
Voices of the Past

The Diary of Charles Perkins

Civil War

1861

The following excerpts are from the diaries of Private Charles C. Perkins, 1st Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, and cover the period from July 14 to July 24, 1861.

A transcribed copy of the complete diaries covering the period from May 24, 1861 to May 25 1864 is available in the USAHEC as part of the Civil War Times Illustrated collection. These transcriptions were completed by hand as the original diaries are in delicate condition and could not be photocopied. Some parts of the diaries are illegible; these spaces are marked with underlined blank spaces. The transcriptions below are taken from the copies in the USAHEC collection, and are presented unedited and as unchanged as possible. As with all transcripts of hand written documents, there are issues of legibility, which may lead to occasional errors.

Sunday July 14

Up early + washed my face + hands also handkerchief. Splendid morning although cloudy Borrowed of Whit .05 milk .06 00 Eve_ New bread for breakfast. In forenoon Had flag raising near Majors tent Saw 2 men this morning the other side of Major Said he saw through glass one man fall. Dinner Boiled rice + hard bread. In afternoon went Berrying with Whit Hathe + Randall found plenty squeezed them through Handkerchief + Brought to camp canteen full of juice treated all round. Coming in met Capt Chamberlain told us to hurry as men were preparing to leave camp going to join Brigade + go over to Virginia it is said Supper piece soft Bread + tea + pork. Pleasant day. all Packed up + ready to Start at about Had to wait till about 9 o'clock for upper Picket to come up. Heavy shower During this time Just before we went we Randall + I went + got piece of pie at womens where I get my milk Borrowed of Whit 10 cts pie Started at 9 very bad stragglng at first frequent stops.

Monday July 15

XX next Day Thursday repoready march all night only waiting for the wagons to get on the Road which was very Bad in places. Arrived at old Camp Banks at about 3 A.M. up at Great Falls Richardson_____ of Brig. General of our Brigade as soon as we arrived took my knapsack took rubber blanket laid down out on the grass + slept. waked up in about 1 hour + found tents Pitched + turned into our 2nd class tent Slept till about_____ got up + walked out pretty stiff went to Canal + washed all over feel Great deal better then in tent + took nap for dinner Hard crackers + coffee in forenoon_____ did not Partake very pleasant night_____ night with much moonlight about _____(first half)_____ cloudy in afternoon _____ read letter from James today stayed till dinner after_____ Brig Drill Dress parade_____ soft bread + meat + coffee. very good + very_____ Turned in at about 9 after Roll Call

Tuesday July 16

Up at 6 o'clock, No Roll call this morning Recd orders to pack our knapsacks + leave all but Rubber Blankets wear Jackets + carry 3 days Rations New Canteens + Haversacks Breakfast piece of new Bread + tea. Dinner Meat + Soft Bread furnished with 30 rounds. Rec'd letter from James yesterday + Sent one to mother to Salem one to new York to Father today Borrowed of Whit 25. Sundries to Day 25 Borrowed of Whit yesterday Sundries yesterday. 30. Now owe Whit just 5.50 Capt says Brigade marching together with others to the amount of 30000 on Fairfax Court House 30,000 rebels.

Camps of 1st Regt M.V
Ellsworth at Cambridge
Cameron at " "
Quarters " Washington
Banks " Georgetown
Richardson " Great Falls 2 Co ? + ?
Co I + CO K

Started on march about 3 or 4 P.M. Marched over Chain Bridge into Virginia + Direct to Vienna where we arrived at about 11 Turned in to a field + Slept till morning with nothing But Rubber Blanket. Splendid Scenery coming out. One good looking girl where Company G stopped to get water Pretty tiresome marching But after 3 or 4 miles took it easier Union people along the line we + they talked Union Sentiments put one rubber Blanket down on grass + Raimond + I laid upon it + put another over us. Splendid moonlight night

