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A Letter to A. C. Van Raalte from His Son, Ben

Ben Van Raalte

Clarence Jalving

Nella Kennedy

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— as Ben wrote it
Camp near Punkinvine Creek, Paldon Co., Ga., May 31, 1864

'Paulding'

A letter to A. C. Van Raalte from his son, Ben, who reported that "Last week we fought nearly all week but our company was lucky and didn't lose a man to the bullets. One evening we were shelled very heavily and a piece of shell hit Wilterdink in his side but fortunately he had a Testament in his pocket which save his life. It hurt him alot but he stayed with the company."

Original in the Archives of the Netherlands Museum.

Translated by Clarence Jalving.

[See the published letters of Wilterdink, edited by Al McGeehan.]

NB.
name change

trasc.
+
trast.

Camp near Pumpkinvine Creek, Paulding County [Georgia]
May 31, 1864

Loving Father,

I am very happy to report that I can write this in good health and hope you are also well. Sunday evening we left the front and were sent to the rear to get some rest. It was impossible to get any at the front either day or night. We were relieved by the 1st Division which has not been at the front as yet. They are all new recruits. Now we are about four miles to the rear and are guarding the trains. Last

[2]

week we fought nearly all week, but our company was lucky and didn't lose a man to the bullets. One evening we were shelled very heavily and a piece of shell hit Wilterdink in his side, but fortunately he had a Testament in his pocket which saved his life. It hurt him a lot, but he stayed with the company. Another was hit but his knapsack saved him. Several others were hit—too many to tell about. One day our company was ordered to go to the skirmish line. We had to clear a ridge there, which we did after a couple of hours of intense battle. That day I had plenty of chances to

[3]

shoot at the Rebs, but they also shot at me. I got a bullet through my shirt between my belt [*tusschen mijn belt door*]. It was quite a fight.¹ We charged them, but they knew how to run. The Rebs are in their breastworks again. It appears they wish us to besiege them because they have not yet made general attacks. Our rifle pits are opposite their works, and close by. They have the habit these days of making charges at night but so far they have always been repulsed with heavy losses. They will get tired of that after a while. My opinion is that much will have to happen before this campaign is concluded.

[4]

Whoever lives through it will have much to tell.

June 1.

It is very warm today. Cannonading is going on continuously and reinforcements are rolling in daily. We haven't been sent back to the front as yet but expect to any moment. The Rebs are finding themselves in a tight spot. Last night I got a letter from you and I see that you know the news almost as well as we, if not better. At the front where you would expect to know the news, one hears nothing but the music of bullets.

I will finish now,
greet everyone from me,

Your loving B. Van Raalte

Please be so good as to send me a day book.² I lost the one you had sent to me.

¹ *Dat ging er nog al kort* [?] *langes* [correctly: *dat ging er nog al van langs*].

² It is likely that Ben meant a book(let) of daily devotions, but it could also be a diary.

[in margin:] We get very little mail. I don't believe it operates very regularly.

[Revision of Clarence Jalving's translation: Nella Kennedy,
February 2008]

Camp Near Pumkinvine [Pumpkinvine] Ceek [Creek]
Paldon [Paulding] Co. [Georgia]
May 31th 1864

Liefhebbende Vader,

Het is met veel genoegen dat ik uw in goede gezondheid mag schrijven en hoop dat het zelvde met uw mag weezen zondag avond zijn wij van het front gekoomen wij zijn wat naar de rear gestuurd om wat te rusten want aan de front kreegen wij geen rust dag nog nacht. wij wierden gereliefd door de first division die zijn nog niet naar de front geweest het zijn alle maal nieuwe recruits. nu zijn wij zo wat vier mijlen van de front en guarden hier de trains. Verleeden

