

Letter to Elizabeth (sister) from Murphreesboro, March 31st, 1863

Q.M. Dept. 1st Regt. W. Vols
Murphreesboro, Tennessee
March 31st, 1863

Dear Elizabeth: -

Although you may have not returned from the East at the present writing, I don't think this letter will anticipate your arrival much, and so will write while I have an opportunity.

I informed you by Mr. Smith that the box you sent arrived sometime ago. Of course, I can only use the old expression that "I am much obliged" but trust this will fully express my thankfulness for this "trivial" favor.

Since I wrote you last not much has transpired within our lines worthy of note, or that would interest you. We are patiently awaiting the finale of affairs at Vicksburg, before advancing on Bragg's Army for the last time this side of the Tennessee River. In the meantime the men of this company are busy at the Fortifications in process of construction at this place. I was riding through a portion of the works yesterday, and was astonished to find the amount of work that had been expended on the Work during the past winter. They surpass anything I have yet seen, and are said by those who know (the engineers) to be much stronger than the works around Washington. Some of the forts are already completed and others will be in time for any "calls" our "deluded southern brethren" may choose to make. Stores are being accumulated without limit within these works and everything looks like a permanent military fort. Entire houses about town are torn down and put up again as warehouses within the fortifications. I don't know but half the town will be transferred in this way to some useful purpose, instead of holding vile secessionists. I had to laugh outright to see some of the smallish buildings that had apparently walked off whole and been set up by some "?????" as their own individual domicile. The doors were generally ornamented with the inmates name "in paint" and the sacred southern walls decorated with portrait paintings of "A. Lincoln" and "J. Davis" executed by "Mudsill Artists" from abroad.

We have a skirmish in front of our picket line almost daily, but with no general result, except killing wounding a few on either side.

The army is in excellent condition. In every Department you can see the energy and life of the Commander infused into the work now in progress for the coming campaign. The officers and men are a unit in their praise of "Old Rusa" who is a patriot as well as a soldier. A different spirit prevails among the officers and men than did a year ago. The "fire in the rear" of the Copperhead has wakened a different feeling among the men and a much more lofty, grand and ennobling patriotism prevails among all ranks, Men see things in a different light than they did. They are not so uneasy about going home, regardless of results, as they were, but are now ready to "finish the job", and thoroughly so, before thinking of going home. As for myself, I can say that in all my trying experiences in military life I never

felt more confident of the ultimate triumph of the right, or of our ability to crush this rebellion, than at present. Though there is much to do yet to thoroughly whip the rebel armies into an obedience and respect of the laws, yet we must, and will eventually conquer. I cannot entertain a doubt even that anything but success will attend so holy a cause as ours, where so many martyrs have fell and noble patriotic souls stand ready to offer themselves up in like manner in behalf of freedom and our glorious Republic. It is a severe trial for us all that are engaged in it, but the gold will be brought out and he who survives will be reined or made doubly better; so that what is lost in one individual will be abundantly compensated for in another, and the nation will not lose in the aggregate but rather be benefited.

Yes, Mrs. Smith, I should like to come home for a "few nights only" and see you and the rest of the good souls there, but should not want to stay longer, until this infernal rebellion is crushed so effectually that not even a vaunting South Carolina would dare pass a "descendant of the "bogs & fens of Ireland & Scotland" without touching his tile and blessing Old Abe and the balance of his Yankee minions for even sharing their unprofitable and valueless lives to eke out a miserable existence in a "subjugated country". Home is no place for me or any other young man that is capable of bearing a musket, in these perilous times. Such cowardly young men as Garland Gullett, and some others I know of ought to be made to enlist if they will not do so voluntarily. When men are wanted as bad as they are now, the excuse that "Pa & Ma" won't consent is disgraceful. Garland's mother ought to be ashamed of him that he don't go, and were I in her shoes, there would be a "clear case of spanking" in the house if he didn't. I can remember the time when Garland was at school and had his theoretical views of duty etc. to tell his deluded school mates, and was considered a model of perfection by his orthodox friends, while the same ones considered me altogether too wild and "worldly" to prove of the right metal in the trying ordeal of "Life's Journey". Whether his conduct has been such as to meet the expectation of his orthodox admirers I am unprepared to say. But if it does, I pity the admirers and the admired; for the Christianity that fails to tell a man his duty so plain that he cannot possibly mistake it in the hour when that very religion and freedom of thought and action are threatened is of but very little account.

