

Letter of Private James Baker, 1st Ohio Light Artillery

January 21, 1862

Dear Father,

I will try to give you an account of what has transpired the last four or five days.

We left camp at Summerset, Friday morn, the 17th, and started for old Zolie's camp which was about eighteen miles distant, on the bank of the Cumberland River. We advanced about four miles that day and halted on the bank of Fishing Creek to await the order of General Thomas. Here we took supper, and just before dark the order came and we were again in line. Then came the order, "Forward march," and the whole brigade was in motion, the 12 Kentucky Reg. in advance, and the Tenn. Brigade [1st and 2nd E. Tenn. Inf. Regts.] in the rear, and Standart's Battery in the water, fording the creek. I could not help noticing the difference between the Kentucky and Tennesseans. The former complained of the cold and crowded on our wagons and guns, while the later plunged in without a murmur. We marched six miles and formed a junction with General Thomas. We were without tents, but some got in with Capt. _____ [Kenny's? - Btty. C, 1st Ohio Arty.] men and thhe rest slept on the ground. That knight there was an alarm. Next day it rained all day, and as did not take but one day's rations, we began to get hungry. Just knight, we got four crackers apiece and some fresh beef which we could not get cooked before morning.

We got up the next morning (Sunday the 19th) tired and sore. The rain was still coming down in torrents. Just as we were getting ready for breakfast, the report of musketry was heard and the next was the long roll from the 10th Ind. and then the order, "Drivers, hitch up cannoneers to your post." The 10th Ind. were the first on the field and we were next. We had three batteries and about 8,000 infantry. There was a continued rattle of musketry and the boom of artilery for three hours. The fight was in the woods and artilery could not do much. After the fight had continued about two hours, the 9 Ohio and the 2nd Minasota advanced into the woods on the right, where the fight was then the hottest. The enemy had around Taft Hill [? - I have not seen this name elsewhere] and our men were in the gully but old McCook [Col. Robert L. McCook, commanding the 3rd Brigade] ordered his men to advance on them with fixed bayonet and loaded guns. They charged up the hill against the Mississippi Tigers [a common Federal sobriquet for the 15th Miss. Inf.], who were behind a fence. They shoved their bayonets through the fence when the devils up and used their legs. Then the old Dutchman [McCook was not German, but his regiment, the 9th Ohio Inf., was composed largely of Germans from Cincinnati] gave the order, fire, and the rebels fell like grass before the wind and the victory was ours. Old Zol lay dead on the field. We did not believe at first that it was Zolicoffer but letters proved it was him.

We followed them about eight miles to their works, or within a mile of them, and opened fire on them with our rifled pieces and Capt. Whitmore's Parrat guns [Capt. Henry Wetmore commanded the 9th Ohio Btty., with two 10-pounder Parrott rifles] and kept up the fire until dark. Lay that night by our guns.

The next morning, the 14th Ohio advanced under cover of our guns and found their camp entirely deserted. We advanced and took possession of their winter quarters on this side of the river and began to shell them on the other, but soon discovered that they were gone. I have heard of soldiers plundering an enemies camp, but now I know what it means. We, the artilery, took the center, the infantry the right and left wings, and in we went like a swarm of hornets, taking everything before us. We have annihilated an entire army, captured their camp, 14 pieces of artilery, a considerate amount of amunition, 125 wagons loaded with bagage and about 1500 horses and mules. Their army can never be collected again. They have talked about starving them out, but when we came to see their hogsheads of sugar and molasses, the bags of flour and meal, the piles of corn and horrs of tobacco, we knew they were not starving. We have taken some of the nicest clothing I ever saw, broadcloth coats worth from five to twenty dollars a piece. I got a satin vest worth five dollars, a shirt worth a dollar and a half, and a silver-handled stiletto, besides a number of other things. The amount number of killed and wounded I have not ascertained.

We have got the horses up and tomorrow we start back to Summerset with all the artilery we have taken. They have left a portion that they might have whipped four to one the dirty cowards.

Summerset, Jan. 23

We returned to Summerset last night. As we came back, I went over the Battlefield. The trees and fences were all cut to pieces with ball and shot. The day of the fight I saw the body of Zolicoffer laying by the side of the rode in the mud. Col. Fry of the fourth Kentucky Reg. shot him with a revolver. Our men have buried over three hundred the enemies' dead and about eighty of ours. None of the battery were killed.

From James