

Camp of 100th Penn. Veteran Volunteers
near Fredericksburg, Va.
July 4, 1864

My dear Jane,

I once more have to write with a pencil. Where I now am the conveniences of a pen and ink and desk are unknown. It strongly reminds me of my first campaign when I wrote on the bottom of my plate. But I cannot do that now, for I have no plate. My utensils consist of a tin cup only. My wardrobe consists of the clothes on my back, so that in these respects I am worse off than when in the ranks.

I was rather disappointed in having so much time to write as I had promised myself and you. On taking command of the company I found its affairs not in the best condition. Muster day was near at hand, and I had to go to work immediately to prepare the necessary rolls so that the men might be mustered and paid to the end of June. The materials to make these from were incomplete and hard to get at, and I am not entirely satisfied with it yet, but it has to go. I also had to make descriptive lists for the men sent to hospitals and final statements of the men killed which took all my time. The amount of work in itself was not great, and under ordinary circumstances I could have done it in the office in three days; but working in a hole in the ground under fire is a very different thing.

There is no change in the position of our Corps since I wrote you last. Our regiment was out in the front line of pits until night before last when we were relieved and retired to the second line. We do not like the change, as the front line was much the best and safest place.

The only advantage we have over our front line is in being able to have more shade. The heat is intolerable, and we go to the spring for a drink at the risk of our lives. The ground we hold was taken from the rebels by us, and they know where the water is and keep up a constant fire on the springs. For the matter of firing though, it is nearly equally safe anywhere for the firing never ceases. It is precisely like the place I described to you last year before Vicksburg. We have dug out to between 500 & 600 yards of the enemys works.

Close up to our pits one is safe if he keeps his head down, but it cannot always be done. We have to look up to fire back, and it don't look well to see the officers joking about. They have to stand up straight or get laughed at. Seven of my men have been wounded since I took command. Two were shot in the head. One of these two will die - his brains are oozing out. The others may get over it. One was shot in the breast, one in the side, one in the neck, one in the arm and one in the back. And all this without a battle.

Still it is reducing us as effectually as a pitched battle. Our only satisfaction is that we are inflicting a great loss on the enemy while we can stand it the longest. You can not imagine what a change these circumstances make in mens habits and feelings. As to danger no one appears to think of it, farther than the instinctive dodge when a shell comes very near. Won't you suppose I had a little sense as to go out to the fire to light my pipe, knowing that from three to a dozen men would have a shot at me before I got into my hole again? Well so it is. We all do this over and over again. Some part of every day we have a fierce cannonade which seldom does much harm. I have been living in a hole in the ground that I dug. We had only two alarms while in front. One in the day time. We formed in line, but the enemy did not come. The other was at night, but I knew nothing of it till the morning. I was fast asleep and my men did not wake me till they were sure it turned out to be a real attack. As it did not they let me alone and I was not aware of the cannonade, although it woke up the men two miles in the rear at the wagon train where I used to be.

I believe I am getting fatter and stronger since I came out here. I don't think I could stand marching if the weather keeps so hot as it is now, but it is not likely there will be much marching in this neighborhood for a while.

I have not been discharged or mustered yet. My application and commission appear to have been lost in passing through the military channels, and I have sent in a second one. Only in our own regiment am I rated as a lieutenant.

The news of our operations you can get a better account of from the newspapers than I can give. The reporters travel around while I have to remain in one place.

We saw our new chaplain yesterday. He ventured up to us to read a letter he received from a preacher at Washington announcing Col. Dawson's death. Our regiment formed around him to hear it, and although we could not hear distinctly for the noise of cannon and musketry, yet I heard the most of it. His wound would not heal. The arteries sloughed & operation after operation was tried to tie them up within his side, but without effect. He bled to death, suffering great pain. After the last ineffectual attempt to tie the arteries, he was informed that he must die. He said "Well! my work is done. Tell my regiment who have followed me in battle so often to follow Jesus." This man who wrote, though a stranger to him and us, sends us his testimony to his dying as he had lived a patriot and a Christian. His letter was touching and eloquent and while describing the agony of his young wife when she saw all surgical aid fail, there was not a dry eye among those sunburnt men who a few minutes before you would have supposed had no feeling at all.

How I pity her. The Colonel needs none. He has ceased from his labors, and his end was peace.

Johnny returns to his regiment tomorrow. I would rather he was not coming back here. I feel better when I have no relatives here to be concerned about. Willie I suppose you have heard is in Philada. and getting better. Things have changed greatly in our brigade since Col. Leasure left. Our men who were detailed in other service are being sent back one after another, and new men put into their place.

Do not be uneasy about me darling. If I could only think that you were contented I would have no care. That is all that concerns me. I expect to get through all this. It is not necessary that we all shall fall. Some will get home to tell the story. I cannot account for my feeling of security - perhaps it is a false one, but my trust is not in our great army, nor in our gallant regiment that has never turned back in battle, but in the Keeper of Israel. He is my "Strong Rock my sure defender". Trust Him for me and yourself. He has never failed yet and why be afraid that He will? Whatever happens learn to submit and say "Thy will be done".

I am behind a good deal in my correspondence. I will try to write to Joe Kirk tomorrow. I owe George & Uncle Robert letters - Genl. Grant gives us all the mail facilities he can now.

Remember me to all the folks and I still remain dearest with much love

Yours affectionately
William