

Roman Citizen – Rome (New York), March 31, 1865

Army Correspondence

FORT MCKEON, - CITY POINT, Va., March 18, 1865.

To the Editor of the *Roman Citizen*:

One week ago last Friday another misguided man was ushered into eternity, whose only crime consisted in deserting, from one regiment in the United States service into, another, and from all the facts that I have been enabled to glean with regard to it, I make the following condensed statement:

It Seems that this man, whose real name is Wm. P. Griffin, (but who assumed that of Geo. Moulter prior to his desertion) enlisted some time during the year 1862, in Co. C, 8th Delaware Volunteers and that after remaining in the service two or three months, he deserted to a New York battery, (the number of which I was unable to learn) and after remaining in the battery a short time, he received a commission as First Lieutenant. As matters stood at that time he would probably have remained unmolested, but for the fact that in an evil hour he determined to return to his home without permission; his determination was acted upon at once, and he went home, but he had been there but a short time when he was recognized by a member of the 8th. Delaware as a deserter from that regiment. He was at once apprehended and delivered into the custody of the Provost Marshal at City Point, and was confined in the Bull Pen, (as it is called, from the fact that deserters and repentant repels are placed there, and who are almost constantly quarreling among themselves,) there to await his arraignment and trial by court-martial, which took place last February; The prisoner was charged with desertion, found guilty, and sentenced to be shot, to death with musketry at such time and place as the commanding officer should direct; and in a general order, Friday, the tenth day of March was designated as the day upon which the sentence would be carried into execution. The day itself was extremely chilly, added to which was a drizzling rain, which did not entirely cease before the time fixed for the execution had arrived. The 10th U. S. colored infantry, 8th Delaware, and a squadron of cavalry formed three sides of a square, spectators forming the other side, and kept within bounds by a detachment of cavalry posted as patrols. The place of execution was within a few yards of the gallows upon which the spy was executed a few weeks since, and it it {sic} seems has since been fixed upon as a place for the execution of all persons who have been condemned to death by courts-martial convened at City Point. The troops, a few minutes before 12 *m.* opened ranks, and at 11:55 the prisoner, attended by the Chaplain of the 8th Delaware, and preceded by the regimental band, two files of soldiers with loaded muskets, and four men bearing his coffin, commenced what proved to be his last march around the lines, the band playing the solemn yet sweet strains of the Death March. So soon as they had passed around the lines the procession filed to the right, at a point directly fronting the place of execution, and marched directly to the fatal spot. So soon as they halted, the coffin was laid upon the ground directly in in {sic} front of the grave. The condemned, with the Chaplain, stood beside it while the charge, specification, finding and sentence were being read by the officer entrusted with the execution of the sentence, at the close of which the prisoner made a few remarks in a remarkably clear and distinct voice, but as I was some distance from him I could only catch an occasional word or sentence, but I heard him make this statement with considerable force: "I die in defense of my country." Upon the conclusion

of his remarks, the Chaplain offered a very fervent petition, after which his overcoat was removed, the firing party were drawn up in line about twenty paces from him, the Chaplain took leave of him, and the officer advanced to place the bandage over his eyes, to which operation he objected, and the officer retired to a position near the firing party.— The prisoner then sat upon the end of his coffin, the orders "Ready, Aim, Fire," were given, and the doomed man fell backward without a struggle or a groan into his coffin.

It may be well perhaps to state that his behavior throughout was characterized by the utmost fearlessness and composure. He was an exceedingly fine looking man, and apparently about twenty-six years of age, straight as an arrow, and to all appearances an unusually intelligent man. It seemed indeed a pity to condemn such a man to such an ignominious death, but, yet the strict observance of military regulations is required as indispensable to the safety and preservation of an army, and as a warning to would-be evil doers of every description.

