

Joseph Milton Elkins:

A Confederate Letter

Joseph Milton Elkins was a private in Company E, 49th Virginia Infantry Regiment, C.S.A. After standing guard duty at a field hospital following the First Battle of Manassas, Joseph, along with the remainder of the Confederate Army, bivouacked at Centreville and Manassas during the fall and winter of 1861. Joseph was stationed at Fort Pickens. The following letters cover that period of time from July to December 1861 and describe camp life in the Confederate Army. Joseph frequently wrote home to his wife for supplies including buckwheat, whiskey and blankets. Joseph was shot in the leg in action around the famous Dunkard (Dunker) Church. He was evacuated to Virginia where he died November 10, 1862, of gangrene.

July 21, 1861

Camp Pickens

Dear Wife,

I take this opportunity of writing you these few lines to inform you that I am well at this present time and when these few lines come to hand they may find you enjoying the same health. We had another great battle Sunday, it commenced at 6 o'clock and ended at 6 o'clock, it was the hardest battle that was ever fought in America. They had 10 to our one--we conquered them, we lost about 800 in killed and wounded. The Yankees lost about 5,000 and we took 1,300 prisoners and 125 horses, baggage wagons and 64 pieces of cannon besides a great many things. I was not in the battle but could hear the report of the cannons which was in very plain view and we was in site of the battlefield, it was a sad and dreary day. I never had spent such a sabbath in my life before I have seen the horror of war.

I had to stand sentinel [duty] at the hospital door were I could see all the wounded soldiers. I stood from Sunday 12 o'clock till Monday night. -- I had to be up all night to guard the wounded--it was the saddest thing I ever saw to hear the moans of the wounded and dying. I saw the surgeons operating on them, it made me shed tears to see how they suffered, some had to have both of their arms cut off and some their legs. I saw all the surgeons operations, it was a distressing sight to see them how they suffered--we like to got old Scott, [General Winfield Scott] they got his coat. We have completely routed them.

Joseph M. Elkins