My dear Jane

I have the pleasure of answering one of your letters once more. We received a mail at last. It followed us over all the rocks and rivers, and when within thirty miles of this place broke down. The driver got the bags put into some wagons coming on with supplies and at last we received it in camp. It brought me your 13th inst. from Pittsburg, and a Mercer Co. Despatch with a list of the drafted men from Mercer Co.

You were so anxious about my health that you forgot to say a word about your own. Did you do so on purpose? Are you any worse of your journey? I hope you have received my notes from Colliers and Barboursville, so that you can see that I am quite well again. I wrote you from here last Sabbath and hope you will get it, but from the long and exposed route that our mail has to travel I have not full faith in it reaching its destination often. It would be the easiest kind of an operation for half a dozen rebels to capture it. I don't think they will make much by capturing mine or feel highly complimented by any remarks I shall inadvertently make about them. In fact we bother our head very little about them, and never lose an hours sleep because we are now in the midst of them, more especially since our brigade has been placed on the outposts.

On Monday before daylight our brigade was started off across the Holston river to take position there. So quietly was it done that when I got up I was astonished that so many men could have got off without some of us hearing them. We were altogether in the dark as to the object of this movement. Of course there were many speculations about what it meant. About ten o'clock in the day we heard a cannon fired, and this firing was kept up at intervals until the middle of the afternoon. It was too distant to be with our brigade, but could not have been over eight or ten miles off. However we heard nothing more about it till Tuesday afternoon, when some of our folks who had been in town, brought word up to camp that there had been a sharp engagement between part of the 23d Corps and some of the rebels. We lost about fifty men. Don't know how many rebels were killed, except one General Pegram. He was killed at last. He was a troublesome man, and had made several raids into Kentucky. We took a number of prisoners, among them fifty indians. Our men saw them marched through the street in Knoxville. Our brigade still remains in position about two miles on the other side of Knoxville, but we expect they will be relieved tomorrow by another brigade, and get returning to their old camp on this side. Willie was sent over to them yesterday with provisions. The second Division has arrived, and
our Corps is all together once more. Genl. Parke is also here. Genl. Burnside visited the camps yesterday afternoon unexpectedly. He examined the wagons, mules, horse and troops, and we expect to have another march before long.

We are encamped in a very nice place on the banks of the Holston river. (Not the Tennessee as I wrote you before. The Clinch & Holston meet below here and form the Tennessee.) There are hills all around us, and the country is tolerably well wooded. We have a fine view of the mountains we have passed, and see a great many beyond, rising one over the other as far as the eye can reach. "Alps peep o'er Alps, and hills on hills arise."

I have been making the most of these few days rest, to get our back papers finished before starting again, or I would have been down to the river fishing before now. A few days more will bring the work all up to time and then I will have plenty of leisure.

I cannot tell you much or in fact anything about what is going on here. You will see all that is to be known in the newspapers. From appearances we are in a bad fix. It certainly was a daring feat of Burnside to penetrate into this region so far and run the risk of being surrounded. The great difficulty is to obtain supplies from such a distance over such bad roads. We have not suffered yet. We have ten days supplies now. If the Loudon bridge was repaired, we might get from Nashville what is wanted, but it is not near finished yet. We don't know whether our communications are open with Rosecrans at Chattanooga or not. I suppose Burnside knows all about it. The telegraph is in good order and working by way of the Cumberland Gap to Washington. However it may be Burnside is determined to hold what he has taken. He says he will only leave here as a prisoner or a dead man. It is amusing to see how the natives look. They hear the cannonading and don't know what will be the result. Some look pleased and some look bothered. They don't know enough to go in and help either side.

We have the promise of having a mail established from here to Crab Orchard three times a week. I will patronize it as often as I can.

Johnny is well - he spent the evening with us. He is to be mustered in tomorrow.

It is getting late and I must close to let all have room to spread their blankets on the floor. We only have one tent now, and move too often to get bunks put up. We are taking our naps on the ground once more.

Shall try to write you in a day or two again dear. In meantime shall often think of you.

With much love.

Your affectionate Husband
William