

## ON THE EVE OF BULL RUN

Washington,  
Saturday, July 13th, 1861.

My Dear Minnie:

I have just found your dear and affectionate letter on my return from the other side, I have but a moment to thank you and to say that I am well, and I can find no paper at hand but this envelope.<sup>1</sup>

I am sure, however, that you will be glad to get even a line from me. I have been visiting all the camps on this and the Virginia side. There are over 80,000 men in camp within ten miles of Washington. Each camp is isolated and therefore the show is not great, but as you ride from one to the other for a whole day you become impressed with the immensity of the gathering.

I have seen our friends Lew Forsyth and wife and Cousin Marion but have not seen Cousin Maria yet. I expected to have been home today, but am waiting the passage of a law authorizing the appointment of generals. I have the promise of an appointment, but after all it depends much on the kind of law passed by Congress. I was very cordially received by the Secretary of War and by the President, and have made the acquaintance of a host of [illegible], generals, etc. etc., besides meeting scores I have known before. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



Detroit, [Sept.] 28th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter:

I have just time to say that I shall (D.V.) leave . . . for Washington Monday evening and expect now to stop a few hours in Philadelphia on Wednesday next. The 8th Regiment went last night and Brodheads' cavalry go tonight. . . . Larned went last night with my staff, horses, and baggage. So we break up. Minnie will write you the news. Love to all.<sup>2</sup>

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.

## IN SEARCH OF A COMMAND

Washington, Oct. 4th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter Irene:<sup>3</sup>

I reached here all safe but hugely annoyed by crowded cars and drunken soldiers. Found my staff and Larned anxious for my arrival. Horses and baggage all arrived safe, and through the courtesy of Col. Rucker are safely deposited and stabled in his private quarters.<sup>4</sup>

Yesterday I occupied a hot day in the War Department and military offices, reporting myself and seeking directions for my brigade. I had an audience of Gen. Scott and was received very graciously and kindly. I have not yet seen Gen. McClellan. Indeed, he is not easily seen, being almost constantly in the saddle on the other side. I, of course, saw his Assistant Adjutant General and the Chief of his Staff, Gen. Marcy.<sup>5</sup> I expect an order today, but don't yet know my destination.

Yesterday I was much encouraged that I should have a full brigade of Michigan troops. Today it is intimated to me that I shall be sent to Banks' division.<sup>6</sup> He has no brigadier general and is posted, as you probably know, on the upper Potomac in the vicinity of Harpers Ferry. I only regret this because I fear I shall have no Michigan troops, and have command of strange regiments. However, we must make the best of a bad case, if it is a bad case. The matter, however, is not definitely settled. I have had a second interview with Gen. Marcy today on the subject. . . . I saw Mrs. Smith a moment yesterday. Kirby, who is now here, has the colonelcy of an Ohio regiment and is going to Columbus, Ohio.<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Smith will probably go with him and spend the winter in Cincinnati, where Kirby's residence will be ordered. . . .

Ever Your Affectionate Father.



## CAMP LIFE BEGINS

Camp near Darnestown, Md.,  
Saturday night, Oct. 12th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter:

Here I am away up amongst the hills of Maryland about two miles from the Potomac and about twenty miles above Washington. Imagine

a pretty high hill (mountains in our state), on top a thick wood, at the bottom a small rapid stream, a valley spreading out for a quarter of a mile or so and bounded on the opposite side by higher hills formed into projecting knobs by lateral ravines. On one of the largest of these is the encampment of Gen. Banks, staff and escort, foot and horse. On our hillside are my eight or ten tents, sheltered by the woods in the rear. Just within the woods are our servants' tents and farther in, the picket for our horses, sheltered as well as may be by a hedge of bushes and covered by one of our tent flies.

Nearby is William Dollarson's cooking apparatus.<sup>8</sup> Around about on the hills (all in sight save one) are the regiments of my brigade as follows: 2nd Massachusetts, Col. Gordon; 5th Connecticut, Col. Ferry; 28th New York, Col. Donnelly; 46th Pennsylvania, Col. Knipe; 19th New York, Maj. Ledlie; Co. A, Rhode Island Battery, Capt. Tompkins; in all, nearly 5,000 men.

