

Letter from John S. Smith to Juliana Reynolds, April 20, 1862

Camp near Yorktown Va Apr 20th 1862

Mrs Juliana Reynolds

Dear Sister,

You perhaps are beginning to think by this time that I do not intend to answer your last letter to me but I hope you will pardon me for my long Silence; for such is my dislike for letter writing that I often neglect writing when it is my absolute duty, another reason is I have not received any money Since I came here and being scarce of money I could not write as much as I should have done. I did not like the idea of sending my letters without the postage being paid, but I am obliged to resort to that for the present, although you may not thank me much for my letter and compelling you to pay the postage. The letter which you had written for Susan is at hand and it is a source of much comfort to my troubled mind to hear that my family is well and getting along so prosperously.

No general engagement has taken place yet, our army is not yet ready to make an attack and probably will not make one for some time. It is busily engaged in making fortifications, roads, pontoon bridges, transporting cannon[s] and every other preparation that is necessary to carry on a Siege. Yorktown is a very strong hold but we think we have a sufficient force here to take it. I do not apprehend that infantry will have much to do in taking it. It will have to be done mostly by artillery. They will have to work on them until their guns are Silenced and then our infantry will have to go and charge on their batteries and hold them. There has been some skirmishing since we came and several killed and wounded, but our regiment has been very fortunate so far as not one of them has been

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hurt by the rebels. The two armies are firing on each other more or less every day but it has not amounted to a great deal yet.

Our regiment has just returned from picket. Our pickets and the rebels pickets are so close to each other in places that they can converse with each other. I will give you a specimen of some of their conversation to day. Says a rebel picket to ours "will you take a letter to the Post Office if I bring it over.["] Union picket, ["]yes bring it over.["] Rebel picket, ["]Well I will bring it over after dinner,["] again says the same rebel. ["]Is that a sharp shooter standing their by the side of you.["] Union picket ["]yes.["] Rebel picket ["]Well pick them off.["] Says another of our pickets, ["]Have you any tobacco over there.["] Rebel picket, ["]yes plenty of it, have you any whiskey.["] Union picket, ["]yes plenty of it come over and we will trade you some whiskey for tobacco.["] Says another of our pickets ["]we belong to the 105th Pa.["] Rebel picket, ["]That's nothing, we have the 115th Alabama.["] Union picket, ["]Bully for you.["] Says another of our pickets, ["]We are coming over to see you some day.["] Rebel picket, ["]Come on we will be ready for you.["] Such is the specimen of some of the conversation of the pickets of our own regiment and the rebel pickets. I am glad they have quit firing on each other for it is a barbarous practice and should not be tolerated in a civilized country. A picket is for the purpose of giving the alarm when the enemy is approaching, not for a mark to shoot at, but enough about pickets.

If we are successful here Richmond will fall an easy prey to us, and when Yorktown and Richmond fall into our hands (and I do not doubt but what they will) I do not see that they can have the least glimmer of hope. The[y] are beaten at almost every point. They do nothing but surrender and evacuate. If they are defeated in a few battles more they will become so discouraged that they will not feel much like fighting. I don't think the war can last a great while longer but it no doubt will last enough to sacrifice a great many lives yet, but I hope we will all soon be able to return to our homes to gladden the hearts of those who are dear to us by the tender ties of nature. Tilton enjoys himself very well he says he likes soldiering. I asked him if he would come back and clerk for the Adjutant if I left, he said he would not for he liked drilling better. I have much respect for Tilton and I believe all

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who are acquainted with him respect him. I think he has improved in morality. I believe him to be a better boy now than he was when he left home. But I have not time to write much more at present and must bring my letter to a close. There is an order issued for all letters for the army of the Potomac to be directed to Washington D.C. They are there put up in packages and sent to the regiment to which they belong. So all letters for us you will direct as follows 105th Regt Pa Vol Hamilton's Division Washington D.C. This arrangement will save you from changing the address whenever we move. It matters not where we are they will all be directed to Washington and then they will be forwarded to the regiment. I close by subscribing myself your affectionate brother.

J.S. Smith