Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park
PO Box 2126
Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia 30742

LETTERS

of

CAPT. WILLIAM S. MITCHELL, 1ST WISCONSIN, CO. "D"

Not for publication

PO Box 2126
Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia 30742

Camp Andy Johnson
December 14, 1862

No. 83

Dear Father:

We arrived in Nashville on the 11th. The next day our Regt. with another, was sent on a foraging expedition with 250 wagons. We went about 16 miles back on the B. G. Pike and although forage is scarce, we loaded the wagons and arrived here last night about 12 P.M. So you see I have had no time to write. I have received no letters from you since I left Mitchellville. The 24th is near us but I have not been out of camp. The pickets of the 24th were shelled by the enemy a few days ago. Some think that we will have a fight here, but I know better. They may make a stand at Murfreesboro, but the big battle will be at Chattanooga. We are the reserve of the center of the 14th army corps and until called in to support our advance, will not see any of the skirmishes. In my opinion the rebels are only keeping up appearances with a small force as they did at Green River. Just as soon as our troops move on they will fall back.

You may have me a pair of boots made. Have them smaller, that is not so long and with a heavier sole. Ballard and Sweet have joined us. If we move soon Sweet will have to go into barracks. I shall try to get him a furlough and as his leg is a little worse I think I can do it. I have tried and I find I can't get away so I have given it up. I don't know what is the trouble with the mails. We received a large one today but none for me. I am hearty as ever and could I manage to get home for a while would willingly remain here for the balance of the term of enlistment. I am not homewisk but "I want to see Ma", I will confess. Well if I can't get home this winter I would like to see Tom down here. If he should come he had better get a pass from the Gov. Give my undying love to Mother, Anna, Jennie and all.

Your affectionate son

Wm. S. Mitchell
Capt.

No. 85

A Merrie Christmas & A Happy New Year to all.

Camp Andy Johnson
Nashville
December 24, 1862

Dear Father:

I have received but one letter by mail from you since we left Mitchellsville and can't account for it. I have received none from Tom or any of the folks. I have written several. We get a mail every day but day after day I am disappointed.

Our Regt. came off of picket today. While on picket about 3 o'clock this morning I heard reveilles from all the camps and at daybreak we received orders to be ready to march. So we rolled up the blankets but remained on picket until relieved at the regular hour. I hear that we move in the morning. Things look equally today. Troops are moving to the rear through Nashville. We have a report here that we are to go back into Kentucky but I don't place any confidence in it. It looks as though this army was governed by the Army of the Potomac. As they move forward we do, and as they have fallen back I think we will, a short distance.

I suppose you, that is all the folks at home are anticipating a good time tomorrow. Well, I hope you will have it. For the present I see nothing ahead except long marches and a few more dreary months. But I feel cheerful and hope in due time to enjoy home and the society of friends once more, and I assure you I now know what a home is. I shall be satisfied to remain there when I get out of the service. I tell you what Father, the army is the place to bring boys to the proper appreciation of mothers, fathers, home, etc. Do not think from this I am discouraged or downhearted for I am not. But you know I always had a desire to leave home. To go to Pikes, Peak, California, etc. Home is the only place that has any pleasure for me now. Sweet is still with me. His wound is improving slowly. Messenger also is here. We have a rumor that the rebels are concentrating again in Ky. If that is the case and this army again enters Ky. I am afraid there will be a great many deserters as the men are getting discouraged with this marching and countermarching.

Lieut. Chandler is well satisfied with his position as Pioneer Officer. He is an engineer by trade, and has a horse to ride so he is all right. I don't think Messenger will

Continued.

stay long as an order has been issued calling all Signal Officers together. I had a talk with Col. Starkweather. Explained to him how I remained with my company, performed my duty etc. and asked for a leave of absence. He replied that he was well aware how faithful I had been and that I certainly deserved a furlough and he would do all in his power in my behalf. But at the same time informed me (what I well know) that to procur a furlough was almost impossible. However, I have his good will and I think as soon as an opening occurs he will do all he can for me.

As we move in the morning I will have to pack up so good-bye. My love to mother dear, and all the family.

Yours affectionately,

Billy

Direct via Louisville.

