

Falmouth Va. Dec 28 [1862]

Dear Father

Our Regt. has once more rec'd a large mail, and the heart of nearly every one of us has been gladdened by news from home. I was fortunate enough to receive three letters, two from you, and one from Mother, and as you still complain of my not writing often enough, I have determined to devote the remainder of the afternoon to letting you understand how little to blame I am for your not receiving letters from me. On arriving at Belle Plain I found Major Pierce just writing to you, so merely sending a word by him, I postponed writing for two or three days. At the expiration of that time I wrote three letters one to you one to Mother and one to Mary, these letters you say you never received. From Belle Plain we moved after a few days delays on the road to our present camp and on the night of our arrival I received a letter from you enclosing five dollars. The receipt of this I acknowledged immediately in a short note written on the leaf of my diary. This I mailed the next morning, and in the evening as we then had a tent I wrote quite a letter once more acknowledging and thanking you for the money. Wednesday the 10th I again wrote directing my letter to Mother and mentioning in it the fact that I had visited the 13th and the 140th on the previous day. Early next morning we had marching orders and started at day light. From that time to the morning of the 16th we were too busy to think of writing and it took me until the next day to recover from the fatigues of our march and fight. I then wrote a short letter to Farley in reply to one from him and soon after another to you or Mother, I hardly know which. At the same time I wrote a letter to Mary and having as I thought done my duty in the writing line I began to wait for answers from home. These answers I never received, but Lt. Merrill and Dr. Arner both informed me that you had not heard from me in a long while and this morning I had determined to write once more whether I received a letter or not. The receipt of your letters this morning freed me from the necessity of writing without having any thing to say, and now that I have sufficiently explained the fact that I am not to blame for your not receiving more letters from me. I will try and give you a little description of our march to Fredericksburg our stay their [*sic*] and finally our retreat.¹

At two o'clock Thursday morning we received orders to be ready and march at daylight with three days rations. We all got up and after rousing the men went to work cooking and preparing for the march. Lt Loder was sick and unable to go with us we were relieved from a good deal of the anxiety which we should otherwise have felt with regard to our clothes etc. but as he was obliged to stay we left him in charge of all our things and were soon ready to start.

At six the firing commenced and though the city is by an air line at least four miles distant the fire of the rebel sharpshooters upon our Engineers could be distinctly heard. Soon after daylight we were underway and all though so far from the scene of conflict there was no need of music. Not only the report of the guns being audible but the whistling of the balls being distinctly heard. We marched in this way for about two hours and were then rested in a deep gulley about half or three quarters of a mile from the River out of range of the enemy's guns. After laying here for about half an hour, the whole line of our batteries commenced directing their fire upon the buildings of the town and kept up such a constant fire from over 100 pieces of artillery that for a time we imagined that

there was a general engagement. The steadiness of the fire however soon undeceived us and then our great wonder was that cannon could work so rapidly. For about an hour (as near as I could judge) there seemed no cessation. One report was so blended with another that you could not distinguish the different discharges. At the end of nearly two hours the firing ceased and then we lay until nearly dark expecting to be advanced. At about four o'clock we were once more under way and marched about half a mile, to the top of a hill from which the Rebel defences were plainly visible. While here the Rebs fired the first gun that they had discharged since early morning the ball passed within twenty feet of where I stood and I saw it strike a man about 50 yards in the rear. As it passed me I saw it distinctly and could tell just where it would strike.

At this point our Regt was separated from the division and advanced to the Lacy House a large house built on the bank of the river very near the pontoon bridge. At about dusk they had succeeded in laying one bridge and a large detail from our Regt was employed during the entire night in laying a bridge close to it. It was splendid sight and the slight danger attending it made the scene all the more engaging. Early in the morning, the troops commenced to cross in a body and for upwards of an hour I watched a steady stream of men eight abreast cross on the two bridges. Soon we were ordered to cross and set foot in F_ at about 10 o'clock Friday A.M. From that time until the night of the 15th we were in the city and in constant danger. The fight you have heard all about and I need say nothing about. As to my feelings "they were too numerous to mention" but from the time that we left the Rail Road I felt that if I were saved, it would be nothing less than divine protection. And when I lay down at night, comparatively safe, I felt that Gods protecting hand had been over me and shielded me in that terrible time of danger. The whole attack was a piece of folly and all that we could do was to advance and when the orders came fall back, this we did, I of course among the rest but of course no sooner than any others of our wing and not as soon as some. As to the Regt it behaved very well but as at Antietam became mixed up with other Regiments and when the orders came for our Brigade to retire each man had to look out for himself. When I reached French's HdQrs which I did at about 4 1/2 PM., I found about thirty men and took command of them until we were ordered to go back to our sleeping place of the night before. After that it was plain sailing only every body was dreadfully scared that we would be advanced against the batteries again. About 9 PM Monday we got orders to recross the pontoons and when we were fairly across and up the opposite bank we felt relieved I can assure you.²

So much for the fight, and now as regards business. Please send me about 5 dollars as I am about dead broke. I wrote for some postage stamp about four weeks ago but as you have never mentioned them in any letter I suppose you failed to receive my letter asking for them. If you would send me about 10 or 12 by letter they would be very acceptable. As regards the box of provisions if you have not sent it yet, please direct care H.H. Sperry Washington and ask Mother to put in some pickles but up in bottles, and any thing else she can think of that I would like.

