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Title: Letters from Thomas Dick (Jan. - Feb. 1863)

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1863

Camp near Belle Landing, Jan 5th

Dear parents

My many letters since the battle have been brief and unsatisfactory; I will embrace the present opportunity to give you a detailed account of the affair as near as I can. I believe the last point I wrote from previous to the battle was Beachs Station. On the morning of the 8th Dec we were ordered in off picket duty and took up the line of march towards the Rappahannock. It was a bitter cold day and rather discouraging for soldiers; But all were willing to endure the exposure, and brave the danger; If we only accomplished our object! But alas we failed! We marched all day and that night until 10 o'clock; we then encamped in a dense pine thicket; And as there had a sheet of snow fallen recently, you may know it was not a very inviting place to spend the night. For if we happened to touch a tree the snow would come down upon us in a perfect torrent; Nevertheless it served to keep the wind off, and we unpacked our blankets and slept as soundly as if we had been at home in feather beds. Griffith and I slept together. Our bed consisted of some pine and cedar tops cut fine covered with two gum blankets and a shelter tent and our great coats; this formed the under part of our bed. We had over us two woollen blankets and a gum. Considering the circumstances, it was a pretty good bed. We remained there the next day and night and also the day following on the evening of that day which was the 10th of the month. We received orders to be ready to

march at midnight. Then we gave up all hopes of ~~were~~ sleeping that night and began preparation for the march, this was soon accomplished, for it requires but little ^{time} for Uncle Sam's boys to make ready to move to any point whatever. After we had made all necessary preparation, the boys gathered around the campfire to talk about the probable object of the movement; But the conversation assumed rather a serious turn, for nearly all came to the conclusion that we would soon be in battle. And we well know that some one of our number must fall. Yet about 12 o'clock when the Capt came around with the familiar command fall in boys they fell in ranks as promptly and marched off as gaily as ever. We marched to the river and there received orders to protect the engineer corps while they threw the pontoons across. We could plainly see the rebel lights on the other side. However they made no show of resistance until the bridges were built; when the pickets opened fire, which resulted in wounding three or four of the workmen. In fact I think their opposition at this point was a mere feint and our Generals permitted themselves to be drawn into the trap. That evening our troops commenced crossing; But our division did not cross until the evening of the following day. We slept that night on the south side of the Rappahannock. Little did I think that that night was the last for poor Griffith on earth. But we know not what a day may bring forth. The next morning we again moved on toward the enemy; and soon the distant sharp report of artillery announced to us, the fact that we had found

them. Our troops advanced steadily forward under the shot and shell of the enemy. We moved on for some distance and then halted for some time, but not long. For as usual the old reserve corps had to pick up the fight. So we were ordered to charge on the enemy's works, which I think was done, in gallant style. We had to advance over a piece of low marshy ground and the rebels were posted in the woods on a range of hills in front of us; thus having all advantage in position. But still we advanced up over their rifle pits and had them driven away from their guns, but we had no support and consequently had to fall back. I think whoever is responsible for this grand movement across the Rappahannock managed it very badly. For any person of common sense with no military ability would know that it was impossible to take that position. And the testimony of the different generals goes to show that it lies with Burnside's entirely. even in his own testimony he assumes the whole responsibility. I think Old Burnie a gallant man and a good military man in his place but I am afraid he has got to high. I believe with him that I'll be an eagle more with this army than any other man. No wonder our army is discouraged we have been slaughtered for nothing. We have always been led to expect great things, and nearly always been disappointed. We are all willing to do or to suffer anything for our glorious cause but we are not willing to see our comrades cut down beside us, and still accomplish nothing. All we want is good leaders, God-fearing men who will do their

Thomas Allen to Parents

duty. For surely the army has done its duty
the people have done theirs, so it must be with our
leaders. I never felt so lonely, in my life as I did
after the battle the last of my messmates gone. In fact
all the company feel the loss of the three that were
killed very deeply. I received your kind letter
by politeness of our Miller. It was the kind of
letter I like to receive. It contains something
which I shall try and justify. But it is impossible
to get a furlow no man can get a furlow unless he
is sick or wounded and the Doctor certifies that it
is necessary to save his life. I believe I have
given you all the news therefore I will close from
your affectionate son

T. Allen

Camp Near Belle Landing January 8 [1863?]

