

## LETTERS FROM A VETERAN OF PEA RIDGE

Edited by  
PAUL R. COOPER AND TED R. WORLEY\*

THE FOLLOWING SEVEN LETTERS were written by an officer of the Forty-Fourth Illinois Volunteers,, commanded by Colonel Charles Knobelsdroff. The Forty-Fourth was in the First Division, commanded by Colonel Peter J. Osterhaus. The letters cover the period from the battle of Pea Ridge almost to the battle of Chickamauga or from March 1862, to August, 1863. The writer participated in the battles of Pea Ridge, Perryville, and Murfreesboro as well as lesser engagements.

The manuscripts are in the possession of a resident of Little Rock, Arkansas, who requests that her own name not be used and that the name of the writer of the letters and the names of the persons to whom the letters were addressed be withheld. Transcripts are, of course, in possession of the editor.

The editors have followed the spelling in the manuscripts in all cases. Punctuation has been inserted in a few instances to overcome considerable reading difficulties, but this was done only when it was certain that the meaning would not be violated.

These seven letters are not the entire collection by any means. Several others by the same writer are not yet available for publication.

Camp Hofman  
Near Keithville, Mo.  
Mar 22, 1862

Dr. H. B. ....  
Richview, Ill.

I wrote you a letter the other night in Sugar Creek<sup>1</sup> Bottom telling you that I had at last been in one Battle Viz

\* Paul R. Cooper is Superintendent of Schools, East End, Saline County, Arkansas. Ted A. Worley is assistant professor of History at Arkansas State Teachers College.

<sup>1</sup> Sugar Creek runs south of Pea Ridge in a westerly direction. The Union soldiers were at the time strung out along the creek for many miles.

the Battle of Pea Ridge Ark after several months hunting the rebels they came to us abed surrounded us and thought they would (as we say out here) bag us take all prisoners but you have heard all about it ere this by papers we had and are having our equinoctial storm out here it is quite disagreeable weather here I have never recd a letter from you I recd a few lines in one or two of Lunas Letters from you I have written to you several letters but never Recd any answers to them but then our mail is so uncertain I scarcely get any letters I have saw but one copy of old dates of papers since we left Lebanon<sup>2</sup> on the 10 of Feb I am getting to be quite an Arkansas Traveler it is not probable we will stay here more than 8 days if that long as forage is very scarce out here and as we have to live in the Army as well as other places we must move around I suppose it is preparatory to our moving to Little Rock or Van Buren Ark and giving them another good whipping before they will lay down their arms

You ought to see with what coolness men go into action (*when*) they have heard tell of the enemy so much and been in hearing of their guns so long that they never appear to think of death. Starting from home and at Camp Ellsworth is the time that danger was most feared and dreaded I used to think that some of us would be killed and wondered what ones it will be. When we would be expecting a fight until even that wore off law me how sore my feet would be as we were going down from Springfield but when I would hear the cannon Boom I would press on without a murmur, and tired as I was I hated to see the Regt halt at night when it was obliged to on account of the men being so tired they could not stay in the rank (I do not profess to be brave yet I wanted to be in a Battle once at least before I wanted to see home again.) The rebels may talk about whipping to (*two*) to one of us but I think it is in running they can do it. If they concentrate at Little Rock I think we will meet our gunboats there and after whipping them out go down the Arkansas River to the Mississippi. I know that when you

<sup>2</sup> A small town through which the 44th Illinois and several other regiments had marched prior to Pea Ridge. It is northeast of Springfield.

would hear of us being in eight miles of them you would think our men are not very anxious or they would catch them but there you are mistaken let our men travel from daylight to dark straining every nerve they have in their bodies exerting every muscle and they can do no more it was only our cannons that stimulated us and got us along as fast as we did I never heard how you came out in the old factory with old Kellogg or your house whether you can hold it or not our Regt was among the fortunate ones losing only one killed and one wounded although we protected the batteries and marched out into a meadow to draw the fire of the enemy so as to learn their position which we did by them opening their fire on us with about 20 or 30 pieces of Cannon at once but our artillery answered it and it was one continual roar and Bust of Balls till we silenced them (I wouldn't be surprised if they wasnt shooting at us from the way the balls whizzed around us and over us)

I must come to a close. Write soon all the news and everything else interesting.

Yours Truly

Jessie C. ....

\* \* \* \*

March 28 1862

Camp Hofman Mo

Dr. H. B. ....

