

85  
Army 85  
Nashville Dec 24th  
Rec'd Jan 5th 63

John S. Mitchell Esq  
Milwaukee  
Wisconsin

A Merrie Christmas & A Happy New Year to all

Camp Andy Johnson  
Nashville Dec 24th 1862

Dear Father

I have rec'd but one letter by mail from you since we left Mitchellville. I cant account for it. I have rec'd 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 Reville from all the camps and at daybreak we rec'd orders to be ready to march. So we rolled up the Blankets but remained on Picket untill relieved at the regular hour. I hear that we move in the morning. Things look squally today. Troops are moveing to the rear through Nashville. We have a report here that we are to go back into Kentucky, But I dont 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 in a short time do so. I suppose that you that is all the folks at home are anticipating a good time tomorrow. Well I hope you 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 enjoye 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 pleasures 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. I am afraid there will be a great many deserters as the men are getting discouraged with this marching & countermarching.

Lieut Chandler is well satisfied with his position as Pioneer Officer. He is an engineer by trade as has a horse to ride so he is all right. I dont think Messenger will 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. 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 benefit. But at the same time informed me (what I well knew) that to procure a Furlough was almoste 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 by. My love to the family, Mother Dear, and all

Yours Affectionately  
Billy

direct Via Louisville

To Thom. L. Mitchell  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Camp near Murfreesboro, Tenn.  
January 8, 1863

Dear Brother

We are once more enjoying a few days of rest after two weeks of the hardest kind of marching and fighting. Genl. Rosecrans would have undoubtedly followed the enemy with his whole force had he proper transportation and rations. And as I am just as anxious to strike the Rebels as they run as any one. Yet a few more days like the last would use us all up. I can't begin to tell you what we suffered during those 5 days of carnage. Fortunately for us the 28th Brigade was not obliged to charge the enemy. The other two Brigades drove the enemy at the point of the bayonet, and in my opinion won the day. This Brigade has gained too good a reputation. As we arrived on a double quick, Starkweather received orders to support the center and hold the Brigade in readiness to charge. No batteries opening at the time, we relieved the 9th Brigade and lay for 3 days in a cornfield knee deep in mud. For several days we had been living from hand to mouth. But the last two days in the rifle pits we had about nothing. Then it was that our Brigade went into dead horses. The first day's fighting we were detached from the army and was on a separate pike where we had quite a heavy skirmish, in which we lost none killed but quite a number wounded and captured. I lost 3 from the Company. They were coming up with the train when it was attacked. They were Baker, Cornish, and Bloomer. Baker was my Company clerk. Cornish received a bad wound in his neck at Chaplin Hills, and had nearly recovered. Bloomer (Mother will recollect him) he was in my tent at Milwaukee. The 24th Wisc. don't stand as well as formerly. I am sorry to say that many of them put for hospitals and to the rear. Capt. Cam Reed has forever disgraced himself. Other officers left their companies. We were under as heavy if not heavier fire the 3rd day than they, but not a man flinched. The fire we recd at Perryville was 4 times as severe as that poured into the 24th. Well, although they are the "Bone and Sinew" of the North, they don't face the music like the boys who responded to the first call. Poor Norm. He was taken prisoner and has not yet been paroled. Do you recollect the last letter he wrote to the Sentinal stating that picket duty was a relief from camp duty and was rather pleasant. Well I think he has changed his mind, for his Company was on picket when the Rebels charged and completely surprised them and was on the Regt nearly as soon as the pickets. We do not cast any particular reflections on the 24th as the whole line gave way, but instead of waiting for orders and retiring in good order, many of them fled and did not stop until they reached Nashville. 4 companies stood their ground until retired. From all a/cts Howard Green, Dick Capson, Tom Baldwin Halton and many other officers conducted themselves bravely. I don't worry about Norm for I think will be parolled and may reach home on a visit. I stopped one of Co. "A"'s stragglers on the road we were on some ten miles from the fight. He reported the whole army in full retreat all cut to pieces and he was the only man in the 24th who escaped. I had seen slinks before and placed him in the ranks and brot him back. All your particular friends are all safe. Young Cole is badly wounded. Also George Bleyer. At --- Geo. Eockwell was killed. I visited the 24th Regt yesterday but in the hurry did not see

