

James Sweney Letter from Vicksburg - July 5, 1863

Twenty-four-year-old James Sweney moved west and enlisted in the 17th Illinois Infantry. While his family was sheltering in their home during the Battle of Gettysburg, Sweney and his unit were in Mississippi waging the Siege of Vicksburg. On July 4, 1863, just a day after the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, Union forces also captured Vicksburg. The tide of war had shifted in the Eastern and Western theaters.

Dear Mother,

I take this present opportunity of answering your kind and welcome letter which came to hand yesterday and I was very glad to learn that you were all well at the time it was written and I hope when this comes to hand it will find you enjoying the same blessing. Vicksburg has fallen we have the strong hold of the confederacy of the south West. We captured everything inside of the walls, we captured about 18,000 stand is small arms besides the Light and heavy artillery we have about 25,000 prisoners in all. They surrendered on the 4th instant, and it will be a fourth long remembered by the soldiers of Grants army, it is one of the greatest and glorious achievements of the day, we have marched over 200 miles[,] fought five Battles and captured Vicksburg in two months and a few days. We fought the enemy at Champion Hills [sic] at port Gibson Jackson Raymond and at the Big Black River Bridge. This was all done in two weeks completely routing them and capturing them and their artillery, if Grant don't [sic] get a name now no General ought to have one in this War, but what does it amount to. We are conquering them here and subduing them here and are being beaten back in the East. [W]e never can gain any thing [sic] for it takes all or nearly all we captured here to exchange for what we loose [sic] there. We now will soon make another draw on them at port Hudson. Banks has them surrounded and now we will assist him in taking the place. Then the waters of the Mississippi will float under the stars and stripes again. The star spangled Banner was planted on the Court House at ten o'clock in Vicksburg, but it took 47 days active and engergeting [sic] sieging to make them come to terms but [unreadable] up the place but it saved the lives of a good many soldiers, for I think that Grant was going to storm it if it was not surrendered by the fourth[.] They marched on the outside of the fort and stacked their arms[.] I stood up on the hill and saw them marching out and stacking their arms[.] Some of them are willing to stop fighting but most of them will fight again as soon as they are exchanged[.] I believe Grant let them keep their side arms that in the officers, but every one must say that they fought and held out untill [sic] the last hope failed them[.] Of any assistance from Jo [sic] Johnson they looked and yearned for im but he failed to come up in their time of trouble and need[.] Our men have started after him now in hot pursuit[.] [H]e is supposed to be some where [sic] near Jackson Miss[.] Vicksburg is not a very nice place or very large but it is a formidable [sic] place fo [sic] an army. There is a great many houses that will show the effects of this for many years where the shells went crashing through them leaving their marks and shattering other to pieces when they exploded in them[.] I had a letter from Will a few days since he was not very well[.] [H]e had fell and hurt his breast on a [illegible] and to help the matter the same day he stepped on a butcher knife and cut his foot severely, and I also had a letter from [illegible] Snyder[.] [H]e was well and at Plymouth NC. I am sorry to hear that Dan Benner is so unwell but I hope he will be well soon[.] [G]ive my best respects to him when you see him[.] I would have written sooner but the enemy was hovering around there so close that I thought that it would not get through if I would write soon, I have written you all the news so I will close[.] You may think I was hard up for paper but not so[.] This is Confederate papper [sic] and I wrote this for curiosity to give my love to sis and John and all inquiring friends[.] [T]his leaves me well at present[.] I do not know where our next move will be, we may stay here some time, send me a 25c worth of stamps. I sent Will 20 dollars to sent to you as soon as the way is clear no more[.] [M]y love to you dear Mother from your son.

J.H. Sweney Co K 17th Reg Volls