

## Capt. Geo. A. Williams Letter

Capt. Geo. A. Williams, Adjutant, Govan's Brigade, To Capt. Irving A. Buck, Former Adjutant, Cleburne's Division Concerning the Battle of Franklin:

Capt. Geo. A. Williams

Dec. 14, 1864

Near Franklin, TN

My Dear Irving,

Yours of the 19th ult, reached me here on the 10th and I hasten to reply, although lack of mail facilities caused me to fear this will not arrive, and although I think it probable you have already left Americus, as you thought you would about the 1st inst. I wrote you from Tusculum and Florence, telling you of the manner in which I thought the money and leave I sent you had been abstracted by Brown, the mail carrier. Although my information upon this point is not positive, I fear it is as I wrote, and officer was sent in pursuit of Brown, but in consequence of our movements I have been unable to learn his success. I procured another leave for you, upon a S. C. which I mailed you at Florence, and which I hope you have received, as you seem to be relieved on the subject of funds. I am less concerned, as I feared the miscarriage of what I sent would prevent your much desired home visit. So if Sherman has not interfered, I suppose you have ere this set out for Front Royal. But I am pretty well satisfied that that gentleman has cut you off; this in the absence of any definite information, as we are totally in the dark concerning the movements of the reckless friend.

Well Pat, I am truly glad to hear that you are doing well, to know that you are now able to go about and enjoy the many pleasures and luxuries which Americus affords, and of which you were so entirely unconscious when I left you. I am glad your wound has prevented your further participation in the hardships and dangers of this interminable campaign. Better that you should convalesce and recruit yourself in quiet at an agreeable home, than that you should have been subjected to orders which have laid low some in whom [sic] you had great interest, on whom [sic] you will regret perhaps more than all others.

Let me tell you of our doing since I last wrote you. We marched from Florence on the 21st ult, in snow, cold, and wind, moving by Waynesboro and Mt. Pleasant to Columbia, when we arrived on the 26th. We found the place occupied by the enemy, and invested it on the south side. The Yankees evacuated on the night of the 27th, but remained on the opposite bank of Duck River, whence they shelled the town. At daylight on the morning of the 29th we crossed 4 miles above and marched for their rear, Forrest

proceeding us, we reached the neighborhood of Spring Hill later in the evening and found the Yankees there in force. Our Div, being first was at once formed, and we attacked, driving the enemy from his rail barricades at the first onset. Gen. Cleburne had his horse, Red Pepper, wounded in three places. It was an easy going thing - we could not see the Yankees in the village, and they continued to shell us, to which we could not reply, having brought no artillery in consequence of our rapid movement. We waited for Bate and Brown (Cheatham) to move in conjunction with us, but the former did not get into position until night and the latter finding the enemy overlapping him did not advance. Thus was lost the golden opportunity. When we attacked, a part of the enemy was yet at Columbia, and we had them completely cut off, while we could easily have beaten those in our front, but they retired under cover of night. The loss in our Div. was about 225, Lowrey suffering most. We did the only fighting. The next morning we started in pursuit in high glee, little thinking what serious work we would have yet that day. The ever active Forrest ran into the enemy at Thompson's Sta. causing them to burn a number of wagons: and he attacked their rear soon after. Three miles from Franklin we came to a high ridge from which we could see the enemy's rear moving into their lines, which extended far and below all around the town. A brigade (Ed; Govan's Brigade) was first marched across the ridge in view of the enemy and under the fire of his cannon, and placed in position on the right of the pike, while Granbury came after us, his left on the pike, Lowrey in reserve, Smith not yet arrived from Florence, where he had been left with the trains. Brown formed on the left of the pike, Bate upon his left, Stewart had advanced upon the Lewisburg pike, to our right, and did not connect with us until we advanced some distance. We began advancing about 3/4 hour before sunset, but the right of regiments to the front. It was a most impressive movement I ever saw, the Grey line moving gradually on, with blue and red colors dancing above, like a wave, how soon to strike with a shock upon the opposing foe. The enemy's artillery opened upon us at a mile's distance. The ground over which we advanced was perfectly open; not a tree, a fence or a stump to stop a bullet. Just before getting under fire the regts. [sic] were formed in line: when the small arms opened, Gen. Govan, Frank and I dismounted and left our horses with a courier. Immediately we were into the heaviest and deadliest fire I have ever witnessed, over the open, level field, on we went, driving the yankees from their first line, and killing many, but losing very, very many of our gallant boys. Frank Govan was wounded in the hip before reaching the first line. Our men now in great confusion and with ranks much thinned, pressed on to the next line, a strong earthworks, from behind which, secure, the Yankees poured a deadly fire. Forward our boys went, massing in on place, rushed over the work. I saw the brave fellows go over bowing their heads, as if in a storm of wind and snow, then leaped the entrenchment and dissapeared [sic] behind it. Alas! they were too few and as usual, the support was not up.

