

ANDERSON ZOUAVE

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NEW SOURCES ON THE BATTLE OF WILLIAMSBURG.

More a matter of good luck than good planning, sees several recently rediscovered and excellent primary source accounts of the Battle of Williamsburg appearing in this issue of *Anderson Zouave*. Given these new (re)discoveries we are taking the opportunity to publish an account by a brigade correspondent known by the non de plume "Scimetar", a transcript of which has resided for some time on the Anderson Zouaves, Company "I" website.

These accounts comes from different members of Peck's brigade and provide historical perspectives of the Battle of Williamsburg from the various regiments and brigade staff organisations. There are other extant accounts of the conduct of the brigade at the battle of Williamsburg such as the reports in the *Official Records*, however, these that follow, along with the account by the Anderson Zouaves chaplain, John Harvey, which appeared in the June 2006 issue of *Anderson Zouave* (Vol. 1, No. 3), have most likely been unread and generally unavailable for almost 150 years and are probably some of the most informative sources for the conduct of regiment and brigade at the Battle of Williamsburg.

The correspondence is here published in the order in which it written. The first two letters are by the Peck's adjutant, being dated May 6 and May 8, 1862, with the first of these being written under the *nom de plume* "Scimetar". These appeared in the *Syracuse Daily Courier and Union* on May 18, and May 21, 1862. The third letter is from an unnamed correspondent of the 55th New York - Gardes Lafayette to the *New York Sunday Mercury*. The fourth letter, sent again to the *New York Sunday Mercury*, is the most recent in the continuing series of correspondence to that paper from members of the Anderson Zouaves which has been published in this paper since our December 2006 issue (Vol. 1 No. 9).

Each of these letters is prefaced by an introduction giving the necessary background information on the author and the paper in which it was originally published so that the context in which it appeared may be fully understood.

The Editor



TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE BATTLE OF WILLIAMSBURG BY LIEUT. SILAS TITUS, AID-DE-CAMP TO BRIG.-GEN. JOHN J. PECK.

The first of these letters was written on May 6, 1862 on the Williamsburg battlefield and appeared in the *Syracuse Daily Courier and Union* on Friday May 18, 1862. It was written by the brigade's adjutant, Lieutenant Silas Titus under the *nom de plume* of "Scimetar". Silas Titus had been corresponding with the *Daily Courier and Union* as a war correspondent under this name since he first served in the Twelfth New York - First Onondaga Regiment¹ as adjutant to Colonel Ezra L. Walrath. It was written the day immediately after the battle and outside of the official reports of Generals Peck, Couch and Keyes is one of the best histories of the brigade's conduct at the Battle of Williamsburg.

The second of the letters by Silas Titus, which appeared in the same paper is substantially different in its tone, but essentially covers the same subject matter. Written two days after the first it was private correspondence to Hon. C. B. Sedgwick, the Congressional representative for Syracuse, the home town of both John J. Peck and Silas Titus. The letter was forwarded to the editor of the paper with a covering letter inviting him to publish. It appeared on May 21, 1862.

Those with an interest in Anderson Zouaves lore, will find the incident involving Lieut. Col. David J. Nevin particularly exciting.



From *The Syracuse Courier and Union* May 18, 1862

On the War Path.

