

Camp of 9th Corps
Near Petersburg, Va.
July 31, 1864

[Petersburg Mine Explosion and Assault]

My dear Jane,

I did not know that this was Sabbath till I sat down to write to you. Then I had to consult my mem: book to get the date and in looking at it found what day it was. Since I wrote you last Tuesday I have been so busy that I had scarcely time to think.

Coming back from the battle I received you letter No. 60 last Sabbath. I need not tell you how welcome it was at such a time. It did me more good than ever a letter did. I don't think I could have gone to sleep last night without it. I had got past my sleep so that I could not sleep. I had been up on picket for 48 hours. One day and night is the time usually imposed on the pickets, and when at the usual hour the relief did not come I began to wonder what was the matter. Hour after hour passed on and no relief. I began to suspect that some important movement was on hand and that in it we had been forgotten. I felt very anxious however, and visited each post every half hour, directing more than ordinary vigilance. I had 37 men on my part of the line, 23 of them were from our own regiment. We agreed to hold on in case of attack to the last, for it would be impossible to get back to our own works. However about 3 1/2 o'clock in the morning we heard men coming from our own side, and found that it was to relieve us. They were colored troops of the 18th Corps. On going back we found that our own Corps was gone. Some Colonel (I forget his name) was left to command the whole of the pickets and take us to the corps. He did not appear to know exactly where it was, and he marched us a great way unnecessarily. The men began to drop off and lay down at various places, and soon we had but a squad left. As we went along and it began to get daylight I saw from the arrangement of things, that instead of breakfast that morning we were to have a fight. We finally halted in line behind where the 10th Corps was massed. We lay down on the ground. Shortly I felt it heave and roll beneath me and jumped up. A terrible explosion followed and the rebel fort that had annoyed us so much heretofore was blown up high into the air - men, guns and everything it contained. At the same time all our batteries commenced firing - Our division led the charge and went in and took the first line of rebel works. The Colonel who commanded us took us through the 10th Corps and out to the front to the head quarters of our division. Here we were dismissed, having dwindled down to between 30 & 40. Each officer was ordered to take the men belonging to his own regiment and take them to it. On looking round I found my command to consist of young Wilson and Tom Birnley. We went out to the gap in the earthwork that led to

the blown up fort. Out there somewhere I supposed our regiment was, but no one could tell me. I told the men to lie down there and I would try to find it. I found Sam George coming in from the ruins of the fort for ammunition. He said the regiment had gone out there, but it was scattered and mixed up with others so that it was impossible to tell where it was as a regiment. He said nearly everyone was on his own hook. He came round with me to where the two men were. Birnley was gone. Geo. Campbell came up then. He had just come back from helping Dave Johnston off; Dave was wounded. Addison Gilfillan was wounded also. One man says mortally another says slightly. Just then our negro troops started through the gap on a charge. I did not know whether I ought to go out or not. I had only the boy Wilson to take, and he had just got back from the hospital the day before we went on picket, and still was not quite well. There were 200 yards of ground to pass over, raked by the heaviest fire of grape, canister, shell and minnies that ever I heard. I resolved to wait till all the niggers got through any how, for I did not care to go in with them, besides as to running across there I did not feel able. It was I think the warmest day this summer, we had not had breakfast and I began to get queer in the head. Wilson laid a few twigs over my head and went back to see if he could get me some water. In about ten minutes I was astonished to see a number of officers rushing up to the gap, and others coming through and drawing their swords and pistols. Presently the wave came. Back came the negroes bearing everything with them. They were in a drove - In vain did I look for some way to get out of the road - they tramped right over me. Finally I got up and at a little distance off a man called to me to come to him. It was one of the Provost Guard - he told me to lie down in his pit, a hole about a foot deep that he had dug with his bayonet. He knew me but I did not know him - He said he used to belong to our brigade in Tennessee. With a great amount of exertion and after killing some of them the negroes were driven back, but the day was lost by that time. Not only had the negroes run, but a great part of the white troops, and the rebels improving the chance charged and retook the line of pits and charged back to the fort. What troops remained repulsed them after a very hard struggle. Their loss was very heavy - We killed one whole regiment except 40 men who surrendered. In the charge our best troops suffered most. The worst ran with the negroes. The 2d & 20th Mich lost their colors and had to retreat the first time. Maj Hamilton was badly wounded and could not be got off - Geo Leasure staid with him and was taken also. Lt. Lyon and Craven were killed. Craven was blown to pieces so that part of his head only could be found. The same shell knocked the top of Loudon's {Co E} head off, killing him instantly and another piece struck Capt Maxwell, bruising him pretty badly. Jamison who married Bruce

