

From: GB <gjb2a@mtsu.edu>
To: gib_backlund@nps.gov
Date: Monday, November 15, 2004 08:26PM
Subject: FWD: Stones River

>===== Original Message From "Gwynn Thayer" <Gwynn.Thayer@state.tn.us> =====
Hello Gib,

Dr. Conard gave me your name regarding this matter. You'll probably want to forward this email to Stuart Johnson at the Stones River Battlefield Park as well:

Recently I finished writing a finding aid for an interesting civil war diary which is NOT owned by the Tennessee State Library and Archives, but it was borrowed for processing and microfilming.

Attached is the finding aid. You may want to examine the microfilm, as the young man who wrote the diary, John Hill Ferguson, speaks of the Battle of Stones River. I believe that it is diary #3 that you will want to examine.

Please let me know if you have any questions. As I recollect, he was not in the battle itself, but he describes its consequences and other related matters.

Thanks,

Gwynn Thayer
Archivist
Tennessee State Library and Archives
gwynn.thayer@state.tn.us
(615) 253-3469

Attachments:(Click the filename to launch)
ferguson diary.doc

Processed by:
Gwynn Thayer
Archival Technical Services
Microfilm Accession Number: 1744
Date Completed: November 2, 2004

MICROFILM ONLY

JOHN HILL FERGUSON CIVIL WAR DIARIES

1862-1865

**(Original diaries in the holdings of the Henry Pfeiffer Library, MacMurray College,
Jacksonville, Illinois)**

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INTRODUCTION

The John Hill Ferguson Civil War Diaries, 1862-1865, are comprised of five handwritten diaries authored by John Hill Ferguson, a soldier in the Union Army with the Tenth Illinois Infantry Regiment, Company G. Ferguson recounts his experiences serving during the Civil War in Tennessee, Georgia, Missouri, Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky. A good portion of his time (in fact, the entirety of what is written in the third book) is spent in Nashville, Tennessee, at Fort Negley. Ferguson's diaries reveal a keen eye for describing his surroundings; the diaries are filled with observations about daily life in the military and the urban culture and landscape. The diaries measure .5 cubic feet and belong to the Henry Pfeiffer Library at MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Illinois.

The five books are in good to excellent condition; only a few bits and pieces are missing, and virtually all of the writing is legible. The diaries were written in pencil (and only very occasionally with a pen) and have been bound by a modern conservator. The dates covered in each diary are: **Book 1**, February 28, 1862 – November 10, 1862; **Book 2**, November 14, 1862 – January 23, 1863; **Book 3**, January 24, 1863 – December 31, 1863; **Book 4**, January 1, 1864 – September 13, 1864; **Book 5**, January 1, 1865 – June 10, 1865. The two later books have been transcribed, edited, and published. According to Janet Correll Ellison, the editor, the diaries came to reside at MacMurray College when a cousin, Ona Brown Mitchell, wrote to her and explained that a family member, John Hill Ferguson, had fought in the Civil War and had kept a diary during his years of service. His granddaughter was a graduate of MacMurray College, and she decided to donate the diaries to her alma mater (Correll Ellison, ix).

There are no restrictions on the John Hill Ferguson Civil War Diaries, but they are owned by MacMurray College, so this institution should be credited when quotations from the diary are cited. Additionally, if these materials are intended to be used in a commercial venture, or used where there may be a potential copyright infringement, the holder of the original materials should be contacted for permission. Those wanting a microfilm copy of the five diaries will have to obtain permission from the MacMurray College library director before TSLA can reproduce the microfilm. TSLA will permanently store a negative and positive copy of the microfilm.

Related sources:

Ash, Stephen V. *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860 – 1870*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.

Bowman, John S., editor. *The Civil War Day by Day*. New York: Dorset Press, 1989.

Durham, Walter T. *Nashville: The Occupied City*, Tennessee Historical Society, 1985

Durham, Walter T. *Reluctant Partners: Nashville and the Union*, Tennessee Historical Society, 1987.

Long, E. B. *The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1971.

