

Joel Hughes

Lucile Hitt Hollingsworth

1972

Joel Hughes came to Choctaw County (now Webster County) in Mississippi with his family when he was seventeen years old. They settled on land adjoining that of the Hitt's and the Gary's.

Joel was a farmer, but he also wrote legal papers. In that time, it was considered a great art to be able to write a beautiful hand. I have several samples of his handwriting with flourished and curlicues. When the Civil War started, Joel volunteered and was killed in the Battle of Shiloh. His wife died in Texas where she had gone with her daughter Mary Emma Hughes Hitt in 1897.

Joel and Elizabeth had five children, but I don't have the dates of birth of all of them. The youngest, Joel David, was the baby his father couldn't remember (in the letter) except that he looked like his brother James.

I will give Joel Hughes' letter (the last one he wrote) that he wrote to his wife Elizabeth. I have the original. It tells what kind of a man Joel was better than I could. Also, it is interesting because it describes the conditions, and agrees with what has been written in history. Bruce Catton, in "The Civil War," telling about the Battle of Shiloh, writes that Sherman and Grant are attacked by the confederates from Corinth under General Albert Sidney Johnston, "the green-as-grass rebels marched 25 miles, ambling along, whooping and shouting, firing their guns just to see if they would work, driving their officers into a frenzy."

Joel Hughes was a Lieutenant when he wrote this letter, but was elected Captain of his company the next day. The Margaret mentioned in his letter was a house servant.

Here is a transcription of Joel Hughes last letter, written to his wife about ten days before he was killed.

Camp near Corinth, Miss., March 27th, 1862

Dear Lizzie,

As I have a chance to send you a letter by hand I will write a few lines tonight to let you know that I am well. I sent you a letter day before yesterday by mail giving you a description of my tower of sickness after we came up here. I wrote to you that I had got well but the exposure in getting with the Regiment gave me a bad cold. With this exception I am now in good health. I have no war news to write. It is expected however that there will be a fight near here in a short time. The pickets of the two armies have been fighting some between this place and the Tennessee River a distance of about twenty miles. It is reported by pickets that they are concentrating heavy forces fifteen or twenty miles from this place. We have a heavy force in this vicinity and all along the Railroad between this place and Tuscumbia and it is now believed by all hands that we will have a big fight between here and the river. One or two of the Regiments of our brigade went off in that direction last night after dark without tent or anything but their blankets. We are all ready for them. Our company and Battalion is armed with the finest kind of Springfield muskets plenty of cartridges and all right. The only thing in our way is sickness. There are several of our boys very sick. Tip Holland, Wm. Arnold, James Simpson and several others are very sick. I have 32 in our company on the sick list. We have 100 men in our company; 20 of them are at home and 79 in Camps and 1 in the hospital at Tuscumbia. Poor fellow he is there without any of his friends with him and I fear that he will die. We are going to send one or two of the boys off to a house in the morning. We have no straw or plants to sleep on here. James Ingram is discharged and he will start home in the morning and carry this letter to you. Captain Pittman will also go home if he is able. He had resigned and been discharged or will get his discharge tomorrow. We will elect another Captain in a few days. I cannot tell who. There are but few however in the Company qualified to discharge the duties of the office. Some of them want me to run but I don't think that I shall.

Lizzie I want to hear from you so bad. It only lacks one or two days of being a month since I heard from you and I am uneasy about you for fear some of you are sick. Poor little children how bad I want to see them all. Lizzie I have forgot

how the little babe looked and I cannot recollect how he looked to save my life only by knowing that he (we belong to General Wood*s brigade the 1st of this division) favored Jimmy, but it is impossible for me to see any of you at anytime soon as there is no chance to get a furlough home. The 15th Regiment came to Decater Ala while I was there sick. Several of the boys went to see me. They were all nearly worn out. Dear Lizzie, let not our separation depress your feelings too much, but be as lively as possible and take care of your children and what you have around you. Be careful about fire and make Margaret be careful. I am uneasy about the old chimneys for fear they will burn up all you have. Then be careful how the fires are left at night. Don't let none of the little children go to the spring by themselves. There is no day passes by but what I think about these things and it makes me uneasy. Lizzie send me a letter by everyone that is passing. Tell my friends to write to me. There are several of our boys at home. Dennis Dil is there, James Goldson, Nail Dickens. Tell Taylor to find out when they start back and write by them, as letters are uncertain by mail. Tell Taylor to write to me and tell me how he is getting along. If Billy has not volunteered tell him to stay at home until I come home if I ever do. Lizzie it is getting late and I must close my letter. When I go to bed at night I can feel the cold ground under me though the weather has moderated and is tolerable pleasant here now. All of our neighbor boys are well. I saw Jacob Bingham the other day. He was well. They are now at Iuka. Nearly all of our officers are sick except myself and Langston. I have boxed up one pair of pants and my overshirt and started them home. I will not want them nor cannot carry them with me. I am allowed a company desk, and the Major allows me to carry my trunk in place of a desk. Lizzie do for yourself and children the best you can, and if any of you gets sick have the doctor with you. Write and give me all the news. Nothing more at present but remain your Absent friend until we meet again. Goodbye Lizzie.

Direct yours thus:
To the care of Lt. D.J. Langston
Commanding
Co. D of 3 Batt.

Miss. Infantry.

Or send your letters to Albert Young and let him back them for you.

Signed: Joel Hughes
Corinth, Miss.