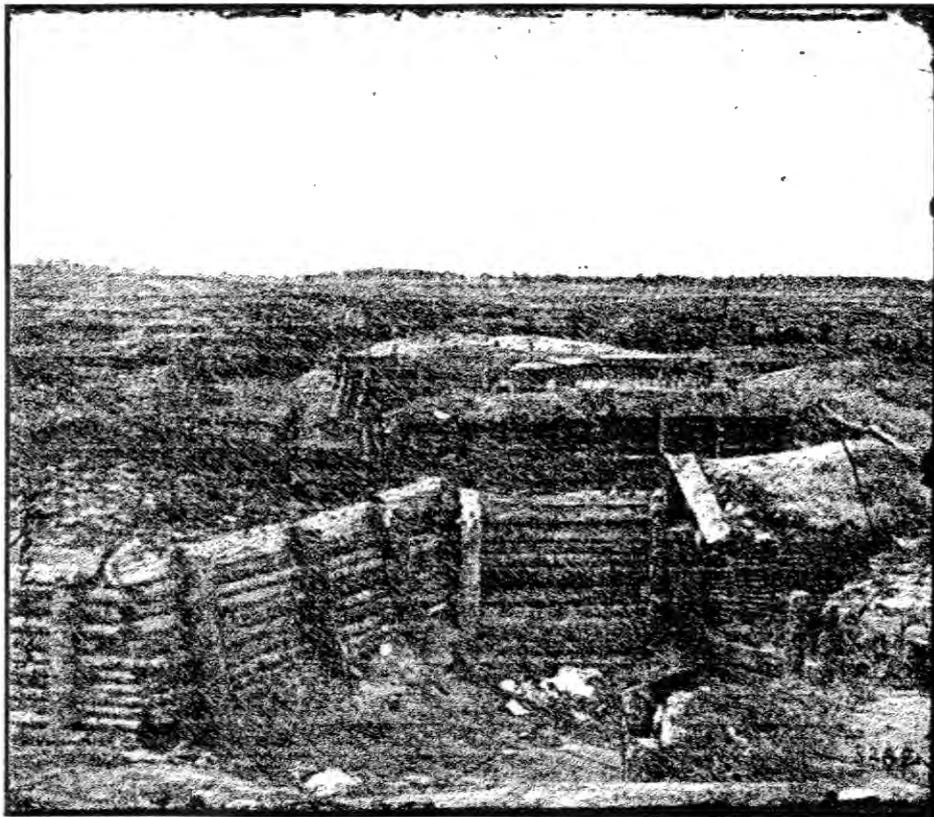


LTC. Charles Cummings Letters of 1864

PART 2



Confederate Entrenchments at Petersburg
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2-Miles S. E. Petersburg, Virginia
June 18th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

I have not received a line from you since yours of the 29th ult., but knowing your usual punctuality, I lay the delay to the mail arrangements. Yet it was a disappointment to me yesterday when the mail arrived with letter from Vermont as late a date as June 10th and not one for me.

Wednesday night at 8 pm., we resumed our march and at 11 were on the right bank of James River. We marched rapidly until 7 am. Breakfasted and at noon were near our present position. Moving and resting alternately until it was determined where the 9th Corps was a needed in the battle then in our immediate front. We were placed in line of battle supporting the 5th corps their charging. The charge failed and we were moved to another part of the line. In the night we were moved circuitously forward and to the night and at day dawn, say 3 a.m., were placed on the right of the line composed of 17th Vermont, 9th New Hampshire, and 32nd Maine for a charge. We had in all not over 550 guns when we were told 5000 men needed, and where 2000 had failed in the evening. I was ordered to take on battery in an orchard which could not be seen but had been felt the early evening at our cost. I went in never expecting to come out. My old Union Mills friend, Col. C. D. McDougall of 141st New York, whose picture you have and over whose brigade I moved up the crest of a hill could not assist me with 800 men as he belonged to the 2nd corps and it was contrary to his orders. He felt keenly his and my position. General Griffin (he is now a full brigadier) felt sadly to but in his three best regiments but it was Burnside's order and made as too often such order are upon information furnished by some incompetent pop-in-jay on his staff who comes into some safe place and looks a minute when all is quiet and reports and there was no alternative. Bailow's Brigade was to assist but it was not forth coming. Griffin said that the 17th was his most reliable regiment and he gave us what was expected to be the hottest place. MacDougall shook hands with me and said that it was another Balaclava and he would bid me a final good bye. I instructed the officers as to their duties and then I gave the command "battalion forward." The regiment went in steadily, bravely, and enthusiastically. We drove in the skirmishing line, passed along and drove a line from behind their entrenchments, captured the colors of the 17th Tennessee, 3 cannon, 1 caisson, 6 horses, and 70 prisoners in fifteen minutes. This we did with 135 men. Our loss as five men killed including Lt. Guyer and 16 wounded including Lt. Branon. General's Potter and Griffin complemented us in the highest terms. There were four guns in the battery but two had changed their position in the night so they did not come within our range; these were taken by the 9th New Hampshire. Yesterday we were in the 2nd line and lost two killed and 5 wounded. Last night we had 24 men out on skirmish line and five or six were wounded.

Thank God I came out safe and sound. The 17th, has won imperishable honors, small as it is if I had 800 such men I could do almost anything.

Sunday night we marched all night, Monday night until after midnight, Tuesday night until 10 o'clock, Wednesday night all night, and Thursday night all night moving halting fighting, and last night as there was much skirmishing in front. I was up every hour all night. This morning I am slightly tired but in good health and tough enough to fight another day and night. . .

In the Hospital near Petersburg, Virginia
June 27th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

Do not be alarmed at the heading of this letter. I have been hard up for a week with diarrhea and some fever, but I am now better. I should have written you sooner but I did not feel able.

The 17th regiment moved forward more than half a mile Saturday and during the night threw up earthworks within the very teeth of the enemy, in a sandy oat field. Here we lay three days and nights without being relieved, where to stand up straight in daylight was to be shot, and a hot vertical sun pouring in upon us. I had one piece of a shelter supported by four little sticks over my hole, and in the three days it got six balls though it, some of them passing as low down as my ears. Tuesday night the 2nd brigade was relieved by the 1st, but that remained out only two days, when we were sent back. Laying there without suitable food, tea or shelter and then on duty Tuesday night as Divisional Field Officer of the Day I gave out Wednesday morning, and as the regiment had orders to fall in and be ready to move at a moment's notice, I came to the hospital. The regiment has not moved but I have not felt able to go back. The major is sick and Capt. Knapp is in command.