The country round about is beautiful, varied into high hills and fertile valleys with numerous small, rapid, clear streams. Altogether it is a delightful spot, especially towards sundown when the bands of the regiments strike up for the evening parades and the hillsides in front are covered with moving bodies of troops and the bugle calls from the neighboring brigades float up the valleys and are echoed along the hillside.

It seems queer, though, and almost magical to be transported in such a brief time from a quiet home to this bustle and stir of battalions of armed men, where civil life is really hardly observable and military pomp and preparation cover everything, the cultivated and uncultivated land and man and beast, with the trappings of war. But you will ask, How did you get there? Well! To go back to my last letter to you from Washington, when I was in daily expectation of a brigade of Michigan troops. On Saturday last I received an order to report forthwith to Gen. Banks, with an intimation (to soften my disappointment) that Gen. Banks was in need of a brigadier, and that I would find a responsible command. So on Monday, as soon as we could gather together our tents and other necessaries, we mounted horse and with three wagons drawn by double mule teams set forward to our unknown destination. . . .

We had a slow and pleasant ride till towards evening when we were overtaken by a tremendous shower, and we took shelter for the night

at a small village inn at Rockville. I never saw it rain harder, and the wind blew a tempest. It was a hard night for the poor soldiers, many of whom are out on picket guard all night without shelter. The next morning we started forward in a drizzle and reached Gen. Banks' headquarters about noon. On my way I rode off the line a few rods to visit Gen. Meade, who commands a brigade eight or ten miles below.<sup>9</sup>

We dined with Gen. Banks, who gave me orders for my brigade, and I started out to select a camping-ground, which I found without difficulty in the position I have attempted to describe.

We were strangers, and none of the regiments near offered me the least assistance. Gen. Banks promised to send me a detail of men but none came. So we all set to work, myself, Capt. Wilkins, Lt. Pittman, Larned, and the three servants, none of whom but Capt. Wilkins and myself had ever seen a tent pitched. However, we were all pretty snugly located before dark and William had opened our mess chest and prepared a very comfortable meal of broiled ham and soda biscuits, and upon this diet we were obliged to feed for a couple of days before we could find fresh meat or bread. The country people bring in nothing, being pretty much all Secessionists, and those disposed to sell have been fairly eaten out by our large army. Man and beast find small pickings. Our horses had a little poor hay for a day or so and then a little corn, but at length we have ferreted out the resources of the land and have meat for ourselves and oats and hay for the horses.

My Yorkshire proves a splendid animal, afraid of nothing and full of life and spirit. We are kept very busy in posting ourselves up with the brigade. I am in the saddle a good deal, visiting the several regiments. Capt. Wilkins is kept employed with a clerk and one or two other assistants and a mounted orderly in answering applications, making the daily details for guard, pickets, duty officers, recording orders, and generally providing for our large military family of 5,000 men, to say nothing of the hundreds of teams and horses. For the latter, especially, we have much trouble in providing day by day, forage being very scarce and very dear.

Our daily routine is: up at reveille (sunrise); William gives us a cup of strong coffee soon after and breakfast in an hour. By eight o'clock the reports begin to arrive from the several regiments, and then sergeant-majors [begin] to copy orders and the general applications

for leave, furloughs, for quartermaster's or commissary's stores, for all kinds of wants. Orders from division headquarters follow, all to be copied, repeated in a new order, and distributed to the several regiments.

We have improvised a few desks out of packing boxes and on these we do most of our writing. Breakfast over, I mount (as soon as the consolidated report of all the regiments is made up and signed) to visit the regiments in turn. I do not get back much before dinner time. After dinner I am again in the saddle with some duty to do. In this way the days seem short, and by eight or nine o'clock we are all in bed.

We know little of what is passing beyond our immediate vicinity. The two other brigades of this division are commanded by Gens. Abercrombie and Hamilton.<sup>10</sup> They lie near at hand but neither have as large and, I think, not as good regiments as I have. You will see that I have troops from five different states, among them the famous Rhode Island Battery with James' rifled cannon. This company was at Bull Run battle and gained a good reputation. The 2nd Massachusetts is a splendid regiment; the colonel and lieutenant-colonel are both graduates of West Point. The 5th Connecticut is commanded by Col. Ferry, a member of Congress from that state, a man of great energy and industry but I think not much of a soldier.<sup>11</sup> The other regiments are tolerably well officered, and all but one have been in service since May.

