



Love Letters from Dalton

Robert D. Jenkins, Sr., November 23, 2020

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Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin F. Jackson | Find A Grave

During the Confederate Army of Tennessee's winter encampment at Dalton, many soldiers wrote letters home to loved ones, or scribbled journal entries in their diaries about their experiences in and around Dalton.

One such soldier was Benjamin F. Jackson, of Covington County, Alabama. He had been married for just two years to Martha Matilda Stubbs Jackson, who gave him a son, James Thomas Jackson, before hostilities took him away from his family. They would have a second child during the war. During the course of the war, Jackson wrote 125 letters, most of them to his loving wife. He would be mortally wounded during the fighting at Pickett's Mill, Georgia, in May 1864, but before then, he would write of his experiences during his six months' stay in Dalton. His letters showed both a strong resolve to serve his country and to bring honor to his family, but they also reveal a sense of despair. Here are a few of them.

Letter from Benjamin F. Jackson, 33rd Alabama Infantry, to wife M. M. Jackson and son J. T. Jackson, Camp near Tunnel Hill, Georgia, December 3, 1863:

Dear Companion and Child,

I seat myself this evening while on picket duty to drop you a few lines which will inform you that I am in tolerable good health and hope these few lines will find you and all the family in good health

Mat I will now tell you something of our fighting, since I wrote you before we left Missionary Ridge on the twenty-second of last month for Knoxville, and got to Chickamauga. Stayed about twelve hours and ordered back to the Ridge where they were fighting. We marched back that night which was the twenty-third, and on the twenty-fourth we were ordered on the right of our line where the Yankees were trying to flank us. We moved to the right that night. On the morning of the twenty-fifth we moved about one mile further to the right where there was skirmishing going on. We built some breast work and I lay there behind our works and saw the men on our left fight nearly all day. We fired at them some but there were too far from us. They did not come in front of us only through skirmishes. They charged our men five times and were repulsed though they whipped our men on the Lookout Mountain and caused us to have to leave Missionary Ridge. We left there the 25th in the night. Our division had to go in the rear to keep the Yankees off our wagons, and we have had a very hard time. We had to run a piece and then stop and fight them till the wagons could get on a-piece and then run again. We had a right smart little fight at Ringgold, Georgia. We did not lose many men killed though several wounded, but nobody that you know. We gave them a good whipping there and they turned back. Our Division [Cleburne's] got great praise for bringing up the rear of our army. I will now bring my letter to a close...

Letter from Benjamin F. Jackson to wife Matilda, from Camp 33rd Alabama Regiment (Upper Spring Place Road—today's Underwood Street, east of Dalton), December 24, 1863:

Dear Companion,

... There is a good deal of furloughing going on in our Regt. now, though there are so many of the company that I belong to that has never been home that it is a bad chance for me. Though I am going to send up a furlough in about three weeks I think...I hope to see you soon. I am yours till Death.

Letter from Benjamin F. Jackson to wife Matilda, from Camp 33rd Alabama Regiment, January 24, 1864:

Dear Companion,

... Mat [Matilda], I have new reenlisting papers. We had great speaking on the subject of reenlisting company. I don't see why they all should not for the conscript holds them all, but those that desert, and if I ever come home I shall come honorably. I don't think this war will last till our time is out for our army is badly torn up and I think will be worse before two months pass ... We draw nothing [to eat] but bread as I call it. We east the beef we drew for three days rations this morning for breakfast and some of the boys said they could eat as much more Write often. I am yours as ever till Death.

Letter from Benjamin F. Jackson to wife Matilda, from Camp 33rd Alabama Regiment, February 21, 1864:

Dear Companion,

... It is cold weather to be moving up here. It is snowing here this morning ... I remain your loving husband till Death.

Letter from Benjamin F. Jackson to wife Matilda, from Camp 33rd Alabama Regiment, March 13, 1864:

Dear Companion and Child,

... Times are very dull here; the men are so badly disheartened that a good many are leaving here of a night. Some call it deserting.* Those that leave call it going to protect their families, which I think is a man's duty ... We are expecting every day to be called on to go out into battle again, which I feel but little like doing. I have, ever since this war has been going on, tried to keep a good heart, till now, and I have now given up as for leaving the army. I don't know as I ever shall do that though as for fighting I shall do as little as possible. There is a right smart of sickness in our regiment now ... I will close as I feel so bad, though I don't want you to be uneasy about me, for I have taken a very bad cold and that is what makes me feel so bad. So I will remain yours as ever till Death.

Letter from Benjamin F. Jackson to wife Matilda, from Camp 33rd Alabama Regiment, April 24, 1864:

... I will now state that the prospects here at the present are very good for a fight very soon. We are fortifying nearly every day and night. I was on detail this morning to take charge of a squad of men to work them but it rained so that we did not work. It is the opinion here that the biggest fight will come on here in a few days that has ever been. They are fighting in hearing of us nearly every day. That is the cavalry out in front but the Yankee infantry is advancing ... Kiss the children for me. I remain yours till Death.

Letter from Benjamin F. Jackson to wife Matilda, from Camp 33rd Alabama Regiment, May the 11 (last night in Dalton), 1864:

Dear Companion and Child,

I seat myself one time more in life to drop you a few lines which will inform you that I am up but not well. I am wore out marching. We have been running from one place to another for five days. We have not done any fighting yet, that is the brigade that I belong to [Lowrey's], but our forces here have been fighting every day for five days. I don't know how soon we may get into it, for the Yankees intend to try us. I was on the field where our men and the Yankees fought [at Dog Gap Mtn.]. I saw a great many dead Yankees. They charged our breast works on a high hill and our men killed a great many more of them than they did of us. We got to the field just as the Yankees fell. The Yankees then tried to flank us, get between us and Atlanta, and we had to run about 18 miles [to Resaca] and by when we got there the Yankees were back where we left. So we have been marching this morning, until just now, when we have stopped. I don't know how long we will stay ... So I remain yours, B. F. Jackson.

Benjamin Franklin Jackson never wrote his wife and family again. At dawn on May 28, 1864, his wife, Martha "Mat" Jackson, was awakened by the sweet sound of a dove perched upon her window. The dove sang to her with such a determined and mourning tone that she knew the dove had brought her news of her husband's passing. She got out of her bed, knelt, and weeping softly, quietly prayed. Her husband had just died.

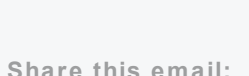
*Note: The level of desertions from the Dalton camps was so great that by January 20, 1864, Federal Gen. George Thomas, Commander, Army of the Cumberland at Chattanooga, Tennessee, reported that as many as 30 rebels a day were coming into their lines to surrender and take an oath of allegiance to the United States, and in Dalton, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston was having to shoot deserters in mass executions to prevent the army's disintegration.

Letters courtesy of Alto Loftin Jackson, a descendent of the Jackson Family, So Mourns the Dove, Letters of a Confederate Infantryman and his Family, Expedition Press (New York City: 1965).



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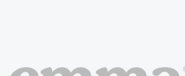
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