



Robert Gould Shaw's Courageous Decision

Handout B: Letter 1 from Robert Gould Shaw to Miss Annie Haggerty:

Stafford Court-House, Va.

February 4th, 1863

My Dear Annie

Your two letters, of the 25th and 29th of January, have reached me at last, and I was glad enough to get them. By this time you are on your way to New York, where you will find my last letter. I sent it to Father, thinking that you were going to Susie's.

I did not read General Hitchcock's testimony in McDowell's case. Holt's summing up of the testimony for and against Porter, seemed to me very poor, for a man of his ability; and if I could persuade myself that the court (composed as it was, of officers of honorable standing) could be dishonest, I should think there had been foul play. Several officers have been dismissed for uttering like sentiments; so I think I had better keep my opinion to myself. I was much surprised to hear, the other day, from a regular officer in Porter's Corps, that, though they considered the latter a fine officer, he was not personally liked. I have hitherto heard just the contrary.

We are tolerably comfortable here now, as our long huts are going up again, and we have come across a sutler who furnishes the officers with means to keep a very good mess.

Father has just left here. He came down yesterday, and brought me an offer from Governor Andrew of the Colonelcy of his new black regiment. The Governor considers it a most important command; and I could not help feeling, from the tone of his letter, that he did me a great honour in offering it to me. My Father will tell you some of the reasons why I thought I ought not to accept it. If I had taken it, it would only have been from a sense of duty; for it would have been anything but an agreeable task. Please tell me, without reserve, what you think about it. For I am very anxious to know. I should have decided much sooner than I did, if I had known before. I am afraid Mother will think I am shirking my duty; but I had some good practical reasons for it, besides the desire to be at liberty to decide what to do when my three years have expired.