

# Samuel W. North Letter and Transcription

## January 12, 1863 - Camp of the 126th

### Introduction

One hundred fifty years ago on New Year's Day in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln, "in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion," issued and signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which "freed" all slaves held in states that seceded from the Union. Union soldiers, like Samuel W. North, had enlisted voluntarily upon the call of their president and governor to save the Union and to protect Pennsylvania's border from invasion. The Emancipation proclamation raised war to a higher military and moral level - that of fighting for a Union without slavery. Consider though the men who found themselves in the midst of some of the fiercest battles of all time, witnessing friends killed instantly with a mini ball to the head, or limbs being severed by shrapnel. Sam wrote near the very end of his letter, "we fought side and side and cheered together but after we got so close to the wall we were separated. I suppose you are getting tired of hearing of that miserable affair. I wish I could stop thinking of it but I have seen things there which seem to be stamped on my brain." It is no wonder that in the middle of his letter, Sam carefully wrote with intense frustration, "I am not altogether satisfied with the course which men in authority are pursuing. instead of trying to bring about reconciliation and kindly feeling it seems as if they were trying to widen the break as much as possible and to exasperate the south as much as possible. I did not enlist to enforce abolition proclamations but must stop as I have said enough it is not altogether safe now a days to express our opinions too freely." The awful destruction of human life on the battlefields affected all soldiers, and they wondered if there wasn't some other avenue to bring about peace and abolition of slavery.

Sam immediately changes the topic. "I am glad to hear that business is so prosperous now. how will you get along for bark will it hold out until spring." What was he talking about? "How will you get along with bark?" Internet research for uses of bark produced a variety of valuable and interesting applications, among which was tanbark. Tanbark-oak in California and the hemlock, native to Pennsylvania, are species of evergreens, the bark of which was used to extract tannin for the tanning of hides into leather. According to the U.S. Census records, Sam's father was a tanner, as was Sam. Sam's letter implies that his father owned his own business. It's January and Sam is concerned, because business is "prosperous," whether A. J. will have enough tanbark to last until spring.

Sam's mention of Zouaves participating in the grand review refers to a number of American Zouave companies who copied their flashy uniforms from French Zouave infantry units, with wide legged pants that tapered at the ankle.

Alexander McClure was a journalist and editor and owned the Franklin Repository in Chambersburg. His journalism helped launch his political career in Harrisburg. In 1857, McClure was elected to Pennsylvania's House of Representatives. Andrew Curtin was appointed Secretary of the Commonwealth by Governor Pollock prior to the Civil War. During this time, Curtin and McClure became allies and were instrumental in swaying the state's Republican Party in favor nominating Lincoln for the presidency in the 1860 elections. McClure carried a lot of political weight as a friend of Curtin when Curtin became governor of Pennsylvania during the Civil War. McClure could have had the regiment's commissioned officer's vote overridden to promote Capt. Brownson to Major. Gov. Curtin did, in fact, appoint Brownson to Major on March 16, 1863.

Hot air balloons were first used for military purposes in the U.S. during the Civil War. The balloon corps was disbanded in August 1863.

Balloons had been used degrees of success when first used in the French Revolution. The United States first used balloons for military purposes during the Civil War. While balloonists for both the North and South accomplished many military missions, the use of balloons stopped in 1863 when the Union disbanded its balloon corps. The failure was a result of many factors, such as commanders playing down the importance of balloons, rivalries between balloonists, and the South's lack of materials to build balloons.

Bonnie A. Shockey, president

Camp of the 10th  
January 1862

Mr. A. J. North  
Dear Father

I received your letter of the 4th inst. on yesterday morning and one from your sister the 7th which I received yesterday evening and was glad to hear that you are all well. We are still in our old camp although we don't know how long we may have it. The weather is unusually fine for the time of the year it rained some days before yesterday on the road and walls are very muddy still it has been an unusually fine winter for camping out - except and I am in fair usual good health. The company generally all in good health. We have been living on the best the government has as we have been drinking plenty of our regular fresh beans crackers coffee & sugar with occasionally cups of potatoes or rice - onions - riding - apples - and vinegar. We get more coffee than we can make use of we have at least five pounds of it aboard in our mule it is not exactly pure but still it makes excellent coffee & pick I had some soap getting some of it home I hate to see it washed as it is his soap now at home but would save soap for it and this soap is destroyed on all occasions often six horses which have been condemned and driven off to die hanging round trying to get a mouthful of grass some of them are really sound young horses with nothing wrong with them but bad usage and want of food they founder a good many of these horses by feeding too much corn - most of the surgeons have not as much humanity about them as their horses they die at a fast trot and I have seen whole teams going at a full run so you can have some idea of the wear and tear in that line. We had quite an explosion on front of our camp a few days ago - our ammunition

