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CORRESPONDENCE AND JOURNAL

of

JACQUES MARTIN  
during the period from

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JACQUES (JAMES) MARTIN





we've been receiving full rations. We hope to continue waging this war vigorously this winter, and that Rosecrans will be less of a traitor or more skillful than Buell; we hope to bring it to an end this winter. But good-by, I want to write a few more lines to Louis. Ah, if only I could see you once more, but whatever happens, let us accept it with good grace. They say that we are going to go reinforce Grant in Mississippi. Good-by, good-by, until we meet, in this world or the next. Your devoted son and brother Jacques.

Near Nashville, December 22, 1862. Letter to his parents. Beloved Parents, brothers and sisters, will these lines find you all alive and well? I fear not, having received a letter from Louis and Conrad the day before yesterday, dated November 13, and at the same time one dated October 24, in which they say that our father is sick, even very sick. I try to be as reasonable as possible, but can't conquer a profound grief. Louis asks me for my address, saying that he hasn't received news from me for months. I wrote him again three weeks ago, and I hope to receive the six letters he tells me he received from you for me, but I don't count on it, too much mail is getting lost. I am in good bodily health, but my heart is suffering. For about four weeks, we haven't been on any marches, and if almost all our time is spent scouting, on foraging expeditions or on guard, picket duty and patrols, at least we have tents and the best location for our camp one could wish for. We also have full rations, water in abundance, and, for the last three days, all the clothing we need, even capes. We are all cheered up already, and our regiment - which today comprises only four hundred men, with our faithful comrades from the 24th Ohio and the 36th Indiana - is ready for a new campaign. Still we don't think we will be able to advance while the rivers are rising, and besides, the rebels have as many troops as we do in Murfreesboro, and in the area, and it's said that they receive reinforcements daily. We are constantly hearing skirmishes to one side or the other. A few days ago our regiment took a Southern cavalry post and we are ready for a serious battle at an instant's notice. We are concerned about the fate of our country, for our generals are ignorant or sympathize with the rebels. And we fear traitors in our Congress even more than the armed Southerners who are before us. In any case, we are doing our duty and keeping up hope, for a cause as just as ours cannot be lost. If only we had good officers and generals. The soldiers themselves aren't found wanting, at least not those of the old regiments. After a tiring march the day before yesterday, for example, we did ten miles in less than three hours, in pitchblack night and on roads and paths full of holes, woods and pebbles. At every moment someone was somersaulting, but no one fell behind. Will we still have the joy of spending a few days together before leaving this poor world? My comrades also have parents, friends, wives, children, and we are often sad, seeing our ranks become thin, and no hope that the rebels will soon surrender. But whatever happens, we will do what we have to. Good-by all. Don't worry about me, for whatever happens, you can be sure that I have done my duty honorably and what is this short life? Good-by, I love you with all my heart. Your son Jacques.



Camp at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. January 4, 1863. Letter to his parents. Good Mother, dear brothers and sisters, a few hasty lines so that you will know that so far I am alive and well. The newspapers will doubtless bring you the news of our battles near Murfreesboro; that's why I am taking advantage of the fact that an officer is leaving for Cincinnati and is willing to mail this letter, written on the battlefield. Christmas Day, my dear Mother, I received your letters announcing the sickness and the demise of our beloved father. I was ready for this news, having feared some such misfortune for many months. How alone you must feel, but you know where to find strength and consolation to meet your trials. I wasn't able to write you sooner. We left in the morning December 26 and since then we have been before the enemy constantly; the weather has been bad, often cold, we are without tents and often without fires, we have often had to fight, and it was impossible for me to write you sooner. At the first free moment I had, I went to find and bury our slain comrades, which we did last night by moonlight. Our regiment suffered greatly, but held firm, and we finally put the enemy to flight. Ten days ago we were about four hundred; yesterday we drew rations for two hundred ten men; so far we have counted a hundred fifty one dead and wounded. Those who are missing are probably dead also. Our company had twenty-seven men as we went into battle, four were killed, seven wounded and disabled, two had their wounds dressed and came back into the ranks, two others were scratched, and only twelve seemed untouched, but our gear, clothes or hats were scarred. I did what was to be done without being touched. We are happy about our victory and about the good news from Knoxville and Virginia, but one can't be really joyful in the middle of so many dead and suffering friends. Dear Mother, how much I have to write you, but it's not possible right now. Ah, if we could only see each other again, but whatever happens, let us accept what Providence has in store for us calmly, with resignation, I would even say joy. Our ranks are becoming terribly thin, but we are decided and resigned, our cause is just, we want a free country for ourselves and our children and we will have it whatever the price. Good-by dear Mother, dear brothers and sisters. I was with you in spirit when my comrades were falling in heaps around me. I want to write a few more lines to my child on the paper that remains, for he must be very worried also. Give my greetings to my uncle, aunts, and to all. Excuse this rambling letter; my heart is too full, thinking of our loss, and of our house without our good father. Farewell, farewell, I love you with all my heart. Your devoted son Jacques.

