

THE SERGEANT JEROME PEIRCE COLLECTION

LETTER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	192
DATE OF LETTER	Jan. 24, 1864
WRITTEN BY	Jerome
WRITTEN TO	Allie
WRITTEN AT	Near Knoxville, Tenn.
NUMBER OF PAGES	4
TRANSCRIBER	Josef Rokus
TRANSCRIPTION DATE	July 26, 2018

ENVELOPE



LETTER TRANSCRIPTION

Near Knoxville, Tenn. Sunday Eve 24th Jan. 1864

My dearest wife,

'tho everything around seems to forbid the idea of writing, yet I cannot let the Sabbath pass without at least beginning a letter to you, so far away in miles yet nearest of all in heart.

We have just got nicely in camp, after four days of action and tedious marching with the usual amount of waiting to see that what was to come next. I wrote you last at "Strawberry Plains" overlooking the beautiful "Houlston [Now spelled "Holston"] River."

Sunday night or early Monday morn. came the order "to be ready to move". Up early and waiting, but finally remained in camp excepting a night trip to the Railroad to load artillery on cars, and everything looking like a grand retreat as we knew the enemy were approaching from the other side of the river. Went to work and built "chimney" [Possibly a chimney for his tent in camp]. Wedns. [Wednesday] another start or "stir" changed camp about half a mile further into the woods out of sight and scarcely got out tent pitched when bang! bang! of artillery from rebel guns over the river and the shells begun to whiz. We were soon on the move towards the river. Came to a halt under a hill between

us and the river and waited developments. After an afternoon of getting position and planting cannon etc. and bringing away from the river pork and other stores which the 23rd Corps. had abandoned, all the while the rebels firing upon the boys at every attempt to get anything and our batteries and skirmishers covering them. Our Co. got plenty of sugar and meat and some clothing.

After dark I went with a party to secure if possible some meal which was on a flat boat on or near the shore – my first night scout – found the rebs first and the boat was empty! Just got back to the Company when ‘Co. H’ “fall in” and away we went on picket, my first experience with the Co. and bitter cold it was on the bank of the river and within rifle shot of the enemy and they kept up a fire upon a party who were destroying artillery property at the depot, so they fired too high for me and but for the bitter cold, ‘twas rather exciting and interesting. The moon came out bright and higher and about 2 o’clock in the morning the firings ceased and a little camp fire showed our reb friends making themselves comfortable and we too for the first time during the night could creep near a fire which was burning near the R. Road track. (The bridge had been burned that day.)

I went to the river and filled my canteen and a little before 4 we were ordered in [Refers to pickets being ordered in from their lines in front of the main body of troops] and soon our suspicions were confirmed and we commenced our tedious rapid march and “Strawberry Plains” was evacuated! And we were pursued by a small party of cavalry which came up with us about 5 miles from Knoxville. Some of the 23rd Corps were on hand and skirmishing began and it looked like a fight for awhile. We rested and went into camp. The enemy in the meantime were driven back and this morning no trace of them could be seen and we came onto this place some 8 miles below R. [Town he refers to could not be identified on current maps.] So, I have seen Knoxville, Parson Brownlow’s House, Fort Sanders, the scene of the siege etc. etc., and we rest in a beautiful woods of hard wood timber about a hillside.

The band is playing and the boys are drawing stockings and chattering about the fires – a spring eve we should call it at the North and a most lovely day it has been with quite dry roads and comfortable marching but for my tender feet but have had a good wash and feel so much better! Another item - we [are] once more with better rations! Coffee, sugar and hard bread instead of parched corn and poor sick wheat. And the prospect is better indeed, especially if the rumors are true viz. that we are even now on our way North! And we even hear that we’ve [been] ordered to Staten Island New York Harbor to rest and recruit! This seems too good to be true, and we hope for it. I think there is no doubt but we are indeed going North via Nashville and we are making for a railroad conveyance somewhere hereabouts. Expect we shall remain here for a day or two to dispose of teams [Most likely, teams of horses] and stuff preparatory to our journey as we did in Miss. [Mississippi] when we left Vicksburg.

So much dear wife, for these last few days in Tenn. and a poor account I have made, but if you could see us, you would wonder how one could talk at all.

Need I tell you how much my thoughts have been with you and what was in each moment of the future? But again “all is well”, health good and no “bloody fray” in immediate prospect. Mails came but nothing but some back papers (very acceptable) ‘Register’ from Murray [???] and a bundle from ‘Will’ mailed Dec. 12 which I haven’t yet opened, received last eve. and we moved early this morning.

