

McGowin Letters

Camp near Winchester, Tenn

Jany. [sic] 7th 1863

Dear Father, Mother and People all,

I write at this time with feelings much mortified, and know too that you will, be much pained to hear the sad news which this contains unless you have already heard.

[illegible] Joseph is no more with us in the world of [illegible] and sorrow. He was killed in battle at Murfreesboro on the 31st ult. He fell at his post like a man. At the time he was shot, I was not exactly by his side though within a few steps. My attention was called to him immediately and he breathed no more, nor moved, He was shot through the brain.

We had fough [sic] hard nearly all day before he fell, and had he escaped a few minutes longer he would have been through all the hard fighting that our regiment was in, and belief [sic] he would have been safe.

On the second night after the fight J. Moore, James McG, and B. Parker went and found his body; though we could not then bury him in order. There was no coffin to be had for anybody. Therefore they who were brought to that place were laid side by side so I learn. I could not see him buried for I had to leave at daylight for the battle field. We lay in the line of battle a whole week. Our Regiment commenced fighting at Tryune [sic] which is about 16 miles from Murfreesboro. We were there for the purpose of guarding the road and to check the enemy when they came so that they could be met properly at Murfreesboro. When they came against us in force we had to give way though we fought them considerable.

After getting to Murfreesboro we were not engaged for the first day through hard fighting was going on. Every day the enemy were driven back until they they [sic] had gone a considerable distance. We had to drive them no farther but waited for them to come against us again, which they did not. On the night of the 3rd inst. we left, why I do not know, but suppose the enemy were re[illegible]ing to [sic] strong for us again to fight them.

Our loss was great of course. I have no idea what, but I am sure that of the enemy was much more. You can learn from the papers. Our first Leieut. [sic] Jackson was killed Loss makes sense here but in the original it looks like lofs

and [illegible] wounded. Jacob Manning was slightly [illegible] in the arm. We are now on the Chattanooga [sic] and Nashville railroad 45 miles from Murfreesboro at a little village by the name of Tulehoma,[sic] which is our P.O. providing we stay here, but I have no idea we will long. This is the first chance I have had to write you since the battle

and its[sic] a poor one for we have never been still long enough. I have no thought what we will do. we came here this evening and may leave tomorrow for all I know. David Blacksher wishes you to let his people know that he escaped, as he can not write. All of your acquaintances are unhurt whom I have not mentioned. We are all worn out and no doubt for we have lain in the weather like brutes for the last two weeks, and how raininf and cold it is yet.

Pa Lewis says you promised to let us have Bill or Toldver if we wished and he is now anxious to get one, so if you think proper you may send one, if he is willing to come if Berry has not left. I think we can pay money enough for you to hire another hand to work in his place. I should have the other boys pay for anything done for them - this they are willing to do. I would rather not take one from you if we could get any other good one but know we could not. Joseph left \$80 which I wish you had it is in my way for nothing here. I will write you more soon as I get the chance. farewell for this time.

Alex and A. L. McGowin

Camp near Tullahoma, Tenn.

Jany. [sic] 11th, 1863

Dear Father & Mother;

Having an opportunity I write you again, though it has been but a few days since writing. I and Lewis ar [sic] about but not very well. Lewis is often complaining, it seems that he is unsound ever since last winter. All of our men went through all the battle, though Lewis and John were sick, and quite so too, all the shile [sic]. All of us were in bad condition after lying in the wet, cold weather for a whole week, and being run hard part of the time and having but little to eat, and little sleep. As I presume you will get my other letter I will only say of Jos. that he was killed on the 31st ult. He was within a few steps of me but I did not see him fall, but was told that he was dead and I went to him but he could not speak or move, for, as I soon learned, he was shot through the brain. The balls were then flying thick around me, and the men falling fast around me. Soon after Jos. was killed three others fell immediately by my side, two of them dead. Although we lost many men the enemy lost many more than we from what I saw. They lay tick where we followed them.

Our company has but few men in it now, nor any of the rest in the regiment. There is a talk of having the Regt. filled with conscripts. I do not know how long we will be here or where we will go, perhaps we will have another fight before going far or any where.