The ground is terribly parched up. I do not remember as we have had a drop of rain for a month. The heavens are as brass and everything is burning, scorching. If this weather continues much longer it does not seem as if we should have many men left.

Our mails come quite regularly now, but between the time we left Fredericksburg and our arrival here they were irregular enough. I have not received your number 8, none between May 29, and June 11. Your last letter, postmarked June 17th, and the Phoenix of that date were received the 20th. That hat, which suits perfectly, arrived to me yesterday. There was not letter in or about it; the box was well shattered but the hat was not injured.

While lying on my bed, made of four forked stakes driven into the ground with one cross piece at the head and another at the foot with eight long poles lengthwise could with boughs swigs and the whole by a rubber blanket. My mind constantly reverts to home and its occupants. I wish myself able to get away for a few days and see you. Besides, I could recover so much faster there than here. But this cannot well be so I must make the best of my lot and take things as I find them. It is a rough, terrible rough campaign. The oldest campaigners freely admit that nothing like it has ever before occurred within their experience.

I saw "Carleton" here yesterday. He will remain a while. I saw him the day I resumed command as we approached the North Anna, but he has been home since. I think he is the most reliable war correspondent I know of Fitzpatrick, the New York Herald correspondence speaks well of that charge of Griffin's brigade on the 17th in Herald of south. "Carlton" has the confidence of commanders and peculiar means for information. He says not for the public ear, that 50,000 troops from New Orleans and the southwest will soon reinforce Grant, and that we already hold the Weldon Railroad. The design is evidently to hold Lee here and reduce him and his army, and by fighting and by starvation.

How is the garden? Will you have many strawberries? If the weather is dry they should be watered night and morning. They will bear so much better.

Give my love to our little children and mother.

I am my dearest – Your Loving Husband – Charles.

Tuesday, Morning June 28th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

This morning I received your letter of June 5th, also a letter from General Washburn acknowledging the reception of my report, and saying that he was more than satisfied, he was proud of the 17th and what it had accomplished.

I feel better this morning and think my disease has pretty much left me, but I am weak, not having eaten so much as ordinary meal of victuals in seven days. I am as "poor as a church mouse" but thanks to the Christian Commission, in whose tent I am writing. I have been supplied with farina, cranberry sauce, Boston Crackers, and lemons. Had it not been for this noble charity I much have suffered.

In this particular camp the Christian has been much more useful than the Sanitary Commission for those charged with the distribution of the articles of the former give their personal attention faithfully to the work. In some cases those in charge of the Sanitary Commission use their articles for their own convenience and that of a set of officers – medical mostly – to the neglect of the sick and wounded. If there is any place in the wide world where attention is appreciated by the sick it is in the field away from home and friends. It is not possible dear wife for you or any other woman to get out here or live after you should arrive. No tongue nor pen can give any adequate idea of the sufferings and privations of this long, continuous and to be continued campaign. It is without a parallel in the record of any war. I do not mean to complain for it would be no good. I do not want to go to Washington if sick or wounded for it is certain death to get anchored in one of those old hospitals full of gangrenous and erysipelas. I can only get home upon surgeon's certification that I am in danger of life or of permanent disability by remaining. That is not my case now by any means, but should I be in that condition I should go to Vermont rather than Washington even if I had to resign and in consequence therefore be dishonorably discharged. I do not apprehend any such contingency for I have such good friends in our Congressional delegation that they would not see me wronged.

"Carleton" is active in the Christian Commission. It is a great pleasure to meet him out here. He gave me the July Atlantic containing his article on the operations of our armies in May. He is quite hopeful of the result.

I should write more for the Phoenix but my official correspondence as commandant of the regiment and my letters to you are all that I can find time to write.

I meant to have sent this yesterday but did not feel energy enough to go to the mail, so I add this sheet, I think you will get this, this week.

I would give much to see you all and stay at home a week, but as this cannot be. You and little Lizzie and Charlie must content yourselves with the reflection that you are not forgotten.

I am dear wife, - Your loving husband – Charles

Near Petersburg, Virginia
July 3rd, 1864

My Dear Wife,

Your letter of 26th, was duly received Thursday night, the mail arrangements being so well perfected that letters come with great dispatch. To the army and I presume to the friends at home these facilities are a source of the greatest gratification for not an officer or soldier that I have seen in the army but what prizes a letter from home as the greatest pleasure of which he is susceptible of enjoying. When I get a batch including one from you I dispatch my others first and in haste and then sit down to the enjoyment of a mental visit home where I see you and the dear little children.

I am intensely gratified to learn that Charlie is out of danger. I trust that under your watchful care he will soon be restored to health and that you will not return be sick, from your care, anxiety, and labors in ministering into him. My health is now tolerable good and is improving daily. Tomorrow I intend to go back to my regiment, which I should have done three days since had it not been for my detail on a Court Martial.

The posture of affair as not much changed, our lines of communication are perfect our army never before on any campaign received its supplies and in such variety and abundance as now. Yesterday the Sanitary Commission distributed to the army two tons and a half of canned tomatoes, curried cabbage, potatoes, vice pickles and etc and distributed more or less, now sutlers are coming up with supplies. Yesterday I purchased some butter 75 cents per pound, one can each of green corn, peas, lobster and shaker applesauce to the amount of \$4.00 with which to celebrate the 4th of July if I get a chance. At Bristow I bought a canteen of whiskey for 50 cents and the night before the Battle of the Wilderness I bought a bottle for \$2.00 nearly all of which, a frolic. I gave to the wounded the next day. That is the extent of my liquor purchases since I left Vermont. I prefer to save my money and send home, but when we shall get any I do not yet know. Besides paying for my horse I have on hand \$60 at this present time, so I can stand it until September or October should necessity require, and I owe not a cent to commissary or any servant. I have now 4 months pay due me, and the mess owe me \$25 for money advanced, so much for financial matters. But you will need much more than herefore everything is so dear and is likely so to continue for the present. Therefore I shall send you every dollar possible. My pay up to July 1st will amount to \$650.

To return to our position. Our troops are engaged to some extent in mining, that is in tunneling under some of the forts of the enemy, and one of these days somebody will be astonished for I understand that our mine under a fort will contain 15,000 pounds of powder. This work is kept quite still and of course correspondents of the press cannot mention it, but since I have been at Burnside's headquarters on Court Martial I have heard the thing talked up. It may be that General Grant will celebrate the 4th of July with some grand fireworks of this description, both on account of the historic association of the day and to commemorate his victory at Vicksburg last years.