Now Minnie dear, I have told you pretty much all I can think of about myself and my matters. Larned makes himself useful, but not exactly in the way I wish. I shall put him in the adjutant general's office. He prefers outdoors. He received your letter yesterday in which you mention an eight-page letter to me, which I grieve to say has not come to hand. I have not received a single letter from you nor from Irene since I left her, but my companions are in the same plight. Neither Capt. Wilkins nor Lt. Pittman have heard from their wives. It is strange how irregularly letters come to us here at home. It was better in Mexico. However, keep writing, I suppose they will turn up.

I commenced this letter last evening and am finishing it on a box upon which my early cup of coffee has made some blots. You must hardly expect a neat letter from camp. I fear this is scarcely legible. We have orders to hold ourselves in readiness to march within twenty-four hours and hence all writing places are occupied now as early as reveille. I think it more than probable we shall not move at all, but the

preparation of two-days' cooked rations, all the fuss and bustle, is as necessary as though the march were certain. . . . We talk of you often in our Detroit mess. You are a great favorite with my staff officers, and Father, you know, never wearies hearing your praises.

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### ROUTINE OF CAMP LIFE

Camp near Darnestown, Md.,  
Oct. 16th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter: . . .

Your first letter was only received today by the hands of Larned, who after much perseverance got it out of the Washington Post Office. He went down last Monday with a train to get us some necessaries, but on arriving in Washington found that his memorandum was lost, so back he posted, arriving at camp about noon, and was off again mounted on horse-back at one o'clock. I was very much pleased with his perseverance and energy in the matter. I gave him your messages. He promises to write you on his return. I see by the New York papers that they have a report that Gen. Banks' Division has been attacked and badly cut up, all of which is without foundation. We have not been even threatened, unless an occasional shot across the river at our pickets can be called threatening, so you see you must not be alarmed at any rumors.

I have no idea that we shall be attacked until we cross the Potomac. We, none of us, can guess what our movements are to be. I have a fine brigade. One of the regiments, 2nd Massachusetts, is the best volunteer regiment I ever saw and drills like regulars. The 2nd Connecticut is under the command of Col. Ferry. The Rhode Island Battery has James' rifled cannon and is the same battery which gained distinction at Bull Run. The New York and the Pennsylvania regiments are well commanded and are making efforts to improve. On the

whole, I am well-satisfied, though I should have preferred one or two regiments from Michigan.

We have had very fine weather for some days, with splendid moonlight nights. Within the hearing of my camp are probably eight or ten regiments, all with excellent bands, besides several camps of artillery, cavalry, and independent zouave companies with bugles and trumpets. In consequence, we have a profusion of music at all hours, but especially during the moonlight evenings. The hillsides and projecting knobs which lie around our circular-formed valley are covered with tents, and at night when the lights are lit and the camp fires blazing and the bands playing the scene is very striking and beautiful. I should like to transplant you here for an evening if I could safely send you back to Aunt Kate's for a lodging. I am sure you would enjoy the sight and the music, to say nothing of my society.

The country around us is much broken with hills and valleys. Some of the rides along the narrow bridle paths by the side of considerable streams are very romantic. I am a great deal in the saddle from necessity, and like it amazingly. Day before yesterday I rode over twenty-five miles and yesterday about fifteen to visit one of my regiments on detached service. In one of my rides I visited the camp of the 7th Michigan, Col. Grosvenor. It is about two miles towards the river from Poolesville. I was received with great eclat. You will remember this is one of the regiments in my camp at Fort Wayne. It is a very fine regiment.<sup>12</sup> The sergeants, and corporals, even, rushed out to greet and shake hands with me.

According to the custom of the army I am obliged to live and travel in considerable state, though you know I have not much fondness for the ceremonies of military life that have not immediate influence upon its efficiency and discipline. I have a guard detailed for me every day at my own camp by the several regiments, in turn. They turn out and present arms every time I leave or return. Behind me rides a mounted orderly, whenever I leave camp, and as soon as I approach the encampment of a regiment, the sentinels begin to pass the word, "Turn out the guard," "The Brigadier General." Out rolls the guard of a hundred men or so and I am obliged to ride along the front, cap in hand, to acknowledge the salutation, while the drummers beat a furious tattoo upon their drums and the guard presents arms. I go through this

process at least once a day with all my regiments, and then leave instructions to "never mind the guard," which means do not turn out on my approach again today.

