

August 30th, 1864

In the Field

Dear Miss C.,

Three long weary months and more have elapsed since I last wrote. It is needless to offer an apology for such silence, as you know it is the greatest pleasure to rec. a letter from you or to indite one to your address. In such a campaign as the present, privileges are debarred from necessity, and that of correspondence in particular by reason of the closing and cutting of communications. In all this time I had not forgotten you. I never can. Hence, the two letters of yours recd a day or two since, had need to remind me of an epistolary obligation. Events, as you are aware, determining the destiny of a continent, have transpired since my last. Unlike Eneas, in his recital to the Queen concerning the Siege of Troy, I have been a “small part” in this great campaign. How well I’ve performed that part, and how much I’ve recognized my individual responsibility, let an easy conscience testify. I feel profoundly thankful to the Great Dispenser of Events that I’ve been spared, while many more valuable than I, have shed their life’s blood upon our country’s altar. I will not recount to you my experience of the campaign; the press has acquainted you thoroughly with the great facts and glorious [...] results, which add to the fame of Lee and Grant and you would tire at the narrations of one of the line, who is regarded as the “Gray Picket” in “All Quiet on the Potomac To-night”.

I am now situated delightfully—on the chesterfield side of the Appomattox. On picket. 200 yds distant is the Yankee line, and from our position we can see for miles into the rear. Upon the heights opposite the enemy has erected batteries of enormous strength and of all sizes and patterns of guns – from the 10 pounder Parrott (rifle) to the immense 300 pounder Mortar. Just to the left is the giant Blakely with which they batter the bricks of Petersburg and far to the right are their mortars devoted to the barbarous purpose. Day and night with short intermissions these monsters eject from iron mouths immense projectiles, which alarm non-combatants – women and children, in the good little City of Petersburg. But the hill bristles with cannon for other objects, and artillery booms all the day long, and at night entertains the sleepy picket with grand pyrotechnical displays. Mortars are fired from both lines, and at night you see a ball of fire going through the air like a meteor. A low whirl, like the puff of a locomotive, accompanied with a screeching noise like the cry of a bird- there is comes- that’s a 64 pounder mortar shell. Here goes a 300 pdr with the noise of a dozen R.R. trains and a whole flock of [...] geese. The very earth shakes under the explosion, and small fragments are distributed in profusion over the area of half a mile. Our batteries respond with spirit, and evince more pluck if they are not as heavy. The enemy has withdrawn his guns to a point under cover of the hill. Before we stood and looked into the very mouths of the deep-throated monsters, and when they opened our picket-line would shoot the gunner, and several Yankee artillerists have leaped from the parapet of the fort and fallen lifeless in the dark running river below. Hence the enemy erected forts in the rear, and now fire with impunity.

We are looking anxiously for peace overtures. The North is on the eve of revolution, (political), and I believe the overthrow of the administration will bring peace. Anyhow this year ends the war. I earnestly pray that it may be an honorable one. But the campaign in Ga. decides the issue. Push the boys to the front- sick and well- cripples and slightly wounded. There is need for all. All can fight in trenches. Let the hospitals empty themselves, and Georgia's salvation will have been accomplished. In after years whether independently or enslaved, censure will attach to them who have refused to accept the soldier's lot in this revolution with the chances of a soldier's grave. Oh! Where is the boasted chivalry of the South; when her own sons, native to the soil, turn a deaf ear to the calls of country while the foe strives to rivet the chains upon our limbs? Thank God- my conscience is satisfied, and if I fall in this late hour in the contest, my life is a willing sacrifice.

Write soon. Have you heard from Billie? I am uneasy with regard to him.

My kindest regards to Mrs. Palmer, to whom and her solider-husband may God grant a long life of happy usefulness! Remember me to Mrs. Hammond.

Yr. obt. servt., E.S. Mitchell.