You ask me if Capt. Thrasher was with the Regt at F__. He has not been with us since the Regt left Bolivar until within a week past. The first news we had of the promotions was through the news papers and Geo and I were mad enough. I have made up my mind however not to show any discontent and so I shall get along very well. The talk has all died out and it is only occasionally now that I think of it. If any thing could be done towards getting me an appointment [to / on?] Palmer's or any other general staff I should

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

very much like to have you use your influence and money if necessary for it is a thing that I should like above any other in the Army but have never expected or dared to hope for. Colonel Palmer is probably in R. and if you could get him to promise me the position it might be a great point gained, though I doubt if he intends returning to the army.

Bob Brewster visited the Regt to day he was looking very well. I gave him Mrs. B's letter to her daughter at W_ which I have carried ever since leaving R.. I am in good health and spirits. Much love to all the family and other friends.³

Your affect.son, Sam

[Written down the side of the final page] Nothing would please me more than a staff appointment.

Notes

¹ The Regiment's march to and stay at Belle Plain is dealt with in detail in Colobnel Palmer's diary (pp.76-87) ; *108th New York* p.35; Pierce letter p.157; *Rochester's Forgotten Regiment*,pp.43-44.

Major Pierce- Francis Edwin Pierce.

Mary – Sam's sister

Farley- Sam's younger brother.

Lt. Merrill – Henry P. Merrill, Co.E

Dr. Arner – Thomas Arner, Assistant Surgeon, discharged Jan.13,1863.

13th -13th New York Infantry

140th -140th New York Infantry, 'Rochester Racehorses', raised in Rochester and mustered in on Sept 13,1862, approx. one month after the 108th NY. Fredericksburg was its first battle.

² For specific details of the actions of the 108th NY during the battle of Fredericksburg see *Rochester's Forgotten Regiment*,pp. 44-55.

Since Lt. Loder was unable to fight, he was left to look after the personal belongings of the officers which otherwise would have been looted or stolen.

The failure to get the bridges across the Rappahannock until late afternoon on Dec. 10 delayed Palmer's Brigade from crossing until the morning of Friday Dec. 12, 1862. They crossed on the bridge which landed on the Fredericksburg shore at the foot of Hawke Street.

Lacy House – Home of Lacy family, built in 1771, known as "Chatham" where Robert E. Lee supposedly proposed to Mary Custis, was located on the eastern shore of the Rappahannock River opposite Fredericksburg

French – William Henry French, Brigadier General, Sept 28,1861, commanding 3rd Division, 2nd Army Corps, Army of the Potomac. He was nicknamed 'Old Blinky' for a nervous tick and his fondness for the bottle led Col. Palmer to request that his regiment be assigned to another division (*Palmer Diary*. p.31; *Warner*,pp.161-62).

³ H.H. Sperry – see Dec. 20th 1862 letter.

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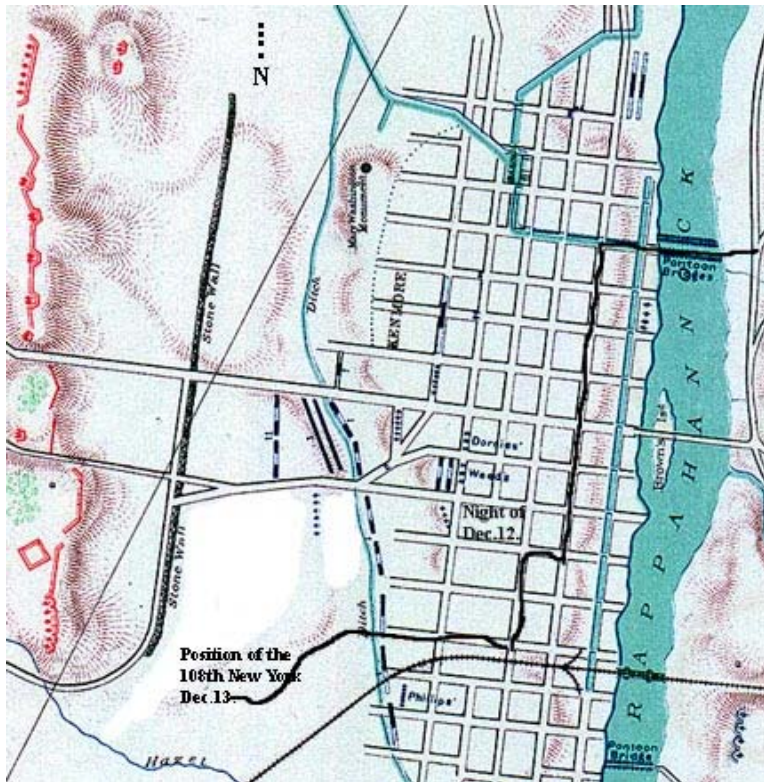
Capt. Thrasher – Captain Byron Thrasher, Co. F, was the man promoted or ‘jumped’ over Sam Porter. The fact that Thrasher was promoted without being at the battle of Fredericksburg must have galled young Porter even more.

Bolivar – Bolivar Heights overlook and are west of Harper’s Ferry.

Geo – Lt. George Loder, Co. F, see letter of Dec. 20th

Bob Brewster –no record found.

After the battles of Antietam and Fredericksburg, as well as the promotion mess, it is not surprising that Sam should request his father to use his clout and get him a staff position on a general staff. He had already witnessed and been part of more carnage at 19 years of age than any of us could imagine.



The above map based on the O.R. Atlas plate 32, #2 depicts the movements of the 108th New York at the battle of Fredericksburg, Va. Dec 13, 1862