FORT MAGRUDER, BEFORE WILLIAMSBURG, VA., May 6, 1862. }

Dear Mahon.¹ —Just after signing my note to you,² we received marching orders and at 1 o'clock P. M. moved off — the weather being fine, but the roads indescribably bad. The troops forced their way through the mud nine or ten miles, leaving our ammunition and baggage trains, sticking in the mud, along the road, halting a little after dark, and lay down on the wet ground. A heavy rain set in, completely drenching everything. At daylight we moved on without waiting for beef, bread or baggage; made a forced march of about ten miles farther. The mud and wet blankets on the overloaded men was too much for any but the very strongest, and many gave out or lingered behind from absolute exhaustion. Our Brigade was far back in the long line, when the cannon several miles ahead told us the head of the column was up with the enemy. We passed on and soon came to a large plantation with light quicksand soil, through which it was most difficult to move our artillery, or even to march our men without halting. We forced our way over this opening to the centre of the long line then in action. — Heintzleman was blazing away on the right and Hooker on the left, and rather a weak fire in the centre, which Gen. Peck was ordered to support. We dashed into the woods, and met the skirmishers falling back. Several roads cut by the enemy, the exact range of which they well understood, and into which they sent their shot and shell. A half a mile of woods, and then a similar slash, and just beyond, and directly in our front; stood the red banks of Fort Magruder, filled with the rebel army under the command of Gen. Johnson. We worked up to the slash took the borders of the woods and opened fire. The rebels feeling the effect, renewed their efforts. A park of artillery in the front belched out their fire and thunder; the rifle pits in front sent their leaden messengers from a cleared space in front of the fort, over which the cannons were playing, and close up to the slashed timber. A timber barrette, — a most formidable breastwork lined with infantry at short range, — showered in the bullets. To get the hang of the woods arranged for such a contest, and under such a fire, with hungry and tired out troops, was no easy matter; but it was done, and done quickly, and well done. Several times, — the enemy perfectly understanding the ground and well-arranged slash, — rushed up and attempted to drive us back; but Peck's Brigade had taken a stand way down in Dixie, and would not go back. The very cunning of the enemy helped to defeat themselves and shield us. Two or three rods³ of this heavy pine forest gave us a vast protection and shelter, and also a splendid chance for bush-fighting. Before we fairly got into action, the rebels made a bold dash at the battery under Gen. Hooker,⁴ just on our left, and actually carried it, and every horse was killed, but Hooker's men rallied, Peck's Brigade gave them a cross fire that sent them skulking to the pits. For a short time their fire was slackened, and then as though they would be revenged for their loss, they gathered all their strength and dashed at us again. We could bring no battery to our aid, from the nature of the ground, as it was a difficult job for a good horse to work his way through the swamp, and we had to depend entirely on our infantry, and well it worked; and never did green troops behave better. The crashing and falling timber and pattering of the balls as they came glancing from tree to tree made it a most fearful place to stay, and in truth, I must say for you know, *I am*

Notes

1. Which was the first volunteer regiment from New York to be sent to Washington.

not afraid of the truth, there were several times indications that our boys would feel a little safer to put some more of those trees in front of them. On one occasion this was so apparent that our bully little General jumped off from Old Topsy, leaving him in the jungle bush, and with a revolver in his hand, rushed forward, calling on the men to hold every inch of the ground. They immediately rallied, recovered their ground, and held it until the last cartridge had been fired, and the Infantry and Rifle pits went out with the day light, and as night came on we held the centre of the battle field—and not a single cartridge left,—but they had been sufficient. The rebels were willing to quit, and did quit under the cover of the darkness. Troops with ammunition were moved up to the front and laid on their arms. We fell back a few rods, built the camp fires dried our drenched clothes, and chatted over the day's work and prepared for another. To-day, horses and mules were sent off to bring up ammunition. All laid down and slept soundly, having a few pine bushes for beds to keep me above water, and the pine knots to dry out the drenching rain that continued until morning. We were all up before day light, and already for a breakfast, or a fight, but we had neither. The commissary stores had not come up, and the rebels had run away. Peck's brigade having done the handsome thing, yesterday, marched over the bloody field, the dead lying thick in ditches, in pits, and amid the fallen timbers. The Fort, the fields, and the roads for miles were strewn with dead horses,—It was a sad sight to see. The rain had ceased, the battle over, the sun came out warm and lovely, as any May morning. We could look up and away over the green fields. The now blooming forests how beautiful; but look to the ground, and O horrible to describe; how many a noble form lay cut, mangled and cold in death; and thousands of men went passing through the woods and slashes, picking up the dead and wounded left on the field where darkness closed the fight. I will not describe the scene when the death struggle for Hookers battery occurred,—take the bloodiest spot in the battle—it is indescribable. The fresh troops are pursuing the retreating enemy.