No. 86

Camp on the March South of
Nashville
December 28, 1862

Dear Father:

We are again on the tramp. Left Nashville the morning of the 26th. We are now about 20 miles from Nashville near Nolensville. We are again having hard times. We have had two days of very rainy weather. The mud is knee deep. We lay down in the mud and get up in mud. Everything in the shape of clothing is wet through. But today we have pitched tents and will remain, so we can have a change. McCook is in the advance and I guess giving the rebels fits as we have heard heavy cannonading for two days. Last night we pushed forward to reenforce him but found the rebel position evacuated and McCook also gone. He is following them up and giving them the benefit of nearly all his batteries. The 24th is with him and they have probably had a fight. We can't be far from Murfreesboro, although on a different pike. Negley is on the Murfreesboro road and we can distinctly hear his guns. He is probably shelling them. I don't think the rebels will stand. They have fallen back as we advance and I think will continue to do so.

Last night, as night before, we were completely drenched as we had been marching all day in the rain. To make it more uncomfortable we have to either sleep in our wet clothes or put them on in the morning. We had just entered camp last night and were not here 5 minutes before we were ordered to move forward 2 miles to a range of hills and form a line of battle. We did so and stood nearly an hour in as hard a rain as I ever saw. But McCook's guns, or the sound, died away and we came back. We demolished a house and placing the boards in the mud near a fire, we laid down and I slept as comfortable as could be. I do not know what is going on in the advance but I suppose we are driving the rebels before us. I wish we had a few more McCooks. "He is lightning on a limb." Capt. Goodrich has been ordered back to his regiment and is now with us. Messenger is with me but he can't march. Sweet marched along with the company and stands it well. Col. Larrabee of the 24th left us yesterday. He is going home to recruit for his regiment, and also his health, which I understand is not very good. I think I wrote before Court Larkin has resigned. Soldiering was too much like work for him. I will close as I have some business to attend to before we march again. I send my love to all the family.

Your affectionate son,
Billy

Enclosure with No. 87.

Capt. Goodrich is all right. Tell his wife so. I am writing on paper that he got from his wife's last letter. Our wagons are in Nashville, We have no tents, baggage and but two or three blankets in the company. The balance are back. But our victory is food, clothing and everything else to us.

George Bleyer was wounded and captured. We shall probably now have a chance to wash up and change clothes. You have heard Richardson tell about the Russian war. Lying in the rifle pits was a good deal like it. No rations, no fire, no blankets and drenched to the skin.

Four companies of the 24th stood their ground until ordered to fall back. Some of the companies made good time to the rear. I don't know as they were to blame as the whole line gave way. But what makes us feel sore, they were supporting Bush's battery and lost two of his pieces. Our rations are out again today.

The enemy are in full retreat, probably for Chattanooga.

No. 87

2½ miles from Murfreesboro
January 4, 1863.

Dear Father:

After 5 days of severe fighting we have driven the enemy from their well chosen position and from trenches that with their force they might have held against double our number.

January 5

Since writing the above we have marched through Murfreesboro and are in camp about 2 miles out on the Shelbyville Pike. We left Nashville on the 26th Dec. in a heavy rain storm. Since then I have not had any of my clothes off and except to empty the water out of my shoes, they have been on night and day. The men have had their accoutrements on also all the whole time. The battle opened on the 30th Dec. The rebels surprised our center about daylight, driving our troops before them. The 24th was among the number and I am sorry to hear that several of the 24th officers and some of the troops, ran before the enemy had fairly opened upon them. Cam Reed was taken Very sick and advised Hibbard to take the Regt. off the field. This is private. Don't say anything about it. Time will bring it out. Will Eldred also left his company. We were not there at the time. Our brigade was sent on a pike to the east to hold a bridge. Our train was attack by a large force of cavalry. We drove them away but not until they burned some 16 wagons belonging to the 79th Penn., 21st Wis. and 24th Ill. The next day we arrived at the battle field and were immediately thrown to the front and held the ground for 3 days. 48 hours as ley in rifle pits ankle deep in water and under a heavy shower of shot, shell etc. It rained constantly for the last two days and being not more than two blocks from the enemy, we had no fires. Thus we passed New Years, not a happy one I assure you. The 4th day the enemy threw a tremendous force against our left wing, which gave way, but Negley came up with his division, charged, routed the enemy and drove them across the river. So fierce was the fight that the water was almost red as it flowed on by us. Lieut Chandler was in the charge with the Pioneer Corps. I shall never forget the sight of carnage and blood and I hope I may never be called upon to see another such. Strange to say, we had but few wounded and one or two filled, although we lay in an exposed position. Capt. McVean received a shot in his leg which will use him up for some time. My company is all right and everybody else that you know. Will write as soon as I can.