One thing is certain – if the young men don't come, the old ones will, and that too soon. Yet this is not right, for no married man ought to be obliged to come, until the young men do, unless they are "copperheads", and then they ought to go anyway.

Of Mr. Farr I have not heard scarcely anything for 3 or 4 weeks. The matter of his getting a discharge is only a question of time of course. He should have had it long ago too. His case is only a repetition of a thousand others, however. His promotion makes him a Sergeant, so that he can go out of the service with that much additional honor.

Edward is getting along well, and will be a Sergeant ere many months. His position as C. Commissary has saved him a good many hard marches and exposures the past winter. He has had a much more pleasant time than myself and I think has no fault to find with the U.S. Service during the past 3 months.

We are expecting Capt. Green here now daily, when I shall have some sport with him about his "bad associations" in F du Lac. I don't think he is at heart to blame for his apparent treason as he is only the reflection of those about him anyway. (This may and may not, be complimentary)

Gen'l Rousseau has returned and taken command of his old Division again (ours). His Head Quarters are only a few rods from my tent, and we have all the music evenings that we want, as Bands are constantly serenading him.

The weather is becoming delightful, and I enjoy it much. When not on drill or otherwise engaged, the boys are out playing ball, quoits, and other games known among outdoor sports.

But I have written too much already, for which I bet your pardon. Give my regards to all the good folks at home, and remember that you cannot write any too often or too much.

Hoping that you take as much pleasure in seeing rebels chastised as we do in doing it. I remain

Your faithful & affect. Scion
Chas. H. Benton
(Address) Quartermaster Sergeant
1st Regt. Wis. Vols
14th Army Corps
Via Louisville

Letter from Sergeant Charles H. Benton to Friend Smith (Fond du Lac, Wis) – early 1863 This was published in the Fond du Lac Newspaper owned by J. A. Smith

Since I wrote you last, events of much importance have transpired within this Department, and which I trust will have no small importance in settling this inhuman and uncivilized rebellion - The army of the Cumberland has advanced, fought a long desperate battle to overcome its enemies, and driven them back to the nefarious regions from whence they came, never more I trust to return.

On the 25th of December, a forward movement of the army of the Cumberland, commenced from Nashville, in a cold cheerless rainstorm, which prevailed during the entire day. The 3rd Division (Rousseau's) moved out on the Franklin pike, in support of the Right Wing of the army, under command of Gen. McCook, and only moved to its position in the center corps, under Gen. Thomas on night of the 28th. On the evening of the 29th, the 28 Brigade moved to the left about 6 miles, to a place called Jefferson, to guard a bridge over Stone River. The next morning while our Brigade train was coming up to join us, it was attacked about one mile from our bivouac by a rebel brigade of Cavalry under command of one Gen. Wheeler, and 28 wagons of the train burned before we could reach the scene of the disaster. In the meantime the 1st and 21st Wisc. Regiments had quite a lively skirmish with the rebel scamps, and on the authority of an "intelligent countraband", working Wheeler killed 98 of them. We lost several in wounded and prisoners. Corporal Freeman H. Farr, who was with the company wagon, was severely wounded in the face, - the ball passing through the left cheek and out at the right, cutting the tongue on the lower side in its passage. Corporal Farr had already surrendered when he was shot, but he stood his ground nobly; and used his revolver with effect on the rebels, they were not the men to let him off without wreaking their vengeance for the injury he had done them. He was taken prisoner and paroled. Private F. M. Ruth was also with the wagon, and taken prisoner, but nothing has been heard from him since, and we are naturally solicitous for his fate. Henry Steady was left to Nolinsville, dangerously sick, and if still alive a paroled prisoner.

