

Ass't Adj't Gen'ls Office
1. B. 2. D. 19. A.C.
Near New Iberia La 19.12.63

My Dear Friend

Your kind and interesting letter of the 1st inst reached me yesterday and I must say that it came through very quickly considering I have had letters sent me from New Orleans which were 12 to 15 days in reaching me. I rec'd a letter some days since in reference to Cap't Friday's case. I answered it the same day requesting that he am't be paid him as there was no doubt but that he was the "original man Friday." It's quite a load off my mind as I was afraid—and not without reason—that some disinterested friend of his would draw the money and give it to his wife who would dispose of it for finery etc. You know what some women are in this respect. Friday is a good upright man and sent home several hundred dollars more than his pay. I recollect how careful he was to arrange it so that his wife could only draw enough for actual expenses thus preventing her from lending it or foolishly throwing it away.

I was greatly pleased to learn that you had received my scribbles which related to Ex Gov Mouton the miserably degraded traitor. I have no patience or sympathy for the leaders; men who have acted as they have merely for personal aggrandizement and power using the mutilated bodies of the poor whites as stepping stones; but the cup is full and when we have drank of it to the dregs then we shall have been punished for allowing the curse of slavery to have been a peculiar institution in our great American Union. This is a baptism of blood out of which we will come purified and washed of all our national sins, respected by our friends and feared by our enemies, then shall we be a free country and not until then. Slavery must be wiped out root and branch. I have never felt the least uneasiness in regard to what is to be done with the negroes. There are thousands of Northern men who will settle here who would rather pay the women and children—as well as the men—than to own. This stands to reason from the fact that it is cheaper to pay a man \$10 a month than it is to own him at 500 or 1,000. He obtains more work of him, has no Dr's bills to pay. The interest on a slave's value will pay for the best hands—while the owner is liable to lose him and services from the slightest causes. The practical working of the deserted plantations now in the Govm't hands clearly proves that more money is made when the hands are hired than when owned. There are men here at the present moment who came from the north as poor as I am who worked the plantation on share and consequently are now worth 30 to 40 thousand dollars. The only question is what can we do without them as all these planters will be glad to hire them at almost fabulous prices. Several ladies have told me that they had no idea that the slaves were such a nuisance as one hired man or woman—colored—were better able and did the work more satisfactorily than three or four slaves. Even if reason was not on this side, I have enough faith in providence and in Uncle Abe to believe implicitly that all will come out as it should. President Lincoln has proved himself above men [] acting as he considered it is duty irrespective of personal feelings or ambition. I know that 100% of our soldiers in this Dept. would cast their vote for Abraham Lincoln as next President of the United States. I some time am vexed when I fell that all of us from our state are to an extent disenfranchised. This should not be as I consider that I am much interested, if not more so than such men as Seymour and Wood and other copperheads, throwing aside pecuniary gains etc.

There is beginning to be a marked improvement in the officers who are in the Negro Regiments. They are being brought before a board which examines them thoroughly and if found wanting in good common school edⁿ and in pretty fair acquaintance with military matters they are discharged. If this course had been pursued in the first place the organizations would have equaled any white regiments in the service. It was a very unfortunate affair that it did not. I know personally of fine energetic officers who are fully in favor of the organizations who will not accept commissions for the reason they would be disgraced by the associating with men who were incompetent in any respect to fill positions. Col weber 18th Corps du Afrique writes that “one great difficulty to be surmounted is having these officers dismissed and good officers in their places. Great efforts are being made to effect this object. May it soon be thoroughly accomplished.

Brig Gen Dwight is in New Orleans but does not seem to be doing anything. I do not understand it, but presume Gen'l Banks does.

Gen'l Weitzel has probably arrived north long before this, he was our Div. Commander and the most popular officer in this Dep't, not even excepting Gen'l Banks. We are all in hopes that he will return shortly. Unlike most Gen'ls he made every effort to leave incognito but we managed to fire a parting salute. Our brigade did not have an opportunity to see him off, as he “out flanked us” but the other brigade heard the salute and hurried out en masse, the men cheering until quite hoarse, throwing their caps as high in the air as possibly. The general was very much affected. By it, as nothing but sincere respect could have called forth such expressions and demonstrations. He is the fighting General of the Dept.

General Emory now commands this division (temporarily). He is a good officer.

The whole or rather the last of the 13th A.C. left here today for Brashears. We think that Texas is their final destination. We will probably fall back in a few days but I am afraid Texas will not see us until all the fun's gone. If we do not go I shall regret my not accepting the offer to go to New Orleans or Baton Rouge as Post A.A.G. This would have been comfortable, not to mention that I should have drawn \$50 per month as Commissioner of Quarters and Fuel etc. which would enable me to save a little money. However, I am getting along slowly once clear of debt, and I will begin to feel like myself again, but staff living is expensive and saving is up hill work.

There are several regiments entering as “Veterans.” The government is wise in making this offer. Major Gen'l Wallace's and afterwards Brig Gen'l McGuiness Regt. The 21st Indiana has reentered. This is the best regiment in the 13 Army Corps.

You very kindly offered to send me papers occasionally. You could not do any thing that would be more appreciated by myself—and many others would see these by doing so. I rec'd one or two papers last mail from an old friend of ours Dr Gregory of Jersey City (son of []), the first I have had since I arrived comic illustrated paper over which we had many hearty laughs. If we want to know what is going on in this Dept we read the N.Y. papers. I was very sorry to hear of the death of the horse that I rode last summer. He was a fine horse and one you might have been proud of.

I wish you could see my horse “Barney” and see me clear 5 ft rail fences without difficulty—martingales on at that. I cleared a ditch 12 ½ ft wide with ease. This is tall jumping and “seems a little fishy” but I very prudently had it measured before hand.

The glasses have been unusually idle for the last few days, but I think will soon come in for chance to be leveled at the Rebels. I consider it the best glass in our division. The signal corps have one which is better but then they require a very powerful glass. It hangs by sword and pistol, and when the rebels get it, I think that when they are stronger than we they will have to buy a pretty good jumping and running horse to do it.

I presume the little ones are cogitating and planning for Christmas as usual or else preparing for a sleigh ride or skate. I should like to see a snow storm. I have not seen snow since March []. The weather is cold here as the wind sweeps over the prairie. I saw a piece of ice yesterday and Jack Frost this morning. Did you ever meet Young Leon (Capt or Maj Gen'l Franklin [])?

I intend trying to send you a specimen of salt from the salt mine if I can.

I have my old Am. Flag with me. It is waving over La soil on a good high pole cut from the “Lowlands low.” But I find that “wee sma horses” are fast approaching. I am sorry that I have not the material wherewith to make a letter interesting, but when we move and go to Texas or some where else I think that we will have some pretty fair fighting before long. It's quite an act here to fire a gun with any accuracy. Imagine a plain like a vast ocean and knowing how difficult it is to measure distance by the eye, and you have an idea of our trouble. A child on these prairies looks as large as an adult.

Give my kind regards to your family. May they have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I am looking out for a Christmas goose. Our Cooke de Afrique, who was to give us a grand dinner, thought the way to do it was to cut it up into small pieces claws and all and fry it. This time we are to watch its dressing and cooking, who wouldn't be a soldier? Your sincerely

Oliver Matthews
AAG

I hope you receive this when business is not pressing. I get in the habit of writing carelessly, as we are generally quite busy. There has been no less than 50 pages that I have written relating to this officer business to day alone. I have forgotten whether or not I sent the Boys the promised picture so I enclose one. The flag in the background is now waving over my tent.

OM