



John Butler Conynham

Small archive of Lt. Col. John B. Conyngham of the 52nd Pennsylvania Infantry, who commanded the first regiment into Charleston and his accounts of raising the Fort Sumter Flag, a visit to Port Royal, and his participation in an abolitionist celebration at Mitchelville, a settlement for escaped slaves

\$8500

A small archive of material by Lt. Col. John Butler Conyngham of the 52nd Pennsylvania Infantry describing several momentous events near the end of the War in South Carolina. In 1864 Congynham had been captured and spent time in both the Macon, Georgia and Columbia, South Carolina prisons before being paroled from Camp Asylum in Columbia, South Carolina in December, 1864 and rejoining the troops. Conyngham's regiment was according to his account the first to enter Charleston and raise the American flag in February, 1865. The archive consists of two letters by Congynham and a signed carte de visite.

1. 16-page Autograph Letter **Signed** from Port Royal dated between April 13th through 16th to his wife consisting of four folios of four pages each. A small hole that proceeded through each page of the letter has been archivally repaired and approximately one word per page has been inked in an unknown hand. The letter is easily readable and written in dark ink. Writing to his wife, Conyngham merely signs the letter: "Your own O." Presumably a pet name, although there is no question of the writer's identity. The letter gives a detailed account of travel to Port Royal (Hilton Head) and going on to witness the re-raising of the American Flag at Fort Sumter, and includes a visit to an abolitionist celebration at Mitchelville, a town for escaped slaves, and the grand celebration upon learning of Lee's surrender.

The letter describes Conyngham's excursion with a group of U.S. dignitaries, first to Cuba, then on to Port Royal, and finally describes the flag raising at Fort Sumter. He provides a detailed account of his sojourn in Cuba, but the vast majority of the letter is concerned with his account of the coast of South Carolina including a fine description of the U. S. installation and the Sutler's stores and describes a ball given by General Gillmore:

"...on the evening of the day of our arrival here Gen. Gillmore and staff came off on a visit, and left us invitations to attend a ball at his headquarters the following evening, which was given by the staff officers, as an anniversary of the fall of Fort Pulaski. Yesterday afternoon by way of change I concluded to go ashore at Hilton Head, and as we were laying on the Bay Point side which was about three miles distant, I took the tug sent us. I was the only officer wishing to go ashore, and on getting there obtained the boat until I was ready to leave. Things looked very much changed since I was here in /61. Sutlers' stores, government store houses, and rough small frame dwellings gives the place quite a village aspect. After walking around some in the sand, I thought I would look up Mr. Dennis' store, and see how things looked there. On inquiry I learned the direction of his place of business. I walked up 'Robber's Row,' which is the principal street, and where all the Sutlers' stores etc. are."

“...Gen. Gillmore’s Headquarters were beautifully arranged and draped in flags for the occasion. The hall for dancing was a large spacious tent attached to the Headquarters. There was a good floor with U. S. Coat of Arms painted in the center and the sentence ‘Fort Pulaski April 11th 1862.’ Above were five large chandeliers suspended burning each about fifty candles. A good band of music enlivened, and invited the flight fantastic ball... .”

An excellent description follows an party’s invitation to attend an abolition celebration at Mitchelville:

“This morning on Gen. Littlefield’s invitation, Fox & party and a few of our officers went to an abolition celebration at Mitchelville. Among the speakers were Wm. Lloyd Garrison, Judge Kelly (Senator), Mr. Hoxie, Mr. Tilton (editor N. Y. Independent), Judge Kellog of Michigan, Geo. Thompson of England, the pastor of the nigger church, and Gen. Littlefield. I saw correspondents taking down some of the speeches phonographically, the subject of which no doubt you will learn from the papers and save me the trouble of writing. As you may judge from the names of the speakers the meeting was a rank one & required a cultivated taste to appreciate in toto. The Bible was read, quoted, etc. and Psalms, hymns & songs sung. Included among the later were ‘John Brown’s body lies a moulding in the grave.’ ‘We will hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree,’ etc., etc. / We stayed after 12 o’clock, and then came along side of the ship... and started for Beaufort... Beaufort is a fine town. We rode in ambulances while there, and drove some ten miles visiting the country. There is quite a large party from New York here - including Ward Beecher etc. They have all gone to Charleston to be present at tomorrow’s celebration while hoisting the flag on Sumter...”