The 17th is in the front line of works two days and in the reserve line two days alternately. It went in Friday night and will be relieved tonight. It is sever work laying in the broiling sun two days where you cannot ever stand up and where you must eat your hardtack and drink water that has stood in your canteen all day, and where you must creep to the sink or wherever else you find it necessary to go. Such a life has a powerful tendency to induce disease. Many of the men are

now sick and more would have been had it not been for the improvement in the quantity and quality of the ration. As it is the army is in a very good condition. It is as full of fight as ever.

The Union army extends in a long line from the James River, when its right flank is covered by the gunboats, across Point of Rocks or rather above then across the Appomattox easterly of Petersburg and so along in a southerly directions, generally facing westerly. Here we meet the rebels face to face and long lines of superior earthworks interspersed with strong forts and filled with contending foes frown upon each other while every few minutes the noise of a projectile from the sharp hissing tube of a minee ball to the deep bass of a mortar running through all the tones and sim-tones of several octaves, shows that the contending parties are neither dead nor sleeping. Nearly everyday along some portion of this line are attempt will be made by one side or the other to take some salient work from which an annoying fire proceeds, but such assaults cost the assailants dear and are not always successful. Friday evening the "Johnnies" undertook to carry a work held by the 1st division, 9th corps and by a part of the 10th corps, but they were repulsed with awful slaughter. It is no ordinary job to carry by open assault a strong earthworks defended by men who are disposed to obey orders and hold the place at all hazards.

In many places as in front of the 2nd brigade and my own regiment the line are so close that there are no pickets between; in fact they are not one hundred yards distant from each other and battle pits are crowded with sharpshooters. Woo to the unlucky man who raises head, hand or foot; it is sure to be perforated the moment is exposed

It may be thought that this is slow work that Richmond is not likely to fall in this way. The fact is, in my judgment, getting Richmond depends upon driving or whipping Lee's army and it may as well be done here as elsewhere. While Grant is holding him up of the defense of his line of which Petersburg is but an insignificant portion in extent but the key in reality, he is troubling Lee's most essentially communication. There is no doubt the Weldon road is most essentially injured. Two days since the 6 Corps destroyed ten miles thereof. If we can destroy Lee's communications, the work of consequence or driving him from Virginia is more than half completed. My opinion is that we long nearly all the troops in the country on both sides will be brought face to face in this vicinity and that on this line we are to fight it out. This is supporting that Lee will not turn tail and run.

I am glad to learn that the garden looks so finely under Mr. Estabrooks care I feel that everything will not be spoiled as it was last year. I think spading up the garden late in the fall injured the worm crop, and I turned on some mackerels salt that helped to the same desirable end. Have you had any strawberries and if so now many. Are they good size and flower? Did the pansies in your flowerbed blossom? One you know never has blossomed before. How about the Baltimore Bells and yellow roses? That erratic may rose must have been beautiful it is indeed a singular and unaccountable freak that produced such results as you describe. The "Queen of the Frauis" is not the ordinary varsity of that celebrated rose, but it is the rarer kind known the florist as the "Madame Harvey." Please have it well cared for.

If you have them in abundance, I wish you would this fall can what tomatoes you can conveniently and please save all the pickles you can, particularly of cucumbers and onions, small silver skin onions - they are so healthy and nice. If you will put in with your vinegar some mustard and a very little sweet oil you will have nearly the English "Chow Chow."

The contents of that box you suit me by Capt. Corey were just what would have been most acceptable and I deeply regretted its fate, yet had he got it along as far as Washington he could have not succeeded in carrying it on a march and he don't know enough to leave it where I

could have received it at some future day. By and By Adam's Express will probably commenced running from Washington to City Point and then packages can be transported. Yet for small parcels the mail is the cheapest and safest.

What does the Universalist Society propose to do about preaching, now Frost has married a woman who goes somewhere else to church. I do not suppose he will take much interested in the affairs of the society. It looks as if there would be a breaking up. If the best elements there and at the Unitarian Society would unite in settling the right kind of a man it would be the best thing that could happen. I do not think Mr. Stowe has felt satisfied to remain since the failure of the effort to unite last spring. He was at one time elated at the prospect and not being much experienced in public life and not having learned that those who propose measures of a radical nature seldom take part in carrying them into effect, such is the difficulty of educating public opinion to anything novel. He became disgusted at what he thought was his want of success. One in public life must learn to labor and to wait.

So long as we remain here I shall not have any army news to write that will be of interest to you aside from what you find in the newspapers. "Carleton" and "Littleton," who by the way is a nephew of "Carleton" and his name is Carleton, will keep you posted. The former last week got from General Potter an account of our charge of the 17th and told me he wrote it out for the Journal. It is undoubtedly more correct in its general features than mine. It told him of one incident that he said he wished he had known for he would have published it. During the charge and while at the head of my regiment I saw an officer crawling up out of a deep ravine. I called upon him to surrender, but he looked astonished said nothing and commenced moving away. I drew my pistol and told him to come in and surrender or I would shoot him. He did not like the looks of the muzzle of my little persuader, but he thought I was trying to fool him for he halted, turned around and said, "Sir, I am an officer in the service of the Confederate States." I replied, "You are just the man I am looking for, I am the commanding officer of the 17th Vermont in the service of the United States, and you are my prisoner." He immediately surrendered but as it was in the gray of early dawn, and he had just been aroused, he just then discovered that he was caught. He was the Adjutant of the 17th Tennessee and gentlemanly fellow.

Love to all and hoping this will find you all well,

I am dear wife, your loving husband – Charles.

Near Petersburg, Virginia
July 11th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

Your letters of July 3rd and 5th were both received last week, and I should have written before today had I felt well enough to do so in addition to the large amount of writing I have been obliged to do in making muster rolls, ordnance, and quarterly returns, and etc. I do not mean by this that I am sick, but I do not get strength very fast for my digestion is quite poor. However, I am yet engaged on a Court Martial and shall continue so a day or two longer. In the meantime, I take care of myself as well as I can. The weather is so intensely hot and dry, no rain having fallen since the 2nd day of June, that it is almost insufferable. The dust is everywhere and flies are as numerous as the frogs and lice of Egypt. Added to this we are in a region when water is scarce. To compensate in part we get ice occasionally. The plantations here all have ice houses and they fill them too, but with much thinner and dirtier ice than we have in Vermont. Besides ice now comes from New England to City Point for the use of the hospitals and headquarters. I think I shall get over my difficulty if I am quite careful; if I do not I shall resign if possible and come home. I am as careful of myself as possible, so do not apprehend any neglect. My wife and children are too dear to me to be careless with my health. It is only when in action that I disregard danger and even then I do not mean to omit any proper precaution for my personal safety. Dr. Edson is an excellent physician and he will take as good care of me as he would of a brother. I am taking quinine and iron daily and my diet is cut down to a low figure. My 4th of July luxuries remain uneaten and will for some time. The fresh tomatoes, peas, bean, cucumbers, and etc. at headquarters of the corps look tempting but I have not tasted them. I bought of the sutler a mackerel and six new potatoes and boiled them yesterday. They made a capital dinner. For supper I ate more than I have for a long time and it tasted better than anything I have had since I left home. What do you think it was? three fish balls. I should like them three times per day.

