

Rufus Coombs Ames Diary
1861-1885
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H. H. Feb 27—62

The Regiment went on Peket yesterday I did not go for I was on camp guard we received orders to day to march with two days Raitions. hered that General Banks¹ had got crost the River

H. H. Feb 28—62

wind blows very hard, we have not marched yet, hered that Gen Banks was within four miles of Mannus² Junction. Isaac had a Box cume from home. I had a pair of Boots cume in it . Government delt us out Legins to day.

H. H. March 2—62

Inspection of Arms on Company grounds Snowed in afternoon cleared off at sundown leaving two inches of snow on the ground the sick were sent to Washington to day

H. H. March 4—62

a Fortnight ago our Bragade comenced to fire for a medle and it has simmired down to one man in each Regiment of the Bregade making four. they fired to day and C W Veazie won the perse.

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H. H. March 5—62

Regemental drill as usual. orders came to day to turn out hereafter at Roll call Armed and Equiped as the Law directs

Hulls Hill March 10—62

Received orders last night to pack our Knapsacks and be in line redy to march at sunrise and this morning at 8 oclock we was on the march. the whole Army is on the move it is very muddy if I should say it was knee deep I should not be much out of the way. we get to Fairfax at sundown. very tired the boys throwed a good meny of their cloths away to lightin them selves. I throwed away my Knapsack and some other things

Fairfax March 11—62

¹ Nathaniel Banks, former Governor of Massachusetts was appointed by Pres. Lincoln in May of 1861 as Major General of Volunteers. He led a successful campaign against a pro-slavery uprising in Baltimore and was then assigned to protect the upper Potomac.

² Possibly means Manassas Junction

it Rained through the night, but is very pleasant to day. we are encamped about 300 yards from Fairfax Court House. we had a Posted Guard in the Town last night. General McClellan passed this forenoon on his way to Centerville. during the day there was a number of Regiments passed on their way to Alexandria from Centerville. the report is that the Rebels

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have left Mannassas Junction so the Army is returning.

Fairfax March 12—62

pleasant and warm through the day. but cold and disagreeable nights. Infantry and Cavalry have been passing all day coming from Mannassas. we are on the highway between Manassas and Alexandria. at sundown Little Mac³ passed on his way to Alexandria he was cheered all along the route he is thought a great deal off by the Boys.

Fairfax March 13—62

overcast and looks as if it was going to rain. nothing to do but plenty of fun. Army still passing to the rear sometimes we see a squad of Johnnies marched by. so with all this and robbing the Sutlers once and a while time flies quite fast. this afternoon I got a pass and went to the City, and had quite agreeable afternoon we get along very well through the day but these cold nights is what tells on us. for we have nothing but a Poncho over us, with an Army Blanket.

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Fairfax March 14—62

Cloudy with some rain, there has been a large number of Slaves passed by going for Washington, they are very pleasant to the soldiers as they pass. we had a Battalion drill this afternoon and the following address delivered

Head Quarters Army of the Potomac.

Soldiers of the Army of the Potomac

For a long time I have kept you inactive but not without a purpose. You were to be disciplined armed and instructed; the formidable artillery you now have had to be created. other Armies were to move and accomplish certain results. I have held you back that you might give the death blow to the Rebellion that has distracted our once happy Country. the patience you have shown and your confidence in your General are worth a dozen victories. these preliminary results are now accomplished. I feel that the patient labors of many Months have produced their fruit. the Army of the Potomac is now a real Army. magnificent in material admirable in discipline and

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instruction excellently equipped and armed. your commanders, are all that I could wish. the moment for action has arrived and I know that I can trust you to save our Country. as

³ Nickname for General George B. McClellan

I ride through your ranks I see in your faces the sure presage of victory. I feel that you will do whatever I ask of you, the period of inaction has passed. I will bring you now face to face with the Rebels. and only pray that God may defend the right. In whatever direction you may mover however strange my actions may appear to you ever bear in mind that my fate is linked with yours, and that all I do is to bring you where I now you wish to be on the decisive battle field. it is my business to place you there. I am to watch over you as a parent over his Children, and you know that your General loves you from the depths of his heart.it shall be my call as it has ever been to gain success with the least possible loss. but I know that if it is necessary you will willingly follow me to our graves. for our righteous cause God smiles upon us victory attends us. yet I would not have you think that our aim is to be attained without

