

TN 18th Infantry McKay Manuscript

William L. McKay's Memoirs

[rest is missing] on the night of Oct 17. Moved to camp near Maney's [sic] Spring on 18 where we lived like millionaires on the best that the county afforded. Butter – Eggs – Chickens – Turkeys – ham – potatoes – biscuit – light bread – cakes of all kinds and in fact everything that a woman could think of to tempt the appetite. We were visited daily by the wives – daughters and sweet hearts of the soldier boys and each of them brought something to eat or wear.

We remained quietly in camp until the 30 when we received marching orders, cooked rations and marched in the direction of Nashville, reached Stewarts Creek about dark and camped in the fence corners.

On Nov 1st continued march to Lavergne and camped. While here being in reach of my Grand Fathers I asked for a furlough which was refused.

On 4 recd [sic] marching orders and marched at 8 PM. Marched slowly all night and reached a point one mile south of Nashville just at daylight driving in the pickets who fired on us. We planted a battery on the toll gate hill on Murfreesboro pike with 18th Tenn [sic] supporting it, about sunrise (Nov 5) our battery opened fire on the city, we (the private Soldiers) of course expected the Yankees to return the fire and send the infantry out to engage us but they made no response. (I think now that the demonstration was made to allow our Cavalry to approach the city on the East and tear up RR.) after waiting some time we were ordered back six miles to Washington Institute to rest then back to Lavergne which we reached about 5 PM. remained [sic] in camp at Lavergne until the 9th when we were ordered back to Murfreesboro.

Cheatham's [sic] Division reached Murfreesboro on Nov 24. The 18th Regt moved camp on 25 to a point between town and the river. recd [sic] marching orders on Dec 5 and marched through snow – mud and water to Pearces mill on Lebanon pike about 8 miles from Murfreesboro where we were very comfortably quartered in the houses in the neighborhood. Co I was quartered in the temperance hall, on the morning of the 8th was ordered to Lebanon, after marching a short distance were ordered back to Pearces Mill. John H Morgan soon came in with 2000 prisoners captured at Hartsville. they [sic] with the arms and munitions of war captured with them were turned over to the 18th Tenn [sic] and the prisoners marched back to Murfreesboro on 10 Dec. While camped at Pearces mill the love of the southern women for the Confederate Soldier was fully proven in my care. I wished to go to Cainsville with Sam Foeas and needed a horse to make the trip. I went to the Rev Branch Owens [sic] house and his wife without knowing any thing about me loaned me a horse.

About Dec 13-14 President Jeff Davis reviewed the Army

I asked again for a leave of absence for 24 or 36 hours to visit the homes of some of my messmates but was again refused. I then without leave went home with Harvey Jarman spent one night with him at home, one night at Gibsons and one night at the widow Hights, the mother of one of my mess mates. On 26 heard heavy cannonading and while going to breakfast a young brother of Harvey Jarman rode up to the gate with a message for me to report at once to my command as a battle was imminent. without [sic] waiting to eat breakfast I got my horse and rode to Murfreesboro in a gallop, young Jarman going with me to take back the horse. I found the Regt had struck camp and were at the front in Line of battle. Lieut[sic] Freas who was in command of the Co was very angry with me for leaving camp without permission.

I found the wagons and secured a gun (not my own however which I had kept in perfect order). on [sic] the 29 AM very heavy Artillery firing at the front about 3 PM ordered in line at 4 several building were fired between the lines, at dark we were ordered to support a battery and built fires but were soon ordered to put them out, began to rain about midnight, heave [sic] artillery firing on the left on 30 am and occasionally infantry, the fighting began early on the 31 on our left wing and the enemy were driven from every position and were almost in complete rout, about 3 PM we were ordered to double quick to the left wing which we did crossing the river in water from knee to waist deep, then across an open Cotton field under a heavy fire of artillery with grape – canister and bomb shells, wounding a number of our regiment, after crossing the field we were halted in a cedar thicket, the original battle line of the Yankees and found a great many wounded and dead Yankees.

