


2-14-1862

Letter from John W.A. Gillespie to Editor

John W.A. Gillespie

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From the 78th Regiment.

4 o'clock, P. M. Friday, Feb. 14th, 1862.—The "*Tecumseh*" has taken five days rations on board, and is now pushing off from Paducah, bound for Fort Donelson. The *Neptune* has not yet appeared in sight. We begin to entertain fears that something has happened her.

6 o'clock, P. M.—Have reached Smithland, Ky. The soldiers here have heard nothing of the *Neptune*. Lieut. Col. Hawkes, in command of the left wing, says that we must go back up the river and hunt her. All hands are anxious to know what has delayed them. Off we start, and I trust we shall soon meet our companions in arms; and have our anxiety relieved.

11 o'clock, P. M. The lost is found, the *Neptune* is with us, and all on board are safe. Their delay was occasioned by the breaking of a boat timber. The boats are now lashed together, and on their way back to the mouth of the Cumberland river. I feel very much like sleeping, and shall go to bed.

Saturday morning, 15th.—Steamers still lashed together and plowing up the Cumberland. The river is about the size of the "Old Muskingum," and at this time in fine order for navigation. The inhabitants thus far along the shore seem to be loyal.

Half-past 8 o'clock.—Just now an old gray headed man on the bank is swinging his hat, and cheering for the "Old Stars and Stripes."

9 o'clock, A. M.—Forty miles up the Cumberland. The country begins to look more like civilization than that which we have passed through this morning.

Half-past 9 o'clock, A. M.—Eddyville, Ky. is in sight. A crowd of citizens are gathering at the landing. The people are loyal.—Hats and handkerchiefs are being waved, and our boys are responding with hearty cheers. Snow covers the surrounding country. The weather has been extremely cold since Thursday evening, but is now moderating very much.

10 o'clock, A. M.—Fifty-five miles up the Cumberland. The different companies have received forty rounds of cartridges to the man, and all are now loading their guns.

11 o'clock, A. M.—The *Tecumseh* has let loose from the *Neptune*, and is now 500 yards in advance.

1 o'clock, P. M.—Have just crossed the Tennessee line, and are 12 or 15 miles from Fort Donelson.

Half-past 2, P. M.—Two gunboats have just passed us on their way back to Paducah. We tried to learn the news from those on board, but couldn't hear what their reply was. Six miles from Fort Donelson. Have heard nothing in regard to the result of the battle.

3 o'clock, P. M.—Have just passed the steamer *Hazel Dell*. Those on board say the fight is still in progress at the fort.

4 o'clock, P. M.—We are now at the landing, 3 miles from the fort. A large number of steamers, loaded with provisions and forage, are here; five gunboats are a few hundred yards above, preparing for work to-morrow. They are all ugly looking customers, and will doubtless play their part well in the fight.

Several ambulances have come in, loaded with the wounded and dying, since our arrival, and others (I am told) are on their way. Some of our regiments have suffered pretty severely, but it is impossible to ascertain the real facts in regard to our loss.

5 o'clock, P. M.—The battle is still raging. The roar of artillery is almost incessant. One of the gunboats is starting up the river toward the rebel battery, for the purpose of throwing in a few shells for good measure.—A great many are starting up to witness the firing. I am one of the number. When I get back I will finish my letter.

8 o'clock, P. M.—In company with Captains Chandler and Stevenson I went up the river bank a half mile, and stood opposite the gun boat while she fired eight rounds at the secesh battery, two miles above. The rebels returned two shots, but both fell in the water three or four hundred yards short. When we came away the boat was still firing.

Col. Leggett and Adjutant Jewett rode out toward the scene of action this evening and have just returned. They learned nothing in addition to what I have already stated. The fight was still progressing at dark last night.

Later, 9 o'clock.—Lieut. Col. Irvin and one 2d Lieut. of the 20th Illinois Regiment were killed.

Lieut. Col. White of the 31st Illinois Regiment was killed.

Lieut. Col. Smith of the 48th Illinois was killed.

[Company B, 12th Illinois, was nearly cut to pieces. Capt. Hale was killed and both Lieutenants were wounded.

9½ o'clock P. M. I am now on board the steamer *Gladiator*. The scene which presents itself is indeed a sickening one. Sixty wounded men are lying in the cabin, but all are enduring their suffering, with the greatest fortitude. One poor fellow is now having a bullet extracted from the left side of his head. He suffers intensely, but bears up manfully.

Our Surgeons have both been detailed to assist in caring for the wounded.

In the morning the 78th will start for the field. My letter is already too lengthy I will close.

Yours, J. W. A. GILLESPIE.

P. S. 65 wounded soldiers are on the steamer *Fanny Bullet*.
Lieut. Col. Jasper A. Maltby, of the Lead Mine 45th Illinois Regiment, severely wounded. 70 wounded on the steamer *J. S. Jewett*. 65 wounded on the steamer *Memphis*.

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¹ Daily Zanesville Courier, February 21, 1862, p. 2

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