

Camp near Falmouth Jan. 6th 1863

Dear Cousin¹

Your kind letter is just at hand and I sit down immediately to answer it. One of the greatest pleasures we can have in this unfortunate stage of the war is to receive a letter from our friends at home assuring us that we are not forgotten, and that our efforts although not blessed with the results that could be desired, are appreciated. The present aspect of affairs is gloomy in the extreme and were it not for the spirit of our friends at home who seem determined to support us to the last we poor soldiers would feel disheartened enough. The encouragement we receive in letters from friends enables us to keep up a good heart and hope for the best. You ask me in your letter as to the state of my health. This I am happy to say is now very good much better than could be expected.

At Fredericksburg I was quite sick and continued so for nearly a fortnight since that time however I have been improving and am in hopes that I shall soon be as hearty as ever. I have not seen Port for three weeks but understand he is well. Our Regiments lay about four miles apart and I expect him over here to see me, but he may be too busy to leave camp, and if I don't see him before long, I shall visit him once more in his own quarters. We have a very nice place here to camp in and if we could procure provisions of the right sort would live very comfortably. As it is we are reduced to rather plain diet, but are gradually getting accustomed to it and as long as we can have enough I for one will not complain of the quality. Since the last battle a great many of our officers have resigned on the plea of sickness leaving double duty on our shoulders, but our numbers have been so thinned since leaving Rochester both by deaths and desertions that we officers stand on about the same proportion to the men as formerly. When we came out a little less than five months ago we numbered over 900 men, now we can scarcely report 400 fit for duty so great a drain has there been upon our strength by the sufferings we have indured (*sic*). Of all the deaths in our Regiment, not more than seventy have been occasioned by wounds received on the battlefield, all the rest have been carried away by the sickness naturally attending the change of life they experienced. Now however that we are settled in a good spot and have had a little resting spell, the boys begin to wear brighter countenances and I am in hopes that before we are again called on to any fighting or marching, we will have a healthy Regiment again.²

In writing to a soldier and especially such a poor correspondent as I am, you must expect nothing to repay you for your trouble unless the knowledge of the favor you have conferred upon me can recompense you for your labor, if so please receive my sincere thanks, and be assured that if there was anything in our manner of life that I thought could be of interest to you I would try to make out a more interesting letter. Please excuse me for writing on such a piece of paper, but it is what I have been reduced to for some time past and is the only paper that I can at present procure. Give my love to all the friends and believe me your affect[ionate] cousin

Sam Porter

PS The envelope inclosing this letter is one I bought from Y and is the only style of envelope I have left.³

Sam

Notes

¹ Cousin – The best guess would be Delia Augusta Farley (b.1843). That he is writing to a Farley is suggested by the familiar reference to ‘Port’ which implies a common connection with Porter Farley – Sam’s cousin- and the fact that he does not need to mention Port’s regiment, the 140th NY. So that would narrow the choice to three:

1. Joseph Farley (1839)
2. Delia Augusta Farley (1843)
3. Mary A. Farley (1853)

Because of the tone and the vagueness of ‘cousin’, it suggests a female recipient because of the 19th century male’s concept of women. The vague salutation keeps the anonymity of the receiver, thereby protecting the identity of the female if the letter were intercepted by the enemy or someone else. The vague details of soldier life protect the naturally more fragile female from the seamier side of soldiering. The tone is adult to adult so would rule out the 10 yr. old Mary.

² According to Palmer, they left Rochester with ‘980 strong officers and men’ and in May of 1865 about 160 of them returned home (*Palmer Diary*, 20; *108th New York*, p. 99). The accepted ratio of disease death to battle death was usually 1:1 The 108th had 106 battle related deaths and 90 disease deaths in the course of the war (*Phisterer*, 4, p3269).

³ Y –is probably fellow officer Thomas Yale who was discharged 12 days earlier (Dec.25,1862) and no longer needed envelopes.