

Muscatine & the Civil War: The Letters of Daniel Parvin Part 3 Letters- Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee

The letters are in the order they are read in the video segment. The letters in the videos are excerpts from longer letters. Contact Katy Loos at the Muscatine Art Center for full versions of the letters.

Pittsburgh Landing Tennessee

April 5, 1862

Dear wife,

I sit down only for a moment, to do as you have requested me to do and that is to write to you if we get into a battle. We have been into a big fight that lasted two days without intermission. The first day they drove us back about three miles. And then we being reinforced about four o'clock, we commenced to drive them and drove them about half a mile that night. And it got dark, so that firing was stopped pretty much for the night. But early next morning it was commenced again and we kept driving them all day.

Yours forever, Danl. J. Parvin

April 14th, 1862

Dear wife and relatives,

I take this opportunity to write to you. I wrote you a short letter after we had the fight, to let you know that I was not hurt. And today I shall try and tell you some of the things that happened in our company. I shall not attempt to describe the battle in general, for that you can read from the papers in better shape and more correct than I could give them to you. Our company was formed and marched in line with the rest of the regiments and we had not been formed but few moments when we were ordered to advance towards the enemy.

We had not gone far before we began to hear the balls whistle pretty thick around us. And then we was put on double quick for about a quarter of a mile. And then we were ordered to halt and form a line of battle. And as soon as we were in line, we were ordered to lay down and about that time the enemy opened fire on us. When we laid down, Wm Gordon was at my left hand and Wm Mikisell at my right. And we had not fired but once or twice before Gordon was shot through the thigh. And I looked around and saw that there was some of the boys that would sooner help off with the wounded than fight. So I told Gordon to crawl back and some of the boys would help him off. And then he crawled back and was helped down to the boat. And we had not fired but a round or two after that when a ball hit Wm. Mikisell. He said, I am shot, carry me back. I put my hand on him and said, Bill where are you hit. He made me no answer, but turned on his back and I seen at a glance that it made but little difference to him whether he was carried back or not.

So I kept on with my shooting and directly after that, two men was shot almost right behind me. One killed, the other wounded. And about that time it was seen that the enemy were flanking us, so we were ordered to fall back. And we fell back about fifty yards and made another stand (some of the boys forgot to stop I shall not mention any names now), but it was soon found that the enemy were too strong for us. So we were ordered to fall back, and we would fall back a piece, and make a stand, and so the thing kept going.

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Part 3 Letters- Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee

We had no General at all. General Grant it is said was at Savannah asleep. One thing is certain, he was not with his command. I have no confidence in the man. If General Buel had of been in command on Sunday, they would not of drove us back as they did. Buel got here Sunday evening and he sent out word along the lines, that if we would keep them in check two hours longer, he would take them off of our hands and let us rest. And from that time we commenced to drive them back. When we had drove them back about half a mile, night came on and fighting was nearly stopped.

They were in possession of our camp one night and they took everything that I had, except my bible. They did not leave me even a change of shirts. They stole all that they could lay hands on and they robbed the pockets of our dead. In our company we had three killed and seventeen wounded. You will see who they are in the paper before you get this. In walking over the field the day after, the scenes was awful. You could see our men and theirs laying in mangling masses together and dead bodies scattered all over the ground. Some with their heads shot entirely off. Others with their bodies almost cut in two with cannon balls. But the greater part were killed by small balls.

In walking over the field, I saw the dead body of Jim Howal that was the only one out of our company that I knew. Besides having a man taken from both sides of me and two from behind me. One of the boys from behind me, shot so close to my head that the powder burned my face and ear and I turned around and gave them a talking to about that.

April 28, 1862

Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee

You want to know if I killed any rebels. I do not know. I shot twenty five or thirty times but whether I hit anybody or not I cannot say. You want to know if they did not look pretty when they were a-falling. I say no for I do not glory in the death of any man, not even my enemies, but I would rather they would do right and live.

But they are very strong yet and they fight with a courage worthy a better cause. I do not blame the rebel soldier so very much for they say that they are a-fighting for their bread and meat. The rich will go to the poor and tell them that they have got to fight or starve. Others are drove into it by threatening to kill them if they do not enlist in the Southern cause. And the prisoner told us that the officers on the battlefield stood behind the men with drawn sword and pistol and swore that they would shoot the first man that offered to run. So under the circumstances it is not much wonder that the men fought brave. They thought that it was better to be shot by us than to be shot by their own officers.

There was one poor wounded rebel that had received his death wound. And as the American flag was carried past, he looked up at it and said that he thanked God that he was a-going to die beneath the American flag. And I have an idea that there are plenty of rebels that would gladly leave their flag and fight under the stars and stripes. But they were told that we kill all that we get our hands on and their ignorance make them believe anything that their leaders tell them for they cannot read for themselves. And if they could read, they do not the opportunity, for slavery requires ignorance.