Taking up the letter again three days later on the April 16th, Conyngham describes hearing the good news of Lee’s surrender and the evacuation of Richmond. He then gives a detailed account of the raising of the American flag at Fort Sumter: “... According to program the flag (the original Fort Sumter flag which Major Anderson was obliged to haul down, but which he was allowed to bring away) was to be hoisted at 12 o’clock. Owing to delay of something, it was not until twenty minutes after one before the flag was hoisted. Cheers resounded from shore and ships, followed in close order the firing of an hundred guns from Fort Sumter. The same from Moultrie and Johnson, and from nearly all the vessels in the harbor. We fired only 21 guns. The noise was almost like a bombardment.”

· “... a little before eight o’clock there was an exhibition of illumination and fireworks from all the naval vessels. The exhibition lasted nigh fifteen minutes or more and was a very grand sight to behold... .”

· “Mr. Fulton (editor of The Baltimore Americans) remained behind to obtain copies of the Charleston Courier in which was published at a late hour the address of H. W. Beecher... .”

2. Autograph Letter Signed to Colonel Hoyt. Four pages in ink. The letter is dated April 24, 1865, “near Raleigh, N.C.” Minor aging, fine. Lt. Col. John Butler Conyngham (soon to be made Colonel) of the 52nd Pennsylvania Infantry writes about the 52nd being the first regiment into Charleston and raising the U.S. Flag. He also disputes that the black soldiers of the U.S.C.T. were the first into Charleston:

“Today we are rather floored to hear in pretty good authority that the terms [Confederate General Joseph] Johnston has been asking for are refused by the government & an unconditional surrender demanded — certain it is that our ‘Unconditional Surrender’ himself is here & was present at the review of the 17th Corps this evening by Sherman. If Johnston allows it to come to blows again it will be a terrible day for him and his army, for with the feeling that has been aroused by the murder of the President nothing but extermination will satisfy our men. He can’t get away from us so that it is ‘fight or surrender’ for him.”

“We are a good deal exercised here upon the subject of the falsehood which seen by artful management in the part of somebody to have become part of the history of the evacuation of Charleston. You are aware of the facts in the case, but let me briefly repeat them. The first flag was raised in Sumter by Major Hennessy at 7:45 in the morning of the evacuation, not by order of Lt. Col. Bennett 21st U.S.C.T. but in pursuance of orders received from Gen. Schimmelfennig some days before, in anticipation of the event.”

“At 3-4 P.M. the same day Capt. Bragg entered the Fort which had been occupied by a guard of a Sergt. & 10 men of the 52’ since 8 A.M. & went through his performance with a flag & boat hook — yet ‘Capt. Bragg of Gen. Gillmore’s staff,’ first threw the American banner to the breeze from the ramparts of recaptured Sumter etc. etc. The same flag, which Hennessy raised on Sumter, he immediately proceeded to wave over Ripley, Castle Pinckney & in the city of Charleston.”

Previous to going to the city he had taken Lt. Col. Bennett, of the 21st Colored, into his boat which is the only foundation for the story that the Negro troops were first in the city. Maj. Hennessy & Lieut. Barr of C. B. with a crew of 52nd men, & Lt. Col. Bennett as a passenger, were the first that landed. The regiment soon followed & were in the city, guarding the public buildings & property and assisting the firemen to stop the progress of the fire the rebels had started before leaving five or six hours before any colored regiment or detachment of a colored regiment, except Col. Bennett himself, had entered.

Then on the plain fact of the case — doesn’t it seem as if we were bound always to be misrepresented? We have received no regimental colors yet but are sporting the flag of Sumter. It is Hennessy’s private property but he proposes to leave it with the regiment to be presented in its name to the State of Penn “when this cruel war is over.”

Conyngham goes on to talk of the grand parade through Charleston:

“Our corps was reviewed by ‘Crazy Billy’ [William Tecumseh Sherman] as the ‘bummers’ call him, on Wednesday & is said to have made a fine appearance. The 52nd marched with two companies of 21 front & swept the street from curb to curb.”

