

## **A letter written by a Union soldier on the night of May 14**

We have seen some pretty rough times on this campaign, as you must know. Hard marches, hot weather, heavy rains, short rations, entrenching, fighting, have all tried us, 'til at times we have grown "weary of well-doing."

We have never before known the full meaning of the term "active service" or felt its full burden. Our history as a regiment shows no other page like "Resaca" and no other grief like the last three months. We are fearfully reduced in numbers. It is now a big company that can make four stacks. Our non-combatants and our "detached" and "absent sick" make up from 2/3 to 3/4 of our strength.

This fearful 14th of May was a sad day for us. Poor Hutchinson and Philpot are with us no more. There was no better soldier in "H" than J. N. Bacon, who fills a soldier's grave on the battlefield. And our wounded! The very best of the Company. Eighty killed and wounded took one-fourth of our number from us in about two hours. It was terrible.

The country does not realize the immense labor already accomplished by this army, which has no newspaper notoriety. Gen. Sherman lets his works praise him. The 130 miles we have driven the enemy is our voucher.

We lost one of our best men on the skirmish line ... Frank Towner was shot through the heart and instantly killed. The man on post with him says he never spoke a word after he was struck. His sudden death has cast a gloom on the company, and indeed the entire regiment, for, although a newcomer, his genial qualities had endeared him to all who met him. He was of our bravest and best. The utter darkness prevailing at the time he was shot convinces me it was the result of a chance shot. We buried him beside the dead of Riley's Brigade (which had that day been badly cut up, in a charge badly conducted) ...

*Heritage Note: Our ancestor, William Thomas Shore, was in Riley's Brigade and was wounded in that charge.*

You will hear, from this part of the country, some big news before many days. Please to imagine the 23rd Corps as doing its share. The boys all wish to be remembered.

*-- A.H. Spencer, in a letter to Capt. John Booth, passed down to great-grandson Peter Phelps of Colorado Springs, CO.*

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May 22, 1864

Dear Wife,

It is a beautiful morning and all nature is full of animation. Over the battleground where one week ago the death dealing missiles flew so fast, the birds are caroling their sweet notes. All is quite and the frowning earth works on either side of Camp Creek are as silent as the grave. The hosts that lay behind them are gone and are about to confront each other in another place.

If we turn to the number of hospitals here and there and look in at the numerous number of suffering patriots, many of whom must yet die, we are painfully reminded of the dreadful conflict so recently here. Hundreds have been seen on the train of cars to Chattanooga and Nashville and many others will go in a few days. They will be furlowed home as soon as possible to remain until cured.

I have not yet learned the ropes in this battle. I think the grand plan of McPherson making a flank movement through Snake Gap, and then finally, Sherman's whole force concentrated there compelling Johnston to fall back from Dalton, was masterly and it made the enemy lose the work they had done at Dalton making it impregnable.

The enemy had their works along the ridge on the east bank of Camp Creek, and our forces worked up and threw up works on the ridge on the west bank. The little valley is mostly cleared and had been cultivated and the hills on either side were covered with woods. So each had a good opportunity to hide from the other, and this gave work to the sharp shooters. If they could see an arm or leg or any part they banged away. The sharp shooters of the enemy had the Mississippi rifle and made bad work on our boys.

At one time on Saturday about 4 o'clock, the enemy were getting the better of us, but reinforcements sent immediately soon pushed the enemy back and our men continued pushing them on until they left Sunday night.

They fired but little artillery on Sunday and were turning away trains and artillery all day and night and Monday morning they were all gone.

It was a singular battle. No driving for miles but standing up and shooting each other until finally the rebs slip out and are gone.

The gain would have been small either way if we had remained as during the battle, but as they went away it threw the gain on our side. They took away their wounded in trains, and all their army I think did well in thus getting out, though such an army for size can go away any time it pleases, from any place.

The medical inspector for our corp came back last night and said our men were to start tomorrow morning with 20 days rations and that indicates a long through again. I can't tell where old Sherman will push to, but am sure he will continue pushing even if he

pushes into a trap and gets wasted. He will do something, I think he will succeed, but if he don't he will fail making energetic trials. He thinks men can do anything and won't stop to count the great tax on physical energies his plans may involve. McPherson is a safe man. I will risk him to do any part assigned him. He is cool and calculating and I feel safe under him. Some Generals are too much for charges and throw away the lives of men. I am not aware that they have accomplished wonders any, when in this war they have accomplished the slaughter of many during the war.

I am painfully reminded of a charge one year ago today, in which, among the many fallen was one dear to us. Had not that charge been made, our brother might be living and the results accomplished in the end the same as they were.

If all the past sacrifice was all, it would be immense. But it would be mingled with joy over present good. But alas, it continues and hundreds and thousands yet are to be slain. O may God hasten its close and lead us speedily out of this great trouble!

Your affectionate  
John M.