artillery was out shelling when one of the caissons blew up sending the splinters and shells into the air and causing a most terrific explosion fortunately no one was seriously hurt although one rider was hurt somewhat and the harness was burnt off the hind horses but the team ran off but was stopped after running a couple of hundred yds. at a meeting of the company officers of our regiment to elect a Major to fill the vacancy occasioned by Cousins resignation Capt. Brownson elected a majority of the vote and is honest and fairly good but if it is going that the whole matter depends on Major McClure if he has a personal friend he will give him the position whether it is the wish of the rest or not. we should not like to lose him but would be glad to see him promoted if he is we would like to see Ordeley McCullough in his place as both our hearts in my estimation at least are small potatoes though they have both treated me very kindly I have no reason to complain of either. We had a grand review of our Army corps (8th) we have a new corps commander Gen. Meade formerly commanding the Pa. Res the review was one grand affair Gen. Burnside was present on the finest horse I ever saw the troops did not cheer him as they used to when Little Mc reviewed them the review was a pleasant sight there was a band, a regt. of yeomanry and lots of artillery it came off in in splendid style though very quickly I don't want to say any of my officers I had work to do but I am not altogether satisfied with the power of which men in authority are pursuing instead of trying to bring about reformation and kindly advice. It seems as if they were trying to sidestep the truth as much as possible and to dispirit the south as much as possible. I did not expect to enforce

abolition proclamations but must stop as I have  
said enough it is not altogether safe now a days  
to express our opinions too freely. I am glad to  
hear that business is so prosperous now how will  
you get along for ball ball it hold out until spring  
I had a letter from Aunt Mary a week ago giving  
us they are all well said they are unusually busy  
this winter. I need the handkerchief and several papers  
the balloon has been up for the purpose of reconnoitering.  
Some of the 126th Cavalry were here yesterday  
at Ferris Tom's place. They were in the  
line at Stafford C. H. in Siegel's Corps  
It is not very far off but it was so dark I could not see  
what I was doing. I don't think there would be much risk  
in sending the box if you can get it expressed I don't  
know how it would be to send it by the freight line  
there has been loads of boxes ruined they are all opened  
in the presence of the man who receives the box if those  
to whom it is taken from them. God has so  
much for his boy but it will not do with all in it  
if you expect him to be expressed you would better find  
out if the other line is safe and see your own papers  
about sending it. but I have scribbled enough for to  
night. I wish you could spend an evening in  
our tent we are as cozy and comfortable as need  
be are all accomplished cooks. I think our mess  
is the most pleasant one in the company we live  
like a little family my first concern after the  
fight was to see if the mess was all safe we fought  
side and side and shared together but after we got  
so close to the wall we were separated. I suppose  
you are getting tired of hearing of that miserable

affair. I wish I could stop thinking of it  
but I saw things there which seem to be stamped  
on my brain. till John I will pass on his  
letter I in a few days till mother and the  
girls to write often and if you have the chance  
to spare I would like to hear from you too.  
yours affectionately C. W. North

### Transcriptions

*Samuel W. North letter in which he mentions Alexander McClure of Chambersburg, Gen Burnside, Gen Meade, an exploded caisson, camp rations and shortage of coffee back home, US property destroyed and wasted by Uncle Sam, unsafe atmosphere to share feelings about the war, sights of war indelibly imprinted on his mind.*

Camp of the 126<sup>th</sup>  
January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1863