Dear parents

As my letters since the battle have been brief and unsatisfactory; I will embrace the present opportunity to give you a detailed account of the affair as near as I can. I believe the last place I wrote from previous to the battle was Brooks Station. On the morning of the 8th Dec we were ordered in off picket drew rations and took up the line of march towards the Rappahannock. It was a bitter cold day and rather discouraging for soldiers; But all were willing to endure the exposure, and brave the danger; if we only accomplished our object! But alas we failed! We marched all day and that night until 10 O'clock: we then encamped in a dense pine thicket; And as there had a skiff of snow fallen recently, you may know it was not a very inviting place to spend the night: For if we happened to touch a tree the snow would come down upon us in a perfect torrent; Nevertheless it served to keep the wind off. and we unpacked our blankets and slept as soundly as if we had been at home in feather beds. Griffith and I slept together. Our bed consisted of some pine and cedar tops cut fine covered with two gum blankets and a shelter tent and our great coats; this formed the under part of our bed. we had over us two woolen blankets and a gum. Considering the circumstances it was a pretty good bed. We remained there the next day and night and also the day following on the evening of that day which was the 10th of the month. We received orders to be ready to

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T W Dick

Camp near Belle Landing Jan 15th 1663

My Dear Sister

Your interesting letter, came to hand in due time, and was read with pleasure; and I humbly beg your ladyship's pardon (I suppose I must call you little girl no longer) for not answering sooner. I was happy to know, that you were getting along well in school, and that you were well pleased with your teacher; and above all, that you had that best of institutions, a literary society. I felt highly flattered to know, that you considered me worthy to be an honorary member. I have very little news to tell you in regard to the company; I suppose you already know who was killed and who wounded in the last battle. The rest of our little crew is encamped on the peninsula between the Potomac & Rappahannock; we are in comparatively comfortable quarters, and will be as contented as mice as long as they leave us here.

There is constant camp rumors going
that the Pennsylvania reserve corps
is ordered to the state to recruit; But
I am afraid they are wholly unfounded.
I know there has been an effort made
by the Governor, our late General and
other influential men; I think they have
failed! And the powers that be will likely
keep the old reserve out as long as there is a
man left. However, we have only to quietly
submit to this wrong, and do our duty. I received
a letter from Spizzie also one from ^{my} P
a few evenings since; I was very glad to
learn that the box containing the good things
had started; I wish it a successful voyage.
But I was so sorry to hear of Grand ma's
sad misfortune: I am afraid I will never
see her again, in this world of sorrow. Yet if not
here, my hope is that I will meet her in a better
and happier clime. Since I have not much more
to write, The last thing I wish to say to you
is improve your time well while in school don't
let the hours which should be spent in study

pass idly away. You say you dont mean
to attend society much; I hope you will not
carry out that intention, For there is nothing
that adds so much to a young lady's charms
as to be able to write a good composition. Then
she can write a good letter, and talk sensibly
to any one; compare some of those whom you
know have paid attention to such things with
those who have idled their time away and see the
difference. You are not too young to begin your
letter shows that you could by practice make
a good composer. Dont be too modest to begin.
Take a simple subject and write what you think.

Now Louie I dont write this merely to
fill up, but I know the advantage of
beginning to write compositions when young.
Should I ever get home, I hope to find in
you a sister to be proud of; nothing more at
present from your loving brother (my love to all)
J W Dick

I I received the 5 loaves father sent

Camp near Belle Landing Jan 15th, 63

my Dear Sister

Your interesting letter came to hand in due time; And was read with pleasure; and I humbly beg your ladyship's pardon (I suppose I must call you little girl no longer) for not answering sooner. I was happy to know, that you were getting along well in school, and that you were well pleased with your teacher; And above all, that you had that best of institutions a literary society. I felt highly flattered to know; That you considered me worthy to be an honorary member. I have very little news to tell you in regard to the company; I suppose you already know who was killed and who wounded in the last battle. The rest of our little crew is encamped on the peninsula between the Potomac & Rappahannock; we are in comparatively comfortable quarters, and will be as contented as mice as long as they leave us here.

