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James K. Ferguson diary

Title: James K. Ferguson diary
Collection No: MSS.39
Creator: James K. Ferguson
Extent: 0.25 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1862-1863

Abstract: The collection comprises the Civil War diary of James K. Ferguson (d. 1864) of the 19th Arkansas Infantry Regiment, written between April 1862 and May 1863.

Donor: Dale P. Kirkman, Memphis, Tennessee, 1965.
Processed by: Stephen Edgerton, December 1990.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
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Publication date: 2018 February

Biographical information

James K. Ferguson, born circa 1838, was probably from Madison, Indiana, on the Kentucky border. He enlisted in the Confederate army in Wilton, Pike County, Arkansas, on October 19, 1861 and was assigned to Company C of the 19th Arkansas Infantry under Colonel C. L. Dawson—organized at Nashville, Arkansas, in November 1861—and made a corporal. Ferguson served on the northern Arkansas border, in the Indian Territory, and then returned to Arkansas. Ferguson was promoted to First Sergeant in May 1862, and when the regiment was reorganized in August 1862 he was promoted to Second Lieutenant and assigned to Fort Hindman at Arkansas Post. He was captured after the surrender of Arkansas Post to Union forces on January 11, 1863. He was imprisoned at Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio, and then exchanged at City Point, Virginia, on April 29, 1863, and returned to his regiment. He became quartermaster of the 3rd Brigade, Churchill's Division. The regiment was reorganized and consolidated with the 24th Regiment in September 1863 and fought at the Battle of Chickamauga. It was then consolidated with the 8th Regiment in November and fought in Georgia. Ferguson died in Gilmer Hospital, Marietta, Georgia on June 26, 1864.

Scope and contents

The volume opens at Boggy Depot in the Choctaw Nation (later Oklahoma) and traces Ferguson's campaigning through various Arkansas military encampments until his capture at the Battle of Arkansas Post (Fort Hindman). He described his imprisonment at Camp Chase, Ohio, and exchange. Ferguson ended the volume as he traveled south to rejoin the Confederate Army and learned about the consolidation of his regiment and brigade. A note in the diary indicates that Ferguson apparently kept other diaries but the location or survival of these is unknown.

Throughout the diary Ferguson referred to daily activities, the health of the men around him, food, rumors and reports of battles, and the locations of his camps. Internal evidence indicates that Ferguson was a native of Indiana and during the war had a mother and sisters living in Madison, Indiana, on the Kentucky border. While he was in prison at Camp Chase, he corresponded with his family. At the outbreak of the war Ferguson appears to have been living in Pike County, Arkansas, and he mentioned the names of several people in that part of the state whom he visited while on furlough. The last few pages of the volume contain personal financial accounts.

Subject terms

Confederate States of America. Army. Arkansas Infantry Regiment, 19th.

Ferguson, James K.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives.

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Appendix 1. Transcription (selected)

1862

Wednesday, April 23. Page 2

"There is sickness beyond measure in camp; One company of sixty four men, has fifty four unable for duty."

Wednesday, April 23. Page 4

"Gen Pike has located his head quarters 15 miles south of Boggey Depot on a small river named Blew It is about 10 miles from Ft Washtaw. His intention is to entrench and put up fortifications."

Saturday, May 3. Pages 11 -12

"Our success on the Mississippi is rather discouraging. Although we have been victorious at the battle of Shiloh Church yet they are encroaching upon our soil. The enemy has taken island 10 and have now in possession Nashville to Shelbyville Tennessee and also Huntsville Ala. with many other places of considerable note. "

Friday, May 9. Page 13

"Gen Pike has given Col Dawson leave to let all those that has wheat growing to go home and harvest it. As I have none I requested Capt Watson to sell me a few acres so that I could go home. But he promised to let me go in July."

Monday, May 12. Page 14

"Congress of the Confederate States has past an act to retain all one year troops two years after the expiration of their first year."

Wednesday, May 14. Page 16

Refers to Colonel Stanwatey, Cherokee leader and Confederate officer.