The details I have to attend to are very considerable, so much so that I have a clerk detailed besides my staff. All the issues from the quartermasters and commissaries I have to approve, all charges for courts martial, all applications for furloughs and leaves, and all reports. In short, everything for 5,000 men has to pass under my supervision, besides the daily detail of guards, officers of the day, etc. Still we have greatly simplified much of this circumlocution system and saved half of our labor. I find time after morning business to visit most of the regiments, to examine the condition of the camps, hospitals, kitchens, etc. Each morning my field officer of the day, whose duty it is to visit and supervise each camp night and day, makes me a long written report, and all his complaints and suggestions I generally attend to in person as the most effectual way of correcting error and improving matters generally. To do all this I am up at sunrise or thereabouts and to bed about nine o'clock, and during these moonlight nights about ten o'clock. . . .

Your Most Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### BEFORE THE BATTLE

Camp at Edwards Ferry,  
Oct. 23rd, 1861.

My Dear Rene:

I am on the point of moving over with my brigade. Have been in the mud and rain forty-eight hours, mostly without sleep and marching by night. I have only time to enclose the money you asked for, and to say that if I fall or am taken prisoner you must help Larned to support yourself and Minnie. You are able and willing and full of energy and confidence. Larned is pretty well used up and nervous. He will write soon.

You will hear by telegraph if anything occurs, long before this reaches you. God bless you my daughter and have you always in his holy keeping.

Most Affectionately, Your Father,  
A.S.W.

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*DISASTER AT BALL'S BLUFF*

Camp near Muddy Brook, Md.,  
November 5, 1861.

My Dear Lew:<sup>13</sup> . . .

Now as to war matters. We are having the devil's own weather and have had since we were so suddenly woke up from our quiet camp near Darnestown. I made a forced march with my brigade, got orders while inspecting a regiment, left all standing, tents, hospitals, etc., with a camp guard, and commencing after dark I was at Edwards Ferry before daylight, having performed nearly twenty-five miles, part of the way in a cold rain and deep clay mud. Gen. Banks had no knowledge of the intended movement till 5 o'clock P.M. nor did any of us know of the disaster to poor Baker till we reached Poolesville, five miles from Edwards Ferry. Here I was taken to the telegraph office and shown Baker's full dress hat and uniform, two ball holes through the hat and several through the coat. His corpse lay in a house nearby.<sup>14</sup>

From this point to the Ferry the road was full of stragglers and ambulances with wounded. Not a man carried his arms. All professed to have thrown them into the river and swam for life. They told enormous stories, and very pitiable if true. Every man was the last of his company. Arriving at the ferry, we had a doleful position on the muddy banks, crowded with arriving troops, cold rain, and high winds. I posted my men in the woods, found Gens. Banks and Stone looking dolefully around a camp fire and waited till daylight to pass over my brigade.

When daylight came, I found the means of transit were two small boats and one canal boat, capable of carrying perhaps one hundred

men and occupying an hour or so in being poled over by awkward boatmen. The river was much swollen and very rapid, about one-quarter mile broad or more, and in the misty, dull morning light it didn't look at all pleasant. Gen. Abercrombie's brigade was ahead of me, having come by the shortest route. I waited and waited in the rain till nearly 2 o'clock, when orders came to bivouac and but a few hours after came the sudden rattle of small arms and the booming of big guns from over the river. We had a stirring sight for a half hour or so, in full view from the high banks on our side. All at once the fight stopped, the guns ceased fire, and there was a painful silence over the other side, especially as the smoke settling down over the field, we could see nothing of the position of our troops. In a short time we learned that the enemy had fled, and subsequently we had positive intelligence that they lost sixty men killed in this short conflict.<sup>15</sup>

My brigade was ordered under arms again and soon we went on a double-quick to the ferry, the men cheering all the way, and considering the weather, the march, the means of transportation, and all things else, were in excellent spirits, better, I confess, than I was, though I assumed an especial alacrity and good cheer at the prospect of passing over. We didn't get over, however, for the cavalry had possession of the boats and it was dark before even they could move. After some delay we were ordered back for the night.

