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An American Civil War Chronicle

ONE BATTLE TOO MANY

The Writings of
Simon Bolivar Hulbert
Private, Company E
100th Regiment, New York State Volunteers
1861 - 1864

Compiled and Interpreted by
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Simon Bolivar Hulbert
Private, Company E, 100th Regiment
New York State Volunteers
December 11, 1861 - August 11, 1864

(Courtesy: Edwin Burch)

Louesa (or Louisa) Miller appears to be a former girlfriend or at least a close acquaintance. Although Bolivar never hints at a serious romantic involvement in either diary or letters, he appears to be more interested in Louisa than anyone else. Since he intended to send his diary home for all to read, perhaps he did not wish to put in writing his most intimate thoughts concerning the opposite sex. Considering his overall staid character he was most likely a shy man with the ladies, with very little practical experience in affairs of the heart.

Gloucester Point
Nov 9th, 1862

Dear Friends at home,

I am one of the most lucky fellows you ever saw. I rec'd the box [and a] letter from home, containing a prize which I value highly. Because I can see the face & study the features of those who are dear to me.

Karl [Smith] is now near Fairfax court house. Newel Burch wrote with him. They were both well & in good spirits at the time.

Tell Louisa I am truly happy to have this prize in my possession. Give her my love & best wishes.

You ask what kind of man [Sgt.] Kavanaugh is. He is very good to me & always has been. He is a Catholic. He goes through with his ceremonies every morning & I hear him swearing at the men every day almost.

Smith is a good hearted fellow, but is to easily taken with new acquaintances. He is a very rough boy [and] uses a great deal of profane language. My tent mates are G. Mason, Johntson, Ellis Ebon, Bill Hartley, Old Sailors, & Paul Hanold, G. Little, P. Kilfry, Wilbur Smith [and] Vanburens.

Your Brother & son
Bolivar

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Bolivar is on top of the world. He now has his \$11 plus the box of food and clothing - and, possibly best of all, a photograph of Louisa.

Newell Burch is the younger brother of Ransom Burch, Bolivar's brother-in-law. Newell is a member of the 154th NYSV and will be captured shortly after this date. He will spend the remaining 21 months of his army life as a prisoner of war, with the final 14 months at Andersonville Prison. He will meet Bolivar there.

Sun, Nov 9, 1862: Presentation [during inspection] of the new flag from Buffalo by the Board of Trade to our Reg't. It is a very nice flag & it must have cost a good sum.

Tues, Nov 11, 1862: Write a letter for Johntson & 1 for C. Pettyes, 1 to Buffalo & the other to Clyde, [N.Y.]. Laying around camp trying to kill time. & I hope the period of time is not far distant when we may all be called home. & then I may throw away this indolent life & go to work faithfully again.

"Johntson" and "C. Pettyes" (CPL Charles Pettis) are among Bolivar's "unlettered friends" in Company E for whom he writes many letters. In a later letter he relates a humorous account of writing for Pettis. While we never learn the exact number of illiterates in Company E, Bolivar often implies there are many. Actually, the average Union company had from one to six illiterates.³ Perhaps Company E was one unit which forced up the average.

Wed, Nov 12, 1862: Barney Smith & Andrew J. Van Buren are promoted from the rank of private to Sergeant in our Co, & Peter Kelian & John Brown, two Sons of Erin or potato hills of Ireland, are promoted to be Corporals. So much for being Irish & in an Irish Co.

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But enough. I must write a little to Mollie. I was sorry to hear that Newel Burch was taken prisoner. Well, I dont want to get taken again if I can help it. The 18th, when we charged on Fort Wagner - after I had been in the fort a long time & I could plainly see that our men would not get possession of the fort, I got out onto the parapet of the fort & saw some twenty men just crossing the ditch & saying, "This way, 100th." The Reg't left after they had been there ten minutes, our men says. I told one fellow there that I did not want to be caught by them & I was going to leave that place as soon as I could, for they would soon come out of them Bomb proofs & take all the men that was there prisoners. So I crossed the ditch & come back towards camp, laid down behind a sand Bank so that no shells would hurt me & slept till morning. Some things which we saw that night I will not tell you until I return home, But a drunken officer had not ought to be permitted to live.