Must close for tonight as I am tired, but a kiss for yourself and Lulu. And how like a dream – you away in Mass. and I in old Tennessee, a lovely country of forest and field but sadly torn and strained by war’s bloody hand! Let us pray that the end may be soon and better times appear!

Monday morn. There is much I should like to talk about but we have just had the order to lay out camp, clean up clothing. Shall remain some ten days here and soon the final inspection and review, one or both, so we are soon to leave the State. Am very busy of course. I forgot to mention before that I have to keep clothing account and other writing for the Co. and am much interrupted. Have also to see to all arms and equipments received and going out, so you see I am not idle.

Have had a good walk this morning and feel much better. A beautiful morning and hope this will find you well and happy. Hope soon to hear from you by letter.

Love to everybody. And now once more adieu, till I can send you something better,
and believe me ever your own

Jerome

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES

NOTE 1: Strawberry Plains was and is now a small community that straddles Jefferson, Knox, and Sevier counties in Tennessee and is located on the bank of the Holston River. Early in the Civil War, in 1861, the railroad bridge at Strawberry Plains was a target of Union sympathizers who tried to burn several East Tennessee bridges to hinder Confederate military progress. The conspirators failed in their efforts to burn the Strawberry Plains bridge, but they succeeded in their attacks of some of their other targets.

NOTE 2: Per the Unit History: December 20, 1863 – April 6, 1864. The regiment moved numerous times in eastern Tennessee, including in the Knoxville area, before being ordered to move by train, by way of Baltimore, to Annapolis, Maryland, where it arrived on April 6, 1864.

NOTE 3: The Holston River is a 136-mile river that flows from Kingsport, Tennessee, to Knoxville, Tennessee. Along with its three branches, it comprises a major river system that drains much of northeastern Tennessee, southwestern Virginia, and northwestern North Carolina. The Holston's confluence with the French Broad River at Knoxville marks the beginning of the Tennessee River.

NOTE 4: William Gannaway "Parson" Brownlow (1805 – 1877) was an American newspaper publisher, Methodist minister, book author, prisoner of war, lecturer, and politician. He served as governor of Tennessee from 1865 to 1869 and as a United States senator from Tennessee from 1869 to 1875. Brownlow rose to prominence in the 1840s as editor of the *Whig*, a polemical newspaper in East Tennessee that promoted Whig Party ideals and opposed secession in the years leading up to the Civil War. Brownlow's uncompromising and radical viewpoints made him one of the most divisive figures in Tennessee political history and one of the most controversial Reconstruction Era politicians of the United States.

NOTE 5: On November 29, 1863, Confederate forces under Gen. Longstreet unsuccessfully tried to capture the Union-held Fort Sanders (also known as Fort Saunders), located northwest of Knoxville, Tenn., with a charge that ultimately failed, with only a few Confederates reaching the inside of the fort, where they were killed or captured. The 36th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment was present at the battle but was not directly involved in the main fighting. It suffered one loss, a private who died of his wounds when a shell exploded near him. Longstreet's failure to capture Fort Sanders essentially ended the Knoxville Campaign, with the city remaining in Federal hands for the remainder of the war. This Confederate defeat, plus the Confederate loss at the Battle of Chattanooga on November 25, 1863, put much of East Tennessee in the Union camp.

NOTE 6: The Union Army's 23rd Corps served in the Western Theater during the Civil War as part of the Army of the Ohio. The corps was organized in April 1863 and with Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's old 9th Corps, which had been sent west with him after Fredericksburg, it was to maintain a primarily defensive position in Eastern Tennessee and Kentucky. It originally consisted of two divisions under the overall

command of General George L. Hartsuff. The corps played a major role during the Knoxville Campaign, its first major action, distinguishing itself at the battles of Campbell's Station and Knoxville, and also took part in some minor actions in early 1864. During this time, it was commanded by Maj. Gen. Mahlon D. Manson.

NOTE 7: The 'Register' newspaper was *The Christian Register* (1821–1957). It was the leading American Unitarian weekly, published by the American Unitarian Association, Boston, until 1957 when the title was changed to *The Unitarian Register*. In 1961, the journal merged with *The Universalist Leader* and is still published today by the Unitarian Universalist Association as *UU World*. Jerome refers to it in other letters. It also published Allie's death notice in its March 18, 1920, edition.

NOTE 8: The "boys are drawing stockings" probably refers to the men drawing warmer footwear from Supply in anticipation of moving North in what would likely be the coldest part of the 1863/1864 winter.