

8-3-1862

Letter from John W.A. Gillespie to Parents, Brother, and Sisters

John W.A. Gillespie

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Letter from the 78th Ohio Regiment.

Bolivar, TENN. SUNDAY,
Aug. 3d, 1862.

DEAR PARENT'S BROTHER AND SISTERS—

We left Grand Junction, July 14th, and arrived at this place the next day at 3 o'clock, P. M. The rebels came into Grand Junction three hours after we left, and burned a large amount of cotton that we had to leave. Since our arrival here, they have been hovering about within a short distance in pretty strong force, but have not ventured to attack us.— On Sunday and Monday last, there were strong apprehensions of an attack, but both days passed away quietly. On Thursday morning last, the 78th and 20th Ohio, with some artillery and cavalry, (composing the 1st Brigade) and commanded by Col. M. D. Leggett) started out on a reconnaissance to Whiteville, twelve miles north west of this place. It was supposed when we started that we would have a brush with the rebel cavalry reported to be in the vicinity of Whiteville. But when we got there, at 5 o'clock, P. M. we found no enemy except one lone cavalryman, who was taken by surprise, and captured by our cavalry who galloped into town before he could escape. The enemy three thousand strong, had been there, but pulled up stakes, and left on Monday of the same week. We remained in town until after dark, then marched back three miles to a creek, and bivouaced for the night. On Friday morning early we started and reached our camp again at noon. Both days were quite warm, but the march there and back was not a very unpleasant one.

The force now at Bolivar numbers six or seven thousand, and constitutes the 2d division of the army of West Tennessee. It is commanded by Brigadier General L. F. Ross, who, by the way, is very much of a gentleman. The force here, represents the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan and Wisconsin. Four Iowa regiments came in from Corinth day before yesterday, also a Battery of six guns, and a Battalion of cavalry. There is no danger of an attack apprehended here now. If the rebels should be foolhardy enough to do so, they will meet with a warmer reception than they have yet bargained for.

Generals McClelland and Logan are still at Jackson with a large force, and ready when necessary to send re-enforcements to this post.

Bolivar is a very nice town, of about 3000 inhabitants. The Hatchee River runs near the town, and affords water in abundance for all army purposes. Near our camp, (which is several hundred yards from town) we have three fine springs from which we get our drinking and cooking water.

Gen Ross has a large number of "contrabands" engaged in doing the drudgery about camps and depot. Also in digging trenches and throwing up breast works. This way of doing things takes a great deal of hard labor from the soldiers, and punishes rebel masters in a new way, and I am of the opinion that this policy should be adopted in all our future dealings with rebels and traitors. Whenever the negroes of the South can be made useful to the Union cause, I say take them and use them, let the consequence to their masters be what it may. We are fighting for the maintenance of the Constitution and the Union. Rebels and black hearted traitors are trying to break them up, and are in the Southern army doing all that they can to bring about such a result, while their slaves are made to stay at home and take care of the growing crops. We have been using a milk and water policy long enough. We have guarded rebel property until we are tired of it. We have heard our soldiers called all sorts of names, by Southern women, who think that they are entitled to the respect which is always due a true lady. Of this we are also tired, and I thank God that our Government, at last, intends to pursue a different course towards all rebels. I go in now for using all the means which God has given us, to crush this great rebellion, and to punish all rebels wherever found. You are well aware that I have never been an abolitionist, and I can assure you that I never expect to be, but I will tell you that it is my firm conviction that this war will end slavery in the United States, and if it is done, the people of the bogus Confederacy will have none to blame except their own ambitious leaders. If in the future they cry out "Behold our house is left unto us desolate," they can say in all truth, "We did it ourselves."

When the war will end, no one can tell.— The future will alone solve the problem.— Thousands of brave and true men will yet have to fall in the struggle—Millions of money will yet have to be expended. Many happy homes must yet be made sad and desolate, and the hearts of untold numbers will yet be made to bleed and suffer for those they will see no more on earth. "But the Union must and shall be preserved," at all hazards.

J. W. A. GILLESPIE.

August 3, 1862

Letter from the 78th Ohio Regiment¹

BOLIVAR, TENN, SUNDAY

Aug. 3d, 1862

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¹ Daily Zanesville Courier, August 16, 1862, p. 2

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