

Letter from Private Theodore F. Whitney, Company G, 89th Illinois Infantry.

*****From private collection for sale on ebay August 8, 2003-do not quote directly or cite as source***

Information in () is my own

Jan 8th, 1863--Father, Mother, Brother & Sisters. As my life has been spared & I have a little spare time, I thought I would write you a few lines to let you know about affairs. Well, I suppose I have been through one of the hardest fought battles that ever was fought & haven't got a scratch, but poor Will was slightly wounded in the right neck and jaw. He went to the hospital & had it dressed & by that time the rebels had them & I expect they took Will to Chattanooga.

The battle commenced Tuesday & our brigade wasn't brought into action until Wednesday morning. We were marched Tuesday night after dark, clear on the extreme right of the army & within 15 rods of enemy's lines & there we laid till daylight. When we got up & was getting breakfast when the next I knew the balls began to fly around me like hailstone. Well, there we was all in a hubbub. We was ordered to retreat. Well, we did. We got out of their way a little. We formed a line of battle, then we retreated off to the left of Rusau (Rousseau) & Crittenden & Davis alos. So we did not fight anymore that day. Our Division was completely disorganized. We went into the fight with 54 men & that night we could muster 23.

I tell you we was badly cut up. I found out who the brave boys are. Some of them run five miles before they stopped. They throwed everything they had, I can tell you. But you mustn't say anything. One was H. P. Tait (Private Horneston P. Tait) & W. Tait (Private William Tait) & I will give the list of killed and wounded & also the ones that is missing. D.C. Scudder (Private DeWitt C. Scudder) from Altona, D. H. Bestor (Private David H. Bestor), Altona, George Murray (Private George W. Murray) killed from near Bainbridge. Missing (Corporal) Thomas Berry, Homer Wagoner (Corporal George H. Wagoner), (Private) George Wells. John Hulick (Private John B. Hulich who died of his wounds) is badly wounded. THE BALL ENTERED THE MOUTH COMING OUT BREAKING THE JAW & GOING INTO THE SHOULDER. The Capt. (Captain Thomas Whiting) was taken prisoner. The last time I saw the Capt., he and myself was retreating together & he got behind a tree & told me to go on and I did & I got out of their way. I think that showed cowardice, what do you think about it? I would like to have Lieut. Copley (1st Lieutenant Isaac Copley) know it. I tell you, I don't never want to get into another fight, for it is awful the way men was slaughtered. The way shot & shell flew wasn't slow. There was one shell struck in our Regiment. It struck a stack of guns. It knocked them all to pieces. That is what will try a man's steel. Then we was in another scary place. We were supporting a battery. We were ordered to lie down. The Rebs got range on it & I tell you the shells made everything snap. They dismounted our gun pretty soon. There was a continual roar Thursday & Friday mornings there was heavy cannonading for about 2 hours, then it was quiet till one hour before sundown. Then they made a break on our center, but they run against a snag. Our regiment made a bayonet charge on them. Oh, how they run. Our boys took 1200 prisoners & 4 pieces of artillery & by that time it was after dark.

Our boys held the ground & Saturday night after dark there was two Regiments charges on them & drove them out of their breast works & took a goodly number of prisoners. Then that night & Sunday they made tracks from Murfreesboro on a double quick. I should think by the looks of things they throwed tents, guns, haversacks, blankets & they did skeedaddled for good. We are 4 miles south of Murfreesboro now in camp. I don't know how long we will stay here. I think I am good for them yet. George Berry come through all right. There was a round shot struck a stone & a piece of the stone struck (1st Sergeant) Peter G. Tait in the back and lamed him a little. Otherwise, the Tait boys are all right, but they can run like bloodhounds. You need not be uneasy about Will(his brother), for he is only slightly wounded. They paroled some of the wounded boys & they say they used(treated) them first rate & I hope they will use him the same.

I haven't had a letter from home for a month. I want you to write often. I am out of paper & stamps & money. The talk is that we are going to get our pay here. Mart[his brother Martin] have you got paid for Shavetail[his horse]? Net[his sister-Nettie} here is a ring that I made. I give it to you for a Christmas gift. I will send you all a present or fetch it to you when I come home. Goodbye, my best wishes to you all from your affectionate son & brother--T. F. Whitney. I am very thankful that I got off as well as I did. (Private) Rob Wilson was wounded. (Corporal William O. Dayton) Bill Dayton is to Nashville sick. (Private) Charles V. Bainbridge is wounded & missing. I have to send this without a stamp. When you get to Victoria, give my best respects to all. May peace and love be in your cot/When I am far away and you are forgot."