

Letter From Battle, Walter written Tuesday, May 17th, 1864

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Soldier: Battle, Walter

Allegiance: Confederate

Unit/Service Branch: 4th Infantry

Date Written: Tuesday, May 17th, 1864

Location: Near Spotsylvania Court House

Correspondence Type: Letter

Subjects: Battlefield, Combat Description, Commanders, Comrades, Eastern Theater, Enemy, Family, Warfare

IN LINE BATTLE NEAR SPOTSYLVANIA COURT HOUSE, VA.

My Dear Mother:

Again by kind Providence I am permitted to write you a short letter. There has been no general engagement since I last wrote you. Fights and skirmishing are kept up along the line. Our brigade is now the extreme left of the whole army. Cavalry joins us on our left. What Grant is waiting for it is impossible to say. It is rumored through camps that he has gone to Washington to consult with Lincoln. I do not think it is possible to have any harder fighting than we had last Thursday. Our brigade did some of the hardest fighting that day and night that has been done during the war. It is hard to realize what our brigade did actually accomplish that day. That morning at day break the enemy attacked Johnston's whole division and took their breastworks from them, together with fifteen or twenty pieces of artillery, which endangered the whole of Ewell's corps, owing to the nature of the position which he held. Our brigade after, we had charged and run the Yankees from their works, was not long enough to cover the line held by Johnston's division, so the Yankees held a position on our right, upon a hill which enabled them to keep up an incessant enfilading fire upon us; two thirds of the men which we lost were done in that way. Men were killed while squatting just as low and as close to the breastworks as it was possible for them to get. Tom Atkinson, poor fellow, was shot through the head, right by my side, another man in Company "E" was killed on the other; the man in front was shot through the body. I did not realize then what a hot place we were in. It was a wonder to me that the last one of us was not killed. We were exposed to that fire for twenty-two hours. Gen. Rodes sent word to Gen. Ramseur he would send his reinforcements, but Gen. R. sent him word that he had taken the position and he was confident his brigade would hold it. All he wanted to let us alone and send us ammunition, which he did. I shot away 120 rounds of cartridges myself, three cartridge boxes full.

Friday morning about an hour before day, we evacuated the works, which had been thrown up during the night by the entire pioneer force of the whole army. I don't suppose there is any man that can express the relief he felt after getting out of such a place. Our rations were out the evening before and we had orders to be ready to move next morning at 3 o'clock. We did not have time to fill our canteens, so we did not have a mouthful to eat or drink when we went into the fight. The ditches behind the works were from three to six inches deep in mud and water, and in addition to it it was raining incessantly from light that morning until we left the works the next morning after.

You can form some idea what our feelings would have been, putting all these privations together, had there been no danger attending, but add to all this the thought that the next minute may be your last, is another thing altogether. There is not a man in this brigade who will ever forget it. I forgot to mention in my last that Burton's leg was broken and he fell in the hands of the enemy. Pat Wooten was also wounded on the leg. Hoping that kind Providence may spare me to see the end of this great struggle, I remain, as ever, your sincere and affectionate son,
WALTER.