

A Guide to the Napoleon B. Brisbane Letters, 1864 MS.0391

Napoleon B. Brisbane Civil War letters

1864

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Descriptive Summary

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Unit ID

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Unit Date

1864

Language

English

Creator

Brisbane, Napoleon B.

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Virginia Military Institute Archives

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

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Biographical / Historical

Napoleon B. Brisbine was a Surgeon serving with the 2nd Ohio Cavalry Regiment. This unit was engaged in the fighting at Winchester, Virginia in August 1864, serving as a rear guard while the rest of the army retreated toward Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of two Civil War letters written by Napoleon B. Brisbine to his brother and sister. The items are dated September 16 and 24, 1864. In the first letter, Brisbine describes being held prisoner in Winchester, Virginia, where he was captured while caring for Union wounded. In the second letter, he describes the recapture of Winchester by Union troops and the Confederate retreat.

Keywords

Winchester (Va.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865
United States. Army—Ohio Cavalry Regiment, 2nd (1861-1865)
Shenandoah Valley Campaign, 1864 (August-November)—Personal narratives
United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Medical care
Correspondence
United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865
Virginia—History—Civil War, 1861-1865
United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Prisoners and prisons

Description of Subordinate Components

Letter from Napoleon B. Brisbine to brother and sister

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/1763

Unit Date 1864 September 16

Language English

Scope and Contents

Written from Winchester, Virginia. Letter describes being held prisoner in Winchester, where Napoleon B. Brisbine was captured while caring for Union wounded.

Keywords

Correspondence

United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Prisoners and prisons

Winchester (Va.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

Transcription

Winchester, Virginia September 16th, 1864

Dear Brother & Sister- The fates are again against me and I am once more a prisoner in this place. On our retreat down the valley it fell to the lot of someone to stay with our wounded at this place and that unfortunate one was your humble servant N.B.B. I had gone on through the place some eight miles and received orders to go back immediately. I started with my boy and had just time to get here and send him back when the rebels came in and I was a prisoner. I have been here near five weeks, and have been living in high hopes that our troops would occupy the place and let me at liberty. But, all in vain.

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, the poet says. But I keep a stiff upper lip and don't trouble my heart about it. If they don't send me to Richmond I'll forgive them.

I have about thirty wounded on my hands yet. But they will soon be able for transportation and then I must make tracks one way or the other. I have no clothes but a common Privates suit and not a change of those. But I live fine, get plenty to eat from the citizens and am without exaggerating well fixed for a prisoner. I have heard since here by one of our own boys that my horses are safe and I believe my things. I don't suppose you could write and in fact it is very doubtful whether you get this yet or not. But I will risk it. I dare not write any news, but send this by a lady. Hoping you will receive it and don't fret for your Brother. N. B. Brisbane.

[at top, postscript from end of letter] Write to uncle William and tell him where I am. My regards to all. I hope I shall be able to write without trouble soon.

Letter from Napoleon B. Brisbane to brother and sister

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/1764

Unit Date 1864 September 24

Language English

Scope and Contents

Written from Winchester, Virginia. Letter describes the recapture of Winchester by Union troops and the Confederate retreat.

Keywords

Correspondence

Winchester (Va.)—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

Transcription

Winchester, Virginia September 24, 1864

Dear Brother and Sister- I sat down two or three days ago to write this to you but some circumstance occurred to stop me and I did not write. But will finish it today and send it post haste.

I was a prisoner five weeks to the day our troops recaptured me at this place, and during the time had no chance of letting you know of my whereabouts. So you see I was not to blame this time. I wrote one letter to you and sent by a citizen who said he would get it through for me.

Last Monday morning I was awakened by the heavy booming of artillery and upon inquiring the cause, was informed that the Yanks were only about two or three miles from town and had made a demonstration at day light. I judged by the time and the length of the firing that we were to have a general engagement that day and oh, how I prayed for success to our arms, for I knew what a formidable antagonist they would have to cope with, and well I knew that day would bring the hardest fighting ever done in the valley. All day the cannon bellowed and once in a while a breeze would bring the faint report of firearms, rifles, muskets, and carbines. But along in the afternoon, the small arms became quite plain and at length cheers could be heard, and a shell would come over me from the Yankee Battery.

Then commenced one of the greatest panic retreats I ever saw without any exception, and the horses, mules & men all went along with their tails up (excuse the last remark, the latter's tails were down). The old 8th Corps done wonders in that day and redeemed itself from all other stains. While the rebels were retreating through town a shell from one of our Batteries came through our Hospital, going over two beds and striking the third one smashing it to splinters, tearing the straw out of the mattress and disappeared through the other side of the house, not hurting a man. The bed was occupied by a man with a fractured thigh but was not hurt. Sheridan is a trump, and is just whipping them as they go.

I am not on duty at present. Have been sick but am now quite well again. We had about thirty five hundred wounded here including Rebs. We captured nearly all their wounded. I stayed on duty as long as I could but had to give up. Was sick when the fight came off. Would like to go home but no chance, every thing is busy. Captured about four thousand seven hundred prisoners here, and since captured some seventeen hundred. About eleven hundred dead on the field of both sides. Up to this time have taken thirty one pieces of artillery with numbers of wagons & horse. Cannot tell how long will stay here. Write soon to your brother. N. B. Brisbane.