

PP 157 Confederate captivity

Memphis, Dec. 30th 1862

Dear Father.

You little thought and neither did I when we took leave of each other at River Point, that in about two weeks time I would be a prisoner of War to the Confederate States of America so styled, but such was my fate. After arriving in St Louis I met Mr Northrup and the next day we started for Holly Springs, Miss, at which place we arrived without any interruption. We had with us some \$17,000 in money which we divided between us I having one half & Mr N. another. On our way down I took particular notice of the country through which we passed and I must confess that I was impressed with the idea that there was not much security to the travelling community or to those who were interested in getting out Cotton, as the whole route from Columbus, Ky. to Holly Springs a distance of over one hundred and twenty miles was through a heavy wooded country and just the kind of country for Guerrilla Warfare. To be sure the road was guarded but the men were stationed along the route in small squads yet did not take much of a distance to exhaust a regiment of a 1000 men & it was very easy for a band of guerrillas to come upon them & capture them by detachments, at the same time cutting the telegraph wires and tearing up the track, when we arrived at Holly

Dramatic eyewitness account of Confederate General Earl Van Dorn's early morning surprise attack on Holly Springs, Mississippi, the resulting capture by the narrator, a cotton buyer from Rhode Island, and the destruction at the Union supply hub

(Civil War) [Greene, Christopher R.] (1827-1885) **Autograph Letter Signed, Memphis, Dec. 30th, 1862, to his father, Simon H. Greene, Richmond, Rhode Island, Describing the Confederate Attack on Holly Springs, Mississippi**

Quarto, 10-pages, approximately 3000 words, old fold line with several separations along folds, but in very good, clean, and legible condition.

An expansive autograph letter signed "Christopher", to his father Simon H. Greene who owned a mill in Richmond, Thode Island (operating as Wm. R. Greene & Co., which became S. H. Greene & Sons in 1865). Christopher had been sent south to purchase cotton for the family business, and was quickly taken prisoner by Confederate cavalry, early in the morning of Saturday, December 20th, [mistakenly noted as the 19th in the letter], the day Confederate General Earl Van Dorn and his lightning cavalry, 3500 strong, surprised the Union troops in Holly Springs, capturing most of the 1500 Union soldiers stationed there and destroying at least a million and a half dollars' worth of U.S. supplies. U.S. post

commander Col. Robert C. Murphy was captured. Grant had twice warned Murphy that Van Dorn was headed his way but Murphy did nothing.

On a cotton buying trip to the South in late 1862, Greene met a colleague, Mr. Northrop, in St. Louis, traveling with him through Kentucky and Tennessee to Holly Springs – “over 120 miles through a heavy wooded country and just the kind of country for guerilla warfare”. Holly Springs was then an important supply depot for Union troops in the area south of Memphis. “We arrived without any interruption ... [with] some \$ 17,000 in money which we divided between us, I having one belt in and Mr. N. [who quickly departed Holly Springs with 80 bales of cotton to ship] another.”

After describing their boarding house and some of its lodgers, Greene fell prey to Gen. Earl Van Dorn's surprise attack on Holly Springs:

“... I was awakened by the rapid discharge of musketry about day break, I immediately jumped out of bed and dressed, went to the window of my room ... and I saw our Cavalry ... not more than 30 feet off firing at the secesh Cavalry, the secesh were too strong for them and they were obliged to beat a retreat, and soon after the whole town was filled with the enemy. I soon learned that we were captured. My first thought was to take care of my valuables... I found the landlady and told her that she must take care of my money ... I sat quietly by the fire ... Hardly seating myself before in walked two men with revolvers in their hands ... inquiring if we were Yankees... they ordered us to fall into line with other citizens & soldiers when we were marched some two miles into a piece of wood where we were obliged to sign a parole, finally were released after a detention of some 5 ½ hours ... the cotton which was in town amount to 12 or 1500 bales was all set fire to and burned by the enemy. We had some 56 bales burnt among it, some of the finest cotton I ever saw... the Rail Road buildings were destroyed as also a very extensive armory ... all the stores which the army had consisting of subsistence and ordinance stores were all burnt. The explosions arising from the powder & the shells was terrific, the pieces of shell flying in every direction ... a piece struck within six feet of me. I ran pretty much all the way. ... The town was badly injured by the explosions, hardly a pane of glass left in any house ... the damage to confederate property far exceeded that of U.S. property.”

Following the account of the attack, Greene described the general demeanor of the Confederates – “Van Dorn was very gentlemanly, it being early in the morning he was not drunk” – and the disaster that befell the Union forces – “I think the surrender of Holly Springs a very disgraceful affair ... no attempt was made to defend the place ... the officer in command, Col. Murphy, I do not think is the right man ... some of his opponents think him a traitor. I do not think so ... he is incompetent... after the enemy left, everything, of course was in great confusion. The soldiers were completely demoralized.”

The final five pages relate, in detail, including an encounter with Confederate guerillas, Greene's miserable multi-day trip from Holly Springs to Memphis (48 miles), walking the distance through steady rain and muddy roads, while accompanying 300 wagons, a relief train organized under Gen. Grant's orders to transport remaining supplies and injured soldiers.

In Memphis Greene reconnected with Northrop and assured his father – “I brought back over \$ 14,000 in money ... it was a relief to me to take the belt off which I had worn so long... with all my bad luck, I have had much good luck and feel truly grateful for my deliverance from the hands of our enemies, as when I was first taken I thought perhaps they would shoot or hang me. In fact, after we arrived upon the ground where we were to be paroled something was said about shooting the cotton buyers ... if Murphy had done his duty the town of Holly Springs could have been held against Van Dorn ... this war,

I am fearful will never be ended until we in some way stop this miserable management on the part of those who are in command and place men in power who are competent.”

\$ 2500.00