

University of Mississippi

eGrove

Correspondence

Civil War Collection

10-16-1861

William C. Nelson to Foster Cage (16 October 1861)

William Cowper Nelson

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/ciwar_corresp



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nelson, William Cowper, "William C. Nelson to Foster Cage (16 October 1861)" (1861). *Correspondence*. 660.

https://egrove.olemiss.edu/ciwar_corresp/660

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Civil War Collection at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Correspondence by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

In Camp, near Pensacola, Fla.,
October 16th 1861.

My Dear Nephew;

Presuming that you would like to hear some of the particulars of the little engagement which took place down here a week ago, and as I owe you a letter anyhow, I don't know how I could better pass away this rainy morning, than by writing to you. To begin at the beginning, our Company, the Spitznagel Rifle Guards from Waterford, and the Dragoon Guards from Hernando, were selected from our Regiment last Monday night week, and ordered to sleep on their arms, and be ready to march at a moment's warning, on Tuesday evening about half past five o'clock, the drum called us into line, and we set out, not knowing what our destination was, but directing our steps towards the Navy Yard, which is distant about six miles from our camp, at Barrancas Redoubt a place about two miles from the Navy Yard we halted and were joined by detachments from the Alabama Georgia and Louisiana troops, so that by the time we reached the Yard our force amounted to 1000 men, we waited there until 9 o'clock, when we embarked on board the steam boat *Time*, and steered for Pensacola, arrived there we disembarked, and immediately re-embarked on board of flats, scows &c, and being taken in tow by a small steamer, we directed our course for Santa Rosa Island, we effected a landing about 2 o'clock, at a point some six or seven miles above Fort Pickens, we then learned that the design of the expedition, was to

surprise and burn Billy Wilson's Camp, which is about a mile from the Fort. We formed into line as soon as we landed, (our company being at the head of the column,) and commenced our march; for two or three miles we continued our march, without getting a sight of the enemy, their pickets not extending over two miles from their camp, I was out scouting during a portion of that time, going at double quick, most of the time, in order to keep far enough ahead of the main body to give the alarm in case the enemy should discover our presence, I had rejoined my company however, when we came up to the first sentry, he was shot, and we continued our course, shooting the pickets as we went, until we got to the Zouave Camp, we were on them, before they were aware of it, they fled precipitately, leaving everything behind them, a few only who did not get out of their tents quick enough, showing fight, we burned their whole encampment, together with their commissary building, containing a large quantity of provisions; having accomplished our object, and daylight beginning to appear, we prepared to depart, before doing so, a good many of our men, secured for themselves such little articles as suited their fancy, several men in our company brought guns with them, one man got a whole suit of splendid clothes, pants, jacket and overcoat, another one took a cartridge box, which he found hanging up in a tent, when he got back to camp and opened it, he found 60 dollars in gold, hid in the bottom of it, put there I suppose by the owner of it, to keep it from being stolen, as Billy's men have the reputation of being great rogues, and they proved themselves on that eventful night, to be arrant cowards.

Give my love to ^{Gus} tell him I wish he could have been here to ^{have} participated in the expedition.

While at the Commissary Building, I managed to secure me a mule, as they were some seven or eight there, and we didn't care to burn them, I promoted him and set out, I rode him about a mile, when I gave him up to a wounded man. While we were engaged in burning, a detachment of Regulars had been sent out from the Fort, to cut off our retreat, but instead of their cutting off our retreat, we cut them all to pieces, took the Major who commanded them prisoner, we finally reached our boats and pushed off, when some two or three hundred yards out in the bay, some more of the Pickenites made their appearance and commenced firing on us, they killed two or three of our men, and wounded several others, it was at this time that Gen. Anderson who had command of the expedition was wounded, I was ~~not~~ ^{not} standing three steps from him, when the ball struck him, he was immediately taken down into the cabin, (we were standing on the deck of the tow boat), they had hardly taken him down & when a ball hit me, it cut my canteen strap in two, ^{and} went through my haversack, but did not penetrate the flesh, the ball was so far spent, it was going hard enough though to hurt pretty considerably and to leave a bruised place there for a week, it struck me on the left hip, I thought surely it had gone in, when it first struck me, but soon discovered my mistake, when I found there was no blood visible, We lost in the undertaking 33 killed, ~~2~~ taken prisoners and 38 wounded, we took about 20 prisoners including Major Vogdes, who was one of the best officers on the island, how many we killed and wounded is not definitely known, variously estimated at from 100 to 300, I don't think it could possibly

I send you enclosed some little mementoes of Santa Rosa Island, not very valuable it is true, but then they are from the United States, have been less than 150. They took Dr. Gholson and two other doctors, prisoners, but released them the next day, on their parole, not to remain in Florida, they have accordingly all left for their respective homes. There was only one man in our company killed, Mr. Watson Webber, and only one wounded Mr. J. K. Stillman, the latter got seriously hurt, he was shot in the left shoulder. Well I have been in a fight; but I never want to get in another one in the night, the next time any fighting is to be done, and I have to do it, I want day light to do it in, I don't know ^{that} there is any more danger from the enemy, but there is a great deal of danger of being shot by your own men, several times on the island that ^{might our} own men fired into each other, and it is thought by some that half of our men were killed in that way. Santa Rosa Island is the roughest place to march over you ever saw in your life, marshes, hammocks, thickets, and drifts of sand sometimes almost perpendicular, sometimes up to your waist in water, and again almost knee deep in sand, I don't think the Virginia boys ever had to go through much worse to get into a little ground scuffle. We moved our camp yesterday, and are now somewhat nearer the Navy Yard and not more than seven or eight miles from Pensacola, we were formerly about 14. Direct your letters to care Capt Saml Benton, Jeff Davis Rifles, 9th Regt. Mis. Vol., Warrington, Fla. Tell your Ma, that she must consider this letter as partly belonging to her, Love to Lyman and Little Sis, tell her I wish she had stayed in A.S. till I ^{had} come home. Your affectionate Uncle Will.

Well Little Sis I am very much obliged to her for the many nice things, she would have given had I gone down to Helena, Tell I take the will for the deed.