

Transcribed by Terry Crooks.

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

Headquarters 2nd Div. 2nd A.C.¹
February 22nd 1865.

Dear Father:

The weather has been for the last ten days delightful, and as during that time the picket duty of our Division has been rather light, the men are nearly all nicely housed. The camps to be sure, do not compare very favorably, with those we left on the 4th inst, (which by the way were generally acknowledged to be the best in the army) but they are clean, and will in a week or two pass inspection. Captain Russell² (my tent mate) and I, have just moved into our new house. It is a very fine one, but as our former one was nicely hung with wall paper, the bare walls of the present domicile rather shock us.

General Smyth though not assigned by the President has been virtually appointed to the command of the 2nd Div. For this, I am very glad both on his account & my own, as it insures my position. I am getting to be quite the lawyer, and am consulted almost daily on points of military justice. Parsons returned a few days ago, and during the temporary absence of Maj. Norval our AAG, is acting in his stead at these headquarters.³ This is a very pleasant arrangement all around. I witnessed Brigade Dress Parade of one of the crack Brigades of the 5th Corps last night. It can't hold a candle to our 3rd Brigade* in marching or soldierly appearance. My clerk went home a few days ago on furlough, he belongs in Buffalo and will doubtless pass through Rochester both going and coming. I think that he will call on you. His name is....[blank] come to write it I remember that I never knew it. Deserters are coming into our lines in large numbers, and all speak of the feeling of discontent in their army. Nothing but the opportunity is waited for by thousands, who would willingly avail themselves of any chance of escape. One hundred shotted guns were fired yesterday in honor of the fall of Columbia and Charleston*. At last that hotbed of treason has fallen into our hands and I should be glad if it were made a desert waste and the port closed. Nothing short would be an adequate punishment.⁴ The prospects of the Confederacy [*emphasis in original*] do indeed look gloomy. As Genl. Gibbon said "Lee's blanket is getting scant if he would cover his feet he must expose his head and vice versa".

Last night word was brought in by deserters that Heath's⁵[sic] Div of the 2nd Corps (Rebel) was under light marching orders and expected to move at dusk. A tenth of our command was kept under arms during the night, and orders issued to be in readiness for an attack, but nothing occurred and I guess that the affair has blown over. Mother writes that your income tax was only assessed of five hundred dollars. Explain in your next. I don't intend to believe any such thing & should like to know how you make it out.

Love to all
Affectionately
Your son, Sam Porter
Judge Advocate, 2nd Div. 2nd A.C.

Transcribed by Terry Crooks.

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

Notes:

¹ The brigade was in the reserve camp near the Vaughan Road and Hatcher's Run (*O.R.46*, 1,p.75-82).

² Sam has the rather annoying habit of never clearly identifying officers that he worked with. There were a number of "Captain Russells" in the 2nd Div. 2nd Corps. Captain Russell is probably Captain Harvey Y. Russell, Captain of Co. D (May 15, 1864). He is mentioned by Gen. William Hays of the 2nd Div. (*O.R.46*, 1,p.759 ; *O.R.46*, 3, p.414) with Porter but not clearly identified until Barlow mentions him with Porter (*O.R.46*, 3, p.1228).

³ Unfortunately for Sam, Thomas Alfred Smyth would not retain leadership of the division. command of the division would be assigned to their old commander William Hays on Feb. 25,1865 . Smyth was returned to command the brigade (*O.R. 46*, 2, pp.690, 708). Smyth would receive command of the division on April 6, 1865 when all of Hays HQ, including Hays, was found to be asleep on the morning of April 6 during the final pursuit of Lee's army. Sadly Smyth would be shot on April 7 at Farmville and die on the morning of April 9 –the day of Lee's surrender. He was the last General officer to die in the war. Parsons is Theron Edwards Parsons, Asst. Adj. Gen. of Smyth's staff. He was the first officer to aid Smyth when he was wounded.

Major Norval was Major John M. Norval, Asst. Adj .Gen for the 2nd Division (*O.R.46*,3,p.415).

⁴ Columbia the capital of South Carolina fell on Feb.17,1865 and subsequently was burned – an occurrence that generated great controversy. Charlestown, S.C. fell into Union hands on Feb.18,1865 (*O.R.47*,1, p.98). Notice that for Sam, the South must be punished and suffer for what it has done. Only the hard hand of war is good for the South at this point. Sam was certainly not alone in his attitude since the dreadful cost of the war was seared into the psyche of the Union soldiers and someone should be held accountable.

⁵ Major General Henry Heth, commanding division in 3rd Army Corps Army of Northern Virginia.
Major General John Gibbon commanding 24th Army Corps, Army of the James.