My dear Jane

I have been a little lazy lately and have only sent you letter for letter, but as we have no drill this afternoon I will try to gain one on you once more. I would like to write to you every day, and think I could easily manage to fill a sheet with something even if it was not news. Mr. Brown wrote to his wife every day, and she is not half as good looking as you, so that by rights you should have two every day. I called to see Mr. Brown to day to invitation – she is no doubt a very nice woman – but - I won't make comparison for fear you might think I was flattering.

We are still in the dark in regard to why we were brought here. We have no word of Burnside's arrival yet, and we begin to doubt if he is coming at all. Orders were given that led us to think that we would be off by to day or perhaps sooner. Each company commander was ordered to see that all his men had a good piece of shelter tent, and if not one was to be furnished: also that each man should have his 60 rounds of ammunition. This with frequent inspections and reviews, such as we used to have before a movement, led us to think that we would soon be off. Since then we have pretty much changed our minds, and begin to think we may make a pretty long stay of it. Orders were read at dress parade that cannot be carried out in active service, and can only be put in force in a permanent camp. For instance our whole days work is laid out, and has to be gone through to the call of the bugle. Reveille at sunrise - must get up immediately and answer at roll call. Half an hour for cleaning up our tents and the street in front of them. Breakfast call. Then clean and wash ourselves. Then guard mounting. Then picket mounting. Then at 8 o'clock for half an hour our guns and equipment are inspected. Then from 9 to 10 drill by companies. From 10 to 11 rest or do what we please: from 11 to 12 drill by regiments: next dinner: drill by companies from 2 to 3: drill by regiment from 4 to 5: dress parade at 5 1/2: supper next, and so goes the day. It is probably to keep us from growing idle that this is done. The men on guard and picket are of course excused from these regulations during the time they are on, and part of the following day. We have in addition to all this been ordered to wash and clean up our clothes and our persons to have our shoes blackened daily, or brass plates polished and as soon as possible to have white gloves to wear on duty. Now all this is a thing that cannot be carried out while marching or in face of the enemy - we then have something more important to look after. Col Leasure came out in dress parade the first time since I came here, and made a speech insisting on our carrying out these orders, and becoming the
neatest and best drilled regiment in the corps. He also gave us a caution about writing disloyal and complaining letters home, or receiving such letters from home. His remarks were brief and to the point, and some of them much needed, and if some of the men don't soon profit by them they will come to grief. I suppose we will have to stay here in readiness till troops are wanted somewhere, and then wherever the want occurs we can soon be sent, as this is a very handy place for embarking.

We cannot complain of this place; unlike where we were before, this improves as we stay. We have improved the appearance of things very much, and under our present regulations must continue to do so. The view from our front is magnificent, on account of the view being so broad. The banks are high and the water looks blue. As I write the flag of truce boat is sailing up to Richmond to exchange prisoners.

We have been living pretty high since the keg came on. The butter is very good, and tastes all the better for coming from home. It will last us a good while. Our tent was too warm to keep it in long without spoiling and we had no other place to put it, so we put our heads together and invented a way of saving it. We dug a hole in one corner of the tent and buried it even with the lid, and I think it will keep there very well till we finish it. We sent one roll to Sam. George and one to the quartermaster and Johnny. The rest, us four will take care of. We get good oysters for 20 cents quart and with the butter to help in cooking we have first rate oyster soup now and then. We get a quart of dried apples for our mess twice a week, a bunch of onions once a week, some potatoes twice a week, rice twice a week, beans twice a week, fresh beef twice a week. Four loaves of bread every day, a tin cup full of sugar to each of us every six days, and a sperm candle every four days. With our drills and parades we are kept in good appetite and can eat all we get. It is just about enough. We can get almost anything to buy here, either in camp or at Newport News. The prices are moderate too in comparison to what they were at Fredericksburg. There they charged 25 cents for four apples; here we get fifteen of the same kind of apples for our quarters. Everything else is in the same proportion. There they charged 25 cents for a box of blacking that we can get here for five cents. There are a good many sutlers here, and a good deal of competition amongst them, and the contrabands come in from the country every day with pies, corn cakes etc to sell to the soldiers. We have very little dealings with either them or the sutlers, but feel it to be a great convenience to have an opportunity to get what we want at a reasonable cost if we choose.

It has been as far as we can see a great blessing for us to be sent here. The poor soldiers of the Army of the Potomac that we left behind have been suffering severely. The storm of Sunday
the 22d of Feby., set hard on them. It was much colder there and
the snow much deeper than with us, and I hear that many of them
have been frost bitten. Hooker has had to suspend all duty there
except picketing and getting wood. Wood must be very scarce there
now. We have abundance of it here, and not very far to go for it
either, good oak, pine and a kind of gum that heats our tent too
much with our new large fire place. With any kind of a chance at
all an old soldier can make himself comfortable. I commenced this
letter yesterday, but will not get it finished. We had to turn
out for brigade drill. Col. Leasure marched us round in the sand
for an hour or two. It took up some of our time, but I can finish
to day. I am on guard, and don't have to drill. I found that it
did not agree with me to sleep on the ground here, as the sand
soaked up the water and kept wet. I invented a bed stead, by
rolling one of our old shelter tents on two poles and laying them
across the logs of our tent. It makes a contrivance between a
cart bed and a hammer, and a first rate invention. The rest of
them still lie on the ground.

I would like you could see our encampment, and various
arrangements it is a sight not often to be seen, but still could
not advise you to come here for that purpose. Since Mrs. Brown
came here Mr. Brown has got sick. Would your arrival here have
the same effect on me? The weather changed again last night, we
had ice. This morning it is blowing sharply and still freezing,
but may be pleasant enough again before night.

We had an arrival of new recruits, and paroled prisoners for
our regiment yesterday. Some of our prisoners taken at Bull Run
got back. Our company is now the largest one in the regiment.

I suppose Uncle William has got back by this time, and
knocked the bottom out of the Silver mine stock. You will
probably find that the one consisted of iron pyrites, and perhaps
oxide or sulphate of zinc. These things are likely to be found in
ground where coal is. I suppose you have got rid of your stock by
this time, and if the fever has not abated made something out of
it too. I think that would be the only way you would ever make
any thing out of it.

I hope that my residence here will not make me discontented
with living again in Pennsylvania. It is now about half a year
since I left. But so long as you are in Mercer Co. I shall have
something to send me back, even if we were encamped in the garden
of Eden.

Yours with much love
William