

Reuben W. Pierce

[Letters]: Defense of Baltimore in the Civil War

Baltimore: 1862-1863

\$3000



An archive of 11 letters written by Reuben W. Pierce to his wife while serving in Baltimore with the 151st Regiment, New York Infantry, during the American Civil War. All letters very good or better.

Pierce was stationed at Lafayette Barracks in Baltimore, Maryland and was among the troops stationed in Baltimore, both for the defense of the city, and traveling out of the city on expeditions. The letters begin in late 1862 and continue through 1863 and discuss the goings on in the barracks and events in the surrounding city. A letter from Christmas 1862 reads “all the soldiers were drunkards... the licentiousness of men and women almost ever other woman is a lewd woman of both black and white there is just across the street a lot of nigger wenches that talk and do anything that comes along it is so most all over the city. Lewdness and dissipation the niggers dress up better than the folk of Carlton... they dress in silks and satins.” He talks to his wife frequently about being homesick and judges the morality of the other soldiers he’s surrounded by. They “drill and drill” and are always threatened by the smallpox which was apparently running rampant throughout the ranks. One letter reads, “there is a great deal of sickness in the 129th (New York) regiment...two of the company died last week.”

Throughout the correspondence Pierce discusses various battles; “they are having an awful battle at Fredericksburg. General Burnside has taken the city but old Stonewall Jackson is fortified just outside of the city with about two hundred thousand men and is throwing shot and shell into the city trying to drive Burnside out and there is a flying report that Burnside is retreating... but it will be a desperate and bloody battle as has been fought since the war commenced. Some reports say that Burnside has lost ten thousand men already but the report has been contradicted.” In another letter he discusses the goings on in Clarksburg, Maryland, “the boys are at Clarksburg yet waiting for the rebels to attack the town... there was a squad of 85 cavalry sent out on a scout and they went to the South 15 miles and came within sight of the rebel pickets they said there were about a thousand of them there.”

One letter speaks of Pierce’s regiment on duty at a Baltimore hospital and he grim sights he witnessed: “we guarded a hospital full of sick and wounded soldiers... there are 500 of them there some have one arm off and others a leg off and some with an eye out... .” Another letter reads, “hope for the best it looks rather dubious now in the future in regards to the war we are having a hard battle in Tennessee but I think that our forces will come out ahead.” He continues, “it is rumored that we shall go to Harper’s Ferry but I think we shall not stay long for we are ordered to take four days rations with us and are not to take out knapsacks with us.”

Although a modest collection, the letters discuss notable events as well as daily life for the soldiers in wonderful detail. [BTC#413947]