

Private Abner O. South was a member of Company F, the Magnolia Rifles of Tippah County. He enrolled on Wednesday, May 1, 1861, as a volunteer for 1-year. He listed his occupation as "planter." His age at enlistment was 34. He was born in Alabama. Neither marital status nor residence were listed in his records. He obviously participated in the battle of First Manassas on July 21, 1861 and wrote the letter to "Dear Friend" dated August 7th, 1861, several days after the battle. It is not known to whom the letter was sent, nor his/her relation to South. It is also not known who the "James" that is referenced in the letter is. South was discharged due to disability on October 13, 1861, while at Camp Fisher, Virginia.

Camp Jones, near Manassas Junction, Va.

August 7th, 1861

Dear Friend,

James received your last letter yesterday and was sorry to hear of the death of his brother and of your being unwell. James is not very well at this time but is able to be about. I have been very sick myself but have got so that I am able to do about half duty. There is 400¹ on the sick list at this time in our regiment none that are dangerous though. We have a good deal of mumps.

Before we left Winchester² we thought we would have a fight every day but could not get the enemy under General Patterson³ to meet us. The day before we left Winchester, Patterson sent forward 2 regiments to make us believe that he was going to attack Winchester, our pickets brought in the word and we were ready and willing. We had thrown up breast works and planted large cannon on the side of the town that we expected him to come. We were ordered in front of our breast works and cannon and lay on our arms all the night waiting him, but the next word our picket guard brought in was that he had retreated and gone toward Harpers Ferry with the intention of crossing the Potomac and going by Washington then to Manassas to whip Beauregard⁴. McDowell⁵, the Genl in command of the Lincoln forces had had a fight⁶ on Thursday the 18th, 2 days before our fight when Beauregard whipped him. Then it was fixed that the enemy forces were to be all concentrated on Manassas, and they would give us a real thrashing and move on to Richmond. The whole army believed this, from McDowell down to the lowest private, but how uncertain such things are. The victory is not for the swift nor the battle to the strong. But to return to us at Winchester, as soon as it was discovered that Patterson had gone towards Manassas, General Johnston⁷ ordered all his forces⁸ to cook 2 days provisions and be ready to march in a few hours. We were ready, carrying nothing but our provisions, our blankets, and coffee pot & frying pans were put in wagons. The road was full of wagons for miles, we after them. You have no idea of the show we made. Over twenty thousand men [Johnston's army was closer in strength to 12,000] on the road at one time with wagons enough to carry our baggage. We marched all night until 2

o'clock in the morning, lying down on the side of the road without anything under us but rocks and nothing to cover with. We were on the march again at daybreak and stopped a little after sunup on the Shenandoah River to get breakfast. The wagons had to cross the river, it is about 250 or 300 yards wide and waist deep. After eating and all the wagons had crossed, we commenced and such a sight nobody that has ever seen, a large body of men move have no idea of it. There was one ferry boat below the ford, but it was nothing in getting us across, about as much as it would be for one wagon to carry everybody to the largest camp meeting you ever saw. We were marched down to the water's edge and took off our clothes some keeping on their shirts to keep the sun from burning them and bulged [plunged?] in by hundreds one after another the river was full of men hollering, screaming, cursing & yelling for hundreds of yards, carrying our gun, cartridge box, cap box, and other things on our shoulders. The bottom was rocky and them sharp. Some one of us would drop in a hole & fall, then for a loud laugh from all in sight. We were hours in crossing and formed in line on the other side and marched on again not stopping until we reached Piedmont⁹, a Depot on the Manassas and Strasburg Railroad¹⁰. it was in the night when we reached this place, and it commenced pouring down rain, we were ordered in a field where there was plenty of wheat in shocks we tore it down to lie on and spread our blankets over it, lying down in the rain without any supper, not being able to cook any, we were so tired.

