

Thomas Turner Letters

Murfreesboro, Tenn.

June 20th 1863

Dear Father.

I received your letter day before yesterday and have just been answering a letter from Henry. They have been to Memphis and are now at Moscow (Tenn.). Colonel Miller of the 29th Inf. has arrived and taken command of the Brigade. When General Kirk returns he will probably take command at some post or garrison – he will never be able to take the field again.

I was out in the country again the other day five or six miles to get clover for the mules. I had a good dinner at a citizen's house and all the mulberries and blackberries I could eat. I mowed one load of clover – before I had hold of the scythe twenty minutes my hands were blistered. We will have blackberries now for two months. I had forgotten Zoekey [sic] and could not call him to recollection when all at once I thought of the man that had such funny eyes.

Everything is in profound silence now – the regiment is out on picket but luckily they did not call for only four noncommissioned officers and I was the last on duty so I don't go out. The tumult of trumpets and the echoing sound of drums are changed into religious songs and divine services. The Rebels have withdrawn their lines—they have found out it don't pay to be prowling about our lines. Captain Tutrich [sic] is not very well. I have a book concerning Rosecrans Campaign of the 14th Army Corps from the time he assumed command til [sic] after the fight. It is a true description. I have read it through and have not seen one misrepresentation. I am going to send it to you when I get a chance to get it carried to Louisville. I can't mail it from here. The stamps are gone this is the last. Say did you get the ten dollars I sent you. Murfreesboro is recovering considerably. Stores and shops are opening once more. Citizens are seen traversing the sidewalks. Little children are heard squeeling [sic] in the gardens and a form of the tender sex are seen. Byron dispatches states that there are lots of Copperheads there. They hold their meetings in Lord Gemmells [sic] old tabernacle up north. I sometimes wish that the rebels would drive us up north in Illinois, Ohio, and New York just to let the people know what war is. You fellows don't know everything about war. I just received a letter from Geo. Walters and one from Henry. George says Mrs. Moulton is dead – she died with the measles. George's wife is in Michigan.

Your Son
Thomas Turner

Camp near Stevenson (Alabama)

July 14th

15th 1863

Dear Father.

We have not moved since I wrote before. Gen Critendon's [sic] Division passed through here last night in middle of the night. I suppose they go on the cars. The Captain came to me this morning and asked if I wanted to go out in the country to get blackberrys [sic] and he would have them made up in pies – so I got a boy to go with me and the Capt. gave me a pass and his revolver and we went out and got our berrys [sic] and our haversacks full of ripe apples and peaches and a mess of green beans. We had a good time. The drum is beating for roll call and after roll call supper, and after supper, dress-parade and so it goes. It is Tuesday and I will attempt to finish my letter. We are put on half rations. I suppose it is because they can't ship provisions here fast enough. The rebels must have burnt some railroad bridge that prevents them.

We get a little mail nearly everyday but it is a little. I believe it is because they are directed right. The right way to direct is Camp near Stevenson, McCook's Division, Alabama via Louisville, the 20th. We moved again the 16th about 16 miles near the mouth of battle creek. We were on picket the day before we moved on the banks of the Tennessee and the rebels on the other side. We went in swimming together and chatted together like old friends. Their pickets are within 1 ½ miles of us now. We went in swimming at the mouth of Indian Creek last night within 100 yds. of the rebel pickets – there is a mountain a little ways from the camp – I was up on top of it yesterday and I could see the rebel camps on the other side of the river and the bridge that they burned down across the river. I could see the peers [sic] across it and could see the wagon trains. It is Sunday. We had inspection this morning. After we were laid down to bed last night the orderly brought in a large mail and I got two letters, one from Henry and the others from Henry and Jane. The 8th and 17th of June I had letters a week ago that left home later it rained last night corn is getting along fine since it has commenced raining. We wear the same clothes we did last winter – they are all woolen and they are as good to keep the heat out as they are to keep the cold out. Henry says Bill Brown is drumming for the Gen. Tell Henry he need not preach up no such stuff as it happens generals don't have drummer boys following them around. The only place they have drummers is in the regiments and they only get \$12 a month. Henry asked if I undressed nights. Yes, only when we are marching and the tents aren't up. Each man has got a good blanket. There is a number of the boys that have pistols but none swords besides the officers.

