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LETTERS OF A TEENAGE CONFEDERATE

edited by HENRY EUGENE STERKX
AND BROOKS THOMPSON

THE HISTORY of the Civil War is replete with many young men who patriotically went off to war hoping to make great contributions to their side. Some did not get a chance to prove themselves in battle. Many spent all of their time in camp where some became victims of disease rather than the enemy's bullets. Thus it was with Langdon Leslie Rumph.

Langdon Leslie Rumph was born December 6, 1844. He died August 16, 1861, at Warrington Navy Yard, Florida.¹ However, he left a record of his career in the "Perote Guards." This unit, composed mostly from students of the Perote Institute, became a part of the First Regiment Alabama Volunteers in February, 1861, at Fort Barrancas, Florida.² Langdon Leslie Rumph wrote home to his father, Dr. James David Rumph. Some of these letters have been preserved and are in the possession of the Misses Maybelle and Effel Rumph. The letters convey the hopes, attitudes and frustrations of a teenage boy during the Civil War, as well as a picture of conditions in northwest Florida.

Langdon L. Rumph to Dr. James David Rumph, Barrancas Barracks, Warrenton, Florida, March 10, 1861.

My dear Father,

Yours of the 5th Came safely to hand yesterday & I was glad to learn that all things at home, were getting along smooth & well. I also recd a letter from Aunt Em R by the mail dated the 2nd, all but grandmother she says, are well. We are all faring much better than at first. We get more & better food, which is about all Soldiers care for. I took a sail to day on a little skiff went near the U S Steamer Wyandotte in about 150 yds of Pickens & then out in the Gulf about 5 miles to where the other US Ships were at anchor, viz. the Brooklin, St Louis & Sabine, all are much larger [than] the Wyandotte & she carries 6. 64 pounds. When [we] were coming back, the wind began to rise & the green waves to roll. The boat came near dipping water 2 or 3 times. I be-

1. Louise F. Hays, typewritten appendix sent out to be attached to her book, *The Rumph and Frederick Families*, p. 4.
2. Edward Young McMorries, *History of the First Regiment, Alabama Volunteer Infantry, C.S.A.* (Montgomery, Ala., 1904), p. 13.

gan to feel kinded squally. No fight is apprehended now & all seem to be well pleased. However we have to work on our Sand batteries daily (Sundays not excepted). The Perote Battery is nearly completed, but the misfortune is we have to make defences & help move cannon, for other companies. A fine show this evening at drill all the companies were present, 640 men in a body. Numbered men we seen on the walls of Pickins looking at us. I must cut short this epistle as my candle is low. I hope this will find you all in good health.

Yours affectionately
L L Rumph

L. L. Rumph to Dr. James David Rumph, Perote Battery,
May 12, 1861.

Dear Father,

It is with the greatest pleasure that [I] undertake to reply to your kind favor, received some few days since. Times are pretty lively down here. A few days ago we came near having a fight. Two Steam Boats, The Louis & Keys laden with supplies for our troops were brought to by the Powhattan & Sabine. The Keys on attempting [to] get away from them was fired into by the Sabine. One ball across her bow and another across her stern. All this happened just beyond the reach of Ft McRee, had they been [nearer they] would certainly have been fired into & thus the battle commenced! had this been the case we were prepared to give them a warm salute. Whilst the scene above discribed [*sic*] was transpiring there was one man in our Company Dakes the gunner of my squad who was one of Walkers men in the Nicaraguan Expedition. He seemed almost frantic with delight. His countenance was lit up with savage joy. He seemed fairly rejoiced at the prospects for a fight & when the guns fired [it] would have done you good [to] have seen him run to his perilous post shouting with all his might. Gov A.B. Moore arrived here this morning at 8 am, Gen G P Beauregard is also reported to be here, and also that he advises Bragg to commence immediately upon a Floating Battery-after the fashion of the one at Charleston. You wished to know something about the Sand Batteries. They are 13 in number 10 completed 3 that [have] guns mounted but the protection for the relief is not done. We have plenty Mortars planted along the beach. The one that did the work at Sumpter [*sic*] is mounted & ready for action. As there is not more of importance I will close-I remain

Yours son
Langdon L. Rumph

I had the Feaver since I wrote to you but I have missed it 2 days now. If I am again attacked I will try and get a furlough for 20 days-Every one that stays in camp is required to do guard duty in the night-this you know will bring them on again. It would not be prudent for me to go to the hospital as they have the Measles there.

Langdon L. Rumph to Dr. James David Rumph, Perote Battery, May 25, 1861.

