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Document: *Letter to Annie Welsh, from Thomas Welsh, In Camp 8 miles West of Frederick, September 14, 1862*

Transcription:

In Camp 8 miles West of Frederick
Sept 14th 1862

My Dear Wife;

I do not know how or when this will find the Post Office still I will write to inform you of my continued good health. I am tired but very well. We have been on the move almost constantly since last Saturday morning - and even before we left Acquia I had been on the go nearly day and night. We passed through Frederick yesterday and encamped here at Eleven last night. Reville was beat at four this morning, but as we are not yet moving (it is just sunrise) I take time to scribble a few lines. Genl. McClellan & Burnside are both in this neighborhood with a very large Army — in pursuit of the Rebels. 150,000 Rebels are said to have passed through Frederick two days before we entered it. Our advance were fighting yesterday and day before, and succeeded in driving the Rebels. It is likely that a great Battle will be fought between here and Hagerstown within a few days — perhaps today. Our Army is in fine condition and I trust will be decisively victorious. We have great confidence in Burnside — and as he is with us — we feel like making the Rebels take the back track suddenly — heavy firing going on to our left this morning. My boys of the 45th are lively and anxious for the fight and I know they will do their duty. I am very proud of my boys — among hundreds of Regiments that are in this Army not one is so completely soldierlike and cheerful as the 45th. General Burnside passed us day before yesterday and in presence of his whole staff complimented the Regiment by saying “Colonel Welsh, your Regiment is the finest body of men that I have seen in the Army during this war.” This was a great compliment and I can assure you made me feel very proud. Yet I know it to be true, and that my good Boys deserved it. I cannot speak very highly of my other Regiments — one of them the 46th New York is Dutch all through and are nearly worthless. I pitched in (scolding) into one of the Captains yesterday for permitting his men to straggle and stand along the road. I thought I was giving him fits when he coolly replied — *[illegible]* — The 100th Penna (Round Head Regt) is some better — The Genl has promised to give me two new Regiments in place of them — my other Regt the 20th Michigan has not yet caught up. If they will give me new Regts. instead of the old ones I can soon make my Brigade as famous as the 45th now is.

I have not had a letter from anywhere since before we left Acquia Creek. My Box is not yet received. I think it would be better if you could get Mr. Ziegler to send to Adam & Co. at Washington to return it to you and I can tell you better in a few days where to send it as it will be a long time before we go to Washington again — and if the Box remains there it may be lost. I need my Over Coat badly. I felt quite cold last night in the hurry passing through Washington without wagons we left nearly all of our baggage at the wharf — my trunk has since been brought up, but my Bedding and every thing else is left back and perhaps lost. George has managed to get me an old Blanket



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and a Comfort and I manage to sleep very well. I do not know how soon I will be able to get a better Bed. Night before last I was invited to a House - had a good supper & Breakfast and a good feather Bed — you can judge how I slept. Dr. Christ slept with me and he says that he never saw a person go to sleep so soon as I did. I met Col. Fisher yesterday, he is very well, and looking well. I also met Sam Evans & Henry Mullen, both are very well. I hope you are well and that the children are all well. Where is Jim has he started after us? We received another old mail from Port Royal – two of your letters of July 16th and 20th. Jim's letter of July 17th also - and lots of old papers. We get no news—I am afraid you may be affected at home at the approach of Rebels—I guess they won't get to Columbia. If they do approach too near take the children and go to Lebanon - lock up the old House or leave some person to take care of it. If any person from our place should be coming this way—please send me some money—about \$25- I am about out of funds, and no sign of Paymaster. I will write whenever I can find time and a Post office—I suppose you get the news through the papers -

Kiss the children for me

Yours affectionately

Thos Welsh

Analysis: Wiggin

This letter was written the morning of the battle of South Mountain, in which Col. Welsh's brigade took heavy losses, but was instrumental in displacing the rebels from Fox's Gap and securing the victory. It is upbeat, brimming with anticipation and confidence. And it foretells the battles of South Mountain and Antietam, where Col. Welsh and his Brigade distinguished themselves, and where he earned his promotion to Brigadier General. Of particular interest are his comments about the various regiments under his command, and his pride in his boys. He shows himself to be a no-nonsense commander.

It also paints an interesting picture of the logistics of the campaign—baggage left behind, mail catching up from months before, the expectation of stuff getting lost or pilfered, occasional courtesies from local residents, and the inconveniences of life on the move.

His complaint about the 46th New York and the 100th Pennsylvania regiments is interesting inasmuch as both were battle-seasoned units, with combat experience at Secessionville and at second Manassas (in contrast with his 45th Pennsylvania regiment, which had seen skirmishing but little serious combat). The comments suggest that combat experience notwithstanding, he considered their level of training and discipline not up to his standard.

This letter is in the Antietam National Battlefield Library, 45th Pennsylvania Regimental File. Transcription provided by Elizabeth Reinhart, corrected by Rick Wiggin



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Scope and Content Note:

Handwritten letter from Thomas Welsh to his wife, Annie. Location is "In Camp 8 miles West of Frederick." Letter written in the early morning, the day of the battle of South Mountain. Text details conditions in the chase of the Rebels through Frederick, Maryland and his feeling "that a great Battle will be fought between here and Hagerstown within a few days — perhaps today." Notes General Burnside's compliment of the 45th Regiment and tells Annie to "take the children and go to Lebanon" if Confederate forces should approach Columbia.

