

8-15-1861

1861-08-15 Colonel Charles Roberts writes to Governor Washburn requesting immediate discharge of the 2nd Regiment

Charles W. Roberts

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Confidential

Head Quarters

170.

Arlington Heights

Camp Rice 2nd Regt. Maine Volunteers

Aug. 15th. 1861

Hon. Israel Washburn Jr

Augusta, Maine

Dear Sir

I yesterday after
mature deliberation telegraphed you as follows or
similar.

"Use all possible means to muster out of
the service the 2nd Maine Regt. & order home, particularly
by mail". I was very much grieved I can assure
you to take the above step both for my own credit, and
that of the heretofore gallant 2nd but it is better for a
man or a body of men "to give up the whole world rather
than to lose their own souls". I cannot consistently with
my present feelings, and views remain in command of
this regiment - disorganised, & ruptured as it now is
as the labor of getting the ship off the rocks, and
ready for another successful voyage will surely
entirely wear out the pilot. I shall now together with
your assistance if granted, use all ^{every} ~~my~~ Endeavors to have

this regiment honorably discharged if possible,
Now I will give you my reasons for the above
course. Since the late disastrous battle at Stone
Bridge we have been shamefully treated, particularly for
men who at a moment's notice bravely marched forth to
defend their Country. Altho on the 28th day of June
last made a requisition on government for clothing none
as yet had been furnished us. We are now ragged,
without shoes, encamped upon a miserable, and
unhealthy spot which during a rain is hardly
fordable. We are daily promised a change but none
comes. We are from time to time promised clothing but none
appears, while the third and fourth Maine Regiments
received a thorough new outfit before the late engagement,
In the mean time the military spirit & vigor of our
men has gradually wasted away, until it has
dropped into a mere skeleton, I am truly ashamed
to have any of my Eastern friends visit us particularly
as we have a good name which we have honorably
gained, the official reports of Genl Tyler & Col^l Hayes
bearing witness to the same, besides we have lost
many prominent men, including Chaplain Standard
beaver, Lieutenants and Captain, Notwith standing
all these misfortunes we have until yesterday

faithfully performed our duty, and strictly obeyed every order issued by our Superiors. Yesterday morning however much to my Surprise & Sorrow nearly four entire Companies together with liberal detachments from others refused longer to do duty, the reason for so doing was, that their time of service had expired. The evening before at Parade I read to them the petition sent to you & returned by you to Col^l Jameson, also to the entire Regiment your letter of explanation, after briefly addressing them on the subject, and urging them to no longer pursue the phantom. I felt encouraged and at two o'clock the following morning retired believing that the bone of contention was at last thoroughly picked dry, but at five o'clock I awoke and soon found that I was mistaken. Our position here being an important one, owing to its location, detachments of our command are continually called upon for picket duty. Consequently one Company being detached that very morning, for drill and artillery in Fort Concoran, and that company refusing to do the same I was obliged to report them to Col^l Sherman, Commanding - which I immediately did, Col^l S. then ordered the Regiment into line, & addressed them also

reading your letter which I had previously
-given him. - He then explained fully the nature
of the offence they were committing, and stated to
them that the punishment was severe. He told
them that he was no lawyer, and could not argue
the point with them. Then all those who refused
duty he ordered to the front. One hundred & fifty
stepped forward, but after some exhortations
all but fifty eight privates, and four non
commissioned officers returned to the ranks,
these latter being reported to Genl Scott, they
were at 8 o'clock (P.M.) last evening under the
guard of a detachment of United States Cavalry
marched to the Navy Yard at Washington, from
thence they are immediately to embark per
Steamer *Pemberton* for Dry Tortugas *Gulf of Mexico*
there to serve on "garrison duty" until they can
like men serve their Country. This after
all our labors is exceedingly trying as well
as mortifying to me, and to the Officers &
generally. Many of the men thus detached
from us have families at home who must
necessarily suffer much in body & mind before

their return to their homes, others are young
lads who may never see New England again,
some sea-lampys, and lady land lubbers who here
for a long time been storming this question like
cowards returned to the ranks, and as often happens
in cases of this description, the most innocent are
receiving the punishment, that should have justly
belonged to them, I am in hopes, the sentence may
yet be revoked, but fear not.

Another source of
annoyance to say the least is, that our recent
recruits on account of physical inability must to
a great extent be discharged, while those remaining
with few exceptions are poor specimens of
humanity, Col^l Jamesons resignation but
yesterday evening announced does not of course
add any charms to our position, as he is much
belov'd both by officers & men as well as admir'd
for his bravery & coolness, were I now to send you
a true list of the vacancies it would I fear comprise
the Field Staff & company Officers entire, but for the
welfare of the men I have drawn up hastily a
petition, which the officers have signed, and forward

the same to you together with this explanation, Col^l Jamison's resignation was very unexpected to me & all the officers but under all the circumstances we cannot blame him but sadly deplore the necessity that caused him so to do. Rumors have reached me that I am spoken of as one of the candidates for Colonel ^{of the} Regiment now being formed in our State, allow me to say to you, if the honor was offered me, I could not now under any circumstances accept. What little remains of my military career belongs strictly to the Maine 2nd particularly as this Regiment is largely composed of those residing near my own home, but before being deprived of my best officers, and the Regiment totally disorganized, I trust you will bear in mind our former services & willingness to obey orders, and give us if possible an honorable discharge. Many of those composing our Regiment are the best of men, and will, after a short respite I have no doubt gladly enlist for a winter campaign, and the war, but they are not now effectual in the field the Army worn of discontent having too long been preying upon their spirits. Please give this matter your immediate attention, I am aware to what extent

The effect of our course will be ensured, but even
I believe that this was not the best course to pursue
I should not suggest it, Dr Allen just returned from
Richmond on parole unharmed will soon truly
relate to you our situation, better than I can describe
it, as I am too frequently interrupted to touch upon
all the various causes that have produced the
present results, In forming new regiments
I hope for the welfare of our State in this
lamentable crisis that has come upon the
country, that the oath will be carefully administered
to each man ^{sworn} and the term of service thoroughly
explained, By so doing no grumbling can
create an argument, One other important
matter is, that the physical state of the recruits
should not be overlooked, Every recruit should
be stripped and carefully examined by a
competent physician, the war is to be one
of great magnitude & long duration and many
in my opinion will be obliged to take arms who now
are striving for peace, In short the greatest pains
should be taken on the start, leaving no loose
serens to work out, at the first rough encounter,
I am aware that your ears, as well as all public

officials are exceedingly laborious, and of a
very trying nature, and I regret that I have
so long trespassed upon your time, but a
thorough statement at once presents the trouble
of repetitions, and for this reason I have written
so profusely. Could we earlier have had a
little more attention paid our regiments in
the field from the general government, and
material aid from our Congressmen whose calls
are comparatively light, many of our present troubles
might have been obviated, but the calamity since
its commencement has gradually assumed new
and more alarming features, until now it has
become a monster which it is in a moment
difficult to decide how to handle, and we must
and can only learn by each bitter experience, and
what an army composed largely of volunteers
most requires from time to time I admit is
difficult to anticipate, in order to keep all
the wheels constantly in motion.

In haste

I remain very respectfully yours

Chas. W. Roberts

Lieut Col in Commanding

2nd Maine Regt.