Not receiving a reply to my last I conclude, that by some mismanagement, it has never reached you. Times with us are very dull-the prospect for a battle being exceedingly poor, in fact but few of our officers, are of the opinion that there will be a battle. Col Clayton thinks that our regiment will be removed to some other point soon. The grounds taken for not anticipating a fight are that Bragg wont attack them as they have so strengthened the Fort with Sand Batteries in front that [it] would be an act of desperation to attack. Storming it would be folly as they have pivot guns on the island for 4 miles down-so as to rake down a storming parties by companies at a fire. And providing we did take it there would trible its value of government property destroyed, besides the immense loss of human beings-far more important than all the rest. Whilst on the other hand Brown knowing that he could never retake the Forts will not be so simple as to make the attempt. We have had good deal of sickness in our camp for the last few weeks. Dr. Billy Crossley has been very sick with chill & feaver nearly every man in the company that had any predisposition to them has had them. The Measles has surrounded our camp. We are looking for some of the younger boys to take them daily. If we should get them we will have a hard time with them, having no conveniences & exposed to all kinds of weather. Our tents not having covers form but poor protection to shelter us from rain. When you reply I want you to tell me what course to pursue should I take them. There was a report reached us today concerning a fight at Harpers Ferry Via, tis said that our side is again victorious, but that 1700 men were killed on both sides. I wish if you could find any one coming down here you would send me 2 pr. drawers 2 shirts & a pair or 2 of pants all as course as you can find. As my space is nearly out I must close

Your affectionate son
L L Rumph

Direct your next letters thus,
This is done that there
should not be so much confusion
about two Captains of the
Same names.

L L Rumph
 Company G 1st Regt Ala
 Vol
 Warrenton Fla

Langdon L. Rumph to Dr. James David Rumph, Perote Battery, June 16, 1861

Dear Father,

I was truly grateful at receiving your last letters a day or two ago. One of which dated May 25 had been delayed & this was how I concluded you had not answered my last letter. From your last I was glad to hear of such fine prospects for a crop & I do hope the seasons will continue for there is a short corn crop. I can but fear twill bring many a one to the grave by starvation. We will be moved tomorrow about 200 yards nearer Fort Barrancas so that all the Companies in the 1st regiment may occupy the same position they do in dress parade-the whole 1st Regiment encampment will embrace only about 15 or 20 acres. The day before yesterday was quite interesting one. Pickens fired a salute to a dead man (a Brig Genl I suppose as 11 cannon were fired off) & Gen Walker notwithstanding the long interval between fire and the flag flying at half mast thought they had opened fire upon us. A flying horseman was dispatched to our Camp & we were all commanded to be ready to return fire at any moment & the wildest excitement prevailed. I had obtained a short furlough & had rambled out into the country. I got plenty of Buttermilk & whortleberry tarts out there. This was you may be sure was very acceptable & eaten without ceremony as it is a very rare thing to have "extras" in camps. I anticipate another rich time tonight. I caught a gopher & we are going to have a *turtle* soup for supper. You said you had sent Brother C & myself some shirts & drawers -these we have never received you must send them either by some private hands or by express. I Padgett is now in Perote & we would like that you would send us some *pants* shirts & drawers by him also \$10 as it seems that we will never make another draw & I am about out of money. If we do draw shortly I will send the \$10 back to you. You advised that we should get a room if possible. We were & are now sleeping in the upstairs of the house near the batters but we will now have to leave it as Clayton is going to convert it into his office for he too will come with the rest of the regiment to this place. S H Dent adjutant says Clayton is trying to influence Genl Bragg to allow the 1st Regiment to go nearer home where it will not be so sickly as all agree we won't fight here.

One $\frac{1}{2}$ of our company are down with Diarhea & other diseases & the well ones come on guard 1 day on & 2 off. This with the drilling & other duty is apt to make them sick. I hope though Clayton will get us away for if we are not healthier we will have more conveniences & [not] pay so high for anything you buy-Chickens sell for 65 or 75 cents, hams 22 c pr lb. and everything else in proportion. I must now close. Brother C is well he received your favor yesterday. Tell Jimmy & Hohy howdy for me & that I wish I could see them.

Your son
Langdon Rumph

Langdon L. Rumph to Dr. James David Rumph, Camp Alabama, July 25, 1861

Dear Father,

Some two weeks ago I received your kind favor but being stretched out with measles I could not answer it. Brother CWR is just taking them. There are over 100 with them at the hospital. In all my life I never saw such a sickly time. Over 300 patients in the hospital, out of 90 men we never get out on parade more than 35 men,-so many sick in Camp & more will not go to hospital. A J Goens is very low now typhoid fever but little hope remains of his recovery. I got a letter from Aunt Em R today all well but Aunty who is suffering with a mental disorder. Intelligence of Beauregard's great achievements reached us yesterday. Pres. Davis telegraphed to Bragg to release all the prisoners-give all the soldiers holiday & fire a salute of 11 guns in honor of the day. All hands are becoming monstrously tired of this hot climate, fleas flies & mosquitos. There has been an effort made by Bullock Clayton, Baker & other influential acquaintances of the Secretary of War to get this Regt off to Virginia. H. D. Clayton is very sick at present some doubt of his recovery. I am afraid I will relapse with Measles. Dawson wanted me to do duty before they were gone in on me good. Several have relapsed & only one as I know of has recovered. Those *provisions* & clothes from home came safe (with the exception of the ham, which the Regulars stole from us) but Dawson gave them to whom *he* pleased. I like to forgot-you asked whether the money & newspapers came to hand-the money did but the paper has not-for want of space I must close

