

MILTON BARNES to RHODA BARNES

NOTE: Wagner's brigade including the 97th Ohio, as previously noted, missed the "great battle of the west" on September 19-20 at Chickamauga Creek. Both their division and corps sustained heavy casualties (respectively, 1,070 and 3,403 killed, wounded and missing) and the career of their corps' commander, was blighted along with that of Rosecrans. Total Union casualties were 16,179 versus 18,454 Confederates. Bragg, as Barnes notes, had been reinforced before Chickamauga by Lieutenant General James Longstreet's corps detached from Lee's army early in September, whereas no reinforcements had materialized even at this date for Rosecrans. Major General Ambrose Burnside had finally moved from Kentucky into eastern Tennessee and occupied Knoxville early in September, but refused to move further. Troops of Major General William T. Sherman, now freed by the fall of Vicksburg, and of Major General Stephen A. Hurlbut, now at Memphis, had received orders on September 15 to reinforce Rosecrans but were not yet near. The referenced letter of September 16 from Rhoda Barnes is missing from this collection.

Chattanooga Tennessee

Sept 27th 1863

My dear wife,

I suppose you have been in anxious suspense since you have been hearing of the fighting in front of this place. I would have written a little sooner but in the unsettled condition of things here there was no certainty that letters would go through. besides I supposed you would rightly infer from what I had previously written, that I would not be in the fight, our brigade having been ordered to remain here as a garrison for this post. all of which has been the case. during the three days fighting in front of us, which was not more than ten or twelve miles off ^[,] we remained here, gathering up stragglers who were falling back - some wounded - some lost from their regiments and a good many running back from pure cowardice. I am not anxious to be at the rear of any more battles! Here we were just flooded with all manner of rumors of disaster and defeat, every straggler had some terrible tale to relate, how that his regiment had been all cut to pieces, the Brigade,

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Chattanooga, Tennessee
September 27th 1863

- 2 -

or Division all scattered, generals killed, the enemy outnumbering us 5 to one, &ec, &ec.....! It was a scene calculated to sicken any one. We could get no straight account, all we knew or could hear was the firing which appeared to be very heavy and continuous until Sunday night [September 20] when the General [Rosecrans] and his corps commanders all came into town, and ~~the~~ soon the troops followed, and began to form their lines right around in front of the town, when it did look like defeat sure enough. teams, ambulances, disabled artillery &c were hurrying across the river with all haste, citizens almost crazy with fright - the scene was well calculated to fill one with dismay[,] the dreadful uncertainty of what awaited us! if the stories were true, we must almost be annihilated. I still felt confidence in the result and would not listen to their stories. On Monday morning I was ordered to pack my train and be ready to cross the river. I did so, but I tell you my dear, I never did anything half so reluctantly in my life, the idea of taking down my flag from that fort where I had planted it so triumphantly a few days before! it filled me with gloom. I would'nt take it down until the last minute. but pretty soon instead of going back across the river I was ordered to the front. I tell you it was a relief. My men all marched out as cheerfully as ever they did anything in their lives. I took a position in reserve ready to go to any part of the line where the regiment might be most needed. It soon became apparent that it had been determined to hold Chattanooga! The whole army had been the night before contracted around the front of the town on a ridge of hills. our men had already thrown up fortifications, planted their batteries, &c, rendering the position perfectly safe - the whole army is in the best of spirits and ready to fight the whole confederacy if need be. Rest assured we

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Chattanooga, Tennessee
September 27th - 1863

- 3 -

will never evacuate Chattanooga, not a man in the whole army thinks of it!
The trains were only sent across for safety, and the confusion was such
only as is usual in the rear of a battle. I dont [want] to be in any more
rears! From all I can learn our army did noble fighting, but Bragg had been
so rapidly reinforced that he litterally [sic] overpowered us with numbers,
and yet at the end of the fight we fixed our position or nearly so, but being
out so far from town and for fear they would swing around our flank and get
in Old Rosey concluded to fall back and he^[sic] held the place which he did in good
order during the night. All is now safe. all their armies combined cant take
this place. it is one of the finest military strong holds in the whole country.
We have as yet received no reinforcements from any quarter. Burnside is above us
in East Tenn. Sherman & Hurlbut are below us at Corinth, or somewhere down there.
We dont need them now. I suppose they may come at their leisure. The rebels are
stretched along in our front on a ridge in full view of us. during the last two
days they have not bothered us. everything is quiet in front. It is the opinion
of all that they will not attempt to fight us here. Bragg understands too well the
strength of our position to try it on. I suppose all manner of stories are afloat
in the north about our defeat, but it must not be so regarded in that light. Their
loss in killed and wounded is certainly much greater than ours, and all ~~their~~ the
prisoners we take say they paid dearly for it. Longstreet's corps was here from
Lee's army, the flower of that army. We took enough a number of them prisoners [-]
they have got enough of western troops [-] they don't drive so easily as the eastern.
they say they got all the fighting they want for the present. But at present my dear
wife I cannot give you any very satisfactory account of things. we have been lying
out in the dirt and dust for several days and nights and everything upside down, in

Milton Barnes to Rhoda Barnes
Chattanooga, Tennessee
September 27th, 1863

- 4 -

a short time probably we will get settled down again, when I can write more and better. I have gotten some better of my cold but have lost considerable of sleep ~~_____~~ - and feel out of fix. The town and its surroundings are one scene of filth and dust, there having been no rain here for weeks. I have been getting your letters pretty regularly. the last was of the 16th inst. when you said you were getting ready to go to Penna. I expected you would probably write again before leaving as you did not tell me where to direct my letters to. I will direct this one to Cambridge and if you should be gone, it will probably be sent to where you are - You spoke of Dr. Clark wanting to borrow what money we have on hands [sic]. I think it ^a good notion. I prefer doing that, to taking shares in the concern, so you can let him have it for six months, keeping enough, of course, for your present needs. I have been very economical my dear wife, almost niggardly so. I have no clothes now that are fit to be seen, and will be compelled to get a suit before long - or go naked. I dont spend a dollar for anything that I can possibly get along without. I must wind up this hurried and unsatisfactory letter and promise to write again in a day or two and frequently. I suspect you have not received all I have sent, but for the present that you may know I am safe is the principal desire of your ever loving and faithful Milton

[Inverted at top of page one of original:]

I am so glad to know that your health is getting good again [-] I hope you will improve on your visit [to Pennsylvania] as also your Mother and dear little pet.