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## A CONNECTICUT YANKEE FIGHTS AT OLUSTEE

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT <sup>1</sup>

by VAUGHN D. BORNET

Olustee was the most important battle of the War for Southern Independence in Florida. While the Union army under Brigadier General Truman Seymour was not "completely defeated, with . . . utter rout," <sup>2</sup> it was a severe setback in the plan of the administration for separating Florida from the Confederacy. If the effort had been successful, the political and economic results would have been serious for the South.

A personal light from the Federal standpoint is thrown on the bloody repulse at Olustee in the letters of Private Milton M. Woodford of Bristol, Connecticut. <sup>3</sup> By chance, fate had determined whether Woodford would grow up to help defend or try to crush secession. He was born November 26, 1834 in Connecticut, but his parents decided to make their fortunes in Texas and emigrated there a few years later. On the sudden death of his wife, the bereaved father decided to return to his New England home to guarantee his children a proper home environment. <sup>4</sup>

The War had been going on for only a few months when a strong moral and religious strain in his makeup seems to have persuaded Milton Woodford, then a mechanic, to enlist. The date was September 4, 1861, the regiment the Seventh Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, <sup>5</sup>

1. The second half of this letter series will appear in the next issue of the *Quarterly* under the title "A Connecticut Yankee After Olustee."
2. James A. Seddon, Confederate Secretary of War, to Jefferson Davis, April 28, 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series IV, Vol. III, 324.
3. I am indebted to Milton M. Woodford's descendants and especially to Robert Woodford Ellison, his great-grandson and a former student of mine for permission to work in the family papers.
4. Evelyn Woodford to Lucy Churchill, Matagorda, Texas, Nov. 24, 1838.
5. The official regimental history is *History of the Seventh Connecticut Volunteer Infantry; Hawley's Brigade, Terry's Division, Tenth Army Corps, 1861-1865*, compiled by Stephen Walkley (private, company A), n.p., 1905. The battle of Olustee is discussed on pages 119-123. See also, *A History of Company K of the Seventh Connecticut Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*, by a member. n.p., 1910.

and his close friends fellow enlistees from Bristol—especially one Lyman S. Johnson.<sup>6 6</sup> Each signed up for three years.

The bare facts of a man's military service are quickly and easily told. Woodford's first action came in the successful campaign against Fort Pulaski, Georgia. A patrol on James Island, South Carolina, resulted in his capture, however, and he spent the summer of 1862 in the Columbia jail. After serious illness and exchange he entered a tour of duty at Camp Parole, Annapolis, Maryland as a male nurse to wounded troops. It was not, therefore, until January, 1864, that Woodford, still a private, was able to rejoin his regiment at Hilton Head, South Carolina. Bloody fighting lay ahead. The Seventh Connecticut was about to leave for Florida in accordance with a politically inspired plan to cut off Florida from the rest of the Confederacy and restore it to the Union.

The Florida expedition was halted suddenly and decisively in the battle of Olustee, and it is at this point that the following letters begin. In addition to the advance into battle, the engagement itself, and the retreat to Jacksonville they reveal in some detail months of busy but disheartened activity by the defeated Federal army as it labored to protect its position on the St. Johns river. Later letters which reveal the writer's role in the Petersburg, Virginia, campaign, his promotion to corporal, and the long awaited day (September 12, 1864) when he was mustered out at the end of his three years have been omitted.

The full story of the battle of Olustee (Ocean Pond) fought over swampy and pine barren land about fifty miles west of Jacksonville has not been told, although much of the picture can be pieced together from the

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6. The writer had access to the Rev. Mr. Johnson's manuscript "Recollections of the Civil War" written in retrospect sometime after 1926.

official records.<sup>7 7</sup> As Colonel George F. Baltzell, U.S.A., stated, "A careful study of this source leaves one unsatisfied . . . . It is undoubtedly true that these official records must give more accurate and complete information than any others, since the reports were generally made within a few days after the event occurred and have the sanction of official responsibility for accuracy and completeness. Yet that which sought does not exist. Purported facts relating to the same occurrence are greatly at variance, while important elements necessary for analyzing and deducing other facts are entirely missing."<sup>8</sup>

If the official dispatches of generals and key officer subordinates on both sides fail to satisfy, can the informal correspondence of a common soldier in the ranks be expected to do any better? On most of the significant details of the engagement it cannot do as well. But an army, after all, is made up of individual men, and (in theory at least) one person can frequently reveal the feelings and innermost thoughts of the group. When an army is defeated each man in it is defeated. The cold, impersonal reports of a commanding officer do not begin to tell the whole story. So it is that the greatest value of the following letters seems to lie in the mixed emotions which fight there for supremacy—emotions perhaps typical of the immediate company, the regiment, or even the whole army.

Woodford had no such purpose, of course. He wrote to let his wife know that he lived, to tell a civilian friend of the violent and exhausting life led by soldiers in the field, and to keep an absent comrade informed of the

7. *Off. Rec.*, Series I, Vol. XXXV, Part I contains nearly all the official dispatches relating to Olustee. (The short title *Off. Rec.* as used hereafter refers to this complete reference unless otherwise indicated.)