Ferguson, John Hill. *On to Atlanta: The Civil War Diaries of John Hill Ferguson, Illinois Tenth Regiment of Volunteers*. Edited by Janet Correll Ellison with assistance from Mark A. Weitz. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

Zimmerman, Mark. *Guide to Civil War Nashville*. Nashville: Battle of Nashville Preservation Society, 2004.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Hill Ferguson (1829-1910) was born in Newton-Stewart, Scotland, in Dumfrireshire, the third son of John Ferguson and Susan Miller Ferguson. He had at least five brothers and two sisters. He emigrated to the United States in 1840 with several of his siblings, and began his days as an American in Morristown, New Jersey. He eventually moved to Clark County, in east-central Illinois, and became a U.S. citizen in 1856. In 1860 he is listed in the Illinois census as a 31-year-old single man whose occupation is farming. At the time, he lived with his brother Thomas and his wife and children. Several other brothers, including James, Thomas, and George, moved to America, but his brother Andrew stayed behind in Scotland with his parents.

Ferguson enlisted in the Union army in the fall of 1861; he was trained at Camp Butler in Springfield, Illinois, and belonged to the 10th Illinois Infantry of Veteran Volunteers, Company G. At thirty-three, he was older than many of his fellow soldiers, and consequently showed a level of maturity and poise not seen in some of his younger compatriots. He tended to avoid alcohol and other temptations available to soldiers and instead spent his time reading, attending church, observing and learning about his surroundings, and improving himself in various other ways. Perhaps because of his age, Ferguson became ill while serving in the army rather frequently, complaining of lung problems and malaise. He was most likely suffering from pneumonia or tuberculosis. On July 4, 1865, Ferguson was mustered out of service with the rank of second lieutenant. His brother James had also served alongside him in the Illinois Tenth Regiment for much of his time during the war.

Several weeks later, on July 28, he was married to Jane Coryell Rogers. The couple had a daughter, Ella, and lived in Hutsonville, Illinois, for the remainder of their lives. Ferguson worked there as a farmer, growing corn and vegetables, tending to an orchard, raising pigs and chickens, and caring for his horse and cow. Ferguson attended the

Presbyterian Church in Hutsonville and was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Post. He retired from farming in 1877 but was able to support himself and his family by drawing his soldier's pension. He died at home on May 13, 1910, of tuberculosis. Lung ailments had troubled him all of his life, especially during his years of military service. Ferguson is buried in the Old Hutsonville Cemetery, not far from where he farmed and lived for the majority of his life.

Sources used:

Ferguson, John Hill. *On to Atlanta: The Civil War Diaries of John Hill Ferguson, Illinois Tenth Regiment of Volunteers*. Edited by Janet Correll Ellison with assistance from Mark A. Weitz. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The John Hill Ferguson Civil War Diaries, 1862-1865, are comprised of five handwritten diaries authored by John Hill Ferguson, a young Scottish immigrant from Illinois. He served as a soldier in the Union Army under the Tenth Illinois Infantry Regiment, Company G. In his five-volume diary, Ferguson recounts his experiences during the Civil War, which include an extensive stay in Nashville. He was personally involved in the Battles of Chickamauga and Chattanooga, as well as the lengthy Atlanta Campaign. Information about other important battles, such as the Battle of Stones River, is also discussed in considerable detail. Daily activities are also chronicled, providing the reader with a sense of what it was like to serve as a Union soldier.

The five books are summarized below, with the following information listed: the date range of each diary, including the location on the first and last day of the journal; notable observations and experiences that might be of interest to readers of the diaries; and finally, a brief paragraph giving context for the period in which Ferguson was involved in the war. A summary of some of his more significant experiences is also included in this section.

Taken as a whole, the diaries will be extremely useful to scholars of the Civil War in its western theatre as well as those interested in day-to-day aspects of life during the years 1862 – 1865. Of especial interest is Ferguson's extended stay in Nashville and his experiences in this city. Although some sections of the diary include information about the weather or daily marches and picketing, amongst these dry observations are interesting vignettes about life and culture in the South during the Civil War.