is mortally wounded. Montgomery, Co. E. is killed, Miles, Co E - wounded - young Offitt is wounded. We lost a good many prisoners also. Capt. M'Fecter was ran over with the negroes and had his leg hurt, so that he cannot walk. Perrine Co. G. is left wounded on the field. Keltz Co. K crept in before day this morning - he says Perine lay near him. When the stampede commenced I thought that my chances for Richmond were very good. I could not run. Nor walk far either. Wilson got back with the water. We lay there a little, while Wilson found a shade near by under a small tree & I went there. Shortly I saw the colors of our regiment borne across the field followed by about a dozen men. I started over and joined them. Less than five minutes afterwards the man who sat down at the tree where I was was torn to pieces with a load of grape shot. We rallied round the colors - about twenty men. Some regiments had lost theirs and had no rallying point. A second stampede now took place, but not so bad as the first one. Orders were given to abandon the fort. But it had now become more dangerous to leave it than to go to it a few hours before.

Occasionally another man would come up on seeing our colors. One after another came in with their story of observations. We heard who was killed, wounded etc. No one could remember seeing Johnny. Sam Grace was also given up. I supposed they were prisoners. But an hour afterwards I saw them both. They ran through the fire safely and got in with a slight hurt. Grace was struck on the thigh with a ball. Johnny's leg is bruised with a piece of shell. He was the last officer of our regiment that left the fort and got back. There are seven officers now at the regiment. The man who commands it was carrying his knapsack in Tennessee. Johnny is adjutant. M'Fecter, Maxwell, Critchlow and myself are boarding at Lt. Justices. Critchlow was not in the fight. He has been sick for a couple of weeks. The rest of our officers are all killed or prisoners except the ones now at home or in hospital. The total loss by report to regimental head quarters this morning is 66.

7 officers - 2 of them killed, 2 wounded, 3 prisoners.
59 men - 25 of them killed & wounded, 34 prisoners or missing - 66 total.

We tried to get the ambulances out this morning to bring in the dead bodies. I don't know yet whether it was allowed or not. I fear not for I hear the firing as usual. It is still very warm and that will make it go very hard on our wounded men. Towards evening we had gathered up about 100 of our men, and marched back to where we were the night previous. I could not keep up with the regiment, but reported sick and went over to Lt. Justice's. I will stay there a few days. I don't feel right. I have some dysentery from drinking the unwholesome water that I got on the picket line and in the field yesterday. I think it will be all right in a few

days. Sam Grace is off duty too. He is not as well as I am. Douglas is commanding the company and he is not well either.

The result of yesterday's operations were the killed and wounding of about (3,000 my guess). The loss in our division is 900. The negroes lost most as we shot them ourselves, when they commenced backing. We took a few hundred prisoners, but lost probably twice as many. We gained no ground that we did not have to give up, and the day closed on the 9th Corps considerably demoralized. The old soldiers of it are getting ashamed of it. They are not numerous to redeem the vast amount of poor material that has been put in it. As to the negroes I think they did tolerable well - none but veterans could have been held in the place they were put and it was wrong to put them for the first time in such a bad fix. As to running off - the first two men who ran were two Generals. Why blame the niggers for doing so too? Some of them only fell back as far as the destroyed fort, and were there still fighting when the last man got in that we saw. A rumor came (I know not how) that on finally giving up the ground at the fort, the rebels rushed in and bayoneted every one there, even the wounded, both black and white. I don't state this as a fact - only a rumor.