The day following was a furious gale, so strong that only one or two boats crossed. Our poor fellows already over lay in the mud day and night without shelter and badly provisioned. We were hourly expecting an attack upon them and we had no means to reinforce them. I contrived to get over one company of sharpshooters to scout on the south side of Goose Creek, where we had not one man and from which direction our flank was exposed. There was a furious popping of skirmishers all day and we could see bodies of their troops in position on the hills behind. My brigade was taken down to the ferry, my artillery embarked on the boats, and after dark I was ordered back again to remain in readiness to embark during the night. I tumbled myself onto my bed full-armed, expecting to be called at any moment. I did not awake till morning, when I found my scouting officer at hand to report that all our troops had recrossed and left the "sacred soil" to its own people.

Gen. McClellan had been in camp the day before all day. No general officer, unless Gen. Banks, knew his decision till it was carried out during the night by the withdrawal. During the gale of Wednesday I had put all my regiments in tents behind the first roll of the high bank, my wagon train having followed me up as I ordered and the same day my supply train arrived, so that my whole brigade was well provided. It was mighty cold, however, and I regret to say that few fences within a mile of Edwards Ferry had even a foundation rail left. We remained in camp within full reach of their guns and shells till Saturday, but as my brigade was in advance I took the precaution to send my whole wagon train (which with its hundreds of mules and heavy wagons is no joke in a stampede) five miles to the rear.

On Saturday (26th) we broke up and marched by the river road to this point, reaching this [place] after dark and encamping pell mell, weather raining, in an open space surrounded by woods of evergreens. I have since got all my regiments into the evergreens, well protected from the high winds, which blow furiously more than half the time. We are about a mile in direct line from the river, which my brigade has been picketing for nearly five miles on the banks of the canal, but which I have had narrowed down to two and a half miles. All the roads are also picketed, which besides the camp guards takes nearly one man in four of my command on duty every night.

Since coming to this camp, we have had two furious northeasters and last night ice formed very thick. All the troops of my brigade have overcoats, but the single blanket and such worn-out tents are poor protection. The men are suffering badly, though strange to say in this brigade we have less sickness than before marching to Edwards Ferry. The other brigades, which are encamped west of me in open and elevated plains, are suffering much more, and sickness has greatly increased and is increasing. As division officer of the day yesterday I had to visit every regiment of the three brigades and was in the saddle from 9 o'clock till sundown. I found one Indiana regiment without overcoats, and yet doing duty on the river as pickets. This is too bad and any country ought to be damned that suffers it.

We have not been molested from the other side. Their scouts and pickets show themselves, but scarcely a musket is fired. I go along the tow-path with as much feeling of safety as I should on the Erie Canal.

Yesterday, I went two or three miles down, part of the way with an escort of dragoons (my officer-of-the-day hangers-on) but received no recognition from our saluting friends opposite. Indeed, picket shooting is getting to be voted barbarous. Up at Edwards Ferry they exchange visits now, crossing over and having confabs. . . .

No one here (not [even] Gen. Banks) can guess what is to come next. We talk of winter quarters at Frederick, at Poolesville, at Rockville, at Washington, and now and then it is guessed that we are to follow the southern expedition. In the meantime, we watch the opposite shore, but I fear don't *pray* much, but rather swear. I shall not comment on the sad repulse at Conrad's Ferry near Edwards Ferry. I have my opinion of the whole movement—the originator, the motive, and the expectation. McCall was at Darnesville (nearly opposite our present camp) reconnoitering. Stone was at Poolesville. Baker was burning for a fight. A few horsemen crossed, rode towards Leesburg, and came back reporting no enemy at Leesburg or on the road. There seemed a golden chance to get ahead of McCall and take Leesburg by a simple march. One rickety boat transported over two or three small regiments and a few men [were] held ready to be passed over in an equally singular way at Edwards Ferry. It is plain that nobody expected to be driven back or come back in a hurry, for it was simply impossible to do so with the transit means at hand. Gen. Banks, fifteen to twenty miles distant, was not notified of the movement. Gen. McCall at Darnesville moving toward Leesburg was not notified, for on the same day he made a retrograde movement of twelve miles, thus leaving the enemy at liberty to go to Leesburg. Gen. McClellan was not notified till Baker was defeated. It was therefore plainly an unpremeditated and unprepared effort, and failed, as nine out of ten such hasty affairs will.

