Leroy Edwards was correct when he stated that “We are still near Norfolk and but little probability of leaving or fighting.” The Petersburg Riflemen (the “Rifles” in the letter) were organized as part of the 4th Battalion, Virginia State Militia. The 4th Battalion later became the 12th VA Infantry on July 12, 1861. They left Petersburg and arrived in Norfolk on April 20, 1861, where they would remain for over a year. The Petersburg Riflemen were stationed in Portsmouth near the Marine Hospital and also camped at Harrison’s Farm at Norfolk, and in late August 1861 moved to the Entrenched Camp located about 1 ½ miles north of the Norfolk city line, where they remained until May of 1862. On May 7, 1862, the 12th VA marched from Portsmouth to Suffolk. On May 8, they were sent by train to Petersburg, and on May 15, they went to Drewry’s Bluff on the James River and assisted in chasing Union gunboats down the James away from Richmond. On May 28, they went into camp on the eastern edge of Richmond near Oakwood Cemetery. Four days later on June 1, 1862, they would see their first heavy action and suffer their first casualties at Seven Pines.

P.F.C. was Petersburg Female College, a school for women. Leroy Edwards taught here from 1860-1861, when he enlisted. He was Professor of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy. Petersburg Female College was located at the southwest corner of College Place and S. Sycamore Street in the Poplar Lawn area of Petersburg, an upper middle-class neighborhood.

Ed Portlock was likely Col. Edward Edwards Portlock, Jr. (1840-1887), a Virginian who later in the war commanded the 24th Arkansas Infantry. Col. Portlock is buried in Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg. The 1860 Norfolk City Directory lists Edward E. Portlock, Sr., along with Edward E. Portlock, Jr., a bookkeeper at B. T. Bockover and a boarder at his father’s address. Born the year after Leroy, it is certainly the son rather than the father who is listed as “one of my Norfolk acquaintances” with the nickname “Ed.”