

Transcribed by Terry Crooks.

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

Camp 108th NYVols¹
July ^ 11th 1864

Dear Father

I have nothing of any particular interest to write about, but will describe our present position as nearly as I can and try to give you some little idea of the discomforts that our boys were subjected to during my visit home. To go back as far as the 3rd of June when the army lay in front of Coal Harbor [*Cold Harbor*] _____ On Friday they were engaged in the fierce and disastrous charges upon the Rebel works, full particulars of which were received while I was in Rochester,² and I will say nothing in regard to that days operation, but confine myself to the share our Regiment had in the digging and skirmishing of the next week. As soon as it became evident that no direct attack promised a seasons show of success the shovel was presented to and the distance between the two lines so contracted that a stone could easily be thrown from party to the other. While this work was being accomplished our Regiment met with a severe loss, from the stupidity of the men in our rear who taking it for granted that they were in the first line opened a fire upon a line of Rebel skirmishers subjecting our boys for several hours to a heavy fire from front and rear.

When the pits were completed there was nothing to do but keep as low as possible and improve every opportunity of shooting a Johnny. While they remained in this position [there?] were upwards of thirty casualties in the Regiment most of the men being wounded while cooking going for water etc ...Holes were dug to cook in, and trenches connecting them with the main line of works, but as some portions of these were necessarily exposed to the enemies fire, no one could feel safe for a single moment. The march to the James³ and from there to this point was a very trying one owing both to the heat & dust but with the exception of a few men captured one night on the skirmish line no men have been lost since crossing the river. The lines of the two armies are now in some places but a few hundred yards from each other, and there the skirmishing is incessant interspersed with little artillery practice. Here on the left where we are there is no firing and as long as we remain ('here' ~~crossed out~~) we shall be pretty comfortable, but for once I really dread a march as the heat is intense and the dust at least six inches deep. I am perfectly well and my leg has entirely closed, so that I am fit for any kind of duty. The Regiment is much larger than I expected to find it, and is in good spirits. I had a pleasant trip from R[ochester] to the front spending two days in Washington where I saw Col Powers. He seems to be improving, and begins to talk of home. I went to the Surgeon General's office but could learn nothing of young Churchill. I saw Seward yesterday and was surprised to find him looking well. He is in perfect health and doesn't fell at all blue.⁴ Much love to all the family etc.

Sam Porter
Captain, F Co. 108th

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Notes:

¹Sam has obviously returned from his Wilderness wound – see July 13th letter - but the regiment is now at Petersburg, Virginia and taking part in Grant's siege of the Cockade City.

² Cold Harbor was the disastrous Union assault on Lee's works on June 3, 1864. By this stage of the war veteran regiments realized the futility of frontal assaults so Smyth's Brigade did not over exert themselves during the attack but suffered over the next number of days from the constant harassment of sniper fire (see *Rochester's Forgotten Regiment* pp.246-256).

³ On June 14, the regiment crossed the James River on a boat to the Petersburg front.

⁴ Col. Powers was severely wounded on May 6, 1864 – see letters of May 6 and 13.

Young Churchill was probably Pvt. George W. Churchill of Co. F, 108th NY.

Seward Gould of the 4th NY Heavy Artillery may have had a reason to feel blue since his regiment lost 104 men on June 21-23 at the fight on the Weldon Railroad near Petersburg, Va.