

Contant Rev Augustus Letters

In a Hospital on the Battlefield near

Murfreesboro, Tenn. Jan. 2, 1863

Dear Wife,

We have been fighting three days nearly on the same ground and the battle is not yet decided. I suppose you will hear of it and feel anxious about our safety, and I write to say that I am yet unharmed and that I saw Naroy after the severest of the fight in which his regt. was engaged day before yesterday about noon, and he was unhurt though he had been in a hot battle, and as Col. March said, "fought like a tiger." According to his own account of it, I should think he behaved with great coolness and used his gun effectively. I took a cup of tea with him hastily prepared and drank while the storm of battle was roaring like seven thunders from $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile to 3 miles distant. His Regt. had been so badly broken up and scattered that I do not think they were again brought into the hardest of the fighting which has since occurred and therefore I hope he is till safe.

The hardest fighting as yet, was on the 31st Dec., though there was constant skirmishing through the day yesterday, and our hospital being in a rather central position on the battlefield was a good deal of the time between the two fires. Some of the time the yard was full of confederate troops and the skirmishers were firing from behind the house and the trees in the yard at our men. Since I began writing our skirmishers have been here firing this morning at the Rebels and now about 15 minutes later they have fallen back and the Rebels are about the house firing at them.

We have over 100 wounded men in the house – Confederates and Federals together, and both sides try to avoid hitting the house. I worked all night till 4 o'clock in the morning night before last bringing in the wounded from the battlefield. During the night while the ambulance was taking in a load, I generally remained out in the woods or fields building fires for the comfort of the poor fellows who were waiting to be taken in and hunting them up. While so employed I was taken prisoner by a Confederate Col. and my ambulance and assistants were also captured. But upon representation of what we were doing, after considerable parley, they concluded to let us all go and keep about our work.

Just now (as I wrote) the Rebels were in the yard. Now again our men are here and the house jars and the windows rattle from the artillery discharges near by. We are surrounded as with a wall of fire and I can hear the balls sing and shells burst as I write. But our work of mercy is our protection. We shall be hit only by accident. But I need not dwell on this.

I have often been impatient that I have had so little to do, but the opportunity to help those in need of help on this battlefield pays for all delays. You cannot imagine how

much I have enjoyed for the last 48 hours in helping friend and foe. When captured I made some of the Confederate soldiers help me bring a wounded Ohioan to a fire and as we clasped hands beneath him I told them "we would take one brotherly grip if we never did again." It was the best right hand of fellowship I ever gave and received. But I must to my duties, and write more in full when more at leisure –

The Good Lord willing –

Your affectionate Husband

A.H. Conant

written on side margin of page: My paper and envelope were picked up on the battlefield.

Brigade Hospital, Battle-Field near

Murfreesboro, Tenn. Jan. 5, 1863

Dear Wife,

The storm of battle is at last over, and I have the happiness to inform you that Naroy and myself are still unharmed. I wrote you the day before yesterday, while the fight was going on, and we knew not which way the tide of battle would turn. Yesterday afternoon it was found that the Confederate army had returned from Murphreesborough, [sic] and at sunset we heard the distant roar of our artillery hurrying up their flying footsteps. I went tonight toward that part of the field where the 19th regiment were camped to learn their condition, then returned to the hospital by way of the camp of the 74th Illinois, and saw Naroy safe and well.

Since I wrote you, I have been acting assistant surgeon, nurse, and messenger, and have felt that my opportunities of helping those in need have richly paid for all the delay and discontent of the past. I think I must set down the last night of the old year and the morning of the new, passed in the woods on the battlefield gathering up and bringing in the wounded men, as the grandest and happiest night of my life. I wanted to stay in Nashville and work in the hospital when our army left there, and tried to get a situation and could not, made up my mind that something else was in store for me, and so it is turned out. I have been permitted to do more and better than I could hope.

Your loving husband –

A.H. Conant

Head Quarters 3rd Brigade 3rd Division

14th Army Corps

Camp on Stone River Jan 8th 1863

My Darling Hettie,

Now that affairs have again resumed the "even tenor of their way" and we are once more comfortably situated I seat myself to write you a short account of what we have passed through during the past two weeks.

