

Chaplain Philos G Cook, 94th NYV

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We are permitted to make the following extracts from a letter written by Chaplain Cook of the 94th Reg't to a friend in this city. It will be read with interest by the friends of the Chaplain and of the boys in the 94th, though containing little in the way of news:

Camp of the 94th NYV in the battlefield,
near Mechanicsville
June 3rd, 1864 *

It makes one feel sad to contemplate the scenes and operations of war at a distance and through "the newspapers," but the actual witness and experience are far more impressive. Take for example my experience yesterday and today. Though I can by no means give you in words an adequate idea or description of what has passed before my vision or the sensations of my heart, nevertheless let me try to give you something of an idea of what has been going on around me. This is Friday; on Wednesday, June 1st, there was a tremendous fight all along our lines. The Second Corps (Hancock's) on the left, the Ninth Corps (Burnside's) next, the Fifth (Warren's) our Corps next, and the Sixth on the extreme left were all engaged with both artillery and infantry at a tremendous rate; especially from about 3 o'clock to 9 or 10 pm. Such cannonading and musketry on so extended a line - probably 6 or 8 miles - are rarely heard and right severely did they punish the enemy. And yet on several points along the line "Johnnie" showed a bold and defiant spirit and was a match for the "Yankees," though generally the Union boys more than held their ground and took a large number of prisoners.

This was a prelude to a change in the position of the Corps. The Second marched by us towards the left in the morning, and in the afternoon the greater portion of the Fifth moved towards the left, and Burnside made his appearance to occupy the vacancy made by the removal of a portion of the Fifth. Just as he was marching into position, a tremendous rainstorm came up to catch the Chaplain and his retinue of non-combatants in a somewhat exposed condition. It occurred to me while the shower was upon us that it would be just like the "Johnnies" to attack us during or immediately after it; and, sure enough, the rain had scarcely ceased before we heard sharp firing and yelling which indicated that the rebs were charging upon our boys. The volleys increased in intensity and rapidity; troops and batteries were got into line of battle and positioned as fast as possible. For two or three hours the battle raged within an area of about a half-mile square with a great vigor and fury. The attack was on our right flank which had been left exposed (at least so it is said,) by the tardy movements of some division that was to have taken the place of those who had been withdrawn.

The line of battle seemed almost in a circle or in the three sides of a square. The shells came in very "freely and carelessly" -making it very difficult to find a place of safety. The doctors, chaplains and their attendants, drummers, and servants of officers usually on such occasions go to the rear for safety but in this instance it was difficult to tell where the rear was. First we went into a thick forest and lay down behind trees at the foot of a slope -the shells going mostly a few rods beyond us. Seeing the brigade passing out of the woods towards the principal scene of conflict, we followed a short distance and then turned into the woods. By and by, we change again a half-mile -then conclude to go to regiment. It is now dark and raining and we know not the exact position of the regiment -find it a mile into and through a piece of wood in an open field -in line of battle -no tents -no fires, or few -no candles. In a few moments, our cook comes up with some supplies -a welcome visitor. Here in the mud and in the rain and dark we squat and partake of our "hasty plate of soup" -and never was a plate of hot soup more acceptable to us. This done, "Ike" (cook,) George (bugler,) and the Chaplain go to the rear with the horses -start a fire and sit around a while to dry and make ourselves comfortable. By and by, a messenger arrives to say that the regiment is liable to move off at any moment and that we must go nearer to them. We obey, reluctantly leaving our comfortable fire. We stop under a large tree, tie our horses near us, and wait an hour or so for further orders -then top down upon the ground, not under, but on a tent, and seek rest. Poor success; get up at one and go down to that fire we had seen burning so cheerfully among the tents of a battery.

After getting partially dry, return to tree - can't find my rubber blanket -must have a light -went to fire again to light a candle -while stooping to do so, a sharpshooter sends a bullet within a foot or two of my head -before I get back to tree, another whizzes by -showing that the fire draws attention of this sort; -all night the skirmishers are at work and every now & then a spent bullet falls nearby or another whizzes over our heads! We rise before it is fairly light and hasten to the rear -find our former position -get and eat breakfast in a drizzling rain -and then seek a place of greater safety; as the balls have commenced passing or falling by us -a short distance off, find what seems to be a desirable position. Hardly get settled before the awful shells begin to come and fall near us; we get behind a tree and lie as close to the ground as possible for safety; -these unwelcome messengers keep coming for an hour -then there is a lull -thus passes the afternoon. This pm, three or four have gone over us -most of the day there has been cannonading and musketry at intervals. Meantime, I have visited the wounded in a field over yonder, brought there to be tended temporarily -found only one of my regiment -having his leg so badly wounded that amputation will be necessary; -said he was hungry -gave him hard bread and water -returned to my headquarters and got some refreshments for the poor fellow -went back and stayed with him the

balance of the day. The rebs choose the last of the evening for their hard fighting, and we'll soon be hotly engaged.