We had been the first to attack and had struck the strongest point. About this time, whilst urging forward some laggards, and about 40 yds [sic] from the second line, I was struck in the back by a minie [sic] ball. From the sensation, I thought it was spent grape, so large did it seem; but a grape would have finished me, I stood a minute to determine the extent of my injury: Felt a wheezing in my lungs and spat blood. This looked serious, and I walked off. The bullets were coming like hail and I expected I would never get out without another wound. I feared to run lest it should cause hemorrhage, in returning my sword to my scabbard I found my arm also hurt. I walked to my horse, and with difficulty mounted and rode to the rear, failing fast. Before reaching my horse, I saw Stewart moving up, and met Lowrey going to our assistance. Brigade after brigade was hurled against that work, sometimes carrying a part, but without general success. Cockrell charged over our ground, and left his brave Missourians scattered thick among our Texans and Arkansians. But two of our batteries had got up, one with us one with Stewart. Presstman placed the former and worked it with great effect. Night saw the contest unabated, heavy firing was constantly kept up. Our Division was moved to the rear to be reformed, but now fearfully diminished. The three brigades did not number over 1,000, and our brave commander was gone. He had fallen within a short distance of the second work. Just before I left the field I saw him, with Phillips, Harley and Mangum, right among the men calling "forward, my brave men." Shortly afterwards Gen. Govan saw him fall. His body was left upon the field that night, during which his splendid belt was taken from him, and was carried next morning to Loring's Hosp. where it was recognized. Granbury too fell, and Strahl, Gist, Adams and Carter, while Gordon was captured, Brown, Quarles and several other wounded. Gen. Govan escaped miraculously. Sawrie was at a friend's house. Gen. Hood had notified the troops that to carry Franklin would open to them Nashville and Kentucky. He was somewhat piqued that we failed to take the place. Lee came up after night and was put into position. Our artillery arriving during the night, as was placed in the most advantageous positions by Presstman, who had orders to open 100 pieces at daylight and fire 100 rounds.

Everyone expected the deadly contest to be renewed at dawn, but light found the enemy gone, it was an unfortunate affair. Night prevented a success which day would most probably have seen accomplished, and after having dealt us a heavy blow the enemy retired without being injured to the same extent, and he is now ensconced in his works at Nashville, - Gens. Cleburne, Granbury and Strahl were buried at Columbia. My dear Pat, I sympathize with you in the loss of your chief, in addition to my sorrow for the death of so good and noble a leader. I know you will be grieved to lose so good a friend, him with whom you have served so long to his satisfaction, and who was perhaps more attached to yourself than any other with whom he had intercourse. On the morning of his death he rode with us, was in high spirits, and spoke of several members of his staff, of you especially in high terms, of your coolness on the field and your promotion.

I wrote the communication to Dixon, and thought I could not make it too strong for his sanction. He was admitted the best division commander in the Army, and had made an enviable and deserved reputation. He will be sadly missed, and by none I think more than by yourself. I fear you will have little inducement to return now that he is gone. Phillips is the only one of your staff who was wounded. His leg was broken and as he lay near the Yankee works he was shot in the both thighs. He is at a house in town, his leg amputated.