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There is constant camp rumors going on that the Pennsylvania reserve corpse is ordered to the state to recruit; But I am afraid they are wholly unfounded. I know there has been an effort made by the Governor our late Generals and other influential men; I think they have failed! And the powers that be will likely keep the old reserve out as long as there is a man left. However, we have only to quietly submit to this wrong, and do our duty. I received a letter from Lizzie also one from W B a few evenings since; I was very glad to learn that the box containing the good things had started; I wish it a successful voyage. But I was so sorry to hear of Grandma's sad misfortune: I am afraid I will never see her again, in this world of sorrow: Yet if not here, my hope is that I will meet her in a better and happier clime. Lucie I have not much more to write; The last thing I wish to say to you is improve your time well while in school dont let the hours which should be spent in study

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pass idly away. You say you dont mean to attend society much; I hope you will not carry out that intentions, For there is nothing that adds so much to a young lady's charms as to be able to write a good composition. then she can write a good letter and talk sensibly to any one; compare some of those whom you know have paid attention to such things with those who have idled their time away and see the difference. you are not to young to begin your letter shows that you could by practice make a good composer. Dont be to modest to begin. take a simple subject and write what you think. Now Lucie I dont write this merely to fill up, but I know the advantage of beginning to write compositions when young And if I ever get home; I hope to find in you a sister to be proud of. nothing more at present from your loving brother. (my love to all)

T W Dick

P S I received the 5 dollars Father sent

Recruiting Station
Columbia Pa
Jan 20th 1862

Dear Sister

I seat myself this morning to let you know that I have arrived safe in Columbia; And just in time for a surprise party on Thursday night. I came to H B on Monday evening and remained for the inauguration on Tuesday it was rather an imposing affair but not near as much so as it would have been had the weather been favorable. I came to Columbia yesterday evening.

nothing happened to discommode
me on my way hither except that
I had to walk across the creek
where the bridge had been broken down
and take the cars on the other side.
Well it is near mailtime and I
must close this is not much of
a letter but when you get it
you will be indebted to me one letter
your brother as ever

Tom W. Dick

Recruiting Station
Columbia Pa
Dec Jan 20th /63

Dear Sister

I seat myself this morning to let you know that I have arrived safe in Columbia; And just in time for a surprise party on thursday night. I came to H B on monday evening and remained for the inauguration on tuesday it was rather an imposing affair but not near as much so as it would have been had the weather been favorable. I came to Columbia yesterday evening.

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Your brother as ever

Tom W Dick

Camp near Belle Plain Feb 2nd 1763

Dear Brother

I received your letter of the 25th on Saturday and was glad to read of your welfare. This is Monday, and as I am about square with all my correspondents except you; I thought I could not improve my time to better advantage than by writing to you. Yesterday (Sabbath) Bro H H White of Salzburg preached for Mr Miller: suppose you have seen him he taught select school in Mechanicsburg one term. I was happy to know that you were doing such a smashing business, in my absence; However I believe I was rather a burden to the department of labor than an advantage. Perhaps I neglected to tell you about receiving the packages - mother sent me; But I did receive them, and am very thankful for them. I suppose you have already ascertained that the rumors afloat in regard to the army being engaged with the enemy are all false.

However we have made a forward movement
and also a retrograde movement since that.
But we did not accomplish anything and
never have since little Mac was taken
away from us, and in my opinion never
will; He is the man to lead the army of
the Potomac to victory. I think him the only
man capable of competition with the rebel
Generals in this department. I noticed in the
proceedings of congress the other day that a
senator from Penna proposed the reinstatement
of McClellan; when the applause in the
galleries was so great that the speaker could
scarcely restore order; It gladdened my
heart to know that he still lived in the
hearts of the people. Although those who
are high in authority may throw him into obscurity
yet I am sure he will always be remembered
by the private soldier; and thought of ~~as~~^{as} the best
of men: also I think the same may be
said of the mass of the people at home. Burnside
I think is a noble man but incompetent to
the task of commanding such an army as

this, he has often said so himself and is not to blame. "Hooker the one in command now although a fighting man and can handle a corps to advantage; I think less competent than our late commander the brave and gallant Burnside. we have reliable information to the effect that we are going back to Washington to rest and recruit. I am glad of it it's what should have been done before this there is now but a miserable remnant of the gay old division that marched from Perpont last spring. I was very sorry to hear that Grandmother was not likely to ever leave her bed again give her my love and tell her I am well. I think you wrong Spencer for I believe he spends as much if not more than any man in the mess; He was very much cut down when the box come and nothing in it for him. and wrote immediately for a small box of his own. I cannot ^{think} why his mother sent him nothing without she was expecting him home which I am lead to believe is the case. I would be pleased if you could send me

