

Nashville, Tenn. July 22 [1862]

Dear Folks at Home,

I wrote to you immediately on arriving here which I hope you have already received. I almost dread to attempt to give you even a faint idea of the terrible occurrences of last week. I will not give a description of events as they occurred & are as I had connection with them personally. I will send a printed statement as soon as printed. You can have no idea of the awful misfortune that has fallen upon us. A noble body of men has been most basely surrendered and the splendid name we have so long borne is utterly ruined. And at this moment while this city threatened with attack at any moment 1200 well drilled strong men are chafing in their inability to assist in protecting so important a point, and must stand idly by listening to the roar of cannon & rattle of musketry and perhaps see the old flag again torn from the capitol of Tennessee. Our position is by no means without danger, at this moment in case of attack we should be between two fires and also are near the Penitentiary where certain gentlemen of Nashville are continuing their theological studies and the release of whom will be early attempted.

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I had found myself under pleasanter circumstances just the Sat. eve before the surrender than I had ever been in the Army. My services and ability more fully acknowledge[d], virtually Adjutant, and with a splendid horse fully camparrisoned [sic], fed & tended without expense to myself in my charge & use during the absence of Adjt. Blakely in Minnesota on recruiting service.

I was aroused [sic] from sound sleep on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> by the distant dull irregular & rapid discharge of fire arms, springing to my elbow at the same instant with my fellow we listened, became satisfied that something was awry & sprang up & dressed quickly, laid a wager of Ice Cream on the chance for a fight – I for it – and rushed out to assist in alarming the camp, which was by this time in great excitement. I was cool & pleased, put on my dirty shirt that I might exchange for a clean one on returning. A few

days later regretting the philosophy. Our Colonel was excited, but in no degree to alarm us. While the companies were forming, a vidette rode in at full gallop with the information that the town was full of rebels & the 9<sup>th</sup> Mich. being cut to pieces. We fell rapidly into line. Now see the account forwarded with this and consider your boy as quietly watching the progress of events in his place in rear of the left wing ready at a moment to discharge his duties as aid in carrying commands to the left.

After moving to our 2<sup>nd</sup> position I provided myself with a comfortable lunch of blackberries

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from a clump of bushes at some little distance.

Here we find the first blunder. Our force should have forced its way to town thro. the woods between the pikes to the assistance of the 9<sup>th</sup>. It would have been hotly disputed, but successful as I firmly believe. this would have the sooner abandoned our camp which however Lester in his stupidity permitted to be destroyed within 300 yards of our line - when too - one company would have effectually protected it. A junction formed, the prestige of the first success on our side and the advantage of numbers augmented & position would have ensured the safety of the men, tho at a loss of stores camps &c &c. but nothing of the kind. We remained in a most hazardous position for ourselves. All that fire was engaged in skirmishing & firing over the heads of the rascals in the wood with our artillery. The line fronted on the pike presenting to the woods (in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Geo. was drawn up awaiting a favorable moment to attack) our unprotected left flank and had the little foolish charge been made with 500 instead of 25 our line would have been swept on both sides down its whole length and the battery 2 guns on the left surely captured, perhaps much worse.

A little after noon we moved back as indicated – and had a strong position. Had we taken it in the morning our situation & safety would have been perfect, our camp protected and so far all right.

The flag of truce came & was received. Another terrible blunder. Had Lester replied, “The Minnesota 3<sup>rd</sup> does not

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receive such a flag until after a fight.” The answer alone would have disheartened the 2000 that might have been brought against us. The one hour gained would have barricaded our enclosure – the grounds about the House – with orchards & shade trees & rails & logs from the negro quarters and have made the position impregnable. We could have held it easily so long as am[m]unition & food lasted. Had Lester acted upon the suggestion of his officers he would have obtained from the train a great sufficiency. Lester accompanied the flag to town to consult. We learn that he was told by Col. Duffield then wounded & a prisoner to hold out if possible. Lester only wished to know the rules in cases of surrender!! He came back, called a council of war of his captains and after considerable discussion was carried by show of hands to fight. The coward – & three captains were not satisfied & asked a vote by ballot. Well you know that the vote stood 5 to 3, of our Regt. Capt. Hewitt of the battery voting aye. The feeling was very high at that time impossible to describe. All save a few craven officers wished to hold out. The answer was returned. A few officer[s] rode in. We were permitted to go, after stacking arms, to our camp, take what we wished of private property and fall in to move off as prisoners. Surrendered without a fight!