The night after being wounded Frank and I stayed in a toll house 2 1/2 miles from town. On examination the ball was found imbedded in his hip, and was at once extracted. Mine was found to have entered about 2 inches to the left of the spinal column: it ranged upwards and outwards, coming out under and entering my left arm about the middle, from which place it was cut by Dr. McFadden. I feared at first that one or more ribs had been broken, but it proved otherwise fortunately. The next morning we got into a spring ambulance and bringing a letter from Sawrie came to the house of Mr. Jones whose daughter is his step mother. It is about 4 miles from Franklin. The family consists of the old folks and a young lady their daughter, and all are so kind as can be. They supply every want, and we have even comfort and delicacy we could desire. Thanks to Providence and their kind attentions, we have improved wonderfully. Our surgeon, Dr. Wooton, 35th Tenn. told us at first it would be 6 weeks before we could be up – but we have been sitting up every day since the 11th, and we eat like starved people. Dr. W has just written certificates for each of us for 60 days. I do not want mine now, and don't know that I shall, but wish to have it ready at all events. If I knew you were at Americus, I think I would make a pilgrimage hither. You see I have got the wound as you wished, but to get to Americus is the question. I should like above all things to spend the term of my convalescence with you. If you are yet in Americus and can't get home, telegraph me and I may come down.

There is much talk and some hope, of our and Granbury's brigades being furloughed to recruit this winter. In such event I do not know what will become of me. Sawrie writes me that our brigade numbers 431 effective, Granbury's is not so large and is commanded by a Captain. Maj. Taylor was killed and Col. Young [Ed: commanding the 10th Texas Infantry]. In our brigade, Maj. Meek and Capt. Phillips 2nd Arks. Capt. Garret comdg [sic] 1st and 15th, were killed, Dixon 3d Conf. captured, Bartlett wounded. Others whom I do not remember, or have not heard of were lost. A dearly fought battle, we are greatly reduced.

Had a letter from Mack Blakemore a few days ago, saying he had seen in "Memphis Appeal" a notice of Marsh's death which I had caused to be published, and telling me

that he was convinced that Marsh was not dead, but a prisoner. That he was aware his company officers had so reported him, but that he had seen a Lt. Mosby of Engrs. [sic] who was taken prisoner along with Marsh, and who saw him whilst a prisoner, alive and well. Lt. M escaped and came within our lines. This is pretty straight and I sincerely trust is true. If so it will be like recovering one from the dead. – Saw Dick Blakemore a few days before I was wounded. Is actg [sic] adjt [sic] of a bat'n [sic] arty in Forrest's command and has improved much. Ens. Geo. B staid [sic] with me the first night I came here and was exceedingly kind, he won Frank over completely. I missed Helm as I came off the field wounded, but as the Army is some distance off, my friends do not come to see me. The Army has been besieging Nashville, Forrest and Bate were sent to take Murfreesboro, but I think they have not yet succeeded. Yankees still at Shelbyville and on the Catta. RR Capt. Mitchell reported killed at Shelbyville.

You have been mistaken with regard to Vic and Mollie. Dick Blakemore tells me Mollie is married and Vic is yet single. The Klyer and Boswell refueed from Corinth according to my advices. I think now that we will winter near Nashville, communications being opened via Decatur and Corinth. – I have not seen a paper since leaving Florence. Every one is on the grape vine to hear from Sherman, rumors of his capture and annihilation. Hope they will prove precursure [sic] of the truth.

I must close Pat, -- I am tired, 'tis late, and I must dispatch this early tomorrow to the Army to be mailed. Let me hear from you more frequently and more at length. Letters are my chief delight and yours most welcome. I will hope to hear from you very soon if you do not go to VA, as I hope you may, however what from Ray?

With sincere wishes for your well being and happiness,

I am dear Pat, yours  
Wms. [sic]

[Irving a Buck papers – Museum of the Confederacy – Richmond, Virginia]  
Researched and transcribed by Scott McKay

