

Samuel W. North Letter and Transcription

November 1, 1862 - Camp on the March

Introduction

Sam's letter of November 1, 1862 gives a very clear picture of a Civil War soldier's life on the march. On a daily basis, we, in the 20th and 21st centuries, think nothing of getting into a car or truck, or even a plane, and traveling a couple hundred miles a day. As you read his letter, imagine what it must have been like (sometimes being transported in large groups by train and at other times, and most often, on foot) for someone like Sam, who may not have ever been outside the confines of the Cumberland Valley. Think about what it would be like if you had to carry, day in and day out, the equivalent of 10 five-pound bags of flour on your back in a backpack, not a 21st century backpack but a mid-19th century knapsack.

Six and a half weeks earlier, on September 15, Union forces, numbering more than 12,000, at Harper's Ferry surrendered to Stonewall Jackson because there was no backup from McClellan's army. From the Revolutionary War to September 15, 1862, it was the largest surrender in U.S. history. McClellan did not get to Harper's Ferry until October 31. Read carefully as Sam describes not only the destruction of property by "foreign" troops but also the destruction of human bodies, the collateral damage of war.

Camp on the march
Nov 18 1862

Dec 3rd

We are staying in a field in a small valley between the mountains left our camp about two o'clock on the thirtieth marched through Sharpsburg and on about 8 miles (it is only mud work) and stopped on the other side of the South Mountain in a woods it was an excellent place to spend the night we had leaves for a bed. Spread our tents on top and slept first rats were up and on the line by breakfast and march on through a place called Pleasant Valley and it was a very beautiful place looked something like the little Cove we passed by dozens of deserted camps and one considerable camp saw some men sick but one arm each out in the fields with a dog they seemed to be enjoying themselves asked for Mr G. next he made the and pretty fast too our knapsacks

pulling back all the time I tell you the marching is nothing but carrying a load of about 50 lbs is as hard work as you ever tried on they dont feel so heavy at first but grow amazing a bomb when we start but an old spot when we stop. We can have some idea how horses feel after pulling all day my shoulders are so sore I can hardly move them without hurting. I will not get my boots now and it is about as well as most of the boys who get new boots have sore feet. I will try to get a pair of good shoes when my boots are worn out they are far easier to walk in than home made ones which are too narrow in the sole. I will try and send this letter with some citizens who are here from Greencastle. but I must tell you of Harpers-ferry we got there about dinner time there was a train passing with some very heavy cannon over the mountains and close together

and rise most perpendicular the
R.R. canal river and a road on each
side of the river take up the whole
distance. the government property has
been very much injured one building
has a broad crack from foundation
to the roof it was a strong stone building
we saw dozens of carcasses the bodies
of which had been burnt and several
cords of gun barrels which were destroyed
there are workmen on the RR it is
in running order they have put up
a RR bridge of trussel work across the
River we crossed on a pontoon bridge
it was made of boats fixed straight
up and down the stream about fifteen
or twenty feet apart and fastened above
and below with anchors then beams
laid on the boats and planks laid
across them it makes a very nice bridge
we marched through a gap in the
mountain and have stopped about
five miles south of Harpers ferry

we have not moved this morning yet
and the report is that we are to be
mustered in for pay our officers are
fixing up the pay rolls. Thom
Creigh has been transferred into
the signal corps it is a very nice
position but they have a good deal of
hard climbing to do as the signals
have to be at the highest points of
mountain houses trees & so on. etc
Mother I will answer her letter in
a few days. My shoulders are too
sore to write more
your Bro J. M. South

we belong to porters corps

Transcription

Camp on the march
November 1st 1862

Dear Bro

We are resting in field in a small valley between the mountains left our camp about two o'clock on. The thirtieth marched through Sharpsburg and on about 8 miles (it is only guess work) and stopped on the other side of the South Mountain in a woods it was an excellent place to spend the night we had leaves for a bed Spread our tents on top and slept first rate. were up and on the line by daybreak and moved on through a place called Pleasant Valley and it was a very beautiful place looked something like the little cove we passed by dozens of deserted camps and one convalescent camp saw some men wi(t)h but one arm each out in the fields with a dog they seemed to be enjoying themselves asked for N.Y. Regts. we moved on and pretty fast too our knapsacks

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(page 3)

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Your Bro S. W North

We belong to porters corps