On the morning of the 31st, the Brigade moved to join the main army, in front of Murfreesboro, - 15 miles distant. We came up to our Division about dark. A great battle had already been fought, in which the Union forces had received a severe check. - Johnson's Division which had the advance on the right, was surprised and nearly the whole command killed, wounded and taken prisoners. This same Johnson is the one that allowed himself to be surprised and captured with his command at Gallatin, last summer, by John Morgan. He is a patriot of the Buell stamp. In the rear of the army, as we came up, the sight was sickening. Wounded men skulkers by the thousand, fill the roads and fields. How men can forget their manhood where a few shells may burst, and run to the rear, leaving their few brave comrades the brunt of battle, it is difficult to imagine. They must have thought soldiering something else than it really is - no Holiday affair.

The 1st of January was passed without any ground engagement, although picket firing was constant along our line, - extending over a distance of three miles. - On the morning of the 2nd the enemy was seen forming for a charge on Loowe's battery. The 28th Brigade was called on to resist the attack, and rushed wildly to the front, led by the gallant Rosseau. As we emerged from the cedar swamp that we were in, into an open field in front, the rebels retired to their

woods, and we were ordered to lie down in the mud and await further movements of the evening. – In the afternoon a severe engagement occurred on our immediate left, in which the rebels were badly wounded, losing one battery and about 3000 prisoners. Our forces were commanded by Gen. Negley, and was skillfully handled. While the fight was going on, Gen. Rosecrans was a few rods behind us. At first the rebels forced our lines, and the General's face gave expression of his regret, but soon one of his aides rode up and said, "we are driving them". His face at once lighted up, and with the remark "Thank God", and rode rapidly away.

On the night of the third, as night had set her mantle of darkness over us, a terrible contest was commenced on our left and front, which lasted full an hour. The rebels made a sortie, in order to carry a strip of woods lying between our left and their lines. The darkness was so great that the flash of the evening's muskets was the only thing the combatants were guided by in firing. The wind was blowing a furious gale, and the rain came down in torrents. The demon-like yells of the enemy as they temporarily drove our men, and the cheers they in turn set up as they drove the rebels, together with the rattle of musketry and the roar of artillery, furnished a scene that was truly sublime grand and awful.

Few have ever witnessed the like, and I trust few ever will again. Words are utterly powerless to describe such a scene, or give even a faint idea of its sublimity. On the morning of the 4th it was ascertained that the enemy had evacuated during the previous night. It being Sunday, no general pursuit was commanded. As we passed over the field wrested from us during the first day of the siege, we found, not only our own men but the rebels still unburied. The dead of both armies were strewn over the ground in all directions. There they had lain for five days and the air began to be impregnated with the stench of the decaying bodies. – The faces of many of the dead gave expression of the suffering with which they expired, while others bore a countenance of sweet repose. Noble souls! They that have fallen in defence of the dearest rights of man. They have died

"As die the brave who seek to rest –
By all their country's honors best."

We were witnesses of a somewhat singular incident, as we were passing over the desolate field of the first day's fight. By the side of a dead rebel lay a faithful dog, who had remained there, now the fifth day, evidently awaiting the return of vitality to the form of his departed master. Would that this dead rebel had been as true to his country as this canine had been true to him.

On Monday we moved on through Murfreesboro to the south side of the city, where we are now encamped, the citizens have all left the town, and it is now filled with, paroled, wounded, dead and dying rebels. In nearly every house there is a dead rebel, and I must say that it don't give me much pain to see them, barbarous as it may seem.

The rebels lived exclusively on corn bread and bacon, and were much better clothed and fed than when we met them at Perryville, Ky, last fall. Their loss in killed, wounded and missing is estimated at 12,000. Our loss is 1,100 killed and about 6,000 wounded, we also lost several thousand prisoners.

Thus you will see how the Fond du Lac boys spent their Holidays. In the mud and water knee deep, both day and night, for four days, we have still reason to be thankful that we have no killed or wounded to name, or fond hearts at home to bereave; although leaden missiles, sent by sharpshooters were constantly flying through our ranks, and shells exploding over and about us during the entire siege. Hard as our lot apparently was, it is better that we were thus circumstanced, than to be at home, vassals to a horde of piety tyrants and slavery worshipping despots, who are seeking to rule or ruin the country that gave them birth, and under which they have enjoyed every right freedom could ask or desire. But the war cannot always last. We have the men and means to whip the rebels we can whip them, and by Heavens we will.