Thursday, May 15. Page 17

"The conscrip act has been past by Congress. We will have to serve three years from the date of our inlistment unless the war ends sooner. I have just seen a late Washington Telegraph... anouncing the surrender of Island 10... Gen Gant himself was taken with about three thousand men, only five hundred escaped,..."

Wednesday, May 21. Page 20

"Ft McCulloch is situated on a high roaling peararii on south west side of Blew river (a tributary of Red river) on the over land mail rout 10 miles above Ft Washtaw. "

Thursday, May 22. Page 21

"Gov Rector has evacuated Little Rock and has maid his head quarters at Arkadelphia on the Ouchita River."

Wednesday, June 4. Page 24

"Orders were issued last eve for our Regt to move this camp to the left wing of the brigade which will be a mile above on Blew."

Thursday, June 5. Pages 24-25

"Orders were recd last eve from the General for no more furlows to be granted under any circumstances, Depriveing the young men entierly from visiting their homes. Whilst all the old and maried men in the Regt has recd furlows for 40 days to go home to attend their crops and harvist their wheet. Not with-standing the conscription act permitts all those under 18 and over 35 to go home after the 16th of July their places in ranks to be supplied by men at home between those ages. And we young men who have volunteered for the term of twelve months will be retained for two years longer unless the war ends sooner."

Lordsday, June 8. Page 27

"There has been several desirters from the Regiments of Col Taylors Col Alexanders Caverlry and Major Woodrofs batalion of artillery, or at least they have furlowed themselves."

Monday, June 9. Page 28

"Last evening on dress peraid orders were read (from Major Gen Hindman) for Dawson Regement of infantry with the two atatched companeys, and also Major Woodroff with one hundred and twenty men and six peases of artillery with one hundred and fifty rounds of amunition, to march as soon as passable for Little Rock."

Monday, June 9. Page 29

"...I once had a romantic desire to visit the Indian territory to see the country and learn the ways and habits of the natives. But I am now all most willing to confess that I am satisfied to go back among sivilization."

Wednesday, June 11. Pages 29-30

"Yesterday those preson of our Regt were paid their comutation money, which amounted to fifty dollars each."

Describes the "wild Indians about our camps" coming in to make a treaty with General Albert Pike. "... in aperiance they are Indians and disgusting, some of them are allmoast naked men and wemen, ..."

Saturday, June 21. Page 36

"Memphis and Ft Pillow has been surrendered to the Federals (or rather they were evacuated) the enumey has now the intire river in their hands."

Saturday, July 5, 1862. Page 39

"A report is in circulation that there is an armistis for sixty days, and that the forigne powers are making propositions for the settlement of the diffrentis between the north and south."

Tuesday, July 8. Page 40

"This morning the regement took up the line of march for Little Rock....Our Regement will now number over fifteen hundred men."

Friday, July 11. Page 42

"Col Dawson recd a message to order in all the men yet behind and to hasten on, as there is a battle expected amediatly."

Lordsday, July 20. Page 45

"There is but little respect paid for the Lordsday with moast of the soldiers."

Thursday, July 24. Page 47

"Our diet principle consists of beef corn bread molasses and rice coffee, sometimes rhio & bacon."

Tuesday, August 5. Page 51

"The duties that I have to perform keeps me constantly employed. I have the roal to call at 5 a m & the morning report and detail to make out, attend guard mounting at 8..."

Thursday, August 7. Page 51

"The news from the east is very favorable on our part The northeran dispatches acknollages a compleet rout of their great army before Richmond."

Lordsday, August 10. Page 53

"...we have had nothing but corn bread and molasses for three or four days, until last night when we got a little fresh beef."

Monday, August 18. Page 57

"The examination of the commissioned officers of our regiment commenced today. Some of our company officers are somewhat alarmed for fear they will not be able to pass an examination. Four men deserted from Company D yesterday morning."

Thursday, August 21. Page 58

"I went to see the large gun planted on the river bank. It is the largest that I have ever seen. The balls are about seven inches in diameter."

Friday, August 22. Page 59

"There is a man now walking the parade ground between the camp and the Captains tents with a plank elevated on a pole six feet above his head with the inscription 'Stolen Pants, in large letters ...While at Ft Smith he made way with the clothing of some of the men that died there. Therefore this punishment to walk the parade ground for three successive days two hours each day, has been inflicted upon him."