I have received the hat, knife, and postage stamps. The knife is a treasure, for it will cut tent pins, meat and the like. The stamps go fast for my official correspondence with the departments and with the Adjutant General of Vermont, as well as answers to numerous inquiries concerning men killed in action, creates a large correspondence.

You speak of getting a leave of absence. It is next to impossible. I must get a certificate through all the grades of service up to Secretary of War to the effect that my life is endangered to such an extent that it can only be restored by sending me home; and to resign in the face of the enemy without the gravest reasons would subject me to the court martialled for cowardice. It is not so easy to get out of the service as it was when we lay in the Defenses of Washington and I had rather die than go home disgraced forever. However, I could get off better than some officers under such circumstances for my records, thus far is not unfavorable myself being the judge.

“Carlton’s” account of that charge is in the main correct. After he had sent it on I told him one or two incidents that he wished he had known to incorporate into the narrative; but I am glad they were not put in for it might have seemed vain – glorious in connection with his crediting me with information. “How did I feel” you ask, I felt sober I can assure you. Knowing the full extent of the danger before I went in I considered the chances three to one of my every coming out with a whole skin and even that I should come out alive. The commander of the New

York Brigade of 800 men said that if left to himself he would not go in when I went with 130 men. He shook hands with me and said he did not wish to discourage me but he never expected to see me again. It did not depress me. I commended you and one to him who careth for us all and I gave the command "Forward" with as much self-possession as if on drill. But we caught the rebels half asleep from which cause the fire from their entrenchments was wild and did us but little damage. One volley was all that they could get in before they broke and run like sheep.

I am glad that our dear little boy is getting better, but it will be a long time before he is strong again. I do not like those sores on him. I fear it indicates something constitutionally wrong. I would give much if I could be at home until September both to be with you and enjoy the garden, and to be rid of this hot climate; but it is not so be.

How long we are to remain before Petersburg it is impossible to say. We are making gabions and fascines in abundance and we have nearly completed a series of mines directly under the rebel works, one of them containing 15,000 pound of powder. In a few days somebody will be surprised and hurt. It looks as if a charge would be attempted and when the rebel works are full that the mines will be exploded, scating the Johnnies when we will rush forward and possess their entrenchments. The whole of the 6th corps has been detached and goes a port and I suspect all to Maryland to head off the rebels in that vicinity and prevent their return if possible.

Troops from New Orleans are supposed to be on their way hither. Of the daily progress of our armies you are as well and better posted than I am.

The 17th is in the pits not more than 20 rods from the enemy's lines, without intervening pickets, two days and then in the rear line two days. The 2nd and 1st brigades alternating.

You write about the children's money at the Savings Banks. It is certainly singular that the account cannot be found. All my memoranda of every kind are in my trunk at Washington and I cannot now give dates, but if we remain here much longer, I shall send for it to come to City Point when I can find out all that is necessary to establish the matter.

My dear wife, I know the anxiety you feel about me, and it is a some of constant solicited on my part; but you must remember that if it is my fate to lose my life in this great cause, I am but one among the hundreds thousand who have made equal sacrifices. I hope to come out of it safely and this hope is quadrupled by the reason that I have a good, true and loving wife who is all to me that a wife can be to a husband, and good little children dependent upon me. Were I single I think that I should perhaps run greater risks, although of this I am not sure, yet I would not be without my wife and children for anything in the world. The thoughts of them sustain and animate me in the discharge of my duties and the bright anticipation of rejoining them "when this cruel war is over" keeps up my spirits when otherwise I might be despondent. Kiss the little dears for their absent papa and give my love to mother.

Your loving husband – Charles.

Near Petersburg, Virginia
July 14th, 1864

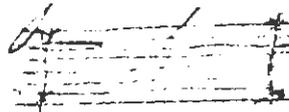
My Dear Wife,

Yours of the 9th was received the 13th. I need not say that its reception, as do all your letters, gave me great pleasure. I am glad to learn that our dear little son is surely recovering. I wrote you in my last that I did not like the appearance of those abscesses that trouble him. They indicate a bad condition of the system. I think after he gets about smart a little cream of Tabasco and sulfur at night followed in the morning by an even teaspoonful of Rochelle salts, once a week would be beneficial. If it should not distress his system it would be well to follow it up several months. Poor little boy, how much I should like to see him.

I had a letter from Henry day before yesterday. His family is well and judging from what he writes he likely to remain at Newport for the present. He wrote that he had not heard from you for two weeks (preceding July 5th) so they concluded Charlie was better.

I am back with the regiment in the 2nd line. Last night the regiment went out to the front to lay in the pits 20 rods from the enemy where there is not a breath of air some days and the sun shines every day and hot enough to almost broil one, for two days. It is so intolerable some days out there that our soldiers will not obey orders not to communicate with the enemy. The last two days they were out there, one of our men jumped up on the breastworks and called out "Johnnies, if you won't shoot we won't!" To this the rebs assented readily. Then the boys straightened themselves up on the works, some mounted the breastworks and others went over and exchanged coffee for tobacco and hard bread for corn dodgers or hoe cakes. The rebs came over also and as there is some water in front that had not been molested for some time, washed their shirts and made themselves quite familiar. They wished to exchange newspaper but as this is peremptorily forbidden by General Meade, they did not succeed. Late in the after one of our men standing on the breastworks was shot in the neck, fatally by a sharpshooter from another direction. The rebs were indignant at this and put a stop to that amusement. They keep good faith with our men. One day their officers called them in they called out. "Get into your pits yanks, for we have go to go to shooting again." The fact is after more than 70 days of fighting the rank and file to say nothing of some of the officers gets tired of picket firing and dodging and laying in hot pits day after day. And who wonders? It is unnatural.

This second line is back about 60 or 80 rods in the border of woods. I have a hole dug ten feet long, six feet wide, and 16 inches deep. On the side next to the front is a long breastwork 2 ½ feet high above the ground. Over all is a shelter tent, twice the length of the one I carried home. At each end is brush with leaves for a shelter. My bed is in the hole about as high as the top of the ground made by driving four forked stakes into the ground at the corners of the bed, then laying a cross each end a head and foot rail an inches and half in diameter then laying length wise eight poles about 7 feet long thus:



These I cover over with small brush, twigs and leaves and special my rubber blanket overall. This weather a good seat by day and a bed by night. Beside this I have this morning

found the side of a box three feet long by two wide. Driving from stakes in the ground and then reaching this side on them. I have an excellent table and a hard break box makes me an excellent seat. A newspaper servers of a table cloth. Barring the dirt and dust – we have not had any rain since the night of the 2nd of June. It is quite comfortable. If I could have green sward under my feet at would be delightful.

