My dear Jane

I think it was about the 2d or 3d inst. that I wrote last, but as I keep no account except from memory I cannot tell exactly. This I think is the longest interval between any of my letters. Yours of 30th ult. was received on Monday Evening and would have been answered the next day if I had remained in Camp, but on Tuesday morning we were ordered out on picket. We did not return till the next day and then it was too late for writing. Yesterday I got a pass to go to see James McKnight and that took all my spare time that day. Today I must answer or postpone till next week, for Saturday is a busy day with us. Our mess observes the old style in regard to preparing for Sabbath. On Saturday we bring in wood for two days, and as we always have inspection on Sabbath we clean up our guns and accoutrements Saturday instead of Sabbath morning. From what you say I think some of my letters have miscarried, as instead of writing less about that time I wrote rather often than usual. Part of the week before new year I had more time than usual, and wrote all the letters I owed any one, so as to be able to take a fresh start. The post office arrangements here in camp are now working right, and our mail leaves regularly every day at 5 P.M. The mail is then taken to Washington and if there is any delay or loss it must be there or beyond. There have been many complaints since pay day of money not reaching home from our regiment, and Mr. Brown announced at the close of worship last Evening that he wished all who had sent money home and had not heard of its reaching there to send their names in to him. He keeps the mail bag in his tent until the P.M. comes for it. I thought often that we should mark our letters so that we could tell whether any missed, and there is a way we can do it. You will observe I mark in the corner of the first page of this No. 1. The next I will mark No. 2 etc as they go on. If they do not reach you in that order you will know that one had missed and what number it is. You can number yours in the same way, or let me know that you have received them regularly.

It is strange how you heard that I had received an appointment to the hospital. What hospital? We have a tent here now called the hospital tent, but there are only two men in it, and I have no more to do with it than you have.

I enclose you a larger lock of hair this time than the last. The time I sent the other it was just dark and I had to cut it with my pen knife which was very dull, and made an ugly job of it. If I had known you wanted some a few days ago I could have sent you about a pound, as I got my hair & whiskers cut. My moustache is coming on finely. It covers my mouth completely and is very useful in straining the grounds out of the coffee, as we have no
eggs to clear it. I thought dear that it would indeed be very
doubtful if I ever returned from Fredericksburg that night I
wrote, but in this as in many other things God has dealt with me
better than I deserved - may he give me grace to be grateful to
him for his many mercies. As we belonged to a tried and veteran
Brigade I certainly expected to be in a post of honor &
consequently of danger, and so we were assigned as was supposed to
the support of an important battery, but God directed the heat of
battle all around us, fighting on our right and left, but not
molesting us, and on that Sabbath morning when our Chief would
have led us against that gun clad hill, he changed his purpose so
that we are still here in the land of the living, which would
hardly have been the case if we had made a charge there. Col.
Leasure told me that those 18 old regiments would have taken the
battery, or anything Else; of that none of the commanders had a
doubt, but it would have cost three fourths of their number to do
it, and the other fourth would be "blown to Kingdom come in five
minutes after they took it." They think the fortifications are
mined and that the rebels will blow them up if driven out of them.
I had a good view of the old battleground again on last Tuesday
while on picket. We were just opposite where we were the day of
the battle, and could see all the places as distinctly and a
little more so, as there was then no smoke. I noticed that the
rebels had thrown up long lines of rifle pits in several places
since the fight. They found out where we had lain in the hollows
and ravines concealed from them during the fight, and are prepared
for us if we attempt to hide there again. On our part I see
nothing doing except sending up the balloon every day to watch
them.

While out on picket our cook brought the mail out to us and
gave me a letter with your writing on it, but it was from Uncle
William. If you see him tell him I will answer it one of these
days. Willie went over with me to the 134th yesterday to see
James McKnight. I found him a little lower than before. He is
holding out well, and if he was in a better place might still get
well, but where he is I have little hope of him. Many who were
there when I visited him last are in their graves. The man lying
next to him was dying while we were there. Their Division was
ordered out for review by Gen. Burnside that day, and was just
moving off as we got there. I just had time to speak to some of
the men in the ranks as they started. I saw James Nelson & John
Boosel. They were hearty and well. The 134th is now as small a
regiment as ours & it is painful to look at the slow deathlike
movements of it compared with the old veteran ones like the 57th
or 8th Mich. The men appear completely dispirited. There is a
continual series of Brigade and Division reviews going on here. I
cannot tell what it means, but some who pretend to know, say that
we may soon afterwards expect a movement. Yesterday the pontoons were all removed somewhere backwards. Since they were taken up till then they had lain in the plain between our camp and the river just alongside our parade ground. I don't know where they have gone to. I saw a good many Philadelphians yesterday on my way to and from the 134th. Most of them were firemen. I felt quite at home among them and they too were glad to see a Philadelphian. We attended or rather came across the funeral of one of them of the 114th Zouaves, young Mahan. They buried him with the Episcopal form. Long as we have been out now we have only seen one military funeral before this, as only one of our own men has died in camp.

We are all well yet. The weather is getting colder, and there was some appearance of the river freezing over, which would make the picket duty more severe, as we would then have to watch much closer. The pickets however, are very civil to each other. On Monday they would engrave their names on the bullets and throw them across to each other. The officers stopped it. There was a while they traded coffee & salt for whiskey and tobacco.

I must close as we are now notified that there is to be regimental drill directly. Capt. Cline has got back & we expect he will be made Lieut. Co. - then we will get drill, drill, drill all the time. If there is time on Sabbath I will write again as I have something more to tell you and not enough space here.

Give my respects to all friends &
My love for yourself

Yours affectionately

William