous night, by rails, inclined at an angle toward a large log a fine place to make a fire heat away from the opposite direction from which, the wind at that time of the afternoon was then blowing furiously.

This with our proposed camp fire, in front would be a ground protection to our weary bodies from the threatening rain, and cold of the approaching night. It was my duty, after the horses were cared for, in company with three others on the detail to chop in three parts an old dry log in the rear of our gun. In this size, we could the more easily roll the sections up toward the pitched tarpaulins front. There with other accumulated fuel we proposed to build our fire.

By a great effort so weak were all of us, that it took a long time to chop this fallen tree in parts.

We rolled these portions along on skids, placing them against our backlog. Beside this we heaped on the fuel and lighted the fire large enough to dry out our wet cover and and for our warmth, and to cook by.

It continued to rain with some sleet falling during the night, with our ample protection, and our big fire, renewed in the hours while we slept, by the guard on duty, we were made comfortable in our exhausted condition.

Our suppers were of necessity a very frugal meal.

In the rapid advance by gallop to the front on Friday afternoon, passing the bushes, my haversack was torn from my saddle. I lost my knife, fork, spoon, a few watersoaked crackers, my china cup and crockery plate. The cup I especially missed for I never could obtain the flavor, or realize a pleasant taste to my coffee, drunk from one of the old tine cups. And I usually provided (when they could be obtained) myself with one of these plates and cups, I used them while I continued in the service, beside, they were more easily washed and kept clean.



We lay down on our blankets this night more like human beings and good soldiers in need of rest, than any of the previous nights on the battle ground.

I was not disturbed during the night – In the morning I found my cap full of water. I had placed it under the edge of our shelter, where the rain fell and caught the drippings along the edge of the tarpaulin. Turning the water out I put it on, but when the sun came out, and the warmth of my head the next day it gave a disastrous and unmilitary curl to the front piece.

Having received a ten days leave of absence it was on Saturday the 3<sup>rd</sup> that L.H. started for Nashville, He in his intriped, masterly way made through without escort, though not without hindrance, by many of the enemies scouting parties, at intervals along the road

And gave to the Chicago people the first news, the famous dispatch telling of our loss, and achievements.

“It reads:

Nashville Tenn. January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1863

‘Murray ? Nelson & Co.

“Chicago.

“Murfreesboro is ours, Terrific fighting on Friday. No more casualties on the Battery; it has won a glorious distinction.

S.H. Stevents”

Answers came to us in camp in the morning of the evacuation of the field by the enemy.

Positive news did not reach us till about five in the afternoon. The enemy was on the retreat and the victory was ours.

It is considered in military parlance, that no matter to what extent the loss mourned on either side of the contending forces, the one who gains the field is the victor.

---Official---

These are the results of 43,000 men engaged on our side—A larger number on the Rebel side.

Our loss        1294 Killed

                  7945 Wounded

                  1027 Missing

Rebel killed & wounded 10,000 (Probably estimated)

## 500 Prisoners

Grand Total            20, 766

Having a little curiosity, and some leisure on Sunday, I visited alone the old position of Wednesday, for the purpose of looking over the ground, from the point where the rebels shot at me, during the engagement while I was trying to, and did get my horses into position, to "limber up" that disable gun in the morning.

I walked down the hill, where the General descended in company with his escort,--I crossed the shallow stream at the bottom of a ravine, and passed upon the other side, to a small slight elevation and came into a circular opening in the woods. Here enclosed by rails, a temporary preparation I suppose, were gathered nearly a hundred of rebel dead, They were killed in the vicinity and undoubtedly were hit by shot and shell by the evidences of the mutilated condition of the remains.

Arms and legs torn asunder; held to their bodies by a scrap of clothing--Faces in an unrecognizable condition, but with a dread appearance. Some heads entirely gone. Bodies in a bent form or lying on one arm, Some with hand raised as if to ward off the approaching shell, others crouching or in a sitting position; All dressed in an undressed uniform, of butternut clothing , their pockets turned inside out.

I passed around this enclosure satisfied with the curiosity, I had had to see the position of the enemy lying here all unconscious and I stole away, like as a murderer would, who had looked upon his victim the second time and he was assured in his mind his man was dead, and he could see him again in cold blood before taking his silent departure.

In retracing my steps and looking upward and toward the brow of the hill on which had been located the Battery during the fight, I say how easily the rebels could interpret the certainty of the position of our guns and, silhouetted at every blaze from the discharge at the cannons mouth, made us a sure target, dressed in our red and blue uniforms, And I also saw the true disguise of their position so well hidden from our rapid fire, from which we could not discover neither dislodge or silence their guns.

Yours,

S.C. Stevens

One page of missing letter

Says, "we", that is the command build two bridges over these streams." One of the nights passed pleasantly. Of the other I have no recollection. Just as we were going to our sleeping quarters, the entire battery procured by armfuls of cotton taken from an old gin house situated on the other side of the road and some distance up the creek. This we put in our tent and spreading our blankets over this surface made a very comfortable and clean bed. This was the only night during the service on the field, I remember of having slept on a cotton bed, although I have burned hundreds of bales of this product while on the march or on the raid.

Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> of December we crossed Stuarts' Creek by a very commodious bridge and came on the ground made illustrious and known to us as the Battlefield of Stone River. Sometimes called by the Rebels as the Battle of Murfreesboro.

Yours very resp.

J.B. Stevens