

Newbern N.C,
March 17th 1863

Dear Friends,

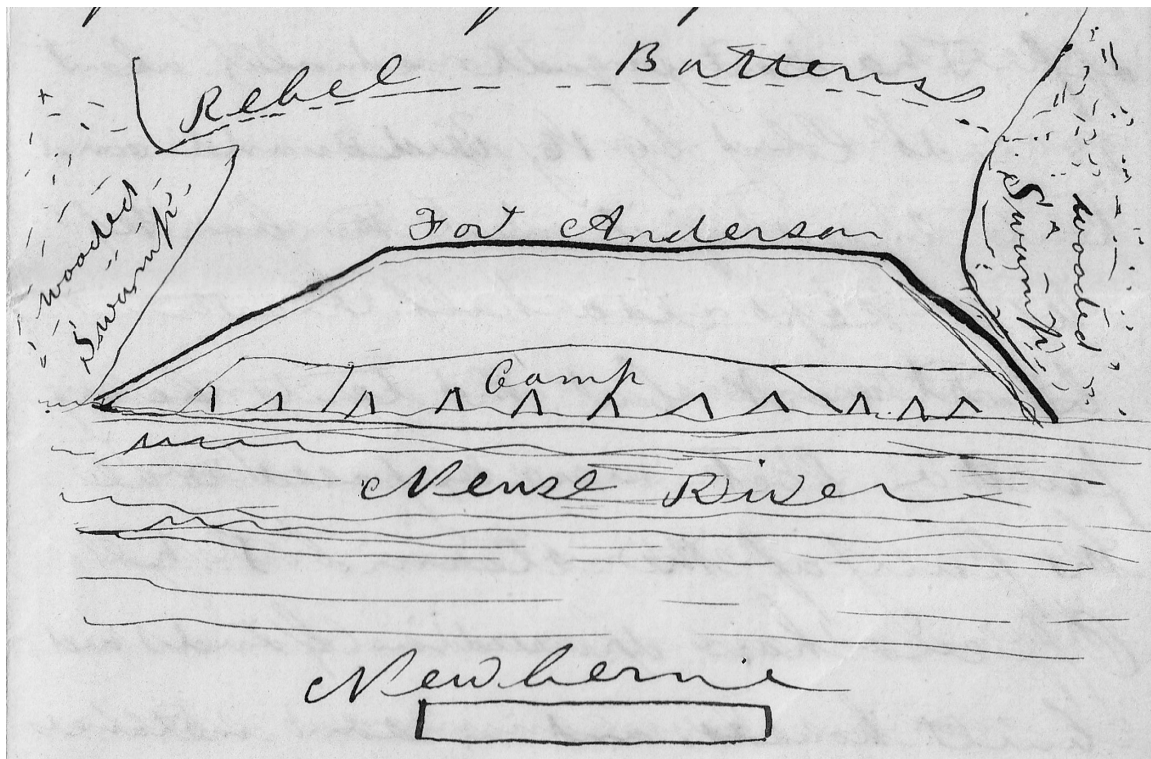
I received two letters from you the 14th and 3 papers yesterday containing a handkerchief. The towels were received several days ago, for all of which accept my thanks.

Lib asks me in her letter if I remember the 14th of March 1861. I don't remember what transpired on that day, but I do remember distinctly the occurrences of March 14th 1863. Newbern was taken by our troop's on the 14th of March 1862 and it was proposed to celebrate the anniversary of that day by the soldiers with great rejoicing and all preparations were made accordingly but it always takes two to make a bargain, and the Rebels proposed to retake Newbern as their part of the celebration. What they did on the other side of the river I don't know, only I know that they did not take the city and the fighting was several miles back from the river and we did not hear much of it. But I know what happened on our side for as you are aware we are on the East bank of the Neuse just opposite Newbern.

About daybreak of the 14th we were roused from our sleep by the roar of musketry on our Picket lines and soon the men were seen falling back on the fort in quick time, but in good order firing as they came and then the rumbling of artillery wagons broke on the ear and we knew full well that the "Philistines were upon us." In the dim gray light of the morning they came down the road filed off right and left in the field and planted their batteries. We had no guns, nothing but our rifles, and it would not pay to shoot with them, and so, very coolly, they took their position only a hundred rods from our Fort. We watched them till they were all ready and with the first flash from their guns, we dodged down behind our bent works, not a second too soon, for the first shell came right over our company and striking a post, burst into a thousand pieces throwing sand and splinters all over us. No one was hurt but it was a great wonder Court Cooper, Cunningham, and myself were standing close to the post but it did not disturb us in the least. Then another gun opened on us and another and we had a great music for awhile but all of a sudden the firing ceased and a flag of truce came down. The Col. went out to meet him, and was told that Newbern was to be taken that day, and that we had better surrender for we could not hold out against their force. Thirty minutes was given us to consider on it. Look at our position. Not a single piece of artillery in our fort. Every gunboat gone but one, and she aground over near Newbern. No chance of reinforcements under two hours and we with only 300 men. While the Rebs with Pettigrew's Brigade of 3000 men and 18 pieces of artillery were ready to attack. The enemy before us, the river behind us, there was no retreating, no falling back. The 92nd was fairly cornered. Our fort is built of logs and sand, with a deep ditch around it, we tore up the bridge over the ditch, barricaded the gate way and when the flag of truce came for an answer. The Col told him "he couldn't see the point."