Wednesday, August 27. Page 60

"Col Dawson has recommended me to Gen Shaver for Lieut of this company. I will have to undergo an examination. If I pass, I will receive the appointment."

Friday, August 30. Page 61

"I received orders last night to take my position as 2nd Lieutenant of Capt Robersons Company."

Wednesday, September 3. Page 62

"The Congress of the Confederate States has passed an act ordering out all up to forty five years of age."

Friday, October 3. Page 67

"I have got a furlough for thirty days and am going to start home in a few days, if I am able." [Goes to Murfreesboro, Pike County, Arkansas.]

Monday, October 26. Page 72

"Our regiment has been sent from Clarendon to Arkansas Post. They waded through water from one to two feet deep for forty miles."

Wednesday, November 12. Page 75

"On Monday I sent my things on with the wagons that was going with clothing to the regt. I am going to start for the Post in the morning. I will go horse back."

Wednesday, November 19. Pages 76-77

"I arrived here [Arkansas Post] last night from home. A few hours after I came the camp was thrown into a great state of excitement, occasioned by the picquets bringing in the intelligence of the enemy being 15 miles below here and advancing the Lieutenant of the picquets was killed as taken prisoner...But alas a sad mishap has befallen us, the late heavy rains has rewined about two tons of powder for us in the magazin, which was our main dependance for defending the Fort... This morning at daylight we moved down the river one mile and formed in line of battle, the negroes were put to work throwing up breast works. We soon all took a hand and ran a ditch for a considerable distance."

Saturday, November 22. Page 79

"The excitement about the attack has rather died away."

Wednesday, December 10. Page 82

"I have been busy making out pay rolls and attending to the Quarter Masters business which I have now in charge."

Thursday, December 14. Page 84

"H D Medlock, our mess mate was detailed to take the money that belonged to our company home to the families of the soldiers. We sat up until quite late last night putting up each mans money in packages."

Friday, December 25. Page 87

"There has not been much going on today in the way of disturbances on account of the men not having liquor to get intoxicated. There has been some horse racing going among those who take an interest in such things. "

Saturday, December 29. Pages 88-90

"Last night he [Capt. Nutt] fired into a federal transport six miles below the mouth of the Arkansas and the Mississippi bound for Vicksburg laden with munitions to war ... She ran up the white flag and drifted to the Mississippi side of the river ... She arrived here this evening she is named the Blue Wing ... The federal officers came out on the guards and was quite sociable. Some of our men had partaken a little too freely of the liquor that was very plenty full on board. There was a very large lot of mail on board, including all the late news of the north. The federals intend attacking Vicksburg on next Thursday."

After reading letters from the wives and others to Federal soldiers in front of Vicksburg, Ferguson comments, "That such a lot of vulgar low licentious talk ever came from a white civilized people (Though they may be from black people) ..."

1863:

Sunday, January 9. Pages 92-93

"The enemy's boats are about 3 or 4 miles down the river ... The number of the enemy's gunboats and transports are variously estimated some say there is near seventy in all ... We anticipate an early attack in the morning."

Monday, January 12. Pages 93-100

"The last two days has been a horable seris of aciton. We are now all prisoners of war the intire army has been captured. I have come out safe and sound with only a few burn shell marks on my face and a hole through my hat. I have lost every thing that I had except what I had on my person. I saved my journal by taking it into action with me."

"On Saturday am the gun boats advanced to feel our position. Shelling our rifel pits and the woods along the river. At one oclock our forces fell back to the Fort, finding that we stood in danger of being out flanked and coming in on our rear. "

Pages 95-99 describe the battle.

"At a few minutes after four oclock there was a white flag raised about the centre of the line." One of the first Federal soldiers over the Confederate breastworks was a man Ferguson knew as a boy in Indiana. The man was in the 67th Indiana. After surrendering, Ferguson met many old acquaintances among the Indiana regiments.

