

Hotchkiss Letter re: John I. Hopkins Death

Background Information

John I. Hopkins

Age: 25

Married: Feb 20, 1862

Died of wounds received in battle Dec. 29, 1863

Headquarters I Battery Minnesota Vols.

Near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Jany. [sic] 29, 186[illegible]

Dear Sir:

A note from you received this day reminded me of a duty which has heretofore been neglected from necessity rather than desire. From the time your son John was wounded until the 7th or 8th of January, I had no time or means of writing, being all the time day and night, on duty without the presence of writing material. Accumulating duties and ill health has prevented my writing since the din of battle ceased.

Your son was wounded on the 26th of December, 1863, while my Battery was engaging the enemy at Knob Gap near Nolensville, Tennessee, by a ball or fragment of a ball which entered the mouth on the right side, passing through the tongue and hence into the left breast. I was lead to believe, from reports of physicians, that his wound was not dangerous. He appeared cheerful and very composed when I visited him after the struggle was over the day he was wounded, and appeared ever grateful for my attention. The next morning I was very much surprised to learn that our wounded were to follow the Army in Ambulances; but at that time there was no alternative but to follow the behests of orders. About 2 o'clock in the morning of the 30th of December I was astonished with the intelligence that John I. Hopkins had breathed his last. It was the first information I had received that his wound was fatal. We were to march at daybreak if we were not attacked at that hour, wherefore it became necessary to consign our beloved companion in arms to his narrow resting place before day light. It was very dark and raining. The funeral services were conducted with due solemnity and respect for the dead, the Chaplain of the 21st Illinois Volunteers officiating. He was buried near Overall's creek of the Wilkison [sic] Pike, three miles from Murfreesboro.

The effects left by your son are as follows:

Cash Five Dollars \$5.00

Postage stamps 36

Sutler Tickets 80 \$6.16

One Pocket Book

One Express Receipt for \$20.00

Private Paper and Letters

One Memorandum Book

Writing Paper

One Portfolio

One Ink Stand

Two Steel Pens and one holder

Two Stencil Plates

One Testament

One Overcoat

One Pair Cotton Hose

Two Wollen [sic] Shirts

One pair Wollen [sic] Drawers

One Pair Boots

These articles are in the hands of Dr. L. F. Russell of my Battery, and will be sent to you by express as soon as a receipt for them from you shall be received by me. This is in accordance with Army regulations.

I miss your dear boy very much. He had endeared himself to me by uniform good conduct. Though in an enemy's country he was among friends and had every attention possible under the circumstances. He appeared cheerful and resigned – talked cheerfully of home, after he was wounded – sayed [sic] it was better to be him than some one that had a wife and children at home to mourn his loss. Generous thoughts and noble expressions. After he was wounded he often spoke of his parents, whose memory he seemed to embalm with grateful affection.

My dear friend, you have lost a noble boy while nobly discharging his duty. It will be with sorrowing recollection that I shall call up his memory in the future. God has softened your bereavement with the Truth that your son passed from life as the pure and valiant die.

You have my unqualified sympathy. May God temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Should I be so fortunate as to pass safely through future conflicts and return to my home, I will be most happy to meet in true friendship the parents, of him whose remains I have deposited in mother earth in Tennessee.

I have the honor to be Sir, Most Respectfully and Truly yours,
Wm. Augustus Hotchkiss

J. C. Hopkins
Saratogo, Minnesota