In hot haste the officer rode back to his men. Their bugles sounded the attack. The 92nd sank behind their breast works, each man grasping his gun in grim silence, and 12 guns opened on the doomed fort. Ah such a shower of shot and shell

you never imagined and not a man killed, only 3 wounded and they slightly and this was kept up for two and a half hours without intermission and we never fired a shot in return. But by this time some gunboats got here and our friends left us as soon as they commenced shelling in earnest. I cannot tell why the rebel did not charge on the Fort with their infantry. They had 10 men to our one and could have walked right in, in spite of us but their loss would have been great for the 92nd had nothing to choose but victory or death. There was no such thing as running away. The following diagram will give you a faint idea of our position.



You will notice that both flanks of the fort extend to the swamp and there is no getting in only in front, and this was all that saved us for the Rebs couldn't plant their batteries to get a cross fire on us, no how. (The fort you will observe is not in proportion to the rest of the plan as I wish to show it on a little larger scale) The river is about one mile wide. The rebel batteries were 50 or a 100 rods off. The Fort is quite small, about 25 rods long by 16 wide and our tents inside of it near the bank. We kept close under the breastwork but the tents being further back were exposed to all the fury of the storm. The Officers have drawn in boards and built houses and in some instances have torn down small houses and drawn them to camp and put them up again, and we had quite a little village of houses and tents with many small oak trees and some very large fine ones, but you would laugh to see the camp now. Every tent and house riddled with shot and shell. Two large tents were knocked down and taking fire burnt up with all their contents. Ever and anon a shell would explode in a tent or house tearing every thing to pieces. The Col.'s house had

114 holes through it, large and small. Whole charges of grape crashed through the trees bringing down their limbs as the frost does the leaves. A tall pine was cut down by a solid shot and fell with a tremendous crash on the tents. Two horses in the stable were killed and the Dr.'s saddle smashed up. A solid shot struck the chimney of my tent and knocked it endways. A charge of grape came into our tent, tore my knapsack and cut our blankets badly and took them partly out of the tent. Our shirts and drawers hanging on the line in the tent were wonderfully cut up. We found grape shot in our bed, and pieces of shell all around, while our tent was admirably adapted for the Daugarian business, from the number of skylights and sidelights in it. Some had their knapsacks burnt up. Others were struck by shells and completely emptied of everything. In fact it was laughable to see how things were smashed up. Dishes, cups, Dr.'s stores, supplies all gone to ruin. It was a perfect rain of shot and shell and why there were not more killed I cannot tell. Occasionally a heavy shot would strike the works and although the bank is very thick and solid it would actually shake it. But the fun of the thing was when a large shell would strike the embankment and burst, then the sand would fly over us, by the bushel and we would get up and shake it off, and wait for the next one. After all there was not much fun about it for we didn't know but what every shot was going to knock a splinter off a post and kill some of us. Then again we expected a charge by the infantry and if they had come we could not have laid behind our works, but should have stood up to meet them and then something would have happened "I reckon"

But "what is good to give is good to take" and when the Old Gun Boat Hunchback began to plant her heavy shells up among their batteries, we were well satisfied. Then other boats commenced shelling and all their shells passed over our camp, or nearly all, and what with friends and enemies we had shelling enough to satisfy the most inveterate lover of artillery firing. After awhile the enemy withdrew, and about this time the 85th N.Y. arrived on our side to help us and the danger was past. At dark the Rebs made good their retreat having as we afterward learned lost several men killed and wounded. They killed 3 of their own men by the bursting of one of their pieces and one of our shells killed 3 and wounded 14 more. We had 3 wounded and 3 taken prisoners, while on picket. Sergt. Scott of Hermon is among the prisoners. None of the De Kalb boys hurt.

The firing of the rebels was splendid. One could not but admire it. If they took a notion to cut down a tree, down it came: and their shells burst just where they wanted them to. It would have done you good to see them, but nevertheless I was perfectly willing they should stop, and in fact if I could have had my way I would have stopped it before it began for this laying on the ground two hours with shells bursting 4 feet above you, and grape and canister howling around, by way of variety don't suit me exactly.

I reckon they won't come again soon for we have our Gunboats on hand now, and we have two guns mounted on our fort, and they dread our gunboats more than anything else.

Today it is warm and pleasant. The Dr. has finished his garden in front of the fort and has sowed his onions and lettuce and other garden seeds. I really hope that they won't be disturbed.

I have been on picket and must clean up my gun and therefore shall not write much more at present but will try and answer your letters soon.

With thankful heart I recognize the hand of God in the preservation of my life through another battle and render unto Him thanksgiving and praise. Ever trusting in Him I remain

Yours as ever

John