3. Carte de Visite Photograph of Conyngham **Signed** on the front “Yours truly, Jno. B. Conyngham, Lt. Col. 52nd P.V.” There is no backmark and the albumen image appears to have been mounted on card stock from a larger photographic frame - probably an improvised solution made in the field if the photograph was made in Port Royal, as some were (as evidenced by the presence there of noted itinerant photographer Henry P. Moore, or possibly some other photographer in the field). Fine with Congynham’s bold signature below the bust view of the Lieut. Colonel, who in June of ‘65 was made Colonel. [BTC#424972]

any time desired.

This morning on Gen. Littlefield's invitation
Fox & party and a few of our officers
went to an abolition celebration at
Mitchelsville. Among the speakers were
Mr. Lloyd Garrison, Judge Kelly (Senator),
Mr. Hoxie, Mr. Tilton (Editor N. Y. Independent),
Judge Kellogg, of Michigan, Geo. Thompson
of England, the pastor of theigger church
and Gen. Littlefield. I saw correspondents
taking down some of the speeches phonog-
raphically, the subject content of which no
doubt you will learn from the papers
and save me the trouble of writing. As
the main interest was the name of the

According to programme the flag (the
original Fort Sumpter flag which Major
Anderson was obliged to haul down, but
which he was ^{allowed} obliged to bring away) was
to be hoisted at 12 o'clock. Owing to delay
of something, it was not until twenty minutes
after one before the flag was hoisted. Cheers
resounded from shore and ships - followed in

You will be on hand to welcome us back to Pennsylvania -
Dr. F. Bowen has just rec^d. his app^t as Surgeon - He is an excellent man. Our
Commissions have not been heard from - I am just going to write to the Adj^t.
Gen. about them - He messaged us that the Major's Commission for Pennsylvania when
Camp should have had it - If it comes for Pennsylvania I shall withhold it
until I hear from Harrisburg.

All the Officers desire to be re-enrolled. *Camp of 37 P. V.*
Send to you & hope to see you when we
get to Harrisburg - Remember we are to
see all my friends - with compliments from Raleigh N.C.
to Mrs. Boyd. I am, my truly
Yours,
Geo. H. Mygast

April 24, 1865

Dear Col,

I have been intending for some time
to send you some account of the whereabouts &
'what abouts' of the old regiment, but the trouble
of writing while we have been all the time in march-
ing order (to say nothing of my natural disincli-
nation to the pen) has hitherto prevented. I pre-
sume Father has told of the trouble I had in find-
ing amidst this huge gathering - I caught them
just in time to march with the Army to this
place where we fully expected to devour John-
ston's old vagabonds, & I can hardly realize
now that there is no more fight in them - It
does seem as if I ought to have a chance to lay
up some old scores with these fellows instead
of being compelled to embrace them again as brothers.
To day we are rather pleased to hear on pretty good
authority that the term Johnston has been assigned
for our refund by the Government, & on unconditionals

of ~~the~~ ~~evacuation~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~course~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~fact~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~case~~,
but let me briefly repeat them - The first flag
was raised ^{on Sumter} by Major Hennessey at 7.45 in the morn-
ing of the evacuation, not by order of Lt. Col. Bennett
21st Regt. Inf. but in pursuance of orders rec^d from Gen.
Schimmelpfening some days before, in anticipation of
the event - At 3 or 4 P.M. the same day Capt. Bragg
entered the Fort, which had been occupied by a
guard of a sergt. & 10 men of the 52^d since 8 A.M.,
& went through his performance with a flag & book
hook. Yet "Capt. Bragg, of Gen. Williams' Staff," first
showed the American banner to the breeze, from the ram-
parts of recaptured Sumter &c. The same flag,
which Hennessey raised on Sumter, he immediately pro-
ceeded to wave over Ripley, Castle Pinckney & in the City
of Charleston is previous to going to the City he had
been taken to the City of Charleston & in the City of Charleston



Very truly
Yours,
Geo. S. Cunningham
Lt. Col. 53rd P.V.