

Falmouth Va Dec 20th 1862¹

Dear Father

Your letter is just at hand, and I sit down immediately to answer it. You say that you have not heard from me since my arrival at Belle Plain². It is very singular as I have written at least five letters since that time.

I wrote a short letter to Farley yesterday and soon after mailing it, received Mary's³ enclosing a few lines from you. The promotion in our company had made a great deal of talk in the Regiment, and all agree in the injustice of the act. As far as Capt Pierce is concerned I thin the whole performance one of the most dishonorable that I know of and I told him so in those very words. The other officers express the same opinion and I think that the Major has lost caste [in the sense of *credibility* see O.E.D.] very much by his share in our disgrace.

I am glad to have heard from you so soon as regards the matter, and shall try to act upon your advice but as far as ever feeling the same respect either for our Major or our Colonel that is impossible. The first has lost by his deceit all claims that he ever had to the title of Gentleman. While the latter by his blind acceptance of the Major's recommendation has laid himself exposed to the charge of imbecility.

It may seem to you that I am using too strong language, but the circumstances of the case are such, that they admit of no milder terms.

Two days before the battle of Fredericksburg I had a long talk with Major Pierce regarding company matters, and even at that late day he made no mention of the expected promotion of Capt. Thrasher. At that time I expressed my determination not to accept the Captaincy of our Co. but to find that my chance for declining the promotion was taken away has upset all my plans and were it not that the same feelings that prompted me to enlist hold me in the Army I would resign in an instant. There are enough resigning without adding myself to the list, and I feel that it is my duty to remain with the Regt.

It is unpleasant enough to be out here under any circumstances, but to be pointed out as the Lieut that was "jumped" makes my position an unusually hard one. However I shall try to discharge all my duties as though nothing happened and perhaps in time some part of the feeling of disgrace may wear off.

Geo. Loder sent in his resignation some time ago as he had the Doctors certificate of permanent disability there can be no doubt that he will be honorably discharged within a few days. This of course will give me his position and will partly make up for my missing promotion through the other channel.⁴

Parsons, Hogoboom, and several others started for Washington this morning to attend a court martial on the murder case which occurred at Camp Palmer. Parsons will probably return in a few days and bring with him my baggage which has been with H.H. Sperry since we left Camp Palmer. It will be a pleasant thing to get some clean clothes, as it is nearly five weeks since I have had any change whatever. By constant washing I have managed to keep pretty clean however and am about the only officer that has never been troubled with "gray backs".

Any body that went through the terrible scenes of Fredericksburg without shrinking ought to have the credit for it and as for Everetts former conduct might make you doubtful as to his fighting on this occasion I wish to say that he remained with his

company all the time that we were south of the Rappahannock and behaved just as an officer should under the firing of the 13th.⁵

Some time ago I sent my commission home, but have failed to mention the circumstances. I ordered the man to leave it at Dewey book store. If you will call there and get it you will oblige me.

Have you received my picture from R.C. Cook yet. I hope it is a good one. I have not felt so well as usual for the past few days but have now nearly recovered and shall be well again in a day or two. Tell Mary that I will answer her letter soon. I wrote a long letter Aunt Delia before leaving camp for Fredericksburg but if she can make much sense out of it she will be smart.⁶

I have got a few trophies which I found myself, in Fredericksburg and will send them home by Loder. The cup belongs to Maj. Pierce the others are mine.

Your affect son
Sam Porter

P.S. Tell mother that I shall soon send a list of the articles that I wish her to send me. Captains Cutler & Yale both sent in their resignations. Lieut Merrill of Co. E is about to do so.⁷

Sam

Notes.

¹Written seven days after the disastrous defeat of the Union Army of the Potomac at Fredericksburg, Virginia on the shore opposite Falmouth.

² Belle Plain, Va., located approx. 6-8 miles SE of Aquia Creek, the Union supply base on the Potomac. Belle Plain, an obvious misnomer since Palmer describes it as "a plain almost a marsh of 200-300 acres of low land" and later the men of the 108th were "literally washed out", was intended as a supply depot for the army at Falmouth. The 108th NY was on duty at Belle Plain from Nov 19- Dec 7, 1862 (*Palmer Diary*, pp.76-87 ; *O.R. I, 21*, 781,798, 814).

³ Farley Porter and Mary Elizabeth Porter, younger brother and older sister respectively of Sam.

⁴ This uproar re: promotion started with the death of Major George Force at the battle of Antietam and the subsequent opening for the rank of major.

What should have occurred is as follows:

- A. Captain Francis Edwin Pierce of Co. F, as senior captain in the regiment should assume Force's majority.
- B. The 1st Lieutenant of Co. F, in this case Lt. George Loder, should assume the captaincy of Co. F.
- C. The 2nd Lieutenant of Co. F, Sam Porter, should then become the 1st Lieutenant of Co. F.
- D. The 1st Sergeant, Byron P. Thrasher, should take the position of 2nd Lieutenant of Co. F.

What happened was:

Since Step B. did not or could not occur because Loder applied for medical discharge, effective Dec. 28, 1862 then instead of Sam moving from 2nd Lt. to 1st Lt., he should have moved into the captaincy of Co. F, vacated by Pierce. However Pierce upset the process when he recommended Thrasher for Captain, which was approved by Colonel Palmer (NB. These were Volunteer Regiments not Regular army and at this stage of the war were not strictly bound by the rules of promotion ie seniority).

Sam seemed to be suffering from a combination of sour grapes and extremely thin skin. He had already told Pierce before the battle that he was not interested so he was furious when Pierce took him at his word! His

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

threat to resign probably stems more from petulance than principle and also some histrionics. This was only the start of Porter's love-hate relationship with Pierce.

⁵ Parsons – Theron Edwards Parsons, Quartermaster Sergeant of the 108th.

Hogoboom – Harmon S. Hogoboom, Captain of Co. B, promoted to major, March 2, 1862. he was originally in the 13th NY and was medically discharged from the 108th on August 7, 1863. He was the third and final major of the 108th NY and from August 1863 until the end of the war the regiment had no major.

Trial - NARA has no military record of such trial in the Judge Advocate General Office.

H.H.Sperry – Monroe County Representative on the Soldier Relief Association.

Gray backs – body lice.

Everetts – Ambrose S. Everett, Captain Co. G. The Comment re: conduct suggests either Everett had a problem at Antietam – which some of the regiment did – or was somehow notorious in his pre-army life.

⁶ Dewey Book Store – located in Arcade Hall, Rochester and owned by D.M. Dewey.

R.C.Cook – University of Rochester classmate of Sam.

Delia – Sam's mother's sister, Delia Farley (1815-1900).

⁷ Major Pierce – Francis Edwin Pierce. The 'trophy' mentioned by Porter were articles stolen during the Union Army's sack of Fredericksburg on Dec. 12-13, 1862. Pierce's letter to Edward D. Chapin of Rochester on Dec. 17 expresses outrage and repugnance at the pillage but evidently was not beyond helping himself to some plunder ("Civil War Letters F.E. Pierce", *Rochester in the Civil War*, ed. Blake McKelvey (Rochester, New York : The Rochester Historical Society, 1944),pp. 158-64).

Loder – George Loder, mentioned earlier.

Cutler - Alexander K. Cutler, Captain Co. E, discharged Jan.1, 1863

Yale – Thomas B. Yale, Captain Co. G, discharged Dec. 25, 1862.

Merrill – Henry P. Merrill, 1st Lt. Co. E, discharged Dec. 30, 1862 (Phisterer, 4, 3269-3282).