Last Wednesday we were ordered out to participate in a brigade inspection and review, which passed off very pleasantly indeed. The day was particularly adapted to the occasion, and that true friend to the soldiers who compose his command, Gen. H. W. Benham, never appeared in finer spirits. The troops passed in review before him once, and then marched to their quarters.— Thursday morning we were ordered out upon battalion drill at 9 o'clock, and drilled until 2 p.m. Gens. Abbott and McKenzie, and Col. Spaulding, of the 50th Engineers, remained, upon the parade ground (as spectators merely) until the drill was dismissed.

This morning two deserters were shot upon the grounds near our camp. They were brothers, and deserters from the 1st Maryland regiment, from which regiment they deserted, went North, received large bounties upon re-enlisting into the Federal service, secured citizens' clothing, and were apprehended when attempting to escape a second time. Their youth and fair open countenances excited universal commiseration for their sad fate. After the charges, specifications, &c, had been read, the doomed men prayed earnestly for the space of a few minutes, and then sat upon their coffins. The bandages were fastened about their eyes and the order to fire was given, and such an irregular scattering volley of musketry I hope never to hear again upon a like occasion. The firing party were evidently wholly unused to the performance of such a task as [they undertook it with con]siderable trepidation. The men fell into their coffins, but death did not end their sufferings until about two minutes after they were shot. The scene was witnessed by Gen. Ingalls, Grant's Quartermaster General, and Provost Marshal General Patrick.

Yesterday afternoon the 1st Maine sharpshooters were ordered to the extreme left of our lines, and to-day the 18th New Hampshire were also ordered off. The 15th Engineers have probably been ordered to the defenses of City Point permanently.

A day or two since we were apprehensive that we would be ordered off speedily, but matters have assumed a more cheerful appearance of late, and it has become evident that we are to guard the inner line of defenses, otherwise, known as the defenses of City Point.

This evening, after I had commenced writing this communication, I was aroused by the report of heavy cannonading. I ran out upon the parapet of our works, and could plainly discern' shells bursting and signal lights displayed in Butler's Lookout. And should the present favorable weather continue a few days longer, Gen. Robert E. Lee will

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be cut off entirely from every possible avenue of escape. But it is growing late, and I must close.

Yours for my country,

D. C. P.

[NOTE: Probably Darwin C. Pavay]

Roman Citizen – Rome (New York), March 17, 1865

A r m y C o r r e s p o n d e n c e

FORT MCKEON, - CITY POINT, Va., March 4, 1865.

To the Editor of the *Roman Citizen*:

Again Mr. Editor I take my pencil in hand for the purpose of keeping the people of Rome posted with regard to the sanitary condition, of the members of the Company of which I am proud to say I am a member. Company L is now, as it has been for nearly six months, one of the best companies in the 15th Engineers, and as proof of this I, would beg leave to state that it was recently assigned to the post of honor, viz: the right of the regiment. The privilege of being at the right of the regiment is one which is thoroughly appreciated by veterans, and it is in a measure also appreciated by each individual member of Co. L.

