

Thomas Owen's Diary

29 April–18 May 1864

April 29th 1864 Friday

Orders to march. Left winter camp¹ at 7½ A.M. Moved canvas pontons to Kelly's Ford, where we bridged the Rappahannock for Gregg's division of cavalry to cross on. Finished building at 11½ P.M. Cavalry crossed in the afternoon. Moved companies over on the west side of the river. Lay down for the night.

April 30th 1864 Saturday²

Turned out at daylight and took up bridge. Took breakfast. Loaded wagons and moved to Paoli Mills³ and camped. Put up tents. All done about noon. Received orders to report to winter camp for muster. Started on foot after dinner for the old camp. Arrived there and was mustered as second lieutenant at 4½ P.M. Stayed in old tent all night.

May 1st 1864 Sunday

Came back from old camp this morning. Company lay in camp all day.

May 2nd 1864 Monday

Lay in camp today. At work on payrolls, clothing rolls, etc. Heavy squall came up at 5 P.M. Heavy winds, plenty of dust, until the rain began to fall, and then we had a soaking in our thin shelter tent.

May 3rd 1864 Tuesday

Moved at 7 A.M. with train to Richardsville⁴ and camped about noon in pine woods. Worked on clothing rolls in afternoon. Fine weather.

May 4th 1864 Wednesday

Broke camp at 11 P.M. last night and took the road to Ely's Ford. On the road until daylight when we arrived at the ford and immediately commenced laying bridge, which we finished in an hour and a half. Gregg's cavalry forded the river before we laid the bridge. As soon as we finish[ed], the 2d Corps commenced crossing. Took breakfast at 9¼. Commenced taking up bridge and, in our train, started for Chancellorsville, where we arrived at 2½ P.M. and stopped for the night.

May 5th 1864 Thursday

March this A.M. at 7 A.M. towards the front. Passed the Leak House.⁵ Followed a train all day that moved very slow. Towards night received orders to rightabout and at dark were at Chancellorsville.

May 6th 1864 Friday

Received orders last night to report to the front at daylight. At 10 P.M. started with 3 days' rations in hav[er]sacks but unfortunate for the commissary, the wagon contain[ing] mess chest was left to _____. At daylight, went into the rifle pits just to the left of the Plank Road where our men had _____ from just before. Lay in pits until about noon. Then went to work throwing up traverse.⁶ Then [in] rifle pits until night. Went back to pits and soon ordered to the right to fill pits in rear of [New] Jersey Brigade which had broke[n].⁷

May 7th 1864 [Saturday]

Lay in rifle pits all night. We moved at about 10½ A.M. thinking the enemy coming. About dark last night, the [New] Jersey Brigade of the +⁸ broke and came in over the pits, where they again rallied. Just after daylight were relieved from the pits and went just in rear of General Warren[']s headquarters, where we lay until sundown. Then started for Chancellorsville.

May 8th 1864 Sunday

Arrived at Chancellorsville about midnight. Lay down near the remains of the old tavern⁹ until 4 A.M. when were called up. Took breakfast. The rest of the companies left us here. Company C came up with canvas train and we started on the Fredericksburg Pike towards that place. Turned to the right on the Mine Road to the Plank. Then to the left down Plank to Spotsylvania Road. Followed that several miles. Turned back very quick. Came back to the Plank and towards Chancellorsville as far as the Mine Road. Lay there until dark and started up the Plank.¹⁰ Then turned to the left and went over the Ny River to Piney Branch Church, where we arrived just before day. Lay down until morning. Wounded went to Fredericksburg.

May 9th 1864 Monday

Lay by the roadside all day in pine grove. A good rest. Fighting heavy.

May 10th 1864 Sunday

Lay in camp today. Company C went with their train to Po River and bridged it. Heavy firing to the left of us. News today that Butler

is in Petersburg and advancing on Richmond.¹¹ Sherman is driving the enemy.¹² At sundown, fell in with arms, etc. Moved train in the [] which is full of supply and ammunition _____.

May 11th 1864 Wednesday

Was rear guard for all the trains on this road last night. Came to the Plank where we found the train about 1 A.M. and lay down for the night. Lay around all day. Rather warm fight continues. Towards night heavy shower. I was sent out on picket with 40 men from each company at dusk. Remained until 10½ P.M. and returned to camp wet through.

May 12th 1864 Thursday

Firing commenced before light this morning. Heavy cannonading all day. Some rain. The fight is southeast of us and southwest of Fredericksburg. We lay with the reserve artillery. Towards night received orders to move from Bensons to Zoan Church on the Fredericksburg Pike.