Richview Ill

I have written you several letters without an answer but day before yesterday we received mail thus showing that now and then we can get mail through I have nothing new or special to write. We Jog along usually our duties are light when in camp as we do not drill much go on picket guard now and then we have plenty to eat now. We get flour from Keithville in abundance. We have very poor beef and for a few days we had bran and shorts for bread. We have abundance of coffee and Sugar nice beans and desicated potatoes. Desicated potatoes are potatoes that have been dried and ground one pound goes very far. We can make soup or cook them drie and roll them in balls they are very good the men draw theirs we have to pay for ours<sup>3</sup> the

<sup>3</sup> Here is the evidence that the writer was an officer.

men have abundance they waste enough to feed many a poor widow and orphan. They always have plenty of coffee beans and rice ahead.

Edwin<sup>4</sup> recd a letter from Luna<sup>5</sup> she seems to think we will never come home but I think we will both come home soon I want to have another fight first. We must double pay them for our hard marching and sore feet it is no trouble for one man to start and walk 15 or 20 miles I had but one fear when we went into the fight was for Edwin he poor fellow would go he had been very sick two or three days I tried to get him to stay back where we threw away our Blankets and go he would and did. I thought the fatigue would kill him but it cured him he commenced mending and got well immediately.

Luna spoke of there being a probability of us taking Bagwell & Dan Teel I want you to write us all the particulars of all Rebel tory prisoners as most of our men know all those that went from Jefferson County.

March 29th still here without marching orders nothing new or special another inspection tomorrow Lieut Hicks went home this morning I suppose Capt Hasmen will also go with him he has very poor Health perhaps occasioned by a little too much Brandy (but I forgot I must not speak so of my superior officer.)

I will write soon again and give you all particulars that may Transpire between now and then.

Yours Truly

Jessie C. ....

\* \* \* \*

Dear Sister Luna

August 23 1862

It has been some time since I heard from any of you I have nothing worthy of writing you at this time. Wesia is not very well Yesterday and today—the first Sickness of the children have had.

We were paid off today Harris and Admius Still *live*. But what is such a Lingering life worth here in a hospital.

Eddie will be very lonesome when he goes home he is

<sup>4</sup> The writer's brother.  
<sup>5</sup> The writer's sister.

the Soldiers pet he goes where he pleases and asks no odds of anybody.

I was on picket guard last night we had very Strict orders Some think the Secesh are advancing on us I dont think there is any danger.

do you remember old *Millenro* (*manuscript illegible*) we still guard his property Everybody thinks he is a Secesh Spie.

I suppose the Regts are full I am sorry there is no drifting.

Write all the particulars about the Companys I suppose they have a recruiting Station at Centralia and Ashley from what I hear.

We live fine now Hire a devilish Nigger Every other day till he or She runs off.

the water in the wells still hold out we get Butter from Old *Williams* potatoes from the Commissary and peaches the Boys Bring us from the Country.

It has been very hot but is getting Cooler now.

Write Soon

Jessie C. ....

\* \* \* \*

Near Nashville, Tennessee  
10th Nov 1862

Dear Sister Luna

I recd your letter at Bowling Green and have neglected answering it until now and as yet I have nothing special to write about.

You ask if I think the war any nearer over than it was one year ago or something to that effect. I cant see that it is or will be as long as we keep such traitors as *Buell*<sup>6</sup> for Generals but now after he has allowed our men killed, wounded and maimed by life by wholesale and then allowed Bragg to quickly march off unmolested with his large train of stolen goods for the rebels to subsist on. Then they call a Military Commission to try him—after the Golden opportunity of capturing Bragg's Army is gone. Then General Rosecrans

<sup>6</sup> D. C. Buell, commanding the Army of the Ohio, later called the Army of the Cumberland. The reference here is to the Battle of Perryville, Oct. 8, 1862. Failure to pursue Bragg resulted in his being replaced by Rosecrans on Oct. 30, 1862. The record of the inquiry into Buell's conduct may be found in *War of the Revolutions Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 1 ser., XVI, pt. 1, 66.

