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Camp at (Heuttonville?) Nov(8<sup>th</sup>?) 1861

My dear Cousin Mattie,

Yours of the 26<sup>th</sup> (nlt?), received about two hours ago, (day?) I answer this soon lest I might be called out on some duty and an answer be delayed too long. I will first answer your letter and then for news. Talk about freezing to death, wait till you get this letter about read, and then you will think freeze, certain. I am obliged to you for your fire, I have one of my own, that is quite as warm as yours, though my fireplace is of wood construction, (my?)(own?) (maintain?), a trench dug out under my tent, arched over with sod, a sod chimney with a barrel on top of it. However, I would like to sit with you awhile and have a chit-chat. I must say here, that I never allow myself to talk to any but pretty girls, and unless you lay claim to that quality, I should ask to be excused. But since I never saw you, I will write, hoping at some future time to see your McKinney face. (I am going to write this letter in such a hand that it will puzzle you considerably to make it out) “(Kantunherum?),” well if that is not the queerest word I ever saw, where did you find it, but then I (am getting away behind the (times?) and sciences by being a soldier, I suppose however it has some meaning else you would not have used it, please give the definition in your next. “Coat-tailed (partum?),” well, will my fair cousin, thats a very strange epithet to give to gentlemen; suppose I were to say, speaking of Ladies, the \_\_\_\_ well, I wont say it, yes I will, the “hooped (partian?) of community, now you are indignant, and would be flying at me if I were near you. We are not yet “out of the wilderness,” and I think it doubtful whether will be this winter, (away/awirry to you?) Ohio General (Rosecrans) having the power to keep us Indianans here, and taking the Ohio

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men out, “hard luck to the ship that brought him over.” I think we will have orders to build winter quarters in a day or two. It is getting comfortably cool already here in the valley, for tent life, although we have had no snow down here yet, but plenty on the mountains, as you will hereafter learn. If we have to stay here this winter I shall be very apt to have a furlough some time during the winter, when I shall humble your quiet a little, and set your head a roaring with some (for?) (missing words due to cease) lands. I am not very (wild?) however, though I am known in the Regiment as the “wild Lieutenant. But it takes wild men to make good soldiers, that fear nothing, and can endure any kind of service cheerfully, always making the best of (substance?) for some is theirs. I am afraid you would be sadly disappointed in the countenance of your soldier coming, for doubtless class you would be expecting to see a man of pleasing appearance, but such would not be the case, he is indeed a very rough looking specimen of humanity. As to “going into my pockets too deep,” why have you talk, I have inexhaustible stores of ready means now, and only want the privilege of visiting the U.S.A once more. I wish

you would get into a (gazing/gaping/gassing?) mood every day, and send it all this way, I am sure I would examine all you would send. As to "Uncle P. L.'s" letters, if he writes as long ones, and as serious ones to the "boys" as he used to write to me when in College, and they go according to his letters, they will be good boys like their "Cousin." The aforesaid "old gentlemen," is sure (an sound?) old letters I assure you, and I am a confident witness to the fact. I guess Sister Mollie must be going to get married, since she has quit writing to both of us. In your next to her, ask her how Mr. (Oser \_\_\_\_?) is, and when she saw him last. I believe, I have now answered your letter, and next for the news. I will now give on another of our expeditions I commanded this week. Last Sunday morning the Colonel sent for me and informed me that I was to take command of an expedition that would take me from Camp four or five days, and that it was a hard one. I tried to have him excuse me, although I did not yet know where I was to go, but he would not, and said, since it would be the hardest and most hazardous expedition yet undertaken, and that he wanted the best Lieutenant in the Regiment to command it.

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(rather complementary to myself, whether deserving or not, I will not say) and I must go. I was to take (40/90?) picked men of the Regiment, six pack horses, to carry provisions and knapsacks and go direct through the mountains 30 miles, to bring in a wounded man of the 13<sup>th</sup> Ind Reg't. that had been wounded while and on a scouting expedition, his own Regiment being at this time away from Camp on an expedition. At 12 (M), I had everything in readiness and marched out with a guide in front, myself mounted on a fine strong horse getting to ride on the expedition, followed by (40/90?) of the best men in the Regiment, and after them, the assistant surgeon of the Regiment, followed by six pack horses, altogether, made quite procession. The rain was pouring down in torrents, and had been all day. We took immediately to the mountains, having only a narrow foot-path for a road, by 4 P.M. when we had reached the summit of the first range of mountains, instead of rain, we had a violent snow storm to meet. The snow soon entirely obliterated already our dim-path, and the night was fast approaching. My guide became bewildered, lost the path entirely, finally confessed he was lost. It was now dark, and we on the mountain top in a terrible snow storm. I took the lead myself, knowing we could not pass the night there and all survive, I pushed on, not knowing whither I was going, passing over logs, and stones, up-steep ascents, and down deep ravines, where it was almost impossible for men to go, though my horse held his footing. At about 9 o'clock I discovered a light, about two miles distant, glowing from a small window, though scarcely perceptible on account of the falling snow. Keeping it in view as well as I could, for the trees, snow and uneven way, I made straight for it, and bade the men follow me, though some were almost frozen, and so disheartened I could scarcely persuade them to follow. But on we went up precipice, and down ravine, over logs through thick underbrush till we reached it, which was about midnight. Found a little 12 feet square cabin, now already filled by the large family.