Your aff son
L L Rumph

M. B. Locke to Dr. James David Rumph, Camp Alabama, Warrington Fla., Aug. 14, 1861.

Dr. J. D. Rumph:

My Dear Sir,

It is with deep regret that I am compelled to inform you of the death of your son, Langdon, together with two other members of our Company, which occurred at the hospital. The first named, yesterday morning at about six o'clock, and the others, Buchan & Lawrence, the former night before last and the latter last night; and while we, their fellow soldiers, bow in humble submission to the will of an all wise Providence. We deeply mourn the loss of three such men—among the best soldiers of our little band—and deeply sympathise with their friends and relatives in their sad misfortune.

It is unnecessary for me to mention the many good qualities Langdon possessed, for in private life you know him, and know that a warmer heart never beat, and as a soldier no one was braver or more willing to meet in deadly conflict the vandal foes of the North. I was with him all night previous to his death, and saw him during his last moments, and have the gratification to say that he died a brave boy, and although his life was not given up in the tempest of battle, yet, he & his other deceased comrades truly deserve as much glory as those brave Southerners who fell on the bloody field of Manassas. They died in the service of their Country and had an opportunity been afforded them, none would have borne themselves more gallantly. I am truly sorry you was not with him during his illness, for although he had every attention that could be given him here under the circumstances. Yet the presence of a kind parent is a great consolation to a sick soldier, it inspires them with confidence in their recovery, which you know has much to do with sick persons, and besides you would have known that he did not suffer for the proper attention, and would have become more reconciled to his death. I should have written you myself concerning his illness had I not known others had. I regret exceedingly that we could not send his remains home for interment: we had made every arrangement to do so, had obtained a Furlough of fifteen days for Christian to accompany his body, and had procured a Zinc Coffin and sealed it up in it, but this morning when we went to the hospital to remove him to the boat we found decomposition had taken place to such an extent that it would have been useless to have attempted to carry him home, and it was the same case with one of the others (Buchan). Consequently we thought it best to bury them all here. Knowing it would be no gratification for their friends to see them in the condition they would be in by that time, besides I think they would have been so offensive that they

would have been compelled to burry them on the road. In fact Buchan had decayed so much that it was utterly impossible for any one to recognize him and Langdon was fast undergoing the same. After they were sealed up last night they began to decay immediately, and I never saw decomposition proceed as rapidly in my life. The coffins were not sufficiently air tight to prevent them from receiving some air and just enough so as to cause the quantity of air they did receive & soon became very impure. I have no idea they would have decayed so fast had they been exposed to the open air. Those zinc coffins I learn today has proven a failure in nearly (every) instance. All who have tried them with whom I have conversed report unfavorably of them, so it will be useless to attempt to send any more home (should we loose any more) unless we can get the genuine metallic coffin. A gentleman from our County (Mr. Newberry) lost a son in Capt Owens company and started home with his body today and I learn after getting to Pensacola had to burry him. We have marked the spot where Langdon was burried, so it will be no trouble to find the grave should you desire to remove his remains at any time. Langdon, as I presume you are aware, has been in feeble health for four or five weeks, and had just gotten over a spell of Measles, when he was attacked, as his physician said with Typhoid Fever, but I think it was a relapse from Measles, and died in five or six days. Christian is in quite feeble health now and I think a trip home would be of material benefit to him, and as Gen Bragg refused to let him go home after we decided not to send the corpse home I shall make an effort to get him a Furlough for thirty days to go home & recouperate on. I will make the application for him tomorrow through Capt Dawson and think he will succeed in getting it. It is a sad thing to think that we have lost five of our company in so short a time, three of whom were burried today, and I can scarcely realize that such is the fact. It has cast a deep gloom over us, and the number still sick renders it very discouraging to us. We have nine very sick yet, besides a good many others who are not at all well-some having just recovered from measles. The quantity of sickness in our regiment has been attributed to the heavy guard duties we have to perform, but that has been decreased a good deal, and would be comparatively light now, were it not so many are sick. I have always thought that the prime causes were not only on account of the guard & fatigue duty, but the manner in which we are so crowded at this particular camp. All the companies moved here with a great deal of reluctance, fearing the evil consequences, but it had to be done to satisfy the foolish whims of some of our

superiors. We expect to petition Gen Bragg to let our company move out from the regimental encampment. I entertain a hope that he will grant us permission. Have some doubts about it however, not on his (Braggs) account, but others. We will know in a few days at any rate. I should like to hear from you occasionally Dr.

Very truly, your friend
M. B. Locke