May 13th 1864 Friday

Was on the road all night, it being blocked up with trains ahead. A little after daylight went into camp near Zoan Church. Lay still all day. Slept. Some reports says we have taken Richmond. No fighting today. Enemy reported gone. Still continues wet. Teams went yesterday to Belle Plain after forage. Roads bad.

May 14th 1864 Saturday

Cloudy. Order from General Meade stating we have taken, in the late fight, 8,000 prisoners, 22 stands colors, 18 pieces artillery. Broke camp about 8 A.M. Moved below Salem Church, a distance of two or three miles. Saw Colonel Tracey¹³ of the 109th [New York, Volunteer Infantry Regiment] in the afternoon. Likewise viewed others of that regiment. Pleasant shower towards night.

May 15th 1864 Sunday

Broke camp at 10 A.M. Moved to Fredericksburg. Camped just south of Marye's Heights.¹⁴ Enemy reported in our rear. Trains all moving to this city. Went down to the river at night and got some fish of Company G, they being in charge of the bridge at the lower part of the city. Fredericksburg presents a pleasing sight from the surrounding hills.

May 16th 1864 Monday

Lay in camp at Fredericksburg all day. Little going on of interest. A depot of supplies is open at Belle Plain and the Army is now getting forage and rations from the place. Colonel Schriver¹⁵ is

military governor of Fredericksburg. General Benham is at Belle Plain with a detachment of the 15th New York. Major Ford¹⁶ was here today. Just came from Washington.

May 17th 1864 Tuesday

Breakfast at 5 A.M. Orders to move to the front. Broke camp early and marched to General Meade's headquarters near Anderson House close to the Ny River.¹⁷ Reserve Artillery attached to corps and sent to the front.

May 18th 1864 Wednesday

Broke camp very early and moved 2 miles towards the right of our line. Quite a stir among hospitals, etc. Some sharp fighting in the early part of the day. Company built corduroy bridge over swamp and came back to same camp we left this morning. All hospitals, etc., go back to same camp.

NOTES TO DIARY

1. Rappahannock Station, Virginia.
2. For operations of the Fiftieth New York Volunteer Engineer Regiment and Company I at the battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House, see pages 303–316 in Part I, Volume 36, Series I, of War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901) (hereafter referred to as *Official Records, Army*).
3. Paoli Mills is southwest of Kelly's Ford on Map 3, Plate 44, in War Department, *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891–1895) (hereafter referred to as *Official Atlas*).
4. Richardsville, Virginia, which is southwest of Ellis Ford, can also be found on the map cited in the annotation above.
5. The Leak House could not be located on the various maps consulted.
6. A traverse is a wall of dirt erected to safeguard men in a rifle pit from enfilading fire. Henry L. Scott, *Military Dictionary* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1861), p. 625; Philip Babcock Grove, editor in chief, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company, Publishers, 1961), p. 2433; and Robert I. Alotta, *A Glossary of Fortification Terms as They Relate to Historic Old Fort Mifflin* (Philadelphia: The Shackamaxon Society, Inc., 1972).
7. Lieutenant Colonel Ira Spaulding reported that on 6 May 1864 “just before dark . . . the enemy succeeded in flanking and breaking a division of the Sixth Corps on our front and right and drove them behind the second line” of rifle pits. Confederate General Jubal A. Early's men attacked Horatio G. Wright's First Division of the Sixth Corps on its rear and flank. One brigade, commanded by Alexander Shaler, sustained the brunt of the attack with the loss of many men killed, wounded, and captured. The attack and resulting confusion caused panic within the other brigades of the division and generally throughout the Sixth Corps. The First Brigade of Wright's Division, commanded by Colonel Henry W. Brown, comprised the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Tenth, and Fifteenth New Jersey volunteer infantry regiments. Apparently, some soldiers from this New Jersey Brigade panicked and ran pell-mell back to the rifle pits occupied by Owen and his men. Officers of the Sixth Corps rallied their men, the Confederates quit the attack, and darkness ended the conflict. *Official Records, Army*, Series I, Volume 36, Part I, pp. 11 and 307; J.H. Stine, *History of the Army of the Potomac: The Wilderness Campaign* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Stackpole Company, 1960), pp. 440–450; Camille Baquet, *History of the First Brigade, New Jersey Volunteers from 1861 to 1865* (Trenton, New Jersey: MacCrellish and Quigley, State Printers, 1910), pp. 116–118; and Alanson A. Haines, *The History of the Fifteenth Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers* (New York: Jenkins and Thomas, Printers, 1883), pp. 146–153.