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a manly struggle. I will not disguise it from you. you have brave foes to encounter freemen well worthy of the steel that you will use so well. I shall demand of you great heroic exertions rapid and long marches despirate combats privations perhaps we will share all these together, and when this sad war is over we will return to our homes and feel that we can ask ho higher honor than the proud consciousness that we belonged to the Army of the Potomac

Geo B McClellan
Major General Commanding

March 15-62

a Rainey day we left Fairfax at 6 this morning the roads are very bad the Regiment stoped within three miles of Alexandria but Johnie Veezie and I went on further untill we found a Barn full of hay we got up on the hay Mow and crawled down into it where we slept all night and turned out **st—nning** and smiled while we have a sigh for the poor soldirs that had to sleep on the wet ground.

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March 16-62

it has stoped raining but looks as if it wanted to rain some more. I am siting in the Barn window looking out upon the Potomac River, about one and a half miles off. there is a schooner becalmed with her flying jid run down it looks home like and makes we wish I was at home. dering the day John and I went where the company was and got some coffee and hardbread, I was detailed to go no fertig but did not go

March 17-62

still threatning to rain six of our Company found out where John and I stoped and they have come to the Barn they stoped with us last night. this morning I went to the Company and Charles Veezie and I went to Alexandria and went on baord of the Schooner Herret of Castine. I had the pleasure of escorting a lady part of the way she was afraid of the Soldirs

March 18–62

cleered off very pleasent still at the Barn the oficer of the day tried to drive us out

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but he is gon and we are here. I went to the Co and was detailed to stand camp guard and went on duty

March 20–62

it has rained very hard for the last 24 hours. the Regiment has shifted a short distance and taken tents left by the 59th N York and John and I was compeled to leave our comfetable Qarters and go to a well tent Lomesome times in old Virginia,

March 21–62

we left camp this forenoon and arived at Alexandria at 5 in afternoon, then I was detailed to help load a Steammer with cartridges and while I was gon the Regiment went on board of the Steamer Arial, and when I got on board of her late in the evening, I could not find Knapsack Haversack or gun. the boys had cared them on board by there was such a g---- so meny on board that they had lost run of them. but such cases as that dont bother an old Soldir much. he steals some ones else then they watch and freese on to some one else.

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Steamer Arial March 22–62

rained hard through the night this morning we droped out into the River in looking up River I can see the Capital of United States from the Steamers deck. General Martendal our Brigadier General is on board of the Steamer Mass.. with the 18th Mass Regiment. the 18 and 22 Mass and 1st Michigan Regiment belongs to our Bragade. we soon got under way and steamed down river untill dark. things so not look as pleasent as they might for I have had nothing to eat all day⁴.

on Board Steamer. March 23–62

we got underway early and started down River. it has been a very pleasant day. in afternoon arived at Hampton just about Fortress Munroe on the James River. we halled in to the wharf where the Monitor laid that fought the Merymack a few days ago⁵, after the Steamer was made fast we fell in and marched ashore. Hampton must have been a very prety place before the Rebels burnt it last fall.

⁴ Rufus and the 2nd Maine are embarking on McClellan's Peninsula Campaign, the long awaited move against the Confederate army. McClellan's strategy was to attack Richmond from the southeast to avoid what he thought would be superior forces if he marched south from Washington.

⁵ The two iron clads, the USS Monitor & CSS Virginia (made from remnants of the USS Merrimac) fought to a draw on March 9 at Hampton Roads.

Hampton March 24–62

to day we marched a couple of miles from Hampton and pitched our Punchoes in a very pretty place. the Country around here is low and flat not much above the sea level. there is a very few Inhabitants and it must be very sickley here, it is covered with a marshy forest and the Roads are very poor. streams are very plenty and in rainy seasons the land must be mostly covered with water you dig a hole a foot deep and it soon fills with water. after getting our Punchoes pitched Moses and I went to the Surgeon and got a Tonic I understand the jonies have orderd us off. Just before dark I took my gun and went on a Hog raid.