We are camped on a fine old plantation, stripped of fences, and everything desolated, with long lines of ditching, and fort after fort.

The Herald's map of the rebels's defences on the peninsular looked formidable on paper, but vastly more so in fact; that at Lee's Mills, abandoned a few miles back, being a more formidable work than those here.

Williamsburgh was a fine old Southern city, with considerable pretensions to the F. F.'s,⁵ but a very shabby and sorry looking place now; its resemblance to the half French and half English style of Canadian towns is remarkable.

I visited some of the hospitals to-day. The old College,⁶ — probably the best, — with bare floors, or rather well-covered with mud and dirt; dead, dying and wounded, and fevered patients lying in filth, without anything to eat or drink, and woefully deficient in everything to heal or cure. Oh, the horrors of war. O, how has Old Virginia fallen. It seems she has no sense of honor or humanity left.

Early this morning I rode up back of the fort to a large farmhouse, and in it found eighteen or twenty of their wounded, and in a barn, as many more, a few hospital stores, and some surgical instruments, and lint bandages. The patients were suffering for the want of attention, and some very much from hasty, murderous amputations. Passing through the house to the dissecting room in the old kitchen, I looked out of a window, and oh, horrors! what a pile of legs, hands and arms cut off and pitched into the mud. As I was surveying this sickening sight, I cast my eye down a long, narrow lane and discovered four men with a white flag approaching. I went out to meet the party. A regular old uncle Ned carried the flag followed by three sad, chop-fallen secesh soldiers. Uncle Ned halted and waved his white flag, showed his ivory and wool, and said, "General, dese three men hab come to give in, dey is sick ob de fight." I stepped back into the house and promised the men that I would send some assistance. I soon after returned and found that the rebel surgeon had cleared out, taking the entire medical stock

— instruments and all.

But I must close by saying that the friends of Gen. Peck, at home or elsewhere, have not been disappointed in his valuable military experience and soldierly conduct yesterday. Under most trying circumstances he was cool and plucky to the backbone, and has done honor to himself and Syracuse, as you will have learned long before this reaches you, if justice is done, for he held the field, and turned a defeat into a victory; protected his own command and hurt more of the enemy than any other brigade in the fight.

Wounded prisoners say it was the buck and ball from our front that cut them up so badly. Fearful and terrible as this action was, it was so arranged that our loss in killed is about twenty, wounded one hundred, and twenty or twenty-five missing, some of whom will come in from the woods. This may vary a little from the official report not fully made up. I cannot state the enemy's loss, — if I did it would be old before the mail could carry it to you. So good, night. You see I make no pretensions to describe the battle beyond our brigade.

SCIMETAR.

Notes

1. "Mahon" seems to have been the name of someone at the paper as many letters begin with "Dear Mahon" or "Friend Mahon".
2. Silas Titus had written a letter from Peck's Warwick River encampment on April 20, 1862.
3. A "rod" (also known as a 'perch' or a 'pole') is a unit of measurement equivalent to 16.5 feet or roughly 5 metres.
4. Bramhall's 6th New York Light Artillery.
5. First Families of Virginia (F. F. V.), an hereditary society of individuals who can prove their descent from one of the original colonists from England who primarily settled at Jamestown and along the James River and other navigable waters in the Virginia Colony during the 17th century.
6. College of William and Mary which nowadays has a collection of letters by William P. Allcot of the Anderson Zouaves.

From *The Syracuse Courier and Union* May 21, 1862

Letter of Hon. C. B. Sedgwick.

WASHINGTON, May 15, 1862

MY DEAR SIR: I enclose herewith the official report of Gen. Peck, (copy) of the battle of Williamsburg in which he had prominent and honorable part. It was a well contested field, and our soldiers held their ground with great pertinacity and bravery, and were evidently handled with much coolness and skill. If you think it would be interesting to the neighbours and friends of Gen. Peck, you are at liberty to publish it. I am glad to hear from army quarters that Capt. Titus is acquiring a high reputation as a brave, active and skillful officer.

