

A.T. Gay Letter

Shelbyville, Tenn. March 14th, 1863.

Dear Father:

Bro. Will and I received your letter om yesterday, and he desires that I shall answer it, as he has some business to attend to. Your letter gives me no little satisfaction to hear that all were well. I have never been as anxious to come home in my life. The time that I have been away, seems almost an age. But while this cruel and inhuman war continues, you need not expect to see me. I am not a soldier form a matter of choice, but from necessity. And while that necessity remains, I am a solider, let it be long or short. No price is too high to pay for liberty and freedom. I have endured, and undergone more already, than I thought I would be able to do, when I entered the service, and am still ready and willing, to undergo much more for the cause I espouse. I would ask you to give yourself no unnecessary trouble about me, should I never return to you. You may console yourself that I fell at my post, battling for a noble cause. I could fill a volume, but my space is limited, and I hardly know where to commence. I will give you a sketch of the Battle of Perryville. The Battle of Murfreesboro was one of no less importance. I stood on the battle field six days, and nights, in a very cold rain the most of the time. I had several bullet holes made in my clothes, but came out unharmed. I cannot see how it is possible for a man to pass through such a fight. I must have been protected by an All Mighty hand. Our Brigade supported one of Genl. Withers [sic] Brigade, composed of Mississippi and Alabama troops. The fight had scarcely begun, when they gave way, and retreated in confusion, from our brigade. We were ordered forward to take their place. We charged across a field, and succeeded in routing the enemy, and capturing a part of two Batteries. Onward we pressed in Double Quick. Two hundred yards brought us on the enemy's second line. (Lying Down) They sprang to their feet, but nothing could with stand the impetuosity of our charge, and they too gave way, and retreated in confusion, while we poured the shot into their third, and last line, composed of 14-15-16 and 18th U.S. Regulars. For a few moments the contest is doubtful. A shout passes down the Rebel lines that could be heard above the din of battle. Onward is the command, until we reached a large plantation, where we came to a halt, and had the satisfaction of seeing the enemy retreat, across a field at least one mile in width. There we stood and witnessed one of the sublimest [sic] scenes of the war. But we were too weary to pursue them any farther. At least 13,000 men, artillery, wagons, and cavalry, all in double quick, skedaddling from one little brigade of Tennesseans. (about 2500 in number) Here the fight closed on the 31st of Dec. 1862, as it was then too late for any farther operations. The enemy was driven back about five miles on their left, and about one on their right, with a loss of 7000 prisoners. About 10,000 in killed and wounded, 600 wagons, and teams, loaded with Army stores, 40 pieces of Cannon and about 7000 small arms. We held the entire battlefield three days, and then fell back to this place. No doubt, you have heard the Abolitionist gained a victory over us. Such victories will soon force them to recognize us as an independent

nation. I am willing to take a few more such defeats. Our loss was about 7,000 in killed, wounded, and missing. Cousin Marion Gay was killed, and Cousin Joe badly wounded, and Elias I have not heard from. They are in Genl. Breckenridge Division, who fell back to Tallahoma [sic], and our Division fell back to Shelbyville. We are about twenty miles apart. One of our doctors saw Cousin Joe in the hospital at Winchester Tenn. He said he thought he would get well.

Bro, Will has been herding government stock down in Lincoln Co. for some time. I saw him yesterday. He is in fine health. Bro. James left here in Jan. to go to Miss. The last I heard from him, he was at Cousin I.H. Gays. His health was not good by any means, when he left here. I hear from Cousin Hampton Gay's family often. I never hear from Bro. Joseph, and John. You wrote that John had been wounded, and left on the way side. I fear that he may suffer for want of attention, and it may terminate seriously. I shall hope for the best. May he yet live to avenge an outraged country, and home. I have always been hopeful of the final result. I never despair. Our successes have exceeded my expectations. We have defeated them in almost every important engagement, and if we but remain true to ourselves, victory will crown us in the end, in the establishment of Southern Confederacy, on firmer principales [sic] than the U.S. Government. The people of West Tenn. need not suppose that the whole army is acting like that section. At least one half of the West Tenn. troops have deserted. This is not the case with any other troops, not even among the troops of East Tenn. Now as to those deserters, I have no feeling toward them, but contempt. The day will come, when they will be held up to the gaze of the world, scoffed at, spit upon, and held as unworthy to associate with a brave, and free people. There is no crime (save treason) that sinks a man lower than that of desertion. All those soldiers who return to that portion of country are deserters. They may claim to have a furlough, but it is false. Keep your eyes on them, for I believe that a man who would desert our army, is capable of committing the most heinous [sic] crime. Wash, and John Hunt, are in the cavalry Service. They were well, when heard from last.

I do not believe that the war will close soon, but I hope that you will cheer up. and be more hopeful. Always look upon the bright side of every subject. As for us, we are determined to conquer, and can adopt, Patrick Henry's sentiments, "Give us Liberty or Death." I was sick about a month from my exposure in the Murfreesboro fight, but am now able for duty. Give my love to all the family, and friends, and believe me to be,

Your Affectionate Son,

A.T. Gay

P.S. Write us as often as you can, if you can find an opportunity of sending letters through the lines, and have them mailed. Address us at Shelbyville, Tenn. Capt. A.T. Gay, 31st Tenn. Regt. Stewart Brigade, Cheatham's Division, Shelbyville, Tenn.

Genl. Van Dorn brought in 2300 prisoners last Saturday. They were a dirty looking set of thieves, and villians [sic]. We hear cannon nearly every day. Would not be surprised

to a general engagement any day. Let them come, we are ready for them. We will give them a hot reception, with grape and ball.

If you can find an opportunity to send Jim Orgain any word, tell him that we are well, and in spirits. The time is coming, when our banner will float gallantly on every sea. I may not live to see it, but there are those now alive, who will. I never will consent for a reunion on any terms. Liberty or death, is the soldiers [sic] motto. We cannot, and will not, live under the same government with the Yankees. Cheer up, we are stronger today than when the war commenced. God is with us, and victory will crown us in the end, in the establishment of our independence.

A.T. Gay