As I sit here writing to you the shells are flying a little way to the front. We have a battery not more than fifteen rods from me and the enemy send their shells in still nearer. Last night several musket shots struck in the earthwork that protects me. Perhaps there will no another one come for several days. I did not go to the front last night with the regiment for I did not feel quite able and a more potent reason I was expecting to be on Court Martial today, and home since I received a notification to attend at 10 o'clock.

Since Griffin has got to be a general he puts on airs quite noticeably. He has got his headquarter wagons labeled "General Griffin's Headquarter wagons," but he don't put in this initials for them is another General Griffin and a much great than he, in the 5th corps. Ah well, we all have our weakness!

I don't know what we are all coming to. If the present high price continues it will be hard for poor folks, hard for us all. Officers are paid in depreciated currency and this year are taxed 8 percent on all over \$600 of their pay. This will make my tax over 100 per year. Some things I can buy out here cheaper than you can at home. I get crushed sugar for 21 cents, salt pork for 12, tea 100, and hard bread for 6 and coffee for 40, etc.

Now we are stationary our supplies are abundant. I bought last night some pork new potatoes, beets, turnips. Bemuch onions all at government prices and will have a boiled dish as soon as I get time to cook it. But at sutlers we have to pay exorbitantly, it is so difficult for them to get goods here as government wants all the harbor and whorfage. In fact corps and headquarters sutlers are all the ones that can do anything. Some of them sell brown sugar at 40 cents, cheese at 50, bake pies of dried peaches at 40 cents, yet after all I do not know, as their prices are proportionally higher, than usual. There is such an increase of duties on imported articles that it cost them twice as much as formerly. Sardines that last winter at home cost 25 cents now cost out here 67 to 75 cents.

I can buy a pint of good draught ale for 10 cents and that is cheap enough. All has done no more good than anything else as it is a better time. I have not drank any liquor except when Griffin wet his commission this six weeks.

Love to the dear little children and to mother.

Your loving husband - Charles

Near Petersburg, VA
July 18th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

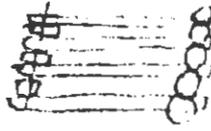
I received your letter of July 12th this morning. In it you write that you have not received any letter from me since the one dated July 3rd. I cannot keep the numbers of mine so it is impossible to give dates, but I have written at least twice since then before today. I do not see why there should be so much delay in the reception of my letters. For instance this letter is given to the regimental postmaster tonight and he puts it in the brigade mail from when on it goes to then division, and corps mail in season for tomorrow's boat from City Point to Washington, which leaves at 10 am, and arrives in Washington Wednesday morning. You should get it Thursday or at the latest by Friday night. I suppose however, that the recent raid of the rebels in Maryland delayed my last.

As I was detailed on Court Martial I did not return to my regiment until the 12th, not feeling able for fully duty. Since this I have not been into the pits in front, for my court marital duties detained me until Saturday, and will take a few hours tomorrow to finish. Last night was our turn for the trenches but the 17th and 32nd Maine Regiment under my command were detailed for fatigue duty at a new 10-gun fort building this side. The two regiments are divided into three reliefs each, one relief on four hours and off eight. I merely went out with each relief the first time and turned them over to the engineer in charge, and some thereafter returned to my quarters. It is quite light duty for me. I presume when relieved from this we shall immediately resume the trenches. Last night our commanders expected an attack from the enemy, so at 12 midnight we were ordered to be ready to move at a moment's notice. Consequently I did not sleep two hours in all. The night wore away and all was quiet along the line as usual, which means irregular mortar firing and considerable picket firing. Our big mine will, I understand unofficially, be ready for explosion in a day or two when we shall probably have some hard fighting to do. We are getting up big batteries of 30 pounders – 4 inches in diameter and 12 inches long, and they trouble the enemy considerably. But their works are strong and there is line behind line.

There is not much variety or romance about this condition of things. Although it is easier than marching it is not as healthy. We have not had five minutes rain in any place when I have been since the night of the 2nd of June, and oh how dusty it is. The air is filled with this impalpable powder, which comes from one inch to one foot and we breath, eat and drink it. We are a dirty, lousy set of men. The heavens are as brass and the earth as molten iron. Yet on our of days we are in the woods which were heedlessly thinned of all brush before it was supposed we should occupy them so long, and we had nothing for shelter but tall pines with scarcely any foliage and a few tall cotton woods which are much better with now and then a small oak. Yet some days there is a breeze, which is truly refreshing. We go or send a mile for all the water we have to drink. The great nuisance here is the flies, but they are necessary to kill the dead animal weather in this climate. A new sink used by the men one day and left over one morn will be nothing but a surging mass of maggots apparently several inches in depth. I have had a piece of fresh beef killed in the morning covered with them before night, yet the meat was not tainted in the least. You may imagine that sluping in the daytime is out of the question, as it is, but when I can I go to had as soon as the flies however, much I would like to "sit on the piazza" in the cool of the evening. I have not burned so much as one candle for two months. I must sleep when I

can. By improving my opportunities I do not miss the loss of one night's sleep half as much as I used to at home.

I have fixed up my quarters so they are quite comfortable. In the first place protection from stray balls and shells was necessary so I built up a little fort. First are the front are five oak logs each a foot or more through and 12 feet long our top of another laid up log house style; the ends are one solid but of six inches pine logs and the other of the same material but open thus front:



this is the rear. The illustration represents the south end. Over all is my tent like the roof of a house with both gable ends open. The ends and front, except a passage for an entrance, are thickly shaded with brush reaching above the tent. On the back side is my bed, and against the open end is my table on which I am writing. It is now half past five and the breeze circulates through nicely. I am stripped to shirt and pantaloons.

The lord be praised at this moment a few drops of rain are patting on my tent. I thought the air felt better when a few lines back I was writing of the cool breeze. I do hope we are to have a good rain.

What a tornado you must have had to do so much damage. I hope our garden is not materially injured. For the maple tree I do not care and Mr. Estabrooks will be glad. How are the pear trees? Have the Flemish Beauties that have borne such nice pears any on them?

I am rejoiced that our dear little Charlie is getting along so finely. He has had a narrow escape. Tell him and Lizzie that papa would like to see them very much indeed, and that he thinks of them every day.