Wednesday July 17

Up Early + went to nearby house + fill Canteen Dried Blanket By a huge Camp fire. our Regt formed a square with Wagons in centre Went black berrying after eating piece of salt Beef + Hard Cracker, found them very thick about equal to at great Falls although a little riper. Started on march for Fairfax about 8 Frequent halts along the road. Trees felled in our path large illegible portion
Stopped near fairfax Earthworks thrown up + now Evacuated Women said Rebels passed in morning about 8 or 9 Houses fired here it is supposed by our troops. Marched from here to Centreville where we (Birgade + I don't know how many others) encamped _____
+c +c along the road were seen Wagons broken Down + contents spilled +c +c. Union men came back as we advanced + occupied their Houses Supper from Haversack Crackers Pork roasted on stick in fire Company detailed for guard

Thursday July 18

On guard about 1 hour started on _____ encamped for night about 2 miles from Bat Threw away Blanket + had nothing But Jacket to night with part of Whit's Rubber Blanket when it Rained first part of Evening _____ Furnished Rations which I brought in Haversack _____
_____ on _____ No Dinner But when we arrived were issued Rations were furnished from Wagons which Arrived this evening Pigs killed _____ very good

supper cut down with knife Cabbage + turnips + ate them with good Relish. Hard Bread was furnished + Salt Pork + Beef. Had a sound Sleep. Musketry Cracking in the Distance all night.

Friday July 19

up Before light + had Breakfast with Company Crackers Coffee Pork +c +c. Cloudy in morn. Started with Brigade quite slow on the way _____ Yesterday our Regt had the Right Post of honor + 3 times occupied very Dangerous positions. Balls Musket at first then Canon Balls _____ whizzing over our heads. The Cannon Balls we could dodge Some times one Ball which which Evans picked up struck(after bouncing) went about 5 ft. Direct in front + left 6 _____ Probably _____ + several _____ the enemy were _____ which _____ in woods _____ Back about _____ mile from this our Battery made stand + covered us as we advanced. When we Retreated behind them Both Batteries commenced fire Shells from this side None that I know of from other Side We laid in Hollows + shot went over Heads Wheeler was _____ few wounded None killed _____ Had heavy loss _____ . But then came 2 or 3 on _____ of us. Rain forecast to Day + we have hopes Battery Remained in their Place I believe last night Only one.(Wheeler missing from our mess(2nd) non killed or Wounded While Marching (Friday Morning) Having come to a halt (for Artillery to Pass I believe) Mr. Parker Member of Mass. Socy. Hold conversation on a Mass Company _____ walking _____ of Reg at Red _____ volunteer my services Capt _____ Co K. as Lieutenant Sutherland + Carruth Both Remain behind at Camp Banks I believe + He accepted I believe we are now officered as well as any company in the Reg't. Yesterday our Regt(except skirmishers) Did not fire a shot) During our place in exposed position most of the time laid on our Bellies Part of the time we were standing partly exposed . From the 1st gun from _____ other side (Rifle 6) yesterday was fired _____ . Report that _____

That Maj. Chandler said he Counted 40 killed in the Regiment as we lay there. yesterday with the shot passing above our heads + sometimes striking in our midst Thoughts of home of Mother of Lizzie of E.M.P. that I might at any time be killed almost made me wish I had never come But Being here I am bound to stick it out as long as life last to be found at my post doing my duty or dying. Do not _____ the Field. The worst of it we _____ Where the enemy could _____ But we could not they being covered By trees pouring their fire + not returning it so there was nothing But trees to fire to. Twas hard to stand. Two leaves torn out here to write home to folks _____ people _____ carry mail _____ send them without envelopes said they would attend to that Co's I + K were detailed this forenoon for picket went out + our Men we see all around No sign of the Enemy at this post. Four hours on post [two lines illegible] for _____ picking _____ Part of the men were sent out to picket + part - about half posted at House + outbuildings to watch the woods opposite the river. Whit + I remained at _____ while there. Saw Baggage wagons + men going toward front in rear of Battery Rebels Right? of our pickets carrying up Blankets + c which 1st Mass left on ground at the time of the Battle yesterday. Wheeler's _____ was found to day _____ Supper _____ Hoe cake I bought six _____

