

1861 8-1 Yonkers Examiner 27th NY Bull Run Robert Ellerbeck letter. He would be discharged for disability October 1, 1861

ADVENTURES AT BULL RUN.

WE are indebted to Mr. F. J. M. Cornell, for the following private letter received by him from his brother-in-law, Mr. Robert E. Ellerbeck of the 27th Regiment of New York Volunteers for the war. Mr. Ellerbeck is well known to many of our readers. The New York 27th has not had due credit for its share in the conflict. It formed a part of Col. Porter's Brigade in the division under acting General Hunter, and consequently was placed on the extreme right of our lines, where the fight was most severe and the march the longest and most fatiguing. The letter was written with the attendant inconveniences of camp life, and was not intended for publication:

CAMP ANDERSON,
Washington, July 25, 1861.

DEAR BROTHER:—You of course have heard much of the battle, and defeat of our army at Bull Run—or what is more proper if I know anything about the location of the country—before Manassas, for we marched at least five or six miles after we crossed the Run. I suppose you have not had an account from an eye-witness. Of all the days I ever beheld, last Sunday was one that will be remembered by me and by many, not a few of whom were Rochester boys.

Since I came to Washington it seems as if here, where above all other places we expected better treatment, we have received the worst. There seems to be no management but to have the Quartermaster make as much as possible, for no other excuse seems to go down with our men.

If I begin to give a detailed account of all that took place on that eventful Sunday, it would take a much longer time than I can possibly spare, for our regiment is so much disordered by that retreat, it will take a good while to get them as they were before they left Washington. We left this city for Virginia one week ago last Tuesday, camped each night in the open field with but a blanket to wrap around us, and not a day passing without the men grumbling of their scanty provisions, except one day when they went out and brought in everything you could think of being raised on a farm, enough at least to appease their appetites for one day, among other things they got a bull belonging to Beauregard or some other "seersher," shot him, dressed him, and divided him among our regiment, they burned barns and houses in their rambles, harboring no pity for the enemy who is

the cause of all their sufferings. The night previous to the battle of Bull Run or Manassas, we were up cooking beef for the day's rations, that and biscuit for the same period was all we had to subsist on. At one o'clock on the morning of the 21st of July we commenced our march, which was a laborious one to begin a day's work of which no man could foretell the result, or who of us would be left to tell the tale, but I am thankful to say I saw it all and did my duty, and although I saw my comrades shot from my side I am among the number who remain to lament the fall of our fellow soldiers. We marched about ten miles before we saw the battle field, on which some of our bones might be bleached. We made but one halt and that only long enough to get water from a stream that many thousands of soldiers had marched through but a few moments before. Many men fell exhausted from hunger and thirst, together with the burning effects of a Southern sun. I saw numbers fall out of the ranks to die by the roadside from the effects of sun-strokes; we fear that one of our men on the retreat, after passing the danger of the cannon's mouth, fell exhausted from its effects and was taken by the rebels.

It seems very strange to me that none of the New York papers speak of the conduct of the New York 27th Volunteers when we were the first to engage the enemy with musketry. We were led in from the right by our gallant Col. Slocum, followed by the N. Y. 14th, who after we had reached the ravine, in full view and reach of musketry and grape, retired and left us alone to the mercy of a deadly fire, till our Colonel was shot and many of our men fell mortally wounded, at which time our Colonel gave the command to retire, or at least ordered the Major to do it, but the men seemed reluctant to do so without revenging the fall of our Colonel. When my friend John T. Clague fell I saw a dying look in his features, he threw his arms across his breast as if in calm and sweet repose, and swooned to rise no more. I had only time to order men to carry him to the rear, and then to my post. They carried him a short distance, laid him carefully on the ground, and then returned to our aid. We finally had to retreat over the brow of the hill, firing as we went, and leaving our dead and wounded on the field. It seemed to be almost a shower of bullets and shell, tearing up the ground all around us. After our first engagement our Major rallied us together under cover of the hill, when our boys were completely exhausted, and led us in again down the hill at a double quick. Some were played out, and some were frightened out, but, however, I led our company in the second time, followed by our Ensign in charge of the left platoon. I was cheering our men on down hill, when all at once a dozen voices sung

out, "Go in Bob, bully for you." I looked to the left, and there, scarcely recognizable, I beheld the 13th N. Y. Volunteers, in whose ranks I, for the first time since we left Elmira, have seen so many familiar faces; I was grasped by the hand (and who knew but for the last time) by my old friend Capt. Putnam, and many others that I cannot recall, as I kept up a hurried march for the balls were falling fast around us. The 13th were waiting for orders to move forward. I saw them ascend the hill almost to the enemy's lines of defence afterwards, but they were soon compelled to retire. We had driven all the rebels in the fort and taken up a position behind a bank near a creek, shell whistling over our heads and almost grazing our backs. I began to look around and found the rebels had brought a piece to bear on us from the extreme east of the fort, that would sweep right along the the bank. I gave the word to the men to retreat to the ravine by small squads, which they did, and it protected them from cannon ball, however two of our men remained on their own responsibility and a moment later a shot took off one of their legs, he is among the missing. After our first engagement we did not see our Captain or Lieutenant till next day (Monday) at Washington.

Our company have missing four, probably dead, our regiment probably seventy-five or more. We are in hopes some are prisoners. William H. Merrill our correspondent of the Rochester Express was wounded twice and is missing, William Hanlon, leg shot off probably dead.

I met Capt. and Lieutenant Putnam in Washington yesterday, and exchanged another friendly greeting with warm congratulations for our deliverance. Our Colonel is getting along finely, but it will be several weeks before he is out.

There was very little water we drank that day but looked like such a pool as one sees by the roadside after a heavy shower. I don't know when we will go again, but probably not till our Colonel gets about. I will have lots to tell when I see you. I have got a secession sword.

Yours as ever, ROBERT.