Our regiment has not as yet been very much exposed; but they are in a position now which will be very likely to bring them into a general engagement and make it almost certain that more or less will be wounded or killed. I cannot bear to think of their being injured in this way but such is war and such will doubtless be their fate. This is the fifth day since we came up with the army, or rather, since we have participated in the series of battles which have been fought in this campaign. Of our general success and the general results, the papers will give you more information than I can. In fact, those who are participating in the struggle are often not in the most favorable position to acquire or impart general views; the officials and general reporters are the persons to do that. But it is obvious that the Army of the Potomac is battling valiantly and successfully; and that we soon shall be knocking loudly for admittance at the doors of Richmond there can be no doubt. Indeed, our advance can hardly be more than five miles from Richmond today. Our hospitals, etc, will all be moved forward three miles today. We hope and expect that Richmond will be ours on or before the Fourth of July. Yes, it is often said by the officers around me: "We must eat ice cream in Richmond on the Fourth of July." But Alas! How many who now talk of these glorious consummations will offer their lives as a sacrifice for the purchase.

It is refreshing to see the spirit which animates many of these noble fellows now exposing life and limb for their country. Yesterday, as I was passing a young soldier, I said "How about hardtack; got a supply?" "Oh yes, plenty." "How do you stand these hard marches and battles?" "First rate." "Have you re-enlisted?" "Oh, yes. This is a big thing and I like it!"

To a venerable-looking old man who was at work near here making corduroy roads I gave some hard bread, he being out; he thanked me. I replied that I felt thankful to him for being willing to suffer so much for his country. He said he did it cheerfully and wished he could do more. God bless him and all of the kindred spirit! How costly and precious is liberty!

It is now 5:30 pm; very few guns have been fired for the last two hours - what is the cause; what the "Johnnies" are up to - whether retreating or manuvering to get some advantage we cannot tell, but probably the latter. I would it might be otherwise but our boys will be enough for them under God, do what they may.

NOTES:

a Chaplain Cook's comments refer to his experiences during June & June 2 at the outset of Cold Harbor's twelve days; the 94th NYV was in Col Lyle's brigade, Lockwood's Division, Fifth Corps. Between May 31 and June 12 of 1864, the 94th lost 49 members either killed, wounded, or missing. Lieutenant Colonel Moffett commanded the regiment. On June 6, Lyle's brigade became the first brigade of Crawford's third division in the Fifth Corps.

b The bloody "Forty Days" which it took Grant to reach Richmond were almost finished. May 30 saw the four corps of the Army of the Potomac were reinforced by elements of Ben Butler's Army of the James at White House Landing on the Pamunkey River; as this force renewed its southerly march it encountered increasing resistance in the vicinity of Totopotomoy Creek. As soon as Grant realized how strong Lee's positions were, he began planning a tactical shift around the Confederate right flank.

Although the leading elements of Wright's corps began arriving at Cold Harbor in the morning of June 1, delays experienced by Wright and Smith put off a planned attack until 6 that evening. By then the rebels had had sufficient time to establish a line of entrenchments. During the ensuing encounter, the VI & XVIII Corps managed to capture the enemy's forward line of works; despite stiff resistance and the loss of 2,000 men, the two corps pushed ahead westward roughly a half mile. A June 2 assault was planned in order to capitalize upon the gains of June 1 but required night movements caused so many delays that the assault was postponed until 4:30 a.m., June 3.

c The V and IX Corps did not participate in the June 3 because they guarded the Union right. At dawn on June 3, however, 50,000 men from the II, VI, and XVIII Corps began an attack which would earn for Grant the nickname "butcher." All three corps were pinned down within an hour and had sustained between 5,600 and 7,000 casualties.

Chaplain's Quarters,
94th N.Y. Vols.,
Near Petersburg, Va.
June 27th, 1864.

Erax Fay, Esq.,

Dear Sir:-

Yours of the 23rd inst came to hand this morning. It grieves me to say that I find Adrian Fay's name among those captured or supposed to be, on the 3rd inst, while on the skirmish line. It somehow happened that a portion of the skirmish line got in advance of the rest, and consequently did not get notice of the withdrawal or change of the picket, and were consequently captured. A brave fellow volunteered to go out and notify these advanced outposts that it was time to fall back, and if possible save them. But on arriving on the ground, he found the Rebel pickets so near that it was impossible to communicate with our men. Indeed, this man came near being captured himself. A Reb. picket or skirmisher dressed in our uniform, got very near him and ordered him to ~~dress in our uniform~~ but our man chose to take his chances for life by running. The Reb. fired, and inflicted a very slight wound. Our man had no arms with him, but fortunately escaped unharmed.

In all we have lost 28 men by capture since the 30th of May. On the 6th, 20 or 22 were lost in this way. Nothing of the kind that has happened in the Regt. has grieved me so much as the loss of so many brave fellows by capture, and yet this may be the means of saving their lives. Thousands will be shot and die while they are in captivity. I am inclined to think that the Rebels will treat their prisoners better than heretofore.

You have my cordial sympathy in this trial to your feelings, and my prayer is that God may sustain and comfort your son, and bring him safely through all his trials and sufferings while in captivity. Verily this is a "civil war" may God hasten the time when we may have an honorable peace.

Yours very truly,

P. C. Cook,

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You have my cordial sympathy in this trial to your feelings, and my prayer is that God may comfort and sustain your son, and bring him safely through all his trial and sufferings while in captivity. Verily this is a "cruel war". May God hasten the time when we may have an honorable peace.

Yours very truly,

P. G. Cook.

Chaplain, 94th N.Y. Vols.