

Chaplain Philos G Cook, 94th NYV

Item in The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser for June 14 of 1864 - page 4, column 1

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.^b 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 maneuvering 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.

Ernest 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 surrender, but our uniform chose to take his chances for life by running. The Rebel 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,

Chaplain, 94th N.Y. Vols.

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

Mr. 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 among those captured or supposed to be, on the 3rd inst. while on the skirmish line. It some how 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 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 to him and ordered him to surrender, 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 this way. Nothing 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 in captivity. I am inclined to think that the Rebels will treat their prisoners better than heretofor.

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.

them to be in these darned
old breast works up to the
front a man can't look
but what some sharp
shooter will peg away at him
and then about every night
we can hear their charging
some place near the muskets
& our men on infantry man
when we fight it is done in a
hurry & I don't know some
times I think we never can
whip the reds and then again
we hear some good news then
we think it will not last
long we don't get much
news lately we can't get papers
every time we want them
I got the Freeman's Ass sent
me but there want no news
in it after all it does us
good to get any thing from
home the boys are getting lots
of things from home now
by mail they get hats shirts
and most every thing that can
be done up in a mail bundle

Camp Near Lighthouse point!
July 28th 1864

Dear Mother

I received your
letter last night and was
glad to hear from you
I am getting tough of a bear
again I am rather poor I
don't think you would
hardly know me if you
could see me
I have quit using tobacco
I don't care a snap for it
~~I~~ I could get plenty if
I wanted almost every barn
is full of it but I
don't like it to chew
I smoke some times
you wanted to know if
we don't suffer for water

well some times we do
but as a general thing
we have had plenty
you see amon on a horse
can find water if it is
within two miles
when I get dry I take
five or six canteens and
pull out and run my
Old horse until I find
some water I suffered the
the most when I was sick
for water for I could not
ride fast for fear my boots
would get filled but
the boys use to get it for
me as much as they could
this quick step is of fine
thing it makes a fellow
thrive so once in while
thank the Lord I am all
right again we have
got a nice camp here in

woods with plenty of
water close by
I must write to Jan
King to day she is our
pigeon what got I believe
I have been writing to me
about once in two weeks
so I hear from Mansfield
of ten enough Wilson
Marcum and I wrote to
Uncle Asa a few weeks
ago you must
have to write when he
gets the one we wrote
to him I think the
rebs will use Adrian
well as they can the
sitizens say they take
all the prisoners to
Georgia but they say it
is not any more sickly
then it is here I had
rather be where he is

I am a ging to have me
a good set of writing tools
when I get my pay if
the gutler comes then wout
I write to every body I can
think of when we are
in camp the rumor is
now that the veterans
are a going to be put to
gether and those that there
times is ~~not~~ put them
to gether they say they
are a going to send the
veterans to tenasse but
I dont believe these camp
rumors I thought
I would let you see how
the lies go hear in camp
sall I must quit for
this time Moreum is snorting
away hear like some old hot
Will Moreum is one of our boys
lies aboird know just what
is a going to be done just what
I know itt condemn it
Just dock good night

ask Mary what she thinks
of ~~that~~ that letter I sent her
I have just been out.
blowing my bugle now
I must feed my Old
racker and get some
supper pretty soon there
is four of us mess
to gether two sargents
black smith and bugler
the sargents by potatoes
and soft bread and
fish and I eat it we
live high I tell you
we have plenty of
pickels and sourerout
beens Oh we are doing
well now we dont
know what to do with
our selves hear I write
most of the time
I have to write when my
hand dont tremble

Aug 1 M. Barry



Mrs Electa Fay

Great Valley

Cattaraugus Co

W Y

M. R.

how are you dear paper
I am short so I shall have
write on this to you
I suppose you wont like
I am in hopes we shal get
our pay in a few days
then I can get me some
things I very much
need my portfolio is
worn out I shal have
to get me a new one
and a spider and coffee
pot I have got me some
a silver cup and plate
that I took from a pretty
est girl you ever see but
we dont loir for girls
when we want dishes
and grub you may think
I am hard hearted but
I dont take any thing from
the poor I shal cost
about 40 dollars on private

horses he would payed
for him self if he had
we had drawn pay untill
the first July but we
only get pay up to the
first of May I dont
expect I can send much
home but I will send
all I can for I suppose you
need it every thing is
so high I suppose this
will answer for you and
so to I will try and
write some to Bro I will
write to Charley in a day
or two if we dont move
we may stay here two weeks
and we may leave before
night well I must stop
from your son

Frankrose Day
Co I of the N. M. & Co.