8. "The Battle of Olustee (Ocean Pond), Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, April, 1931, 199. A map of Florida as it was during the War appears in *Confederate Military History*, Gen. Clement A. Evans, editor, 12 vols., Atlanta, Ga., 1899, Vol. XI, 192. A sketch of the battlefield appears opposite page 66 of this volume and also appears with the article just cited.

latest military events. He was in general surprisingly accurate. It should be remembered that he wrote without fear of censorship, for there was none, and his blunt, soldierly comments on his superior officers are made without apology. He is neither glib nor eloquent. Indeed, he once confessed to being unable to collect his thoughts. "What I do write," he revealed, "is what comes into my mind first."<sup>9</sup> He is in the best modern scholarly tradition when he tries to differentiate between fact and rumor and even gives the source of important information. "Now this is only a story," he confides, "but as it is reported by our chaplain, who has pretty good facilities for ascertaining the truth from headquarters, I venture to give it to you, with the caution that the official report may contradict the whole story."<sup>10</sup>

Private Woodford's powers of observation and knowledge of human nature seem to be superior. Perhaps in a measure responsible for this were the high moral and spiritual aspects of his character. At Camp Parole he was president of a "Temperance Society and Debating Club"<sup>11</sup> but did not let it remove him from his fellows. "Speaking of the proportion of *bad men* in the army," he wrote his sister, "I don't know as it is any larger than among the same number anywhere else when they first enlist, but I notice men grow bad fast, especially in a place like this [Camp Parole] where they have nothing to do."<sup>12</sup> Baptist Woodford's God is ever before him "If I should live to get an honorable discharge from the service, and have my usual health, I shall not regret the experience of the campaign. Those who live it through and are not disabled by wounds or sickness, or ruined by the vices of camp life, will be benefitted by it. I hope we may, as individuals and as a nation, recognize the hand of God leading us 'in a way

9. To his wife, from Bermuda Hundred, Va., June 3, 1864.

10. To his wife, from Bermuda Hundred, Va., June 25, 1864.

11. Woodford's manuscript diary, July 31, 1863. The diary was abandoned previous to February, 1864.

12. To his sister Tina from Camp Parole, Annapolis, Md., Dec. 6, 1862.

we knew not.' I wish our people, as a people, could realize that in God is our only hope. We are to use the means, of course, but use them trusting in *Him*. Too many are trusting in the means and leaving God out of the question."<sup>13</sup>

It can be seen that these letters have a certain quality of fascination, but their historical value lies elsewhere. Although they tell about Olustee in detail they correct few if any important matters of fact. But they show how an enlisted soldier felt—which can be said neither of the official records nor of accounts based almost entirely on them.<sup>14</sup> They demonstrate, in their matter-of-fact tone, the businesslike approach toward battle and death possible to a veteran soldier. Violent and bombastic malice toward the enemy is almost completely absent. Finally, as Milton Woodford's letters change in tone from his initial gratitude at mere survival to a later feeling which is, perhaps, self-justification and accompanying recrimination, they show what may well be successive stages in the destruction and rebuilding of any defeated soldier's morale.

Editing of the letters involved the verification of many statements of fact in order to establish the writer's reliability, the exclusion of personal material of no apparent historical value,<sup>15</sup> and the addition of suggestive notes.

A new accent by historians on the lives, thoughts, and emotions of ordinary soldiers in the ranks is certainly needed if the full story of the military history of the United States is to be revealed. The Woodford letters may well be a step in that direction.

13. *Ibid.*

14. The best purely military account of the battle of Olustee is that of Colonel Baltzell. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913), has a chapter on the Olustee campaign which presents some of the political and economic aspects of the battle. *Confederate Military History*, Vol. XI, deals with Texas and Florida in the war. The Florida section was written by Col. J. J. Dickison.

15. Expressions of endearment to his wife, speculations about the arrival of money he sent home, the activities of relatives, etc.

Camp near Jacksonville, Florida.  
Feb. 23rd, 1864.

My own dear Wife:-

You are wondering why you don't hear from *Milton*, and your heart is full of anxiety on my account. I know it all, my own dear one, and I have wanted to send you word where I was and how; but since I wrote the first part of this letter I have been on the move all the time, and most of the time have not had my knapsack, nor a bit of paper to write on, and no chance to *send* if I had written. I am sorry, but can't help it.

I hope this will find you well, and the little darlings *better* at least of their cough. I don't know how much I can write now, so will say just here that we have just returned from a trip fifty miles into the interior of Florida. Arrived here last night completely tired out, dirty, ragged, some sick, all *sore* more or less ; but I am still alive, thanks to a kind Providence.

The great "expedition" from Hilton Head [South Carolina] has sailed, landed, gone in, and *come out*, or at least, part of it, all that ever will. Very likely you will see some account of the performance, perhaps correct, perhaps not; so I will give you a statement of things as *I* saw them; perhaps not all *now*, for I am too tired and played out to think very fast, and may not have time to write much today.

February fifth we <sup>16</sup> had orders to get ready to go *somewhere*, right away. No one, not even the Col. had any idea where. I was detailed for fatigue and had to work till we were ready to go aboard the steamer, so I could not send you the letter I had partly written.

