

Letter from John M. Stone (Captain, Company K, 2nd Mississippi) to his mother, undated fragment, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Acc. No. Z265 (pages 1 and 2 are missing).

When we discovered troops on our left. I was next to the left company of our whole forces at this junction. I directed the attention of my men to those on the left and gave the command signal. My men signaled and they returned it and ceased firing. And we pressed forward toward the battery¹ of the enemy which we saw they had left and was retreating but still firing on us. When we commenced firing on our enemy in front, these treacherous Yankees on our left² commenced their fire again and they had passed our flank and our line being diagonal, it threw my company immediately between two fires, the line in front was about two hundred yards in our front, the flankers about 150 yards in our rear pouring their fire into us from both sides.

As soon as I was satisfied of the position of my men, I determined to order them back to the edge of the wood. At this instant a well spent ball or something also struck me in the stomach and brought me down. I had a Mississippi Rifle³ which I had taken from one of the Tishomingo⁴ boys who fell in the retreat and I fell being in front or past the battery, I caught the saddle of the Yankee's dead artillery horse and threw myself behind the horse.

I did not feel hurt only a sharp shock. As soon as I had sufficiently recovered I turned to the boys and commanded them to fall back. About this time young Williams⁵ fell dead on my left and Robert Weaver⁶ fell wounded on my left and near me as H.A.J. Inman⁷ started to obey my command a ball from the enemy in our rear passing through his left thigh brought him down by the side of Robert Weaver. I saw the rest of the boys fall back and I turned my attention to my rifle. The horse fell on the rider and the Yankee's knee was above the horse. I took sight on [the] Yankee's knee, took deliberate aim and fired into the hordes of Yankees just beyond a fence and about 200 yards off. I saw him fall. I think 'twas I that killed him.

I then got up and retreated in the direction of the woods were I had ordered my company. The woods was so that the regiment was split up and the companies could not keep in line and became confused. As I retreated I saw the Stars and Stripes on our left flank not more than one hundred yards off. As the boys fell back they continued to load and fire; here they became confused and separated. 'Twas at this point that Billy Foy⁸ fell. Billy is dead. The boy I loved so dearly the boy who was so universally beloved and who is so universally lamented. He was shot with a Minié ball by the skirmishers on our left. As he was firing at them the ball entered his lower right breast and passed through the body. I did not see him fall neither did any of our men. The wood was so thick a man could not see but a few feet from the right or left. Only one man saw him before he expired. I think he was a Tennessean. Billy gave him his port? [indecipherable]. And told him to take it to his captain and tell him Billy Foy is dead. Told him something about a ring in it but the man could not remember who it was he wanted me to send it to but thought it was a young lady. I think it is one of the girls in Iuka.

We buried Billy this evening. Intend to send his remains home as soon as we can get a coffin. The death of Billy Foy has cast a gloom over the company which it well never get over. It caused many a tear throughout the regiment. And nothing in the history of my life ever was so painful to me as the death of our beloved Billy. Williams⁹ we also buried this evening. He was a noble boy fought gallantly and fell in the front rank near my side and farther in advance than any one of our regiment. He was the first victim from my company. Billy fell after I ordered them back to the woods. These two are all we had killed. I had the point of my sword shot off. That is about three inches of the scabbard was carried away. And the sword was bent into an indescribable shape.

I was the last person to leave the battery¹⁰. I did not hear the Colonel's command to fall back with the boys on my right before we were in fifty yards of the battery. The right of my company with all of the officers fell back at the Colonel's command while the center and left of the company waited for me to say retreat. When I gave the command, the rest

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of the boys obeyed believing I was either dead or wounded. I did not receive the slightest injury after I recovered from the blow to the stomach which I suppose was a bouncing ball. I felt as well as ever. Another regiment came up on our right and engaged the enemy.