Mr. A.J. North

Dear Father

I received your letter of the 4<sup>th</sup> inst on yesterday morning and one from John dated the 7<sup>th</sup> received yesterday evening and was glad to hear that you are all well. We are still in our old camp although we don't know how soon we may leave it. The weather is unusually fine for the time of the year. It rained some day before yesterday and the roads and walks are very muddy. Still it has been an unusually fine winter for

camping out. Jacob and I are in our usual good health. The company generally are in good health. We have been living on the best the government has. We have been drawing plenty of our regular pork, beans, crackers, coffee and sugar with occasionally extras of potatoes or rice onions or dry apples and vinegar. We get more coffee than we can make use of. We have at five pounds of it ahead in our mess. It is not exactly pure but still it makes excellent coffee. I wish I had some way of getting some of it home. I hate to see it wasted as it is very dear now at home but Uncle Sam pays for it. And his property is destroyed on all occasions. I often see horses which have been condemned and driven off to die hanging round trying to get a mouthful of hay. Some of them are really sound young horses with nothing wrong with them but bad usage and want of feed. They founder a good many of their horses by feeding too much corn. Most of the drivers have not as much humanity about them as their horses. They drive at a fast trot and I have seen whole trains going at a full run so you can have some idea of the wear and tear in that line. We had quite an explosion in front of our camp a few days ago. Our division artillery was out drilling when one of the caissons blew up sending the splinters and shells into the air and causing a most terrific explosion. Fortunately no one was seriously hurt although one rider was burnt somewhat and the hair was burnt off the hind horses tails. The team ran off but was stopped after running a couple of hundred yds. At a meeting of the commissioned officers of our regt to elect a maj to fill the vacancy occasioned by Austin's (Greencastle resident) resignation. Cap Brownson recd a majority of the votes and is honestly and fairly elected but it is said that the whole matter depends on Alex(ander) McClure (Chambersburg) if he has a personal friend he will give him the position whether it is the wish of the regt or not. We should not like to lose him but would be glad to see him promoted. If he is we would like to see Orderly McCullough in his place as both our liets (in my estimation at least) are small potatoes though they have both treated me very kindly I have no reason to complain of either. We had a grand review of our Army corps (5<sup>th</sup>) We have a new corps commander Gen Mead formerly commanding the Pa Res. The review was "one grand affair." Gen Burnside was present on the finest horse I ever saw. The troops did not cheer him as they used to. When Little Mc reviewed them the review was a pleasant sight. There was a band, a regt of Zouaves, and lots of artillery. It came of in splendid stile though very quietly I don't want to disobey any of my officers I have sworn to obey, but I am not altogether satisfied with the course which men in authority are pursuing instead of trying to bring about reconciliation and kindly feeling it seems as if they were trying to widen the break as much as possible and to exasperate the south as much as possible. I did not enlist to enforce abolition proclamations but must stop as I have said enough. It is not altogether safe now a days to express our opinions too freely. I am glad to hear that business is so prosperous now. How will you get along for \_\_\_\_\_ will it hold out until spring. I had a letter from Aunt Mary a week ago yesterday. They are all well said they are unusually busy this winter. I recd the

hankerchief and several papers. The baloon has abeen up for the purpose of reconnoitering. Some of the 17<sup>th</sup> Pa Cavalry were here yesterday. Toby McFerran, Tom Metcalf, Hes' Polsgrove and Doct Ley have been all down to see us. They are lying at Stafford C.H. In Siegels Corps. This is very poor writing but it was so dark I could not see what I was doing. I don't think there would be much risk in sending the box if you can get it expressed. I don't know how it would do to send it by the freight line. There has been loads of boxes received. They are all opened in the presence of the man who receives the box. If there is liquor in it it is taken from him. Cook had no receipt for his box but it came safely with all in it. If you cannot have it sent by express you would better find out if the other line is safe and use your own judgment about sending it. But I have scribbled enough for tonight. I wish you could spend an evening in our tent. We are cozy and comfortable as need be. Are all accomplished cooks. I think our mess is the most pleasant one in the company. We live like a little family. My first concern after the fight was to see if the mess was all safe. We fought side and side and cheered together but after we got so close to the wall we were separated. I suppose you are getting tired of hearing of that miserable affair. I wish I could stop thinking of it but I have seen things there which seem to be stamped on my brain. Tell John I will answer his letter in a few days. Tell mother and the girls to write often and if you have the time to spare I would like to hear from you too.

Yours affectionately S.W. North