

MILTON BARNES to RHODA BARNES

NOTE: On April 17 Grant had ordered IV Corps to be withdrawn from East Tennessee to Nashville. As Milton indicates, the 97th Ohio arrived in Nashville on the evening of April 25. Rumors that the corps would be sent to Texas to help crush the Confederate field force under General Edmund Kirby Smith were premature. After Smith's surrender of May 26 (formalized June 2) the regiment was mustered out June 12, but the remainder of IV Corps was ordered to New Orleans. Jefferson Davis had reached Charlotte, North Carolina, a week prior, April 26; on this date he held his last full cabinet meeting and headed southwest into South Carolina, hoping to reach Confederate forces still in being under Major General Richard Taylor in Alabama or even to reach Smith in Texas. Taylor surrendered May 4 and Davis was captured in Georgia early on May 10. The novel Barnes was reading, Fashion and Famine, was first published in 1854. It was one of many by Ann S. Stephens.

Near Nashville, Tennessee

April 26th 1865

My own dear wife,

There - I have been working hard all day fixing up my little quarters so that I could be sort o' comfortable and now late in the day I settle myself to write to my darling wife. I would have sent a line off this morning to apprise you[,] dearest, of my safe arrival here but it was quite late last night when we got in, and we were all quite tired and needed rest, after three days and nights on the railroad. when we got in we just tumbled ourselves out on the ground till morning and this morning proceeded to hunt a a nice camping ground which we found about four miles south of the city, in a pleasant grove on a part of the old battle ground of Nashville. The first and second Divisions of the corps are here, the third (Wood's) is on the way. I feel so nice and good and glad I hardly know what to do with myself,

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th 1865

- 2 -

and then I want to say so many things to you. what shall I say first[?]
I guess I'll just begin and blather away "without any plan", as military
men say when they go to fight sometimes. I reckon you have almost for-
gotten that this is my birth day. Then I had been thinking for several
days before I left the mountain fortresses of East Tennessee that I would
try to write a nice letter to you in [sic] this day. I believe darling
it is the fourth birth day [sic] of mine I have spent in the army of the
Union. right glad am I at the prospect of its being my last army birthday.
I think I will live to a ripe old age indeed if I ever again have cause to
do so. However we know not what a day may bring forth. it may be our
glorious country may again need my poor services[.] then it might be I
would have to forgo [sic] the pleasures of home and the dear ones there and
rally again to the upholding of that dear old flag, but may God hide me from
the day when my country shall be called again to pass through the terrible
ordeal of a struggle for its very existence against the conspiracies of
traitors at home, or combinations of enemies abroad. Certainly it will be
the proudest day of my life, if I should yet be permitted to see her proud
ensign floating everywhere from sea to sea and from the lakes to the gulf,
with the consciousness that I had left and sacrificed all - every ~~thing~~^{thing} that
is dear to man [-] in contributing my mite to aid in the glorious consummation.
I had thought that the events of the last four years in our nation's history

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 3 -

were the greatest that had ever crowded themselves into the life of any nation or people, yet it seems we are not yet at an end. The wholesale tragedies that have left so many fields bathed in the blood of our common countrymen are culminating in those of individuals which seem to startle the whole civilized world from their complacency. ^[.] God be praised if only these are to be the closing scenes in the nation's bloody drama, after which the curtain is to fall which shall forever hide them from our view! I heard the simple announcement of the President's assassination while at Blue Springs, but we were so far away from communication with the intelligent world. I tried to write to you a little how I, in common with others felt, but I could not. the emotions that crowded upon me were simply indescribable and could not be embodied in words. As we began our movement hitherward we began to get at each stopping place some papers which threw more light upon the terrible catastrophe. every paper I saw was laden with accounts and comments that bespoke the nation's grief! How truly does the nation mourn and all hearts are stricken with sorrow that will not be assuaged! A few hours ago I got my mail and two large, dear sweet letters from you, O, so good, and breathing so truly and beautifully the spirit of sadness at our great loss. I had seen and read dispatches and communications and leaders in all the papers upon the subject, but among them all there was none so well written! none so beautifully embodying the pure language of the heart as the one which came from my own the pen of my own dear

