

Hdqtrs 1st Brigade 1st Div, 19 Comp
In Bivouac on Bayou Vermillion, La.
November 10th 1863

My dear Friend

The sight of huge camp fire and its cheerfull jolly look of its darting vivid flames set me into quite a reverie and finally “put me into” writing to you. How you must be enjoying yourself tonight--just cold enough to make home doubly attractive--the little ones to lay out plans for the evening’s entertainment & rather the evening’s interruptions etc. while the elders interest themselves in “talking up the administration.” As we say in the army, “bully for them.” This is the first cold evening we have had—generally we are dressed as coolly as possible—tonight we are heaping on wood in order to keep even comfortable.

I called on Major Gen’l Franklin. I handed him the letter your Bro. so kindly gave me, but as good luck would have it, Major Hoffman a.a.g.. of whom you may have heard spoke of, is on his staff as a.a.g.. He made command [] with him in the Generals []. Until I was assigned to this Brigade I found the Gen’l a pleasant Gentleman very socially inclined. He gave me my choice of 5 Brigades – which was the best he could do for me. And I concluded to be assigned to this as it’s considered a great honor to be of the 1st Brigade Weitzel’s Div. generally known as the fighting Div. We are continually in the front, and where a fight is there are we. Col Leone of the 116th NYV is at present commanding the Brigade—he is what is generally termed a sporting character—as is most of his staff but is withal a good fighting officer and has a fine reputation as to ability etc. to command a Brigade. I could have been ordered to Baton Rouge for duty if I had preferred, but I do not care to play soldier. I could also have been assigned to Gen’l McMillan of Ind. But he and I could never agree, as he can dispose of less water than any person I know of and plays Euchre incessantly [] etc. though I hear he is improving. I trust for our Country’s sake he is.

I have bought quite a horse rather wild—he is a Roan—can jump a 4 foot fence “at a standing jump.” One fault he has is that he has been run at a race—consequently wants to race with every horse he comes up with. He is a perfect beauty. I p’d \$140.00 for him. The officer who sold him had been thrown several times and was evidently afraid of him—as I was anxious to learn riding I purchased him on account of his fiery restless spirit. I have not yet found a second horse. I am using an artllry horse which I borrowed from the Government for a few days until I could purchase one. One horse could not stand the wear & tear that I am obliged to give him—not to mention the fact that they seldom are under cover—and are badly fed—i.e. they have nothing but corn of the poorest quality for feed.

Gen’l Banks landed safely in Texas, though of course you have heard that long before this. We had quite a celebration at our headquarters in honor of it—consisting of music by the band, dancing by the contra bands, singing, telling yarns, and having a jolly good time. It broke up toward the wee sma hours. Gen’l Weitzel & his staff and a great many

other officers were in attendance. It was the [] party of the season but very little whiskey being around "cause why" couldn't get it.

We had quite a reverse the other day. The rebs made a bold cavalry dash and captured four or five hundred prisoners though they were greatly disappointed in not having accomplished more than they did. They lost a large number wounded nearly double that of ours. Our loss was 40 wounded and about 10 or 12 killed. This Country here is a "facsimile" of Texas being one immense plain as far as the eye can reach. The only water to be had is to be found in buffalo holes, i.e. every two or three miles there are ponds generally 40 or 50 ft across and 3 or 4 ft deep, where cattle go to water. The water is quite muddy, anything but agreeable to drink. "Tarantulas," the celebrated poisonous spiders, are quite numerous here. Last spring when I came here one of our officers was bitten and died from the effects of the bite in less than four hours.

There is a species of spider here, small black, which bite very severely. Gen'l Maguiness was bitten on the great toe a few days since and it was feared it would prove fatal, though he is now recovering.

Gen'l Banks is doing a very good thing in mounting all our old regiments on the Creole ponies which are so numerous here. The nature of the country as well as the enemy we are to encounter render this [] necessary.

New Orleans is very dull at present. The river is very low, rendering it difficult to navigate.

They are still raising a large number of Col'd Reg'ts here, though privately speaking it is outrageous the number of incompetent men that are receiving positions in them. I have come to the conclusion that it is not my duty to accept a commission on one of these Reg'ts. A Lt. Dicky who used to be on the same staff with me is made a Colonel [] Brigade. He is about 24, has no capacity, is thoroughly incompetent to discharge the duties. If they wish a company etc, it is not ability, but how many men can he furnish, that recommends. You would be surprised to know how lightly a Colonel of these troops is looked upon not having as much respect shown him as a Lieutenant in a white Regiment. I am very much disappointed, as I would like to have made application for an appointment in one of these Reg'ts. But at present I must give up all thoughts of it.

But I have lengthened out my scribble already to more than I had intended. I hope you still find time to decipher it, as it will be almost as difficult as reading the ancient hieroglyphics do.

I rec'd a letter from you a few days since. I have rec'd quite a number of other letters which had forwarded. You can hardly realize with how much anxiety we all are looking out for letters. We get nothing else to read unless it be an occasional Herald or Times for which we pay a quarter after it is nearly a month old.

Present my best regards to all, particularly to Mrs. Roosevelt & to the Young Folks.

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Believe me as Ever
Yours Sincerely
Oliver Matthews
Aa

[In the Margin]

Address me to
1st Brigade, 1st Div. 19 Army Corp
Via New Orleans, La.

I handed the war purchasing associations card to the printers.