The next morning, we were up by 2 o'clock to start on the cars but did not get off until day when we left. There was thousands of soldiers waiting to get to Manassas, but we got off first being the oldest regiment on the ground. We reached Manassas about 11 o'clock Saturday the day before the fight. We rested at the junction 1 or 2 hours then marched out some 3 miles to camp and rested there until morning, getting a loaf of light Bakers bread and a few crackers and a piece of shoulder meat for two rations.

While eating our breakfast we herd cannon booming to our right. All started up and commenced looking up their guns cartridge & cap boxes and were soon ordered in line and to march in a minute by our Genl Bee¹¹. He had charge of our brigade composed of the 2nd¹² & 11¹³ Mississippi the 4th Alabama¹⁴ the 1st Tennessee¹⁵ and one North Carolina regiment¹⁶ along with a battery¹⁷ composed of several cannon and a large force of cavalry under Col. Stewart¹⁸, the two last from Virginia. We bore to the left all the time close to a creek called Bull Run as we advanced, we herd the cannon and very often musketry in swift succession bearing to the left also. We kept on until we got some six miles from where we started, going all the time in quick and double-quick time. At last, we were ordered to halt, then load and march again, pulling down fences as we went along.

**Keep this, I will want to see it
when I come home**

A. South

(note in upper right hand. corner of page 4)

Just before going into action while in the rode close to where we went action one of our ammunition wagons got destroyed by the horses running away. We were ordered up to a little skirt of woods, the enemy being over on the other hill [Matthews Hill] in an open field. We lay down in the edge of the woods waiting for further orders. the 4th Alabama came up and passed through the woods stooping like they were close to their game. they went to our right in a little while we were ordered down through the woods to a fence and lay down behind it. In a little while there was two of our companies ordered over the fence and up the hill as skirmishers. as soon as they got high enough to see the enemy at[?] the cannon the fired some rounds and called attention of them to us. The battery commenced leveling their pieces at the cannons for they were one of the companies that were skirmishing. They fired too high to do much damage to them and their bomb, shell, and grape came in amongst us at the fence, wounding some, cutting our clothes, canteens, and haversacks off from our sides. There was but few killed at the fence, but we had the narrowest escape in the world, and it could be nothing but a Providential escape in all not getting killed. Besides the cannon that was playing on us, we were fired on several times by the enemy's infantry who were to the right of us and in the rear of their own cannon. the 4th Alabama were in shot of their infantry every time they would show their heads over the opposite slope of the hill. The Alabamians being in full view of the enemy with nothing to protect them, they suffered severely, but stood it like heroes. We too were ordered over the fence to charge the cannon and our boys shoved the top rails of and jumped over as if the enemy were ten miles off in place of 250 yards. After getting up the hill the enemy being on the other slope we were ordered back, their cannon & infantry firing on us all the time. We then lay down again behind the fence. After a little while we were contending with their best battery, Sherman's and fifteen thousand infantry. Our force at this place was just our brigade, commanded by Genl. Bee who was killed, composing 5 regiments averaging about 600 strong most of us not being able to get a shot at their place. We stood this for nearly an hour. All behaved as if they were familiar to such sport. In our retiring up this hill, we were fired on all the time, the enemy's battery almost silencing our battery, giving them the time to play on us. In our retiring we became scattered like sheep, and with all the head officers' pains they could not be rallied together again. Companies getting away from these regiments, the men getting lost from companies from fatigue and exhaustion, and even regiments getting lost from the brigade, the enemy meeting us at every place. They fought well where we were particularly. Ellsworth's Zouaves the 69[th] and 71[st] New York regiments. They were

their best troops. After going about 3/4 [mile?] most of our men got together again close to Sherman's battery of 8 pieces and were ordered to charge and take it. They done so but had to retire. Charged again, destroying most of their horses and a good many of their men and thinking they took [it?],but others claim the credit of it, particularly the Virginians. It was here we lost most of our men. We lost 6 out of our company, our 2 Lieuts Smith¹⁹ and Braselman²⁰, John Green²¹, J.A. Norton²², Sam McBride²³, and Ed Sullivan²⁴, and when Wm A. Morgan²⁵ got wounded. They carried him some 200 yards to keep as a prisoner but were so tightly pressed that they had to leave him. This shows who took the battery for we lost more than any other company²⁶.

