

APRIL 14TH 1862

IN CAMP, YORKTOWN VIRGINIA.

DEAR FATHER.

IT HAS BEEN LONG SINCE I WROTE TO YOU, I SO AMEND THIS.

IT ALL BEGAN HERE, HERE IN THIS PLACE WHERE I NOW WRITE YOU THESE LINES, LIKE THAT DAY BACK A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, MUCH HAS CHANGED AND MUCH WILL CHANGE. THE REGIMENT LEFT THE CAMP OF INSTRUCTION AT RICHMOND ABOUT A WEEK AGO, MAYBE MORE; TO TELL THE TRUTH I HAVE LOST COUNT OF THE DAYS, I ESTIMATE HOWEVER IT TOOK US THAT LONG TO COVER THE 120 OR SO MILES TO THE YORKTOWN LINES, WHICH IS NO GOOD RATE, BUT WE ARE HARDLY A SEASONED OUTFIT. THERE IS NO RAILROAD TO YORKTOWN SO WE HAD TO MARCH, OUR BRIGADE MUSTERED UNDER GENERAL SAMUEL GARLAND JR. WHICH INCLUDED OUR OWN 2ND FLORIDA A BATTALION OF THE 2ND MISSISSIPPI, THE 5TH AND 23RD NORTH CAROLINA, THE 24TH AND 38TH VIRGINIA AND A BATTERY OF ALABAMA ARTILLERY, SIX REGIMENTS IN ALL AND ABOUT EIGHT GUNS, 12 POUND SMOOTHBORE 'NAPOLEONS' AS THEY ARE CALLED.

THE MARCHES WERE HARDER THAN ANYTHING I OR BILLY HAVE EVER YET ATTEMPTED, AT FIRST THEY WERE NOTHING TO EXHAUSTING BUT BY THE SECOND OR THIRD THE ROAD HAD BECOME LITTERED WITH 'UNNECESSARIES' KNAPSACKS, EXTRA SHIRTS, BOOKS AND ALL MANNER OF OTHER ACCESSORIES, I AND BILLY DID NOT DROP MUCH, BUT WE ARE TEMPERED TO HARD WORK. BY THE FOURTH MARCH WE HAD TAKEN ON A MUCH LEANER ASPECT THAN BEFORE, THOUGH VETERANS WE WERE OBVIOUSLY NOT.

AS WE HAD LEFT RICHMOND I CONTRACTED A FARMER TO SUPPLY ME WITH SOME WHEAT, HE GAVE ME A GOOD FRESH BUSHEL FOR A GOOD PRICE, I THOUGHT A RAINY DAY MAY COME SOME TIME AND I WANTED SOME SOURCE OF FOOD.

I REMEMBERED THAT BILLY HAS NOW TURNED SEVENTEEN YESTERDAY, THE MATTER OF IT IS THAT BILLY WAS RESTING BY THE FIRE AND HAD STAKED OUT HIS SHOES TO DRY AFTER SOAKING THEM ON THE LINES, IT HAS BEEN APPALLING WET RECENTLY, A SMALL SCRAP OF PAPER DROPPED OUT OF THE LEFT ONE, PICKING IT UP THE LETTER 18 WAS BRANDED ON IT, WHEN ASKED HE EXPLAINED THAT HE FEARED HE COULD NOT ENLIST PROPER LEAST HE WAS OVER 17 OF COURSE HE WAS SIXTEEN WHEN HE DID, HE TOLD ME THAT HE COULDN'T OF LIED SO HE STUFFED THIS PAPER IN HIS SHOE AND TRUTHFULLY SAID "I AM OVER 18!" MANY LAUGHS GREETED THIS NEWS.

RAIN HAS CONTINUED TO FALL EVER SINCE WE ARRIVED, INTERMITTENTLY BUT HEAVILY, IT HAS TURNED THE ROADS INTO RIVERS OF MUD, NOT HELPED ANY BY THE LARGE MANOEUVRES THAT GENERAL MACGRUDER INSTIGATED WHEN THE YANKEE'S FIRST CAME UP WHICH FOOLED THEM INTO THINKING OUR NUMBERS IN MUCH EXCESS OF WHAT THEY ARE. RUMOURS ABOUND AS USUAL, THE SUBJECT THIS TIME IS THE MOVEMENT OF TROOPS AND THE WAY THE CAMPAIGN IS TO BE EXECUTED. THE SERGEANT HAS IT THAT WE ARE TO BE SHIPPED OVER TO THE POINT AND COME DOWN ON THE YANKEE'S FLANK, BUT WE ALL THINK THAT THIS IS ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE LICK MY SHOE IDEAS, SINCE THEY HAVE A LARGE FLEET OUT THERE AND GENERAL JOHNSTON WHO IS NOW TOOK OVER IS FAR TOO SENSIBLE A SOLDIER TO TRY SO RUINOUS A DESIGN.