some postage stamps, as I am very much
in need of them and cant get them here. we were
paid off a few days ago and I will send some
money home as soon as I can do so safely. as there
is no regular agent here I think I will wait
until we go to Washington I believe I have
given you all the news I can think of at present
so I will close

my love to all

J. S. Dick

Thos. J. Dick

Camp near Belle Plain Feb 2nd /63

Dear Brother

I received your letter of the 25th on Saturday and was glad to read of your welfare. This is Monday, and as I am about square with all my correspondents except you; I thought I could not improve my time to better advantage, than by writing to you. Yesterday (Sabbath) Rev H H White of Saltsburg preached for Mr Miller: suppose you have seen him he taught select school in Mechanicsburg one term. I was happy to know that you were doing such a smashing business, in my absence; However I believe I was rather a burden to the department of labor than an advantage. Perhaps I neglected to tell you about receiving the packages mother sent me; But I did receive them and am very thankful for them. I suppose you have already ascertained that the rumors afloat in regard to the army being engaged with the enemy are all false.

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my love to all

Thos W Dick

J S Dick

Camp near Bullrun
Feb 2nd 1865

Dear Brother

I wrote to Pizzie just after I came back from home the last time; And have as yet received no answer. Now I will write to you; And if I don't get one I will quit until I do get one. I arrived in Columbia on Tuesday evening; And next we received orders to report in Philadelphia on the next Monday. On Tuesday I went up to H. J. Fox. Fox who was then at home. Then on Wednesday we went to Philadelphia; And on Thursday received orders relieving us from recruiting service and ordering us to report to the Regt.

We left Philadelphia on Friday
morning; and arrived in Balt
about 1 1/2 o'clock at 3 o'clock
we left Baltimore and arrived
in Washington about 5 o'clock
where we remained over night. The
next day took the 1 o'clock boat
went to Alexandria and tried to
get on to the 6th but failed.

So we had the best of a bad bargain
and went to the soldier's rest
and stayed until next day
at 11 o'clock when we took the
cars and went to Bull Run bridge
found the boys all hearty except
Johnston he really looks very bad.

They made a surprise party for
us ^{the night} before we left Columbia; and
I didn't like to leave that
good old place for this wilderness.
But the powers that be have
seen fit so to order it. And
we have nothing to do but accept

our gate. However we have very
comfortable quarters here; and
as I had to come back I could
not have come in a better time.
But army rations goes pretty
tough after the living we have
had. I was fortunate enough to
get in with my old associates
again. They had been thoughtful
enough to leave a place for me.
Write soon and give me all the
news I am anxious to hear from
mother as she was sick when I
went away my love to all
write soon

Your brother

as ever

J W Dick

Camp near Bullrun bridge

Feb 2nd /63

Dear Brother

I wrote to Lizzie just after I came back from home the last time; And have as yet received no answer. Now I will write to you; and if I dont get one I will quit until I do get one. I arrived in Columbia on tuesday evening; And we received orders to report in Philadelphia on the next monday. on tuesday I went up to H B for Fox who was then at home. Then on wednesday we went to Philadelphia; And on thursday received orders relieving us from recruiting service and ordering us to report to the Regt.

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We left Philadelphia on friday morning; And arrived in Baltimore about 1 1/2 oclock at 3 oclock we left Baltimore and arrived in Washington about 5 oclock where we remained over night. The next day took the 1 oclock boat went to Alexandria and tried to get on to the Regt but failed. So we made the best of a bad bargain and went to the soldier's rest and stayed until next day at 11 oclock when we took the cars and went to bullrun bridge. Found the boys all hearty except Johnston he really looks very bad. They made a surprise party for us the night before we left Columbia; And I didnt like to leave that good old place for this wilderness. But the powers that be have seen fit so to order it; And there is nothing to do but accept

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our fate. However we have very comfortable quarters here; And as I had to come back I could not have come in a better time. But army rations goes pretty rough after the living we have had. I was fortunate enough to get in with my old messmates again. They had been thoughtful enough to leave a place for me. Write soon and give me all the news I am anxious to hear from mother as she was sick when I came away. my love to all write soon

Your brother
as ever

T W Dick