The fight was for 8 or 10 miles up and down Bull Run and back from it some two miles on our side about 3/4 on their side. bombs shells, and mortars buzzing and flying in every direction all over the field, and when falling, bursting and spreading destruction all around. The fight commenced about 6 o'clock in the morning and lasted until dark even in the night. They commenced retreating about 4 o'clock from where we were in the utmost confusion, the first running over those behind. They taking the alarm running back and so on until they reached Centreville our cavalry pushing them all the time it was the most complete rout ever known in history. The panic became so terrible at Centreville where members of the Lincoln Cabinet, Member of Congress, and other big bugs, along with Ladies and even children where congregated to witness our defeat and to go to Richmond. Their hopes were all disappointed they had to fire on the teamsters to keep them from running over the carriages with the Ladies and children.

As near as I can ascertain the loss on both sides must have been some from 7 to 10 thousand [2,708 Union casualties, so 4,605 total casualties, both sides]. Our loss was about 1500 or 2000 [1,897]. 4 or 500 killed [378] and from 12 to 15 hundred wounded [1,489]. We took 60 cannon, a large amount of arms, any amount of ammunition and wagons, and in fact everything else that you can think off. President Davis came on the field about 4 o'clock the retreat had commenced when he came on the field. Johnston commanded the left wing and Beauregard the right wing [Johnston was the senior general, so upon arriving on the field, was in overall command].

In the evening toward night our boys walked over the field to see what havoc had been done. They saw the most awful sights. Some cry for water. Our wagons and men were gathering up our dead and wounded, bringing them into the junction about 5 miles from the field. It rained all the rest of day, but our dead and wounded came in. [cannon gun?] with prisoners from one to fifty. As fast as our guard house became full we sent them off to Richmond. This was going on for days. We buried all of our boys at the junction. Wednesday we were close to where the enemy were unburied, and they became so offensive that we had to move. We left and went about 2 miles on [down?] Bull Run. After the first rains maggots came down the creek from the field of battle by

millions, and we had to leave there and come to this place some 8 miles off on the Orange & Alexandria Railroad. We have a fine camping ground and are doing very well. We have a good many sick but none very dangerous. We do not know how long we will stay here. There is talk in camp of our having to go to Romney. All of our brigade was not in the battle, but 2 Regiments & 2 companies of the 11th Mississippians 2nd Miss & 4 ala.

It was a great Victory and will be long remembered the North will never whip us. There is now talk of peace by some of the Northern papers, but they are raising troops fast.

You must write to me and James as soon as you receive this. No more [?]

Respectfully Yours

A. O. South

P.S. you must read this to most of the neighbors as it will be news to them.

¹ Colonel Falkner, commanding the 2nd Mississippi, had earlier reported about 200 on the sick list. So, if at the time of the battle, there were 400 sick, and the rest of the regiment were present for duty, the 2nd Mississippi probably numbered between 500-600 men on the day of the battle.

² The Confederates had decided to stand and fight along Bull Run and rely on reinforcements by rail from Johnston's Army of the Shenandoah to arrive in time to tip the balance in their favor. Portions of Johnston's army, including the 2nd Mississippi, left Winchester for Manassas on July 18th. The troops marched to Piedmont where they boarded trains for the trip to Manassas on July 20th, arriving there the same day. Unfortunately, only part of the brigade could fit into the available railway cars. Only the 4th Alabama, 2nd Mississippi, and two companies (A and F) of the 11th Mississippi found room.

³ Major General Robert Patterson was tasked to keep Johnston's Army of the Shenandoah pinned near Winchester so he could not reinforce Beauregard's Confederate army at Manassas. Johnston was able to give Patterson the slip however and turned the tide at the battle of First Manassas. Patterson, widely criticized for his failure to contain the enemy forces, was mustered out of the Army in late July 1861.