BREATHING PERSON WHO IN ANOTHER TIME I MIGHT HAVE HAILED AND BEFRIENDED, I SHOT HIM; SQUARE IN THE CHEST, YOU KNOW I SHOOT WHAT I AIM AT AND I AIMED FOR HIS CHEST. HE CRUMPLED TO THE GROUND AS THOUGH MADE OF NOTHING, HOW PRECIOUS IS A HUMAN LIFE THAT IT MAY BE SNUFFED OUT WITH AN OUNCE OF LEAD? I GAVE THE WORD READY TO MY PARTNER AND HE STEPPED FORWARD TO COVER ME AS I RELOADED, AGAIN I GAVE THE WORD, HE TOOK AIM AND FIRED, DUCKING DOWN BEHIND A FENCE AS HE DID, I KNOW LET HIM FALL BEHIND ME SO I COULD COVER HIM, A YANKEE TOOK AIM AT ME, ACTUALLY AT ME, IT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE THAN FIFTY YARDS DISTANT, I COULD SEE THE DARK BARREL OF HIS GUN COME UP I FELT COLD, BUT MORE ALIVE THAN I HAVE EVER FELT, FOR IT IS SURLY WHEN ONE STANDS TO LOSE LIFE THAT IT BECOMES ALL SO MORE PRECIOUS. I COULD NOT LET HIM SHOOT ME, BUT IF I DISCHARGED THEN MY PARTNER WOULD HAVE NO COVER, I WAS LOADED, WE BOTH HAD OUR GUNS UP BUT I DROPPED PRONE AND WE BOTH FIRED TOGETHER I FELT THE BALL PASS BY MY HEAD AS I SAW HIM CLUTCH HIS CHEST AND SLUMP OVER A FENCE, YOU KNOW THAT I AM NOT A SWEARING PERSON BUT GOD FORGIVE ME I CURSED FOUL THAT DAY.

WE WITHDREW FARTHER, OUR OFFICER DOING US PROUD, I HAD JUST GIVEN THE WORD READY AFTER DISCHARGING AND RAN BEHIND HIM TO FIND COVER AND RELOAD, I HEARD A GUNSHOT AMID HUNDREDS, I TURNED WITH MY RAMMER OUT TO SEE MY PARTNER TWIST ROUND AND HIT THE BOGGY GROUND, I RAN TO HIM BUT HE HAD BEEN DEAD BEFORE HITTING THE GROUND, SILENTLY PRAYING FOR HIM I FOUND IN HIS BREAST POCKET A SCRAP OF PAPER AND TOOK IT AND WHATEVER AMMUNITION MY FAITHFUL COMPANION HAD LEFT, AND RAN AND LEFT HIM. WE AT LAST MADE THE WORKS, THE PAPER I GAVE TO THE CAPTAIN WHO HAS SENT IT TO HIS FAMILY.

THE SKIRMISHING CONTINUES EVERY DAY AS DOES NOW THE THUNDERING BLAST OF THEIR ARTILLERY, I AM OUT ALMOST EVERY SECOND DAY, HIDING IN A TREE I FOUND AND CAMOUFLAGED WITH EXTRA BRUSH, TAKING POT SHOTS AT THEIR SKIRMISHERS AND TRENCHES WITH MY ENFIELD. I HAVE JUST RETURNED FORM SUCH AN EXPEDITION WITH NOTHING TO SHOW FOR IT BUT WET POWDER, IT IS NOW GETTING DARK AND THE YANKEE ARTILLERY IS ABATING, BILLY HAS JUST COME IN AND HAS BROUGHT SOME PARDS TO SHARE THE LAST OF OUR COFFEE, I HAVE GOTTEN INTO THE HABIT OF MIXING WHATEVER SLATED BEEF WITH WATER, AND THEN LAYING OUT MY JACKET TAKING THE WHEAT I BOUGHT, RUBBING IT INTO BITS, THEN ADDING IT TO THE CONCOCTION, TO YOU BACK HOME IT MUST SOUND TERRIBLE BUT TO US OUT HERE IN THE WET, STICKY VIRGINIA PENINSULA IT TASTES VERY GOOD. I AM GOING TO USE MY LAST TONIGHT SO WE MIGHT ALL HAVE AT LEAST HALF FULL BELLIES TOMORROW; THE RUMOUR IS STILL PERSISTENT THAT WE WILL WITHDRAW TOWARDS RICHMOND.

I MUST FINISH NOW, MY LOVE TO MY FAMILY, REGARDS TO ALL FRIENDS, CONFUSION TO ALL ENEMIES.

I REMAIN YOUR LOVING SON.

J D PROVAN