One object of the expedition became apparent on the *start*, and that was seemingly to find into how small a compass a regiment of men could be packed. The 7th Conn. and the 7th N. H. [New Hampshire] were both

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16. The 7th Conn. Vol. Inf. For the embarkation orders see *Off. Rec.*, 280-1. Maj. Gen. Q. A. Gillmore to Brig. Gen. Truman Seymour. Gillmore commanded the Dept. of the South, Seymour the Dist. of Florida.

put on the "Ben Deford," a moderate sized steamer, and if you ever saw a flock of sheep, or drove of pigs in a small pen, you can form some idea of the shape we were in.

For a while we had no room to lie down or even to sit down, and just had to stand as close as we could stand all over the boat. After a while one and another would find a corner or space somewhere to stow himself, until we could finally all sit down ; then if one wanted to go on deck, he had to walk over the rest.

Saturday morning found us out to sea bound south. Many were the surmises as to the place of our destination, but none seemed to know. The sea was rather rough, and about nine or ten o'clock a good many might have been seen leaning over the side of the vessel, paying their tribute to "Old Nep." In fact, more than half of us were sea-sick. O such a time ! Were you ever sea-sick? If so, I need not describe it to you, and if not, I need not try, for I couldn't.

Sunday morning we were in sight of land, and about nine o'clock our boat struck on the bar at the mouth of the St. Johns river, Fla. Here we lay till night waiting for high water; but when it came we got off only to ground still harder in another place. It was found impossible to get her off, and Monday morning two small steamers came alongside. One took the 7th N. H., the other the 7th Conn. (The two regiments are called by the boys "the 77th New England"). We had a beautiful sail up the river 25 miles to Jacksonville.

This is, or has been, a very nice place for a Southern town ; but part of it has been burned, some by the Rebs and some by our own men last year.<sup>17</sup> What remains of it shows that Northern men built it. . . . As soon as Col. Hawley's brigade (He is acting Brig. Gen.)<sup>18</sup> had all landed, we took up our line of march for the

17. Davis, *Civil War and Recunstruction*, describes the military situation during 1862 and 1863 in East Florida in chapter VII.

18. Col. Joseph R. Hawley, later Brig. Gen., and a United States senator from Connecticut after the war.



interior, the 7th Conn. in advance as usual. About three miles out we came onto the enemy's pickets, who skedaddled as lively as their horses could carry them; but, loaded down with knapsacks and 70 rounds of cartridges and three days provisions, we were ordered to double-quick after them.

Of course that could not last long; but we went on a quick step for about ten miles, when we came to a rebel camp just deserted. Here we took one piece of artillery that in their haste they could not carry off. We stopped here for the night, all but four companies of cavalry and the 40th Mass. mounted Infantry, who pushed right on that night to Baldwin, some fifteen miles farther on. Tuesday we marched to another deserted camp called Camp Cooper, (The first was Camp Finnegan). At all these places the Rebs left just as our men came in sight.

Camp Cooper is at a station on the R. R. between Jacksonville and Lake City. Here they had four pieces of artillery drawn up in line to give us a salute; but when they heard the cavalry coming their hearts failed them<sup>19</sup> and they left their guns and made off, and when we got there next day we found them just as they left them.

After resting nearly 24 hours, we went on to Baldwin, some ten miles. Here we found about 100 bales of cotton, some resin etc. This is the junction of three railroads, and a place of some importance to the enemy, as they get more or less supplies, such as beef, pork, salt, etc. from that part of the state through which those railroads pass. We stayed here one night, then had orders to leave our knapsacks and go in light marching order, that is, with just as little as we can get along with, either

19. Comments of this loosely confident nature are typical of human nature, it seems, and must not be considered good evidence of why, in this case, these Confederates retreated. In this case, however, he was right, for Capt. J. L. Dunham, C.S.A., Co. A, Milton Light Artillery, wrote in his official report that the warning of a sergeant shouted at 11 to 11:30 at night plus the sound of Union forces in the distance caused his men to flee *en masse*! *Off. Rec.*, 347.

a blanket or overcoat, but not both. I took my overcoat and left all the rest.

About one o'clock we left Baldwin and marched ten miles without a rest. Here the Cav. had a little skirmish and lost three men killed and fourteen wounded. The Rebs lay in ambush and fired on them as they rode through a narrow place, then ran as fast as legs could carry them and left their horses. Every man took to the woods in a different direction. Our men captured about fifty horses and killed some of the Rebs, how many I could not learn.

We had a cup of coffee made and started right on again, and marched ten miles farther that night, making twenty miles march that day. That night it rained, and if ever I passed a disagreeable night, that was one of them. Tired out, the wind blowing, rain pouring, no rubber blanket, and forty miles from our base of operations, with no knowledge of what might be around us, I thought of the warm fire, pleasant faces and good cheer of *home*.

But the longest night has a morning, and that was no exception. Morning came, and with it the sun. Then you would have pitied the poor pigs around there. About half the boys were foraging for pork, and by the *squealing* one would naturally think that every man intended to eat a whole pig, which, by the way, would not be a very big job for a hungry man. The hogs here look about like the fish we call roach,<sup>20</sup> and not much larger. Their noses are the largest part of them, but by killing enough of them we made out a meal.

