

James Buckley Letters

Near Nashville, Tennessee December 21st, 1862

Dear Wife:

It is with great pleasure that I sit down to write a few lines to you. I received your letter and package and James [sic] letter all safe last night. Dear Mary, I am much obliged to you indeed. It is quite a present for a soldier to receive, and especially when it is from those we love the most. I shall take good care of them. I will tell you what as [sic] in the package so you will know that I received them. There was a pair of mittens, a necktie, some yarn and thread and darning needles, a few buttons, and some candy which was first rate. When I come home I will pay you for them with double interest. The 5 dollar bill and the postage stamps were all safe for which I again thank you until I can show you in some other way.

I feel a consciousness in me a great many times that it shall not be long before I see you again, but how soon I cannot tell or under what circumstances, but my trust is in the Lord and I know that all will be for the best. My faith is strong in the Lord. Oh what a feeling of peace comes over me after I lay me down to rest and have offered a prayer for the loved ones at home. I would not care to live in this world any longer if it was not for those I love. but I feel it is my duty to love and protect you and the children, and I feel that with confidence in the Lord, that He will spare me for that end. May God bless you and keep you faithful until [illegible] Him.

It seems to me that I have not felt so happy since I left home as I do this morning while I am writing to you. I feel as happy as though I was in a class meeting. This is Sunday morning and the weather is beautiful - my heart is full almost to overflowing. I rejoice that I was ever brought over to the Lord for I know there is a God. I can feel Him in my heart this morning. His presence feels precious to my soul. It is possible for me to describe by feeling to you. Oh, how I wish could see you and talk with you. It would be happiness indeed to talk with you about the many blessings we receive from the Lord. I feel thankful unto Him for the good health I now enjoy. I have suffered some since I joined the army, but the Lord has given me patience under my trials, and I know He will do so as long as I put my trust in Him. Only think how pleasant it is to have the assurance in your heart that God will protect you from all harm. I feel to bless God that you and I were joined together in the bonds of Matrimony, for if I had not married you, I might still have been traveling in the wide world of sin like a vessel out at sea without any rudder, that is driven to and fro [sic] and finally wrecked. I look upon it as one of the Lord's ways of bringing repentance to my soul, and may God bless you for being the instrument He made use of for the purpose. I should say more to you in this way, but my room will not permit, so I will proceed with minor matters.

I received your letter dated the 10th last Wednesday evening. I was sorry to learn that your lip was swollen, but I hope you are all right by this time. I am sorry to hear that

mother is gone back to Johns for I know that it would be better for you and for her too if she staid [sic] with you, but I do not want you to fret about it. It may be all for the best, but I cannot but feel sorry that she left, for you would have been company for each other. I can assure you she was very welcome to stay with you as far as I am concerned. Give her my kind love and best wishes.

You don't know how it pained me to learn that John had commenced drinking again. How did it happen? I hope he has not given up his religion, but you must send me all particulars in your next for you know all will be kept secret with me if you wish it. Give him my best wishes for his present and future welfare.

I am glad you have got Thomas to do the chores this winter. It will make it a great deal easier for you. Be patient with him and I think you will get along very well. I want you to take good care of the horses, and if there are any oats left in the granary, I would save them to feed in spring.

W. Litsey carries himself about as he did at home. Charles is teaming yet. I do not see much of him, so I cannot tell you how he gets along with his religious affairs.

You spoke about Johnny being Aide de Camp to the Lieutenant Colonel. I suppose the title sounds large to you, but he is nothing more than a hostler. Al I he does is take care of the Lieutenant Colonel's horse and other things to [sic] numerour [sic] to mention. Will Cooper has the same situation in our Regiment. I will not give you the name the boys call him as it would not look well on paper.

I am glad that the wheat is good, and that you have so much of it, for I think you will have enough to last you until I get back.

I hope John was not trying to find fault with your banking up the house. You gave hime [sic] a good answer.

You did well to sell the red cow. I do not recollect for certain how much we owed Turvey, but I think it was about a dollar. I cannot say whether you did well or not in selling your hogs as I don t know what condition they were in. How does the house look now that you have got a new chimney put up?

Letter #13

Murfreesborough [sic] January 8, 1863

Dear Mary,

It is with great pleasure that I write to you once more to inform you that I am enjoying the best of health, for which I am thankful to the giver or [sic] all good gifts.

You will have heard of the Battle of Murfreesborough [sic] long before this reaches you as there is no mail from here yet. I am anxious to let you know that I have, by the Mercy of God, come safe through one of the greatest battles that was ever fought without a

wound or scratch of any kind. I will comence [sic] from the time we left our camp near Nashville, Christmas Day.

Our Brigade went out to get forage. We went out about 10 miles and drove the evening pickets. We returned back to camp late at night. Next day we started our march toward Murfreesborough [sic]. It rained all day and all night and next day. We drove them out of two or three small towns. They destroyed the bridges as they went along, which hindered us a little.