Thursday, January 15. Pages 101-102

"This evening finds me on board the Samuel Gaty going up the Mississippi destined to parts unknown to any of us ...The intire 3rd Brigade is on board. The 1st Brigade is on board the Schraskey. The 2nd is on the John J. Roe all going up the river together....Our intire loss killed and wounded was 63. The enameys loss was estimated at 2500."

Sunday, January 18. Page 103

"All the plantations along the river that belonged to the southeran people has been destroyed. On friday eve-g we reached Memphis and lay over there untill this morning. The southeran principled citizans of Memphis was very jenerous and showed us great kindness. They brought us clothing and other articles that added to our comfort."

Tuesday, January 20. Page 106.

"The distress on board excells any thing that I have ever witnessed before. The sick is prostrated all over the cabin floor, and but very little aid can be rendered them and it is daily increasing. "

Thursday, January 22. Page 108

"The Lincoln administration has issued an order for no more rebel officers to be paroled or exchanged untill further orders...Last night I became so disgusted at the unpleasant odder of the cabbins, that I took my place of rest out on the guards ."

Sunday, January 25. Page 110

[At St. Louis, Missouri] "I did think that I would watch my opertunity and run away from the feds and go to see my mother But I have come to a different conclution. I think it beneath the dignety of a man, To visit his native land and be derided with contempt and live in dread of being called in castidy."

Saturday, January 31. Pages 111 -115.

Ferguson comments on the Federal guards, members of the 37th Iowa, the Silver Greys, who were all old men and "looked upon us as desperadoes or some vicious animals." Later guarded by the 12th Iowa, many of whom were released prisoners of the Confederates, who treated the prisoners very well.

[Wednesday night]"We past through North Vernon at the junction of the Madison & Indianapolis rail road some time dureing the night which is within 22 miles of Madison, my native home. But I was denyed the privalege of visiting the loved ones which I suppose to be there."

"Myself and nine other of our Texas officers are in a ranch together. We have goten it arranged in a tolerable order and are doing very well. We have received much more provisions than we have been able to consume. Gen Churchill is quartered in the next ranch to that of ours."

Friday, February 6. Page 119.

"It is heartrending to wittness the seans that meets our eyes every day in Camp Chase, there is nearly two hundred citizan prisoners here. No reguard has been paid to age or sect. There is weman old men and children. Some have been in confinement for 16 months. "

Lordsday, February 8. Pages 119-120

"We are alowed to get papers twice pr day. But they are only such sheets as the authorities see fit to let us have. There is a great discention among the different parties of the north. There is likly to be muteny and war among themselves. I have seen a report of the wounded federal soldiers that were brought from Arks Post It far excedes the number that I had estimated ... Our men were very cool and deliberate only shooting when they saw an oportunity. As for my self I gave them seventeen well directed rounds."

Wednesday, February 11. Page 120.

"The small pox has made their apperance in the prison."

Saturday, February 14. Page 122

"Yesterday afternoon I recd a letter from Mother sister Margaret and Christina. But lo how greatly I was surprized to find them quite hostile towards me ... Margaret ridicules me a great deal for being a reble and would have me take the oath and come home."

Wednesday, February 18. Pages 127-128

"The people of the north are divided into several oposing parties. The abolition party that suports the administration are becoming very uneasy about the large majority of democrats that are now no ways backward about expressing their opinions against the Lincoln administration. They are termed copperheads or southeran sympethizers."

Mentions a speech in Congress by Clement L. Vallandigham, U.S. Congressman and Southern sympathizer from Ohio.

Monday, February 23. Page 129-130

"...several of the prisoners makeing an atemt to escape by means of an under ground rout ... They had the means of escape nearly compleated, when they were betrayed by one of their own mess."

"The acceptance of negro regiments into the service the united states are utterly demoralizing the their white troops and creating mutiny in camp."

Wednesday, February 25. Page 135

"He [brother-in-law George Dodds] came with letters from high authority to the governer to procure my releas on oath. He was quite confident that I woud accept the proposition But I respectfully declined, giving as my reason, that I could not take it without sacrificing my principles and sence of honor and also betraying trust."