Then we were ready for the usual camp rumors. Some said we were to advance right on to Lake City, and from there to the capitol of the state; but other rumors said that Col. Henry with his Cav. and mounted Inf. had found the enemy in force, and that we should get no further at present; and so it proved. We stayed there one night more, then fell back to Barbers, where

20. He refers, probably, to a similarity in facial expression. Webster's *New International Dictionary* has a picture of this fresh water fish.

the Cav. had the fight. Here we remained, (but did not lie idle) till last Saturday morning (the 20th) when, with between four and five thousand men, we started inland again.

The Cav. and a light battery went in advance about fifteen miles, when they encountered the enemy's lines of skirmishers, who would not give way for our Cav. skirmishers. As soon as we came up, the 1st and 2nd companies were ordered out as skirmishers to drive the enemy back.<sup>21</sup> The first Co. (ours) was deployed, and the second held as reserve, the Rebs firing on us all the time.

As soon as we were deployed, [we] were ordered to advance, keep cool, take good aim and not waste our ammunition. Perhaps you will better understand if I explain what it is to deploy as skirmishers. The Co. is formed into a single line, the men five paces apart, then the whole line, reaching about a half a mile, moves forward, the reserve Co. following the center of the line about 100 yards in the rear. As we advanced, the enemy retired, keeping just in sight.<sup>22</sup> Whenever we could get near enough to stand any chance of doing execution we would blaze away at them, and they returned the fire in a way that showed that they were good marksmen, for their shots came plenty near enough, although none of us were hit.

This kind of running fight was kept up for about three miles, then we came in sight of their line of battle. Then we lay down and our artillery fired a shot over our heads; then we got up and went on again a short distance, when we lay down for our artillery to fire again. This second shot drew a reply from the other side, and in less time than I can write it the whole skirmish line rushed up to within good fair rifle shot; and such a rattle of riflery is seldom heard from so few men.<sup>23</sup>

21. Confirmed in the official report of Capt. B. F. Skinner, 7th Conn., Feb. 25, 1864, *Off. Rec.*, 307.

22. The Confederates planned to draw the Federal army toward their previously prepared entrenchments. *Off. Rec.*, 331-2.

23. The 7th Conn. was armed with Spencer carbines. *Off. Rec.*, 303.

The enemy were behind earthworks, but the fire of the skirmishers was so hot that they had to send out two regiments to dislodge us.<sup>24</sup> The rest of our regiment was brought up, and the others as fast as possible, and very soon the battle became general ; and another thing soon became apparent,<sup>25</sup> and that was, that the enemy had three men to our one.

Our men for the most part fought well, and the darkys just as well as anyone,<sup>26</sup> but we were greatly outnumbered, and merely held our ground till dark, when we retired from the field leaving our dead and those who were wounded too badly to walk, or at least a good many of them.

I think our commanding general (Seymour) showed very poor generalship in taking us into such a place in the way he did,<sup>27</sup> for although his own was the advancing army, it is plain to be seen that he was *surprised*.<sup>28</sup> He didn't expect a force at that place; but as Commanding General, he *should* have known something about it. It turns out that they had 15,000 men.<sup>29</sup> No wonder we could

24. Elements of the 64th and 32nd Ga. regiments. Baltzell, "Olustee," 215.

25. Private Woodford had good company in his exaggerated opinion of the enemy's strength. Officers of the Federal forces wrote similar views in their official dispatches-as did the Confederates. Although the Union forces had a slight advantage, the armies at Olustee were actually nearly equal in size (about 5,000 men each). Commanders in battle normally over-estimate the size of the enemy.

26. Seymour agreed. *Off. Rec.*, 290. Losses among negro troops were heavy.

27. Gillmore expressed this feeling more definitely in November, 1865 in an indorsement to Seymour's battle report: "General Seymour was never entrusted with the execution of any general plan in Florida." He used phrases like "ill-judged advance . . . direct disregard of those instructions . . . disastrous battle of Olustee . . . the 'results' were a 'decisive' defeat upon the field of battle . . ." *Off. Rec.*, 291.

28. Maj. Gen. Gillmore: ". . . our forces appear to have been surprised into fighting or attempting to fight, an offensive battle, in which the component parts of the command were beaten in detail." *Ibid.*

29. This must have been a "grapevine" report, for Adolph Major, Chief Medical Officer with the Union army, later reported that the 15,000 men information even came to Seymour "but no reliance was placed on such dubious information in regard to strength as well as position." *Off. Rec.*, 299. Yet on the day after the battle Seymour gave the Confederate total as "10,000 to 15,000" and repeated this on the 26th. *Off. Rec.*, 488, 495.

not drive them out. Our loss is *severe*; how heavy I don't know.<sup>30</sup>

Our regiment, although clear in advance and under the very hottest of the fire, lost comparatively few men.<sup>31 31</sup> We lost one lieutenant killed. Our company had one man killed and three wounded. . . . The loss in the other companies I have not learned as yet. As soon as the wounded who had been brought off the field could be got into wagons, we commenced our retreat, and before twelve o'clock were back to Barbers where we started from in the morning, having marched nearly forty miles<sup>32 32</sup> and fought a five hour battle with three times our number. You may imagine that we were somewhat tired, and so we were.