Dave Merrill. I don't think he was in the fight, but am not certain. Hank Drake, the Eddy boys, Charley Day, etc. are all sound. I had a good time dined with Capt Eldred and returned better satisfied with the old 1st than ever. The battlefield presented an awful sight. In some places it seemed as though regiments had been slaughtered where they stood. Some places where a solid shot or shell had struck a man you could see his remains scattered some 20 feet apart. Well this I know is not a pleasant topic, so I will quit. But we had to dance sometimes. Our Brigade was placed at the apex of the line which was formed like a letter V (A) and in front of us were sharpshooters. One in particular just made me move lively. I finely got behind a tree and the scoundrel send a pard of his to the right where the two kept up a cross fire. A Capt. commanding the 33rd Ohio could not move for these fellows. They kept him between two trees for 2 days. He sent out skirmishers twice but could not find them. I had a good laugh to see him standing there in the rain hugging the tree. I have not heard from any of the family but as the mail is now more regular, I hope to soon and often. Give my love to all.

Your Affectionate bro.

Billy

Camp near Murfreesboro  
January 11, 1863

Dear Father

I have just recd. two letters from you of the 21st and 28th Dec. date. Also one from Tom and one from Anna, so I can't grumble for want of mail. Our victory here is more complete than was at first supposed. Yet the Rebels are cocentrating at Tullahoma, and if they do not give us battle there, they will at Chattanooga. The army is being reorganized throughout. We are now the 3rd Brigade 1st Division instead of 28th Brigade. When we move from here we in all probabilities will have to reduce transportation. Large droves of mules arrive daily, which leads me to believe that we shall have but few wagons and those only for provisions. It will be impossible to take wagons over the mountains. We fought 75,000 rebels here many were of the Potomac Army sent here after the Fredricksburg battle. Their killed and wounded far exceeds ours, although they have captured more prisoners than we. Our force was about 40,000- far less than the Rebels. You have heard, I suppose, that Norm was captured and from what I can learn was taken the Chattanooga or Vicksburg. Jim Hodges also is in the hands of the Secesh. Capt. McLean, who was wounded, has gone home on leave of absence. John Davis, Capt Green and others of the Sanitary Commission are here. I rather expected you along. The officers of the 24th are a lot of homesick fellows. The majority of them want to resign. Henry Drake has been promoted to Lieut. for gallant conduct on the field. He will make as good an officer as there is in the Regt. The officers in this Regt., who like myself have had no furlough, are dissatisfied. Many want to resign. I offered mine to the Col (Bingham) and he would not accept it. I said I did not want to resign if I could get a leave of abs. but said he would do all in his power to get one for me, but did not want me to leave him. So here I am and shall hold on for a while longer. But in the spring should nothing turn up I will leave. Chase says in a late letter that my situation is always ready for me. It is good in him, but I don't know but what I can do better as to wages. Everything goes quietly on. We are having a good rest after the hard times before Murfreesboro and I feel like a new man. How do folks look upon resigned officers? Well, my case would be different from those new officers such as the 24th. I have worked for 15 months as faithfully as any officer in the service, so do not consider myself a coward or shrink by leaving the service. I will close with my everlasting love to Mother, yourself and all the family.

Yours Affectionately,

Wm S. Mitchell

Army 89  
Dated Jany 18th (1863)  
Rec'd 27

John S. Mitchell Esq  
Milwaukee  
Wisconsin

Jim Douglas can tell you all the news. He stayed with me.  
Also Fred Hart.