March 25–62

we advanced about three miles to day and pitched our ponchoes. Moses and I have been arested for lifting things that belonged to the Setlers the Army is about 85,000 at the present time.

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March 26–62

we did not march to day so I washed and have found some creeps. but it is not considered a disgrace to be lousey in the Army, for it is imposible to keep clear of them. we drew rations to day I9 cakes hard bread and one half pound of Beef. that is a days rations

March 27–62

this has been a fine day. I am on camp guard the regiment was out to day on a Bragade drill. one Division is advancing I had a sick spell this afternoon.

March 28–62

pleasent we had Company Inspection and Company drill in forenoon and Regimentle drill and dress prade in afternoon have not been very well to day.

March 31–62

Charles Hooper, C. W. Veazie and I left our camp to go to the James River by Newport News. it is about three miles from camp. there was strict orders for the Soldiers nit to leave camp so we run away. when we got to the

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River there was about 2000 Soldiers there fishing for oysters, the water was very schole so they had to waid out Quite a distence. my two chums started rite in but I thought I would sit on the beach and watch things for a while. Just to my left and down River was the Cumberlin partly out of water where the Merrimack sunk her. the River is very wide here and things looked pleasent. in looking around I see a steamer a little up river and clost to the opisite shore. she steamed down huging the shore, untill she got opisite to us then she headed for us. all this times I was watching her and thought it was one of our

Gun boats. but when she got about half way abreast and swang brodside to us run up the Rebel flag and fired a big gun the ball striking the water and sciping untill it burrid itself in the bank. we knew what was the mater, that brought me to my feet but I waited untill my chums got ashore then we run up over the bank the rebel firing his half dozen guns as fast as he could, one shell bust just as

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we got up the bank. there we had a large level field to run over before we could get into the woods. when we got part ways we cume acrost a gutter that had been washed out we jumped in there and waited untill the guns dot [got] through firing. then we started for camp where we arived saft, but as we had run away, we kept very still about our excursion. I do not know whether the johnnies hit any one or not but he had a good chance.

Camp Porter April 1st 62

this camp is named after Fitz John Porter our Corps General. this has been a nice day heavy cannonading through the day. the Schoonr Fairdealer of Castine is at the Fort.

Camp Porter April 2-62

lots of drilling to day. the Schooner James Brophy of Castine is at the Fort. the Capt of her Henri Cox was here today. Sergeant James Collins would not take the Company out to drill

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April 4 - 62

we left Camp Porter this morning and got to Little Bethel at noon where we stoped to rest a short time, and while we were there a darkie cume clost to our Co with an officers horse he had a long rope to the horse and he lyed down on his back holing his hat over his face and let the horse feed around him. I noticed he had a very nice Harversack on and it seemed to be full, so I went and barred a knife sharpened the little blade, walked by him once then kneeled down and cut the strap that was over his shoulder went to the company rolled the Harversack up in my blanket and just got seated when the darkie got up and he rise the strap fell off his shoulder he picked it up and if there ever was a surprised darkie he was one, after looking at the ends of the strap a while he left. then I examed my prize and found a lofe of soft tack some supper and other things. the sack was the pretiest one I ever see patent leather and all worked up in silk when I got a chance I sent it to Georgetown.

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where we kept our extry things, thinking that if I ever get home I would get it.

April 5 - 62

we Camped on a Rebel camp ground last night. early tis morning we started on the march. but we advance very slowly for we have to force the rebels foot by foot in

afternoon we halted and I was put on guard and the Regiment was sent on a scout. I was relieved just before dark and got with the Regiment

In Front of York Town April 6–62

this morning we advanced slowly until we found the rebels in force, and got in sight of their works. so I see this centry and could hear them hallor they sounded like a lot of school boys.