Sunday morning we fell in again to retire still farther back, as it was reported the Rebs were following us with their whole force, and there was danger of their flanking us. We took our place in the line and started out with the brigade. When about a mile out, an Aide came riding up with orders for the 7th Conn. to go back and act as rear guard.<sup>33</sup> We thought this rather hard after what we had done, but there was no help for it.

We came back to Baldwin Sunday, and all but our regiment and the 40th Mass. kept on to Camp Cooper. We stayed all night, and yesterday came in to Jacksonville. Today we have to *rest*.

Your letter of the 10th has just come. Dear Lina, I am so glad to hear from you. Am glad to know you re-

30. Federal : killed 203, wounded 1,152, missing 506. Confederate: killed 93, wounded 847, missing 6. *Off. Rec.*, 298, 337. The large "missing" figure for the Federal army is typical of defeated armies. Yet Seymour insisted that the issue was "finely drawn, nearly equal to its very close, the enemy's losses as heavy as my own, ground firmly held to the last." *Ibid.*, 290.

31. The 7th Conn. lost: killed 5, wounded 42, missing 22. *Off. Rec.*, 298. The regiment's battle strength was 10 officers and 365 enlisted men. *Ibid.*, 307.

32. This was not a boastful overestimate, for Capt. Skinner of the regiment reported that they "marched a distance of 36 miles, 18 of which was marched without rest and over bad ground; many swamps, ditches, pickets, and fences intervened to obstruct my march." *Off. Rec.*, 309.

33. Woodford was one of 125 men so deployed. *Off. Rec.*, 308.

ceived the money. The mail closes right away and I must cut this short. My love to all. God bless you, my own dear ones.

Milton

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On Picket in the Woods 5 miles  
from Jacksonville, Fla.  
February 25th, 1864

Friend Thompson: <sup>34</sup>

You will see at once that this a second edition. Since writing the *first* I have been on the go all the time, and have not had a chance to write to my wife until yesterday.

We left St. Helena in a hurry and I had no time to mail letters or anything else, except attend to my regular duties. No doubt you have read all about the Expedition to Florida, and perhaps anything I can write will not be news to you, but still it may not be entirely uninteresting to have a brief account from a private who saw *some* of the show. I presume *you* heard a good deal more about the Expedition before it sailed than we did, for a good deal was said in the papers about it *north*, but it took us all by *surprise*. So many of our men were home on Furlough that we thought we should not be called on for anything of that kind until they came back.

But on the night of the 4th orders came for us to be ready to embark [details of their arrival in Jacksonville are the same as in the above letter] early next morning. Col. Hawley is in command of a *Brigade*, <sup>35</sup> and as soon as it was landed [at Jacksonville] we took up our line of march for the interior, the 7th Conn. in the *advance* as *usual*.

A few miles out we came upon some Reb pickets who made tracks with as little delay as possible. We kept on until after dark, when we came onto a *camp* from which

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34. One S. G. Thompson of New Haven, Conn. Woodford wrote this civilian about four times a year.

35. Italics here are accounted for by Private Woodford's pride in the additional authority given his chief. Vicarious satisfaction in the advancement of an able and popular superior officer is a common phenomenon in military organizations.

they had just skedaddled, leaving in their haste a very fine rifled *field piece*. The Infantry stopped here for the night, but 4 companies of the 1st Mass. Cavalry and the 40th Mass. *Mounted Inf.* pushed on 15 miles further to a place called *Baldwin* where a quantity of Cotton, Bacon, etc., was captured.

Between "Camp Finigan" (where we stopped) and Baldwin, is a station where was another camp called "Camp Cooper." They *intended* to make a stand there, and had 5 pieces of artillery placed in position to give us a warm reception when we should come, but when they heard our cavalry dashing down the road, their hearts failed them, and they left their pieces, jumped onto the train that had just come with reenforcements, and got 'as far away as possible. And when the Cavalry entered Baldwin, the Rebs were leaving the other end of town. Next morning the cavalry pushed on and at a place called *Barbours* came onto a company of cavalry being in *ambush*, who fired into them killing three and wounding 13 men, then left their horses and each man for himself took to the woods. Our men killed some and captured others—how many I don't know.

Tuesday morning we marched to "Coopers" and found things just as they were left by the "Johnnies." Remained here twenty-four hours then went on to Baldwin. There we left our knapsacks and went in "light marching order." Thursday the 11th, we left Baldwin—marched to Barbours, 10 miles, then on to Saunders, 10 miles further, making 20 miles marching that day. That night it *rained*, and if ever I longed for a good fire under a friendly roof, and something good to eat, it was that night. I can't describe it so you can *realize* it, so won't try. I hope you may never *experience* such a time.

Next morning the sun came out and every one felt better. *Pigs* run wild here, and if you could have heard the squealing in every direction you would have thought that every man had turned *butcher*. It takes a southern pig to make a meal for a *hungry* man.

The Cavalry sent back word here that they had found

the enemy in force 2 miles from *Lake City*, and it was thought advisable to fall back a little, and on Saturday went back 10 miles to Barbour's. This is a good position to defend as there is a creek here and other things that make it a strong position. Here we remained just a week, drilling, digging, scouting, reconnoitering, etc.