[Eleven line illegible]

We all went down on our knees before our defense + Ready for them But nothing came + we laid down to Sleep again slept short time + were all sent into _____ building of logs shingled with spaces between the logs not yet filled with mud + c. which is generally the case in these parts.) We Packed in there so close that we had to _____ to sleep + sometimes laid our heads on anothers boots _____ anywhere we could. Pretty tough sleeping but we managed to get some sleep were awakened several times before Morning But nothing serious happened. _____ For 3rd relief + I was rather _____ to get some of them But somewhat frightened by the firing [one line illegible] first part of the night.

Saturday July 20, 1861

Up Early in Morning Breakfast at 8 o'clock 4 hard crackers + Coffee Dissatisfaction about feed + c. Borrowed of Whit 08 mills. 08 orders to day to keep under cover + not fire gun picket are out rest of men laying round log cabin. Was said that Thursday there were 900 of the Rebels encamped in the field adjacent + 5 of the officers Dined in the house where we are not stationed. Very warm to day. Capt Chamberlain went to Gen. Tyler about our grub + today we shall have a decent Dinner all quiet this forenoon Dinner Salt Beef + Hard Bread at about 5 o'clock Laying round in shade about all day. towards evening several men were out in open field Toops in the distance. Sent letter home By Lynn man General Tyler here to day coffee + 4 hard crackers for Supper + Just as I went down from Barn I heard the news Richmond is taken by Gen. Butler Capt. Chamberlain Jumped up 3 ft. when he heard it + said he we have them in a Box now Laid in upper floor of Barn Splendid even.

Sunday July 21

Up Early Splendid Sunrise Breakfast Coffee + Hard Bread + Boiled fresh Beef. While we were eating Battery of 2 guns rifled came on the hill just Back of Log house which we are guarding + commenced firing shell. We marched Back Both companies by the left of the guns waited short time when Regt 18 of New York came up. Then we sent into the woods 12 pickets from each company + went down behind fence + now as I am writing we lay down to protect the pickets if they retreat very warm sun guns firing every once in a while No guns fired as yet from the enemies consealed battery. Were soon sent into the woods and we fired one volley it was said afterwards into our own troops. Then we went back but they fired into us first As we went Back we met Lieut Carruth at house with Letters I rec'd 4 papers from Mrs. Pickering + 1 letter from E.G.B one from James + one from mother. Unexpected Pleasure. Sat down to Read letters + papers then went up on hill to look as Battery 2 rifled guns No 1 + 2 part of Sherman battery 20 pdrs 3 1/2 in bore I should think was looking at guns + all at once the men saw troops going along Road on Edge of trees on left of Battery The Battery was ordered round facing them + then some devilish fool Ran up + told them not to fire as there were some of our men there But there was only a few of ours scouting Round there + there was hundred of there troops filing along the road. Then Capt's Chamberlain + Rand marched their Companies down on the Side of the hill + as we stood there fully exposed to the fire of the enemy about 75 or 100 yards off) Capt. Chamberlain challenged them three times "what troops are those" then he said if you don't answer I shall fire then we made Ready aim + fired then laid down on ground + the enemy fired + bullets whizzed over our heads Corporal Baxter was shot in thigh + Lieu. Gill was shot dead through the heart we fired a few shots where we were (Co K)(Co I retreated after first fire frightened I suppose) Then went Back short distance + fired again + kept it up for short time