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The storm was still raging and the house was not large enough to shelter us. I then order large fires to be built which was soon done out of the already cut wood at the house and the fence rails around it, and we passed the remainder of the night keeping warm around our fires. The (Boys?) wanted me to go into the house and lie down and sleep, but I thought that I could stand the storm as well as they, so we all staid together, dancing around the fires, singing songs that made the forrests sing. Toward morning the storm abated, preparing an early breakfast and faring sumptuously on hard-bread and coffee; we took an early start on our toilsome and winding way. I found that we had wandered far out of the direction I wanted to go, though the snow, now covering the ground entirely hid our path, so we had to go mainly by direction. We traveled hard all day, and only made 10 miles distance, so difficult and rough was the way, and the wind was piercing cold. That night we camped in a little valley, out on the snow, built (missing due to cease) and worried about the night through. The next day we reached the house where the wounded man lay; slept in a (team?) that night, and soundly too, though the rain (pound/poured?) down in torrents, and (Rebre?) were not far from us. In the morning still raining, but the man must be (taken?) , his condition was indeed a lost one, he had been wounded eleven days, and his wounds not yet dressed by Surgeon, there having none (never) than our Camp. He had been struck by three balls, one entering the right side, shattering two ribs, the ball yet in his body, two balls had passed through his right arm above the elbow, completely shattering the bone. Our (Surgeon?) dressed is now greatly swollen and inflamed wounds as best he could and in such condition he was to be borne on the shoulders of men, (An eg? Missing part) 30 miles distant. We placed him on a Litter we had taken with us, and as they started out of the house with him, into the driving rain, my heart (ihened?) at the thought of the undertaking, and to think that I as commander (of?) the expedition, would be in a measure held responsible, if such an (expedition?) proved destructive to the man's life, although I had positive orders to (bring/help?) him. He was quite a large man, and himself, his wrappings of blankets, together with the litter, all, I presumed weighted some 300 lbs, and to be carried so far over such a road. We toiled on till 10 A. M. when the weather changed, and instead of rain, we had another driving snowstorm, much worse than the first day we was out. In fact, it was the hardest storm I ever was in, in (missing due to cease) a different (missing due to cease), than the one we (even?) out, more upon though I had to keep axmen ahead to open the path wide enough for the litter to pass. I gave my horse in charge of tired men, and helped to carry the litter. The way was even more precipitous than the one we had come out, and more dangerous in some respects. The recent rains had so swollen the mountain streams, that they were almost impossible. They ran over such rough stony beds, and have such a fall, they go plunging along with great speed and terrible force, many of these we had to wade (for there is one in every little valley after a (heavy/long?) rain) where they were waist deep, and such was the force with which they flowed, that I and 10 men would have to surround the litter, lock their arms together for support and thus cross over. Often times I was fearful that wounded man and all would be carried headlong down the streams, and all be lost.

In this way we toiled on till 9 o'clock at night, before we reached a house, and it was so small, could accommodate none but the wounded man beside the family. (To gain?) we built large fires and passed the night around them, though the storm still raged with fury. All were soaking wet with wading streams, some were almost frozen, and others quite worn out with the labor of bearing the litter. By morning all had dried their clothes, and as the storm had abated, leaving only the (missing part of the letter) stocked (missing part of the letter) on our march. That day we crossed one stream more than 20 times, it being much swollen, was up to be armpits of those bearing the wounded, and rushing along with terrible force but by great ease we got through safe, and by dark, we reached a house near the road that could be reached by an Ambulance. There we left the wounded man, and although we were then 8 miles from our Camp, and after dark, we concluded we would rather go to Camp that night, than remain out another night with wet clothes. We reached Camp about 10 o'clock, the most completely worn out set of men that anyone ever saw. Found when we came to Camp, that not a flake of snow had fallen here in the valley and they did not even know there, that it had been raining any place. Such is but a faint outline of the expedition, you can, perhaps form some idea of what we had to suffer. We traveled during that trip more than 60 miles, and all, with the exception of 8 miles, over the mountains, without any road. I never want to command such another expedition while I am in the service, and if I had not have had the very best men in the Regiment, I never would have brought the man in at all. Strange to say that during the entire journey and exposure, I did not even catch a cold. I am beginning to think I myself proof against any temperature (missing piece of the letter) fatigue, after I rested one night in my tent I felt as well (missing piece of the letter)

(to the back side of the letter)

Many of the men that were with me will be unfit for duty for some time to come, so completely where they worn out. I have been acting Adjutant of the Regiment for some days. The former one having been appointed a Captain. It may be possible I shall take the position permanently. I believe I have nothing more of particular interest to write. I received a vital present from Aunt Angie yesterday. "The soldier's Companion," it suits my ideas of precisely, just what I had often been wishing for, since my needles, thread, buttons, & e, & c., would persist in distributing themselves from () () through my valise, and I had no means of (even fixing them?) (missing due to cease and staining) to their places now. Give my love to your Father and Mother, and write to me immediately, I remain as heretofore,

Your affectionate Cousin,

WM McKinney