

Camp of the 108th NY Vols
Falmouth Va.
[probably May 6th 1863]

Every thing in military line is quieted down, and the indications are that the army of the Potomac will once more have a lengthy resting spell.¹ General Hookers proclamation was read to our Regt this evening at dress parade. I am glad to see that he does not feel so much discouraged as most of the army officers do, but wish that he would not try to smooth over our disaster quite so much. We that were in the fight, know that we were whipped. However, I for one, am just as ready to cross the river as ever before and if any thing more willing. I believe that we can lick the Rebs, and am willing to say it at any time.² I have said very little about the fight, but know that you will get all the news from others and in a much more interesting form than I can put it.

One word I must say about our Regt.

Our position was a very trying one but the boys stood up to their work nobly. Col Powers cant be beat. He is my (Beau Ideal) of a soldier. Our loss during the fight was not so large as that suffered by a great many other Regt but it was owing to our good liuck and no cowardice on our part.

I was out on picket yesterday, and to day, and never suffered more from the heat. The weather is intensely hot & I cannot help looking forward with a little dread, to our next march. Please to give Lieut Locke my light military coat that I left at home when last here.³ It is after 12 PM. And I must close. Much love to all

Sam

Morning [May 7th?]

Lieut Locke leaves in a short time and will carry this to you. Poor Thrasher has not been heard from yet. I very much fear that his wound will prove fatal. Has my first Lts commission ever reached you I think that I sent it home but am not positive. My money is all safe in my own hands.

Sam

Notes:

¹ The “resting spell” comment is typical of the fighting at this point in the war. Since civil war armies never achieved a victory like Cannae (Aug.2, 216BC) – a battle of total annihilation – the pattern was maneuver, find the enemy, followed by a fight, disengage, then lick wounds and prepare for the next one. Only when Grant took over was the modern concept of relentless continuous battle until one side is defeated applied to the armies of the South (see Griffith pp. 189f.).

² Hooker’s proclamation –General Orders no. 49–was read to the army on May 6 so hence the dating of the letter. Hooker tried to put as good a light on the disaster as he could but the army knew it had been ‘whipped’ again. Despite the obvious courage of the men, the leaders of the army were not up to the task of leading or using this marvelous weapon in an effective manner (*O.R.25*, 1,p.171). Sam’s attitude clearly reveals that he is down but not defeated. The army needed and wanted a leader who was not afraid to lead them.

³Sam’s comment about his and Powers actions in the battle will be dealt with in the notes for the May 7 letter.

Lt. Andrew J. Locke was 2nd Lt., Co. F. 108th NY.

Captain Byron Thrasher of Co. F died on May 31, 1863 at Armory Square Hospital, Washington of wounds received at Chancellorsville. It can only be assumed that Sam’s concern is sincere for the man who ‘jumped’ him in promotion. Sam would become Captain of Co. F on Jan 16, 1864 with rank from May 30, 1863(*Phisterer*, 4, pp.3278- 3279).