Last Saturday afternoon I procured a pass for the purpose of visiting the front and Capt Pond, took it to the Adjutant's office to secure the approval of Col. BRAINARD.— Sabbath morning I again went to headquarters, ascertained that my pass had been approved, secured it, and walked down the railroad track to City Point Station to take the cars. A description of the manner in which we ride may interest the readers of the *CITIZEN*. In the first place it is customary to examine every pass before the passengers are permitted to enjoy a ride upon GRANT'S army railroad. This necessarily consumes, much time, and as the cars start at 10 A. M., it is necessary that a man should have his pass stamped so soon in the morning as he can conveniently. Our accommodations are ample, and we are not excessively annoyed by particles of dust or cinders, as we take a deck passage, viz: upon the tops of freight cars, which are usually heavily laden with forage, which, taken in addition to their human, freight, causes an almost unbearable and continual jarring, which, however, must be patiently borne with, in order to reach the front. But the pleasure-seeker having had these facts presented to him very vividly by constant observation, had determined to go [to] the front. I had clambered to the top of the car, had selected the soft side of a board for my post of observation, and sat waiting like MICAWBER for "something to turn up." I had sat thus for perhaps five minutes, when my attention was directed towards a crowd of very indifferently dressed men whom I saw approaching. Upon a nearer approach I discerned the scarlet trowsers {sic} and white turbans of a squad of our Zouave troops. In an instant I comprehended all. The men before me were rebel deserters under a Zouave guard. There were apparently between one hundred and fifty and two hundred Johnnies, nearly all of whom wore light felt hats, destitute of any ornament whatever, gray or butternut pants, and the inevitable dirty gray blanket. But two or three of that entire squad wore overcoats, and it is a very uncommon sight indeed to see a Confederate overcoat. The article (according to the stories of the rebels who desert the sinking ship daily in squads of from ten to one hundred) seems to be extremely scarce in Dixie. These deserters were to be confined in the warehouse upon the dock, under a strong guard, until arrangements for their transportation to Fortress should have been effected. Nothing else worthy of special notice occurred while the train remained at the station; at last when the patience of the pleasure-seekers had become well

nigh exhausted, the premonitory screech of the iron horse was heard, and the train moved from the depot. Within the space of fifteen minutes we were actually buzzing over-hill and dale, as any one acquainted with the peculiar feature of Grant's army railroad can testify, viz: The fact that when a hill seemed to hinder the onward progress of the construction corps, instead of wasting precious time by grading the aforesaid bill down to a reasonable level in imitation of their brethren of the pick and shovel upon the Northern railroads, the track was laid directly over the hill, thus rendering a trip over the road rather disagreeable when taken under the most favorable circumstances; but when but when one is obliged to ride upon the top of a freight car with a strong gale of wind blowing, the situation is anything but satisfactory. I had a splendid opportunity of realizing in a marked degree the beauty of the aforesaid situation in my trip to Warren Station. But there are arguments in favor of as well as against this method of journeying to and fro upon this line of railroad. One can see the condition of the country through which he is passing much better by being thus exposed to the combined action of the elements, than if he were snugly ensconced within the narrow limits of a passenger coach. We passed many deserted mansions, nearly all of which were surrounded with beautiful evergreen trees. No smoke ascended from those old chimneys, and the indefinite something upon every side of those antique structures told of the desolation and ruin which pervades this section of Virginia. Scattered over the entire landscape, so far as the eye could see, were graves without number. Here are eleven graves side by side, and but a few feet from the track, while but a few yards beyond is a rude railing enclosing a mound of earth, beneath which repose the bones of an officer. Virginia is indeed one vast battlefield; her soil is saturated with the blood of the brave citizen soldiery of the ever victorious Federal army. And has this immense shedding of some of the noblest blood in the country amounted to nothing? Has not the blood of the gallant Christian hero, Rush P. Cady, called loudly upon a righteous God of battles for swift retribution upon the heads of his murderers? Not being able to divine the meaning of the mysterious workings of a just Jehovah, we can only point to the wonderful military operations of the past few weeks. It does seem that the Almighty had not turned a deaf ear to our entreaties for a reunion of the North and South. The reduction of Wilmington, following closely in the wake of that of Savannah and Charleston, to say nothing of the capture of Forts Fisher and Anderson, renders the Confederate cause rather insecure at present, at least that opinion prevails among the soldiers. My own opinion is that the soil of the Old Dominion will be the scene of the last conflict between the Federal and Confederate armies.

Rumors are rife in camp nearly every day of the evacuation of Richmond or Petersburg, and sometimes both. These rumors have proved false thus far, but we expect to retire some night in our quarters at Fort McKeon, to awake in the morning in the city of Petersburg. But I have wandered far from my subject. I had commenced a description of my visit to the camp of the 50th [New York Engineers], near Warren Station, to which, however, I will return.