[2]

week hebben wij zo wat de heele week zo wat gevochten maar onze Co: is heel gelukkig geweest wij hebben niet een man aan de koogels verlooren. een avond wierden wij zwaar gesheld een stuk shell vloog wilderdink tegen zijn zij maar had gelukkig een testament is [in] zijn zak en dat bewaarde zijn leefen het deed wel veel zeer maar is tog bij de Co: gebleefen. en ander kreeg het op zijn knapsak en dat bewaarde hem en vershijden meer te veel om op te noemen. een dag werd onze Co: gedetailed om aan de skirmish line te gaan en toen moesten wij een rige klearen het welk wij deden met – na een paar uur scherp vechten dien dag heb ik goed kans gehad

[3]

om op de rebs: te schieten maar zij op mij ook. Ik keeg nog een koogel door mijn blouse tusschen mijn belt door. dat ging er nog al kort langes. wij maakten er een chage op hen maar zij wisten van loopen. De Rebs zitten nu méer in haar werken het schijnt wel of zij ze hier [?] willen beseiged willen want genaral atackts worden er nog niet gemaakt onze rifel pits zijn flak tegen over haarlui werken zij hebben tegen woordig een moode om charges te maaken in de nacht maar zij zijn altijd nog te rug gemoeten met zwaar verlies dus dat zullen zij wel moei worden in het vervolg van tijd. Mijn gedachten is dat er nog veel gebueren zal eer dat deeze Champaign gesloten zal worden

[4]

die het door leeft zal veel weeten te vertellen

June 1. Lieve vader

Het weer is van daag warm kannoneeren gaat gëstaadig voort and reinforcements are roling in dailey. wij zij nog niet naar het front gestuurd het welk ik gouw verwacht. De Rebs krijgen het benauwd gisteren avond kreegen wij een brief van uw en zie wel dat uw het niew bijna zo goed weet als wij zo niet beeter. aan het front daar men news zouw verwachten daar hoort men niets als koogel muziek

nu zal ik maar eindigen
groet allen van mij

Uw Lief. B. Van Raalte

Wees zo goed en stuur mij een dag boekje ik heb het mijne dat uw mij gestuurd heb verloren.

[in margin] mail krijgen wij heel wijzig ik geloof niet dat zij heel geregeld gaat

[Transcription: Nella Kennedy,
February 2008]



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Pickett's Mill
May 27, 1864
Estimated casualties: 2,100 (Union: 1,600, Confederate: 500)

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Pickett's Mill remains a "misunderstood" encounter. Referred to in general terms like "The Dallas Line" or "Hell Hole" by Union soldiers, three separate battles south of Kingston are frequently confused and often combined. Today most historians view the battles as three distinct encounters:

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- May 25 - New Hope Church
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Sherman and his Generals
Left to right - Oliver O. Howard, John "Blackjack" Logan (seated),

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William B. Hazen, William Tecumseh Sherman (seated) and J. A. Mower.

Benjamin and Malachi Pickett move to the rugged, densely forested hills west of Atlanta to build a business and their families. William Tecumseh Sherman moves there to avoid a battle. Late on a Friday in the Spring of 1864, 14,000 men from Oliver O. Howard's 4th Army Corps move towards the Pickett's farm and grist mill on Little Pumpkinvine Creek and arguably the worst Union defeat during the Atlanta Campaign.

The story of the Battle of Pickett's Mill begins ten days earlier, as Sherman occupies Kingston, Georgia. In 2 weeks the red-haired commander from Ohio marches half the distance between Chattanooga and Atlanta avoiding Joe Johnston's entrenched positions by outflanking him at Dalton and Resaca. The speed at which he is moving has alarmed most Georgians and the entire Confederacy. Johnston lay waiting in Allatoona Pass, eight miles due east of Kingston and along Sherman's all weather lifeline, the Western and Atlantic Railroad.

Sherman chooses to venture south into the hills of Paulding County. The move presents major logistical problems, trying to feed 100,000 soldiers deep in enemy territory. Additionally, as his path grows longer the lines of wagon trains must be guarded.

"Fighting Joe" Hooker runs into resistance near a Methodist church. Confused by inaccurate maps and hindered by poor communication, Hooker waits for additional men. Sherman orders an attack, trying to outflank the Rebels before they have time to fortify the position. The engagement at New Hope Church stuns the General, simply because he is not expecting strong Rebel resistance.