I am, very respectfully, your friend,

C. B. Sedgwick.

(The report of Gen. Peck is in type, but we omit its publication at the request of the War Department).

Letter of Adjutant Titus.

HEADQUARTERS PECK'S BRIGADE

Battlefield near Williamsburgh. Va., May 8th. }

Hon. C. B. Sedgwick:— Dear Sir — Remembering well the pain and chagrin experienced on meeting you last July, by the unjust aspersions upon our Onondaga troops, and feeling deeply mortified with the whole Bull Run affair, and disappointed at the long delay for another chance, it affords me pleasure to say I can now meet you with better cheer, but having many dangers yet to encounter before we shall probably meet.

I take the liberty to congratulate you as the representative of Onondaga, that you or your constituents have no occasion to feel ashamed of, at least one of your constituents. General Peck has, by his skill and courage, added new lustre to our arms.

You will learn by other sources, of the movement on Sunday evening. The forced march, the bivouac in the mud and rain of that night, the start at daylight, without bread, coffee or comfort, other than that of a prospect of overtaking the enemy. To describe such a march, in a drenching rain, is impossible.

You will understand it better when I tell you I had an extra good and strong horse, and it required all my skill to pass many of the

mud barriers. The massive mud banks, deep ditches and rifle pits with which the Peninsula is ditched and dotted over, are nothing compared with the quick-sand pits we encountered in the woods of Warwick River; and how we got such an army through without wings, is difficult to imagine; yet, thank God, we got sufficient up to the plains of Williamsburgh to meet the rebel crew.

Peck, on the smell of gunpowder at a distance of several miles, renewed his efforts, and with the strongest men, forced the way past long lines of troops in our front, and passing a large plantation, took to the woods swarming with the advancing enemy.

The battle was fairly begun, and in fact had been hot on the extreme right and left, and but a slight fire in the centre, where the enemy had their bulwarks of Fort Magruder hid by this belt of thick woods. Without a halt, Peck directed the head of his brigade to a point where our lines were falling back, and entering the woods, met the pickets and a few broken parties retreating in considerable trepidation. Peck deployed into line of battle, and steadily sweeping through the woods, came up to the new slash of 20 to 40 rods¹ wide, behind which the enemy's infantry were posted in pits, ditches, and wood breast-works, then an open space of about the same distance, and then Fort Magruder, with a long line of strong flanking forts extending several miles.

We were met with the fire of the enemy's guns and mortars from Fort Magruder, which came crashing through the trees, and the infantry, from their cover, with well selected short ranges, poured in a murderous fire.—Peck halted, and sheltered his men with two or three rods² of the woods, and returned the fire, and such a fire never was, nor will be, beat by fresh troops who had never been under fire.

The enemy found their hiding places convenient, and would sneak down, then rally with desperation and make a new assault, to be again met by our rifles, and buck and ball, with much fury as to force them back.

Several times the enemy's fire would cool, and then the shot and shells centred on a single regiment, came crashing on, carrying down a mass of the thick pine wood, with a most fearful crash.

To avoid, this, part, and sometimes whole companies, would have to up and back to avoid the bursting shells. It was in one of these fearful crashes that some few of our men showed a willingness to put more trees between them and the enemy.

Then our bully little General, springing from his horse, and with revolver in hand, rushed up and said, "now, boys, return the compliment." This little incident sent a thrill of joy through the ranks. Immediately every man at his place sent a shout and shot that done our very hearts good.

The manner of fighting this battle was thus established, taking all the cover possible of the intervening trees, and falling back from the bursting shells, and then responding by shout and shots, we held our ground and drove the enemy from their cover.

Hooker, immediately on our left, had lost a fine battery, (1st U. S.).³ Peck, having⁴ relieved his own front,⁵ crossed his fire on the rebels at Hooker's battery, and routed them. Hooker again rallied and returned to his battery, or rather where it had been, for now it was one mass of ruins; friend and foe, and battery, and dead horses, piled together deep in the mud.

