

Camp Opposite Fredericksburg  
December 22, 1862

My dear Children

It is a good while now since I received a letter from each one of you, and I would have liked very much to have answered them at once and separately, but as that cannot be done I send this one to you all. Tommy, I received yours first, and will try to tell you what you want to know about camps too. But first of all let me tell you that I am very much pleased to hear a good report of your behavior and attention to your studies at school. Try to keep on as you have begun. Now is the time for you to learn, and be diligent while you have the opportunity, for you know not how long it may last. This is not only your father's advice, but that of the Wisest man who ever lived. He says "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go, for she is thy life" try to find the place in your Bible and you will see what a rich reward is promised to those who do so. You may get wealth, but it may be stolen, you may lose it, or be cheated out of it; you may get honor, and at last be stripped of it, but learning once stored up in the mind cannot be taken from you.

I cannot now give you a history complete of a soldier's life, but will try to give you some ideas of how we live as you requested. Unless there is some emergency requiring a change the drum beats the Reveille at Sunrise. We then get up as quickly as possible, and each company forms a line, two deep and the roll is called. We then cook our breakfast. That is easily done as we only have to boil coffee. In half an hour the drum beats the "Surgeons Call" or as the men say it says "Poor old soldier, come and get your guinine, guinine, guinine. Every one sick has then to go to the surgeon, and if he thinks fit he can excuse them from duty that day. If he doesn't they must go to work at whatever is to be done, whether sick or not. There are a great many who act sick to get off duty, and the surgeon has to be pretty sure that there is something wrong before he will excuse any one. Those who act sick when they are not are said to be playing "Old Soldier." That is what I am doing to day to get time to write. Our Regiment was ordered out on picket this morning, and I had a little sore place on my instep, and by holding it near the fire till it got pretty red and looked like erysipelas, I got the doctor to think I had better stay at home till it got better. It got better in five minutes. I was out on picket day before yesterday and it is very unusual to send so soon again; the soldiers consider it an imposition, and I played "Old Soldier" to be even with them. If we remain in camp we have dinner about 12 o'clock, but if on the march, there is no regular time for it, sometimes we get none at all, but eat some crackers as we go along. We get supper about 4 o'clock, and always have dress parade at 5 P.M. Then the whole

Regt has to turn out, and all orders and news necessary for us to know is read to us by the Adjutant. At 8 P.M. the drum beats "Tattoo." This is to go to bed, but we are not obliged to go if we don't choose. At this time the roll is called again. Any one who is absent at roll call without leave is punished. This is the way we live from day to day when in camp. When we have to march from place to place they wake us up at any time it suits, or sometimes start us in the day time. The Colonel starts first, and the regiment follows, company by company, the baggage wagons and ambulances behind. The men march four deep, and are not obliged to keep step like you see in the city.

This is about the way a regiment marches.

Thus we go about ten miles a day. When we stop it is generally in some large field or wood where we can get plenty of water and wood. The regt. is formed into a straight line 2 deep and the guns all stacked thus and the men pitch their tents just behind their guns so that they can get at them in a minute if they need them. They then make themselves as comfortable as they can, but sometimes the ground is wet & muddy and we have to lie down there, for we must all stay in our proper places. Your Uncle Willie & Henderson George sleep with me. We have slept in the mud and in puddles of water, and got up with the water frozen in our canteens, but still God has taken care of us and we are as well as ever we were. We see a great many curious things on the way. One thing you would think strange. You could gather up a wagon load of horse shoes in a days march. No one picks them up. The fences are all gone in the country we marched through. I send a sketch of our camp here opposite Fredericksburg, drawn by Dick Holmes. It is for Willie as his letter was a picture one, I send his answer of the same kind. The tents are scattered more than I ever saw them before, but it was because there were so many fires. Then trees have been mostly cut down since. Since the weather got so cold lately we have built little fireplaces & chimneys at the entrance of our tents. We made them of sods & put a barrel on top. We can thus keep ourselves warmer than gathering around a large fire out of doors as we used to. About a ago we left our camp and expected we would not come back to it again. We went across the river to engage in a fight. You never saw a battle, nor did I, and I hope you never will. It was a terrible sight. Our Regt. was not engaged, contrary to our expectation and our Generals calculation. We were placed in the gap between the right wing and the centre, at an equal distance from each, with the object of giving help to either if they needed it. The position was threatened early in the day and a battery of Napoleon guns were sent to strengthen it. We were ordered to support the battery. That is to keep a large force of men from coming and taking the guns away we had to go

right behind the gunners and be ready to stop them. We lay down on the ground to let the balls go over us. The Enemy appeared indisposed to attack us and we lay there all day and all night and only had five or six shells thrown at us. They did not hurt any one. They sunk into the ground. From where I lay I saw the whole battle as it raged till night, and saw the fire from the guns as the last charge was made after night. The next morning we expected to be sent to do the same work, but other counsel prevailed, and a retreat was ordered. Now my dear children I don't know how long it may be before I may have to cross again and it is very certain that I will be in the next fight. Our Corps will have to commence it and you may never receive another letter from me. If you wish to please me and make me feel comfortable here, you will obey your mother and try to make yourself useful to her. She has had much trouble and anxiety about you so far, and will for years to come, and the only way you can repay her is by minding your studies and behaving like good children do. And remember you cannot do this for yourselves, but Jesus who loved and still loves children has promised to help you to do so, and if you ask him he will. Ask him and try him, and then though both your parents leave you, the Lord will take you up.

Now Bert, I am glad to see you improve in your writing so much. By taking care you can in a while beat Tommy at that. If Willie chooses to send me any more pictures I will be glad to get them. And little Siss, she can't write any yet, so I'll not expect to hear from her except through her mother.

Uncle George will send this on to Bert & Willie after Tommy has read it. Tell the folks I am very well, and Willie & Johnny also. Since our chimney was built we sometimes have Johnny or Dick Holmes to spend the evening with us and a very snug place it then seems. Tell Uncle George I can't get that box yet till some new arrangements are made. Our Q M was in Washn. & could not even get permission to bring a can of oysters on the Govt. boat.

Give my respects & kind regards to Uncle George & Robert and Aunt Kate, Mary & Louisa. Shall always be glad to hear from them, but until the days are a great deal longer no one need expect much letter writing from this camp. With much love your affectionate father.

W. Taylor