Yours as ever
Charlie

Letter to Mother (actually Mrs. Smith) from Murphreesboro, May 10, 1863

H.Q. 1st Regt. Wis. Vols
Murphreesboro, Tenn
May 10th, 1863

Dear Mother,

The box containing those shirts so kindly made by you, arrived last night. Not having heard a word from you for over two months and-a-half, and as you did not send any line with the articles I am somewhat at a loss to know what it means. From Patch, I learn that the cloth cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$13. I do not know how much you will charge for making, so I send you an order on Patch for any am't you may call for which will be "all right". I trust you will not allow your modesty to overcome your discretion when you present your bill and thus deprive yourself of what is your due.

The shirts are an excellent fit and are the right color. Your judgement in "military matters" is excellent. I think you would do for a "Mrs. General". If Hooker fails (which we very much doubt) I shall be in favor of giving you command of the "army of the Potomac". Capt. Green likes the looks of my shirts so well that he has written to his wife for some just like them to-day. With them on Col. Bingham says I make a very "fine looking" addition to his con-commissioned staff. (I concur of course, in a Pickwickian way).

I thank you many times for your kindness, and shall place myself under additional obligations to you which I trust it will be my pleasure, at some future day, to, in some small degree, repay.

The troops in this Dept. are now in shelter tents and ten days rations ordered kept on hand and be ready to move on an hour's notice. I trust our inactivity is at an end which has been of a respite. We'll try and atone, in some measure, for Hooker's misfortune (for it is nothing else). "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver" – and he ought to love a fighting man, – for such Joe Hooker is, and "of such, should be the "Kingdom of Heaven (now-a-days.)"

We are all well as could be wished for. Edward is doing quite quite well, though I notice his eyes are somewhat inflamed.

I see that Sergt. Clark has been to your place lately. I wonder if he can "whip" me. If he is going to do it, we want him to come down here, so that no officious policeman" can break up the encounter.

Hoping that a few days more will break your protracted reticence and wishing you all manner of good things.

I remain as ever

Your affc't scion
Chas. H. Benton
Quartermaster Serg't
1st Regt. Wis. Vols.
Murphreesboro
Tennessee

Mrs. E. C. Smith

From "The Fond du Lac Commonwealth"

Sept. 1861

Benton

"Our Boy's" _____ Charles H. Benton, though not for sometime past, employed in this office, was yet "Our Boy" at the household; for he had been our "left hand man", at the table for years. He finished his trade, as a Printer, some time ago, but was working mostly for Mr. Beeson, enough to pay his way through High School – an object of desire nearly accomplished – when he enlisted for the war. He was among the first to enroll his name for the recruiting of Company I and did much in getting others to join. ---- Charlie is "sound" physically, morally, theologically and politically. He makes sunshine, whatever may be the condition of the atmosphere or the cloudiness of the sky. He is bound to have a "good time" all the time, and make others enjoy it. ___ Noble Boy's, everyone, God keep you in the hollow of his hand, and bear you back again. _____



THREE OF THE SOLDIER BOYS

(FROM A TINTYPE TAKEN IN KENTUCKY IN 1861)

Thomas Bryant Charles H Benton Ed McGlachlin

MILITARY ORDER

OF THE

LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES.

HEADQUARTERS COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF WISCONSIN,

Milwaukee, Wis., June 5th, 1891.

CIRCULAR No. 12. }
SERIES 1891. }
WHOLE No. 206. }

IN MEMORIAM.

COMPANION

Charles F. Benton,

LIEUTENANT AND QUARTERMASTER, 1st WISCONSIN INFANTRY, U. S. V.

DIED AT FOND DU LAC, WISCONSIN,

May 1st, 1891.

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States.

COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF WISCONSIN.

MILWAUKEE, June 5th, 1891.

At a stated meeting of the Commandery, held June 3d, 1891, the accompanying report of the Committee to prepare resolutions on the death of our late Companion,

LIEUTENANT CHARLES H. BENTON,

was read and adopted, as a tribute to his memory.

By order of

LIEUT. EDWARD FERGUSON, U. S. V.,

Commander.

CHANDLER P. CHAPMAN,

Acting Recorder.

OFFICIAL :

Recorder.

IN MEMORIAM.