Ken Burns' Civil War

Caught off-guard, with his men beginning to suffer from a lack of rations, Sherman orders Major General Oliver O. Howard to attack the left flank of the Confederate Army. General George Thomas, Commander, Army of the Cumberland, and Howard scout the area and decide to attack what appears to be the end of the Rebel line at Pickett's Mill.

With Little Pumpkinvine Creek to the east men under the command of William B. Hazen advance on the fortified Confederate line. Hazen knows the attack is a serious mistake, but he follows the orders. Comprised mostly of men from Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, Hazen comes up against the best commander in the Western Theater and possibly the entire Civil War, Patrick Cleburne.

At 4:30 pm on that Friday in the Spring of 1864, the Civil War comes to Benjamin and Malachi Pickett's farm. It is not a pleasant day.

Hazen begins to move toward the Rebel line. During the initial advance some of his men become confused and end up east of the intended objective. Additionally, Hazen's support on the right flank was distracted by dismounted Confederate cavalry firing from the other side of Little Pumpkinvine Creek. Stranded on the middle of one of the few open areas in the field of battle, Hazen's men come under incredible fire. Additional support moving from the Union line is delayed by the thick underbrush. When Hazen realizes the lack of support he has no choice. The order is given to retreat.

Pumpkinvine and Little Pumpkinvine Creek got their names from the curving, winding path they take, much like a pumpkin vine. This also illustrates the unusual, hilly nature of the terrain.

Pumpkinvine Creek begins at the southern end of the Allatoona Mountains, and after a nearly 20 mile run ends about four miles from where it started.



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At 6:00 pm General Thomas J. Woods orders a second attack. This time the men have a shorter distance to go because of the advance made by Hazen. The brigade, under the command of Colonel William H. Gibson, is routed by Cleburne's men.

Confederate Hiram Granbury has successfully repulsed attacks by the Federals. He asks and receives permission to advance to sweep the area in front of him for Union soldiers. At 10:00 pm Granbury's Texans begin their advance. The Federals meet the advancing line with a single volley, then withdraw. With this brief blast the battle is over. Based on the number of dead at the battlefield, Pat Cleburne estimates the Union losses at 3,000.

The battle of Pickett's Mill is a decisive victory for the Confederates. Sherman, for the first time during the Atlanta Campaign is now faced with the possibility of retreat. He must return to the railroad to supply his army. He begins movement along the Dallas Line to the north and east on May 29th. On June 1, 1864, he is relieved to find that General George Stoneman's cavalry has taken Allatoona Pass with little resistance.

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die het door leeft al veel
weten te vertellen

June 1. ~~De~~ Lieve vader
het weer is van daag warm
Kanonneren gaat gestaadj voort
and reinforcements are coming in
daily. wij zij nog niet
naar het front gestuurd het
welk ik goom verwacht. de Reb.
Wijgen het benaamd gisteren
avond kregen wij een brief
van u en zij wel dat u
het niem bijna so goed weet
als wij so niet beter. aan
het front daar men niems
goum verwacht. daar wort men
niets als Hoogel musiek.

nu zal ik maareindigen
groet allen van mij

Wv Lief: B Van Raalte

Wees so goed en stuur mij
eer dag Boekje ik heb het
mijne dat u mij gestuurd het
verlooren.

ik heb het boekje niet
gekocht nu ik heb het
niet goudt. ik heb het
niet goudt. ik heb het
niet goudt.

19

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5/31/64

Camp Near Pankin river Beck Palden Co.

May 31st 1864.