York Town April 7 62

we have been Supporting the 3rd Mass Battery since yesterday after noon there has been some artillery firing during the time on both sides but no general engagement, yet. in afternoon we was relieved went a short distance to the rear and pitched our Ponchoes.

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the 22 Mass, shot a Rebel that was coming in our lines to give himself up it was a mistake.

York Town April 8–62

it rained very hard last night fluding our tents so we was obliged to turn out we started on peaket earley this morning

York Town April 9–62

very bad weather,. we have been on peket 36 hours clost under a Rebel Fort. this has been the hardest Peket that I ever was on. the Rebels had sharpshooter posted and if we raised our heads they would fire at us. our Posts were about 50 feet apart and two on a post bur before the 36 hours was over a large part of the peaket in the vicinity of me had crawled to the rear. Moses Veazie was Quite a distence from me. but as the peket had all left between us he crawled up to me and he and I staid until we was relieved. when I was relieved in the fare part of the night I jumped up to run to the rear but was fired at 4 or 5 times before I fell I crawled the rest of the ways, until I

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got under cover. During the 36 hours it was a cold as it could be and raine. and I ha to squat snug to the ground and like a hog wallow in the mud, my limbs was swelled so that I could hardly use them.

York Town April 10–62

more raine, to day we shifted our camp ground some further to the rite and are now clost to York River, have not got limbered up yet.

York River April 11 –62

inspection of Arms this forenoon, the report is that we are to have Spring Field Rifles, we have the Spring Field musket now, fires a Ball and then Buck shot. hered to day that the

Merymack went to Fortress Monroe and took two transports, herded of a great battle in Tennessee I was detailed for furtig but did not go.

York River April 13 –62

I went on camp guard yesterday and was relieved to day countersign very cruise the report around the fire to day is that the johnnies are trying to get in our rear.

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York River April 16–62

our Regiment went on peaket early this morning. I had a man by the name of Randle on post with me. the Post not over 100 feet apart. my post was at the edge of the woods, in front of me was a level field and across the field was the rebels works. about 300 yards off. the rebs had sharpshooter posted out of sight and we was shore to get fired at if we shoed ourselves the sentry next to me was shot through the body. Randle was so frightened that he lyed down and trembled like a leaf it was something new to him he was a recruit. the rebs run out a battry and comenced shelling us. but our folks soon drove them under cover. there has been a considerable firing all along the line to day. California Joe⁶ has been doing some fine work to off set the rebel side.

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York River April 18–62

our folks had a scurmish on our left last night and beet the johnnies they got one of our big guns, but we got it back. we are having lots of trouble now adays.

York River April 19– 62

There was a few peaces of Ponchoes I shered to day to our Company, but not enough for the whole company. we drewed lots fer them and I drewed one peace. we was detailed to go on Fertig clost by an old Bridge we dug up shells burried five feet deep Thomas Murphy cut his leg to day.

York River April 20–62

Very rainy they had a schurmish, on our left last night but things have been Quite on the right.

York River April 21–62

Rained hard all last night and is still raining. every thing Quiert except the Gun boats. they are firing across the Rive on the Gloucester side. the Rebs are trying to plant guns ther

⁶ A private in Company C of the 1st US Sharpshooter Regiment, Truman Head, also known as "California Joe". He was the first Sharpshooter to be armed with a Sharps rifle that he had purchased prior to enlistment. Company C was one of the first two companies of Sharpshooters to be fully armed and to engage the enemy in combat (National Civil War Association)

York River April 22 – 62

I am on camp guard last night the countersign was Almon, the Regiment started on picket this morning Capt Tilden has been home on a furlow and arived back to day he brings one Recruit

York River April 25 – 62

Raines most of the time only stops to take a new hold. we had orders to go on fertig but it was afterward countermander. the Gun's Boats don considerable firing last night General Franklins Division has joined our Army.