Wednesday, March 4. Pages 138-139

"It is curantly reported and believed that we will go off on exchange in a few days....Andrew Johnson the federal governor of Tennassee ...came in to the prison this afternoon ...he recd a cool reception from our officers. When he came to Gen Churchills quarters the General would not receive an introduction to his honor. And he went off cursing, saying he would remember the rebel."

Tuesday, March 10. Page 143

[Received a package from Miss Belle Bridgeford of "Lewisville, Kentucky" after he had written to her father.] "The above [letter from Miss Bridgeford] shows the sentiments of our copperhead friends of the north. And their arderous disier to assist the unfortunate rebels that fall into the hands of the enamey."

Friday, March 13. Page 146

"We have plenty of provisions and that of the best quality such as light bread vegetables beef and bacon."

Sunday, March 29. Page 150

"This day brings about the anevercery of my 24 birth day."

"Friday the 27th was the day appointed by Jefferson Davis as a day of fasting prayr to be observed through out the Confederate States. We therefore the soldiery of that government procured permission from the authorities of the prison to observe the day."

"All officers in this prison... were sent off on exchange yesterday morning. We are in hopes of going soon also."

Thursday, April 2. Page 153

"Great honor is due our friends in the north for the asistance they have rindered us. There is daily large amounts of money recd here by the prisoners from their northeran friends."

Friday, April 3. Page 155

"Although this one of the first class prisons in the United States yet it is anything but pleasant at inhabit it. Camp Chase is a place of considerable magnitude From the best of my gudgement I would suppose that from 8000 to 10,000 men could be quartered here... One third of their men here are reported to have desirted a few nights cince. There is great dissatisfaction among the federal troops here and in their army."

Saturday, April 4. Page 156

"We had a splendid dinner. Much better than we would have had, if we had been in camp in Dixie. We are all in good heart with the expectation of leaving here next week on exchange."

Saturday, April 11. Page 161

"They examined us as we went out, and rapped us of the best of our clothing. They striped us of our coats shirts pants and blankets as we went out." [exchange]

Lordsday, April 12. Page 163

"...we arrived in Philadelphia... Great crowds gathered from all directions as the cars moved slowly through the streets. Great union inthusiesm was manafasted, hissing at us... Man woman and childeran came flocking to see us as if we were a cargo of wild beasts."

Thursday, April 16. Page 169

"Fort Delaware is situated on a small island...forty miles south of the City of Philadelphia in the Delaware Bay...The restrictions here are not so ridged as at Camp Chase."

Sunday, April 26. Page 172

"Yesterday we all took a parool of honor , preparatory to being sent south. It is reported to us that all we are waiting for now is a steamer to carry us away and she is hourly expected."

Saturday, May 2. Page 175

"As we asended the [James] river we could see the fearful effect of the war upon the soil of the old dominion state."

Monday, May 4. Pages 178-180

"This eve- at dark we were put ashore from off the Steamer State of Maine which was quite agreeable to our feelings as there was no accomidations what ever on board."

"Our Arkansas Poast men have been at this place [Petersburg, Virginia] untill this morning. They were armed and sent on to Richmond in case of an emergency."

Monday, May 11. Pages 181-182.

"On Saturday the 1st brigade left for Vicksburg the 2nd left yesterday at 4 oclock. We will follow them this afternoon... They have no use for us here as Gen Lee has completely routed and defeated Gen Hookers army and have driven them across the Rapahaunock again... The lamentable news reached hear this morning of the death of Stone Wall Jackson ...His remains reached this this city [Richmond , Virginia] at 12 oclock. Moast all the business houses in the city has cloased for the day."

Thursday, May 14. Pages 186-187

Ferguson refers to the people in east Tennessee: "They are as they have the name of being. Some what tainted with abolition principles ."

Traveling through Tennessee he notes: "But at evry bridge along the line of rail road that we have traveled there is a fortyfication and troops stationed for their defence & protection.

Tuesday, May 19. Pages 189-190

"We are now encamped ½ mile south of the town of Tullahoma. Our entire Devision is now together again. There is many other troops encamped in this vicinity. This is the central depot to for the suppley of the army."

"From some unknown reason to us we have been sent to Brags army instead of Vicksburg. I am fearfull that we will not be able to get on the other side of the river to our original command ."

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