

Will D Ward Letter

37th Regiment Indiana Volunteers

Murfreesboro, Tenn [sic]

Jan. 8, 1863

Dear Wife-

In the notes I sent you since the recent battle I promised that I would the first opportunity send you a description of that eventful period. Now for the task. On the 26th day of December 1862 we left Nashville and arrived at Nolensville at which place the advance of our army had a considerable skirmish. From this on thru the 30th of Dec. we kept advancing slowly fighting more or less everyday [sic] when we reached Stones River 2½ miles from the place where the enemy had erected Rifle Pits and had prepared for a desperate encounter. During the 30th skirmishing sometimes very severe was going on but it was reserved for the 31st. This day we had one killed and four wounded. The last day of the old year I witness one of the most desperate conflicts of the war. At sunrise on the 31st the Right division of the right wing commanded by Gen'l [sic] Johnson (the same one who surrendered his forces at Gallatin without fighting) was surprised and driven in and our right completely turned. The action then became general along the whole right. The fighting was terrible- the roar of musketry was so continuous that no distinction could be made between the different volleys. Added to this was the continuous roar of about 100 cannon for hours at a time. The enemy gradually drove our right back until the right of our regiment- on the right of center was turned. the troops on our left also fell back and exposed our left flank. In this situation we were attacked by a Brigade of Rebels in front-a Brigade on our left – and a force on our right. But the boys stood it nobly – After a few volleys the command was given to charge which was promptly done and the Rebels driven back. They rallied and in turn drove us – we rallied and after a sharp encounter drove them again and held our position until our ammunition was exhausted and we were nearly surrounded when we retreated in order from the field, or rather fell back about one mile supplied ourselves with ammunition and took up a new position preparatory to a renewal of the conflict. They were checked and driven back however before they reached that position and the battle so far as we were concerned ended for that day. In this conflict we had 30 killed and 98 wounded which of itself shows the severity of the conflict which lasted but about an hour. My brown mare was killed and my saddle, bridle and rubber blanket and pistol lost. The rebels also cut the shoes off my mares [sic] feet. On Thursday we were not under fire. On Friday, Jan. [sic] 2nd the Rebels charged VanCleves [sic] division on our left and drove it back and attempted to cross the river. At this juncture our division was ordered to charge the Rebels and at them we went driving them before us until night

closed the conflict. In this conflict we lost 11 men wounded mostly by shell as we charged through a perfect storm of shot and shell. I have been over a part of the battle field since the action and oh! the horrors of the battlefield. Men shot in every conceivable manner. torn by shot and shell until they could not be possibly be recognized – hundreds of corpses scattered over the ground for miles and horses innumerable [sic] scattered about. But I shall not attempt to describe it – language would fail me if I did. That charge spoken of above was the last we had to do with the battle. On Saturday however the enemy charged several times but were easily driven back. And Saturday night immediately after dark a part of our forces charged a force of the Rebels [sic] encamped in an open woods about 3/4 of an mile in front and in plain view of our position. This was a splendid sight. The sheets of flame from our volleys of musketry as they steadily advanced fairly lit up the woods. which was answered rapidly but not effectively by the Rebs – The roar of musketry [sic] for about an hour was incessant when it gradually died away as the enemy were driven from their strong position in the woods. This ended the battle – the enemy immediately commenced evacuating the place and carried [sic] it on as secretly and rapidly as possible and succeeded in saving most of their stores. p.s. Col. [sic] Hull was wounded first day since which I have had command. The loss is variously estimated at from 7,000 to 10,000. I think near the last number and the enemy's at from 15,000 to 20,000 men. The loss of our regt. is 30 killed 111 wounded and 9 missing. Tip was in the ranks through the whole affair and stood up to the work manfully. He is a Brother of whom I have good reason to be proud – his manly bearing on the battle field has endeared him to me. Cap. Hyatt and Shook fought nobly. Lt. Stockwell ran. Tip and I are both unhurt. I have a bullet hole in my overcoat. Amid the shock of battle I felt calm and composed and prepared to meet my fate be it what it might. I am truly thankful that I have been preserved and can say that I felt as if I was shielded by the All seeing eye from harm during the terrible conflict. I hope never again to witness such another scene. May the time come when the accursed strife shall cease. Peace and prosperity reign triumphant – our Union be restored, and have not heard from you for some time am very anxious. hope to receive a letter soon. Tip and I are unwell – but are about and expect to be all right in a few days. I have rec'd [sic] nothing from Kate. Weather warm and pleasant. My trunk has been robbed of my uniform, my pecuniary loss in the recent battle is over 200\$ - pretty dear but cheaper than blood. Tip sends his love. My love to all. Write Sallie and give me Eastern news as I can get none here. Hoping that health and happiness maybe [sic] yours

I close

From your husband, Will D. Ward