My horse that used to excite so much wonder for his ugliness and restiveness is a jewel. He has calmed down and is a splendid riding animal, strong, easy and fast. The first day I was in the march from Alexandria he was all over the lot, rearing, and plunging at the sights he never saw before but he has got bravely over all that. A strong hand, short commons and hard work did the job. My other animal is a good serviceable beast. Sherman is doing nobly. Bank's forces are two divisions at Washington and one here. How long we are to be here and where next, I cannot guess.

Give my mother and to the dear little children.

Your loving husband, Charles.

Near Petersburg, Virginia
July 23rd, 1864

My Dear Wife,

Yours of the 17th was received this morning and last weeks Phoenix came to hand Wednesday, so I have quite full news from home and the tornado. I am glad that the children are getting along so well, for I do not attach any importance to Lizzie's sickness as her constitution is such that she will have little disturbances frequently but which are easily controlled. I have feared you would be quite sick from your sever labors and excessive anxieties. I trust you are not sick as you write.

I wrote you Monday and when I was nearly through it commenced sprinkling a little. During the evening and night following then was occasional a sprinkle, but not enough to run of the roof of my tent. In the morning however, rain commenced falling in earnest and we had a good rain of ten hours duration. This has done much to promote the comfort of our troops as it has allayed the intolerable dust. But it has not cooled the atmosphere.

The court martial at Burnside's Headquarters concluded its labors yesterday and will probably be dissolved. While at headquarters yesterday morning in General Burnside's tent I saw Lt. General Grant and Major General Meade. The latter I had seen several times, but I never met Grant before. He is a sandy competition, hard, wiry looking man with a short, stiff beard, and if physiogorwing is good for anything is as obstinate as he is represented. Brigadier General Robert B. Potter, the commander of the division I am in is a young man not more than thirty I think. While on the court with him I got well acquainted and like him much. He is intelligent and bright and a very brave soldier. He is, I am informed a son of Bishop Potter of New York. General Ferraro and Potter both came out one as Colonel and the other as Lieutenant Colonel of a New York Regiment and now both are commanding Divisions in the same corps. Brigadier General Bartlett, the one legged colonel of the Mass 59th and recently promoted is the youngest general I have seen. He looks not more than 23. It is said that he is very smart and brave, and that he has been wounded in very battle in which he has been engaged. He is to command the 2nd brigade, 1st Division. The 17th is out in the rifle pits in their old place. I did not go out this time nor have I been out to stay since. I was sick for I have had court martial duties to attend to. I should have gone out with them last Sunday night, but they omitted our tour of two days then and worked on a fort instead. I then had charge of them and the 32nd Maine, but all I had to do was to see that the details reported promptly to the engineer in charge of the fort. During the off two days I drill the regiment morning and late in the afternoon in company and battalion drills.

The regiment now number but about 130 men fit for duty. But few of those first wounded have returned, and many are away sick in hospitals. Company I which left Brattleboro nearly two weeks since has not bee heard from. I am glad that there is another call for troops made and I hope the 17th will be filled up. If it is I shall expect promotion, but if Col. Randall is then sent out, I shall resign if there is any chance of getting my resignation accepted. It won't be fair after such a campaign as this to supercede me in the command.

We are now well supplied with food and vegetables. Yesterday I bought a loaf of brown bread of a sutler 40 cents and three little bottles of jelly 50 cents each, pineapple, strawberry, and raspberry. I thought I would luxuriate a little. It costs us officers double what it did to live when I was out before. Beef then was 8 cents now 16 cents a pound all pieces a like so you may be sure that I take nothing but sirloin steak, sugar then 9 cents now 17 cent and etc. Lately my living has

been more expensive for I have had more variety then on a march. This morning I bought 1- $\frac{3}{4}$ lbs of butter at 75 cents per pound.

This country is full of the nicest blackberries but the army is so large that there is not much of a chance for a taste. A bush that in Vermont would bear ten here, bears a hundred. Peaches will soon be ripe and every tree is loaded, but if the army stays here I shall hardly get a taste, as there are so many mouths to feed.

Who does Lucy Pratt marry? I hope she will get a good husband for she is an agreeable, amiable girl and a very good housekeeper. Poor Mrs. White has a hard life. White will never forgive me for not "doing something for Abner." But he will find out that Abner is no such smart boy as was his oldest son, and is likely to be even more dissipated.

All the troops that were at New Orleans are here or in the vicinity of Washington, after the rebel raiders.

By the way the beauty of "Home Guards" was well illustrated in that recent raid into Maryland. Their motto, like those in Brattleboro, seems to have been "never to leave town except in case of invasion." We have a heavy force after and on the flank of Ewell that will trouble him severely. But the rebel raiders into Maryland did not do half so badly as our own soldiers do when raiding it into Dixie. I have seen our soldiers go into a house and rip open feather beds, take an axe and chop to pieces, pianos, secretaries, bureaus, break looking glasses, and do all manner of such damage that did them nor anyone else any good with a fiendishness that would delight savages; while nothing but the halter kept them from grouply insulting females. The northern soldiers are every whit as ruthless as the Goths and Vandals. If something I have seen done by our men were done by those under my command I would shoot them down as I would so many dogs. We have made many homes desolate in the south and it does not if some are destroyed by our enemies when they get a chance.

I have not sold the Phoenix. Last winter I told Peroti that it was senseless to keep their names at the mast head, more especially as letters would come every week for some who did not know or would not remember that I was in the army, which country require them to answer. Now all letters for the paper will be directed to either editor or publisher and it I will be more convenient for the office.

Tell Lizzie I thank her for her letter, and hope that by and by. The will get so she can write one herself. Papa will write her a letter before a great while. He hopes she will be a good girl and help her mother all she can.

Love to all,

Your loving husband – Charles.

Near Petersburg, Virginia
July 31st, 1864

My Dear Wife:

Last week I receive two letters from you and this morning two Harpers. Yesterday there was another sever fight with great losses in our corps and nothing accomplished. At 4:30 am, that mine was exploded and a terrific bombardment commenced under cover of which we assaulted and carried a portion of the rebel line. But in our new position we were subjected to such a murderous fire from front and both flanks that in the end we were compelled to fall back with terrible loss. The 2nd brigade is all cut up. Every officer command a regiment is either killed, wounded or a prisoner. The 17th went out with 8 officers including Major Reynolds commanding and not one returned to the regiment. The Major and two Lieutenants were killed, our wounded and four taken prisoners. Out of about 100 men we have lost 41 to wit: 1 killed, 17 wounded and 21 missing some of where are undoubtedly dead others wounded and all who are alive prisoners. The adjutant just returned and two surgeons are all the commissioned officer present for duty. It is hard, terrible.

