

Camp of 1st. Division 9th A.C.

May 17. 1864

My dear Jane

I have made several attempts to send you word of my own and your brothers safety, but am afraid that the notes will not reach you. I did not expect that they all would, but if only one gets home it will relieve your anxiety in the absence of further information. It is nearly impossible to send word back, in fact it was altogether so until they commenced sending back our wounded men. Oliver Breckenridge is here now and when he goes home you will get all the news. That is the only way that you are certain to hear. Letters are too uncertain. As to getting any brought here I do not expect it. Such matters cannot now be attended to. It is a struggle for life. I can scarcely get time to sit down to write to you dear, and when I do I cannot collect my thoughts or find a place to begin. The last two weeks are so full of stupendous events here that some other pen must record them. The main faeatures might be sketched, but it will take a lifetime to finish the shading. The whole events since I wrote last are comprised in the - forced march crossing the Rapidan - Battle of the Wilderness - changing base on Fredericksburg, and the battle at Mine Run. But all these are blended in one and are in fact fourteen days fighting. Nothing in history equals this contest. Desperate, long and deadly, it still goes on. From morn till night, nor ends the carnage there - all night it goes on too. I cannot tell you any of the particulars. You could not understand it. I do not understand it myself. I doubt if any one does. On the largest scale this great battle has been fought and is still fighting - as I write the stretcher bearers are carrying by the tent men who are wounded in [battle] with their life blood dripping through the canvass - The earth vibrates with the cannonade. All nature seems changed. Humanity seems changed. Never will be written in full the history of these days. No pen can do it. Who is able to describe these terrific connonades, tearing men, animals, the earth and woods, the fierce charge and shout, the panic and stampede. The crush of horses, vehicles and men in confused masses. The area of dead and mutilated men? The usual course of feeling seems turned back or suspended. No groan or lamentation comes from the wounded man. Men with ghastly wounds or freshly amputated arms may be seen marching to the rear. Long files of rebel prisoners are going back also. Where is there a place of safety? The rebel cavalry hovers round. Our wounded are taken prisoners. The guerilla is concealed in every bush. Hunger and thirst have entered the lists with our men. Pestilence must soon follow. Our dead lie yet unburied. Our neighbors, Milton Campbell, Stewart Gill, Vogan, Hunt, M'Clure and others are lying within sight among others between our skirmishes and the

enemys [enemies] ever since they fell. And so it is all along the lines. But I can give you no idea of this struggle. Surely the rider on the pale horse has made this his pathway.

You are no doubt anxious about how I am getting through dear. Well, sometimes I go with the tide - Sometimes let it pass - anything to get along. My health is good, and I am uninjured yet. I have not felt any worse from the effects of the "sun by day or the moon by night", and while God gives me grace and faith to go on I will go trusting him and believing his promise "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness etc."

Willie is well. I see him every day. Johnny was well yesterday. We started then for Fredericksburg with a train. I am too lousy to write much or often. I would like to tell you who fought, who fell, who is wounded etc. but cannot take time. Oliver Breckenridge is charged with these matters. Our business is to try to live.

You must not think darling that it is for want of desire to write home that we do not do more of it. It is nearly impossible now. Still we often think of home. It is the only pleasant thing we have to think of here. The dying soldiers last thoughts and words are there. How I would like to see you to day! But for a while we cannot. Yet our prayers may at the Mercy Seat. Nothing prevents our access there.

Remember me to all the folks, and with much love I have the pleasure of once more subscribing myself.

Your affectionate husband

William