*Written by Captain John Sullivan to his wife, Lucy, while at a Field Hospital at Resaca. He was the Chaplain of the 70th Ohio Infantry Regiment.*

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From a letter dated May 4, 1914:

Have often wondered what would have been the outcome if you had enlisted and gone with us into the old 112th, that regiment that nearly put down the war. Likely you would have been killed like so many of the best of our company did instead of losing an arm.

After we came home, Captain Armstrong said to me, "John, I think you were lucky in getting wounded as you did, for if you had gone on with us I feel sure you would have been buried down there with John Lake, Andrew Pike, Robert Dewey, George Rhodes and others who so bravely fell doing their duty." It may have been so, but I have never felt gratitude towards the fellow that shot that hole through my arm. As we were both sharp shooting and fired about the same time, I hope I did not hit him, but do hope I gave him a good scare.

It will be fifty years the 14th of this month since that day. I remember as plainly as though it were but yesterday how a few of us had crawled up to the top of a hill at Resaca, Ga., and were keeping them from firing some cannon that they had on another hill just a little in front of our position. I see a big white horse come sticking his head above their breastworks, as they were trying to hitch to one of their guns. I took

deliberate aim at his head and fired. It seemed to me that I could see the hole in his head as the poor brute fell over. Those were cruel times and we did cruel things.

I have often wondered how we could have done it; just deliberately, without malice, shoot at each other, and I was a pretty good shot in those days, and I fired away 39 rounds of ammunition that day before I got a hole through each arm. I have always felt as though they meant to disable me. They did give me a pain that has been with me more or less all these years.

*Written by John F. Rhodes, of Co. F, 112th Illinois Infantry. Suffered wounds in both arms at Resaca.*

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### **A news report from the battlefield**

I have just been over that portion of the battlefield where the 20th Corps repulsed the enemy yesterday, and the sight presented is enough to make the heart of one long accustomed to war ache.

The ambulance corps, so complete in all its details, is gathering in the wounded, and the groans of the sufferers are grating to the ear. All the rebel dead and wounded are left in our hands to be cared for.

The ground is thickly strewn with the victims in about equal proportions, excepting at those places where desperate charges were made upon our line, when the enemy came out of his breastworks; there the rebels largely predominate.

There, within a few yards of me, a wounded rebel is stopping blood that endeavors to make its exit through a ghastly grape wound in the leg of a Union soldier; while over yonder, beneath an oak, a wounded Federal is in the act of giving water from his canteen to an enemy who fell beside him, and whose lifeblood discolors the garments of both. After the shock of battle has passed, the helpless inhabitants of the rifle pits and trenches are no longer enemies. A common sympathy seems to inspire them and they are once more friends and brothers -- children of one Father.

On the field yesterday, near Tilton, where our cavalry engaged the enemy, a beautiful garden, clothed in all the loveliness that rare plants and Southern flowers could give it, attracted my attention, and I was drawn to it.

The house had been deserted by its owners, and the smiling magnolias and roses seemed to stand guard over the deserted premises. I entered through an open gate, stopped to pluck a rose from the bush, when I discovered one of the enemy's pickets

lying partially covered by the grass and bushes -- dead.

He was a noble-looking man, and upon his countenance there seemed to rest the remnant of a smile. The right hand clasped a rose, which he was in the act of severing from its stem when he received the messenger of death. In the afternoon, the cavalry dug a narrow grave and, with Federal soldiers for pallbearers, and the beautiful flowers for mourners, he was laid to rest, the rose still clasped in his stiffened hand. Nothing was found to identify him, and in that lonely grave his life's history lies entombed.

No sister's tears will baptize the grave among the roses where the dead picket sleeps.

*A newspaper report from an unidentified correspondent in "The Civil War in Song and Story," published 1865.*

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### **Burying the dead**

During the War Between the States, among the beardless boys who enlisted in the Confederate army was the 18-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Jethro Jackson of Griffin, Georgia. This brave boy met with his death in the Battle of Resaca on the Western and Atlantic railroad. His comrades buried him in a pine coffin constructed of rough planks torn from a bridge.

In 1866, when peace had spread her wings over the land, Mr. Jackson, after receiving instructions from a comrade of the dead boy relative to the location of the grave, went to the battleground at Resaca for the purpose of moving his son's remains to Griffin, but, although a thorough search was made, the place of burial could not be found, and the broken-hearted father returned home.

A few nights afterward, he dreamed that his son came back to him and, standing by the bedside, said, "Father, I am buried under a mound which was thrown up by the Yankees after I was killed. You will know the mound when you see it by the pokeberry bushes growing upon it. Go and take me up and carry me home to Mother."

So strong was the impression made on Mr. Jackson by his dream that he returned at once to Resaca, taking with him one of the comrades who had buried his son. The mound was found with the pokeberries growing upon it as described in the dream. An excavation was made, revealing a rough pine coffin a few feet below the surface of the earth. It contained the body of young Jackson. He was fully identified not only by the coffin, but by his shoes, a recent gift from his father, and by the name marked on the clothing. The remains of the young soldier were placed in a fine casket and "carried home to Mother."

*-- Dr. John Jones, chaplain of the State Senate of Georgia.*