As I rode to the spot next morning, the awful sight was too much for my pen to describe, and I will not pain you by the attempt, along the front of our lines, as I rode—now a bright and beautiful May morning—to see what effect our fire had had, in the pits, ditches and tangled brush. In every possible shape, were representatives from nearly every Southern State. The sight was sickening, and I would but cannot forget it.

During the battle, the General and all his staff were much exposed on their horses, back and forward along the lines, in full view. At one time I found myself the mark of a sharpshooter. Lieut.-Col. Nevin, of the 62d N. Y. V., had just come up, and had a rifle in his hand. He handed it to me, and I fired. In the morning I went to the spot; he had waked up the wrong man; but he sleeps the last sleep. I confess I dropped a bitter tear over the poor fellow, and rode over the field to conduct our brigade up to the Fort.

I will only add, we entered the fight not far from 2 o'clock, but

the day, the duties, gave no opportunity to see my watch. The sun was hid, the rain fell constantly, and we held our ground until it was dark, and with our bayonets, for we had not a tingle shot left, or an enemy to be seen or heard. It was too dark and difficult to advance, and then Gen. Peck gave up the front to Gen. McKeim,⁶ of Pennsylvania, who had for some time been begging to take his place, we fell back a few rods, and Gen. McKeim, with fresh men and ammunition, took the front, and we slept on a pine log.

Peck, having had the butt of the battle, had the butt of the tree, and offered the next berth to Gen. McKeim, but he waived it, kindly saying, I had fought by the side of the General, I should sleep there. And I slept well between the two Generals, on the pine log, on the bloody but well-fought battle field. Pardon me, dear sir, for this long letter, and for the apparent egotism, especially the latter, and allow me again to congratulate you as a staunch friend of the Union cause.

I shall forward to your care, by express a Virginia State Flag, captured by this brigade, which Gen. Peck desired to have forwarded, by you, to the Mayor and Common Council of our city. It was done up to send direct, but you are at liberty to display it, and open the letter inside, and forward at your pleasure. Thanks to a cool and prudent General, our loss (Peck's brigade,) is small. Killed, not exceeding 26; wounded, 100.

The old city of Williamsburgh is a rebel hospital, with near a thousand of their wounded, and adding ours, it is large and numerous to nurse. You, I know, will think of this, but I greatly fear some who should will not.

The General is well.

I am, dear sir,

Your obedient and humble servant,

SILAS TITUS,

Lieut. and A. D. C.

Notes

1. Approx. 100 – 200 metres.
2. Approx. 10 – 15 metres.
3. Silas Titus is probably referring to Bramhall's 6th Battery of New York Light Artillery.
4. In this transcription "having" has replaced "have" in the original document.
5. J. E. B. Stuart's 4th Virginia Cavalry under the command of Maj. William Payne had galloped out in pursuit of Hooker's retreating regiments only to find Peck's troops forming at the edge of the woods and across Telegraph Road. As the 4th Virginia cavalrymen attacked Peck's line Major Payne was seriously wounded in the jaw. Cavalry Private Dr Edmund S. Pendleton noticed Payne bleeding to death and dragging the major behind a tree clamped the bleeding artery in his mouth with his fingers. Payne would later recall that as he lay on this part of the field the air above him was so full of bullets "that one could have caught a hatful by holding it up" – Dubbs, C. K., 2002, *Defend this Old Town: Williamsburg during the Civil War*, pp. 123-124.
6. Brigadier General William H. Keim, 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, IV Corps.

LETTER TO THE *NEW YORK SUNDAY MERCURY* BY QUARTERMASTER SERGEANT HENRY DABIN OF COMPANY "A", GARDES LAFAYETTE – 55TH N. Y. S. M.