Billy

No. 98

Camp near Murfreesboro
March 18, 1863

Dear Father:

Since writing to you we have changed our camp, in fact, the whole army has taken new position. All our moves look very much like remaining here some time as every stump in the camp has been removed and wells are ordered to be dug. We expected Cap. Wilson today but he has not arrived. Will be here probably tomorrow, when I shall immediately forward my application. But you must not expect me home for a certainty, as the "powers that be" may not allow the furlough. How is Starkweather doing in Milwaukee? Better I hope than when he was there before. I think he will work hard to have the Regt. ordered home to recuit, but I don't think the government will allow it as the troops here are needed, every Regt.

I believe I wrote before that I had received the boots, paper, envelopes, etc. The company has never been in better condition than at present. I have no trouble. The only case I had had that bothered me was a man who deserted last March while Capt. Starr was comd. He returned last January. Of course I had to Court Martial him. He has since been drumed out of camp and forfeited all pay. As he never received pay you will perceive it amounted to quite a sum. I was sorry to lose him as he made every exertion to become a good soldier.

For the last week the weather has been delightful, a little too warm if anything. During the days our tents are rolled up and the boys bask in the sun in shirt sleeves. A little different, I guess, from your weather. I shall not be short of money as I have now over $100.00 with me. So use what money I have sent just as you like. I never forget father, the expense, say nothing of the troubles yourself and dear old mother have been to in bringing me up. So don't consider that you are holding my money. What's mine is yours or Tom's. I want to see him do well. Let him use it if he wants to. How is he doing now? Tell him if this war ever ends I have some good customers for him in my company as they are nearly all farmers. The 24th all say they are going home in a few days to take care of the copperheads north. I think they had better for they are no use here. They can't turn out as many men as we do and the 21st, poor fellows, are dieing off rapidly. When we moved camp they had only 70 muskets out, some 30 less than one full company.

No. 2

Has Courtenay moved yet? I hope his business next year will be as good as it was this. Tom Culyer who has been a paroled prisoner is expected here tomorrow. Bob Nichols has been here some time.

I will now close by sending love to all including little Anna, of course.

Yours affectionately,

Wm. S. Mitchell

Give Chase my regards. How is his business?

Billey

No. 99

Headquarters 1st Wis.
March 23, 1863

Dear Father:

Capt. Wilson returned Saturday. The Regt. was out towards Lebanon where quite a severe skirmish took place before our arrival. On my return Saturday night I found Wilson in camp and received the box in good condition. Yesterday (Sunday) I was Officer of the Day. Had partly written you a letter when Lieuts. Battle and Rogers came over and I was forded to quit. I forwarded my application yesterday and expect to hear from it about Wednesday. You must not place too much confidence in my going home for "White men are very uncertain" in this country and my paper may come back disapproved. I think Starkweather will do his utmost to have the Regt. ordered home as he is not to be a Brigadier.

I today received a letter from Jim Hodges. He is now at Benton Barracks, St. Louis. All the paroled men from Annapolis were sent to that place. Norm, I suppose, has procured his discharge. I don't blame him much, for a soldier's life is not a pleasant one, I assure you! Since we are having such fine weather I am feeling first rate and if I can only visit you will be contented to remain if necessary till "the last dog is hung." I am in temporary command of the Regt., Col. Bingham having gone to see a review of Sheridan's Division. I frequently act as Major but always prefer to be with my company. Tommy Caliger returned from Camp Lew Wallace day before yesterday. The train he and Wilson came down on was thrown off the track and captured by guerillas. But while the rebs were paroling the officers, some of our troops came up and drove off the Battery Mts.(?) Wilson, however, lost most all the letters he had. Yours and Anna's fortunately, they did not get hold of. I think we shall stay here some time as we have taken new positions and formed a double line of camp completely around this city. Messenger was here last night. He has a wild project on foot that I advised him to drop but will inform you more definitely in my next. Charley is a wild fellow but after all I think he means well. I know him to be as brave a man as there is in the army. It is rumored in camp that we are to be relieved by the 30th Wis. and the boys are almost crazy. I never swallow camp yearns unless I know the authority. By the way, won't Tom be liable to draft under the conscription act. I have thought of that considerably lately. He would never stand it and if he can procure his exemption he must do so by all means. Hoping to see you soon and with love to all, I am as ever

Your affectionate son,
Wm. S. Mitchell

No. 2

Camp 1st Wis. Infft. Vol.
Murfreesboro, Tenn, April 10, 1863

Dear Father:

I wrote you a few days ago. The Regt. has gone on picket today. I was on duty yesterday as Officer of Day and consequently off duty today. We had a heavy rain last night but this morning the sun came out and in a few hours all the mud has disappeared. This afternoon is a little too warm for comfort. I am in good health, better than when I was home. The paymaster has arrived and will pay off in a day or two for January and February (2 months).

