

Fredericksburg, Va.¹
May 13th '64

Dear Mother

From the battle field I sent a few words to Father assuring him that my wound was a most trifling one, and some hours later our hospital steward wrote at greater length describing it more particularly. Since that I have delayed writing, hoping that the next account I should give of myself would be that I was in Washington. Fredericksburg however seems to be our present resting place, & although we all expect to reach W__ before a great while there is no knowing when our hopes will be realised . The Col., Parsons and I are all together in one room with two men to wait on us, and as both Christian & Sanitary Commissions are doing their best to supply the wounded with not only the necessities but many of the comforts of life, we live well and for the army rather high. Beef, ham, potatoes, biscuits etc..., make rather a pleasant variety for men who have been living for some time on army rations.

My wound is doing first rate. It is a mere flesh wound and pains very little giving me also considerable use of the limb. The Col. is still pretty uncomfortable & it has been principally on his account that Parsons & I have not made more strenuous endeavors to get to Washington. P. has a slight flesh wound on the chin which stiffens his jaw some what but does not disable him at all. He will be fit for service again in two or three weeks.²

We have been in town since Monday morning and although being confined is tedious I have had rather a pleasant time, much more so after my previous wound. We were wounded on the 6th and about fifty others of the Regt at the same time. Since then we have been constantly in receipt of news from the front through wounded who are continually coming into town. There has been one succession of battles for the last 8 days³ and our Regiment has been engaged again and again until there are scarcely forty sound men left. Col. Pierce is still with them doing his duty nobly. He was slightly wounded on the afternoon of the 6th but refused to leave the field. What a pity it is that his talk should so belie his actions.⁴

Large numbers of prisoners have been marched through this place and the rumors in circulation are all most favorable. I really believe that this time we are destined to push the Rebels to the wall & only regret my wound as it will deprive me of the pleasure of being in at the death.

The news from the 140th is very sad, but I hope it exaggerated. Poor Hamilton! if his fate should turn out what is feared, what a blow it would be to the family. Pool, also lost, they say is all right and I hope will escape through the struggle. The Army of the Potomac at last counts negroes among its soldiers and instead of the opposition which it is said would attend their introduction they were received well & are now every where praised. I have not had an opportunity of seeing them fight, but some of them passed on the march & I was pleased to see the good discipline manifest in their actions.

The wounded are being conveyed to Belle Plain & from there to W_ as fast as possible, but as the great bulk of ambulances are needed at the front transportation is limited and the work goes on slowly.

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

If the Col. is in a condition to be moved we will probably leave in two or three days, but as war is mighty uncertain, there is no way of knowing what may turn up. In my last I mentioned the fact that Alfred Langdale helped bring me off the field. The next day he went back to the regiment and in less than 24 hours was killed. He was a brave little fellow and few losses in my company have given me greater pain.⁵

Much love to all
Your affect. Son
Sam Porter
Capt. F. Co. 108th

Notes:

¹ Fredericksburg was now a Union possession once Lee moved his army and defensive line south of the Rapidan. It functioned as a medical depot for cases either being sent home or on to Washington Hospitals.

² The Colonel is Charles J. Powers (see May 6 letter) and he never fully recovered from the wound. The enormity of the casualty problem for the medical corps even this late in the war is evident since it took almost a month to get Powers admitted to Douglas General Hospital in Washington, D.C. (NARA file). Since Sam did not get a medical leave until June 17, perhaps he did stay with his colonel as he says in the letter.

The Christian Commission was created after Bull Run to support the soldiers and help cope with the suffering after the battle. They distributed more than \$6,000,000 worth of goods and supplies in hospitals, camps, prisons and battlefields (Wikipedia).

The Sanitary Commission was a similar organization "To provide all that was necessary for the soldier" via civilian agencies. The Rochester architect Frederick Law Olmstead was chosen secretary in the first year of its existence. Interestingly the War Department and the Medical Corps, who were completely ill prepared for carnage on this scale, opposed the formation of the commission.

³The succession of battles was the 'new' war started by Grant in the East and Sherman in the west- the advent of **total war** until one side drops. The fight with Lee would be continuous for the next 11 months so Sam had no need to worry about missing the death throes of the Confederacy.

⁴ Lt. Col Francis Edwin Pierce enjoyed soldiering so much that he would never return to civilian life. He may have been outspoken about slavery and Lincoln but he was fearlessly dedicated to the Union army and the defeat of Lee. In a letter to Sam's father he admits that McClellan was beloved by the army but Grant would lead it to final victory, Little Mac's time had passed.

⁵Hamilton is Sam's friend, Henry G. Hamilton, Capt. Co. K 140th NY (April 9,1864) and Pool is Joseph H. Pool Jr., 1st Lt. Co.C (March 1864). Both men were missing in action after the initial fight at Saunders Field on May 5th in the Wilderness. Both Pool and Hamilton were known to have been wounded but the severity of their wounds was unknown since both were unaccounted for after the action on May 5. Sometime during the day a fruitless effort was made to recover the bodies dead or alive. People in Rochester believed that Hamilton had in fact died. Sam's father, Joseph Pool and Arthur Hamilton (Henry's brother) arrived in Fredericksburg to determine the fate of their respective sons or relatives. Hamilton had been wounded, captured and received treatment but was then sent to Libby Prison until exchanged in Sept. 1864. Pool was not so fortunate. He died of wounds on July 29th 1864 (Phisterer, 4, pp.3624, 3627 ; Bennett, pp.365,375,380,410).

Alfred Langdale (see May 6th letter). In a letter of June 9,1864, Sgt. Peter Anger of Co. F claimed that he "helped Porter off the field when he was wounded" in the Wilderness and makes no mention of Langdale (typescript of letter compliments of Ron Erwin of Rochester). However that Sam would be sure to mention a young private by name, suggests that Langdale was present in some capacity.

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