

NOTE: This letter dated May 21, 1864 is the only one in this collection written by Milton Barnes during the two months in which he participated in Sherman's campaign to take Atlanta. It was the first he had time to write after Sherman's armies moved southeast from Chattanooga early in May, 1864. In Rhoda's letter dated June 27, she mentions one from Milton dated June 21, but it is missing. On June 27 Milton was seriously wounded at Kenesaw Mountain and -- except for a brief note (mentioned by Rhoda but also missing) presumably written before he was evacuated from Georgia on June 30 - he wrote no more from that state. By the time he rejoined his regiment in the fall, it had been sent back to Tennessee with General Thomas to stop the Confederate re-invasion under Hood.

The 97th Ohio had departed its railroad bridge guard duties at Charleston, Tenn., on April 20 to rejoin the Army of the Cumberland and other Union forces (Army of the Ohio, Army of the Tennessee) assembling at Cleveland, Tenn. Preceding the launching of the campaign (scheduled on May 5 but actually May 6), the Army of the Cumberland began concentrating on May 1 with its left wing, the parent corps of the 97th Ohio, at Catoosa Springs, Ga. According to a history of the regiment, it actually began moving on May 3. Sherman's axis of advance was the railway line from Chattanooga southeast to Atlanta, approximately 100 miles distant. The Army of the Cumberland under Thomas was the central of Sherman's three advancing armies. All the place names Barnes mentions in this letter are to be found either on or near the Chattanooga-Atlanta railway, with the exception of Rome, Ga., which is on another line running west from Kingston into Alabama. In this Note, all place names mentioned in the letter are underlined to distinguish them from other place names, necessary to round out this brief account, ~~as~~ found in several regimental histories of the 97th Ohio and scholarly studies of the Army of the Cumberland. (The Official Records concerning the Atlanta campaign do not include reports of the Army of the Cumberland and its components.)

On May 7 the 97th Ohio first encountered Confederate outposts at Red Clay, on the Tennessee-Georgia border. Its parent corps was in support of another corps which captured the Tunnel Hill portion of the positions defending Dalton, the Confederate commander's headquarters some 15 miles southeast of Chattanooga. On May 8 the regiment went into position at Rocky Face Ridge as part of a demonstration at the Buzzards Roost Gap designed to hold the Confederates around Dalton while other forces made a flanking march around their left to try to take Resaca, a dozen miles below Dalton, and trap the rebel army. Barnes refers to the 97th Ohio participating in a charge on Rocky Face Ridge. Losses were slight. Dalton was evacuated on the night of May 12.

On May 14-15 the 97th Ohio was under constant fire before entering Resaca on May 16 after the Confederates pulled out. In the ensuing pursuit the regiment lost 20 men in less than a quarter hour at Adairsville, 20 miles below Resaca, in an engagement Barnes describes as "about the hottest place I have been in." After sweeping "like a hurricane" through evacuated Kingston, the 97th Ohio was reported as

near Cassville on May 19. On May 21 Barnes took advantage of a two-day rest halt ordered by Sherman and wrote this letter "four miles south of Kingston" and half-way to Atlanta.

After May 21, according to a campaign chronology, the regiment participated in "operations around Dallas and Marietta," including battles around Dallas, New Hope Church, and Allatoona Hills. The 97th was under constant fire from May 27 to June 5. The advance on Dallas was another of Sherman's flanking moves to oust strongly entrenched Confederates at Marietta only 25 miles from Atlanta. Stubborn resistance was encountered as the Confederates slowly withdrew to successive prepared lines protecting Marietta. Sherman finally decided on a series of frontal assaults to break the defense complex now centered on Kenesaw Mountain. A regimental history states that on June 22 when the 97th Ohio drove in Confederate outposts in support of the main Union advance further right, 112 of the 253 regimental personnel in the action were killed or wounded within a half hour. For details of the role of the 97th in the main assault of June 27, when Barnes was wounded, see the Note preceding Rhoda Barnes to Milton Barnes, June 27, 1864.

Barnes refers to a number of Union commanders. In addition to the well-known Sherman, Thomas and "Fighting Joe" Hooker (commanding a corps under Thomas), they are, in the order mentioned: Colonel Charles G. Harker, commanding Third Brigade in the 97th Ohio's parent Second Division; Major General Oliver O. Howard and Major General John Newton, previously noted as commanding respectively IV Corps and Second Division; and General Franz Sigel.

MILTON BARNES to RHODA BARNES

4 Miles south of Kingston, Georgia

May 21st '64

My very dear wife,

At length, after three weeks ^[of] constant marching, counter marching, fighting, skirmishing, watching and anxiety of mind after capturing Tunnell [sic] Hill, Dalton, Resaca (fighting a battle at the Cutter place,) and then moving right on and capturing Rome and Kingston, we have gone into camp to rest a few days. So I will now avail myself of the first opportunity to write more fully to my own dear one It has been a great source of annoyance to me that I could not send you a letter regularly as of yore, well knowing that you would be full of anxiety. You must not think that we of the 97th have been engaged with the enemy all the time, in an army so large as ours the Divisions, Brigades and regiments only fight by reliefs, while the rest all stand ready if needed in supporting distance. I have just been reading a long letter in the Cin. Commercial giving an account of our investment of Dalton which is very full and accurate, a much more satisfactory account than any one officer could give, since each one has his place in the line and can know but little of what is going on at other points especially when our line was some 10 miles in length. I hope you will get that paper regularly while this campaign continues, as it is the most complete and reliable in its details. Well[,] I have seen what I considered strong military positions, but I have never yet seen anything to compare with that occupied by the rebels at Dalton. Nature made it almost impregnable while every assailable point was carefully protected by substantial fortifications. But old Sherman found an inlet and took advantage of it and followed up his advantage so rapidly that Mr. rebs [sic] had to abandon their chosen position[.]