I do not hear any thing from Winters. I suppose that he was killed.

Your Brother,
Bolivar

Mollie Sackett.

Bolivar's comments on the "draft in York State" refer to public reaction to the Conscription Act passed on March 3 and scheduled to go into effect on July 7. After passage several persons questioned the government's constitutional right to enforce the draft. Further, the poorer classes violently objected to one of its provisions which would allow a draftee to hire a substitute for \$300. Thus, Bolivar's reference to "that 300 dollar apperation," which he wants "knocked galley west." The provision was popularly known among the poor as "The Rich Man's Exemption."

Bolivar is one among thousands without the least bit of structured shelter. Some men are fortunate enough to have a coat or blanket, to be slept on at night then draped over sticks as a shelter from the sun or rain.

"Camp rumors" refer to constant hopes that through some miracle prisoner exchanges will be resumed. The men are also certain that Sherman, somewhere in the western Georgia area undertaking his Atlanta Campaign, will liberate the camp in a matter of days.

Sun, June 5, 1864: To day is the Sabbath, But it seems like any other day here. Rain a very little, But still it is quite pleasant. I should like to be at home this day.

Mon, June 6, 1864: This AM go & see Newel Burch. Take dinner with him.

Bolivar's spirits are uplifted to find a familiar face from home and someone who is almost family - Newell Burch, his brother-in-law's brother.

Tues, June 7, 1864: To day about 1,100 Prisoners come. Report that Grant is near Richmond, [and] Bridge at Danville burned. Rain all night.

Wed, June 8, 1864: To day Newel come & I go over with him & get into a tent there. So the day passes as usual. A few prisoners come.

Newell, probably being one of the original 500 prisoners, is fortunate enough to have a tent. Now Bolivar at least has shelter on "clean" ground away from the swamp area.

Thurs, June 9, 1864: To day rain again. I saw Asey Halls son for the first time since I

have been here. No News to day.

Fri, June 10, 1864: Very pleasant & hot. Go down & get my rations this AM. I saw Lile Skinner to day for the first time to speak with him.

Rations are brought into the compound on flat bed wagons and doled out by prisoner detachment leaders near one of the gates.

Sat, June 11, 1864: All is quiet in Camp Sumter to day. This PM rain again as it has for the most of the time.

Sun, June 12, 1864: To day is Sunday. I feel lonely this evening for the first time in the confederacy.

Mon, June 13, 1864: Rain all day long & it is quite cold & unpleasant. Lay in our little open tent nearly all day & sleep, covered with my over coat.

We learn that Bolivar has somehow managed to keep his overcoat, contrary to McElroy's account of the arrival of Butler's men.

Tues, June 14, 1864: Rain all day again, very unpleasant. I do not like this weather at all. Get rations to night about 10 O'clock PM. Wet to night.

The average annual rainfall of 56 inches appears to be occurring in June alone.

Wed, June 15, 1864: Rain part of the day. This PM Yank's come from Grants Army, about 700, I think.

Thurs, June 16, 1864: Commenced raining this morning. More Yankees to day. Newel gets a letter from home. Rain again this evening. Prison life is nice.

Newell's letter from home makes one wonder why Bolivar never received or sent any mail while imprisoned.

Apparently his family has yet to learn of his whereabouts. Mail in and out of Andersonville was not an everyday occurrence. One-page letters were allowed out (provided writing material was available), and a minimum was allowed in. All mail was closely censored.⁵

His comment that "prison life is nice" is assumed to be facetious.

Fri, June 17, 1864: Rain all day long & also to night. This makes it very unpleasant for the prisoners which have to lay out on the ground.

On this date Brigadier General John H. Winder relieves Persons as camp commandant. Winder would later boast that, in his prison capacity, he was "doing more for the Confederacy than twenty regiments."⁶

Sat, June 18, 1864: Still raining & stormy. Charley Lear called on us to day. He is unfortunate too.

Sun, June 19, 1864: Rain AM. Evening rain again. How I should like to see the folks at home to day. More Yankees to night.

Mon, June 20, 1864: Quite pleasant AM, but this PM rained like guns again. Clear off though to night, while I was getting rations, the first time in a long while.

Tues, June 21, 1864: Today quite pleasant.

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