(Unsigned – but drew a "Horn of Plenty")

Bellefonte, Ala.

Aug. 23rd, 1863

T. E. TURNER

Dear Father.

Here we are down in old Alabama once more. After one year, one month and fourteen days hard marches, toil and endurance has brought us back to the same old place. Bellefonte is a town about as large as Oregon (Ill.) but the inhabitants have all deserted except a few families. We arrived in this city day before yesterday after a five days march.

We left Tullahoma (Tenn.) at four in the evening went seven miles to Elk Creek. The next day we went through Winchester. The third day we marched to the foot of the mountain, passed Colonel David Crockets residence – or the ruins rather. The fourth day we marched through ravine and thus avoided the first chain, but the fifth day we had it foul – each reg. was divided amongst the teams to bust them up. We gained the top about four in the evening and then marched eight miles without ever stopping to look back. I told a story on the other fold, we was six days on the road. The sixth day we came down the mountain and arrived here. Yesterday we moved up in town for Provost Guards our regiment. I wrote last evening but the paper was put in Old Jinny's cooking things and got greasy and I forgot to send if of [sic] this morning so I thought I would copy it. You must not expect very fancy writing as I am sitting on the ground to do it. I have not had a letter from anybody since the third day I came to the regiment. Now that is a shame for somebody – Jane says they write often. The next news you hear from me will be when the war is over or my 3 years is up. I was a fool for not knowing it before that it was only throwing away time and money writing to folks that did not care a snap how I was or whether I was alive or not, but it is all right.

I have not been very well for some time. The Dr. said it was Ague but if it is it is dumb for I have not had a chill yet. I got along tolerably well on the march, I had no cartridge box to carry. I have not drank any since I came back. It is getting dark and I have been out fooling til [sic] I am warm and nervous and I see I am not making very good work writing this page so I will have to make two letters with what I have to say so I will end by saying I sent for a fine comb but I can't see it yet. Now I will see if you will be so kind, so condescending and so obliging as to send me a pair of shoulder braces. I am getting quite round shouldered when here is just the place to learn to be straight. I don't know if you can get them in Quasqueton [sic] (Iowa)? If not you can send to Independence (Iowa). Don't get too large ones for I am a small man yet. There was a man in the 79th was bushwhacked the day we came in here. He was shot through the head.

I am as ever true to my Country.
Ezra Turner

Approved Aug. 24th 1863

Camp on Tennessee River – Sept 8th

Dear Father.

