

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## A WAR LETTER

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Recently Legislator Frank Berger shared the following letter with me which was written by a soldier in the Civil War. Although we are not sure who Oscar or Anna were, the contents of the letter give first hand flavor of the war as seen by a western New York man one hundred twenty-eight years ago.

"Camp in the woods near the rebel Fort Hunter April 10th 1862

Dear Anna,

It has been a long time since I wrote you or even received a letter. Until this eve I received from home and one from George. I see by his letter he is much better. But I must tell you something of our battle, in fact we are still laying where the rebels could shell us out if they knew where we were. With our brigade in advance we started for Yorktown last Thursday. Marched about 12 miles and drove about 2000 rebels ahead of us the last 5 miles and then drove them out of their forts and barracks. They set fire to their barracks before leaving but we put the fire out before doing much damage. We camped for the night on their ground. Took one prisoner who said we would not march so far the next day and sure enough we did not. Or we only went 5 miles where we have been obliged to retire about a mile from where the rebels are shooting at our pickets and now and then we hear a cannon. Well, as I said, we marched up to the rebel forts within 300 yds. and they fired shell at us and we at them until we marched on but turned to the left behind a narrow skirt of timber between us and the forts so they could not see us. We remained an hour very quiet until our company was ordered to skirmish in the woods. But before the company had gone a hundred yds. the rebels opened fire on our boys. But they deployed and hid behind trees. They found the rebels were just over a small stream of water behind the brush. Our boys soon returned the fire. This commenced a bout and they kept up a storm of lead until after dark then Gen. told our boys to hold the position at all hazards. So our men lay at their post without being relieved for 21 hours. Milton Lewis from Busby was shot through the brain. I helped to carry him off the field. This is hard to see our bravest fall first.

We had 4 wounded, one with his leg broken, one in the face, 2 of the 7th were killed by the bursting of shells, one or 2 of the 7th wounded. This fighting lasted 2 days. and then we were relieved by Gen. Brooks Brigade. Gen. McClellan was here day before yesterday with Prina De Joinville, Wm. Astor and other distinguished gents. and soon after he left our army was changed to a different position as the rebels had learned our position and had planted large guns where they could shell us out at night so without the least noise we were ordered to form line and retire, a mile back out of the way. So through the rain and mud we retired until we can get some large guns and mortars with which to shell them out the roads are so bad we can not get them to us, but will be able to in a few days, as the weather is clearing up, but tis cold. We have about half rations now while the need is so bad our men carry pork 2 miles on their bayonets. Last night they brought us 5 barrels on their guns. All we get is coffee, meat, crackers and rice. I had about one quarter of a pound today and none yesterday but a little for breakfast, but we do not fare as bad as many in the field. There is probably 75 thousand men here and I have been told that Yorktown is about surrounded. Gen. Hancock is there. We expect to move on the forts in a few days. They have 3 in sight. I stood for some time the other day watching them but I expect a shell every moment to invite me back to my regiment. We have taken several prisoners and some of them have come into our camp and tell us that one of our shells killed 30 in their fort. Co. R. shot a good many more but I must close. Last night our men on picket came near being taken they were posting the reliefs they got lost and wandered nearly all night coming out at the rebel camp near the forts. The rebels fired at them and they left double quick for the woods. I can assure you Anna tis not pleasant to have the balls whistle about ones head and shells burst at our feet. But we must get used to it. Give my love to all, Lorenzo and Julia and brother George. Please excuse this and write soon. Direct to Fortress Monroe, 49th B.V. With much love I am as ever yours, until death."

Oscar, write soon