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 4 -

precious wife! I never felt prouder of you than now, my darling. Everywhere along the route I saw unmistable [sic] signs of mourning [-] flags at half mast, crape [sic] upon the arms of officers and soldiers, and even in one instance upon the doors of a rebel house down here in war-ridden, rebel trodden Tennessee. O how my heart sickens at the contemplation of such a theme! But you, my love, have so beautifully encouraged me to hope and trust in that Arm which cannot fail, and which is able to bear us through! I can but turn with a proper faith and brighter hope to the future and in view of all the good that seems to mingle with the ill that has befallen us trust that all will yet be well with us. Turning from these things I have many things to be thankful for in my own case. We had been dreading our trip down here, our boys would persist in saying they would as lief go into battle as start on a trip on the Military R. R. but notwithstanding we were three days and nearly three nights on the cars loaded down with human freight[.] we reached Nashville about 10 o'clock last night with the occurrence of a single accident, all safe and in excellent spirits. I dont think the boys ever have felt half so good as now. when we moved in[to] East Tennessee we anticipated a meeting with Lee and his army, but fortunately we never got the sight of our enemy except in the shape of prisoners and deserters, hundreds of whom came to us every day almost, from the big hearted rebels. as we turned our faces this

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 5 -

way all seemed impressed with the belief that we were at last homeward bound, although perhaps [in] directly, yet in fact we were so destined in no long time. At all events here we are within the precincts of Nashville where we commenced the great campaign under Rosecrans in the winter of '62 & '63. It is really pleasant to contemplate the scenes through which we have passed so successfully, and now realize that we are safe and back again snugly in camp with no enemy in our front, not even having to keep a regular picket! Though it is difficult to repress a sigh at the thought of so many of our bravest comrades having found a grave where not even a rude slab shall tell of their fate and mark the spot where they lie! I said we were in camp on the old battle field of last winter, in a beautiful grove, our row of Hd Qrs tents are almost hidden beneath the foliage of tall spreading maples, hickory and dogwood. The Chaplain & I took quite a notion that for once in our army life we would be tidy, so we have been working hard all day in fixing up with our limited facilities, and really I wish you could look in on us tonight in our neat tidy little tent [.] [Inverted at top of page 1:] When we first landed and had our ground pointed out to us I took time "by the hair" as Kossuth said and secured a few rails, which I metamorphosed into a little bed on one side of the tent, threw on them a rusty old matrass [sic] of husks almost worn out, spread on it an old faded and worn calico quilt so that it just comes to the ground, on that an army blanket. now that is a first class army bed. next thing was to fix a table to write on. I drove down some rude stakes in the ground on which [I] implaced [sic] a piece of

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 6 -

rough board[.]

[Text continues on new page:]

on this I spread two large newspapers for a table cover, got out my little old portfolio which contains my writing implements, papers, inkstand &c, laid out three or four old books. it looks splendid I tell you. Chaplain is fixed up on the other side opposite me though I think not with so much taste. then on the canvass [sic] wall just above the table I worked and hung up a kind of pocket, something after the fashion of a pin cushion like our grand mothers used to make out of calico. mine is made out of paper without any sewing, just folding into a pocket, and then I was put to it to get it to stick on the wall, so after venting [sic] my ingenuity I took the only pin I had left out of my shirt collar and pinned it to the tent wall. my collar[,] which is also made of paper you know[,] has become so thoroughly adapted to my neck by long wearing that it stays on quite well without any pin in it. but then I know you will ask what I use that for. why it is my cigar box. just think of half a dozen fragrant havannas [sic] lying up there to tempt the appetite and treat my friends when they call in. then I know you will ask what has become of my meerschaum. Well I have laid it aside - haven't smoked it any since I heard of Lee's surrender - thought I was coming home pretty soon and

