

Letters from the Front

I found two letters in an old Civil War magazine that I find very interesting and I hope you will also. The letters are of two very different mindsets and I believe from two very brave men. The first letter was written by Private John W. Watson of the 47th North Carolina State Troops, Pettigrew's Brigade, Heth's Division, Hill's Corps. His letter was written just after their march to the Gettysburg area and just prior to the beginning of the battles. He was obviously a very homesick soldier and would like to have run back to his home. But he did not and became engaged in the earliest of the battles on July 1. Unfortunately, I cannot tell you whether Private Watson survived Gettysburg or not.

The second letter, written by Henry S. Fingers five days after the Battle was over describes their heroic efforts to take the hill known as Little Round Top. His main concern seems to be that his superiors looked upon his actions with credit. So we do know that he survived Gettysburg, but I have learned that he died on May 5, 1864, in the Battle of the Wilderness. He served in the 4th Alabama Infantry and the 48th Alabama Infantry, General E. M. Law's Brigade, Hood's Division, Longstreet's Corps.

I have made a sincere effort to reproduce the letters exactly as they were written, including bad spelling, capitalization, punctuation and grammar. I have omitted the use of (sic) as it would be repetitive and distracting.

*The State of Pennsylvania
Franklin County
June 29. 1863*

My Dear Wife

I sit my self down with grief and trouble to write you a few lines to let you know where I am and how I am. I am well as could be expected after such a long a werrisome march that we have taken from 1 miles below fredericksburg up through the valley of virginia and crossed to Potomac river at Shepard Town and marched through Maryland and into pennsylvania. We got there friday 26 of June about 2 oclock and marched again on Saturday and camped near the mountain about 65 miles from har-risonburg the capital of pennsylvania. I don't know whither we are going there or not it is impossible for us to know where we are going until we get there we rested Sunday but are redy to march this morning, but we are here yet awaiting for further orders.

I read a letter from Stafford County yesterday from Mrs. Lucy Boller to her borther Lewis Payne in our company. She says he would not know the place whene he got in sight of it. and says the place is cut down and burned up so that it is a desolate looking place. My Dear Margaret I would have ben the gladest of all things if I had knew that Willy Payne was going to Stafford time enouf to have written to you all. but by the time I knew he was going he was gon. And I wrote one and left it at Aunt Susan Blescham to send to you at the first oportunity. You must write to me as soon as you get this and let me hear from you and Mother and farther and all the familys around. and let me hear [what] the Yankees have done in Stafford. give my love to mother and farther and all the family and to Aunt Peggy and Mary and to all inquiring friends if I have any. but keep the greatest portion for your self. I have ben tempted to run away and corn hom

but I do so dislike to do the like but if I had of knew this when I was in Spot-sylvania I should have come horn for a while. I would give the wind to be with you all but we are a long ways apart at this present time but I trust in god that I shal live to see you all again. I shal live in hope if I dye in dispar. we are now in the enemy country we know not what will befall us for some of our solders have done mity bad since they have ben here but orders was read out last evening prohibiting any private property being taken only by the quarter masters. James P. Bloseham is well and sends his love to you all and sayes he wants to send a letter home. Payton Jones send best respects to you all and to farther's family.

You must excuse this letter being written with a pensyl for ink is hard to get. nothing more at present but remain your sinser and affetionate husband until death

John W. Watson

*Hd. Qrs. Laws Brigade
July 8, 1863*

Dear Father and Mother,

You know by this time that I am in Maryland. We crossed at Williamsport on 26th, got to Chambersburg, Penn. that evening, staid there several days. our regt. was sent over to Scotland about 2 miles from camp to guard some commissary stores, then we went to New Gilford, then to Gettysburg—where we had a great fight. I escaped unhurt, did not get touched any where. I tried to conduct myself with credit through the fight. I think I done it. Col. Sheffield & all the officers in the regt think a great of me. I never saw a braver man in my life than Col. S is. Our regt. charged up the mountain for two miles, when it became so steep that we could not go any farther, we then fell back, & charged it four successive times but could not take the hights. The steepest place I ever saw in my life. I will send you a list of the killed & wounded in our regt. You will get one from the 4th I suppose. Capt. Leftwich, Tom Lanier, Jim Duff, Ben was killed in our old company. Sand White, Tribble, Reasoner, Matherson & several others was wounded. Tell Mr. Leftwich that I have his son's sword I will send it to him as soon as I have an opportunity. His sword belt was lost as some one of his company has it I suppose I carried the colors in the fight for a while. The color sergeant was killed & they were lying on the ground so I picked them up & carried them for awhile. We had the fight on the 2nds, on the 3rd some Yankee cavalry about a Brigade charged through our lines, our brigade was doubled quicked about 300 yards & we got behind them & caught them all but 10 or 20. Next day we fell back about half mile next day we came on to Hagerstown. We have been here two or three days. Col. Sheffield was put in command of the Brigade on the night of the 2nd—Genl. Hood was wounded in the arm. Genl. Law took command of the Division. I am now acting Adjutant Genl for the Brigade. I got your letter by Mr. Mooser last night,

Baldrige went to Winchester after the mail while we were at Chambersburg Penn. & got back last night. Mooser left my shoes in safe hands at Richmond. Maj. Scruggs was kind enough to lend me a horse the other day. It is a very nic young horse. He wont sell or I would buy it. I will write some more this evening. I cannot write much more now. give my love to all of the family & to Miss Ellen Sanders & Kate Coles. I would like to see her tell her that her brother is well, did not get hurt.

Tell Mooser that I am adjt of the 48th Ala & not the 4th Ala. I got the gloves you sent by Mr. Hamer. I wrote you a letter by Mr. Alldredge while we were at Sawyer's Gap, that you must make up the suit of clothese you had for me, I guess, for I could not get my measure taken.

*I must close
Give my love to all
I remain your eff Son
H.S. Figures*



Henry Figures and tombstone in the Maplevew Cemetery in Huntsville, Alabama