I carried water from a well to the wounded until about midnight. about [sic] 2 am we were ordered back to our old position on the right wing where we remained quietly except an occasional bombardment from the enemy which would force us to mover about to keep out of range until the afternoon of the 2 January when our Division (Breckenridges) [sic] was ordered to charge the enemy who were massed on our right wing, we charged across an open field and were met by a large force of infantry, supported by about 80 pieces of artillery massed on the river bluff.

after a short but bloody fight in the open field the first line of the enemy broke and were followed to the river by our men with the Rebel yell. when [sic] they were met by the reserve force of the Yankees and forced to retreat with heavy loss. I was shot through the right thigh with minnie [sic] ball soon after starting after the retreating enemy. I was the last of the color guard to fall, Geo Lowe [two illegible words crossed out] (the color bearer) was in the act of falling being shot through the body, when I caught hold of the flag staff to prevent the fall of the flag and received my first wound and we fell together. Capt [sic] Nat Gooch then took the flag (and has told me since that the color bearer and

the color guard had fallen so close together that he could have covered us all with the flag) and was soon shot down. Louge Nelson of Murfreesboro then took the flag and carried it safely through the battle, I remained helpless and partially unconscious until our command retreated. I saw the Yankees coming and attempted to get up but could not, our men moved up a battery of three guns and planted them just over where I lay, the fire from the guns was nearly hot enough to burn my face, the yankee [sic] bullets rattled on the gun carriages like hail and our men were forced to leave the guns as they did not have horses enough to take them away after the battery was deserted I being between the lines received my second wound from a bomb shell fired by the Confederates breaking my left arm and terribly bruising my body (from concussion I was told by the Surgeon), I received several other slight wounds on my legs while lying between the lines, I lay where I fell until midnight and received brutal treatment from some of the Yankees. yankee [sic] Genl [sic] Jeff Davis s [sic] division marched by and over me and the commanders of companies would say as they passed me "look out men here is a wounded man" some of them would step over me carefully while others would give a kick and call me a damned rebel and I was covered with black spots from the bruises.

About 12 or 1 o'clock two yankee [sic] boys who were searching the battle field for a friend, they seemed very sorry for me and determined to have me taken to the hospital, one of them would stay with me holding my hand while the other would hunt for an ambulance, it was some time before they could get one so they were hauling off their own wounded first, they finally secured one and helped to lift me in it. I was taken to a hospital camp and laid out on the ground they thinking I was too near dead to waste time on, it was then raining, I lay all day Saturday in the rain without any attention being paid me when I would ask for water they would say you dont [sic] need water we will take you to the grave yard after a while. I did not suffer however as I could suck the water out of my coat sleeve as it rained on me. about [sic] dark Saturday finding I would not die I was picked up and laid in a tent out of the rain, during the night two wounded Confederates died in this tent, one of them having fallen across my legs and lay there several hours.

Sunday about noon I was moved to another tent where I could have more room and attention, this tent was occupied by both Confederate and Yankee wounded, on Monday I was given breakfast, the first food offered me and the first I had eaten since Friday.

This Monday morning the surgeons eight in number going the rounds of the camp examining the wounded, one of them examined me and decided to amputate my leg, my arm could be saved. I at first rebelled and said they should not, but finding that this would not do I then begged them not to cut it off. this [sic] attracted the attention of the Chief. a [sic] big dutch [sic] surgeon who came and examined me and said let him