On my arrival I found a letter from Philip Lipsett which I answered today, also quite a number of business letters, all of which have been attended to. I have used up all my stamps and wish you would send a few more. I shall be able to send home enough of my pay to raise the amount now there to $1000.00 and to settle for the clothing etc. besides. The coat I brought down just suited the officers and 4 of them have sent to Mullen Bros. for coats, pants, etc. made in the same style. I sent yesterday to Anna a rebel flag, one that I got in Columbia while sick. I have carried it around ever since and thought of giving it away, but you may want to see it so I forwarded it to her.

I tried to see Mr. Besley at Waukegan but he was not at the depot, so failed to. Col. Starkweather and party arrived here soon after myself, and conducting himself well. That is he doesn't drink. There is a general fight among our officers as to who shall go home on the next furlough but I don't think any more will be allowed, as Genl. Rosecrans says he will <u>not</u> allow officers or men away until after the next fight. But for my part I see no prospect for one here unless weadvance. There is some talk of the army moving and strong talk of our Division being left to hold this place. We would have no marching but lots of train guarding and picket duty to do, so we don't much care which we do. I find on my arrival that the men have potatoes, pickles and other vegetables issued to them so they are living first rate. Owing to the attack made on the RR the day I came from Louisville we did not get to Nashville until 12:00 o'clock P.M. and as I had to leave at 7 in the morning did not see John Henderson, although I inquired of a great many of his Regiment. None knew him. I went to the Provost Marshall's office but it was so early I could not get in, so was obliged to come through without seeing him. I have

No. 1

Camp near Murfreesboro
April 12, 1863

Dear Father:

I arrived here yesterday safe and sound, though twice barely missed being captured by the rebels. My boys were very glad to see me and doubly so receiving the packages which I managed after considerable trouble to get through to them.

I found Major Mitchell in Louisville and he procured for me transportation to Nashville, thereby saving me about 7 dollars. I met Cal, John, etc. at Kenosha and had a pleasant time to Chicago. They remained there but as they were going it rather strong, I went through and left them.

At Louisville they overtook me and again I gave them the slip by leaving on the morning train for Nashville. From appearances I should judge they had been tight about all the time. The party is expected here tomorrow. Of course, their doings are private.

Col. Bingham, Adjt. Watkins and myself visited the 24th this morning and had a good time. I find my returns made out by Bob Nicholes but my rolls are still on hand. Will write as soon as I am done with them.

With love to all, I am

Yours affectionately

Billey

Continued.

We have had three rainy days but the sun is out a
the air very pleasant. My rolls are all completed
ready for pay. Do not know when that will be. Exp
before we move.

I would like a dark blue flannel blouse or sack coat
warmer weather and marching. You can get one cheap a
are not lined. If you can't get a flannel one get som
light cloth. Most of the stores keep them. Perhaps y
better have Mullen make one for they seldom fit around
neck and shoulders. Have him make a military undress c
sack coat, brass buttons. Have it good and made fashion
sleeves, etc. Love to all

Your affectionate son,

Billy

P. S. Pockets in the sides and one breast pocket in
coat.

No. 6

Camp 1st Wis.
May 11, 1863

Dear Father:

Yours of May 7th I received today. Charley Messenger has not been in from his station since the trial. The findings of the Court has not been published as yet. We are all very much excited in regard to the news just received viz. that Hooker had again crossed the Rapahanock and was driving the rebels before him, also that Keyes has possession of Richmond. This last I don't swallow but I believe that Hooker is at it again. By the time this reaches you, however, you will know all about it. There seems to be no prospect for immediate payment. Our rolls are all ready for the paymaster whenever he comes. That watch I spoke of keeps splendid time. I have no means, however, of knowing how fine the gold is, but I fancy it is good. Shall hold on to it until next pay day when I think I will have no difficulty getting about $80.00 for it.

Before this reaches you, Tom I suppose will be happy in the possession of a wife. As you say, "May God bless them." Tom could not do better in selecting a wife than he has. May they be happy.

I was very sorry to hear of Jennies trouble and earnestly hope she may have recovered ere this. How does my little namesake get along? Well, I hope.

We are having very warm weather here but so long as we are not on the march, don't mind it. I yesterday visited the Forts and works around this place. They are splendid works. 20,000 men can hold this place against the whole Confed. Army. Lieut. Chandler surveyed nearly all of them and superintended part of their construction. He is a practical surveyor and is now a Big Man or Genl. Morton's Staff. He calls often and when I was over, showed me everything of interest to be seen, such as the magazine, redoubts, etc. I am somewhat puzzled about our moving. We are all ready but Rosey seems to be waiting on Hooker. Some officers high in command think we will not move for some time. I think different.

