

Letters

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Joseph Milton Elkins was a private in Company E, 49th Virginia Infantry Regiment, C.S.A. He enlisted at Culpeper, Virginia around June 1861. He accompanied the 49th Virginia Regiment to Antietam in September 1862 and was shot in the leg in action around the famous Dunkard (Dunker) Church. He was evacuated to Virginia where he died November 10, 1862, of gangrene.

Letter to his wife Sarah Elkins in Flint Hill, Virginia, July 21st, 1861.

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July 21, 1861

Camp Pickens

Dear Wife,

I take this opportunity of writing you these few lines to inform you that I am well at this present time and when these few lines come to hand they may find you enjoying the same health. We had another great battle Sunday, it commenced at 6 o'clock and ended at 6 o'clock, it was the hardest battle that was ever fought in America. They had 10 to our one--we conquered them, we lost about 800 in killed and wounded. The Yankees lost about 5,000 and we took 1,300 prisoners and 125 horses, baggage wagons and 64 pieces of cannon besides a great many things. I was not in the battle but could hear the report of the cannons which was in very plain view and we was in site of the battlefield, it was a sad and dreary day. I never had spent such a sabbath in my life before I have seen the horror of war. I had to stand sentinel [duty] at the hospital door were I could see all the wounded soldiers. I stood from Sunday 12 o'clock till Monday night. --

I had to be up all night to guard the wounded--it was the saddest thing I ever saw to hear the moans of the wounded and dying. I saw the surgeons operating on them, it made me shed tears to see how they suffered, some had to have both of their arms cut off and some their legs. I saw all the surgeons operations, it was a distressing sight to see them how they suffered--we like to got old Scott, [General Winfield Scott] they got his coat. We have completely routed them. I expect we will attack Washington City next. President (Jefferson ) Davis] came here Sunday. He went out on the battlefield, he came round and looked at all the wounded soldiers and shed tears over them, he is pleasant and graceful in his manner --it seemed to put new vigor in his army to see him in their presence.

I have heard and read a good deal about war but I have seen the horror at last. I never want to look into another hospital if I can

help myself again. I have nothing more to say about the war. If it should be the will of the almighty for me to go into battle -I trust to be in his care --he has the power to save. I will put my trust in him. I want you to write to me as soon as I can direct it in the care of Captain Williams and how are you getting along and if they have sent you provisions yet. I don't know when I can come up but I will come as soon as I can. I am always thinking of you and the children. I hope I will return to you all again. I want you to raise them right if I should not get back. Nothing more at present but remain your affectionate husband until death parts us.

Joseph M. Elkins

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Private John Miller was a member of the 123rd Regiment Indiana Infantry, Company F. His letters to his father, Colonel Hiram Miller (and other family members), detail his life as a Union soldier from his enlistment in 1863, through the later stages of the War. Included is a short account of being trapped behind Hood's Army at the Battle of Franklin and subsequently escaping with his regiment.

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Nashville, Tenn

Dec 4th, 1864

Dear Father,

I have not written to you since I was at Chattanooga but we have been run about so that I have scarecly had time.

I have not had a letter from home since we left Decatur, GA and I am anxious to hear from you. I received the articles you sent me by Busley, I was glad to get them and thank you for sending them.

We had a pretty hard time for a few days. We were at Columbia about 8 or 10 days. At the time the rebels advanced on that place. Our regt was laying on Duck River guarding the fords. Six companies under Col. McQuiston were at Williamsport and 4 companies 'B' 'C' and G and our company under Col. Walter were at Gordon's ferry 4 miles farther down the regt., while the 91st Ind. Was at a point farther down the river. When our army fell back to Franklin, we were cut off from it. The army evacuated Columbia in the morning and we did not receive notice of it till 12 o'clock that night, we immediately started. We marched till day light when we halted about 30 minutes for breakfast and then

resumed the marched, we marched all day and in the evening found we were cut off from our army and in the rear of Hood's army.

We marched around the rear of the rebels, passing within 2 miles of their camp fires and stopped past his flank. All this time they were fighting hard at Franklin, had they not been we could not possibly have escaped. About 10 o'clock that night we reached the Big Harper river and were safe. We marched 47 miles that day. The next day we came to Nashville. It was reported and believed here that we were captured. I suppose you have read at home that we were. That day I had more expectations of being in some southern prison by this time.

We are laying in the trenches here expecting an attack at any moment. We have got to fight here and fight hard. I hope they will at any rate, for I would fight them here than any place else. We have got to fight them sometime and I would just as big to it now as any other time, and rather do it here than any where else.

They are fighting on our right today, I do not know how the fight is going. I am as well and stout as ever and expect to remain so. Newt & Billy Matkin & Tom Anderson are all well.

You need not look for me home this winter, as I have not the least idea of being able to get a furlough, as long as the fighting continues.

[This is where the letter ended]