My health is miserable. I have a surgeon's certificate for a leave of absence but I cannot use it in the present deplorable condition of things. I must get the regiment in some shape before applying for leave. If I can succeed you may expect we home for a brief period next week, say two days hence.

I completed my ordnance returns yesterday, but I was obliged to work on them when I ought not to for there was not a man in the regiment when the adjutant was away equal to ordering clerical duty.

Yet I am as well as I was a week since, or at last can do so much work sitting still, but I cannot move about much. I had one-day 23 bloody discharges. These I have succeeded in checking.

We have 60 men for duty in the regiment and 550 in the brigade. Griffin feels badly and rumor fixes considerable stigma on him. The general particulars you will get in the newspapers.

Love to all the family, Your loving husband – Charles.

Near Petersburg, Virginia
September 18th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

I arrived in safety at Washington, Thursday morning at 7 o'clock remained there until Friday afternoon at 2, when I took the boat for City Point. I devoted my time at Washington to getting my claim, which was allowed to the amount of \$164, the value of horse, saddle, and bridle and disallowed for clothing ect, \$48. Oh "red tape." I went to over thirty different offices in the treasury building, counting the three visits to any one office as so many separate visits, and a messenger went with me so no steps were lost, before I got my money. Every visit was for a copy, memorandum or signature, but as all the officials interested themselves as the claim was old and I was going to the front. So it was begun Thursday morning at nine a.m., and completed at 15 minutes past 12 Friday. I also got my pay for July and August. The Paymaster offering it without asking. So my pay is not yet stopped.

I sent from Washington to Silas M. Waite, Carline, a draft on Assistant Treasurer at NY for \$350, which I directed him to credit to my account for you to draw upon. Thus you have \$500 to your credit. Please pay Daniel the first thing. He asked me for it, but not knowing what my luck would be I did not think it safe to pay him. So I told him that if I had the luck to get some money at Washington. I would write you to pay him. He said it would be somewhere six to eight dollars. If it don't amount to over 10 or 12 dollars for the year that is to winter it will be cheap enough.

I brought in Washington a rubber coat, a large and splendid one \$18, – bag. \$7 – saddle fixings to supply worn out ones \$13 and paid \$5.75 for one day's board at Hotel. I shall not now be in the way of spending much money except board four or five dollars per week.

On my way out I stopped at Fortress Monroe two hours in the morning and saw watermelons and peaches by the hogshead.

Our car left Brattleboro at 9 o'clock in the morning and if on time stop in New York two hours from 5 ½ to 7 ½ p.m., arrive in Washington to breakfast. Stay until 1:30 pm., leave on the boat at 2 arrive at Fortress Monroe at 7:30 or 8 am., stopped 2 hours and arrive at City Point the 3rd day at 4 pm., Quick is it not? I had stateroom No. 1 on the boat, as I was the ranking officer when we left Washington,

I am in excellent health as you may judge for I lugged my haversack and leather bag full with great coat and etc over a mile to reach my regiment, after getting out of the cars at Parke Station. We are about 16 miles from City Point, close to the Weldon Railroad, and an extemporized railroad from City Point runs within a mile of our camp.

When I got here at 9 pm, for the cars do not leave CP until dark as at one place the rebels fire Whitworth bolts at the train when they see it as they can in one spot close to Meade's Headquarter, if cars run in the day time. I found the regiment encamped away back from the front line, in a pine grove and splendidly situated. Every man has a bunk made as I told you I made mine up from the ground, and a wall tent was erected for me with a bed made in it. The regiment has been here ten days and is doing some fatigue work, as building corduroy roads, and drilling daily. It is altogether the best time that has been experienced since we left Alexandria. Our sutler is with us. Today I had for dinner stewed oysters, baked potatoes, common and sweet, fricasseed chicken and a rice plum pudding made of corns starch and etc, by the adjutant. We

also had ginger cakes, Boston crackers, and peaches. But this was an extra meal. We get good living however; I inspected the regiment this morning. We have over 200 guns.

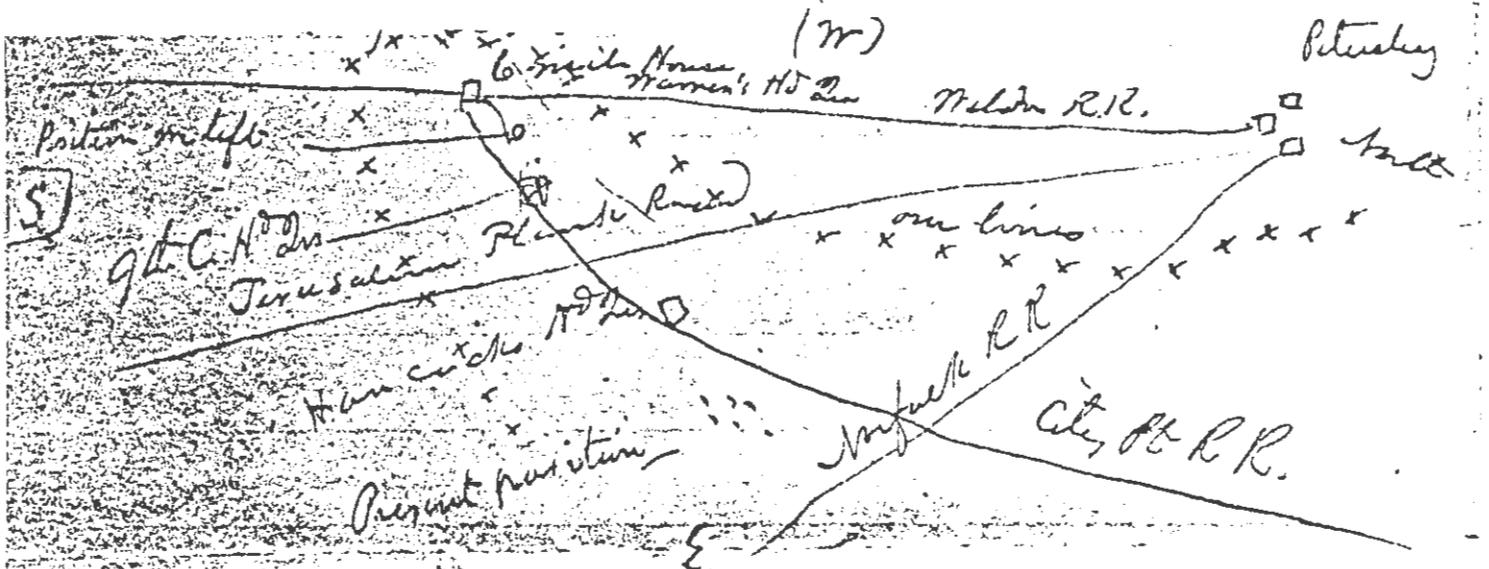
Tell Charlie and Lizzie that papa is in camp but now at 4 ½ pm., Sunday has not heard a gun. Also that papa thinks of them out here.