⁴ General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, commander of the Confederate Army of the Potomac at First Manassas.

⁵ Major General Irvin McDowell, commander of the Union Army of Northeastern Virginia at the battle of First Manassas.

⁶ It was a relatively minor battle at Blackburn's Ford when McDowell was probing for weaknesses along the Confederate lines at Bull Run.

⁷ General Joseph E. Johnston, commander of the Confederate Army of the Shenandoah at First Manassas.

⁸ Approximately 12,000 men.

⁹ Piedmont Station (depot), now known as Delaplane, is a tiny village located in the Virginia Piedmont situated on what was in 1861 the Manassas Gap Railroad. It figured importantly in the campaign resulting in the First Battle of Bull Run or Manassas. The Manassas Gap RR connected Manassas Junction with its terminus at Strasburg in the Shenandoah Valley.

¹⁰ The Manassas Gap Railroad.

¹¹ Brigadier General Barnard Elliott Bee, commanding Third Brigade, Army of the Shenandoah.

¹² The regiment was sent to reinforce the endangered left flank. It arrived at the scene of the fighting around 11am, crossing Young's Branch and forming a defensive line that was supported by two batteries. Under heavy

small arms and artillery fire that mortally wounded General Bee, the regiment fell back with heavy losses and reformed behind Jackson's Brigade. It then joined Jackson in the attack on the Union batteries. Major Whiting gave the 2nd Mississippi credit for the capture of Rickett's Federal Battery. The regiment lost 22 men killed, 9 mortally wounded, and 77 men wounded. Colonel Falkner and Sergeant Major John Blair were wounded, and Lieutenant Colonel Bartley Boone was captured by the First Minnesota Infantry.

¹³ Companies A and F under Lieutenant Colonel Liddell were sent along with Bee's Brigade to reinforce the endangered left flank. They arrived at the scene of the fighting around 11am, crossing Young's Branch and forming a defensive line that was supported by two batteries. Under heavy small arms and artillery fire that mortally wounded General Bee, the companies fell back with heavy losses and reformed behind Jackson's Brigade. They then joined Jackson in the attack on the Union batteries. The two companies lost 7 men killed and 21 wounded.

¹⁴ The regiment was engaged in heavy fighting on Matthews Hill. Captain Lewis E. Lindsay and 37 enlisted men were killed, Colonel Jones was mortally wounded, and Major Charles L. Scott and 206 other men were wounded out of 750 engaged.

¹⁵ Turney's First Tennessee Infantry Regiment, Provisional Army. Arrived on the battlefield after the fighting had concluded. Did not participate.

¹⁶ Sixth North Carolina State Troops Infantry Regiment. Arrived at Manassas Junction in the early morning and ordered to march to Henry Hill. Seven companies reached the battlefield, while Companies D, H & K became separated and were not engaged.

¹⁷ Staunton Artillery, Capt. John D. Imboden.

¹⁸ First Virginia Cavalry Regiment, Colonel James Ewell Brown (JEB) Stuart

¹⁹ 2nd Lieutenant John H. Smith, 30 years old, killed in action.

²⁰ 2nd Lieutenant Nathan T. Braselman, 28 years old, killed in action.

²¹ Private John W. Green, 19 years old, killed in action.

²² Private John A. Norton, 19 years old, killed in action.

²³ Private Samuel A. McBride, 21 years old, killed in action.

²⁴ 4th Sergeant Edward D. Sullivan, 34 years old, killed in action.

²⁵ Private William A. Morgan, 21 years old, severely wounded (through right thigh). Discharged for disability on November 12, 1861.

²⁶ South missed a few additional casualties from Company F. Private Lewis J. Hudson, age 24, was killed in action. Privates John Cook – age 27, William L. Luna – age 32, James B. Roberson – age 21, and Richard C. Wareham – age 30, were all reported as wounded.