

Transcribed by Terry Crooks.

The original letter is in the Porter Family Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections,
University of Rochester Libraries.

Head Quarters 3rd Brigade
2nd Div 2nd A.C.
October 30th

Dear Mary

Last night I wrote a few lines to Father in order to relieve him of any anxiety he might feel on my account, assuring him at the same time that I would write him at length today. I now intend to show you the preference and by giving you the full particulars of our recent movement afford you a slight excuse for writing the parental mansion.

At 2 P.M. of the 27th we broke camp and after eight or nine miles marching went into camp on the Halifax road just beyond the Weldon RRoad and several miles to the left of the line previously occupied by our army. Camp guards were thrown out and pickets established some miles or more in our front. At 3A.M. of the 28th we were under arms and marching to the left with the apparent intention of cutting the SouthSide road.¹ Flankers and Skirmishers were both thrown out and we advanced in the dark expecting every moment to strike the enemy. We saw nothing of them however until about 6 A.M. when two or three bullets were fired by the rebel videttes and immediately replied to by our Skirmishers. The enemy then commenced opposing us but our Skirmishers (4th Ohio and 7th Vir [*7th West Virginia*]) drove them steadily through a dense wood to the bank of a creek, protected on the farther side by a line of breastworks. Here they were brought to a standstill and as the nature of the land prevented our crossing at the right or left a direct attack was ordered. Our Brigade was formed in line of battle and led by Genl Smyth and staff carried the works on the run. The creek was nearly breast deep and in climbing the other side my horse fell on me, just as he was settling on one of my legs however a rousing kick from the other sent him jumping and I received no serious injury. Here I captured a letter which I send as a specimen of Virginia style.²

At the creek the Brigade suffered severely. Having among others one Colonel killed³ and two majors wounded. The advance was then resumed the 3rd Division taking the lead. Occasional shots were interchanged between the pickets but nothing serious occurred until about noon when we had nearly reached Hatcher creek.. The Rebels then opened on us with artillery from several directions and at the same time drove in, with infantry our advance cavalry. The 3rd Brigade was once more brought into play and gallantly advanced driving the rebels more than a quarter mile and finally dislodging them from a line of works they held on this side of the creek.

Lines were reformed and one of our Regiments deployed towards the right to endeavour to touch the left of the 5th Corps which was supposed to be fighting on our flank. Word was soon brought that no connection could be made as a rebel column was already marching between the two Corps and towards our rear. This was reported by Genl Smyth to superior HdQrs but [*no?*] attention [*was?*] paid to it. General Egan Comdg Div then told Smyth to carry the creek in our immediate front by moving a column of fours across a narrow bridge which the rebels held with infantry & raked with artillery. Everything was in readiness for this movement and Genl Smyth and staff seemed liable to lose a few horses at least, when the rebels moving on our flank showed themselves and poured a heavy fire into our 3rd Division. The 3rd immediately faced about and did their best to resist the attack. The Rebels kept moving farther and farther around until our line of battle was almost a complete circle. At one part of this line our men were for a time driven back in disorder but with the assistance of one of the Brigades of 2 Div. rallied and succeeded in surrounding and capturing nearly a thousand prisoners. Things looked desperate enough however and for a time I guess everybody expected to be captured. The day had all along been drizzly but

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now it began to rain and the other discomforts were thus augmented. After repeated attacks on every portion of our line the rebels began to get discouraged and contented themselves [*'with' - crossed out*] by showing their spite in a rapid fire of artillery which they kept up until after dark. About 8 P.M. our troops began to withdraw in perfect silence leaving strong picket lines to be brought in by me at 1A.M. the next morning. How I did this I may let you know at some future time but for the present let it suffice for me to say that we all got in safely and are now recuperating (*'from the' - crossed out*).⁴

I am just in receipt of a letter from you in which you describe your visits to Brooklyn etc,etc... I am very glad that you had so nice a time. Valise reached me this morning everything very nice cake especially.

Love to Charlie⁵
Sam Porter
Capt. A.A.D.C.

Direct

Capt. S. Porter
Hd Qrs 3rd Brigade 2 Div 2A.C.

Notes:

¹ The battle that Sam describes in his letter is usually referred to as the battle of the Boydton Plank Road , Oct.27,1864. Sam records events as part of the brigade HQ staff and therefore does not record the movement of his regiment. The details as Sam records them can be amplified by reading Smyth's report in the Official Records (*O.R.42, 1, pp.325-328*).

As stated before, the attack was meant to capture the Southside RR., the westernmost RR to supply Petersburg and therefore give Grant nominal control of the rail lines of supply to Lee's army, Petersburg and Richmond. Two divisions of the 2nd Corps (2nd & 3rd) were the left flank of the Union attack. On the right flank of the 2nd Corps support was to be provided by the 5th and 9th Corps.

² Videttes were mounted pickets, usually cavalry.

Sam refers to Thomas Alfred Smyth as General since he received his brigadier's star on Oct.1,1864.

³ The Colonel who fell was Lt. Col. F.J. Spalter, 4th Ohio.

⁴ General Egan is Thomas Wilburforce Egan, originally of the 40th NY. He was wounded close to his spine in June 1864 and promoted to Brigadier on Sept.3, 1864 (Warner,p.140).

On paper the plan was supposed to bring 3 Union Corps into battle and thereby achieve a foothold or even a grasp on the Southside RR. Such did not happen. The Rebel works at Hatcher's Run were completed all the way to Armstrong's Mill so the attack of the 5th & 9th Corps could not occur as planned. The left flank (2nd Corps) was almost cut off but managed to extricate itself - overall a rather ill conceived and poorly executed plan.

In his letter, Sam vaguely refers to geography and mentions very little in clear detail. Such is typical since it is generally conceded that in battle, soldiers are only aware of events in a very small area surrounding them.