York River April 26 –62

We started last night on fertig when we got to the front line of works we was deployed as schermishers about 10 feet apart with Pick shovel guns and equipments and advanced for the rebel works over a level field. the wind was blowing from the rebels and it was very dark. after getting part the distence between the rebel and our works we lied our guns down and comenced diging a hole each one for himself, throwing the dirt up in front of us. we had to

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dig with the greatest care we was so nigh the johnnies any little noise would alarmed them and then they would have opened on us. there is none so lazie that they would not work situated like that and I soon had a big whole we then dug for one anuther, then dug trenches to the rear so our men could come out in the day time and finish what we had begun and be under cover.

York River April 29 – 62

still the raines, we started this morning on fertig diging the rebs out, I went down to the bank of the River, where I could see up River bye York Town. there was a number of small vessels sailing from and to York Town, when we started for camp the johnnies see us and comenced to fire at us.

York River April 28 – 62

it has the appearance of clearing off. the Guns Boats fired a few sots last night signed they pay rolls to day. two of the NY 13 regiment was wounded last night hered that New Orleans was in our hand

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York River April 29 – 62

it had cleared off at last. we started on fertig early this morning and dug all day on a tranch to place 10 Morters in

York River April 30 – 62

overcast and looks very much as if it was agoing to Raine. we was paid off last night at 10 oclock. I received \$4 Charles Hooper is discharged and gon home sick.

York River May 1st 62

we started at 4 this morning to go on peket to take the place of the 13th N.York regiment they broke and run. the rebs have been firing at us all day.

York River May 2 – 62

we got relieved this morning and got back to camp in a short time we was called upon to go and surport some men that was diging Rifle pits 500 yards from the Rebel works, the rebs have been very busy firing all day they busted one of their big guns. there is three Beloons up in sight watching the rebels. the johnies fire at them

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York River May 4 – 62

we are having the finest of weather now. the Rebels left York Town last night we have all our Cavelery and 90 peaces of flying Artillery⁷ in pursuit of them. our folks are clost to them we have hered them firing all day. the rebs left all their heavy guns 80 in number and lots of ammuniton and other war like stors, but they destroyed all they could

York Town May 5 –62

it has rained all day. we marched inside of the rebel works to day. the rebs had torpedos buried all along the line of their works the cap only exposed Good bye if you steped on them. we had men detailed to hunt them up and place a stick over them with a rag on it, untill we had time to dig them up. General Hookers Corps has got up with the rebs at Williamsburg and is fighting them

York Town May 6 – 62

it has cleared off and the sun is shining on us onse more. but it was Quite cold last night. I went inside of a Rebel fort to day, and found

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some things left by them. one knife the blade was three inches wide and 15 inches long. looked as if it was made of a saw plate.

York Town May 7 – 62

Pleasant, this morning we got on board of the Steamer Arial to go up River. I think the whole of our Corps (the 5th) is agoing with us.

West Point May 8 – 62

⁷ Flying artillery was the nickname for the horse artillery

we landed here at West Point this morn Franklins Division arived here yesterday and had a battle. the dead are not buried yet. we went back a short distance and just before sundown pitched Ponchos and had to dig wells before we got any water

May 9 – 62

we advanced about one mile to day, and in the evening when we thought we was agoing to stop all night we dug a well and found plenty of water. we have taken a good meny prisners the last two days. we have had a fine day, and when we get nice weather here things look splendid

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May 12 – 62

My Birthday. we started on the march early this morning, and have had a very hard day of it marched 15 miles and hot enough to rost Hell. The Rebels blowed up the Merimac on the 11th.⁸

May 15 – 62

it has rained hard all day. we struck our Ponchoes at noon and advanced about two miles and camped in the woods we got wett to day.

May 16 – 62

I fell in the ranks this morning to advance but was detailed to go as a guard to the wagons. the regiment got to White House at sundown but I did not get with them untill 11 oclock

May 17 – 62

another pleasent day. we drewed rations to day. we are agoing to have baked Beens. we bake them in the ground by diging a big hole in the ground and keeping a hard wood fire in it all day. after the beens are parboyled they are put in a big Sheat Iron

⁸ The CSS Virginia (the rebuilt union ship Merrimack) was destroyed by her confederate Captain because the Union troops had captured Norfolk and the ship was not seaworthy enough to escape via the Atlantic and had too deep a draft for a river escape.