

EDITED TRANSCRIPTION – Original file: "Letter Jan. 25th 1864.tif"
Edited to enhance readability. Added notes are *{italicized-bracketed}*.

{The envelope is probably not the original as it is addressed to his wife's sister but the letter is written to his wife.}

{Envelope:}

{Postmark:} NEWBERN, ??? 14 ???

Mrs. Sarah E. Lester
East Saginaw
Michigan

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Headquarters 23rd Michigan Volunteer Infantry
In the Field five miles East of Knoxville, Tennessee
January 25th 1864

Dear Wife,

This is the first chance I have had to write in two weeks and I suppose you will think that something has happened to me for not writing sooner. Well, Susan, nothing has happened *{to}* me yet and I am well as usual and I would have wrote sooner if circumstances would have permitted me. We left our comfortable quarters at Strawberry Plains *{TN}* two weeks ago and took up the line of march for Dandridge *{TN}*, 18 miles from the Plains, and at the front. Well, we reached that place after marching two half days in the mud. We were ordered to move camp the next day to better ground and prepare winter quarters. Well, we had not more than stacked arms than the rebels made their appearance on our front in considerable force and fighting commenced and lasted until dark. Our forces held their line and finally drove them back. The firing was rapid and severe. No artillery was used until near dark and the rattle of musketry was like hailstones on a tin roof and was kept up without intermission for nearly three hours. Our loss was mostly in wounded, but how large I have not yet heard. Soon after dark we were ordered to move back to Strawberry Plains and we started

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about 8 o'clock and marched all night and only got two miles. We had to let the wagon train move in advance and over bad roads was necessarily slow and it was daylight before we could move with any rapidity. We marched until noon and then halted for dinner twenty minutes. Some of the men had something to eat and some did not. I had only a raw cold pickle that was saved from what we had to leave belonging to the hospital. As it rained most all day the mud was mixed up to the consistency of mortar and we kept on and reached Strawberry Plains at 4 o'clock tired and hungry. We camped near the house we occupied

previously to going to Dandridge. The 2nd Michigan Volunteer Infantry occupied the house and we were too tired to look up a better camping place, so we camped among the cedars around the house. The 2nd Michigan took advantage of our worn out men and stole most everything the men had to eat and cooking utensils. Our men drew meat rations that night and were too tired to cook it so went to sleep without supper expecting to have a good breakfast in the morning, but woke up to find everything that they had to eat most all stolen. As we are used to small rations we made up our minds to take it in good part and if we ever camp near them again they will have to look out for their traps as *{the}* boys have sworn to be even with them if an opportunity offers to do so. I had a good supper that night of boiled potatoes and meat and as I had been 24 hours without food or sleep I made a good meal of it and laid down on the ground and slept until morning, woke up and found myself covered with two inches of snow which had fell during the night.

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The next night we were ordered to cross the river as still as possible, our brigade being the last over, and we moved about a half of a mile from the bridge and halted until daylight while the bridge was being destroyed. The rebels made their appearance soon after daylight and shots were exchanged at long range. Only one man in our brigade was wounded slightly in the leg. About noon everything had been got away of any value and we started for Knoxville and marched down the railroad to within seven miles of there and camped for the night. Then I got another full meal and shared my bed of dry leaves with Quartermaster Davis and we slept sound until morning. Soon it was reported that the reb cavalry had forded the river and were coming. Well, we soon got in line of battle, our division on the left of the line and the 9th Army Corps on the right, our brigade on the extreme left. A line of skirmishers were advanced and we had not to wait long before the rebs made their appearance. We expected to have a fight, but were disappointed for it was not the intention of our general to fight for we were on the retreat. As all our trains were safely out of the way and nothing could be gained by fighting it was not deemed necessary to bring on a general engagement, so as soon as about a mile and a half of rebs got into line our line commenced to move to the rear, our skirmishers keeping them at a safe distance. And I tell you it was a grand sight to see our two lines of infantry move back all at once and a line of skirmishers covering our whole front which was at least a mile long. We moved back three miles and within four miles of Knoxville

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when we were ordered to make a stand and fight, but the rebs concluded not to fight us. Our skirmishers kept them at a safe distance and the rebels would not come any nearer so we sat down and looked at each other until dark, then went into camp, our skirmishers doing the picket duty. We only lost one man named Reuben Spayde of Company A. No other man of our regiment was hurt. Another man of the 111th Ohio was killed, that being all the casualties I have yet heard of. We had two (2) taken prisoners that got behind the night we left

Dandridge. We now are about six or seven miles from Knoxville on the advance doing outpost duty. We are to go into winter quarters here and send all of our horses and mules north as there is no forage here. No officer below a division commander is to keep a horse and only one team to a regiment. Brigade commanders will not be allowed a horse, so you see we have all go on foot after this. All of the citizens in East Tennessee that are dependent of the government ~~ar~~ are likely to become so are to be sent north so there will not be anyone but soldiers here now. The country is stripped of everything in the shape of eatables and forage and in fact the whole country is laid waste. Fences are most all burned and it is now as a wilderness except the trees which there is not one half enough to fence it again. It will take a long time after the war is over to restore East Tennessee to life again. Such is the havoc of war; women and children drove from their houses upon the charity of the world without food and clothes to keep them from suffering. The people of East Tennessee never will forget the ruin that war has brought upon their once beautiful country. I could write a great deal more of the doing of the armies here but have not time. This is the first time that I have unpacked in two weeks and that is the excuse for not answering your kind letter before. The weather is very fine now and the sun burns my back as I sit writing. Spring will soon be upon us now while you have just begun with winter. As I have neglected business to write this to you dear wife, do not think that I have forgotten to write for not writing sooner. Remember me to all inquiring friends and write soon to

Your Affectionate Husband

D. D. Keeler

Adjutant D. D. Keeler

C^o Tro 23^d Mich Vol & Infantry
In the field five miles East of Knoxville Tenn
January 23rd 1864

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with winter. God I have neglected business to write this to you dear
wife do not think that I have forgotten to write for not writing
I never remember me to all my inquiring friends and write soon to
your Affectionate Husband D D Keller

Adjt D D Keller



Mrs Sarah E. Lee
East Saginaw
Michigan