I rode my horse. Our reception by the rebels was courteous & kind. They were as much astonished as we ourselves. We moved without halt thro town & directly for McMinnville. We marched 13 miles to Reedyville & camped. My horse had had nothing since the night previous & got nothing this night – nor indeed the men. I lay down in my overcoat beside a fence with a canteen for a pillow but slept feverishly. Next day Monday we marched 32 miles with only a little piece of corn bread in the morning and again getting nothing that night.

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I was fortunate in buying a good supper and lay down in a blanket & overcoat under the starry canopy, well & comfortable in body but so sad in mind. Next day we were paroled – simply signing a paper “not to bear arms or give information of the movements of the brigade” and at 4 o.c. we fell into line 1200 strong fine men and moved for Nashville. Of these 610 were of our Regt., 380 of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 150 cavalry (7<sup>th</sup> Penn. & 4<sup>th</sup> Ky.) 70 1<sup>st</sup> Ky Battery &c. We marched back to McMinnville 3 miles and waited two or three hours for the citizens to furnish some corn ‘pone’ & meat and then marched some 7, or 8, miles and lay down to rest by the road. I put on an overcoat I had found and lay down under a tree and slept as sweetly as ever I did under the roof of my home. Next day the poor weary footsore boys dragged on. Some fresh & strong, others not able to walk half a mile without rest, and so the column stretched out for 20 miles along the road. I walked as gamy as ever. Had saved a biscuit for breakfast in my pocket & got a dinner – supper – rested all the afternoon – and at dusk marched on alone but passing hundreds along the road & in houses. I marched to Reedyville & crawled into a comfortable corn crib & found a nice place with my dress coat for a coverlid & a corn cob for a pillow. I had thrown away my overcoat in the morning, that was too heavy to carry.

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The pattering rain awoke me next morn so I lay quiet till 8 o.c. and then got out, went into a house, remained quite a while & then hired a covered buggy to carry two of us in to town, arriving in good trim about noon – was immediately invited to the house of a “sesech” & enjoyed his kind hospitality till next morn when at 4 we started for Nashville, marching half way we got aboard a return train that had taken troops under Genl. Nelson to reoccupy the town and so got safe to town at 4 o.c. P.M. weary & dirty & hungry.

Now of the treatment we received – Really as surprising as any part of this whole business! – Men and officers treated as like gentlemen. Kindly, generously, dividing their scanty piece of bread & meat with us, walking to let a sick & wounded “Yank” ride, and, while compelled to force us much farther than we ought to go – doing it in a kind

gentlemanly sympathetic manner. Their uniform, if it might be called such, is gray, coarse home made stuff, durable & dirty. Armed with revolvers & shot guns & occasional sabers which they do not know how to use, tolerably [sic] mounted on lean & tough horses. The physique of the men is good, compares favorably with ours. They are excellent riders & and can live in the saddle, as for instance. They rode 50 miles to attack us and then some of them returned that whole distance, stopping but to feed a half hour & eat a bite. They subsist on the people. I assure you there's no holding back on the part of the inhabitants in furnishing

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them so far as possible and their wants can be communicated in advance. The country is poor, & had been drained by their advance – poor picking fell to our lot for that reason. Their officers are fine men, dress & live & labor among their men & can scarcely be distinguished from them. In point of education, I should judge them to be well.

We leave tomorrow (Thursday, 24) morning at 2 o.c. via R.R. to Louisville for Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis.

All well. Country in great stew, town threatened but strongly reinforced. Safe.

Goodbye,  
Will

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We left N. 5 o.c. A.M. 24 and arr safe & comfortably aboard "Forest Que[en?]" at 12 P.M. a pretty hard jaunt.



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