To write you a full account is impossible for a full history of all the horror of the events attending the "Battle of Stone [sic] River" would occupy more time than I can possibly spare. Very true it is that we have passed through one of the bloodiest ordeals of this bloody war.

The day before Christmas (Dec – 24th) orders were issued from Rosecrans [sic] Head Quarters to march. We struck our camp and advanced a short distance when orders were received countermanding the order to march so we returned to our old camp. In that camp we spent Christmas and had a happy time. Col Roberts, invited Col Harrington to eat a Christmas dinner with him I invited a very dear friend of mine and at 12 o'clock we eat our Christmas feast the last we shall eat again together for Roberts, Harrington and Wood are now sleeping in death.

Dec 26th we again received orders to march and this time no order came countermanding.

We marched 5 miles and at Mill Creek found the bridge torn up the streams much swollen by the recent rains and the opposite bank occupied by the enemy they were however soon dislodged by our skirmishers who plunged into the stream crossed over and in less than fifteen minutes put the rebels to flight. We continued the march driving the enemy before us passed through Nolensville where we had quite a skirmish routing the enemy and capturing 1 gun. That night our brigade was placed on guard and we occupied the hills lay all night in the rain without a spark of fire and nothing shield us from the storm but our blankets.

Next morning we resumed the march met with no enemy. It rained all day and in the afternoon it poured down in torrents of course we had an awful time. We camped that night near Triune. Next day was Sunday, clear bright and beautiful and we rested. Monday morning we marched met with no opposition whatever that night we camped within 5 miles of Murphreesborough. [sic] The enemy were reported in strong force in our front and with no difficulty we could see the lights of their camp fires reflected against the eastern horizon. It rained very hard during the night and as no fires were allowed time passed by rather uncomfortably. Tuesday morning orders were given to Col Roberts to take the advance with his Brigade and without delay the order was obeyed. We advanced 3 miles when our skirmishers were suddenly fired upon as rapidly as it possibly could be done our skirmishers were deployed and after a sharp

fight the enemy was driven back. During all that day a constant skirmishing was kept up which only closed when night thrust its somber pall over the combatants.

Tuesday night was passed very comfortably we all slept soundly little dreaming of the bloody drama we would [illegible] on the coming morrow.

At daylight next morning our Brigade was formed for battle ready for any emergency that might occur. Would that other divisions had but took the same precaution. Just as the sun was rising we heard heavy firing to our right and in a few moments saw the advancing lines of the enemy.

Sills Brigade of our division was soon engaged and compelled in a short time to fall back and the enemy occupied his position at this moment. Col Roberts went to Genl. Sheridan and asked for permission to drive the enemy from the position he had just gained. It was granted and in a short time three regiments were moving to the attack. The enemy occupied a neck of the woods and to reach them we had to pass over an open field exposed to a flanking fire of grape and canister from a battery on our left. Halfway across the field was a fence to this we advanced at a quick step. There the order was given to charge. With a yell that sounded the death knell to many a Rebel the order was obeyed. Oh it was a glorious charge Roberts rode at the head of his column with hat off cheered the noble fellows on. The enemy did not wait for us but fled in great confusion. All this time a destructive fire was being poured in our flank from the battery to the left. As I was galloping over the field a ball struck my horse in the head. I thought he was killed but he soon recovered from the shock and I have him yet. The ball struck a large metal plate that was on the bridle, passed through it into his head and down his neck. The plate saved him though he received a severe wound. I used him during the day had the ball taken out after the fight and keep it as a trophy.