alone, if de dam Rebel wants to die let him go so they left me and examined a Florida soldier who was wounded almost exactly like myself through the thigh but did not have the arm and body wounds. he [sic] made no objection to the amputation, they took him out cut off his leg and brought him back the next day he died, on my other side was a handsome young Yankee soldier shot through the calf of his leg, no bones broken. he [sic] seemed unable to stand the pain just gave up and died, the surgeon said there was no reason for him to die. just [sic] simply gave up. the [sic] man at my head (a Yankee) died, so three men nearest me died and neither of them seemed to be wounded as badly as I was. the [sic] young surgeon in charge of the tent was a nice gentleman and very kind to me. paid [sic] me especial attention, he was from near Chicago and gave me his address so I might write to him but unfortunately I lost it. about [sic] the 7 or 8 Casper Freas (a Union or yankee [sic] sympathizer) the only man in his neighborhood who would venture inside the yankee [sic] lines came with Mrs [sic] R R Clemmons in search of her husband who was missing and his wife hoped to find him in the hospital (He was never found) his two brothers "Hall and Tollie" were both Killed on Friday. I was reported killed on the field and Bob Dillon reported that he had turned me over and knew that I was dead. so [sic] Mr [sic] Freas and Mrs [sic] C were very much surprised to find me. Mr [sic] Freas took a great interest in me, he procured a certificate from the Surgeon that I was mortally wounded and with this he got a pass to take me out of the lines.

Elisas Casper Provost Marshall General came and issued me a parole and gave me a good cursing saying that a great many of my kind had been found behind rock fences and cedar bushes bushwhacking with paroles in their pockets. Mr [sic] Freas came for me about 10 (my memory is not clear as to dates during this time) with spring wagon and feather bed, the young Surgeon before mentioned, gave me a pair of blankets - a bottle of whiskey - some tea -coffee and sugar but as soon as the wagon was out of his sight the Yankee guards and camp loafers stole [crossed out] took from under my head the whiskey and the blankets from over me, the other things they did not find as they were under the feather bed. Mr [sic] Freas took me to his home about 10 miles from Murfreesboro in Wilson County, his family consisted of a wife and six children and his house had only one large room. I could not understand until afterwards why he would burden himself with a wounded man. he [sic] was a union man and feared the Confederates would take his horses, but knew that if he had a wounded man in his house they would not disturb him, he took especially good care of me and no doubt saved my life with his good nursing. when [sic] he got his affairs in shape so that he could leave the country he sent to Murfreesboro for a squad of men to be sent out to guard him to town. Capt [sic] Faver Carson came with his Co of Cavalry and saw him safe to Murfreesboro from where he went to Indiana. I have never heard from him since but have repeatedly tried to do so. the [sic] night he left me proved to be the most horrible of all my trials, he sold all of his effects that he could not move to the Negroes in

the neighborhood who had been notified of his intention to leave. the [sic] bed that I was on had been sold to a big negro fellow who lived near and he promised Mr [sic] Freas that he would stay with me until morning (the family left about midnight) the wagons were not out of hearing before the Negro begin bringing in fence rails to make a fire by putting one end on the fire and the other on the floor as he did not take time to cut or break them. I begged him to desist but he would not obey me. said [sic] he would make me a good fire and then go home, he filled the fire place with the rails and left me. I had a fine fire for a time but did not enjoy it as I expected the house to burn and me with it as I was perfectly helpless, but fortunately the rails were cedar and the fire died out before reaching the floor.

the next morning Mr [sic] Jno [sic] M Cason hearing from the Negroes that Mr [sic] Freas had gone came over early to see what had become of me. he [sic] found me very cold and despondent. he [sic] hurried back home and got some breakfast and bed clothing for me, he then notified Mr [sic] M W (Gunn) Huddleston of my condition and he at once came with wagon feather bed and took me to his house and nursed me until I was able to walk on crutches, sometime during the early summer of /63.

I here add from Lieut [sic] Geo H Dillons [sic] diary the following

Feby 9th 1863

Camp 18 Tenn [sic] Vol

Corporal W L McKay was unanimously chosen by Co I 18th Tenn [sic] to be presented to the President for promotion for his superior gallantry on the battle field at Murfreesboro on the 2d day of Jany [sic] 1863

signed S H Freas Commanding Co

I am inclined to think that the above compliment was paid me simply because I was the most wounded man in the company that did not die, it seemed almost a miracle that I ever got up at all.

during [sic] the year /63 I remained in the neighborhood Cainsville on crutches a good part of the time.

