

9<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 1862  
NEAR WILLIAMSBURG

DEAR FATHER.

WE DID INDEED PULL OUT. ON THE FOURTH WE RECEIVED ORDERS TO MAKE READY FOR DECAMPMENT. WE PACKED UP OUR POSSESSIONS AND EFFECTS AND IN THE DARKNESS OF THE 5<sup>TH</sup> WE SNEAKED OUT OF OUR MUDDY, WET AND DREARY HOME ON THE YORKTOWN PENINSULA, NOT HOWEVER BEFORE WE LEFT SOME PRESENTS FOR OUR YANKEE GUESTS.

BY THE LIGHT OF OUR CAMPFIRES WE MARCHED THROUGH THE CAMP AND OBSERVED SMALL GROUPS OF MEN, DIGGING SMALL DITCHES AND RUNNING WIRES AROUND THE TENTS. I AND BILLY FELL OUT AND ASKED A CORPORAL WHAT WAS WHAT, THEY WERE PLANTING MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS, BY WAY OF TRIP WIRES, SMALL CACHES OF GUNPOWDER AND PERCUSSION CAPS. THERE WAS ALLOT OF BUSTLING AND JOSTLING AND SOME COLUMNS OF TROOPS WERE INTERTWINED IN THE DARK, BUT THE YANKEES DIDNT EVEN NOTICE, WE HAD SPENT THE FEW DAY'S PREVIOUSLY KNOCKING UP QUAKER GUNS AND DUMMIES OUT OF SPARE CLOTHES OR THOSE WHO HAD NO MORE NEED OF THEM, THE SKIRMISHING HAD BEEN VERY SPIRITED THOSE PAST DAY'S. THE YANKEES WERE AFTER ALL PREPARING TO ASSAULT THE NEXT DAY AS THE 2<sup>ND</sup> TRUDGED OUT A WELCOME SMILE WAS GIFTED TO OUR LIPS AS WE OBSERVED A WRITING UPON A TENT, BOLDLY READING THE ARMY THAT FIGHTS AND RUNS AWAY LIVES TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY.

I MUST APOLOGIZE FOR THE STATE OF THIS PAPER, YOU SEE, ON THE 5<sup>TH</sup> OF MAY WE WERE ENGAGED IN A MOST DESPERATE AND SINGULAR ACTION AND I FIND MYSELF STILL REELING FROM IT, A SHELL SPLINTER WHIPPED PAST ME, SEVERING THE STRAP OF MY KNAPSACK, IT FELL TO THE WET GROUND SOAKING MUCH OF ITS CONTENTS. IN THAT SPIRIT OF APOLOGY I ALSO BEG FORGIVENESS FOR MY POOR HANDWRITING AS I HAVE HAD ABOUT ONLY FIVE HOURS SLEEP THE WHOLE TIME SINCE.

WE HAD PULLED BACK SWIFTLY BUT THE YANKEE'S CAME UP HOT ON OUR HEELS WITH THE RABID BREATH OF WOLVES ON THE FOLD BREATHING HARD ON OUR BACKS, THE DAY BEFORE THEIR CAVALRY HAD SCRAPPED WITH OURS A COUPLE OF MILES BEFORE WILLIAMSBURG WHICH GENERAL MAGRUDER HAD ORDERED ENTRENCHED.

ON THE 5<sup>TH</sup> WE MARCHED INTO POSITION PAST THE THICK WOODS JUST A LITTLE NORTH OF WILLIAMSBURG, THERE WAS NO FEAR OF RUMOURS WE ALL NEW A GENERAL ACTION WAS IN THE OFFING, WE HEARD THE ACTION START RATHER THAN SEE IT FOR WE WERE IN THE REAR, THE YANKEE'S ADVANCED VIA TWO ROADS AND CONVERGED TO ASSAULT OUR MAIN REDOUBT NAMED FOR OUR GENERAL MAGRUDER, THE SOUNDS OF THUNDEROUS GUNFIRE RAGED ALL ALONG OUR FRONT FOR A TIME THAT I CANNOT FATHOM, WE WERE PRESSED HARD IN THE CANTER AND ONE OF THE VIRGINIA CAVALRY TELLS ME GENERAL ANDERSON LAUNCHED A FURIOUS ATTACK ON THEIR LEFT, OUR TIME HAD YET TO COME WE ALL THOUGHT IT WAS A STRANGE WAY TO FIGHT A BATTLE, THEREFORE IMAGINE OUR RAGE AND CONSTERNATION AS GENERAL EARLY'S DIVISION MARCHES OFF TOWARDS THE NORTH. ANY OF THESE