Saturday morning (the 20th) we fell into line with 5 days' rations in our haversacks. I can't find out just how many men were in line, but as near as I can calculate, between four and five thousand men in all.<sup>36</sup> We marched to Saunders, and five miles or more beyond, when our advance cavalry came onto the enemy's line of skirmishers. As soon as the 7th came up, the 1st Company (ours) was deployed as skirmishers. We then advanced and drove the Rebels some four or five miles, when we came onto, or in sight of, a line of breastworks supported by a long line of infantry, cavalry and artillery.

Our general (Seymour) seemed to think the 7th ought to take the whole thing,<sup>37</sup> and we were ordered to advance right on. For the 7th to hear an order is to *obey*.<sup>38</sup> In less time than I can write it, our men had rushed right up within good fair range and with their seven-shooters, poured in such a fire as cannot be delivered by any other arm in use. "Johnnies" couldn't stand that long, and had to send out two Regiments to drive off our line of *skirmishers*. Just at this time the 7th N. H. came up, but the shot flew too thick for them and they broke and *ran*, I am sorry to say.<sup>39</sup>

36. This was a good estimate. Gillmore and Seymour gave the figure as 5,500. *Off. Rec.*, 288, 291.

37. Woodford's resentment against his commanding officer grows steadily.

38. Captain Skinner's commendation of the 7th Conn., though roughly typical of such statements, is timely here: "Of my command I can only speak in the highest terms, both officers and men exhibiting the utmost coolness, bravery, and patience; in fact, it was a feature to be noticed and praised that when called to perform arduous duties it was done with a cheerfulness really remarkable." *Off. Rec.*, 309.

39. It is interesting to note the difference in attitude between the commanding officer and the private here: Seymour blamed his failure to win a victory largely on the failure of the men in the 7th New Hampshire (*Off. Rec.*, 288-9, 290), but Woodford, for his part, regards the loss as the inevitable result of poor generalship.



It soon became evident that we were greatly outnumbered, as they were in strong force in front, and were moving to get on both of our flanks. Our men for the most part fought *well*, and the *darkies just as well as any*. (There were two regiments of them—perhaps more). But we were too few in numbers to do more than hold our ground, which we did til dark (5 hours), when we moved off the *bloody* field, leaving our dead and many of our wounded—also 7 pieces of cannon which had lost all their horses killed,<sup>40</sup> and most of the men.

We have lost *heavily* and it seems to *me, unnecessarily*. Probably you may see different opinions from mine, but it is *my opinion* that the battle should *not* have been fought, and *Gen. Seymour* is the only one to blame.<sup>41</sup> No one here has any confidence in him.<sup>42</sup> I hope he may do better next time.

We marched back to Barbours that night, making *40 miles' march and 5 hours' fight in one day*.

I may write more next time, but must stop for now.

Woodford

Jacksonville, Fla.

Feb. 27th, 1864

Dear Bro. Johnson :—

I've a great long letter to write you and I hardly know what to write first. I may have to "fall in" before I have written a page, but will commence now and finish when I can.

The day I received your letter we were preparing to

40. Checks well with *Off. Rec.*, 289.

41. Colonel Hawley, after the war, charged that the decision to advance beyond Baldwin was taken by Seymour despite considerable hesitancy from his staff. *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4, 79. Quoted in Davis, *Civil War and Reconstruction*, 285n.

42. The Rev. Mr. Johnson recalled in his "Recollections" (written when there were only three survivors of the regiment still living) that Olustee had brought disastrous results. "It is sadly depressing to men in the ranks to suffer because of the incompetency of officers in command. This was the grievance of our boys as I rejoined them in Florida. I have forgotten the general's name, but he was not of our regiment . . ." Resentment has a long life.

embark on some unknown expedition, or rather to some unknown destination. The regiment was reorganized for the occasion, being formed into four companies; Co.s A and G under Capt. Mills; Corp'ls Butler and Hatch Acting Sergeants, Charlie Hills and Lardner Acting Corp'ls. As Capt. Mills was in command Co. G had the right of the line. Sergeant Cook is color-bearer, the one who had carried the colors at dress parade not liking the idea so well in case of action.

On the night of the 5th of Feb. we embarked [details the same as above]. . . .

The expedition appears to be one of some size, as I counted some 25 vessels of all kinds as we passed up the river. Col. Hawley commands a brigade, and Capt. Skinner the regiment. . . .

We landed at Jacksonville about 1 o'clock and as soon as the brigade were all ashore we took three days rations and started for the interior, the 7th Conn. in advance, as usual. There was with us four companies of 1st Mass. mounted infantry, a few of the cavalry acted as advance guard for us, and the rest took roads to the right and left of us.