My friend Jim Rhodes gave a me a little roan pony (very fast) to keep out of the way of the yankees [sic]. I joined Capt [sic] Jim Phillips Co of Cavalry and tried to go with them but broke down on account of my wounds and was forced to go back to Mrs [sic] Martha Freas where I was suffering and was confined to bed again several weeks and became satisfied that I could not either ride or walk and abandoned all idea of trying to serve in the army again, had I been inside the Confederate lines I could have served in the commissary or Quartermasters [sic] department or in a clerical capacity at some post

but had no opportunity to go south and not a dollar to pay my way. I remained in the neighborhood of Cainsville until about 1st of 1864. I felt that I had lived on the good people long enough. I asked Rev. Wm Grumimit a truly loyal citizen and relative of Capt [sic] Waters of Stokes [sic] Cavalry to go to Murfreesboro (with me or rather let me go with him) to have my parole renewed so that I could come home safely. he [sic] went my security that I would fight no more until exchanged. I then traded my fast pony back to my Friend Jim Rhodes for a big black condemned artillery horse about 17 hands high (that he had found wandering in the Cedars) and started home when I got to Lavergne my old horse was about played out. I stopped all night with Mr [sic] Pate Watson who next morning proposed to trade horses with me, my old black looked good to him standing in the stable and he gave me a little bay mare and 10\$ and my nights [sic] lodging for my horse and told me afterward that it was the worst horse trade he ever made.

I reached my Grand fathers [sic] house on Sunday morning the date forgotten.

[illegible sentence crossed out]

A Poem by a Prisoner of War

By a prisoner of war

1

A prisoner grew weary of camp noise and fires,

Withdrew to his bunk and soliloquized thus,

My coat all in tatters, my shirt without collar

A thousand miles from home and have not a dollar

2

Scanty the fare on which we are fed.

This butter bean coffee and gun wadding bread

The bacon is as old as I, if not older,

The hogs of the Yankees are surely all shoulder

3

The butter we buy is old enough to walk
The milk we buy is whitewashed with chalk
The yanks take the beef to feed their own ranks
And give us poor Reb's the heads necks and shanks

4

But this is not half the trouble we brook
Our rations of wood are so short we can't cook
The tough shank bones of Old Brick and Ball
Neither can we make our bean coffee boil

5

Sometimes we get water from the hydrants outside
Sometimes when thirsty we're coldly denied
By armed yankee [sic] soldiers who say with a sneer
You damned rebel cecesh [sic] cant [sic] get water here

6

We smuggle in papers if we get them to read
The last news from Richmond is sinful indeed
They are surely pressed on every hand
The blessings of heaven are all contraband

7

Then all of our letters are opened and gleaned
By the meddlesome hand of some yankee [sic] fiend
Sometimes they take letter money and all
Without giving us any reason at all

8

But of late they agree to pay us one half of
The money sent to us minus the tariff
The money when paid my advice is
Must be taken in goods at sutlers [sic] high price

9

And thus they continue committing such crimes
Unequaled perhaps in all modern times
There is nothing so bare theyd [sic] scruple to do
For the pitiful sum of a dollar or two

10

But not satisfied with their postal purloin
And thinking perhaps we've secreted some coin
They marched us out of our quarters line upon line
And searched our barracks committing great crime

11

Tobacco – Jack Knives – money and watches
All fell a prey to their pilfering clutches
They took books from some and clothing from others
And from some the pictures of their dead mothers

12

Thus we are treated by a nation that boast
Of all other nations of liberty the most
They are all villains and such I eschew
The devil is being greatly robbed of his due.