

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

