

Letter From Freeman, Warren H. written Friday, June 6th, 1862

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Soldier: Freeman, Warren H.

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Location: Front Royal, Va.

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Subjects: Commanders, Eastern Theater, Family, On the March, Suffering

DEAR FATHER, — I received yours of May 24th and 28th this morning. I have not written for two weeks for reasons that will be obvious before you finish reading this letter.

We left our camp opposite Fredericksburg on Sunday afternoon, May 25th, at about five o'clock, and about midnight reached Aquia Creek, nearly thirteen miles distant ; a part of the road was of the roughest kind. The next morning I went over the deserted batteries there ; they were in a very commanding position. After some delay we went on board the steamer John Brooks, and came up to Alexandria. Part of our brigade took passage in the Vanderbilt, but she got aground and did not arrive till the day after we did. We remained on board the boat that night, and at day-break started for the cars that were to take us to Manassas ; we passed the " Marshall House," where Colonel Ellsworth was murdered, but did not have a chance to enter it. We left in the cars between seven and eight o'clock, and did not reach Manassas till the middle of the afternoon, only twenty-seven miles ; so you will perceive that this is not a fast road. Manassas has greatly improved in appearance since we left there a few weeks since. We remained there two nights, then marched to Thoroughfare Gap, distant fifteen miles, and encamped for the night; started next morning and marched about the same distance, to within about three miles of Piedmont ; next morning marched to Piedmont; here we left our knapsacks, taking only one rubber blanket and three days' rations ; this day we marched about twenty-three miles, over a very bad road, and the last four or five miles was in a most violent thunder storm. It is about five miles through Manassas Gap, and the scenery is exceedingly grand. I tell you that when we halted there was a gloomy prospect for a night's sleep : it was raining like sixties as we filed into a grove of pines, and dark as Egypt. We soon made a rousing fire, and after taking a drink of coffee felt much better. We then sheltered ourselves in the best way we could with our rubber blankets and got a little sleep. We here met General Rickett's Brigade, General Burgee's Brigade, and General Shields's Division — quite a formidable army, the various batteries numbering nearly one hundred guns. Sunday noon, June 1st, we all took up the line of march, but only remained together for a few miles. General Shields, with his division, went across the country in a westerly direction to intercept Jackson, who was supposed to be retreating that way. Part of our forces encamped on the banks of the Shenandoah. On the next day we crossed the river and went about five miles on the railroad, when it commenced raining, and we halted for the night. I took a railroad sleeper and lay on that, throwing my rubber blanket over me. I had a cold and wet time of it, as it rained all night. The next day we went about three miles and camped again.

Four of us made a little shanty and slept quite comfortable : fortunately it was on rising ground, for when we turned out in the morning we found the water over shoes all over the camp ground. The storm continued and the river was rising fast, causing fears that the bridge might be carried away, which would cut us off from our supplies. Although the rain was falling in torrents, they started some of us off on the railroad track, and even here the water was over shoes ; but those that marched with the baggage train were plastered all over with mud ; the boys said that the mud in some places was almost knee deep. I noticed one small house on the bank of the river where the water was several feet above the first floor ; it was probably soon after carried away.

It was fortunate we hurried on as we did, for we had only fairly got all over, baggage train and all, when the bridge went down stream. There were two bridges carried away at this place.

When I left Falmouth I weighed all that I had to carry on the march, which was forty-three pounds. This weight, on a march of eighteen miles in a day, rather drags a body down.

Front Royal is a pleasant place. It was here, you will know, that the Second Maryland regiment was cut up and nearly all captured by the rebels, about two weeks since. There are about 170 rebel prisoners here now. I saw some of the rebel officers out on parole yesterday ; they had on quite handsome uniforms.

We got our knapsacks yesterday, and I have embraced the first opportunity of writing that offered after getting my writing materials. I saw our major with his cap on his knee, writing ; this was the best accommodation furnished to a major by our camp. A private would not expect to fare any better : still, it is a very awkward position to scribble a letter in.

Captain Fox got back to his company last night ; he has been absent four months.

During the last eleven days of hardship and scant fare I have lost nearly nine pounds in weight. This is the kind of training to take the flesh off, and will enable us to stand the intense heat of this climate that will soon be upon us. as I think the rainy season is about over. My health is good — never felt better.

There have been two deaths in the regiment since I wrote last, namely, Albert A. Rice and E. Winslow.

We do not expect to remain here long, but are held in readiness to march at an hour's notice : in eleven days we were encamped in ten different places — all but the camps. Please direct letters as heretofore. WARREN. P. S. — I have just heard that John F. Fuller, of Freedom, Maine, and Charles B. Cashing, both of our regiment, were drowned while crossing the river in a small skiff today.