Liefhebende vader

Het is met veel
genoegen dat ik u in goede
gesondheid mag beschrijven en
hoop dat het selve met u
mag weesen. Zondag avond
zijn wij van het front gekomen
wij zijn wat naar de rear gestuurd
om wat te rusten. want aan
de front kregen wij een rust
dag nog nacht. wij werden
gereliefd door de first-division
die zijn nog niet. maar de front
gemeest. het zijn alle maal niem
recruits. nu zijn wij so wat
vier mijlen van de front. en
quander hier de trains. Verleden

meek hebben my zo wat de
heele meek²⁰ wat gezocht maar
onse Co. is heel gelukkig geweest
my hebben niet een man van
de kogels verloren. een avond
vorden my maar gesheld een
stuk shell vloog nimmerdink tegen
zijn zij maar had gelukkig een
testament is zijn zak. en dat
bemaarde zijn lefen het deed
heel veel een maar is teg
by de Co. gebleef. en ander
kreeg het op zijn knapsak en
dat bemaarde ~~met~~ hem
en verschijden meer te veel
om op te nemen een dag
werd onse Co. gedetaild
op aan de skermink line te
gaan en toen moesten my
een ~~aan~~ eige klearen het.
welk my deden met na een
paar uur s'herp vechten dien
dag het s'k goed kans gehad

om op de ebs. te schieten
maar zij op mij ook
Ik kreeg nog een kogel
door mijn blouse tusschen mijn
belt door. dat ging er nog al
koud langes. wij maakten er een
charge op hen maar zij misten
van loopen. de Pebs s'iten
nu meer in haer merken het ~~besigt~~
mel of zij de kiva nillien besigend
willen want genarat atackts worden
er nog niet gemaakt onse rifel
pits zijn flak tegen over haarlui
werken zij hebben tegen moordig
een woode om charges te
maaken in de nacht maar
zij zijn altyt nog te rug geweest
met spaar wilies dus dat
dullen zij wel moet worden in
het vervolg van tyd. mijn
gedachten is dat er nog veel
gebeuren zal eer dat deze
Champaign geslooten zal worden

Dear Father:

I am ^{very} happy to report that I ^{can write this} am in good health and hope you are also well. Sunday evening we left the front and were sent to the rear to get some rest. It was impossible to get any at the front either day or night. We were relieved by the 1st Division which has not been at the front as yet. They are all new recruits. Now we are about four miles to the rear and are guarding the trains. Last week we fought nearly all week but our company was lucky and didn't lose a man to the bullets. One evening we were shelled very heavily and a piece of shell hit Wilterdink in his side but fortunately he had a Testament in his pocket which saved his life. It hurt him a lot but he stayed with the company. Another was hit but his knapsack saved him. Several others were hit - too many to tell about. One day our company was ordered to ^{go to the SKIRMISH LINE} clear a ridge ^{and after a} and after a couple of hours of sharp fighting we did so. That day I had plenty of chances to shoot at Rebs but they also had shots at me. I got a bullet through my blouse at the belt line. It was quite a fight, ^{but we} ^{charged them} ^{but} ^{know how to run} and they retreated ^{The Rebs} and are in their breastworks again. It appears they wish us to besiege them because they ^{make} ^{no} ^{general} ^{attacks}. Our rifle pits are ^{opposite} ^{their} ^{works}. They have the habit of making charges at night but so far they have always been repulsed with heavy losses. ^{I think} they will get tired of that after a while. My opinion is that much will have to happen before this campaign is concluded. Whoever lives through it will have much to tell.

Morning of June 1.

It is very warm today. Cannonading is going on continuously and reinforcements are rolling in daily. We haven't been sent back to the front as yet but expect ^{to} ~~to be sent back~~ any moment. The Rebs are finding themselves in a tight spot. Last night I got your letter ^{from you and I set} in which you said that you know the news almost as well as we, if not better. ^{Yes,} at the front where you would expect to know ^{the} ~~it,~~ one hears nothing but the music of bullets.

We get very little mail. I am afraid that it doesn't travel regularly. Please send me a day book. Lost the one you sent before. Now I must close.

Best regards to all.

Greet everyone from me

Now I will just have to do Avish
Your loving *g*

B. Van Raalte

dat. ging er kort van langs

dat. ging er van langs

it came close