Your brief letter came to hand this morning just as I was mounting. Several, also one from Henry. I was sorry to hear that Mary was unwell and also that you was sick. I am afraid that you work too hard. I received a letter from you on the 27th of Aug. and one from Mary on the 28th and we marched on the 29th, so I did not get to answer yours til [sic] now. I will attempt it. My relief is posted 2 men on this side of the pontoon bridge and 2 on the other and at the guns. The army is all passed on and our reg. is elected to guard the pontoon. We are working everyday erecting a fortification in the form of a semicircle around the south side of the south end of the bridge and we have to furnish our own pickets and camp guards and bridge guards so it falls pretty heavy on me besides working 7 hours a day. The boys formed last evening after tadoo [sic] and tore down the Sutler's tent and cleaned out the Sutler and a dozen clerks he has, and took about \$300 worth of goods. It is a fair hint that we don't want him any longer and if he sets up again we won't leave a gut in him an inch long. The officers are most all well mad as fire about it because he keeps whisky for them except a few that reside with us. Two or three of the officers got knocked over in the operation running in and trying to show their authority. They ordered an extra roll call and they searched every tent but we are to[sic] old chickens to not know better than bring our plunder in our tents. I did not take a thing but I did help riddle the tent up in stripes. It is what he needed long ago. I am on extra duty for the first time in my life. It is getting the habit in this Co. if a man is not here to roll call just at the minute they put them on guard the next day. I did not get awake this morning at reveille and no one waked me. There were 2 more in our tent that overslept threw [sic] the same way and we are on duty for it. I am going to the Cap. when he comes around and demand satisfaction for all I had a great deal rather be on guard then work in the hot sun. He nor no other man can put me on extra duty if I have disobeyed orders or done anything out of the way. It is in his place to report it to the Reg. Commander and he is the only one can reduce me and then they can punish me. Now the Capt. has got to straighten this or I will report him and have charges entered against him. Lt. Williams acting adjutant [sic] curst [sic] the Capt. of Co. D last evening and the Capt. had him put under arrest and I expect he will be mustered out of the service. The whole regiment was drunk last night especially the officers. Henry's letters were written when he was going down on the boat. They are bound for Helena and from there to Natches [sic] I expect. He has sent for a watch for me by my request. I need one badly worth \$15. He has just received 4 months pay. I am thankful for those stamps as I had none. I have got a dozen letters to answer but don't know when I will get time to answer them. A drownded [sic] man came down the river the other day. I presume he was a rebel comming [sic] over to give himself up. He was naked so we could not tell. My hands are so tender that before I had hold of a shovel 15 minutes my hands were all blistered. There are lots of citizens coming in our camp everyday, male and female. Two real pretty girls came in yesterday and little children are running around. Upwards of 30 rebel deserters and Union citizens came in a few days ago. They would all enlist in our regiment but we had to take them over to Bridgeport to report them and they are going to put them in a Tennessee reg. I am

getting very fat. I am about 5 feet 8 inches high. Well I must go down to the bend of the river to the guard quarters. There has to be one relief on post and one has to stay to the quarters so it leaves us 2 hours in six to ourselves. So goes, Bye for this time, from your Son
Ezra

Chattanooga, Nov. 17, 1863

Dear Father.

This move brings us right under the range of the rebel dogs on old Lookout. We crossed the mountain and went up to Dallas, a place twenty miles above Chatt. [sic] and stayed there over night when the order came to report to Gen. Brady "or some such name" on the north side of the river. That was the 14th. We started immediately and arrived here the afternoon of the 15th and they have put us below Chatt. [sic] on the north side of the river right across from Lookout Mountain. I started to write you a letter yesterday but have nothing to write on and my fingers got cold so I quit.

Yesterday just as I was writing, as I came to the word Dallas, a shell came from Lookout and struck just above the majors tent a few rods – it did not burst. There is a Battery out in front of our camp over the peaks of Lookout. We often go up there and look over. We can see the whole rebel army camped this side of Missionary Ridge. We can see three armies all at once – the rebel army, Thomas's army, and Hooker's army. Hooker's army is camped below the mountain. We send out pickets in the night. They dare not go in daylight – they will shell them. They are firing all hours of the day. We have got a lot of Siege guns now and as soon as we get them in a good position and masked we will batter the mountain down to nothing.

My hands are getting cold and it is hard work handling the pen.

We signed the payrolls last evening and I suppose we will get our pay this afternoon. I send it home when I can get a chance. I don't know when that will be. I got two letters from Henry yesterday – they are fixing up for winter.

I had another spell of the infernal ague on this trip. I rode in the ambulance two days. Everytime [sic] we march and I lie on the ground and get chilled through I get the ague. Well it is most noon and we are going to have beef soup with some sorted vegetables in it.

I don't think we will stay here long – I think we will move as soon as we get orders. Did you get the letter that I inquired about Grandma and who lived in our old house. I will answer Jane's letter as soon as we get settled. You did not send them shoulder braces yet and I am in need of them. Henry wants a pair too.

Your Son, Ezra Turner

Camp near Roseville – March 22

(Ga.)