Interestingly, Ferguson does not tend to dwell on the death and misery that he sees around him; rather, he takes these aspects of war in stride and accepts them as being a part of a soldier's world. He is loyal to the Union cause and earnestly attempts to act in an upstanding manner, although many of his compatriots are not so inclined to abstain from drink and other distractions. In all, Ferguson has a keen eye for the world around him and offers insight into the life in the war-torn South in the early 1860s.

Book 1

Feb. 28, 1862 (Bird's Point, Missouri) – Nov. 10, 1862 (Nashville, Tennessee)

As a member of the 10th Illinois Infantry, Company G, Ferguson describes his daily experiences as his unit generally heads south, including stops in Mississippi and Alabama. Before heading south, however, Ferguson marches towards New Madrid, Missouri, and Island Number Ten, located on a double bend in the Mississippi River at the Tennessee and Kentucky border. He is involved with the capture of New Madrid beginning in early March 1862. General John Pope's victory at New Madrid allows the Federals to gain a strategic position which will later allow them to attack Island Number Ten, a Confederate post that controlled part of the Mississippi River. By April 7, 1862, the Federals were able to land several regiments in Tennessee below the Confederate position on this island.

Once Ferguson heads south, many days are uneventful, with long marching and picketing, although skirmishing with the "Rebels" (Ferguson often refers to them as guerillas) is a fairly common occurrence. He spends a good deal of time in Mississippi, and is involved with the siege of Corinth that takes place for several months, beginning in late April. Ferguson is frequently ill, a problem which will plague him for his entire time as a soldier. Rations are scarce for much of the year.

Ferguson eventually reaches Nashville for a lengthy military posting. During his stay, Nashville experienced a long period of unrest, as the city was threatened by the Confederate forces. Nashville had earlier fallen—without a struggle but with widespread panic—to the Union forces earlier in the year. After occupation, the possibility of a Confederate assault to win back the city was frequently present in the hearts and minds of Nashvillians. Historian Walter Durham explains, "Secessionists continued to expect that this city would be freed by an attack from the south. It was as well known to them as to Federal authorities that the Confederates planned to take Nashville and Middle Tennessee by October 15 even if it should require the transfer of troops from Virginia to accomplish it" (*Nashville: The Occupied City*, 112). Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry forces in particular were a bane to the Union occupiers; he and his men destroyed railway lines and bridges, breaking off critical supply lines.

A number of Ferguson's notable observations and experiences include:

- (1) Ferguson's unit heads towards New Madrid and eventually occupies the area; he describes the fort in New Madrid that the "Rebels" had abandoned. Ferguson is later involved with General John Pope's campaign against Island Number Ten in the Mississippi River (begins March 10)
- (2) Ferguson is almost killed when a shell lands near him and renders him stunned and breathless (March 13)

- (3) Ferguson spends time in Mississippi, and is involved with various skirmishes, including the siege of Corinth (begins approximately May 3)
- (4) Ferguson's brother James very sick for days with the "flucks" (begins June 17)
- (5) Skirmishing around "Linville" (Lynnville), Tennessee, and description of the area (Sept. 9)
- (6) Description of Franklin, Tennessee, as a prosperous-looking area (Sept. 11)
- (7) Description of the city cemetery of Nashville with burials of important Tennesseans (Sept. 19)
- (8) Ferguson states that the telegraph should soon be in operation between Nashville and Evansville (Nov. 4)
- (9) Lengthy description and drawing of Fort Negley in Nashville; the fort was of a classical European design, in a star-shaped polygonal shape (begins Nov. 4)

Book 2

Nov. 14, 1862 (Nashville, TN) – Jan. 23, 1863 (Nashville, TN)

For much of this volume, the soldiers are garrisoned at Fort Negley for the winter, but some Confederate attacks take place on Union strongholds in Nashville and the surrounding area in December. Most importantly, the Battle of Stones River takes place in late December and early January, and Ferguson discusses the events of the days prior to the battle as well as what he learns of the battle itself. The Battle of Stones River began on December 31, 1862, when troops of General William S. Rosecrans were attacked by General Braxton Bragg's army. The Confederates ultimately decided to withdraw, which led to widespread criticism of Bragg's battle strategies. Bragg's decision to retreat allowed the Union army to control Middle Tennessee, and provided a much-needed boost to the Federals.

