

Camp Jefferson
January 26, 1862

Dear Mother,

I received your welcome letter yesterday afternoon while I was on guard. Lave Thompson brought it to me. He got one an hour afterward from his father stating that his mother is some better. The box of mittens got here a day or so ago. They were a long time on the road. The cake you sent me was not as good as it was before it was boxed up, but it was good. The mittens were good ones. At roll call that evening we gave seven and a tiger for the ladies of Moline. I suppose Thee Wheelock is having a good time in Moline. I wish I were there with him.

It is the report in today's paper that Buckner has resigned. He had better or he will get served the same as Jollicoffer. There are several hundred men at work every day on the road between here and Green River.

Last evening we presented Lt. Mansur with a sash which cost us forty dollars. It is the best that could be bought in Chicago. He did not know that we were getting him one until it was presented to him at roll call. He is liked more than any other officer in the regiment. If any of the boys are out of money, he gets them what they need.

From your son,

George Kerns

Camp Jefferson
January 26, 1862

Dear Mother,

I received your welcome letter yesterday afternoon while I was on guard. Dave Thompson brought it to me. He got one an hour afterward from his father stating that his mother is ~~some~~ better. The box of mittens got here a day or so ago. They were a long time on the road. The cake you sent me was not as good as it was before it was boxed up, but it was good. The mittens were good ones. At roll call that evening we gave seven and a tiger for the ladies of Noline. I suppose Thee Wheelock is having a good time in Noline. I wish I were there with him.

It is the report in today's paper that Buckner has resigned. He had better or he will get served the same as Jollicoffer. There are several hundred men at work every day on the road between here and Green River.

Last evening we presented Lt. Mansur with a sash which cost us forty dollars. It is the best that could be bought in Chicago. He did not know that we were getting him one until it was presented to him at roll call. He is liked more than any other officer in the regiment. If any of the boys are out of money, he gets them what they need.

From your son,

George Kerns

Camp at Winchester, Tenn.
January 22, 1862

Dear Brother,

I received your kind letter along with one from Father while at Fayetteville. Then we came here. We were two days on the road. Winchester is a very pretty town. There is an institute here for both males and females, so there are lots of young people.

The boys had a skirmish at Chattanooga. One man in the 24th was killed and four or five in our regiment wounded. They all belonged to Company A. They have gone to Chicago. The boys give a very interesting account of the skirmish. Our Brigade came up on this side of the Tennessee river, but could not see the enemy. The enemy were first on the opposite side of the river in rifle pits. Our men could see nothing but their heads except when they would run from the houses to the river. Some of them were in houses on the bank of the river and when our shells would strike, the first thing you would see they would be going like lightning to another place. Our men were exposed to fire all of the time, but less of our men were killed. The Colonel of the 37th Indiana was up on a high mountain with a glass and could see everything that was going on. They would call across the river at each other. Our boys would call them rebels and they would call our boys blue bellied Yankees. Every time one of our shells would fall in the river they would call "try it again and see if you can't do it."

I do not know what the reason is that our boys came back so soon. I think it may be because they could get nothing to eat. It is almost impossible to travel the road our boys went. Some places where they crossed the mountains they had to march single file, take the horses off the cannon and haul it up by hand. The cavalry men could not sit on their horses. They found a great many Union people on the road. They marched up and met our men. Some of them wanted to enlist and others wanted to go up North. They have been sent to Nashville. We are but a few miles from the Cumberland Mountains, and I expect we shall see some fun before we leave for the mountains are full of Rebel cavalry. Our Brigade is scattered all over. The 11th Illinois is still at Fayetteville. The 24th Indiana is still at Fayetteville. The 37th Indiana has his headquarters with our regiment. Morris has gone to Chicago. I suppose he will go to Moline before he gets back.

I am thankful for those stamps you sent me. I shall send you some Southern money to pay for them. Southern money may go up North but people down here do not like it as well as they used to.

Excuse this poor letter and write soon.

Your Brother,

George Kerns

OFFICER'S REPORT

Camp near Murfreesboro, Tenn.
February 24th 1863Wm. Kerns, Esq.
Moline, Illinois

It is with feelings of deepest regret that I am compelled to write you that I have no satisfactory information yet concerning George. The reason that I have not written is that I have hoped to hear every day something of him. Let me assure you that no means in my power have been left untried to ascertain his fate. I have been over every foot of ground occupied by our division on the day George was missed, but cannot find any trace of his body or grave. To be sure there are many trenches containing many bodies of men unknown by name, but in every such instance the regiment was ascertained from marks on their accoutrements, and placed on their head board. I have been strongly of the opinion that George was taken prisoner, and altho it seems unaccountable that we should not hear of him if such was the case; I am still of the same mind. David W. Thompson who was last with him, (the two were together and assisted each other in climbing a fence while the regiment was retreating under heavy fire) said that he saw George after the regiment had reached a point of comparative safety out of reach of the hot fire which obliged them to retire. Still, from this point the regiment retreated half a mile farther and it was then that so many of our men were taken prisoners. After this I cannot find that George was seen by anyone. David thinks he is a prisoner. He may have stopped under the shelter of a rock or tree or hollow, the enemy not pursuing very fast, to take another shot at them, and been seized by an unseen party, or he may have been wounded even when David saw him last and been unable to keep pace with the regiment and thus been taken.

I do not wish to raise any false hopes in your mind. The chances for life for every man in the 19th were desperately small, in that fearful retreat. You probably know at this juncture our regiment covered the retreat of the whole division when the enemy had out flanked us, and were pouring in upon us from three sides. I only give you my own feelings. I cannot call it opinion as I have nothing tangible to base it on. I shall not lose hope of George if months should yet pass without telling where he is.

I certainly sympathize with you in this suffering uncertainty and shall consider it a pleasure as well as duty to do what I can for his exchange and recovery. I shall yet visit the battle ground again and shall quickly inform you of any knowledge I may receive of the fate of your son.

With highest regards for yourself and lady, I remain,

Very Truly Yours,

Alvah Mansur

P. S. Perhaps you are not aware that I have been acting as Quartermaster of the regiment since last December and consequently was not with company H in my capacity as a lieutenant of the company during any one of the five days engagements and altho I was with the regiment several times each day and night, I went with them into no action except that of Friday, having a wagon train to take care of by which means I fed the regiment.

Your letter of the 17th was received yesterday.