Love to all, yours,

Billie

Continued.

We have had three rainy days but the sun is out again and the air very pleasant. My rolls are all completed and ready for pay. Do not know when that will be. Expect it before we move.

I would like a dark blue flannel blouse or sack coat for warmer weather and marching. You can get one cheap as they are not lined. If you can't get a flannel one get some light cloth. Most of the stores keep them. Perhaps you had better have Mullen make one for they seldom fit arounhd the neck and shoulders. Have him make a military undress or sack coat, brass buttons. Have it good and made fashionable, sleeves, etc. Love to all

Your affectionate son,

Billy

P. S. Pockets in the sides and one breast pocket in the coat.

No. 4

Headquarters Co. "D" 1st Wis
Murfreesboro
May 5, 1863

Dear Father:

I have received all your letters up to number 4. This I number 4, calling the note I sent by Adjt. Walker, No. 3. I am a member of a Gen. Court Martial and am having quite a good time. It may be two weeks or perhaps two months before we can get through. I am still with my company but do no duty, as picket or marching. I did not intend to accept but concluded that it may be of some service to me to understand the working of a Court. We get no pay unless the Court meets 10 miles from the Regt. In that case we get $1.50 per day extra. We have rooms in the city about a mile from camp.

Genl. Rosecrans has countermanded the order of forming the Elite Corps. We still have the Roll of Honor, upon which stands my name, We are having splendid weather, too warm if anything. Now have a little news which must be kept quiet, especially from Mr. Messenger. Charley has been court martialed--charges--beastly intoxication. The testimony was all in and court cleared for consultation, Saturday night. Charley thinks he is all right. Says the charges were not sustained. I hop he is and believe it. I know the man (a Signal Officer) who preferred the charges to be a perfect sot and a man of no principle. Charley assures me he was not drunk and had witnesses to the same effect. The proceedings of the court have been sent to Genl. Rosecrans for approval or otherwise. He feels very bad about it and if he should be dismissed (from) the service, I wouldn't give much for Phelps (his enemy) life. The trouble happened at Readyville where Charley and Phelps are on station together.

Our muster and pay rolls have been sent in but prospects for pay are not as good as they appeared a week ago. Still, I think we will be paid off this month again. I suppose you received the money, $200.00 I sent by Watkins. We are now the 2nd Brigade instead of the 3rd. The old 2nd has been ordered to join Genl. Negley. In your next don't fail to let me know how young Billie Flourishes, also Jennie & Courtney. Will write to Jennie in a day or two. With everlasting love to all.

I am affectionately yours,

Billie

May 14 1863

Dear Father:

Adjt. Watkins leaves today so I thought I would send a few lines to addition to those in the package containing the money. I have sold the watch, or rather one of my sergeants raffled it off for $35.00. One of my boys won it and has sent it home. Those packages you will keep until called for and by the way, one of my men named Wicker tells me a letter he sent in the package I sent to you before this has never reached home. I think you told me you placed them in the P. O. and took receipts. The missing one was direc directed to Mrs. _____ Wicker, West Bend. If you have the receipt send it to me, if not let it go. He thinks that the Postmaster at West Bend did not deliver it.

A splendid double case gold watch was raffled off for $100.00 yesterday. I kept out of the raffle and as soon as the fellow won it, gave him $40.00 for it. It is one of the American Watch Co. and I should judge worth from $70.00 to $80.00 dollars. But I bought it to sell again and have been offered $50.00 for it. Am holding it at $60.00 and think I will get it yet. If not will let it slide at $50.00. It is good gold and keeps splendid time. I have seen silver watches of the same manufacture sell for $50.00.

The packages not called for in the course of a week drop in the Post Office. The Adjut. leaves now, so good bye

Your affectionate son,

Billy

Continued.

sent the package back by Capt. Wall of the 21st who is on his way home and also the papers to Capt. Frank Townsend, those given to me by his brother. You will explain this to him (John Townsend) and to Mrs. Porter. Tell her I was behind time and dared not lay over. The gold piece she gave me I will wait until some better chance turns up and will send to him. I may get to Nashville myself soon and if I do will hand it to him.

I have not as yet received any letters from you but can hardly expect them so soon. Will anxiously await the arrival of one.

Give my love to mother and all the family.

Yours affectionate son,

Wm. S. Mitchell.