loading kneeling + standing up + firing I fired 8 shots We then Retreated Back behind the Brow of the hill + laid there some time. After our company commenced firing The Battery opened fire shell +c + we soon saw the enemy Retreating as the Battery wheeled round the New York 18 being on the field marched Up behind them But the devilish fools did not fire at all if they had + had not been such cowards we should killed off a great many more. This commenced about middle of afternoon. I should think The Cannonading began forenoon this forenoon on the right wing of the army to here the rest of battle was to right twas said by a gentleman who timed it lasted 5 hours We had laid but short time behind the hill when the Battery Retreated first then the New York 18 then our two companies We went Back where the Rest of the Regt was stationed + were surprised to find them all gone we followed the NY 18 + went Back about a mile where the rest of the regts. were Troops were formed here in a line of Battle ready for an expected charge of Cavalry but they did not come. Mass 1st after fooling around a long time formed in hollow Square + laid down + had about 2 hours rest had to fall in again at 11½ o'clock + Commenced marching back to old camp in Georgetown

Monday, July 22

As we marched along the road we saw Baggage wagons capsized + Broken + spilled of their contents Road was strewd with horse collars shovels + about everything else Boxes of crackers on the Road were taken from the wagon Broken open + the Marching soldiers filled their Haversacks +c. We had very few rests + short at that when we rested no matter where there we dropped of them as in the dust of the road or any where there we dropped + once or twice I fell asleep. We marched into Fairfax where Mass 1st separated from Main Column + marched off on different Road. But found they had the wrong one + marched Back past the court House + Joined the column again. as we were marching across a field when we separated from Main Column. I stopped at Ditch to get a drink of water slipped + down I went above my knees in water on getting out my Boots were full. But they felt very much better + I let them stay so until by marching it was all dried up. At about 11½ we arrived at a place where they said it was 5 miles to long Bridge Sometime before this whit + a few others + C.C.P. left the Reg't + lagged behind Picking Blackberries +c At one place we got some nice pears (Chodburn + C.C.P) Took it easy about marching + went where we pleased about 1c it Began to Rain + we put on our Rubber B's We went to long Bridge supposing the Reg't did But found it did not. Here it rained Hard + while there Borrowed of Whit 10 cts Bot 1 tomato, glass lemonade + 5 cakes We stayed here about an hour in the rain as they would not let us cross the Bridge we then went Back + crossed the canal Bridge over the Potomac in to Maryland again. We then marched from Bridge towards camp + stopped at house of colored _____ dried ourselves + had supper + stayed for night.

Tuesday July 23

Up at about 4½ oc. Day Break went down to Spring + got Some water for family + washed + then they got Breakfast for us about 5½ o'clock or 6. Splendid morning. Took Breakfast at this house + milk apples + c then left for Camp Hearing that we were to leave for Arlington Heights wrote letter to mother packed knapsack + c + c most of men pretty well used up. Washed Handkerchief, Havclock + c. Borrowed of Whit 60 cts Paid 50 for my half of the lodging + meals. Bot cakes .05 lemonade .02 have got sore eye sty coming Rather Painful Tomatoes 03 Regt started on march about noon across the Potomac Canal Bridge a short Distance near Arlington Heights with Rest of Brigade soon after we had stacked arms we had to fall in again +

were reviewed by Gen Rich, President Lincoln + Secretary Seward Supper of Crackers + cheese
Bot cheese at 20 per lb. Borrowed of Whit 12 Cheese .12 Turned in in 1st mass tent no
knapsacks or Blankets here 2nd tent not come fine evening ...

Wednesday July 24

Up Early at sunrise took a walk round Camp to get water +c +c. Breakfast of Crackers + cheese
Borrowed of White 15+8=23 cts. Bot Cheese .05 Cakes 4, ½ pie .08 2 glasses lemonade .06
loafing round all day for Dinner we were served with crackers + Raw Beef cooked 2 slices of
Beef Steak + Saved one for supper Twas very good. Pleasant Day Did not feel very well Had a
spell of Diareah eye pained me Considerable Supper Hard Crackers + Boiled fresh meat.
Turned in Early at about 8½ mass + other Regts passed Camp great Cheering + Bonfires
Knapsacks arrived this evening.