A number of Ferguson's notable observations and experiences include:

- (1) Skirmishing at Stones River near Nashville and burning of "Levurn" (La Vergne) (November 27)
- (2) Ferguson sees a play (what Ferguson calls "King Henry the III") as well as a "wind-up play" shown before the main attraction about a man who grows up never exposed to women (Dec. 17)
- (3) Ferguson witnesses a violent domestic dispute (Dec. 30)
- (4) Ferguson describes and draws a picture of the reservoir on the river bank in Nashville (December 31)
- (5) Various poems are included throughout (December 23) and at the end of this journal (December 28, January 1)
- (6) Ferguson witnesses a "darky" being whipped by an "oversear" (Jan. 19)

Book 3

Jan. 24, 1863 (Nashville, TN) – Dec. 31, 1863 (Rogersville)

During the beginning of this journal, Ferguson spends much of his time in Nashville. He describes some minor skirmishes in Murfreesboro, Franklin, and surrounding areas. Ferguson also mentions, on a number of occasions, Confederate prisoners heading to Nashville. Some of his fellow Union soldiers also find themselves getting into various sorts of trouble (in seedier areas of Nashville, such as "Smokey Row") when they have free time. Although he is not involved in the Battle of Vicksburg, Ferguson reports on the battle and the city's eventual fall. He heads south through Murfreesboro, (New) Fostersville (sic), Lewisburg, Columbia, Pulaski (all towns in Tennessee), Athens (Alabama), Jackson County (Alabama), Bridgeport (Alabama) and finally ends up in the vicinity of Chattanooga. He describes many aspects of the forthcoming battles, including the general conditions and the many soldiers who are wounded. Some of his time is also spent at Camp Anderson's Cross Roads, located in Tennessee.

Ferguson was involved in both the Battle of Chickamauga and the campaigns around Chattanooga which followed. The Battle of Chickamauga took place from September 19-20, 1863, and both sides sustained serious losses. Initially, General Bragg and his forces occupied Missionary Ridge, Lookout Mountain, and Chattanooga Valley. The assault forced the demoralized Union troops to retreat into Chattanooga. This city was an important prize, as it was an important rail center and the gateway to the Deep South. By positioning artillery on the heights overlooking the river (and by blocking the rail lines and roads), the Confederates prevented Federal supplies from entering Chattanooga. The Union Army faced surrender or starvation until a supply line was improvised and the Confederate siege ultimately failed. After Grant's troops had regained their strength, they charged up Missionary Ridge. From November 23-25, 1863, Union and Confederate troops engaged in heavy fighting which resulted in a Union victory. The Confederates then retreated to Georgia.

A number of Ferguson's notable observations and experiences include:

- (1) George Washington's birthday celebrated (Feb. 23)
- (2) Mentions improvements made to Fort Negley and plans to work on nearby fort (April 23)
- (3) Has photograph taken in Nashville (April 24)
- (4) Reports the death of General Thomas J. ("Stonewall") Jackson (May 14)
- (5) Ferguson sees deserter executed (May 15)
- (6) Describes a Nashville church service (May 24)
- (7) Spies are hung in Franklin, Tennessee (June 9)

- (8) Drunken soldiers raid the courthouse in Lewisburg, Tennessee (August 22)
- (9) Details about their reception in Columbia, Tennessee, and worshipping with people from a colored church (August 23)
- (10) En route to Chattanooga, they encounter 500 "Rebel" deserters (Sept. 14)
- (11) Battle of Stones River data (listed in the back of the journal)
- (12) Various poems, ballads, songs, maxims, & proverbs (included in the back of the journal)
- (13) A descriptive list of members of 10th Illinois Regiment, Co. G (listed in the back of the journal)

(Several pages in the front of this book have had some water damage, rendering some parts difficult to read)

Book 4

Jan. 1, 1864 to Sept. 13, 1864

The Atlanta Campaign is the subject covered throughout much of the fourth diary. Ultimately a Union victory, there were approximately 12,140 casualties sustained by both sides. William Tecumseh Sherman's three armies faced a poorly supplied Confederate force of approximately 65,000 men, led by Joseph E. Johnston, and later, John Bell Hood, who replaced him on July 17. Sherman was instructed by Grant to "move against Johnston's army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their War resources" (Bowman, 156).