Camp near Murfreesboro  
January 18th 63

Dear Father

I intended to send this by some of the Sanitary Commission But they have gone and so I will send it by mail. Untill yesterday my prospects were good for a visit home. I told Col Bingham it was necessary for me to have a leave of absence or that my resignation be accepted as important business matters required my presence home. He flatly refused to hear to my resigning and said He would do his best to procure me a leave. So He sent a request to Genl Rosencrans that Capt Rogers be returned to the Regiment and I be appointed Recruiting Officer. The request was approved by Col Hambright, Comdr Brigade & Col "S" Comdr Division. I heard no more of it untill yesterday. I went to Lieut Stone (Rosecrans Adjut Genl) and he told me that they had not arrived, being probably with Genl Thomas, But that they could not signe them as Orders were expected daily from Washington with different orders as to the recruiting service. So there it stands. As soon as the papers are returned I will then make written application for a furlough as I understand they are being granted. But I cant as long as this application is in. One of our Lieuts applied yesterday and I think he will get it through. I dislike to resigne as there are so many, But if I cant get home any other way I will. I rec'd the Pkg by the committee (?) and could you have seen the way we sailed into those pies, They were the first mince pies I have had since I left home. You can immagine (sic) how we enjoyed them. We had a regular spree on mince pies. The Shirts are splendid every body envies me. Tell Anna so. We have a rumor that this Division will winter in Nashville. I dont know how true it is, But if it is so, chances for goeing home are good. I will keep you posted however and when I apply for a furlough I intend to carry it through. Capt Eldred has resigned and I hear hs rec'd his paper all signed. Dr Wolcott I expect helped him considerably. I have seen all of the Mil folks except Wm Merrill who I understand is in Nashville working to get Dave discharged. He dont stand the fatigue very well. I would try to procure a Surgeons Certificate of

Disability if my cheeks did not protrude so much. But my face would give the lie to the Certificate. I was all played out for awhile after The Fight. But this rest is bringing me up to the old weight. Every body tells me I am more fleshy than I ever have been. Tell Mother not to worry about me for I know she does as well as yourself. For I am bound to get home this winter some how or other. With The Love to all, I am

Your Affectionate Son  
Billy

Camp near Murfreesboro  
Feb. 4th, 63

Dear Father

At last I have recd a letter from you. Louis Bleyer brot it down, the one you expected to send by Bob Nicker. We are doing all the work that men can do. For instance we just came off picket and were ordered to guard the train to Nashville the same day. We were 4 days on the road and ret'd last night. The balance of the Brigade have been working on the forts or foraging. Bob has not arrived here and I don't think he will just yet if (as you say) he has just been married. I suppose you have seen Jim Babcock. He told me he would call on you soon after his arrival. There appears no prospect for an advance. In fact Gene Granger says the Rebels are advancing, but I don't think they will attack us as we have works here that 20,000 men could hold against 70,000. I saw Hanson in Nashville. He is the clerk on one of the boats- a chum of John Leonard. He can't get any farther south than Nashville. No citizen is allowed to pass through Nashville unless passed by Genl Rosecrans. John Rycraft was in Nashville but I could not find him. He is attending some relation of his who was wounded belonging to the 24th. Cam Reed is in Nashville also. He has applied for a Court Martial. He says he can clear himself. I think Cam had better say nothing more about it, but leave for Pike's Peak or California.

I have been for some time settling up my accounts. You have no idea what work it is. So many returns, vouchers, certificates etc. But when I get it finished I shall know how I stand with the Government. Some officers are indebted to the U.S. several hundred dollars. I may have to pay \$50 or \$60, but I think not as my books are as nearly correct as can be. Still no chance of a furlough. I am well. That is, my health is good but I feel stiff and old. I can't make the marches I have done, but as I said, my health is good and so long as it continues I don't think I can get away as no resignations are accepted unless accompanied by a surgeon's certificate of disability. So don't worry about me. I shall ever be on the lookout for some chance of going home, but I must confess the prospect is not very flattering. Franklin has resigned and he is discharged. On what grounds he got it I can't tell unless it was incompetancy which I rather guess it was. All the papers relating to the Court Martial were burned with McCook's train. A lucky thing for Franklin. Harry Bingham has also resigned. He is not well, and so has left the service. He has made a big thing out of it, so is all sound. What has become of Capt. Rogers? Is he in Milwaukee, Madison or Sheboygan? He don't amount to much. I hope the mails will soon come through regular as I have never been so long without letters and consequently have the Blues quite often.

My Love to All  
Your Affectionate Son  
Wm S. Mitchell

Army 90

Dated Jany 2 (torn off, but dated Jan. 24th 1863)

Rec'd Feb 3rd - 63

John S. Mitchell Esq  
Milwaukee  
Wisconsin

(on back): Wm H Pawlett  
Co K 16th Regt Wis Vol  
Collierville  
(via) Memphis Tenn