8. During the Civil War, the various Union Army Corps adopted designating symbols which were sewn or attached to their headgear. The New Jersey Brigade belonged to the Sixth Corps, whose first symbol or corps badge was the St. Andrew's Cross. Later, the corps switched its badge to the George's Cross. Thus, Owen's inclusion of + is a reference to the Sixth Corps. John D. Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee or the Unwritten Story of Army Life* (Boston: George M. Smith and Company, 1887), pp. 254–268.
9. Most likely, Owen slept near the remains of the Chancellor House at Chancellorsville. The headquarters of Joseph Hooker during the Battle of Chancellorsville, the Chancellor House later burned. Joseph P. Cullen, *Where a Hundred Thousand Fell: The Battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 29.
10. For an understanding of the road network in the Wilderness-Spotsylvania area, see *Official Atlas*, especially Map 1, Plate 41; Map 3, Plate 55; Map 1, Plate 81; Map 1, Plate 91; and Map 1, Plate 96. See also Cullen, *Where a Hundred Thousand Fell*.
11. When the 1864 Union campaign began, Major Benjamin F. Butler, Commander of the Army of the James, began to move north and threaten Richmond and its communications with the southern states. Experiencing some initial success including the seizure of City Point, Virginia, Butler allowed his army to be bottled up at Bermuda Hundreds on the south side of the James River by a smaller Confederate force on 17 May 1864. Richard W. Lykes, *Petersburg Battlefields* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), pp. 2–3; and Mark M. Boatner, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1959), p. 61.
12. In early May of 1864, William T. Sherman's troops began an advance on the Confederate forces opposing him in the West. Sherman's movements resulted in the capture of Atlanta, Georgia, in September 1864. Boatner, *Civil War Dictionary*, p. 30.
13. Benjamin Franklin Tracey was colonel and commander of the 109th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment from 28 August 1862–17 May 1864 and received a Congressional Medal of Honor for his service at the Battle of the Wilderness. His regiment organized at Binghamton, New York, and mustered into federal service on 27 August 1862. Serving with the Middle Department and Department of Washington before joining the Army of the Potomac, it fought in numerous battles before mustering out on 4 June 1865. Possibly, Owen knew Colonel Tracey from New York or from association with him in the Army. Also, since Binghamton is not far from Owego, some of Owen's friends and neighbors may have enlisted in the regiment. Boatner, *Civil War Dictionary*, p. 845; and Frederick B. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Reprint, New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Publisher, 1959), Volume 3, p. 1448.
14. Marye's Heights is a ridge behind Fredericksburg, Virginia. In the Battle of Fredericksburg, 13 December 1862, hundreds of Union soldiers marched up Marye's Heights and forfeited their lives in an unsuccessful attempt to dislodge

Confederate forces from a virtually impregnable position at the top of the ridge. Cullen, *Where a Hundred Thousand Fell*, pp. 14–15 and 21.

15. Edmund Schriver, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy in 1833 and a Regular Army officer from 1833 until he resigned in 1846, received a commission as lieutenant colonel in the Eleventh U.S. Infantry at the beginning of the Civil War. During the war he served in various staff positions. He was commanding officer at Fredericksburg for some time and part of his correspondence appears in the *Official Records, Army*, especially Series I, Volume 36, Part II. After the war, Schriver remained in the Army and served as Inspector General twice before resigning in 1881. Dumas Malone, editor, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), Volume 8, p. 463.

16. Formerly serving as first sergeant in the Seventh New York State Militia at the beginning of the Civil War, George W. Ford mustered in as a captain in Company A of the Fiftieth New York Volunteer Engineer Regiment on 18 September 1861. Promoted to major on 9 April 1864, Ford resigned from the service on 25 March 1865 after receiving a brevet lieutenant colonelcy of volunteers dating from 1 August 1864. Frederick Phisterer, compiler, *New York in the War of the Rebellion 1861 to 1865* (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1912), p. 1679.

17. The “Anderson House” referred to by Owen was a farmhouse located about a mile and a half east and a little north of Spotsylvania Court House near the Ny River. Robert McAllister, *The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister*, edited by James I. Robertson (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1965), p. 424, fn. 23, and *Official Atlas*, Plate 55, Map 2.