Sunday our Brigade went out on a scouting expedition, but we saw no tracks of the enemy, so we returned back to camp after about 20 miles of a tramp. Monday we started on our march to overtake the balance of the division. We got up with it on Tuesday evening. A part of our Army had a brush with the enemy on Monday and again on Tuesday evening. A part of our Brigade was engaged on Tuesday evening. It was late when we went into camp next morning. General Willich went to General Johnson to get permission to leave his Brigade drawn up in line of battle, but he refused. He then sent his Aide de Camp three times after that, but was refused. The consequences were that we were attacked by four times our number, while we were cooking breakfast. Had just got my coffee ready, and was in the act of taking it off the fire when they came out of the woods - eight columns deep and fired on us, and charged our Batteries. The horses which belong to the Battery were gone to water so that there was no chance to get away. The Battery boys discharged their cannon on the Rebels which cut them up very much. We had not time to get into the line of battle as the Rebels were only 10 rods from us, and we all had our traps to pick up. We never stirred away until we got the order to retreat, and our Regiment did not get the order until after the old Regiment had retreated.

When our Colonel gave us the order to retreat as the bullets were falling very thick among us, we retreated until we got a crop cotton field. When our Colonel gave us the order to rally and give them a few of our bullets, we did so, and ours was the only Regiment that made a stand there. We checked them some there. Our Colonel's horse was shot from under him there. Our Captain was killed there too. He was shot in the head by a bullet just as he was turning around to face the enemy. When the enemy made a stand there, they sent a large force to out flank us, and cut us off from the balance of our army and take us prisoners. Our Colonel gave us the order to retreat as we could do nothing with them alone, and at that time, the Rebels had got so far around us so as to throw a [illegible] fire upon us. I tell you the bullets came among us as thick as hail. That is where we had the most wounded. We fell back until we got up to two more Regiments that did not rally when we did. We then got into the timber and all three Regiments formed into a line of battle. We allowed them to get up pretty close to us when we were ordered to advance to the edge of the timber, and then give it to them which we did with a will and courage that did us credit. The Rebels lost a great many in that part of the fight. They threw their shells among us, but we did not mind it much. We should have charged on their Battery there but they had a large force trying to out flank

us. When we retreated through the woods and just as we got through, we got reinforced by General Rousseau's division. Then we made a stand right in front of one of Rousseau's batteries. It must have been pretty near noon by this time. We supported Rousseau's battery for quite a while and I tell you the shells flew over our heads pretty thick, and some of them burst very near us but none of them did us serious injury.

Our batteries played the Rebels with great affect which turned the scale of the fight against them. Rousseau's infantry were fresh in the fight so they were ordered to advance on the enemy, and we were ordered to the rear to make way for them (as we had fought up to that time) and be in readiness to support them in case of need.

JANUARY 10th

We were ordered from one position to another wherever we should be wanted, but were not called into action again that day. I will now relate a few incidents of the day.

JANUARY 12th

I had just written the above few lines when we were ordered out about 4 miles to reconoiter [sic] and I have not had time to write until now, as we moved our camp to a better position yesterday.

I have just finished washing. It is the first chance I have had since I left Nashville at Christmas. Our Brigade commander was wounded in the beginning of the battle and taken prisoner. The Rebels asked him a great many questions about the strength of our forces, and all they could get out of him was the following: (by tam I tell you nottin [sic]). He is a Dutchman and as fine a man as ever went to battle. His name is General Willich.

Colonel Gibson was taken prisoner soon after the fight commenced. He was Colonel of the 49th Ohio. He is acting Brigade Commander in Willich's place. He did not have his shoulder strap on when he was taken. They asked him what rank he was, He said "he would tell them when he was ready". So they ordered him along with some others they had taken prisoners, to the rear, and also told them to drap [sic] our canon (sic) to the rear of the Rebel line, but instead of dragging them to the Rebel line, Colonel Gibson ordered the boys to drag them to our lines. They were successful in getting 4 guns out of the six back again, besides escaping themselves. One of the guns that was left was spiked. so they only got one gun that would do them any service. William Litsey was wounded just after we commenced to retreat. I was only about a rod away from him when he fell. Several of us started to help him, but he told us to take care of ourselves. Just at that moment, another man fell close to me on the other side of me. We were about the last in the Regiment on the field when Will was shot, so we had either to leave or be taken prisoner. So we left. Bullets were flying thick and fast, and how it was so many escaped without being killed is a mystery to most everyone. Litsey died in the hospital a few days after he was shot. We were all surprised when we heard he was dead as we heard a day or two before that he was improving. William Cooper was

wounded in the leg above the knee. I saw him a day or two after the fight. His brother told me this afternoon that he was a little feverish yesterday.