Your loving Husband – Charles.

On a Log in the Woods
Near Petersburg,
September 25th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

Your letter with the enclosures was duly received last week. During the week we were busy in remodeling our camp, company, battalion, and brigade drills, and in fatigue duty. Yesterday, Sunday, I intended to write you, but a batch of Paymasters arrived in camp, among them Major W. C. Sawyn of Brattleboro, Redington of St. Johnsbury and Gardiner of Maryland. The last pays our brigade. So after morning inspection I spent the day with them until after dinner. Then without any premonition orders came to strike camp immediately and fall in for a march. Our splendid camp, the best in the division, and all our conveniences such as my table, chairs, which I had manufactured out of old boxes had to be deserted. We marched about 4 miles back towards City Point, covering that portion of the line vacated a day or two since by Hancock's corps. The General has just said that we shall probably go into camp here. Our line is something like this:



Sheridan has done splendidly. Dispatches announcing his several victories were sent around to all regimental headquarters. 24 hours before they reached Brattleboro in the New York papers. Stanton keeps us informed of such movements. Such Union ratification meetings as these victories and the withdrawal of Fremont and Cochran makes the few McClellan officers here feel cheap. I know the Union men and women at the North feel good too.

I got a letter from Col. Waite acknowledging receipt of draft. It is a little safer to send it in his name than in yours, for every Bank knows his signature so if it should get lost it could not be made available.

You have sufficient funds now so if you please you may get the black and white checkered material and make me a pair of shirts. One pair will do to being upon. My darkest colored one of the three has give out at one elbow. If you can get some binding you may ornaments the front as we talked of.

There is nothing new out here to write about.

My health is first rate. I am gaining health and strength every day. The fine weather of yesterday and today, after the thunderstorms of Saturday. I slept in the ground last night. It was not a soft bed but I slept very well.

When I get a better chance I will write more. Love to Lizze and Charlie and tell them that papa is well.

Your loving husband – Charles

Near the Weldon Railroad
September 30th, 1864

My Dear Wife,

Since I last wrote you I have received a letter from you, and this morning two Harper's came.

We have been circulating all the time since Sunday. Monday I sat on a log or did like service until 4 pm., when we were allowed to encamp where we were. So we cleaned up brush and stumps and pitched tents. The next day was employed in policing camp and on Court Martial. By noon I had my table built out of a stray box and my pale bed up with pine boughs for feathers, and my tent covered with like material. At 4 am. Wednesday morning received orders to be ready to march at daylight, and at 7 we actually did march back to our old camp, but not to encamp only to "hang out." The paymaster paid the regiment and by the time he had got through - 5 pm., we were allowed to pitch our tents. I got up mine on the old spot with an extra nice pole and pine feather bed and went to sleep at 8 o'clock. At half past eleven orders came to be in readiness march at 4 am., so there was no more sleep as ammunition and rations were to be distributed. In the morning we were in readiness according to orders all one surplus baggage was turned in, mess chest, tents, valises, and everything we could not take with us on horses or on foot. But during the day no "marching orders" came so hung around all day. At night we slept without tents, but nicely for I remained my bed under a bough owing and with my blankets slept so sweetly, the soft breezes fanning my face.

This morning we are again in the same condition. Orders to march may come in a moment and may not come at all. All the week Generals and their staffs have been riding to and fro. Meade was past here yesterday and some say Grant.

Last Night we received a circular saying that Butler yesterday, had captured Chopin's farm, in the rear of Drewry's Bluff. 300 prisoners and 15 pieces of artillery.

I considered these movements thus, our movements of troops Wednesday back to our old position was made with ostentation. We were ordered to beat reveille with as much noise as possible. When we marched our route lay along side of on breast works, in sight some of the way of the enemy's lines. We were then moving southwesterly towards the Weldon Railroad. You remember our lines here are like a horse shoe one heel resting at our old camp near where the mine exploded; running south westerly you come to the toe a cross the Weldon Railroad encircling the "Yellow Tavern" or 6 Mile House, a station on that road; then curving the other side extends easterly; fronting the south, away around City Point and Fort Powhatan down the James. Well we moved out towards the toe, as I think to make the rebels believe that we were massing troops in that vicinity. The cars too ran ever hour with the doorways and tops covered with men, which were quietly stowed inside and taken back out of sight at the next return trip. In my opinion all this was a feint to draw Lee's attention from the real point of attack in front of Bulter as confirming this view our artillery opened on our left, at the toe of the aforesaid horse shoe, and for a while it was furious. There was also musket firing, and this morning 16 rebs were sent to over rear as prisoners. How much the affair amounted to I do not know.

Just at this moment our corps commander, General Parke with his staff have gone past in that direction. Potter the division commander, went half an hour since. It may be possible that we shall today attack at that point, believing that Lee now thinks this a faint here and so moved last

night to Butler's front across the Appomattox. But then this is all guess work and General Griffin don't know any more about the plans than I do.

Our think is evident. Fighting in this vicinity cannot be much longer delayed. All the signs of the times indicate a determination on the part of General Grant to make an early onset for the possession of the rebel capital.

The army is in good spirits, and this corps are nearly all Lincoln men. We miss Burnside. It is understood that he will not again command us so long as we are with the Army of the Potomac.

The weather is fine and the roads in capital condition. The heat of the days in unusual, save then it is a little cloudy as today. The nights are so long that before moving blankets that are thrown off early in the evening, are quite comfortable. My diarrhea has substantially disappeared and my health is quite good. My legs feel a little stiff in the morning after lying on the ground all night. They don't "go off" quite so well since I had that neuralgia.

Love to all the family. Love to all the family. It looks as if orders would come in a moment. -

Yours loving husband - Charles

On the field near Petersburg, Virginia
October 2nd, 1864

Mrs. Charles Cummings
Brattleboro, Vermont

My friend,

With sincere regret have to inform you that your husband was wounded and captured by the enemy in the action of the 30th ult.

His wound was in the hip but we hope it was not serious. He fell but a few steps from the enemy who were pressing us so closely at the time, it was impossible for his men to bring him off.

Knowing how anxious you must be to hear from him, and I take the first opportunity to send you a line which I am compelled to do in pencil.

Yours respectfully, yours, etc. L. G. Griffin