

UC Davis Archives and Special Collections

MC200: Folder 18: Rockwell, Joseph J. to [Fowler], May, May 30, 1898

This transcription from the original letter contains language contemporaneous of the time and is being presented as part of a historical record.

Camp Thomas
Monday May 30 – 98

My Dear May,

Herb said to me yesterday that he had a letter from you in which you told him to remind me that I owed you a letter. There isn't that a noble sentence, so well constructed you know. However letting the grammar slide, I have not forgotten that I promised to write to you, so I suppose you might say that my debt to you is in the form of a promissory note. That isn't so bad now is it, for a fellow whose thoughts are burdened with military cares and upon whose shoulders rests such a load of military dignity. I ought to be able to give you some news in this letter and I would if it were not for the newspapers, which will be about two days ahead of me. So my news will be no news. The papers can't give it however in the beautiful style I can put it in, as you of course will readily understand. The news as it just came to me is that we move from here Wednesday morning for Tampa, and the official order has been published by the Colonel. There, isn't that fine. You see we are getting a little closer to that Spanish army every time we make a move. The next move we ought to be able to say "Howdy" to them and say it just as forcibly as we please.

I am on outpost duty today and so I haven't seen Herb since the order was published but I know that he is just as pleased over it as I am. I was on guard last night and came out in charge of the outpost this morning. On this duty, we have to take our rations with us in our haversacks. You ought to have seen me cooking my dinner! It was alright though after I had it ready although of course it was properly seasoned with dirt, but then I didn't get any more dirt in than I had to, I prefer salt, as a choice. Just imagine me though bending over a little wood fire with a frying pan in one hand my fork in the other gravely frying in salt pork fat, the slices had just cut from a slightly soiled potato while my face from the heat of the fire and the sun was as red as a beet. Then once in a while in my earnest efforts to turn over a slice that was brown on one side I would knock two or three slices out of the pan. I mourned over those lost slices more than I would mourn at home over the loss of a whole meal, and that would by no means be a slight grief. Well, it was good meal, may it rest in peace. I hope it will, I don't want it to create any disturbance just because as Artemas Ward said about his funeral, "it wasn't well done."

My relief ought to be here pretty soon now, it is after 6 o'clock, so I guess I will put this in my haversack and finish it in my tent tonight. - - -

I am writing now by candle-light in my tent. After being relieved from the guard I came back to quarters. I just asked Herb, who is lying down outside my tent what he thought of the new order. He grimaced expressively and said, "It suits me right down to the ground." He doesn't know that I am writing to you. I find that the boys are a good deal excited though why they should be I can't see. This move is right in line with what we have been looking and

hoping for why should they be all in a flurry now just because they've got the official order. We are to be inspected in the morning by General Slocomb. There are only four regiments to go; it seems to me that it is considerable honor to the "first" to be among the four selected.

What I am wondering now is just how soon the fun will begin, and yet although I always, nearly, speak and think of it so lightly, it is not fine. It is stern hard serious work. Work of the most arduous yet the most glorious character. What can any man find to do that is nobler, holier, grander, than to fight [illegible] his country's cause. Often I wonder, also; how shall I act when the time comes for one to do my devoir? Will I do my duty fearlessly, honorably, like "a gentleman unafraid" or will I shrink and give way and fall to the level of a craven? Perhaps I am more frank in discussing these things than most of the boys but I know they nearly all feel them as keenly as I do. Well, discussion is useless but experience teaches and if I get any of it I will tell you all about it when I get back, - next month??

How shall I sign? Guess.
Jos. J. Rockwell