Who was to blame, I know not—but I do know that there is a mighty amount of stupidity in those papers who lay the affair to Gen. Banks. Gen. Stone's division is not under Gen. Banks' command. It is (like Gen. Banks') one division of Gen. McClellan's Army of the Potomac. On the very morning that Baker crossed, Gen. Banks was at my tent talking over the probabilities of crossing and expressed his opinion that no advance on the upper Potomac could be made till further movements were had before Washington. At 10 o'clock the

same day, hearing that some movement was on foot above, he telegraphed and got answer that there was no intention of crossing, or something to that effect! This was received after Baker's column had actually in part crossed the river!

It was not till Baker was driven back that Gen. Banks was telegraphed to send one brigade to Conrad's Ferry and Hamilton's brigade (being nearest in position) was put in motion. At the same time the other two brigades were ordered to move to Seneca Ford, and I had actually marched nearly four miles toward the mouth of the Seneca before a second telegraph directed us all toward Poolesville and Edwards Ferry. My night march was increased nearly eight miles by this operation. Our editors seem to speak as if Gen. Banks commanded the whole line of the upper Potomac. It is not so. McCall commands one division below—partly over the river. Banks comes next and Stone one above, each three brigades, but there was no 25,000 men at Edwards Ferry, nor half of that number. There is a great overestimating of troops on this line. The regiments are greatly reduced in number and some never had over 750 men. If the estimates made of troops around Washington are equally erroneous then indeed there is good cause to remain stationary. Besides, our troops are miserably armed. Our fine 7th Regiment, Col. Grosvenor, which was across the river at Edwards Ferry, is armed with the Belgian rifle, not one in ten of which can be discharged. I have one regiment with guns of three different calibers and I found a regiment yesterday with guns of four different calibers. What are we to think of such indifference to the effectiveness of troops? This whole matter is weekly reported by me, and I doubt not sent up. But in truth we have no good guns, and to all uses of war, we should be just as strong with half the men we have well-armed as we are now. But enough. I am sending you an intolerable letter. Give much love to Jule and Syl and Cousin Maria and Mary, and to little Jule one of my provoking kisses. I shall hope to hear from you often—give us the little news. Our letters are provokingly slow, but they do come. . . .

Yours Affectionately,

Alph.

P.S. Don't mention what I have said about Banks' telegraphs or our forces.

Can't stop to read over. A. S. Williams.

*ALL QUIET ALONG THE POTOMAC*

Camp near Muddy Brook, Md.,  
Nov. 9th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter:

I wrote you a pretty long letter a few days since in which I promised photographs of my headquarters' log cabin. The weather has been so stormy since that I have not been able to get them printed. We have had two violent easterly gales with rain followed by high north-easterly winds, very cold and disagreeable.

Yesterday we had a fine day, quite Indian summer like. The day before was clear but cool with high winds. As division officer of the day I rode all day from 9 A.M. till sundown, visiting all the regiments of the three brigades, the several picket guards on the road, the cavalry and artillery camps, and finishing up by following the river pickets for miles (along the tow-path of the canal, which runs on the margin of the Potomac) partly on horseback and partly on foot. My brigade has been picketing the river bank for nearly five miles, from Great Falls to the mouth of the Muddy Branch. About 200 men are put on each afternoon carrying 24 hours' rations and returning the following evening after being relieved.

It is a hard duty, as the poor fellows are not allowed fires and the weather has been very inclement. Still they go on with wonderful cheerfulness. There is a strange excitement in the prospect of shooting at one another across the river. We have had, however, very little picket firing and do not encourage it. The Rebels appear on the opposite bank, but so long as they remain quiet we do not trouble them. The river has been unusually high, overflowing the banks of the canal and wholly submerging the island. Since I wrote you last (I think) Gov. Blair and suite paid me a visit and dined with us.<sup>16</sup> . . .

Dr. Antisell joined us as brigade-surgeon a few days ago. He is a very agreeable and intelligent addition to our mess.<sup>17</sup> Capt. Whittlesey has received his appointment as brigade quarter-master and been ordered to report to me, so you see I am getting my staff filled up pretty much as I wished.<sup>18</sup> The young officer who is acting-assistant-commissary of subsistence is from my native village of Deep River and is a most excellent and efficient officer. He has the strong recommendations of the

regular commissary and will probably get his appointment and be permanently put on duty with me. This, with the appointment of one more aide (which I can make from lieutenants) completes my staff. I expect Capt. Whittlesey some time next week.