comes in and takes charge of the army of the Cumberland, but before he will get such a chance he will be assigned some quiet place where he cannot accomplish anything thus it appears the war is prolonged from day to day and from year to year. I have not your letter at hand as Edwin has it. I believe you ask were we in two days fight no we were in but one day but in two different engagements that day.<sup>7</sup> In the morning went out to relieve Mo 2nd Regt who was fighting the rebels who were hid behind a stone fence and killing the second by wholesale The rebels very reluctantly gave up the field to us—as we went on a double quick and hollowing with all our might. They it appears gave up that the 44th was a legion and ran, but very leisurely did they trot off. I shot at one as he was trotting along with his Butternut Knapsack hanging by one arm and dangling across his back. Some writers have it that it was the 15th Mo that cleared the field in the morning but it (*was*) none other than the 44th Ill. When I was running and hollowing I thought it would not be so funny if a ball was to hit me in the mouth as just then it appeared to be a conspicuous place. Our regiment appears to be fortunate. 78 of the 2nd<sup>8</sup> fell before and beside us while only 6 or 7 of our men *fell* that is in the morning I *speak of*.<sup>9</sup> A great many of the Mos (*Missourians*) was shot through the head and breast. The first man I saw was about a rod in front of me. He was shot through the head, he was looking as if he was going to shoot and I was looking to see what he was going to shoot at when he threw up both hands and fell. Poor fellow he was no more. I think we will move from here to Chattanooga Tenn next as the rebels are reported fortified there and in large numbers too. May God bring this war to a close soon is my prayer. I have seen suffering enough to do me. I cannot describe the suffering I saw at one rebel hospital. It was not any of our own. Write soon direct to me Louisville, Ky (*remainder of sentence not*

<sup>7</sup> October 8, 1862.

<sup>8</sup> *Official Records*, 1 ser., XVI, pt. 1, 1036, gives the casualties of the 2nd Mo. as 70 and the casualties of the 44th Ill., as 11 or 12. This passage and others show a remarkable degree of accuracy in the letters on matters of fact which can be checked. The writer was not merely bragging when he claimed credit for the 44th Ill., as against the claim of the 15th Mo., as can be seen in *Official Records*, 1 ser., XVI, pt. 1, 1083.

<sup>9</sup> The main battle was fought after 2 p. m.

legible).

Truly Yours,  
Brother Jessie

\* \* \* \*

Nov 27 Late in afternoon

(Probably to Sister Luna)

We started in the morning at 4 o'clock intending to surprise the rebels, which we did just at daylight we came to their pickets and drove them in. They returned our shot pretty lively for a while throwing Grape Shot among us one whole charge falling among us one spent Ball struck John Hall's foot but did not hurt him. We could have had a bully fight by going to Nolensville 3 or 4 miles further.<sup>10</sup> But as we had only part of two brigades, ours and two Regts of Grussels (*Greusel's*) Brigade with orders to not go any further.<sup>11</sup> So we turned back after going as far as we were allowed to. The Citizens report 8000 at Nolensville.

I am a little sore and tired having marched very hard on hard turnpike part of the time.

Got over my cough. Stout as a horse (very small one). Our Company go on Picket tomorrow night. Tonight was our right time but they let us off as we had done our part. Just recd a letter from Harriet will answer it tomorrow.

No more but remain  
Truly Your Brother  
Jessie C. ....

(P. S.) Ed is well too.

\* \* \* \*

Jan 8 1863

Near Murphressboro Tenn  
On Stone River

(This battle described in the letter was the Battle of Murfressboro. The letter was written just a week after the battle)  
Dear Sister

I write you again. I have written to Harriet yesterday therefore know but little of interest to write. I have, as well

<sup>10</sup> Nolensville, Tenn. The skirmish referred to here was probably the one at Mill Creek. *Official Records*, 1 ser., XX, pt. 1, 22.  
<sup>11</sup> Report of Brig.-Gen. P. H. Sheridan says, "This morning I directed a reconnaissance in force in the direction of Nolensville, under the direction of Colonel Schaefer, supported by two regiments and a section of artillery, under Colonel Greusel."

as Edwin, passed through another Battle unhurt except Edwin got a small scratch on the side from a rifle ball. The loss of our division was 1600 men almost as many (as) 3 years ago.<sup>12</sup> We had a terrible loss a slaughter whatever you are a mind to call it men went down by the hundreds in a few minutes. For a long time we were surrounded. We, when we could, fought like deamons for my part I felt determined to die before I would surrender but thanks to Him who rules the Heavens I escaped either. I think our loss will be very great in Killed, wounded and missing. Pea Ridge and Shiloh Veterans say this is the hardest Battle they ever saw in their lives. One old man from the 73rd said to me the evening of the battle when it was raging the hardest, "Perryville was not a Breakfast stove compared with this."<sup>13</sup> Houghtailen Battery<sup>14</sup> lost nearly all its men and horses and was compelled to leave their guns. This battle is the one that tried men's souls. Men in whom I had but little confidence raised themselves in my estimation while others lowered themselves just as much. If any man is hateful to a soldier it is a Coward. Our men in killed was large. Dead (are) D. McCormick, Corp. Isaac Price, Corp. Lacy, John C. Hall and Joshua Hall Brothers all shot in the head except Corp. Lacy.

