

TWO CIVIL WAR LETTERS

Below are printed two letters from a Union soldier encamped at Yorktown, Virginia in the spring of 1863. The writer, Samuel Montgomery, born 1834 in Luzerne County, was a shoemaker by trade who lived in Sugarloaf Township in Columbia County. He was drafted for nine months of service in the Pennsylvania militia beginning October 1862. His fellow soldiers elected him 1st Sergeant in Company A in the 178th Regiment, which included draftees from Columbia, Montour, Luzerne and Lancaster counties.

After training, his unit was stationed at the fort at Yorktown in preparation for a renewed advance against the Confederate capital at Richmond. In April, 1863 the regiment was sent to reinforce Union troops under attack near Williamsburg and fought several skirmishes. In late June, when Rebel forces threatened Gettysburg, the 178th joined other Union troops in an advance toward Richmond to tie up Confederate forces; a brisk skirmish at the Chickahominy river on July 2nd caused only a few casualties in the regiment. Soon after, the regiment was rushed to Washington, which was threatened, but the Rebel army was driven back across the Potomac before they arrived. On July 27th, the 178th was mustered out at Harrisburg and the soldiers returned to their homes.

Sergeant Montgomery addresses the letters to his wife Celestia, who was living in Danville, Montour County, possibly with her parents. She had four small children, including a baby born in 1862.

The letters (see photo of letter 1, page 3) are reproduced with little modernization except to add sentence-ending periods and a few modern spellings [in square brackets]. Samuel evidently had only a rudimentary education, but his cheerful optimism and newsy reporting shine through his "like-it-sounds" spelling. A few proper names are identified in the endnotes; others remain uncertain.

Authorization to print Samuel Montgomery's letters was kindly given by two of his many descendants through his daughter Carrie Montgomery: Louise Montgomery-Kishbach McGarigle of Bellefonte, PA late of Nescopeck, PA, and David Montgomery-Kishbach Kline of Benton, PA.

Letter 1

Yorktown Va 178 Regt Co A
February 8 [1863]

Celestia having a little time I will improve it by dropping you a few lines. I am well. It is pleasant hear today. It has been very bad wither for some time back it snowed and rained and is very muddy yet. This forenoon I took a walk about a mile outside of the fort and saw one of the largest Peach orchards that I ever saw. it has for [four] thousand and five hundred trees in it. they say they get ripe here in July. if we stay here till that I think I will have some of them to eat. by the way I had a very pleasant walk and returned to camp again.

there is a nigger school in York town. this place has improved very much since we came here. the officers have a most all got their wives here now so it begins to look kind of natural but it doesn't do me any good it is only aggravation to them that have none. there was a battle fought at Blackwater the other day and we gave the rebels a good licking. we could hear the guns here plain. it commenced at three o'clock in the morning. the report of the cannon wakened me up. there was some of the drafted men in the battle and some got killed and several wounded. there is skirmishing [skirmishing] with our pickets near here almost every day and prisoners brought in every day. our cavalry does all the picket duty here. our old General is still strengthening [strengthening] the fort and making every preparation for a defence if [dreads] [dares] a tacked [attacked] it.¹

February 9

I received your letter of the 3- last evening. it found me well as you desired and on duty. there is nothing new this morn only Bob got his nose hurt last night. he was on guard and he and three other

guards and a corpral was orderd to arest a capton of one of the gun boats. he was in liker [in liquor, i.e., drunk] and the corprel got scart [scared] and the rest of the gard and left Bob and the capton struk him on the nose it is not serius. He throd the capton down and was about to run the baynt [bayonet] through him when one of the gun boat men took him off. in answer to you their was no Draft maid in eny state but Pensilvania. we will not get eny pay till Aprill or May they paid the old troops of hear last weak. tell mr swagart he will be safe in sending a box to me and if he sends it I will pay the frait on it when I get my pay. if he sends it he will have to pay the frait at Bloom [Bloomsburg] tell him to send the receipt of the box in a letter he can in close it in a letter at Bloom as soon as the agent gives it to him.

Letter 2

Yorktown Varginia

March 18 186[3]

Celestia again I take my pen in hand to in form you that I am well. it is quite plesant hear to day. in my Last I stated that I thought we would Leave hear soon but we are hear still and things goes off as usual. their is all kinde of Reports hear in Regard to the Enamey. we still Exspect a atact over the River but how soon I cant tell.

Emanuel Labauch is hear he is at trying to get Osees Roner home.²

You notest [noticed] a Letter some time ago in the Demacrat that was writen hear by one of our regiment and sinde [signed] Loyal.³ that letter was writen by Gorge Jacoba you will see a reply in the Republican by Leut Rinebolt. if uncle George had of sinde his name sesesh [i.e., Secessionist] it were bin nearer the thing. The Sol[diers] hear is in goode spirits and thing begins to look briter again. you will Hear tell of some hard fiting before long and I hope it will be crowned with victory to our brave boys.

I writ to Fathers to know if William Stephens was a going to stay on the lot a nother year or not but have got no answer from him. if he dose not stay tell father to doe the best he can with it. if he don't Rent it to get someone to Nail the windows shut and the Dores. if you hear any thing a bout it write to me in your next. the boys ar all well and ar doeing well our orderly is a going home this weak. I got a letter from thomas to night he is well. will I will close for the presant I will send this with Emanel Labach so good by for the presant write soone. from your Afectinet Husband

Samel Montgomry

[To:] M- Celestia Montgomry

Notes

1 In temporary command of Yorktown was Irish-born Brigadier-General Richard Busted of New York, who resigned his commission on 10 March 1863; since he was under 40 years old, another officer may be meant.

2 Emanuel Laubach, a young farmer of Sugarloaf Township, Columbia County, was a civilian visitor to the regiment. Hosea or Isaiah Roner is unidentified; he is not listed in Bates' roster of the regiment in *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers* (4:1270ff.).

3 Private George W. Jacoby was promoted to Corporal in Company I of the 178th regiment, a company drawn mainly from Columbia County; William H. Reinbold was 1st Lieutenant of the same company. Jacoby's lengthy letter signed "LOYAL" was dated "Jan. 16, 1863" and appeared in the *Columbia*

Democrat on January 31st. The letter provides an account of the brave fighting of the 84th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, in the Battle of Fredericksburg, a bloody debacle for the Union. The writer lays blame on the “President’s *unconstitutional Emancipation Proclamation*, the removal of cautious and qualified Commanders, and the appointing of careless and incompetent blunderers.”

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