

David's Island Nov. 28th 1864

To Mother and Lib,

Your very practical letter came to hand as is duty bound and was received by your humble Sergt with pleasure and I must say of him that he arose from the perusal of said epistle with exalted views of the intellectual capacity of its author. Perhaps he would have answered in the same strain if he had been possessed of an education or of talents that would have permitted him to do it, but judging himself not equal to the task he proposes to confine himself to sober prose.

The writer of this Epistle is pleased to hear of the success of his friend Frank (B. F. Drury) and he begs leave to present his compliments to the Dr. & Lady, and hopes they will ever persevere in their laudable attempts to increase the population of this terrestrial ball etc.

Yesterday was a great day for David's Island, for we had a Thanksgiving Dinner. You can imagine there was some work to do to feed so many men on Turkey and pies but it was done and well done too.

The fowls came to the Island all picked and we had to clean, stuff and bake them. Our kitchen had 90 turkeys and chickens for its share and the other three kitchens had each more than we. The large ovens in the Government Bakery were all given up to roast them and all one day and night turkeys, geese, ducks and chickens were marching with well stuffed bellies and drooping wings into that silent oven from whence no turkey ever returns unbaked. Never a shriek or a groan uttered they, but as if fully conscious of the fact that they were giving up their lives for their country's good, they submitted without a murmur. At 2 p.m. on the eventful 27th the doors of the mess halls opened and hundreds of hungry soldiers were let loose upon hundreds of fowls, pies, bread, butter, apple sauce, mashed potatoes and a mug of cider for each. Terribly raged the battle for a full half hour, never a man faltered or flinched in the least, all that human beings could do was done; but all in vain. They were obliged to retreat and leave turkey masters of the field. The next morning at breakfast the attack was commenced again but turkey was not so easily vanished and one can still find "turkeys" in sundry places in said mess-hall that have not yet succumbed to their inevitable fate. Of course every soldier is very grateful for these favors and beyond all doubt the soldiers' friends at home will also join in expressing their gratitude to the noble and generous donors.

"Long may they wave."

But it is the day after Thanksgiving, a warm, sunny, hazy, smoky, dreamy, Indian summer kind of a day. Out on the sound the white sails of the schooners flap idly in the slight breeze and the vessels move slowly and solemnly along like a vast funeral procession. The water is still and smooth and calm and hundreds of gulls are sailing and wheeling around so easily, so lazily and seem to be enjoying themselves so happily that one could almost wish himself a gull. (But supper must be got ready now)

29th

I must not forget to tell of the good dinner that we had in the kitchen. Apple, pumpkin, mince and other pie, all kind of fowls. Cider and apples and in fact whatever we wanted. I must acknowledge that I did not expect one year ago now I should be spending my next Thanksgiving in a hospital but I am very thankful that my life has been spared to spend it anywhere.

The year that is past has certainly not been one of great immunity from suffering or sorrow to me, but never has a Thanksgiving passed on which I have had more reason to be thankful than the present. If my memory serves me, it was just one year ago today that I went to Potsdam to enlist. Little I knew then what a year would bring forth!!

But it is will, God's will be done and not ours, and our sorrow is not unmixed with gladness, for we mourn not as those without hope.

Well today is like yesterday calm and smoky, very different weather I imagine from what you are getting up in Old St. Lawrence for I'll warrant it is cold enough to suit anyone there now and I should wonder if you had some snow there too. You received my last letter with 3 cents due on it, I presume, and the reason is because the Post Office is out of stamps. I will have to send this one the same way, but if I can find a stamp I will certainly put one on. I guess you may send me 6 or 8 of them.

My best respects to Mr. Hurlburt and Lady and for that matter to the whole of you and with that for the concluding sentiment I bid you good day.

John