Wounded (are) Sargt. John A. Nale, Sargt. Norris H. Taylor, Corp. E. L. ....<sup>15</sup> (Hardly worth reporting), James Lacy right arm broken, John McGill right thigh, William G. Rhines right thigh, Franklin S. Parker in one thigh, Andrew I Young in both thighs severely. Missing Joseph Stanton, Ole Scott Hardcase, Alfred le duesgraves (Brady) and John R. Cunningham. Not hearing from our men for so long I think they must have been taken prisoners by the enemy at least I hope so for we have enough deaths in our little Company (Brother Waite come out safe). Our Sargt. Major was taken prisoner and paroled says the rebels treated him well enough but the citizens who flocked in to plunder

<sup>12</sup> The writer probably meant three months instead of three years. The letter was written exactly three months after the Battle of Perryville.

<sup>13</sup> The 73rd Illinois Volunteers.

<sup>14</sup> Houghtaling's Battery. The reporting is accurate here even down to the horses. General Sheridan's report says, "Captain Houghtaling's, having exhausted all of his ammunition, and nearly all the horses in his battery having been killed, attempted with the assistance of his men to withdraw his pieces by hand."

<sup>15</sup> The brother of the writer, who is elsewhere referred to as Edwin.

treated him very rough. He says he saw the citizens strip wounded men and leave them on the ground . . . this is southern Chivalry the reckless bloodthirsty Scoundrels who will flock to our Generals for a Guard the first thing when we get near them will flock to the Battlefield while in possession of their friends to plunder the unlucky men who may chance to fall into their hands. May God forgive them. Our next camp will be Taleahoma (*Tullahoma*) then Chattanooga Tenn where if the rebels make a stand which I think they will we will fight them another Battle the Chattanooga. By this time many a union Soldier will bite the dust. I hope and trust how soon the unholy rebellion may be put down but not one inch must we bulge (*budge?*) to them they began it they must come back the old Constitution is good enough well I will quit.

Write soon all of you  
your brother

Jessie .....

\* \* \* \*

(No place, no date)

Dear Sister

I recd your letter yesterday directed to Edwin written to us both<sup>16</sup> I also recd one from Harriet dated 2nd and June 3rd you all appear to be very anxious about us and I know you are but your chance of coming to see us is very poor according to General Halleck's order and the chance of getting to us. You speak about the soldiers going into Battle with a volley of oaths it's true they from continual habit become very negligent, very wicked as far as swearing and gaming is concerned and was whiskey allowed in the army they would be entirely beyond Control. The Sutters and Parsons are looked on as nuisances. Our Chaplain tendered his resignation while in Missouri but General Curtis would not accept it. He could have been spared very well although he is a good preacher when he does preach, but there is but little preaching in the army as we are frequently on the march.

<sup>16</sup> This letter bears the page number three, and probably the first two pages were written by Brother Edwin and were later separated and given to a collector of Edwin's letters. The fact that the two brothers had received a letter written to both is further evidence of a partnership answer.

I write so often that it is impossible to write anything like news you get the papers and hear all about the movements of the army.

Write soon Truly your brother  
Jessie C. ....

\* \* \* \*

Camp Harrington Ala  
August 26, 1863

Dear Sister Luna

I recd yours of the 19 Instant—last night and hasten to reply.

It is quite Cool today having rained night before last. We stored our things Sunday preparatory for a move but now we expect to get them back again. I hear heavy Cannonading this morning. I suppose it is some of our troops shelling the rebels from some point on the river. I think this place is rather sickly.

I think our destination is Huntsville or will be when we leave here.

Edwin has good health. We have a large field hospital here and plenty of everything we want although at exorbitant rates but better that way than not at all.

I thought (*when*) we first stopped here that (*we*) was going to stay sometime and I would try to get a leave of absence to go home but then came the order get ready to march, so I never thought of trying. Although I could have been home and back by this time and the Service been none the worse for it. Would be useless to try—only a waste of time and paper.

Old Waite has been tried but his sentence has never been returned dont know what it will be suppose it will be light as he returned himself (*remainder of sentence illegible*).

I have nothing interesting therefore for the good of the Service I think I had better quit writing.

Truly as Ever  
Your Brother

Jessie C. ....