

“My Dear Miss Mollie”
The letters of Capt. Richard Henry Parker, Jr.
32nd Regiment North Carolina Troops
Daniel’s Brigade, Rodes’ Division, army of northern Virginia

To Mary “Mollie” Lewis Burwell
Oakland
Near Kittrell’s Depot
Granville County, North Carolina
- transcribed by Rick Britton-

-Introduction-
By Mary Scott Parker Blake

Some of the war-time letters of my grandfather, Richard Henry Parker, Jr., survived the vicissitudes of the century and more that has elapsed since they were written. Passed on from one family member to another, a string-tied cardboard box finally came into my keeping. Untying the string and lifting the cover released a faintly musty smell. There was a rather dilapidated scrapbook, bulging with snapshots, newspaper clippings and a few frayed one hundred dollar bills in Confederate scrip. The letters, however, were carefully tied with a narrow satin ribbon rendered colorless by time...

[From an earlier type-written transcription. The original has not been located]

Camp near Kinston NC
Feb 18 1863

My dear Miss Mollie,

I had the pleasure of receiving your kind note on yesterday and was delighted to have you comply so soon to my request. ...[section left out by transcriber]

The day Mr. Smith left out camp we marched through the snow for this place and being three days on the road all suffered terribly The first day after the troops had camped for the night I rode [to?] an old man’s house some three or four miles off and he treated me very kindly giving me an elegant supper and other comforts for the night which quite spoiled me as it was the first time I had slept in a house for nearly a year so I did not fare so very badly. This privilege was allowed me because I had been sick, the surgeon thinking it very imprudent of me to leave Goldsboro but I had never yet been left behind so was unwilling to remain. This is the dullest place we have ever been to yet. Everybody has left the town and there is no one to be seen except soldiers. I get so tired of them that it is enough to kill one. While stationed at Drewry’s Bluff we had a delightful time as nearly every week there was a party given by some of the citizens and the officers gave several which were largely attended by the ladies but Oh! How different here. It is enough to give one the blues.

Your nice present did much in the way of protecting my next from the cold during the march and was particularly nice just then as I was suffering with sore throat. Please write very soon. Goodnight

Your devoted friend

Direct to Kinston.

In Camp Sunday March 1st [1863]

After spending an awful dull day, about sunset the postman handed me your very acceptable letter. I had been wondering all day if you would not write about this time, and at the same time almost afraid to receive it, because I was afraid you would say what would not be agreeable for me to hear, and so much so that I commenced and read it backwards. You have no doubt experienced such a feeling better felt, than described.

You ought to understand why I tried to forget you, not that you were not a friend, but because you were not such a friend as was my wish for you to be; indeed, the word friend is a very indefinite expression, and one I never did much admire as it is used to express to many different meanings. There are very few persons I regard as friends, while others, you perhaps, may consider nearly all those that have been at all intimate with you as friends, but hope the expression with you does not imply such friendship. You seem to think I have found another that is more than a friend. There is not one that I consider so, but cannot speak for any one else. Miss Mollie I would not intentionally tell you an untruth, therefore think it rather unkind in you to doubt what I really mean.

The unfinished sentence in you letter might be guessed a hundred different things. I have guessed several, some that pleased me, and others that did not so intend to make you tell me when we meet which will not be very long unless something occurs which cannot be now foretold.

Oh! What would I give to have the pleasure of speaking this evening with you instead of this miserable lonely camp but such is impossible therefore must be content with the hope soon to have that long looked for pleasure. I have long wished to pay you a visit but circumstances over which I had no control has prevented, since the war I have never left the regiment except on duty for more than a day. The Col has always objected when I talked about a furlough, but now he has promised that I should have one if Genl Hill says so, and should I be so fortunate intend to divide it between you and my sister who is in Oxford, and unless you get mad with me will share the larger portion with you.

To-day somehow has been more lonely than usual, and until evening when you letter reached me I had been suffering terribly with the blues, had thought frequently of you, and had many doubts & fears to arise in my mind. The Chaplain gave us quite a good Sermon, can't remember the text, and during the whole service was thinking of you.

Oh! I came near forgetting to tell you of a ball or rather dancing party we had in Kinston the other evening, it was quite a gay affair; indeed I had no idea that there were so many young ladies in the place. I did not know any of them before, but was introduced to several and had only a dancing acquaintance.

Bev spent night before last with me, quite unexpectedly to me. I was truly glad to see him; he has probably told you about it. Did he deliver my message? Would have written but he was here such a Short time that it was impossible. Liz he tells me is going to be married to Mr. Smith. I would give anything to see her for a short while that I might tease her about him Mr. Smith is the reason she has not written me recently.

[Across the top of first page] You must write me when the affair is to come off. Bev says it is certainly to be soon. I would like to be there.