"Death loves a shining mark." So saith the old adage, and its truth has been exemplified during the last six months in our Commandery. The last one to fall before his merciless shaft was Companion CHARLES H. BENTON. Six months ago all would have agreed that he, with his apparent robust health, would have been one of our last survivors; and yet we are now called upon to write his "In Memoriam."

To us, who knew him well, the duty thus imposed is a labor of love; and we who stood around his bier, now bring this sincere tribute to his memory.

The military history of CHARLES H. BENTON was briefly as follows: He enlisted in the service as private August 31st, 1861, in Co. K, 1st Wis. Inf. Vols., at Fond du Lac, Wis., being the first man enrolled in the Company; made Corporal October 8th, 1861; Sergeant August 27th, 1862; Quartermaster Sergeant of Regiment March 16th, 1863; 1st Lieut. Co. G, March 28th, 1864, and Quartermaster of Regiment April 26th, 1864.

His first military duty was in Kentucky, commencing with the action at Green River December 17th, 1861, in 1st Div., 14th A. C. Army of the Cumberland, under Gen. D. C. Buell. He participated in advance on Corinth to Columbia, Tenn., May, 1862; did duty at this post until ordered to Florence, Ala., and then in retrograde movement of Buell's entire army to Nashville, Tenn., and thence to Louisville, Ky., necessitated by the rebel Gen. Bragg's flank movement toward the latter place. He was at the battle of Perryville October 8th, 1862, Stone River, or Murfreesboro, December 31st, 1862, to January 4th, 1863, under Gen. Rosecrans. Took part in the Chattanooga campaign, commencing June 23d, 1863; was in action of McLe-more's Cove, Lookout Mountain, Sept. 11th, 1863; battle of Chickamauga Sept. 18th to 22d, 1863. Was in actions under Gen. Grant at Chattanooga, commencing with the battle of Lookout Mountain Nov. 24th, and ending with Missionary Ridge Nov. 25th, 1863; was in Atlanta campaign under Gen. Sherman, commencing in month of May, 1864, and resulting in the actions at Dalton, Resaca, Cassville, Allatoona, Burnt Hickory, New Hope Church, Dallas, Big Shanty, Lost Mountain, Pine Mountain and Kenesaw Mountain, from June 10th to July 3d, being a continuous battle. Was in the battle in front of Atlanta, commencing with Peach Tree Creek, July 19th, and ending at Jonesboro and Atlanta Sept. 1st. As his time of enlistment (3) years had expired, he was ordered back to Milwaukee and mustered out in October, 1864. He was elected to Commandery of Wisconsin, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, January 7th, 1885, the number of his insignia being 3713.

Such is the naked framework of his service; but on this bald and barren frame what a mighty cluster of events there once was hung. The beardless boy, fresh from school, in that brief time had become a seasoned, dauntless veteran. He had helped to shatter the bulwarks of the Confederacy and plant a mine beneath its very citadel. He came home in the full flush of manhood with such a flood of glorious memories as are vouchsafed to men only now and then, at intervals of generations. That he was a good soldier none who knew him need to be assured; his temperament was such that he could not have been otherwise. Free, hearty and off-hand, he ever had a pleasant smile and jest for every man; with no sulking over the past, with the happy faculty of making the most of the present, and with buoyant hope and courage for the future, he must have been, and was, the ideal soldier—the very personification of the "*bon comrade*."

One can well fancy how his hearty laugh awoke the echoes in the mountains of Georgia; and how his keen, good-natured witticisms revived and stimulated the hungry and weary soldiers marching in column beside him, while his abounding spirits took the place of sleep and rations.

In civil life he was one of the most delightful Companions; the weight of care lifted at his approach, and dullness fled from his presence. Being acute, strong and energetic, he naturally was a successful business man.

He was a true soldier, a true friend, and a true man. He took especial pleasure in the meetings of the Loyal Legion, the last one he attended being at Madison in March last. He went home and shortly after took to his bed, from which he never rose, but died May 1st, 1891.

His work is done. He has gone hence—whither we know not; but if there be a bright and happy place in the "Far beyond," it will be the happier and the brighter with "Charley Benton" there. Old friend and Companion, farewell, and peace be with you!

GEO. W. BURNELL,

N. S. GILSON,

A. S. LUDLOW,

Committee.