We had six or seven severely wounded, three killed as follows - Captain Hillet, William Litsey and Henry Huggins. There are about six that we have not heard from yet. There were three out of my mess that went into battle, and I was the only one that came out all right. One was wounded in the leg, and one was taken prisoner and paroled. I saw Joe Whitham in the afternoon. He came out with four bullet holes in his pants, and was not hurt a bit. Tom Hurrup was all right and William Duckworth was all right. Ed Pierce is all right.

The 35th got cut up very badly. Next day our Brigade was stationed on the right wing but close to the center, and held as reserve. The Rebels threw a great many shells among us beside some solid shot. One solid shot struck one company's guns as they stood in the stacks and broke six guns and bayonets all to smash, and doubled some of them up. It also took the top of our flag staff off. We heard the ball coming, and we slid ourselves down just in time as we were standing close to the guns and some of them had their hands on the very guns that were struck.

JANUARY 13th

I thought I would finish this letter this morning, but last night we received orders to be ready to march at seven o'clock in the morning to go with the forage teams. We had been and got back again, and we fetched some shoats with us. I made a mess of pancakes for us, and I can assure you we did them justice. We also fetched some mutton with us, so we shall eat well for a few days at least.

Dear Wife, you must excuse my writing anymore at present as I am tired but in good spirit, and I never was in better health than I am enjoying at present. I weigh about twenty pounds more than I did when I left home. I think it is partly with eating so much more meat than I did when I was at home. I can eat three slices of pork without anything to it, especially when I can't get anything to eat with it, which happens to be the case sometimes, but more about than [sic] in the next.

Tell James I meant to have written to him before this, but I have not had time. You can let him see this, and it will answer for both of you. I will write to you again in a few days. I have a good deal more to say, but I am tired and anxious that you should hear from me.

Give my love to all, and especially to Charlie and Georgie, and accept my love and best wished. From your devoted husband

Joseph Buckley

Direct your letter to me as follows:

Mr. Joseph Buckley Company H

89th Regt.

Ill. vol.

1st Brigade 2nd Division

Army of the Ohio

Via Louisville, Kentucky.

Undated Letter Fragment

Did Foreward say anything about the quarrel we had?

I am glad to hear the cows are giving a good mess of milk. Butter in cans is worth a dollar and a quarter at the Sutlers.

I would very much like to come and take a ride with you in your new wagon over as far as Samuels and help to eat up that Turkey. (Tell Mary I say it is about time for her to stop raising (stock) as thirteen is enough for a woman to raise.)

The case to my likeness did not cost me anything as they charge the same without the case as they do with it. It is well enough for you to trade six months in advance if you always had the money, but I will leave that to you. I got the red pepper you sent me which will be very useful to me. Tavern keeping will sui t Lawton's taste better than farming. How much did he ask you for the pigs? Give my respect to the Lawtons' folks and especially to Joe. I would like to have a good talk with him. Tell him to write to me and send me his directions so that I can correspond with him. Do you know whether he was paroled and exchanged or simply exchanged? The (sted tonge [sic]) was left on Arrundale's marker when Joe Arrundale finished marking last spring.

The necktie you send me is better for camp services than any that I left at home. I am proud of it. I have got some writing paper now. I traded some of my coffee for some at the Suttlers.

Tell Charley I am very much obliged to him for wanting to lend me his money and also tell hime [sic] I am glad to hear that he has earned so much. Tell him to save his money until I come back and see how much he can save.

Tell Georgie that Pa would like to see him very much as most all the little boys that I see now are black. I wonder if Georgie would like me to fetch a black boy home for him to play with.

I do not blame James at all about the thrashing and you know I shall not blame you, so do not think any more about it. I think I may possibly get home by spring if our troops take Richmond. If I find out that I cannot get home by spring, I would like Sammy to work the farm on shares and use two of the horses, and you will have two to run around with. I would rather trust him with the horses than anyone I know of, but you know it is soon enough to decide about that yet. I mean your Nephew Samuel.

Dear Mary, I know the winter months will pass rather heavy at times, but then you must not give up, for you know your dear husband will love you and think of you and pray for you, do all in his power for your comfort. You asked me a favor in your last letter, which has been granted long ago. You have done nothing to me but what is forgiven. We have both been to blame, and my love increases for you all the time, but let us ask God to forgive us and all will be well my Dear Wife. I have kept faithful to you both in body and mind. I have not had a desire to have dealings with any female but yourself since I left home. If I cannot return as pure as when I left, I shall not return at all.

I will now conclude as I am getting tired, but I have not said all I want to. I am so tired, I know you will excuse me. I had just commenced reading your letter last night when the sound of cannons surprised us a little, and then word for us to fall into line of battle was given, so I had to put it in my pocket. We stood there about an hour to be in readiness in case we were attacked. I heard today that the Rebels had fixed a battery and fired on our pickets. I am so tired. Give my love to all my relations and friends and accept my best love, from your dear husband.

Joseph Buckley