A number of Ferguson's notable observations and experiences include:

- (1) Description of war refugees and their desperate condition (March 7)
- (2) Comments upon the group of "Copperheads" (Southern sympathizers) that attack Federal soldiers in Charleston, Illinois (April 12)
- (3) Description of how to make lard candles (July 2)
- (4) Involved with the Atlanta Campaign (approximately May 1 – Sept. 13)
 - (a) Battlefield at Buzzard Roost Gap (Dalton, Georgia) and nearby skirmishes (begins May 9)
 - (b) Ferguson reports being on the battlefield in "Tacoosa" (Catoosa) County, Georgia. He may be involved with the Battle of Resaca, which took place from May 14 – May 15, north of Resaca, Georgia. He then reports being on the battlefield in Rome, Georgia (begins May 15)

- (c) Ferguson reports being on the battlefield in Dallas, Georgia, and near Acworth, Georgia (begins May 26)
- (d) Marietta battles (June)
- (e) Involved with Battle of Kennesaw Mountain (begins June 21)
- (f) "A Soldier's Song for the Times," a song about the Georgia battles (after July 5 entry)
- (g) Ferguson reports being "in Line of Battle South of Chattahoochee River," on July 20 and reports on the Battle at Peachtree Creek (July 21)
- (h) "How the majority of soldiers talk in the field" (probably a poem or song) and "Hints to farmers" (general tips on farming) (after Sept. 13)
- (i) List of Company Roll for Co. G, from its first formation, up to Sept. 12th, 1864 (listed in the back of the journal)
- (j) List of Company G wounded during Spring Campaign of 1864 (listed in the back of the journal)

Book 5

Jan. 1, 1865 – June 10, 1865

The last volume essentially details Ferguson's experiences as he continues to participate in William Tecumseh Sherman's march through Georgia* and later, his campaign in the Carolinas. They eventually continue through Columbia, South Carolina; Bentonville, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; and finally, to Washington, D.C. While the Federals are in South Carolina, Columbia is targeted and much of the city succumbs to fire. Sherman's strategy was to break the southern will to fight by pillaging the countryside and causing all to suffer. He commented that this would "make war so terrible...that generations would pass before they could appeal again to it." He left hundreds of miles of countryside in ruins, noting that "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it....Those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out."

*Ferguson was not a part of the official "March to the Sea," which took place for 37 days, starting in Atlanta on November 15, 1864, and finishing in Savannah, Georgia. There are no diary entries in Book Four or Five during these dates. However, Ferguson did travel the same general route several weeks later, in January, behind the troops heading towards Savannah.

A number of Ferguson's notable observations include:

- (1) The possession and/or destruction of railroads in Savannah, Charleston, Midway, and Orangeburg (Jan. 15, Feb. 8, Feb. 13)
- (2) An attack/riot on several black soldiers (Jan. 6)

- (3) The description of the plundering of the old Haywood Mansion in South Carolina (Jan. 15)
- (4) A description of the reaction of women seeing their houses pillaged (Feb. 3, Feb. 12)
- (5) The destruction of Columbia, South Carolina (begins Feb. 15)
- (6) Ferguson is involved in the Battle of Bentonville in North Carolina (March 21)
- (7) Ferguson describes a visit to the "Deaf and Dumb Asylum" (April 28)
- (8) Ferguson's analysis of why Ambrose Everett Burnside lost his battle in Fredericksburg (May 16)
- (9) Sherman's parade through Washington and Ferguson's discussion of this event as well as his description of the U.S. Capitol (May 23, May 24, May 27)