

1862 - CHRISTMAS DAY FOR THE SOLDIERS

By Leslie Korenko, author, Kelleys Island 1862-1865 – the Civil War, the Island soldiers and the *Island Queen*

While Kelleys Islander families missed their sons at the family Christmas dinner, the soldiers celebrated a different type of Christmas. The 101st near Nashville Tenn.

“Christmas Day – Dear Brother E. [Erastus Huntington]. Your very welcome letter of the 15th or 16th was received yesterday while we were forming the company to march. We had the tents stowed away in the wagons and the little shelter tents strapped on our backs. After marching out as far as the picket lines we turned around and came back to our old camps, pitched tents again and are now under orders to be ready to march at any time. There is firing of cannon and artillery pretty much all the time now. As I am writing it can be heard distinctly.

Monday afternoon while we were on picket, a forage train was passing our station at the same time the rear was being attacked. You will understand that these trains are very long. Each Division guards its train with a part or a whole of a Brigade of Infantry and one or two sections of Artillery as they did this time. The troops march behind the train of the Division to which they belong. One to 300 6-mule teams makes a long train with a part or whole of a Brigade of Infantry and one or two sections of Artillery as they did that time. They were attacked with Cavalry but our forces, not having enough of Calvary, gave them grape. There was one killed and two wounded on our side, could not of course tell how the enemy suffered.

You may think it strange but it is nevertheless true that firing directly in port as there is today fails to create the least excitement among the troops in camp. I had not the least idea before I left home that the chances of getting into a fight were so small as they are. The soldiers all see this and it is probably the reason why they think so little of hearing guns fired.”

Another soldier remarked on the new rifles the company received. Lewis Day noted that on “The morning of December 24, 1862, brought with it a great surprise for all our boys. Bright new Springfield rifles were given us in exchange for the Austrian horrors we had so long carried. We went wild over the change and acted much like little boys with new sleds. At once we became anxious to try our new guns on the enemy-nor had we long to wait.”

Simon Huntington also commented on the rifles. “Yesterday morning the 101st was furnished with the new Springfield rifle, the very best guns there is in the service of our nation, so it is said. Any way, we have a gun we have confidence in. The first lot of guns we had, the Austrian rifle, were very poor affairs, not more than half of them would go off. We had no ball screw to draw the lead, so that often times the powder would get wet and we had no means of getting the load out to put in a fresh one when going on picket. I have been on picket here when I knew my gun would not go off if fired. We now have a good gun, a ball screw, tube wrench, screw driven and an extra tube for each gun and a stopper for the muzzle also. In short, we are fixed out in fine style. They say the State of Ohio furnished them. If so, ‘Bully for the State of Ohio.’”

“It is warm enough today to lie around without any coat on. Just think of it, Christmas Day and so warm. It has not frozen for over a week now, and then not very hard. The roads are first rate here now, not having much of any rain lately.

Brad [Severy] and George Wright are not well yet but I think are improving. John Ward has been having a siege of the tooth ache for a few days past. His face is badly swollen but his teeth have stopt aching. Bill Hutton seems to feel well enough now. As to your humble servant, he is all right and writing on a full stomach. I have been cooking up some biscuits this forenoon for the mess. Geo. Wright, Brad, Bill and John Ward, Charles M’Gottteghan [McGettigan] and Henry Pope have not come up yet. I understood that Pope had started for the regiment and turned back on account of ill health.

I doubt whether he will be with us again this winter. I forgot to wish you a Merry Christmas at the beginning of this but do so now with a will as well as all the rest of the

Springfield Rifles replaced the ‘Austrian Horrors’ used by the 101st.



Islanders. We have no drill today, but will probably have dress parade this evening. Simon Huntington.”

The soldiers of the 101st would not enjoy a peaceful Christmas. On Christmas night, a meeting was called by General Rosecrans and the decision made to march on the position of the Confederate Army where Bragg was expected to fight at Murfreesboro or possibly Shelbyville. One soldier, Lewis Day, described the scene.

“The shrill notes of bugles, the long roll of drums, the commands of officers, the marching of companies and regiments into position, the deserted camp – all indicated even to the dullest of us that a move of very unusual importance was being made. Well did we know, and quite fully did we appreciate that the army was moving forward to engage in a momentous struggle – a struggle which involved the possession of one whole state and half of another...”

By December 27 the troops were approaching Knob Gap and on December 29 they marched on Murfreesboro where they engaged the enemy. However, bad news would reach the island: one missing and one injured in the battle.