

Sept. 26th 63¹

Dear Mother

It is but a few days ago that I wrote to you and now I have nothing new to tell you save to recount a little midnight experience of the 108th. Night before last was our second night on picket we acting as a reserve. At midnight just as we were enjoying our slumbers the orders came around for us to fall in with nothing but our arms [&] ammunition. This we did as silently as possible wondering greatly. Soon we found out that Genl Hays had taken a notion into his head that we must drive in the Rebel pickets and if possible capture them. The Regt advanced to within about a quarter mile of the Rebel reserve and then sent out two parties with the intention of surrounding them. By some mistake these parties failed to meet and when one of them arrived near the houses where the Rebs were the enemy was found to be too strong for them alone. Word was sent to Genl Hays who was only a short distance in the rear. After waiting some time for the other party to make its arrival, he sent for the rest of us to come up. This we did on the double quick but we were not quick enough. When we got there the Rebels had skedaddled and all the satisfaction that we had was in burning the buildings.²

While we were accomplishing this great many stray shots were fired at us but owing to the darkness none were injured. We then retired and waited anxiously for the first party that had been sent out. In about an hour they came up minus two men and with one wounded man. It seems that they had followed the Rebs down to the river and after exchanging a few shots with them had sent out two men to reconnoiter. These men never came back and after waiting for them some time the party was obliged to return without them.

Yesterday we found out from the Rebel picket that they had both been captured after making a brave resistance.³

Last night we were relieved from picket, and are now three or four miles from the lines. We expect a visit from the pay master before long.

W.Ely is expecting to leave us soon. We will all be sorry to lose him⁴.

Love to all

Sam

Notes:

¹ At this date the regiment was in the area SW of Somerville Ford on the Rapidan near Cedar Run Mountain.

² There seems to be some confusion as to when this foray took place. Captain Andrew Boyd recorded the date as evening of the 25th Sept. whereas Porter would make it Midnight of the 24th to the morning of the 25th. According to the regimental history (p.156) Hays had a notion to take a large white house behind the enemy picket line as his HQ which may be somewhat embellished but Porter writing *at the time* also mentions the whimsical nature of Hays. Hays found army inactivity particularly 'irksome' so whether or not the motive for his sortee is accurate, the actual attack itself sound typical of the easily bored Alex Hays. The event caused considerable uproar but little in the way of a real results. The fact that they burned the buildings suggests a new HQ was not the goal.

³ The wounded soldier was James Plunkett, Sgt. Co. D. One of the captured was believed to be Corporal Al Hadley and the other was not identified.

⁴ Dr. William Smith Ely left the regiment on Sept. 17, 1863 to accept an appointment with the War Department. Until the end of the war Ely was attached to the U.S. General Hospital at Annapolis.