FEELINGS HOWEVER WERE STYMIED AS SUDDENLY ROUNDSHOT BUZZED BY OUR HEADS LIKE HORNETS, ALL WAS CONFUSION, WE COULD NOT FIGHT, FOR WE COULD NOT SEE, WE COULD ONLY DIE, FOR A HORRIBLE AMOUNT OF TIME, WE HEARD THE RATTLE OF MUSKETRY ALL AROUND US, SMOKE SEETHED FROM THE WOODS IN THE DISTANCE AND THE INHUMAN SHRIEK OF SHELLS SENT SHIVERS DOWN OUR BACKS. COL T WARD WAS KILLED BY A SHELL SPLINTER AND THUDDED TO THE GROUND FROM HIS TERRIFIED HORSE, OUR ADJUTANT LIEUTENANT FLEMING WAS BADLY WOUNDED AND A MAN BEHIND ME TOPPLED WITH A SHARD OF SHRAPNEL IN HIS HEART WHICH CUT HIS MUSKET IN TWO BEFORE ENDING HIM, THIS PIECE OF METAL WAS THE MISSILE THAT CUT MY KNAPSACK STRAP, HOW EERIE TO THINK HOW CLOSE I CAME TO OBLIVION, AND I CANNOT HELP BUT WONDER WHAT MADE ME MORE SPECIAL THAN THAT OTHER POOR MAN?

AT ABOUT 5.PM GENERAL HILL CAME UP AND ASSESSING THE DIRE SITUATION ORDERED GENERAL EARLY'S DIVISION OUT. AS DARKNESS FELL OUR BATTALION HAD SUFFERED ABOUT FOUR KILLED AND THIRTY WOUNDED, MOSTLY BY ARTILLERY. FOR THE LIFE OF ME I CAN NOT FATHOM WHY WE WERE NOT DESTROYED AT WILLIAMSBURG, SINCE OUR LEFT HAD BEEN COMPLETELY TURNED, BUT THE YANKEES MUST HAVE DITHERED AND THUS THE ARMY AGAIN ESCAPED. NOW WE CONTINUE TO RETREAT, MORAL I CAN TELL YOU IS NOT HIGH AS MANY HAVE COMMENTED THAT WE SHOULD TURN AND DEFEND RICHMOND INSTEAD OF RUNNING TO HIDE BEHIND IT, IT IS AS EVER RAINING, AND WE TRY EVER DESPERATELY TO KEEP OUR POWDER DRY, THE FUTURE SEEMS SO UNCERTAIN, AND THINGS ARE GROWING DIM, THE RUMOURS ARE BACK AND THEY ARE FULL OF FUNK, ONE THING IS CERTAIN IF GENERAL JOHNSON DOES NOT STOP THEM, OUR WHOLE CAUSE MIGHT COLLAPSE, THOUGH AS ONE OF THE IMMIGRANTS IN OUR COMPANY SAYS " LOSING A CAPITOL REALLY MAKES NO MATTER TO YOU AMERICANS" AND THINKING BACK TO MY OLD HISTORY LESSONS I THINK HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH.

IN ANY EVENT A BLOW IS STILL A BLOW AND A RETREATING ARMY MAY LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY BUT RETREATS DON'T WIN WARS AND WHICH DAY WILL WE FIGHT, NO ONE KNOWS AND NOW HERE ALONE WITH ONLY THE SOUNDS OF A MARCHING ARMY CONSUMING ME IN THE NIGHT WITH THE RAIN SPITTING DOWN THROUGH THE PINES I CANNOT HELP BUT THINK, COULD THIS BE OUR DARKEST HOUR?

I REMAIN WELL AND SO DOES BILLY.

YOUR AFFECTIONATE SON  
J D PROVAN

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