Camp near Murfreesboro  
January 24th 1863

Daer Father

I yesterday rec'd a letter from you dated the 5th, Same date as the one sent by the Sanitary Commission. I have rec'd nothing from you since the Battle although I have written several. The Telegraph lines being down I could not send you news that way, But wrote the first chance I had after the Enemy evacuated. From all appearances we shall probably remain here for a month perhaps longer. I am very comfortable haveing two tents joining each other and both floored. I have also a Stove & Beds. The weather has been beautiful untill today. It is now raining and probably will for several days. I have tried every means of procuring a furlough, But cant get one. A request that Col Bingham made that I be appointed Recruiting Officer was approved by all the Genl except Rosecrans. He returned it with the remark that as soon as the Officer on Duty reported to the Regt the request might be renewed. There was also a request that Rogers be ordered back, which, as it was not returned, I think has gone on to the Gov of Wis. Lieut Messenger has rec'd an order to report as Signal Officer. All of the Corps has been ordered to report for duty. He says that if Rogers returns and I go He will remain with the Co But I dont know. He has undoubtedly worked for the Detail and now will have to go. Lieut Watkins of Co "C" has resigned on Surgeons Certificate of Disability. Sam Babcock of Co "A" is trying the Same. There is a general stampede of Officers in the 24th Wis. I dont think they like the smell of powder. As for me I cant get out if I would as I am well & hearty and the Dr wont give me a certificate. I dont expect Rogers will return. But I wish you would keep me posted about him. Dont think of comeing down with Sutlers goods as they are getting the devil confiscating goods mules etc. I cant hear a word from Norm or Jim Hodges - they were captured you know. But dont worry about Norm. He will turn up Fareded soon probably visit Mil. I am again Busey with my clothing a/c. Genl Granger Commander this Division, Direct to 3rd Brigade 1st Division Center 14th Army Corps, Nashville. I will close with much love to all

Your Affectionate Son

Billy



## Eyewitness to War

# Captain William S. Mitchell's letters contain details of the Battles of Perryville and Stone's River.

BY JANET MITCHELL

**A**t 19 years of age, William S. Mitchell, a clerk in a Milwaukee candle warehouse, volunteered for three years' service with the 1st Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. He was later elected first lieutenant of Company D, and eventually promoted to captain. He fought at Perryville, Stone's River and Tullahoma and was killed in action at Chickamauga. By the time of his death his brigade of the 1st Division of the XIV Corps of Major General William S. Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland was led by Brigadier General John C. Starkweather and consisted of

the 1st and 21st Wisconsin, the 24th Illinois and the 79th Pennsylvania.

Most of Captain Mitchell's letters were sent to his immediate family. The captain's strong sense of duty to his country emerges from his letters, as does his sense of humor. He confessed to a greater appreciation of home after he had seen something of the wider world.

Seven of his letters are included below. They describe his contacts with Southern civilians in Nashville, Tenn., and what he witnessed at the October 9, 1862, Battle of Perryville and the December 31, 1862–January 2, 1863, Battle of Stone's River.

The letters are presented with minimal editing.

pork. I shall not apply for a furlough till the war is ended and I think it soon will be in this section.

### *December 27, 1861-(Camp Wood)*

We had as good a...Christmas as we could expect. The Capt's box arrived Christmas Eve and it was filled with delicacies Such as Mince Pies Fruit Cake a large can of fresh Tomatoes, Jelly, Apples, Candy, etc. Bentley the Sutler gave us a turkey weighing 16 lbs and as we had 3 cans of Oysters you can imagine what kinde of a time we had. After drill we had dinner The Capt had a Bottle of Champayin (We had a Capt to dinner) and as I do not drink I with Chandler started on a hunting tour and after 2 or 3 hours of a tramp more to see the country than to hunt however, we returned to camp just as the Officers were on their way to Genl Negley's where they had been invited. But being muddy & tired I did not go and as Scotch Whiskey was the order of the night did not miss much.... About the marches—dont be alarmed at my overdoing myself I am to Lazy for that but when I see men who are not fit to leave the hospital shoulder their knapsack 40 rounds of cartridges and a gun while I carry nothing compared to their load, I shall always want to help them especially such men as we were fortunate to get.... Last night being Officer of the Guard and the day after Christmas, I felt a little Blue and as I sat beside the Guard Fire (Everybody except the guard asleep) I thot how happy we would be if we were together again and thinking how all will hail with joy the ending of this Rebellion But although as anxious as I am to see you all, I earnestly hope that no resignation be ex-