The firing was hot for a short time. Soon a charge was ordered by the cavalry¹¹ which finished the fight and drove the last one of them from the field. Jeff Davis came up about this time waved his hat and shouted for the Mississippi boys. The cavalry pursued the flying enemy for about seven miles to Centerville cutting them down at every step. Their guns, wagons, horses, and all manner property were scattered from the field to Centerville. They threw everything down would facilitate their flight. It is reported that Scott¹² was on the field. Some of the prisoners say he was their camp the evening before but they did not know whether he was on the field or not. They say Scott was very closely pursued by the cavalry and if they had gone one half mile further the old Black Chief¹³ would have been captured.

A great many prisoners were taken probably no less than 12,000 to 13,000 [actually, 1,216], it is impossible for me to say what the loss of the enemy is in killed and wounded but it is immense. It is the most complete, glorious victory ever achieved. And no matter what history may say the 2nd Mississippi Regiment gained glory by protecting the left flank which we did completely. I don't know the object of our two retreats were but it certainly worked greatly to our advantage and hastened the victory. All troops from the state fought most valiantly.

I can't tell what our loss is but it is considerable. Our Regiment loss 21 killed and about one hundred wounded¹⁴. Since two have died, one of which is Ben Boone¹⁵ of [the] Tishomingo Riflemen. The wounded of my company, John A. Blair¹⁶ in the foot with a ball. Have not seen him but think the wound is slight. Andrew B. Harvey¹⁷ flesh wound in the leg. He was doing well. H.A.J. Inman ball through the thigh doing well. J.H. Miller¹⁸ fought most bravely was shot through the lower part of the body, wound thought to be mortal but the surgeon says he is doing well and will probably recover. J.A. Keenan¹⁹ slightly in the foot. A.F. Tubb²⁰ slightly in the shoulder. Robert Weaver, severely in the leg and also in the back, don't know the extent of the wound in the back but he was doing well when he left for Culpepper Courthouse.

All of the wounded are being carried to that place. Bob [Robert Weaver] fell fighting most gallantly near my side the rest of the boys escaped without a scratch. Several of my company are still at Winchester, not able to march when we left. Among them is Frank Ussery²¹ and others.

The Pontotoc Minute Men [Company G, Pontotoc County] lost their best officer, Lt. Palmer²² was killed. They lost several men [3 killed, 1 mortally wounded, 13 wounded]. The Magnolia Rifles [Company F, Tippah County] had only two Lts²³, they both were killed. Tishomingo Rifles lost three killed Ben Boone and several wounded [3 killed, 2 mortally wounded, 4 wounded]. The rest I have not time to mention. The South Carolinians, North Carolinians and Alabamians suffered greatly. Several of the F [Company F – 7 killed, 5 wounded] boys fell. Our Brigadier General Bee²⁴ fell mortally wounded since died. Col Falkner²⁵ received a very slight wound in the cheek which brought him down. Lt. Col. Boone's²⁶ horse was killed, don't know whether he is wounded or not. He was missing until this evening I heard he as at a private house. I don't think any of my command will die unless Miller should, Neither do I think any of them will lose a limb.

The horse had pulled the cannon but his rider and the other horses hitched to the same gun were dead. I threw myself behind the horse and turned to tell my men what to do when I saw a portion of my company with the rest of the companies on the right had fell

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back in to the woods. I also saw the enemy behind us firing at our backs from the left so we were exposed to two fires and the farthest not more than 200 yards. So I commanded my men to fall back as I gave the command, I saw two more of my men fall within five or six feet of me. They were not dead but both were badly wounded. As I saw my men obey my command and fall back, I found I was recovering from my shock. I determined to avenge the death of one of my boys. I had a Mississippi Rifle in my hands. I turned took rest on the dead Yankees knee and took deliberate aim before I fired. When I was satisfied I would hit him I fired. I saw him fall. Today I went to the spot and he is still lying there where I saw him fall. He is shot through the right breast. After I fired I got up and walked slowly away and passed within one hundred yards of the enemy who had been shooting us in the back. I saw the Stars and Stripes not more than one hundred yards off. They fired occasionally but they did not hit us. I received no injury at all. As soon as my stars was over from the bouncing ball, I felt well as it did not break the skin. The only injury I sustained was my sword, about three inches off the end was shot off. I sent it to [indecipherable] to day. The sword was a present to me from R. W. Price²⁷.

