Letter From Cummings, Milo written Wednesday, July 24th, 1861

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[to Hollis Cumming]

I wrote to father last Sunday, when I was at St. Charles, St. Charles County, Missouri, 25 miles from Alton [IL]. We left Alton last Friday at 5 o'clock P.M. on a boat and went down to the mouth of the Missouri [River] then plowed up it to St. Charles [MO] at the fast rate of four miles an hour and landed at 12 o'clock at night. Such a blowing and scratching to find our own things, running here and ... there. Our Company, with three others, was in the cabin hot enough to boil eggs. I believe it would stew a hard shelled squash with the rind on. But after half an hour's waiting, our turn came to go off. You [had] better believe we weren't much sorry to get another puff of fresh air. Up the street we went and halted a few minutes until all of the companies could get together. We stood on one foot and rested on the other. We soon marched a mile to the camp ground. There was a few of the town[s] people (some of the girls mixed in) up to cheer us and wave their handkerchiefs at us ... Thursday morning ... We fairly made the heavens ring cheering them in return. The two Regiments that left there the night before ours did, camped one day at St. Charles. The German Regiment is a mile from here. They have 16 of the great North Western Band from Chicago with them. They came down here last night and gave us a serenade, and also the 21 st. Reg., that came here last week, the other Reg. that was with us from Alton, is camped between here and St. Charles. Whenever we stop at our journey's end, night or day, and as soon as we break ranks, off comes the knapsacks and out with our blankets. Then, the man who finds a shade tree first is the best fellow; then look out for a good snooze. Every man for himself. There is only half our regiment that comes with us and nobody knows when the rest will come, but General [John] Pope. When he gives orders to march, we strip our tents and the cooks pack up the things and in half an hour we are off from camp. We came from St. Charles here in the night, most of the way. It took 10 hours to come 80 miles, 800 of us and 100 Cavalry men. There is another Company here that belongs to the other Regiment. Part of us rode on open [railroad] cars. There was 20 cars and so heavy loaded that the old engine got stuck twice. The first time they had to take part of the train and go to the first station and then came back for the rest. We had a glorious time. The country grew better the farther we came from St. Charles, a fine prairie on each side of the road for miles, that was not broke. There is not quarter as much fruit here as there is at Alton. This is the third time. we noticed several houses on our route, where there was slaves [Missouri originally was a slave state]. Most of the men pretend to be Union men. All along the road in places (in the morning, when we could see) there would be old women and little tow heads out waving their hands at us. We come through only one town, out of 7 or 8 towns, besides the two places where there was regiments stationed, that had the Stars and Stripes up and waving. We gave it three hearty cheers and a tiger. It done us good to see the flag that we are sustaining, unfurled in the open air. We arrived here at 9 o'clock in the morning and marched a short distance to the camp ground, where we rested until after dinner, then we moved across the railroad track and pitched our tents on a level piece of ground. Mexico is a small town of five or six hundred inhabitants. Get a map [and] you can find out where we are situated. A train came up last night with one company of infantry and one of cavalry and a quantity of provisions. Capt. took out about 50 of us this forenoon a scouting. We went 3 or 4 miles, shot off an old sweepstakes at a target, and came home. The rest of our Regiment has just come in on the cars, but have not come in camp yet. This country is very destitute of water. Most of the water is cistern water. The wheat here is all in the stuck [?]. Corn is poor and uneven and not near as good a it was in St. Charles ... I was sick a while, but have got well again. Our principal living is bacon and beef, hard bread, coffee, rice and sugar, rice once or twice a week. Five of our boys at at Alton, sick and lame. They are Daniel Allen, Steven Calkins, Charles Wilson from Elkhorn, Abertis Turner and William Smith. Turner and Smith are lame ... We expect to get our rifles soon. How long we are to stay here, I don't know. We are toted around wherever the General sends us. It is hard to tell whether we will have any fighting to do or not. The darned whelps are scattered all around and keep hid and fire into the [railroad] cars when they are running. They have the track guarded and have an engine on hand [which] can run ahead of the train to see it it is in order. They are almost afraid to run in the night ... Friday morning ... Everything is quite lively this morning. There is 3 or 4 trains of cars here and I expect that they are to take us of to parts unknown in a day or two. I would like [to] have you send me a back number of the Mirror that has a lis tof the Carroll County Rangers .. We have not received our money yet, but it is due us now ... I am corporal of the guard today and I must go in a few minutes ...