

Bellefonte, Ala. Aug. 23rd 1863

Dear Parents,

"Away down in Alabama," you exclaim as your eye catches the heading of the letter. Yes, we are away down in Alabama right glad of, at last finding a resting place, after a long and weary march of six days from Tullahoma.

On Sunday afternoon the 16th inst. our quiet meditation were suddenly interrupted by an order to be in readiness to march in two hours. Long before that time had expired everything was in readiness and at 4 P.M. we started on our way rejoicing in the direction of Winchester. The men were never in better spirits since we left camp Butler or Green River; they acted like so many schoolboys just let loose from school. Every little occurrence that could be construed into something funny, provoked a roar of applause and laughter, like that you would hear at a political meeting when the speaker relates a funny anecdote. One unlucky fellow whose eyes were evidently not gazing upon the way that he should go stumbled and fell as we marched out of camp. This was ridiculous in the extreme and of course had to be announced in the usual noisy manner.

We marched that evening 8 miles before encamping. Early next morning moved out again and reached Winchester about noon. It is a beautiful village, laid out with great taste, and pleasantly located in a fertile and productive country. It forms a striking contrast with the old fashioned, dilapidated towers we have been accustomed to see in Kentucky and Tennessee. There was but one objection to the country, the scarcity of water. In a march of 30 miles south of Tullahoma we did not see a single spring.

During the afternoon of the 18th, reached Larkins Creek in this State. Here, our route for ten miles lay along the course of the stream. The road crossed and recrossed and in many places followed the bed of the stream for a number of rods. There were no bridges of any kind and the men on foot had to follow the road--wading through the water which was in many places almost waist deep. The nightfall found us, still with six miles of water to navigate. We were in a deep valley shut in on all sides by crowning mountains, and as the moon did not shine, we had a specimen of Egyptian darkness. As we would pick our way up out one ford, and scarcely before we had set our feet on dry land, splash, splash, would go plunging again into the water, there perhaps to be stopped in the middle of the stream by the sudden halt of the team in front, standing there until some wagon had been lifted out of the mire. We would again stumble on to plunge in more mud holes, or wade through more water. It was almost midnight when we encamped--when almost every man weary as he was, flung himself on the ground in his wet clothing to steal a little slumber ere the morning bugle called him forth to move again on another day. I know not a single man who has taken sick from the effects of that soaking.

On the morning of the 19th we again moved off and reached the foot of the principal mountain about noon. There the road ascends the side of the mountain for 1 1/4 miles almost perpendicularly, high (sic) ledges of rock projecting one above the other give it about the shape and slope of a common pair of stairs. Yet up this place we were to drag all our wagons. From 10 to 12 mules were hitched to each wagon and about as men to push behind--knapsacks, blankets, and shelter tents were all carried by the men and yet it required twenty-four hours hard labor to draw the teams of this brigade to the top. Our Brigade was the first to ascent, and soon as we reached the summit which was at noon on the 20, we moved 8 miles further and encamped, being still on top of the mountain. It is there 10 miles wide and comparatively level. On the 21st we began to descend and soon found ourselves in a rich valley along which we continued for 15 miles until we reached Bellefonte on the same day. The 1st brigade of this Division arrived here yesterday afternoon, and the 3rd Brigade is expected this afternoon. We were all together at the foot of the mountain, but it required 24 hours labor, night and day, to get the train of each brigade to the top. Upon our arrival here the 34th was detailed by Gen. Johnson as Provost Guards to the town, and Lt. Col. Van Tassell appointed Post Provost Marshal.

Yesterday morning, Head Quarters was moved to the Courthouse, and the Adjutant's Office located in the room formerly occupied by the Clerk of Court. We found all the old records of the County (Jackson) scattered over the floor. The documents are dated as far back as 1820. About fifty large books, we reserved while the remaining books and papers were collected in one great heap and burned. There were not less than 3 bushels of marriage licenses and bonds signed by the Jeremiah's, his X mark and Elizabeth's, her X marks--not one out of ten could sign their own name.

This building is an excellent one for this country, it is built of brick, and 2 stories high. It is surrounded by a fine cluster of locust trees and altogether is a very pleasant place for persons who have within the last two years spent as little time within a house as I have.

It is less than a mile to the bank of the Tennessee River from this place. The Memphis & Charleston R.R. runs by, two miles to the north. There are plenty of Rebels just across the River and were plainly seen by some of our men who went to the river to bathe.

Lyman S. Widney

Note: Lyman S. Widney was the Sgt. Major of the 34th Illinois Volunteer Regiment of the Union Army.

(Widney was better known to the Confederates, not "Rebels," as one of those "Damn Yankees" spoken and spelled as one word.)

BELLEFONTE, ALABAMA

