

# **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 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> century backpack but a mid-19<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup>

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 daybreak and went 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