guard duty I have seen since I have been soldiering. Last night I was ordered to take 3 men from Co "D" + 17 from Co "A" and act as provost guard. My men are stationed in Houses and patrol the Road & RR Track watching for stragglers. Many of the Soldiers fall out and forage on their own Hook doing a great deal of damage and in many cases insulting the Ladies of Houses. The Houses or rather Mansions that we are guarding are splendid Buildings some of brick others of stone. The owners have all fled with 2 or 3 exceptions and in such haste that every thing is left just as it was used. Everyone but the Negroes have fled. There are some 10 or 12 of them. They tell me (as in fact every one that I have seen does) that their masters believe that if they are caught they will all be murdered. Every Negro I have seen has been made to believe that [they] will all be killed as soon as the Yankees come.... I posted 3 men last night at a splendid place owned by a widow. While there a little nigger gal asked if I was the Lieut. I told her I was she then asked me to follow her to her Ladies room. I was shown into a splendidly furnished Room and had a long talk with "My Lady." She was young, very wealthy and the strongest Secessionist I have seen. She advised me as a friend to go back before we were driven back as we surely would be. I told her I did not think I would go back until I got to New Orleans. Everybody here are secessionists and every house is guarded. The very ones that our men are guarding abuse the guards and talk all sorts of Rebel slang, that is, the few that are left. Bill Brown & myself went to see our men and on our way passed two Women (they were not Ladies) and as soon as we came up they separated one to one side the other the opposite side of the road and after getting as far away as possible waited until we had passed. The people here have all been deceived They have been led to believe that we were perfect Devils. They are fast learning the contrary and many are returning.

*September 26, 1862 (Louisville Ky)*

We have had two weeks of the hardest kinde of times. Have marched all the way from Nashville. We left B. Green on the 15th and except 1 day before the Enemy at Green River we were marching Moste of the time during the night. We marched without Tents or Blankets and what night halts we made We dropped by the fires and snatched what little sleep we could. Add to this part of the time we were on 1/2 rations and some days no rations. We arrived here this morning at 4 O'clock after marching from 3 O'clock the morning before. Making yesterday a march of over 30 miles. Notwithstanding this what men we brot in with us are feeling first rate. Having just

seen the 24th Wis and blowing to them what they would have to go through. You can imagine how rough we looked and the Boys stretched their stories of hardships so much that many of the 24th are awfull sick of Soldiering. They have made a four mile tramp and consider themselves Veterans. You would laugh to see the Officers strutting around the streets all Buckled up. One can pick them out from the old Soldiers, not only the 24th but all new men.

*Oct. 9, 1862--In the field on the Battle Ground [Perryville, Ky.]*

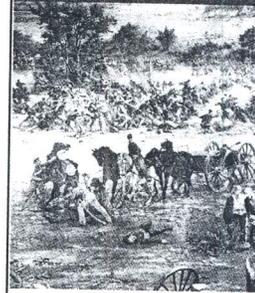
We have just pased through a terrible Ordeal. We engaged the Enemy yesterday at 2 Oc & fought til dark. I am all Safe, my cloths Riddled but not a scratch. I lost 4 Killed 11 Wounded & 5 Missing.... Our Collors are perfectly Shot away but we not only held them, but captured those of the Rebel Regt that charged us. We were supporting a battery [of] the 21st Wis in front of us when a whole Rebel Brigade Charged our Battery. The 21st Broke and Ran over us to the rear. The Artillery men deserted their guns So our Regt alone not only repulsed the whole Brigade but brot off the Battery, the horses all being shot.... Father rest assured your son and his Co did their duty, being the last to leave the field. My Boys fought like tigers. The Rebels have retreated, although they had four times our numbers. Our Brigade stood the Brunt.

