

John H. Ervine Civil War letterMS.0331

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1861 June 18

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1861 June 18

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English

Creator

Ervine, John H. (John Hamilton), 1831-1917

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Manuscripts stacks

Repository

Virginia Military Institute Archives

Administrative Information

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Biographical / Historical

John Hamilton Ervine was born on January 28, 1831 in Bridgewater, Rockingham County, Virginia. He was a farmer before enlisting as a 2nd Sergeant in Company I, 1st Virginia Cavalry on May 22, 1861. He was hired substitute and discharged in October 1862 and then enlisted in Company I, 4th Virginia Infantry on October 23, 1864.

Ervine was wounded in action and imprisoned at Ft. Monroe, Virginia in March 1865 and was released on May 31, 1865. After the War he was farmer in Brownsburg, Rockbridge County, Virginia. Ervine died near Brownsburg on January 31, 1917.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of one letter (dated June 18, 1861) from Confederate soldier John Hamilton Ervine of Bridgewater, Rockingham County, Virginia, to his wife Ellen J. Ervine. The letter was written from camp in Berkeley County, West Virginia. Primary topics are troop movements, value of horses, camp life, helpfulness of civilians in providing food and water, and family news.

Keywords

Confederate States of America. Army—Virginia Cavalry Regiment, 1st
Soldiers—Virginia—Correspondence
Virginia—History—Civil War, 1861-1865
United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Personal narratives—Confederate
Correspondence
United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

Online Access

This letter is available online.

Description of Subordinate Components

Letter to Ellen J. Ervine

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/5288

Unit Date 1861 June 18

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Creator Ervine, John H. (John Hamilton), 1831-1917

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Transcription

Berkeley County June 18, 1861

Dear Ellen: As we are not marching today I have another chance of writing, I shall write again. I have not heard from home yet except by Andrews letter which was dated the 9th. I know you have written several times but I have no chance of getting them. Yesterday was an exciting time with us as the enemy was at our old camp (Camp [Clover]) & we expected a fight but they did not come, they retreated it is said to Maryland. We were marched to Martinsburg early yesterday morning & taken in a corn field over a hill from the road & was kept waiting for 7 or 8 hours dismounted with our guns in hand ready to mount at the [word] & two companies sent out to meet the northern men & get them to advance on us but they had not the spunk. There is now 8 cavalry company in this regiment all well mounted on the very best of horses & about 16 or 18 thousand infantry within a few miles at a little town called Bunker Hill. Since I wrote to you at Winchester we have been marching all the time. I will try & give you the routes.

About 1/2 hour after I finished my last letter to you we left that place to cover the retreat of some troops from Sheperdstown. Then to Charles Town to cover the retreat of the troops from Harpers Ferry. We got to Charles Town early in the morning & stayed there for several hours, while we were there the road near filled with soldier from the ferry as full as you ever seen a road filled with stock cattle. I do not know how many thousand this I can say the road near full for about 12 or 15 miles one regiment after another as close as they could march for the baggage wagons. After they got past we left that place & come about three or four miles & stopped until about ten o'clock when we left & marched about 30 miles taking a back road to a point back of Martinsburg about 2 miles where we had to sleep on the ground with out our tents so as not to be easily seen. Now we are about 3 miles from Mburg on the Winchester road. There was three companies left here this morning to go down to see after the enemy & join Whites that was out in that part as a scout. I expect there will be a skirmish today if they can find the boys. News come to camp several times today that they had been plundering houses stealing negroes & stock of all kinds. Several family have moved by here today & a great many persons passing in vehicles of all kinds fleeing from the fiends.

I heard that the R-ham Regiment had gone to Romney but do not know it to be certain. I told Capt Yancey today if there was any more men detached from his company for express riders I wished to be one as my chance for getting letters would be better as I would go as often to Winchester as any other point. We are treated with all the kindness that any one could wish by citizens. Everyone has water and provisions ready for soldiers which is either sent to camp or handed out as we pass. I have no idea which way we will go from here no more than you do & can't tell until we get out on the road which way we will go so secret are the moves kept. I have been quite well since I left home & did not find it so hard to sleep on the ground as some did. I suppose the rest of the family think I ought to write to them but I can't get the time to do so & they must not complain for I will not write to anyone unless I can write to you oftener than I have done. I don't want you to imagine so many things about me as you have done especially that I will be hurt in a fight for I do not have any fears of being hurt if we do get in a fight. I have not thought that anyone [would] be hurt after hearing from those fights where two men at Romney [could] keep back several hundred. It is a bad show for hard fighting with abolitionists is said & believe to be true that 2 men in a bridge there with several negroes to [hold] for them made several hundred retreat.

We had our horses valued today & at big figures as well as I can guess the average must have been at \$175. My horse was valued at \$175 and saddle & bridle at 18. It is said by everyone that we have the best lot of horses in the regiment. Col Stuart said about 40 of our men are the best mounted men he ever seen as good the [---star] company is [here] the one other said who had such fine horses. There was some 20 of our horses went to & over \$190. The highest was 225, only one as low as a hundred.

I wish you could see us getting meals. You used to think that we was dirty but if you was to see the beef strewn about on the ground & men cooking off it you would think we did not care for dirt. Our fare is nought nothing but beef or bacon & wheat bread. The bread is baked. Coffee we have to toast & grind ourselves. We have had sugar all the time until a few days ago the supply gave out.

Tell grandmother I will write to her soon & will try to give her all the news in camp. Tell Maggie & May for me the dear little things Pappa will come back some day & bring them candy & will tell them so many pretty story about little girls giving Pappa bread & butter & pies. Tell Father I want him to get me some goods for pants as my pants is getting somewhat worn and will not last me very long. Line the legs below with something strong as they soon cut through with the stirrups [tethers] & send me ten dollars by someone for I may want more money if I should get a chance to go home. I can't go on horseback as they will not let a horse go out of camp unless on duty. Though I will not come back without [Percey] unless he is killed or shot or I lose him some other way. You must not try to send any provisions to me for I can't get it. There is a number of boxes there now for our company in Winchester.

When you go home to your Ma's I want you to take Ginnie with you & ride her as much as you wish to do & take good care of the colt. Tell me if Henry Applegate will stay in our house until I get back & when you expect to leave & how everything looks.

All the ladies or most of them are leaving. I seen Miss Sue Pitman last Friday. She said she would leave for Shenandoah the next day also said she was going to write to Mary H. in a few days. She come to the gate & cheered the soldiers as they passed & gave some of them water while two or three servants did the

same & Mrs. Arch Pitman.

I want you to give every soldier you see something to eat as I should hate to have it said that you refused a soldier food when I have been fed by everyone almost. I will stop. Tell Sister I will write to her soon. I want to hear from Howard & Sam when you write again. I will perhaps get some of your letters tomorrow as Dr. M[---] will send his servant to Winchester for the mail for our company. If I should fail to get one I will be badly disappointed worse than I ever have been before. I will now close this. Give my love to all of the folks at Fathers. Tell Father if I don't write to him not to think I don't want to do so as our chance for writing is bad and mailing worse. I want you to kiss the children once a day for me until I get home. Then I will get to take the job off your hands. Good bye, from your husband John H. Ervine