All my regiments are now encamped in evergreen woods, except the 19th New York, which is two or three miles distant guarding the division supply train. They are very comfortably located and much less exposed than the regiments of other brigades, encamped on high table lands open to all the high winds of the season. Two of my regiments have cut out the small scrub pines and grubbed up the roots making a square completely hedged in, in which they pitch their tents, and on the edge of the square piled up the bushes so as to completely cut off the cold winds. Almost every tent has its fire, which is built in the mouth of a trench in the front. The trench is carried through the tent covered over with flat stones and earth and terminating behind in a turf chimney surmounted by a barrel to increase the draft. In this way the fire is carried under the tent; the stones, once heated, keep up the warmth a long time, and a tent is made very comfortable. Others dig deep cellars and build regular fire-places, carrying the chimney through the ground under the wall of the tent to some distance away and use the barrel for a chimney.

In one regiment (28th), which is encamped among trees of larger growth, the men are building log huts along the line of streets. If we are left in position long this whole regiment will be hutted. I have a busy brigade and am much pleased with it. I fancy it is far the best in the division in all respects, in drill, policing, good order, and cheerful discharge of any duty. In marching, I believe (since my forced march to Edwards Ferry through the rain and mud) that I can beat any troops in the Army of the Potomac. . . .

I should like to visit you at Christmas and perhaps we may be so placed in winter quarters that I can get away. While, however, operations are liable to be active and we are still in the field I do not like to be absent one day. All the other generals of this division have been away and both, I believe, are in Washington now. I intend to stick close to the camp till the prospect of any movement this season is closed. There is some talk about winter quarters. Gen. Banks has intimated that we shall move soon, but I think he is not much better advised than the rest.

It has been thrown out that we may follow the southern expedition as a reinforcement. I think all movements are in suspense awaiting information from that source.

In the meantime we hear, day after day, the booming of cannon above and below us and our minds are kept conjecturing "what is up." Yesterday, all day, we heard reports of heavy guns, and a few days before we were sure that Gen. McCall was engaged below Danesville. Dr. Antisell, who came up, says the rumor below was that all our division was fighting the enemy and that the cannon reports came from our direction. In the meantime, around the whole front of our encampment the rolling drill ground, covering a space of several hundred acres, is on every pleasant day a scene of the most lively and pleasant kind. Several regiments are engaged in all kinds of drill, some by battalion, some by companies, some skirmishing, some forming squares, some charging in line of battle; in short, employed in all manner of maneuvers. While the regiments are marching out and in, the bands play, and occasionally, when the companies are at rest. This scene begins at 8 o'clock A.M. when all regiments "mount guard" and all bands play in succession. Then comes the drill by companies till near 11 o'clock, then for two or three hours the space is cleared, excepting [for] straggling details and mounted orderlies. In the afternoon the regiments appear again by battalion, all the bands playing and the sounds very discordant sometimes, from the quantity of instruments from different directions. In a few moments, the whole space will be covered by the changing and moving masses and detachments of men, and the sound of many voices giving hoarse and loud orders takes the place of musical instruments.

Towards sundown the drills stop and the music begins again, till the regiments form for evening parades skirting along the circular line of the evergreen woods, and all in full view of our log-cabin home. The scene is then most animating and cheerful. I often wish you were here to enjoy it, knowing your fondness for this military display and for the music of bands. In the evening, before tattoo, the bands generally play again, in turn, and now and then one comes round to serenade the General.

Tattoo comes and then taps, all lights are extinguished, all noise hushed, except the outrageous braying of mules or the more agreeable

neighing of horses or perhaps the call of some far-off sentinel, who calls loudly the number of his post, with a yell for "Corporal of the Guard." Then may be heard in the stillness of the night the tramp of horses, some officer, with his escort, going the "grand rounds"; or perhaps a single horseman can be heard dashing furiously over the hills in the direction of division headquarters, coming as if he bore a message of vast importance, which, though often delivered at midnight, turns out to be nothing more than a leave of absence or a detail for next day, or some other insignificant matter which might as well have been delivered next day.

When the days are fair, I ride with some of my staff over the country to get familiar with the many byroads and bridle paths. It is a country full of commanding views and pleasant prospects. Almost every hill one ascends gives him a far-off view of hill and dale and river. From some we get long peeps into Virginia. We have on these highest points regular signal stations, with a corps of officers in permanent charge. Communications are made at fixed hours with Washington below and as high up as Point of Rocks and Harpers Ferry—in the daytime, by a series of flags, and by night by varied-colored lamps, after the system invented by Major Ayers, who is in command of the corps.

