# **89.** Marcus M. Spiegel, Letter of a Civil War Soldier (1864)

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Born into a Jewish family in Germany in 1829, Marcus Spiegel took part in the failed German revolution of 1848. In the following year, he emigrated to Ohio, where he married the daughter of a local farmer. He enlisted in the Union army in 1861. He went to war, he wrote to his brother-in-law, to

defend "the flag that was ever ready to protect you and me and every one who sought its protection from oppression." Spiegel rose to the rank of colonel in the 120th Ohio Infantry and saw action in Virginia, Mississippi, and Louisiana. He was an ardent Democrat, who shared the era's racist attitudes and thought Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation a serious mistake. Yet, as the Union army penetrated the heart of the Deep South, Spiegel became increasingly antislavery. Spiegel died in a minor engagement in Louisiana in May 1864, one of the hundreds of thousands of Americans to perish in the Civil War.

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PLAQUEMINE LA JAN 22/64

My dear Wife, my sweet Cary!

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... You must not expect any news inasmuch as this [is] as monotonous a place as ever Millersburg can be. We are living here right on the Mississippi River and with exception of three or four Steamboats landing here every day which are called Coast Packets and travel from Baton Rouge to New Orleans and back, we have no news. When I first came here we had four Regiments of Infantry, three Batteries of Artillery and one Company of Cavelery. Since then two Regiments of Infantry, the 22nd and 7th Kentucky and two Batteries have been moved to Baton Rouge where they got up a big scare the other day.

This leaves us the 42nd-Ohio and the 120th Ohio, one Battery and one Company of Cavelery, sufficient to hold this place against all marauding forces they can bring; we are building a very large and formidable Fort here. The weather here is beautiful, just like our June; it is very warm and the air is mild, wholesome and refreshing. I wish to God you could be here. Colonel L. A. Sheldon of the 42nd Ohio is in command here; you know if you remember what I think of him; he commanded our Brigade last year at Chickasaw and Arkansas Post. Yet he is a very clever man and extremely kind to me. He has his wife here; she is from Lorain County; a regular build



Western Reserve Yankee Girl. I do not see her often, though very much pressed to call. I saw her twice in four weeks.

Dr. Stanton, Adjutand, Uncle Josey, Sinsheimer and myself spend most of our time together. There was a report yesterday that there were a lot of Rebels twelve miles from here, so I started out with a Company of Cavelery. Uncle Josey and Doctor Stanton and my friend Lieutenant Miller (whom you saw at home) acted as volunteer Aids, but we found "nary Reb" after a hard ride. I managed to get four dozend Eggs and we came home. We are living in a House all together (i.e. field and Staff); our boy does the cooking for our Mess. Uncle Josey's business does not go very well just now; there are so very few troops here and they have no money and the lines are closed.

I have at present twelve Sergeants in Ohio on the recruiting Service; I do not know how well or whether at all, they succeed. It takes so long somehow to hear from Ohio and the North generally that we do not know what is going on. In New Orleans they have news once a week at least but here it is very irregular.

Captain Moffit sent in his resignation Papers about three months ago and a few days ago they came back accepted. I am very sorry for them indeed. Since I am here I have learned and seen more of what the horrors of Slavery was than I ever knew before and I am glad indeed that the signs of the times show, towards closing out the accursed institution. You know it takes me long to say anything that sounds antidemocratic and it goes hard, but whether I stay in the Army or come home, I am [in] favor of doing away with the institution of Slavery. I am willing for the Planters to hire them and in favor of making the negro work at all events; inasmuch as he is naturally lazy and indolent, but never hereafter will I either speak or vote in favor of Slavery; this is no hasty conclusion but a deep conviction. Yet I never mean hereafter to be a politician, but quietly as a good citizen doing duty to my God, my family, my Country and myself.

Charley has left here about a week ago; I think however he is yet in New Orleans. You must write me a long, long letter and many of them and ask me ten thousand questions in every one and I will take

them up one by one and answer them. This is the tirest place I ever was at, during my Soldier life, but the boys are so comfortable and feel so very well that I am not at all anxious to leave here. We had a negro woman cooking for us when Uncle Josey, Charley and Sinsheimer messed with us, but it is so far for them and they left us and we discharged our Cook and have only our boy. One of my men who deserted in Covington and was brought up by the Provost Marshal was tried by a Court Marshal and sentenced to forfeit all his pay and condemned for six months hard labor on Fort Espararox [Esperanza], Texas, with a Ball and Chain on his right leg, a very very hard sentence indeed; I would rather they would have shot him, for death is not so hard as degradation.

I am well and hearty and if I had my dear, dear little family here I would not wish anything better, but as it is my heart is ever yearning for home, home with all its blessings. I hope you are comfortable during this extreme awful cold weather, such as I see by the Papers you must have had; it makes me tremble to think you had to be there without me God grant all was right.

Hamlin must continue to be a good and obedient boy. It is about getting to be a youth and he must endeavor to learn well and make a man so he can aid and assist his father and mother when they get old. I hope soon to be at home when I can teach him and help him along....

## Questions

1. What do you think Spiegel means by "the horrors of slavery"?

2. Why does he say that his new antislavery viewpoint "goes hard"?