About three miles out of the city we came upon the enemy's pickets, who took themselves off as lively as possible; but I suppose Gen. Seymour thought we could catch them easy enough, and gave us the order to "double quick," which we did for half a mile or so, with knapsacks on. This soon played out. We thought if our mounted men could not catch the Rebs, we should not be likely to till they stopped. We kept on however at a smart step for ten miles, when we came upon a large camp that had just been left by the Rebs, and left in a hurry too, so much so that they failed to carry off a very fine rifled field piece. Here the infantry stopped for the night, but the cavalry and the 40th, who had joined the main body, pushed on to another camp, called Camp Cooper. It seems the Rebs intended to make a stand at that place, but when they heard our cavalry charging down the road they left their battery, which was in position, got onto a train of

cars that had just come up with reinforcements, and made off, and the next day when we came along, the guns stood there where they left them. The cavalry took seventeen prisoners at this place, and the same night pushed on ten miles beyond to a place called Baldwin.

As at the other places, so here, the Rebs ran out of one end of the town as our cavalry entered the other. The next morning they started again and went ten miles, when they came to a creek where the Rebs had torn up the bridge and lay in ambush on the other side, and as our men came up, fired into them killing three and wounding fourteen men.

After this gallant act the Rebs scattered to the woods every one for himself. Our men killed some and caught some of them, how many, I don't know. They then waited for us to come up, or at least, part of them.

We stayed at Camp Cooper one night, then went to Baldwin and stopped one night. Here we left our knapsacks. Thursday the 11th we left Baldwin in "light marching order," marched ten miles without resting. Here we found the cavalry and the wounded men. After getting a cup of coffee we were told we had ten miles further to go that night. It seemed to me that I *could not* do it; for with all the marching I ever did, I never felt so lame and sore as at that time. But no one knows what he can do till he gets where he is obliged to do it. We "fell in" and marched ten miles to a place called Saunders, making twenty miles march that day. We thought John's Island was a hard time for us; but our trip down here has been a *series* of Johns Islands marches, and part of the way reminded me of that time, for we had some miles of just such marching. Florida is a great level piece of woods (pine) full of swamps, just the place for skirmishing.<sup>43</sup>

43. This letter to Johnson, a fellow "veteran", has a more professional tone than Woodford's other letters. Such terms as "skirmishing" are not explained in this technical letter.

The night we got to Saunders it rained and was *cold*, and if ever I spent an uncomfortable night, that was one of them. The wind blew and the rain *poured*. We were all tired out and *hungry*. We built fires and sat down and let it rain....

By the way—I have not told you anything about the towns we passed through and I may as well do so now. Jacksonville is quite a place. A good many of the buildings are brick, built in good style, and show that they were built by Northern men. A good part of the place has been burned, part by the Rebs and part by our men; but there is enough standing to show what it has been. Baldwin is composed of a depot, tavern, half a dozen shanties, three *railroads* and a *rail fence*. Barbours is a house, barn, three shanties, two rail fences and a *creek*, where our cavalry had the skirmish. Saunders has a depot, tavern, and one or two houses. The houses between these places are few and far between, in fact, it is a brand new country, and for *my* part I can't see what there is in here worth sending an *army* after; but I suppose Gen. Seymour or some other general does.<sup>44</sup>

Saturday, for some reason or other the whole force moved back to Barbours.<sup>45</sup> This is a good position to hold, as the creek is deep, and can be crossed only in certain places. Here we lay a week, but not *idle*. Every day we had a scout, battalion drill, or something else of the kind. Gen. Seymour does not believe in soldiers lying still. If there is nothing else, he will have them put on everything and march out five miles or so and back just for exercise. He is very unpopular among the men.

Sat. the 20th we took five days rations, and with two

44. Gillmore explained to his superior officer that the occupation of Florida between the Suwannee and the St. Johns Rivers was desired to procure an outlet for cotton, lumber, timber, turpentine, and other products of the state, to upset the Confederate commissary department's railroad utilization and troop provisioning system, to obtain negro recruits for the Union army, and to restore Florida to the Union. Gillmore to Halleck, Jan. 22, 1864, *Off. Rec.*, 279.

45. Reports of a mounted force on the right flank caused Gillmore to order Seymour to withdraw his advance units to Baldwin. *Off. Rec.*, 283-4.

light batteries, three darky regiments, and five white ones in all, started for Lake City, the Seventh in advance of the infantry, and the cavalry in advance of us. We went to Saunders and five miles or so beyond, when our Cav. skirmishers came onto the Reb's line of skirmishers. As soon as we came up, the 1st and 2nd Co.'s were deployed as skirmishers (1st Co. deployed, and 2nd held as reserve) and sent right forward. As soon as we advanced, the Rebs retreated and kept just out of shot for five miles or more, when we came in sight of their line of earthworks and a long line of battle of infantry, cavalry and artillery. (We had kept up a running fight all the way with their skirmishers.) We had the order to "forward"! and in less time than I can write it we rushed up where we had a good fair sight of Rebs, and such a *cracking* you never heard from the same number of men, for it is impossible to fire so fast from any other gun in the service as from our little rifle. Each man of us had a tree to cover him, and every one took good aim. As soon as the rest of the regiment came up *they* were deployed, that is, they scattered, every man taking a tree and fighting on his own hook, just like skirmishers.<sup>46</sup>

It seems the commanding general was taken by surprise, not thinking to find the enemy there in force. The regiments were brought in one at a time and formed in line right in the hottest of the fire, and it is no wonder that some of them broke and ran, as some did.<sup>47</sup> Our

46. Davis: statement that "The Southern troops took advantage of natural cover as the Virginians under Washington in Braddock's army had done a hundred years before," (*Civil War and Reconstruction*, 292) based only on a Confederate's comment, "Our men sheltered themselves behind the trees ... thus gaining considerable advantage over the enemy, who used the trees to a less extent," (*Off. Rec.*, 341) seems to be overdrawn. It hardly takes into account the training and instinctive common sense of at least the veterans among the Federal troops.