Camp at Murfreesboro, January 9, 1863. Letter to his mother. Dear good Mother, I must not hide it from you, this war is costing a lot of blood and we aren't supported by the North as we should be. Our regiments are melting away and aren't being replaced. Eighteen months ago our company filled five big tents, today we have two, half empty. We aren't discouraged, we always have a firm hope of the success of our just cause, but we consider ourselves more or less as sacrifices.

January 11. The day before yesterday, while I was writing you, the trumpet sounded, we had to break camp. I had just washed my clothes, which I had to put on wet, putting my two spare shirts and my spare shorts wet into my sack. The rain and snow stopped yesterday, the night was cold, but the sun will dry out everything today if we have to break camp again. I feel alone, my best comrades, those with whom I could speak a little intimately, are all dead or wounded, among others one from Berne and one from Schwytze, good boys if it came to that, and who each received a bullet in the forehead; another Bernois whom I loved a lot was wounded in the shoulder, and a Spaniard, a very educated man who speaks seven languages, and with whom I liked to talk, had a leg amputated. Our regiment had thirty-five men killed during the battle, a hundred thirty-six wounded and three missing, probably dead, no prisoners and no deserters. We now count two hundred and twelve men in the ranks, including several who suffered scratches. We were caught in cross-fire on the flank by the incredible negligence or the treason of General Johnson, who had sent all the horses and three batteries two miles away when he was attacked. If we had as good generals as the Southerners, the war would be over. The building of the railroad between Murfreesboro and Nashville is progressing rapidly, and we are planning to go in a few days to attack the enemy, which is entrenched, they say, at Tullahoma, thirty-five miles from here. I must leave you, we are living like the bird on the branch. I forgot to tell you that my health is admirable, we left Nashville with three days of rations in our packs and just a blanket, most of us were without capes, they are cumbersome in combat. We bivouacked the whole time, spent entire days almost immobile in the mud with rain, snow and sleet, and we haven't had a man sick in the regiment. Will it be granted that we see each other again? If I could see my child reach his eighteenth or twentieth year, if I could spend a few more days with you, I would die happy. Your letter, dear Mother, gladdened my heart by the calm and resignation with which you are accepting the trial sent us. Thank you for the portrait of our father, I won't see him again, the thought is painful, but his memory is sweet to my heart, and he is happy, delivered from so many cares and griefs that torment us in this world. We were happy for so long in our family, sometimes it almost frightened me, and I was ready to endure this trial some day. The news from my boy is good. Perhaps other misfortunes await us, but whatever happens, we can be happy if we want, and as you say, there is even a certain happiness and joy in supporting trials with calm and resignation. We are still near Murfreesboro. Guard duty, fatigue duty, foraging expeditions and so on take up all our time. We have no more than two hundred men. We lost forty-seven and a half per cent of our complement during the last battle, yet we must do the same work as before. Last week, in really awful weather, we went to Woodbury, and we fought. Nineteen men were wounded. The enemy soon took flight, leaving several dead on the field, among others, Colonel Atchinson. Forgive me for writing you so briefly, but every instant one person or another is called for some service. Our trumpet is tireless and we must be ready to leave at any instant. Farewell all, my friendship to uncle, aunts, friends. Your devoted son and brother Jacques.

Camp near Murfreesboro, February 16, 1863. Journal. During our campaign in Kentucky, under the orders of this scoundrel Buell, whom every soldier has

known for a traitor since Corinth, I've had few opportunities to write, not even a line. Although I haven't been sick, I have suffered from an accident that happened before we left Murfreesboro. Having arrived at ten o'clock at night to bivouac in the woods, we were lying down pell-mell; the night was very dark and one of my comrades didn't see me when he left the fire, and he spilled his boiling coffee over my foot. All my lower leg was nothing but an immense swelling. The next day, it was already considerably better. A few days later, as the regiment was leaving for Kentucky, the officers and soldiers told me to go to the hospital, but we were expecting to surprise the rearguard of the enemy near Louisville and to destroy it as Buell could have done, and I wanted to be among them, especially since several of my comrades were a little discouraged, and I made them hold their tongues by marching with my wounded foot. I had to go part of the way barefoot, not being able to bear any shoe. If we had a moment of rest, weariness overcame me and I slept. Finally, little by little, it healed; we were then not only on half rations, but it was given to us in flour, which we didn't have time to cook well, which produced diarrheas that didn't help things. We arrived in Louisville full of rage; we expected to turn right near Elizabethtown, take the rebels on the flank, and hit them on their tail at Louisville. One consolation and hope was left us: the brave Nelson, who was in Louisville, was going to take back his old veterans and lead us to the enemy, but the day after our arrival he was murdered by that infamous Jeff Davis. My courage almost failed me.