*Oct 16, 1862-- in the field near Crab Orchard*

I can imagine how anxious you & mother as well as the rest of the family are to hear from Your Boy, But we have been chasing the Enemy so close that I have not had time to write to you or the Parents of the poor Boys who fell so bravely on the field of Chaplin Hills [Perryville]. No pen can describe the horrors of such a battle.... We had soldiers there who had passed through the Shiloe and Ft Donaldson fights and they all say that the 28th Brigade was under a heavier fire than any Brigade at either of those. We are badly cut up. How I escaped God only knows. When the Bullets flew like hail and the Piece my company was supporting was in danger of being captured, the cannoniers all gone, 6 of my men with myself started to run it off to the rear. 3 out of the 6 were shot dead. I felt something just [brush] my pants & looking down I saw the hole made by a Ball passing through pants & Boot but strange to say did not even scratch me.... The Battle field presented a sad spectacle the poor fellows begging for Gods sake to give them a drink of water. The Rebel lines covered the only springs in the vacinity of the Battle field so we had no water. I have had 2 days without eating But hunger creates no suffering compared

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with that of thirst. We had no water on the march & consequently entered the fight without any. Toward the close I saw many poor fellows lying on the ground their tongues out & swollen fairly suffocating for water. I was nearly crazy myself, as I had been talking or rather yelling at the men until I was so dry I could not swallow. Fortunately Charley Messenger found a Bottle of Brandy & gave me some. It tasted wet and that was enough. After taking a good pull I felt very much revived and after giving the Rebels two or three good volleys they retreated. Then had our Genls a Regt or two of fresh troops to charge them the route would have been complete.... We Buried all of our Dead But hundreds of Rebels are still in the field together with horses & mules & cattle. The smell is terrible. The Boys from my Co I helped bury myself. We Buried them about 2 Oclock in the morning. We wrapt each man in his Blanket and placed their Cartridge Box for a pillow. The Chaplain of the 21st was on the field and he kindly assisted and performed the funeral services at the Grave. I could not help the tears trickling down my cheeks as one after another we laid the 4 Brave fellows in the Grave. We have been together for one year, Had suffered the hardships of a Soldiers life....

*January 4, 1863*

*(2½ miles from Murfreesboro)*

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. [He continues on 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 rainstorm. Since then I have not had any of my clothes off and except to empty water out of my shoes they have been on night and day. The men have had their accoutrements on also the whole time. The Battle opened on the 30th Dec. The Rebels surprised our center about day-light, driving our troops before them....Our Brigade was sent on a pike to the east to hold a bridge. Our Train was attacked by a large force of Cavetry. We drove them away but not until they burned some 16 waggons belonging to the 79th Penn, 21st Wis and 24th Ill. The next day we arrived at the Battle field and was immediately thrown to the front and held the ground for 3 days. 48 hours we lay in Rifle Pits ankle deep in water and under heavy shower of Shot, Shells etc. It rained constantly for the last 2 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.... I shall never forget that sight of carnage & 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 killed although we lay in an exposed position.... My company is all right and every body else that you know.... We have no tents, baggage, but 2 or 3 blankets in the company, the balance are back. But our victory is food, clothing and every thing to us.

January 8, 1863 Dear Brother We are once more enjoying a few days of rest after two weeks of the hardest kind of marching and fighting. Genl. Rosecrans would have undoubtedly followed the enemy with his whole force had he the proper transportation and rations. And as I am just as anxious to strike the Rebels as they run as any one. Yet a few more days like the last would use us all up. I cant begin to tell you what we suffered during those 5 days of carnage. Fortunately for us the 28th Brigade was not obliged to charge the enemy. The other two Brigades drove the enemy at the point of the bayonet, and in my opinion won the day. This Brigade has gained too good a reputation. As we arrived at the double quick Starkweather received orders to support the center and hold the Brigade in readiness to charge. No batteries opening at the time, we relieved the 9th Brigade and lay for 3 days in a cornfield deep in mud. For several days we had been living from hand to mouth But the last two days in the rifle pits we had about nothing. Then it was that our Brigade went into dead horse.... The battlefield presented an awful sight. In some places it seemed as though regiments had been slaughtered where they stood. Some places where a shot or shell had struck a man you could see his remains scattered some 20 feet apart. Well this I know is not a pleasant topic, so I will quit. But we had to dance sometimes. Our Brigade was placed at the apex of the line which was formed like a letter V and in front of us were sharpshooters. One in particular just made me move lively. I finely got behind a tree and the scoundrel sent a pard of his to the right where the two kept up a cross fire. A Capt commanding the 33rd Ohio could not move for these fellows. They kept him between two trees for 2 days. He sent out skirmishers twice but could not find them. I had a good laugh to see him standing there in the rain hugging the tree. □

*Captain William S. Mitchell wrote well over 100 other letters. Those communications, along with the letters reprinted above, can be found in the Milwaukee County (Wis.) Historical Society.*