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4 Miles south of Kingston, Georgia
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falling back out of their works to fight us on even terms. Previous to our occupation of Dalton we took a position on the crest of Rocky faced mountain, [Rocky Face Ridge] and on the 9th[,] together with [Colonel] Harker's Brigade[,] attempted to charge them off it, but found it very much to our personal comfort to get back as fast as possible, and threw up breast works, where it was so steep a man could hardly stand. Here we remained two days and nights. On the morning of the 13th we learned of the evacuation and our corps moved around the works and marched into town, but did not halt long. [We] moved right on until we again formed a junction with the rest of the army near Resaca. Here we came upon the enemy in force. the evening and forepart of the following day [May 14] was spent in getting into position and feeling the enemy's lines. I never went through such woods in my life. I had charge of the skirmish line a part of the time. in shifting round through the brush wood I lost my overcoat cape, but was glad enough to get off that well. On the morning of the 14th we found the enemy's lines and drove them back a mile into their breast works thrown up the night before and held them there while [General] Hooker swung round on the left and turned their flank, we now had them as we thought, in a very tight place nearly surrounded. on the 15th which was sunday I hoped there would be no fighting, but we had taken their first line of works and were so close that firing was kept up almost without cessation all day from both sides. we continued to pour such a stream of fire into them that the next day[,] when we passed through, large trees 40 feet high were litterally [sic] shaved to pieces with bullets, the

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ground for some distance back of their works was full of little pits where each man had dug in the ground to hide himself from our fire, not daring to lift his head. The [Oostenaula] river was on the south side of them but they had one point for crossing so strongly fortified as to be impossible for us to take it - But for this, we would have gobbled [up] their whole army - They retreated Sunday night. [May 15] Monday morning [May 16] we pressed right forward after them[,] stopping an hour or two in Resaca. here I got the first view of Genl. Sherman. he is very different from what I expected. "he hath a lean and hungry look[.]" But such are "dangerous" you [know?]. at least the rebels think so. Thomas is the finest looking General we have. We all like Genl. Howard very much. [General] Newton also behaved very well. Here out intrepid Col[onel] [Lane] left us for "home,["] "sweet home[.]" he started the morning the fight commenced but [General] Wagner shamed him out of it. I sent a note by him to you. did you get it? From Resaca our corps took the advance, about 8 miles above Kingston the enemy made considerable resistance at a place called Adairville [sic] after another Brigade had exhausted their ammunition and we went to the front to relieve them just before sundown. this was about the hottest place I have been in. we kept up the firing until after dark and then remained on the ground until morning. I have been very careful, I dont expose myself unnecessarily - only when duty absolutely requires it. While I have a duty to perform to my country I never for a moment forget that there are very dear ones at home whom have claims upon my life, fully as strong[,] who in the midst of battle ever seem to be whispering in my ear

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4 Miles south of Kingston, Georgia
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"spare yourself for my sake"! At Kingston the enemy made but feeble resistance and we swept down through its deserted streets like a hurricane. This is the point where the rail road from Rome connects with the main road to Atlanta and prisoners reported the enemy intended to make another stand here. finding them gone we turned in for a little rest before proceeding on to Atlanta. We have now gotten pretty well out of the mountain fortresses of Northern Georgia in the open southern country which contrasts favorably with that through which we have passed. I am glad of it for I am very tired of the interminable mountains. Though it is getting quite warm, we are not suffering in that regard yet.

Your letters have reached me pretty promptly thus far. yesterday I received the copy of the Atlantic you sent me. I am quite much pleased with it, especially the poem on the veterans. It is indeed a source of joy and pride to me to know that while I am here fighting the enemies of our common country I have a dear wife who enters so fully into the spirit of the cause as well as the reality of the personal sacrifices as to endorse that Mother's sentiment towards her son, changing it only to the holy relations which you and I sustain to each other my darling! I indeed am very proud of such a spirit and such a companion! and earnestly hope that the past's predictions will soon be realized, that this war [may] soon be over and we can nestle together in our little home castle as in the days of yore! thus indeed will we be happy. O how I would love to be with you this morning, this lovely May morning[,] while ~~we~~ nature is wearing her most winning smiles. I know our

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little home which looked so comfortless and cold through the bleak winter must now be more lovely. we could now sally out with our "little swan" without the danger of taking cold and being laid up for weeks as a consequence. I am pleased to know that she knows all her letters. she will be a bright little star in our home firmament wont she darling? Have you heard anything more from Will Cook? or from any of our boys, Clark, Frank, or Jimmy [Barnes]? I would like very much indeed to hear. I suppose Clark & Frank are with [General] Siegle's [sic] command - poor Jimmy, I dont know where his got to. You wanted to know if I got back with all my things safely. I did - I saw quite a curiosity on Rocky face mountain the other day. The sweet scented shrub growing wild in great abundance, also what is called the fringe  flower, a white flower very fine, but I dont get to devote much attention to such things. We have passed some beautiful farms and shaded groves. A much better country than about Chattanooga[.]

[Inverted at top of page 1:]

I read your "extra" [the] day before yesterday. a little extra thrown in occasionally is very acceptable indeed provided it dont stave off your regular issue. Then, I will close now and if we dont move for a day or two will write again before leaving here The other boys are all well. Myers [sp?] was very uneasy about Frank but got a letter saying he was better. he dotes on him very much[.]

[On left margin of page 1:]

I am looking for another tonight - My love good bye from your ever loving and trusting Milton -