Had M'Bride was in with his darkies - He came out safe. Robt M'Bride called at Justice's last night to see me, but as I was asleep they would not let him wake me up. I think Butler is fighting to day on our right.

I don't think I have answered your No. 59 yet - In fact my ideas are rather mixed with the noise yesterday. The confusion was about as bad as could well be. The \$5 came as stated. I could have got along without it. You had better keep your money. You will want it worse than I will. Genl Grant had issued an order enabling officers to draw rations until they get paid. I think the paymaster will soon be along. I will lose a month and a half pay by being mustered as 1st Lieut, but it was better to do it for fear of accident, especially when accidents are so plenty. I wrote you some time ago of Lt. Anderson being instantly killed while on a visit to his company at the pits. Yesterday the Capt. (Oliver) was killed: the 1st. Lt Hammond of New Wilmington wounded, leaving them without any officers. These are the first losses in that Co. of officers. In my company we have lost so many heretofore that it appears to be our turn to get off.

I did not know that any one had published that parody in Mercer Co., but I saw it in a Chicago paper in Spring. They must be badly off for stuff to fill up their columns. I think I answered your letter that mentioned Aunt Jenny's death, though I do not remember particularly about doing so. I also heard of it from Henderson George and Johnny got word too. We have the same difficulty for want of rain here that you have, but not so much

anxiety about harvesting. I used to stand behind our breastworks and look at a fine large field of oats that lay between us and the rebel line and tell the men that I intended to have it cut into shares. It stood and ripened there. No one cared for cradling that field. There the partridge and meadow lark revelled undisturbed till yesterday. Then it was mowed - mowed with grape shot and minnie balls. Hardly a stalk remains. In all the din of the firing I could not help noticing the bewilderment of the poor birds who were so suddenly disturbed and how long they tried to stay about their homes where till then they had enjoyed quiet and plenty. Though flying around in great numbers I did not see any of them fall. If they cannot fall without our Heavenly Father's direction, how much less cause have we his intelligent creatures reason to mistrust his care of us?

I will perhaps see Lt. Stewart of the 83d. The 5th Corps is now next to us. I seldom go a visiting. It pays better in this business to stay at home. I have not yet returned Cap't Nelson's visit. I intended yesterday to have gone to the 112th to see D. Griswold whom I have never seen since the day he introduced me to D. James. Instead of seeing him however I had a more interesting time of it, but I cannot say so pleasant. I will let Johnny know where he is, but he will have no time for visiting while he is adjutant.

Mrs. Floyd will be quite alone when Miss Kenah leaves. It is to Cumberland Md. I suppose she is going. Lt. Justice's new clerk is from there. He has been promoted to Lieutenant. This is the third one he has got off that way and he has no difficulty in getting plenty more with such brilliant prospects before them.

There were some more of our men killed whose names I did not learn. Capt Maxwell is writing and will give them all. There was another M'Cune killed.

The pens came all right. I have not tried them yet, because I have here an old quill that I like better.

I got a letter and some papers from Joe Kirk, but will not write to him to day. I feel a little tired and am going to lie down and take it easy.

I am so glad that Willie was not here yesterday. It is enough to think for one's self. I felt considerably worried to know what had become of Johnny, and towards evening had given him up. He dont appear any the worse however, but gives a heavy grunt on getting up on his bruised shin. I cannot do near so much as all the rest. I have not even a hole in my clothes to show. The man at my back was hashed with a shell and I never turned round to see it. Young Wilson was looking that way and told me so, though I thought as much by the crash among his bones.

I don't think they will risk the 9th Corps soon again in a charge against earthworks. It is one of the follies of modern

warfare, provided the works are only half manned.

With kind regards to all the folks, and much love to
yourself, I am Yours affectionately,

William