All this time a terrific fight was going on to our right (which was composed of Davis and Johnson's divisions) and at 8 o'clock A.M., the right had been driven back 1 ½ miles. Our Division still held its ground. It was at this time that the enemy advanced to attack us the right being turned they advanced in front and on our flank. Houghtalings [sic] Battery immediately opened fire upon them with murderous effect and with equal [sic] effect their Battery replied. For one hour we lay under a terrific artillery fire and then the Rebels advanced on three sides of us to make an attack. Our lines were quickly formed and we went to work. Thinking again of all that happened my heart sickens at thought of the many noble hearts that ceased to beat in that unequal struggle for the missiles of death seemed to come from every direction. Roberts was in the thickest of the fight every where. He was seen cheering the braves who fought under. At ten and a half o'clock as he was giving an order to Capt. Rose he fell pierced by a ball through the heart at the same time another ball struck Col Harrington of the 27th Ills. I saw him wounded and immediately placed him on my horse and took him to a surgeon. Since that – he died. Orders were finally given for us to fall back which was done in good order. Things looked dark at that time defeat stared us in the face. We retreated through a dense growth of cedars to the Nashville and Murphreesborough [sic]. There I saw

Rosecrans for the first time that day. The sight of him gave me fresh courage. I felt then that all was not yet lost. Marching down the Pike a short distance we, we were halted and soon had enough to do. Right in our front a brigade was advancing flushed with victory and intent on getting possession of the Pike on which were all our [illegible] of ammunition, provisions and [illegible]. Genl. McCook who commanded our forces at Perryville came to us and told us we must hold that front to the very last and we did. With only three rounds of cartridges in the cartridge boxes the men rushed forward to engage three times their number. The order to charge was given with a yell. The boys went at them and less than five minutes the rebels were running as fast as their legs could carry them. We captured 200 of them and killed lots of them. McCook says this repulse saved the day and Rosecrans gives our division the honor of having saved the day. We had no more fighting in our front though heavy cannonading [illegible] kept up on our left until night fall. Next day Jan 1st 1863 we spent quietly. I had charge of a skirmishing party and had the good fortune to capture 117 Rebels which was the only feature of the day. Friday passed away until 4:00 CK in M when the enemy made an attack upon our center and then commenced a most terrific fight in which the enemy was repulsed with awful loss. One regiment, the 26th Tenn. was captured also 3 flags and 3 guns belonging to the famous Washington Light artillery from New Orleans. Our loss was heavy, among the killed was my friend Lieut. Wood of the 19th Illinois a brave and noble fellow. Saturday night in a violent storm they made their last attack and were again repulsed and great loss.

That same night they retreated Murphreesborough. [sic] Saturday we marched in and occupied the town. During Sunday I assisted in the solemn duty of bringing the dead. It was a sorrowful task. We found the grave of Col Roberts (the Rebels had buried him) took up his body and sent it to Nashville. He had been buried 4 days and yet looked as though he was sleeping. Oh he was a noble man. I miss him so much. This Brigade misses him and deeply laments his loss. The Rebels had stripped most all our dead of their clothing. Not a shoe was left. They are very destitute so far as regards clothing but they are armed as well as we are. Our victory is completed, the enemy left with great precipitation [sic] their wounded lie in Murphreesboro. [sic] Their loss is much heavier than ours and ours will be between eight and ten thousand killed and missing. We have heard but from [illegible] Batty is a prisoner, not wounded and Fred Neuman is a prisoner, wounded. The others are Thompson, Philp Holmes [sentence illegible]. Sergt. Dickner commanded the Co. and did nobly so the boys of the Co. say. We are now three miles the other side of the town on the Shelbyville Pike and are comfortable camped. I have written you a very meagre account of the fight but have not time to write a fuller account. And now my dear Hettie as I close I want to say to you alone how thankful I feel that I have passed through that harvest of death unharmed. I tried to do my duty regardless of danger and I did. I was in the hottest of the fight, but an invisible power shielded me from harm and brought me safely through the deadly tempest. I must close for it's very late and I am weary, very weary. Good night my dearest. God bless and protect you do the [illegible] wish of

Your own Lewis

written on top margin: I wrote a short letter to you 2 days after the fight. Hope you have recd. It. Write immediately. I want to hear from you so bad. Best wishes to all my friends. Tell Mrs. Lehaprin of capt. [sic]

Direct your letters to 3rd Brigade 3rd Division Right Wing 14th Army Corp. and they will come through well. Oafely [sic]

I forgot to say in my account of the fight that the repulse of our right was owing to the fact that Johnsons [sic] Division was surprised by the Rebels. Some of the Regiments did not have time to get their arms before the enemy was upon them. To Johnson may be attributed the results of that day which almost came to a defeat.