

George Oscar French (1844-1865)
Diary, September 13-October 8, 1864
Transcribed by Dawn Hance; typed by Joann Nichols; edited by Paul Zeller

[French's sister stated that the most important item of his personal belongings that were returned to the family was a small leather volume in which he recorded his day to day activities. Possibly he removed the following pages from the journal and sent them home as the following pages are very small in size.]

Sept 13th 1864

Our Division reconnoitered as far as Opequan Creek, returning at 10 P.M.

Sept 14

Wrote to Uncle John F in reference to boots etc.

Sept 15

Recd letters from Home Foxboro &c

Sept 16

Went to Camp 1st Vt Cavalry

17 Lieut Meeker assigned to 5th Vt. Sam Dowling over to see me

18 Recd letters from home and I wrote to C. Packed up expecting to go to Winchester. If we could get there. Orders countermanded. At 9 P.M. recd orders to move next morning at 2 A.M.

19 Had reveille at 1 oclock & at 2 moved out to the front marching all night. We crossed the Opequan at 6 and at 7 formed line and advanced up under cover of the woods under a severe Art. Fire. Lay down till about 12 & then charged across the field in front, fought all day. Making three charges. When at 9 camped near Winchester, very tired and quite worn out. Recd orders to move at six the next morning. The enemy continued their flight all night: closely pursued by our cavalry. This day we captured many prisoners and gained a most decisive victory. Also captured 5 pieces Arty.

20th

Moved out at 6 A.M. passing through Newton, Middleton &c camped 2 miles from Strasburg at 4 P.M. Having made 20 miles. Some skirmishing and artillery firing in front. But no engagements. Laid here all night.

21st

Laid in woods till 12 M. Moved out onto the right Col Foster Cowdy Brigade. Threw up Breastworks in the night. Lt. J.A. Lewis slightly wounded.

22nd

Lay in works till 4 P.M. then moved out to the front and at 5 P.M. charged the enemys works on a very high hill & surrounded by an abattis. Carried the works with Artillery,

horses & c. moved out on the pike. 19th corps on the lead marched slow and at daylight on the morn of the 23rd. Encamped beyond the town. Moved out after dressing our lines some 7 miles & lay till morning of the 24th.

24th

Broke camp at 6 A.M. Passing through Mt. Jackson where a mill & Rebel hospital were burnt. Came up in three lines of Battle on the south fork of the Shenandoah. But after a little shelling, the enemy left. Followed up & pressed the enemy to beyond New Market: where we went into Camp for the night. Very tired, and some what lame & foot sore. This day was warm but night closed in cold & windy. Were in sight of the retreating foe most all day. Made about 20 miles. On the 25th again started up the valley. But found no Johnnies. The day was very fine being cool & pleasant. About 5 o'clock P.M. went into camp in hollow square, with the village of Harrisburg in the centre. Our boys were fatigued, footsore and [illegible] having had no rest since midnight of the 18th. Here we get vague rumors that Gen. Grant is fighting there at Petersburg. It is Sabbath. But the [illegible] derive no benefit from a recurrence of the Lords day.

26

Nothing of importance done. We laid in camp all day Just what the boys need. Started for the second time to get my discharge but went no farther than Division HdQrs. Our Cavalry continues to pick up squads of stragglers from the broken remnant of Earlys Army. Wrote to Messrs Wood and Whalen. Weather very fine.

27th

Lay in camp, just the thing for us. Mail went out Recd 5 recruits for the Co and some convalescents. Recd orders to be ready to move at 5 on the next morning.

28 Sept 1864

As per orders were all ready to move at five But the orders were countermanded accordingly lay in camp till next morning. Wrote to Florence. Orders to move

29th

At 5 A.M. moved out and up the valley as far as Mt. Crawford, found a bridge burned by the Rebs. Went into camp for the night. Report came that Roberts Cav had torn up 30 miles of Railroad south of Staunton And that he was cut-off. Have recd no mail since leaving Woodstock 23rd inst and can get no chance to send out mail. Weather quite showery. But not enough to muddy the roads.

30th

Sam Dowling came to camp brought 75 lbs plug tobacco at 1 P.M. had orders to pack up. Moved back to the old position on the hill above Harrisburg. Was Detailed for picket – night came on cold and rainy. Went on picket, expecting the train up on the morrow with mail.

October

1st

Nothing of importance occurred. 8th Corps went out toward Piedmont on some kind of an excursion. Weather continued cold and rainy.

2nd

Cleared off. Detail of 2000 men from our Div went out after guerillas. The mail came about noon. Recd letters from Sister Emma and Zerua B. Henry. Arty firing heard in the direction of Cross Keys. Proved to be the Johnneys coming on a reconnaissance, ran against our Cavalry, were repulsed with a loss of over 200 prisoners.

3rd

Weather quite cool and a drizzling rain, were relieved at 2 P.M. Came into camp. The old regts were being paid off

4th

After over two months exertions, finally got my discharge papers and was mustered for 3 years from 24th July. Wrote to sister Em and Ella. Weather very pleasant, and warm. Large fires in the upper valley. Every house & barn in a radius of 5 miles were burnt in revenge for the murder of Lieut Meigs of Sheridans staff. Weather very fine made out my final statements but could not get my pay on them owing to the meanness of the Paymaster of the 3^d Brigade.

5th

Nothing done. lay in camp. Recd orders tomorrow next morning at 5½ A.M.

6th

Moved out at 6 A.M. down the valley marching all day without halting for dinner. At 4½ we went into camp 5 miles below New Market.

7th

Moved down the valley. as we went from Harrisburg the rear guard burnt every vestige of hay & every barn that contained grain or forage. Camped for the night, 2 miles below Woodstock. Weather quite cloudy, and rather warm. Desolation most complete, followed our track. Every grist mill cotton or sawmill, was burnt.

8th

Moved on down the valley. Our Div in rear of the Army, went into camp at 3 P.M. ½ mile east of Strasburg. Met our supply train & drew 4 days rations. About 3 heard very rapid, heavy, & continuous Artillery firing above, which was kept up until dark. This is the first thing we have heard that sounds like being followed. The weather is very chilly & occasional showers of cold penetrating rain strike us. Our boys suffer some with the cold as we have no overcoats.

[Written across the bottom]:

Send this little condensed record of our proceedings of the first few days. I wish you would lay it up after reading it and keep till my return. I shall send my commission home as soon as the baggage comes up. It is in my valise at (I expect) Martinsburg. Shall also send discharge &c when I am paid on it.

Oscar