[Up the left-hand side of first page] You ought to know I would not shoe one of your letters. Please do not call me soldier friend. Please write very, very, soon. Devotedly
Yours R H P

In Camp near Kinston
Mar 19th 1863

My dear Miss Mollie,

I arrived at Camp last night, and was truly glad to find your letter awaiting my return, while absent frequently wondered if you would give me that pleasure on my return to Camp, that is should I be spared to return. We have been very near Newbern almost in sight of the town, and had one small fight with the enemy; we ran them inside their fortifications, capturing several. Our force was about 3000 and their about 10 or 12000. We offered them fight, but they declined, and retired within their breast works. Newbern is well fortified so Genl Hill thought it prudent not to attack the town with so small a force at present. So after a fatiguing trip of about ten days we are again at Kingston.

You would laugh to see Dr. Butt and myself cooking on the march. We were without tents, and nothing but the ground to sleep upon, but I have now gotten quite used to it, so much so that it does not give me a bad cold. I often thought of you, and wished that instead could be with you, but then if it is necessary for our independence I Cheerfully Submit, and hope for a better future.

Should nothing happen more than I can foresee, will pay you a visit early in April, and can assure you that I look to it with the greatest delight, and sincerely hope we may not be disappointed, for there is nothing that will give so much real pleasure.

Tonight the colonel and several other officers have gone to Kingston to serenade some ladies. They invited me to go with them but have declined preferring to spend the time in writing to one whom I feel decidedly more interested in, and one I hope that feels more than friendship for me. I did not fall in love with any of the ladies at the party, & hope you did not think so.

Why do you think I would not recognize you? Indeed I would know you wherever we might meet. You did not tell me when Liz and Mr. Smith were going to be married. I would like happen along about that time. Give my love to Liz and tell her to write me all about it.

You must excuse this, as it is so cold in my tent, that I can scarcely hold a pen, but will send it anyway, because you might not know why I have not written before. My next will be longer and neater. Good night.

Sincerely & Devotedly yours
R H Parker

Blount Hall Pitt Co NC
March 31st [1863]

My dear Miss Mollie,

I was much delighted last evening on our Postman arriving from Kinston to get your letter for there is nothing that gives me half so much pleasure as to receive even the shortest message or note from you.

We are in an awfully dreary wet country, indeed it is enough to kill one; but there is one consolation we will not remain here long as we are marching in the direction of Washington, and will no doubt before you receive this be again after the _____[?] Yankees. Genl Hill has now a force of several thousand and does not intend to let them have much peace in North Carolina.

So soon as the result of this operation is decided I will most probably get a leave of absence, just now no one is permitted to leave and indeed I would not wish to now that we are expecting to fight every day.

I sincerely hope you _____[?] may never fall in the hands of the Yankees, as wherever they go houses are burnt and every thing else destroyed that comes within their reach There is not three houses left between Kinston and Newbern, a country that was once beautiful now completely devastated.

Do not think dear Miss Mollie that I do not intend to visit you should any thing happen to prevent during the early part of the month, for you know the uncertainty of military life, but should I not be able to get a leave then, will take the very first opportunity. I write this not that I do not expect to come, but do not want you to be too certain, as I fear it will be several days before the result of this trip is decided. So please should such occur, do not get mad and think it my fault, for no effort of mine shall be spared.

I would give any thing to be with you now. I feel more attached to you than any one else on earth, and will do any thing to gain the love of one I love more than all others.

I have no other way of writing than a pencil, so I took [Up left-hand side] several envelopes and directed them before leaving Camp so that I might write with a pencil at any time.

[Across the top of the first page] Write immediately and direct to Kinston yet. Devotedly
Yours R H P

April 12 [1863]

Since writing the enclosed with pencil, dear Miss Mollie, and not having an opportunity of mailing it. I have succeeded in getting a little more paper and some ink, which is quite acceptable as it is my greatest pleasure to write to you whenever I can, and look with the greatest anxiety for letters from you. It has now been a long time since receiving one but know it is not your fault; but please write as often as you can. Excuse the disconnected way which I have to write, as frequently have to stop for something, and the enemy keep such a constant shelling at out Camp that we have to be constantly on the look out, or "somebody may get hurt" They were at it nearly all last night and this morning since writing this there had been one constant roar, and so it is from the one day to another and when it is to end I cannot tell. Soon tho' for a better future, and that the time is not far distant when we can see each other once more.

Tell Liz not to get married until I can get there to see the fun, as I never saw her married but once. I will smile as often as possible and shall look anxiously for a letter from the one dearest to me.

Affectionately Adieu
R.H.P.

32nd NC Regiment
Kinston May 11th 1863

After awfully trying and disagreeable marching we are again at Kinston, we left Greenville on the 28th of last month and arrived here on the 2nd of May only remained two days when we again marched on Newbern, and destroyed a rail road the Yankees had recently built, and brought back about 80 persons who had been expelled from the limits of Newbern because they would not take the oath of allegiance to the Yankee Government. They seemed to be very thankful for our assistance, and gave us many nice things to eat such as oranges cake &c. there are among the number several very pretty young ladies, but I did not fall in love with them, as there was an absent one who had long since won my highest esteem, and one that I think sweeter than all others. To-night there is to be a dance given by the officers of Daniels Brigade to the ladies. I do not think of going as my throat is so awfully sore that it is difficult for me to swallow.