I had another frightening adventure in the bargain. I hadn't had news from Louis for an eternity. An acquaintance who came to the camp told me that the merchant from Fulda was in Louisville. I asked for permission to go see him, and got it. I had barely gotten to town before I was arrested by a patrol. A recruit and a sergeant of the 110th Illinois found that I wasn't quick enough, I was still limping a bit, and one of them wanted to push me; but the conscript's rifle suddenly found itself in my hands, and I told them coldly that I would willingly go where they led me but that the first to touch me would be dead. They then treated me with respect and took me to prison. There I asked in vain for a judge, they left me for three days, in the midst of a pile of drunkards and bandits, on a wooden floor covered with filth, almost without food and water. I had a fever and was sick. The third day an officer released me and apologized, saying that it was a misunderstanding, and I came back to the regiment, which was about to leave. I went with it, fairly sick the first few days, but soon the camp life and the noise of the cannon cured me. Since then, the marches and countermarches haven't ceased until our return to Tennessee. I suffered from our half rations more than many others, not being able to bring myself to steal in friendly territory, and in the midst of a poor population. Some squash and some half-frozen potatoes were all that hunger made me take. In enemy country and among rich planters, I'm not so scrupulous. We fought in vain at Wild Cat, followed the enemy to within forty miles of Cumberland Gap, and bivouacked in a wild country, often full of snow.

I just came out of a meeting in which all the men in the regiment took part. They unanimously endorsed the resolutions taken by the other Ohio regiments, and



sent a message to the people of Ohio, declaring that we had had enough, and asking for an end to the underhand maneuvers and intrigues of the politicians of the North.

Communications with the North have now been re-established, and serious complaints have been brought against the postal employees, so we can hope to have a more regular correspondence in the future. Everyone is in excellent health, although we have had almost too much rest for my constitution these last two weeks. We have clothing, full rations; men are regaining weight and growing fatter before our eyes. Morally, I am doing well, although subjects for grief aren't lacking, but one can't be sad and happy at the same time. My relations with the officers and soldiers are good, but they have changed little by little, especially since my best friends, all those with whom I could speak heart to heart, are dead or wounded. Patriotism had often been just a straw fire, several have deserted, others have left in a shameful way. It is true that reasons for discouragement aren't lacking. The infamous negligence with which our wounded are treated, favoritism in promotions, political intrigues in the North, tend to demoralize the troops, but the cause for which we bear arms is not responsible itself. Why lose courage, weaken, or slacken because others are wrong? As for me, I'm still the same, I think that the trials have strengthened me; I don't hesitate to say what I think and to show my contempt for cowards who disgust me with their complaints. I've not only refused any promotion, because of the complete lack of discipline in our army, but I have become a simple soldier again, and yet everyone respects me. The officers call me Mr. Martin, the soldiers all treat me with respect and fear me perhaps more than they love me. Besides, I hope that the good Rosecrans, who is earning our confidence more each day, will put everything in order. At the battle of Murfreesboro, the men in our regiment held firm, and if earlier I called them cowards, it's not that they are cowards in combat, but just in enduring continual privations and conquering the terrible homesickness that torments us all, with more or less force. If we had been able to obtain leave, one after the other, and if our letters were sent more regularly, everything would be better. In fact, I am perhaps too harsh sometimes, and it is astonishing to see any army capable of holding up like ours. Discipline is nonexistent, everyone does what he wants, several went home and came back without anyone reproaching them in the least; others deserted a long time ago, no one knows where they are, but they are left alone. There is no punishment or reward here, never the least encouragement. Certainly the army of the South, and those of Europe, would cease to exist in a few weeks if they were organized like ours. I've also noticed that the men don't complain while they are suffering, but only when they are living a comparatively tranquil life in camp.

March 10, 1863, Murfreesboro camp. Journal. I finally received two letters, one from Aubonne, the other from Louis. They comforted me, for all us soldiers, although leading a hard life, have hearts as feeling as before, and even more, although perhaps it doesn't seem that way. I hope that more will come, now that our