The following letter was written by a member of the Gardes Lafayette – 55th N. Y. S. V. a sister regiment of the Anderson Zouaves in Peck's Brigade and appeared in the *New York Sunday Mercury* on May 18, 1862. Despite being unsigned this letter is undoubtedly by the correspondent to whom all the other letters appearing in the *Sunday Mercury* from this regiment are attributed – H. D. Yorkville. Assuming that "H. D." are the initials of the writer than there are only two possible candidates belonging to the 55th – Henry Dabin and Henry Diez. Of these two, Quartermaster Sergeant Henry Dabin is most likely the writer of the letters as the letter which immediately follows this one, dated September 1, 1862, has an account of the writer's return to his regiment after an absence of three months in New York. Henry Dabin was wounded at the Battle of Fair Oaks on May 31, 1862 and he probably spent some months in New York recuperating which would explain why no correspondence from the 55th was forthcoming during this period. The word "Yorkville" probably relates to a neighborhood of Manhattan which, at the time was bounded by 96th Street to the north, the East River to the east, 59th Street to the south, and Fifth Avenue to the west. At the time of the Civil War this neighbourhood contained many Irish and German immigrants and it is possible that this is where Henry Dabin, who was most probably English or Irish, had lived prior to enlisting. De-

spite the fact that most of the 55th New York were French, there was a company of Irish and a company of Germans in the regiment.

It was originally intended that all of the letters of Henry Dabin would be presented as a series in *Anderson Zouave* over a number of months, however, as this particular letter has an account of the Battle of Williamsburg it has been promoted to this issue of the paper.

[Special Correspondence of the Sunday Mercury.]
FIFTY-FIFTH REGIMENT, N. Y. S. M.—(GARDE
LAFAYETTE).

NEAR WEST POINT, VA., May 11, 1862.

Another Account of the Evacuation of Yorktown—New Yorkers in Action—A Description—Relieved by the Anderson Zouaves—Killed and Wounded.

Long before you will receive these lines, your readers will have been gladdened with the news of the evacuation of Yorktown and Williamsburg. On Sunday (the 4th) morning a contraband swam to us over the Warwick River. When asked about the state of the state of things on the other side, he said that the enemy had evacuated the place, with the exception of a few regiments, who had remained behind, and that they too were preparing to leave. As everybody had made up his mind that Yorktown would never be given up without a terrific battle, his stories were not much credited, although the quiet reigning on the other side seemed to justify his assertion. That afternoon we got marching orders. Marched to a place about three miles beyond Lee's mills, where we halted for the night. You have heard that several men on our side were killed by torpedoes, left in many places by the enemy. That night it commenced to rain, and continued the whole of the next day, so that the roads were in a most fearful condition, and in many places almost impassable; but onward was the word, and onward we went, until about 2:30 P. M. when we arrived within a mile of Williamsburg, at Fort Magruder, where we found the rebels in position.

As soon as our regiment arrived, being the advance of the brigade, we were ordered forward to support a battery, but it was taken by the enemy before we could reach the scene of conflict. On coming out of the woods saw a regiment drawn up in front of us, got ready to fire, when they suddenly hoisted Union flag; the colonel thinking that it was one of our regiments, gave the order to cease firing. A few minutes after, the stars and stripes disappeared, the rebel flag hoisted, and simultaneously from right, left, and front, volley after volley was poured into our men, while the cannon of Fort Magruder threw shot and shell into their midst at the same time. On our right we were attacked by Stuart's Cavalry, on the front and left by the Eleventh Mississippi, and Twenty-third Virginia.¹ Our men, worn out by the terrible march they had made, taken completely by surprise, and being besides obliged to fight with their knapsacks on their backs, behaved themselves admirably well. True, three companies on the left were soon broken up by the terrible crossfire to which they were exposed, but the right and centre, notwithstanding the great numerical superiority of the enemy, maintained themselves during two hours and a half, and did not give up one foot of ground. At 5¼, P. M., Gen. McClellan arrived and ordered the regiment that were in the fire to be relieved by others. When we were relieved by the Anderson Zouaves, the men had expended all their ammunition. A short time after, having made one more ineffectual charge, the enemy retreated, leaving our forces in possession of the battle-field. During the night the beautiful town of Williamsburg was evacuated.