Your letter dated the 18th April only was received last evening. I had almost begun to think you had forgotten me or [was?] mad about something; indeed I was much distressed to think you had not written, as I wrote two or three times while in front of Washington, but how delighted I felt when your dear sweet letter was handed me last evening. It cannot be possible for you to be half so much delighted at any thing, as to experience the joy a letter from you gives me, more particularly when it has been such a long interval.

We are again in our tents, and everything seems quiet, therefore should it continue so for a few days longer I hope to be able to get a leave of absence, and visit you, but it is so uncertain that I hate almost to mention it, as you may be disappointed again. I would not be surprised if we were ordered to Virginia at any time as we have been expecting it

for some days. What an awful fight we have had at Fredericksburg. My sister has just written me that both relatives we had in fight were wounded. It has been a dearly bought tho' glorious victory to our arms.

[Across the top of two pages] I should not have waited this long before writing you, but only got into Camp on Saturday night, and since leaving Greenville had no possible way of writing so you must not be angry with me.

To-day is so delightful, oh! What would I give to be with you, what a nice ride we could take. It makes me so sad to think we are doomed to be thus separated. I have a great many things to tell you, when I come, many that will wait until we can be together, as it will be so much more pleasant to tell them _____[?].

I must bid you adieu as the regiment is forming to march about two miles to witness a sad spectacle. It is to see two men shot to death for deserting while before the enemy. They deserted from the 32nd regiment while we were before Washington. All the troops are ordered to witness the execution at 12 o'clock to-day.

[Up the left-handed side of the first page] I am not mad at your not writing me before because your reasons are very good, but write now as soon as you get this, and direct to Kinston, and always put Daniels Brigade so that wherever we may go the letters will be forwarded. Yours Sincerely and devotedly R H P

Tuesday May 26 '63

My dear Miss Mollie,

I wrote you the day after getting here, and the next day received your very welcome letter which was sent from Kinston and you can feel assured that nothing could afford me more pleasure. I was sick in bed, and to-day am only able sit up for the first day in the last five. I have that bilious fever which is no doubt the effects of the Swamps of Eastern Carolina. I am now getting better and hope soon to be able to return to duty. I would like much to have received _____[?] you speak of, but appreciate your kindness quite as much tho' it had been received, and should attach all the blame to Mr. Smith. So you can tell him that if he does not mind I shall object to his having my cousin and my objections might have some weight in that matter as she used to think considerably about what I said in regards to such matters. Tell him I only mention this to make him learn to do better the next time. Dr. Butt & myself looked for him several days while at Kinston, hoping he would come that we might have an opportunity of sending some extra baggage to Oxford as I knew he would willingly take charge of it for us. The Drs brother is dear, he was a nice fellow.

The Yankees remain quiet on the other side of the River, and I think the next attack will be made by Genl Lee, at least that seems to be the general opinion. Their pickets and ours are very friendly, frequently exchanging newspapers and Tobacco for coffee. Daniels' Brigade is attached to Jackson's old Corps, and I hope they may emulate the many victories of that gallant old Chieftain.

I wish it was possible to give you some idea when it would be in my power to visit you but cannot therefore will not mention any probable time, hoping tho' some day

to take you all by surprise. Should we be victorious at Vicksburg I think the Yankee Army will be pretty badly used up for the present but on the other hand should they succeed in capturing it our Cause will then receive the saddest blow of all. The news from that quarter is quite cheering to-day.

I wish something would destroy the whole Yankee Army, that we could once more return quietly to our homes, but I can see no end to this war, and almost believe it will last for many more years.

You must write to me often as it takes letters a long time to reach here.

I would write more but feel too unwell.

Adieu
Sincerely & Devotedly yours
R H P

32 Reg. N C Troops
Daniels Brigade
Rhodes Division Army N Va
June 10th 1863

My dearest Miss Mollie,

We are now near Culpepper Court House. I have been trying to get time to write before but could not, and now we are resting in line of battle expecting an order to advance every moment. The enemy are only about two miles off.

Yesterday there was quite a heavy Cavalry fight here we had about 8000, and the Yankees a much larger force. We captured & killed a number of the enemy, and I think they damaged us nearly as much, tho' have not heard the estimate yet. We were marched on the battle field but were not engaged. I saw the body of Col Sol Williams being brought off lying across a horse. Oh I did feel so very sorry for his brother who was with our Regiment, then and could not leave to take care of it and his _____ [?] wife oh how I pity her.

His regiment was surrounded, when he made a charge and cut the way through but poor Col Sol was shot through the head, and instantly killed. Write to me and direct as my letter is headed. I will write when I can.

Adieu. Your much devoted
R H Parker

[Written along left-hand side:] Tomorrow I suppose another event in Liz _____ [?] life takes place. I wish her all _____ [?] pleasure.