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 7 -

did'nt want to come with a dirty old pipe in my mouth, only a cigar occasionally, my dear. that's all that is left of my evil practices - hope to be ["one of those very few who will come out of the army", &c, &c, &c. But I was digressing a little, you see. you want to know next what kind of floor and carpet I have, dont you dear? well my floor is the sacred soil of Tennessee so much polluted of late by the unhallowed tread of the northern vandals "that never would subdue us, no never" (?) My carpet[,] albeit, is green, perfectly so and of the most exquisite hue. it is the grass my love, which the April showers have warmed into a new life, which like all the attendants of spring have come peeping up through the rich layer of decayed leaves which protected it from the cold blasts of winter, and mutely and silently yet eloquently welcoming her returning sceptre over the universe as all things else animate and inanimate seems to welcom[e], with appropriate homeage, the stars and stripes, the emblem of liberty[,] over the long accursed soil of Tennessee!! Apeaking of the prospect of peace, I am reminded of the news we have just received from the east giving the terms of [General] Johnson's [sic. Johnston] proposed surrender to Sherman. What does he mean? is Sherman indeed crazy? one would think so. Can it be possible that that General so much the idol, the all talked of great man of the age^[,] has really compromised his manhood and patriotism and signified his willingness to make peace on such dishonorable^[,] such ignoble terms! as to allow the rebels to have

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 8 -

all they want, let them keep their arms in their hands, and be protected in their rights of property? including their right to keep their slaves? It is preposterous! It is really horrible to think of! Why the army here are astounded and indignant! the feeling among the troops is intense. It certainly cant be possible and yet it seems to come in an official manner. I am glad the President [Johnson] and cabinet and also Grant have utterly repudiated the whole thing. Grant I learn has gone to see about it in person. If it is true I hope he will relieve Sherman at once, before he disgraces himself and the enlightened sense of mankind, by such an enormous folly. Just to think[,] after so much fighting, to allow the wretches to have it all their own way after all. I never felt half so indignant at anything that has occurred since the war began and this is the general feeling along our lines. Why didn't he push right on and make Johnson [sic] surrender on his (Sherman['s] own terms? instead of holding a parley and truce to allow Johnson [sic] to arrange the terms to suit himself, and also withdraw[ing] a part of his forces to allow Jeff Davis to get away! I have'nt a bit of patience with him. he has certainly killed himself forever if it is so. I still hope for the sake of the country and his own heretofore good name that it may prove to be a mistake. But to return. It is confidently expected that this is our last camp in Dixie, that we will remain here until we start

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 9 -

for home. Rumor has it that our corps is to be reorganized to go to Texas, but in that event it is thought that all the non-veterans that came out in 1862 of which we constitute a part will be left out of the expedition, for the reason that only having about four months to serve it would not be completed before our time would expire.

It is thought that since Sherman has let Jeff Davis get away, he will cross the river into Texas and try to reorganize Kirby Smith's forces and make a stand somewhere down there. I think myself he will fail to accomplish much that way, but still in that event we will have to send a force there to dispose [of] them, you know.

Have you sent for any books yet[?] I have a stray volume which I have been reading that I will try to send you. Mrs. Ann S. Stephens, "Fashion and Famine" [-] it is a good one. It gives a perfect insight into New York high life and low life, and [is] written in such a pure chaste style. I want you to read it, Darling. I want you to have more time to read and do less drudgery, wont that be nice.

I dont know about the delegate yet to be sent from this regiment to Columbus. I think the Col[onel] [Lane] expects to go. He has the rank you know. But then I hope to be home before it comes off, to stay maybe, and then I wont care anything about it. At any rate I would'nt run against him if the delegate is to be elected. I would rather let him go a hundred times than

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Near Nashville, Tennessee
April 26th, 1865

- 10 -

to go into a squabble for it unless

[inverted at top of page 5:]

he should volunteerly accord it to me, which in his extreme zeal for the good of the country (nothing else) he would not do I am sure. There[,] love[,] I must quit. I am not half done, but I will send this off now for fear it wont get in in time for the mail

[Inverted at bottom of page 7:]

O what a scribble I have made of this. no matter if only you can decipher it. Write often now my love and I will do the same.

[On right margin of page 6:]

There are so many things in your two letters that calls [sic] for remarks but I must devote another letter to them and let up now. Good bye darling, love to all. Your loving husband Milton.

[Inverted at top of pages 7 and 6:]

O I do want to see you so badly, poor little pet, I reckon'd [sic] I would hardly know her, does she love flowers? I know she does.