Dear Father

A vast change has made us hunt our holes since yesterday and made us shrivel and shrink like a burnt rat. Last evening was a little cloudy and growing cool and today there is a foot of snow on the ground and here it is 4 in the afternoon and it has only stopped snowing. If the snow had fallen dry it would have been a foot and a half deep. As it is there is more snow than was ever known in Georgia before. It has knocked the peaches and flowers conceive. The boys are all out and the commissioned and non-commissioned officers are chosen against the privates and are snowballing each other like fun. Oh, I wish I could go out and join them; but no, the mumps struck me last night and took effect right under the right jaw and I must be satisfied to stay in my tent with a swollen chop.

The Colonel is out and a dozen boys are after him and are pelting him right and left. Now they have run him behind a tent and a number of boys are going around for a flank movement. Now the boys are closing up and charging and cheering through the streets. Now they are getting drove back and as I am looking out of the door of my tent a spent ball comes in on the bed and scatters snow on my writing. They are calling every able bodied man out of the tents and driving them back again. It is the grandest sight I ever saw. Over 500 balls in the air at a time. Now they are all together getting each other and the wounded are coming back. How much I wish I could go out and join in the conflict. But if it was real, I might not be so eager although I hope I would not be counted behind unless under like circumstances.

Now the bugle sounds retreat or evening roll call and the command to cease fire is given and the entire regiment will be in line in their company streets before I will have time to pen it down and answer to their names as we have millions of times before. It is clearing up and growing cold but before tomorrow at this hour the snow will be all gone and the flowers will have to take a new start.

I can hear the other regiments cheer. They are enjoying it. The 113th Ohio opposed by the 78th Illinois and are driving the Buckeyes over in our camp and the Buckeyes are calling on us for support but our boys are pelting them back again in the midst of the 78th. Three regiments that will number 2,000 men – all engaged in snowballing. I have not received any letters since I have been in camp but I expect some soon. There were six old ones waiting my coming. The bill has passed Congress raising the soldiers pay to \$18.00 and the Corporals \$20.00. The boys that did not reenlist are coming back again and it will give us enough men to elect our captain and officers. There will be three sergeants return and that will delay me because they will take their old standing and I am glad they are coming back. We have been together so long it

would be wrong to separate us now. However, I would like to have filled up our regiment when at home.

I sent my order to draw the bond of my Country [space]? \$100 dollars to an honest deacon.

It is getting so dark I will have to defer finishing until morning.

It is evening and I have lit the glimmer and will proceed. The snowballing has ceased and the boys are all singing. Some are singing the Star Spangled Banner and some Gallant Ellsworth. That is a pretty sone. "Strike Free Men For The Union, Sheath your swords no more while remaining in arms a traitor on Columbia's Shore."

Did I tell you I saw Mrs. Haskell while at Byron. Martin T [space]? was trying to coax her out with him. Her husband has enlisted and is in the Knoxville army. She was down to Mr. S? while I was there. Elsie Knollton came down to see me. She is quite a lady. I had a good chat with Mr. K., also Mr. & Mrs. Hall. Mr. Hall is so old he can hardly speak or see. They live at Mr. Knolltons.

Please inform Mr. Gemmell, Jr. that Maj. Christopher is away to school. Miss Louise is a smart girl, good looking and modest.

Saw Mr. S. S. Spalding and wife. David is quite a boy. He has not grown since we moved away. David would coax me a half an hour every time he saw me to come down but I could not get around. I had invitiation [sic] enough which kept me a visiting a month while I was there. I stopped in Mr. Coobergs Sunday evening after prayer meeting and I spent a good portion of the night. C ? just returned from the Army sick. He was able to be around. I did not get to see J. P. Smith. He told Albert to bring me down the night after the party but I was told to start early and could not go.

March 28th – It is just 10 o'clock and we have just got up. We eat our breakfast in bed and then faught [sic] an hour to see which would get up first. It is awful cold. The thermometer is 7 degrees below. Clark St. and the quick silver is freezing up in the ink stand so I can hardly write. My mumps are about the same. I could do better writing than this if I would take pains. I have got a good pen I got it in Dixon. I will have to get me a watch and I can't get one here short of \$40.00 that I would risk. I am a veteran soldier and far from my home. If the rebels don't kill me I will live til [sic] I die.

Ezra