The enemy now tried again to rally but were soon driven back in confusion. Our cavalry now made a charge which closed the scene. They all ran at full speed but the cavalry pursued them six or seven miles cutting them down by the hundreds. It is stated that they ran over everything in their way. The Yankee women who had come down into Virginia to rejoice at the downfall of the south were run over, knocked down by the flying Yankees. It is reported that they had to shoot the waggoners and horses to keep them from running over the carriages, women and all the Wash [rest indecipherable]. Most complete victory the most glorious victory ever achieved in any country. I have but little idea of what the enemies loss is but it must be from two to three thousand. The loss on side is from four to five hundred killed²⁸.

Only twenty one killed in our Regiment [actually 22 killed, and 9 mortally wounded and would die soon after the battle]. Two killed in my company and seven wounded²⁹. One of the boys killed was a great favorite in camp. I loved him like a dear brother and nothing in my life has ever been more painful to me than his death. His name is Billy Foy. I intend to send his remains to his parents if possible. Even if it be at my own expense. I walked over the field after the battle was over, it was an awful sight. But we don't mind it at all the dead Yankees lie thick over the field yet. Notwithstanding they have been burying them for two days. I expect we will go to Washington in a short time, at least I hope so. I think we ought to take Washington at once.

I don't know what effect this grand overthrow will have on the north, but if they are not satisfied we can soon convince them that they can't whip [indecipherable]. Engaged here was about 60,000 northern [actually McDowell's army numbered about 35,000] and 35,000 to 40,000 southerners [about 32,000]. We have received large reinforcements since and have a big army he now. Give my love to all [my] friends. The highest ambition of my life has been realized. I have been in one great battle for the rights of my country.

Your son

J. M. Stone

¹ Although Rickett's Battery was deployed west of the Henry House, since Stone is referring to the extreme left of the Confederate line, the battery referred to may be the two guns of Griffin's Battery that were moved to the Federal right flank and were overrun by the Confederates.

² Since no exact timeline can be established, it is difficult to be sure, but the Union troops on the left may have been the two companies of the 1st Minnesota Infantry that had become separated from the rest of their regiment. They were reportedly on the extreme right of the Union line and were able to flank the extreme left of the Confederate line, firing into their flank and rear. Also, making the situation more confused, the 1st Minnesota also wore red "battle shirts" as did some companies of both the 4th Alabama and the 2nd

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Mississippi. This confusion as to “friend or foe” is what led to the capture of Lieutenant Colonel Boone by the 1st Minnesota Infantry during the fighting.

³ Put into production at Harpers Ferry in 1846, the Model 1841 is also known as the Mississippi Rifle due to its success in the Mexican War with the Mississippi regiment under the command of Colonel Jefferson Davis. Approximately 70,000 Model 1841s were produced by Harpers Ferry and contractors between 1846 and 1855. In 1861, these .54 caliber rifles were put back into service on both sides. Weight = 9 lb. 4 oz., Length = 48.5 in., Barrel Length = 33 in. Effective Range approximately 1,100 yds. Maximum Range = 2,000 yds. (compare this with the effective range of a modified percussion smoothbore musket of about 140 yds).

⁴ Company A, the Tishomingo Rifles from Tishomingo County. At the start of the war, rifle muskets were hard to come by and most of the 2nd Mississippi were equipped with older smoothbore flintlock conversions (.69 caliber). However, apparently some Mississippi Rifles (.54 caliber) were available and given to the two “flank” or skirmishing companies, A and B (the O’Connor Rifles from Tippah County). Stone must have picked up a Mississippi Rifle lost or left behind by a casualty of Company A.

⁵ Private Jefferson Williams of Co. K, 18 years old. Killed in action.

⁶ Private Robert Weaver, Co. K, 20 years old. Mortally wounded and died on 8/10/1861.

⁷ Private Henry A. J. Inman, Co. K, 28 years of age. Recovered from wound and returned to duty.

⁸ Private William T. Foy, Co. K, 19 years old. Killed in action.