The enemy generally fired too high; otherwise not half of our men would have come back, exposed as they were for two hours and a half to such a cross-fire. As it was, their yells and the whistling of the balls made a music which I suppose all who heard it will not easily forget. We had only two killed and seventeen wounded, without counting those who had mere scratches.

Notes

1. The author (Henry Dabin) is clearly mistaken at this point, or the newspaper compositor has incorrectly transcribed his handwriting. The regiments referred to here are most likely not the 11th Mississippi and the 23rd Virginia, but the 19th Mississippi and the 28th Virginia which had some time earlier assisted the 9th Alabama in the taking of Bramhall's badly mired 6th Battery, of New York Light Artillery from Hooker's command (2nd Division, III Corps). These guns were later retaken by Peck's Brigade.

LETTER TO THE *NEW YORK SUNDAY MERCURY* BY SERGEANT ROBERT F. BEASLEY.

The following letter was written by Sergeant Robert F. Beasley of Company "A" of the Anderson Zouaves on May 26, 1862 and published in the *New York Sunday Mercury* on June 1, 1862. This was the third and final letter written by Beasley to the *Sunday Mercury*, at least under his own name, with the other two appearing in the issues of March 9 and March 23, 1862.

Despite ceasing his correspondence with the *Sunday Mercury* Beasley remained with the regiment until his mortal wounding at the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5, 1864. Beasley died of his wounds four days later at Fredericksburg, VA. on May 9, 1864.

[Special Correspondence of the Sunday Mercury.]
SIXTY-SECOND REGIMENT, N. Y. V.—(ANDERSON
ZOUAVES).

CAMP SEVEN MILES FROM RICHMOND, May 26.

Position of the Regiment at Williamsburg—Results of the Battle—Monkey Jack—A Flag of Truce—Little Mac's Answer.

As it has been some time since I wrote, I thought I would let you know something of about the battle of Williamsburg. On the 5th of this month we marched about twelve miles, not thinking about fighting, by when we got to where the artillery was shelling the rebels, we waited about ten minutes, when our brigade was sent into the fight. The Fifty-fifth being on the right of the brigade, had the advance. The Ninety-eighth Pennsylvania was in a hot place. Our regiment was sent to take the place of the Fifty-fifth, who had retired from the field. It was about half-past two o'clock when we relieved them, and we kept up firing above two hours, when we got the order to cease, the guns being all silenced in Fort Magruder and their other bastions. We drove them clear beyond their forts.

The men showed great coolness in the fight. They cheered at the orders given. There were about four hundred rebels taken prisoners, including the killed and wounded. The loss of our regiment was three killed and five wounded.¹ It makes persons feel queer to hear grape and shell flying around their heads; but we must get use to it, for it is all for the Union, and we can't die but once. The rebels have been tearing up the railroad track. There was a skirmish with them yesterday, and they had to "skedaddle". There were some of them taken prisoners and some killed, I did not learn how many—quite conceivable.

Much noise was caused in camp, this afternoon, by a little negro climbing trees and cutting up didoes.² He beats Barnum's "What Is It".

There was a flag of truce sent in today. General McClellan sent it back, and told them that he would probably have his supper in Richmond tomorrow night. As the mail is closing I must do the same.

Yours respectfully,
R. F. B., Co. A.

Notes

1. Available records only account for four wounded members of the regiment at the Battle of Williamsburg. The Historical Data Systems Database only records three wounded members of the regiment, yet both the letter above and another, by William P. Allcot, claim that the regiment had three killed and five wounded at the battle of Williamsburg. See *Anderson Zouave*, Vol. 2, No. 5, June 2007, for an up to date casualty analysis of the Battle of Williamsburg.
2. Definition "Cutting up didoes": A mischievous prank or antic; a caper.

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