I arrived at Warren Station about noon, and at once posted off to the camp of the 50th, which I found to be about two miles from the station. The 50th is encamped in a beautiful grove upon a slight elevation which commands a fine view of the surrounding country. The men have erected the most elegant quarters for Col. Spaulding that I remember to have seen since my advent into Virginia. A spacious and elegant chapel has also been

erected, the finest one (with the exception of the Christian Commission chapel at Meade Station) to be seen in this part of the country.

I had an opportunity of conversing with several Romans; members of Co. C, among whom were Sergeants Charles and William Eddy, Wesley Remington, Harvey Wright, John Brown, George Wright, George Ruby and his father, all of whom are in excellent health. I remained in camp until 3 o'clock P.M., at which time I returned to the station, highly pleased with my visit to the 50th. I seated myself upon the platform of the depot awaiting the arrival of the train, when, chancing to look up, I beheld Othello Amidon, of Co. B, 146th N.Y.S.V., an old Roman, passing by, I hailed him, and ascertained that he was upon his way to City Point upon business. As a matter of course topics of conversation were not lacking and [were only] interrupted by the whistle of the approaching train which soon entered the station. We jumped aboard as speedily as possible, and were soon upon our way to the Point. The train halted at Parks' {sic} Station a moment, and upon the platform stood nearly one hundred rebel deserters who were awaiting transportation to the Point. I also noticed a Lieutenant in the squad, and with but one or two exceptions, they were an extremely fine appearing body of men. Not having means of transportation for them the train moved on, and in a short time we reached City Point.

Large bodies of deserters are constantly coming within our lines, the majority of whom admit that nothing remains with which to prop up the cause espoused by Jeff. Davis and his fellow anarchists. The private opinion of your correspondent is that the resistless march of Sherman may have had something to do with the constantly increasing number of deserting Johnnies.

One night particularly, but a short time since, five hundred (would not be) Confederate Soldiers came into our lines. I ask, is it possible that a cause can maintain itself upon paper which is daily losing from ten to three hundred of its past supporters? It may be possible that they have an inexhaustible supply of men upon whom they can call in the hour of danger to fill their sadly depleted armies. But the day of retribution is surely drawing nigh, when Jeff. Davis and his fellow-workers of iniquity will be consigned to the tender mercies of foreigners.

A terrible accident, by which a member of the 1st Maine sharpshooters lost his life, occurred a few days since. It seems that a sharpshooter found a gun-barrel, which he secured in his fireplace in such a manner that it would serve as a beam upon which to suspend kettles, &c. A few days after he had made this arrangement he started a fire as usual, when a charge of powder that was in the barrel ignited, exploded the barrel, and sent a piece into an adjoining tent, which lodged in the forehead of the occupant of the same, killing him instantly. What renders the matter sadder still is the fact that the man was writing to his wife at the time he was killed. This is but one of the accidents which, are of almost daily occurrence in the army.

Col. Brainard's quarters were removed to a suitable locality a few rods from our camp, a short time since, by order of Gen. Benham. Details were made from each company to beautify the new quarters, which now present a very pleasing appearance

The weather here, the principle part of the time, is delightful. The boys have indulged in the healthful pastime of playing ball nearly every day for two weeks. This morning we had a heavy shower, accompanied by a furious gale. But about noon the sun appeared, and the weather this afternoon has been delightful.

In my last letter I omitted entirely to notice the principal celebrity in our company, and the one whom the boys are compelled to respect. I refer to our obliging Commissary Sergeant, Mr. James A. Baker, who, in addition to fulfilling the functions of a Commissary, employs his time in sketching for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* paper. He recently received a full set of artist's material from Frank Leslie himself, which he proposes to use to the best advantage. Success to our special artist, Jim Baker. But I must close this extremely uninteresting scrawl at once, and would remain,

Yours, &c., D.C.P.

[NOTE: Probably Darwin C. Pavey]