⁹ Private Jefferson Williams, Co. K, 18 years old. Killed in action.

¹⁰ Probably Griffin’s two guns on the extreme right of the Federal line.

¹¹ Presumably J. E. B. Stuart’s 1st Virginia Cavalry Regiment.

¹² General Winfield Scott, Commanding General of the U. S. Army.

¹³ Unsure where Stone got this nickname for General Scott.

¹⁴ Stone’s estimate was very close. The 2nd Mississippi reported official losses of 25 killed, 82 wounded and 1 missing, but a more detailed breakdown examination of the individual Compiled Military Service Records (CMSRs) shows a total of 22 killed, 9 mortally wounded, 77 wounded, 3 captured, 2 missing, and 1 deserted (not sure this should be included in the casualty list or not but included it here). The CMSRs did not include some of the men that were included in Colonel Falkner’s official report several days later, published in the Ripley “Advertiser” newspaper, so they were added to those found in the CMSRs. So, the total loss is 114. The strength of the regiment isn’t known with certainty but was probably about 500-600 men present for duty on July 21st.

¹⁵ 4th Sergeant Benjamin F. Boone of Co. A., 29 years old. Mortally wounded and died the following day.

¹⁶ Regimental Sergeant Major John A. Blair, 25 years old. Slightly wounded. Elected Major at the regimental reorganization on 4/22/1862.

¹⁷ Private Andrew B. Harvey of Co. K. 18 years old. Severely wounded and discharged for disability later that year.

¹⁸ Private Joel H. Miller of Co. K. 18 years old. Listed as drummer. Wounded and discharged in Jan. 1862 due to disability due to wound.

¹⁹ Private James A. Keenan of Co. K. Age not listed. Wounded.

²⁰ Private Abraham S. Tubb of Co. K, 28 years old. Wounded in shoulder. Discharged due to disability caused by wound on 9/13/1861.

²¹ Private Leander Frank Ussery, age 26, Co. K.

²² 1st Lt. Richard A. Palmer of Co. G. 29 years old. Killed in action.

²³ 2nd Lt. Nathan T. Braselman, 28 years old and 2nd Lt. John H. Smith, 30 years old. Both killed in action. Company F (Magnolia Rifles from Tippah County).

²⁴ Brigadier Barnard Elliott Bee, Jr., Commander Third Brigade, Army of the Shenandoah.

²⁵ Colonel William Clark Falkner, 35 years old. Slightly wounded.

²⁶ Lt. Col. Bartley B. Boone. 28 years old. Captured by the 1st Minnesota Infantry. Resigned commission on 1/31/1862.

²⁷ “Colonel” R. W. Price was John M. Stone’s employer at some time prior to the Civil War. Stone had been a clerk in the mercantile establishment of Colonel Price, the largest landowner and merchant in Eastport, Mississippi, on the Tennessee River. Eastport at that time was the home of wealth and culture, the head of all year navigation on the Tennessee River, and freight from all points for east Mississippi and west Alabama came to this port, where it was loaded on wagons and carried to its destination.

²⁸ Gen. McDowell’s Federal army lost 481 men killed, 1,011 wounded, and 1,216 missing (and presumably captured) for a total loss of 2,708. Gen. Heintzelman’s division sustained the greatest losses with 1,582

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from all causes, and Hunter's [Porter's] division the least with 809. On the Confederate side, Gen. Beauregard's and Gen. Johnston's armies lost a combined 378 killed, 1,489 wounded, and 30 missing for a total of 1,897. Of this total, Johnston's army—which did most of the fighting on July 21—lost 270 killed, 979 wounded, and 18 missing. Beauregard's army accounts for the remainder of these numbers with 108 killed, 510 wounded, and 12 missing.

²⁹ Stone may have still been considering Sergeant Major John A. Blair as belonging to Company K, although he is listed as the regimental Sergeant Major and thus would belong to the regimental staff, not Company K. At any rate, if we include Blair, Company K's total casualties were 2 killed, 1 mortally wounded, and 6 wounded.