As I mentioned in my last letter Lewis has taken a notion that he can not get along with a negro boy to help us. But for Lewis I would rather do without than

take one of yours from home, for I think you may need them there though I am willing to spend all I make to add anything to my comfort. We generally have a hard time in camps, as also in marching. While in camps we have to drill and do a thousand other things so that we can not get a chance to wash our clothes or do our cooking properly. And whether in camp or marching we are never permitted to leave to go to any bodies house to procure any thing to eat that is fit to be eaten (in camp we get but little and that very poor generally). Those who have servants sent them out in the country and get what ever there is to be had. If we had a servant I expect we should have to pay for all that he made use of, both clothing and victuals, but I should make him clothe himself as he could make plenty to do it and more. While in camps any thing I like a smart negro can make 10 or 12 dollars a week by washing after doing his other work. In fruit time negroes made money as fast as they could count it by bringing in peaches and apples for sale. We poor old soldiers are not allowed to get out of sight on any occasion, but negroes can go where they please so long as they behave. Just use your own pleasure as regards me. You might lose your negro, so you might lose your negro, so you might at home, but he would not be in near so much danger as I, for in time for battle negros are left behind with the wagons and teamsters where bullets cannot reach them so they are safe if not captured. It is Sunday and a pretty day it is. Our Chaplain is delivering a sermon, but fearing I might not get another chance to write I have declined going to hear him today. If you wish to know any thing relative to Jos. you must say what it is. We got his clothing which was with the wagons and divided among us; he had his new suit of jeans on. We all carried a blanket each with us on the field. Jos. was stolen off of him before we got his body he had the blanket which Lewis had at home. You must write if you will. We never hear from home at all. Direct any where. Most where you think we are; letters will follow. I would like to have dinner with you today. We have only a little meal to cook. We had two days rations stolen this week.

Your Son

Camp near Tullahoma, Tenn.

Jany. [sic] 13th, 1863

Dear brothers;

Yours of the 30th ult. came duly to hand on yesterday and found me and Lewis tolerable, but Jos. poor brother he is no more with us in this world of trouble; he fell a martyr to our cause on the 31st ult. at Murfreesboro in battle. He fell at his post fighting manfully. He was killed instantly with a ball which went directly through his brain. Hard fighting commenced on Tuesday the 30th and continued three days. We fought hard only on the 31st.

A portion of our brigade was in advance 16 miles and the enemy came against us in force when we fought them all we could and fell back to Murfreesboro. We had to retreat fast to keep out of danger of being taken and when we got to Murfreesboro we were quite broken down, but we had to continue a whole week to fight or lye [sic] in line of battle, and our suffering was great as the weather was very cold and rainy.

After driving the yanks back a considerable distance we held them there, or at any rate they did not come against us again so long as we remained there. Perhaps they were reenforcing, of this I know nothing, or the cause of leaving. We left on Saturday night after the battle, and have fallen back perhaps 45 miles. We are now on the Nashville and Chattanooga R. R. Jos. was buried after a day and night after the manner usual among soldiers – without a coffin I mean.

We have had a very hard time but hope for better in the future. Our first Lieut. Jackson was killed and there 9 others wounded. I suppose we had not more than 25 or 30 men of our company engaged; and from what I learn the others of our regiment suffered in proportion, and perhaps the whole brigade and division. We now belong to Claiborn's [sic] division.

Jacob Manning was slightly wounded in the arm. I do not know where he is now. All of your acquaintances [sic], so far as I know, whom I have not mentioned escaped unharmed. I have not received a letter from home since writing you. They will not write at all. In fact I have no correspondent, as you well know, I have nary sweetheart nor am I anxious for one at this time, for, as I conceive, it would only add fuel to the flame.

On yesterday I enjoyed myself the best of any time since going to the wars. I and Jas. had got a pass and went out into the country, and was fortunate enough to find a plenty of kind people who had fine things to eat and drink, and pretty girls to share the whole. You cannot imagine how good a glass of milk is to me, and we got plenty. God bless all such people is my prayer.

I must conclude having nothing more to write. You must write me often, both you and [illegible] I love to write when I have a chance, which I can not always have; for we are marching nearly all the time, or have been.

Farewell, dear brothers. We hope to meet you again at any early day.

Yours in love,

ALEX & A. L. McGOWIN

Direct at this place, letters follow us if we move.