47. The official dispatches relating to this episode form a good example of how officers sometimes protect each other's reputations by blaming disaster loosely on "the men." The two officers directly involved in the *conflict of orders* that led to the breaking of the 7th New Hampshire told a clear story of that mistake on their part. Brig. Gen. Seymour nevertheless turned in a report which passed over this episode and blamed the breaking of the regiment *on the men themselves*. They were, he said, "conscripts and substitutes, of a very inferior class." *Off. Rec.*, 304, 311, 290.

regiment stayed at their place in the front until our ammunition was all expended, when we went back and formed in line, lay down and waited for more ammunition. The darky regiments fought as well as any, and lost heavily. I don't call myself competent to judge, but I am told it was a very severe fight. The shot came in showers, and near enough to me; but I did not get a scratch, thanks to a kind Providence. . . . Sergeant Cook was hit on the head by a spent ball which knocked him down, but he soon recovered and took the colors again.

We soon found we had "caught a Tartar," for the Rebs were three to our one at the least calculation, and after fighting five hours we were obliged to retire from the field, leaving our dead and wounded,<sup>48</sup> seven pieces of artillery, and more or less of small arms. Very likely you have seen the account of the battle and our loss, which is more than *I* have.<sup>49</sup>

The loss from our Reg't (or Battalion) is 78 killed, wounded and missing. As soon as the wounded who could be were got into wagons, we commenced our retreat, and this time the 7th Conn. took the *rear*,<sup>50</sup> and at two o'clock Sunday morning were at Barbours, having been gone 20 hours, in which time we had marched over forty miles and fought five hours. The 7th Conn. won the praise and approval of the commanding general, and although it has always stood as high as any regiment in this department, it never had so good a reputation as now. Col. Hawley was under the hottest of the fire and was as cool as though on dress parade, and in fact, the whole regiment, with very few exceptions, acted *well*. The line of skirmishers rallied on the colors, and formed a line and "dressed up" as coolly and with as much precision as though on drill, with the bullets whistling and the shells

48. Seymour tried to obtain the Federal wounded on parole to give them medical treatment, a policy urged on him strongly by his chief medical officer. Brie. Gen. Finegan refused this request. *Off. Rec.*, 301, 329-30.

49. Woodford believed Johnson to be in Maryland or Connecticut at the time.

50. During a retreat the rear is, of course, nearer the enemy and therefore more dangerous.

screaming around us. Not a man showed any disposition to *run* (that *I* saw) and when we moved off the field we went in good order.<sup>51</sup>

Sunday morning we continued the retreat, as information was received that the enemy were following us with 15,000 men. Again the 7th was chosen for a *rear guard*, although our *place* was near the *right*. Our Co. deployed as skirmishers, and in that way marched back to Baldwin ten miles through swamps. I sha'n't try to tell you how I felt, for I can't. You can imagine.

At Baldwin we lay down and slept all night, although all the rest of the infantry had gone on, and the Rebs were reported advancing on us. We thought we would as soon fight as go any further that night. Monday morning we took our knapsacks and trudged along, and at night found ourselves in Jacksonville twenty miles away.

Tuesday Gen. Seymour said the 7th had done all that had been required of it, and done it cheerfully, and now they were to have a chance to rest. Accordingly we were allowed 24 *hours rest*; then fell in and marched out five miles, stayed 24 hours, and marched back; and here we are *fortifying*, chopping down woods so that the gunboats can have a fair sweep at the Rebs, etc., etc.

How long we shall stay I can't tell; long enough, I hope, for our feet to get well. . . . Our original New Britain squad is at last all separated. Will any of us meet again here?<sup>52</sup>

Now I must close this. I don't know as you can read what I have written; but it's the best I can do under the circumstances. . . . I wish I could see you a little while. I would ask more questions and tell you more stories (true ones) than I can write in a week, but I *must* stop. . .

#### Second Edition—March 6th

I have not sent this letter yet. . . . We have a good sized regiment now, about 700 men,<sup>53</sup> and if we ever get

51. This observation pertains to the 7th Conn. only.

52. "Here" clearly means "this World" rather than "Florida" in view of the other letters he wrote.

53. Additional personnel had arrived.

another so fair a sight at the Rebs as we did at Olustee, we will make them fear and hate the 7th Conn. more than ever. . . .

If you hear that we are *mounted*, you can tell them they *don't* know. The *Rebs mounted us rough shod* the other day, but we have no horses as yet, though there has been a rumor that we were to have them. I hope not, for I don't want to get used to the drill just for six months. . . .<sup>54</sup>

Now Goodnight. Yours truly,  
Woodford.

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54. His three year enlistment would expire in September, 1864.