The highest point for signals is Sugar Loaf Mountain, which rises some few miles above Edwards Ferry in the shape of a loaf of sugar, several hundred feet above any surrounding hill. It is a prominent and conspicuous point from the whole line of the river. From the station at its top one can plainly see Leesburg on one side and Frederick, Maryland, on the other. The next station below is a hilltop near our camp. To gain a higher elevation, an old dry tree on the hill is used and ascended by ladders. Away up in its branches they have fixed a sort of nest where through the strong telescopes used one can see away down to Chain Bridge and away up to Edwards Ferry, the camps of Gen. Stone's division being plainly visible.

It is, indeed, a grand prospect, and along the whole distance long patches of the Potomac gleam out towards a pleasant sunset, seeming like silver lakes. Everything, of a quiet afternoon, such as we have had several times, looks so peaceful and home-like, the cattle grazing on the hillsides, the smoke curling from the many farmhouses, that one can

hardly realize that thousands are armed for battle on either side of that pleasant river and amid those quiet valleys. But so it is, and one's heart feels heavy in the thought that it is so.

You will be glad to hear that my horse is doing finely, notwithstanding his outdoor exposure to rain and wind, and his occasional deprivation of hay or oats. The whole division is much troubled to procure forage. I am obliged to send the wagons of my brigade 25 miles for hay and oats. The roads are now so heavy that the mules consume much of the load before they return, or on the return. When you reflect that we have in the division about a thousand four-mule-wagons, besides the horses of officers, artillery, cavalry, and various staff departments, you will comprehend somewhat the difficulty we have to feed them. The country immediately about us is not very productive, and the farmers have been pretty closely skinned and complain bitterly that they are often obliged to sell at prices fixed by the government. I fear their complaints are well founded, but "necessity knows no law." Still, I think the government should make liberal prices.

There is a great rush to me at each new encampment for guards for houses. I have invariably tried to protect the people, and always send out small pickets to houses near our camps; and yet, in spite of all endeavors and all efforts of commanders of regiments, there is a good deal of rascality done; mainly, however, I think, by the hordes of unenlisted teamsters, drovers, and hangers-on, who are a necessary appendage to an army. I am greatly annoyed by daily complaints and try hard to correct the evil and do justice where damage is done. I fear, however, we are suffering the usual consequences of an armed occupation, making more enemies than friends. Indeed, I fear there is not much real loyalty in this part of Maryland, and that the people would greatly rejoice to see us driven out. They *talk* very patriotic. . . .

Ever Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



## ARMY DRILLS AND NEEDS

Camp near Muddy Branch, Md.,

Nov. 24th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter:

Your last letters have reached me with much better regularity and all have come to hand. The last, with the enclosure of your school report, was very gratifying. . . . I was much pleased with Aunt Kate's letter. I shall answer it soon, but at present my time is much occupied. I have, in consequence, somewhat delayed writing you or Irene longer than usual, and I shall be obliged now to make a short letter. I could write you in the evening, but that our small log cabin, 12 by 15, is full of the desks of staff officers and their assistants, who keep up a constant talk about forage, rations, abstracts, requisitions, claims, prices, supplies, and the like with the regimental quartermaster and others who seek the night to make arrangements for the succeeding day. Add to this a very smoky chimney and all the [illegible] of a crowded cabin, with all writing tables occupied, and you can imagine I have a poor chance for letter writing.

The past has been a tolerably pleasant week and I have improved it by a review of my brigade and brigade drills, in which all my regiments are maneuvered together. We make a great show in these "evolutions de luxe," especially as they are mainly done in double-quick, and the regiments being very well drilled the movements are made with wonderful precision and accuracy. Would you not like to see four or five regiments closing up into mass, then deploying into line of battle, then moving rapidly to the front in "echelons" forming squares all in one grand oblong parallelogram, then separating into squares of single regiments, oblique and direct; in short, taking all manner of offensive and defensive positions and all moved without confusion or disorder and controlled as by a single thought to the same end?

Mine is the only brigade in this division which has these drills, and consequently we have a large crowd of spectators from the three brigades and from the host of civilian employees of the army. It was quite an imposing affair, *we* all think. I found a large field of many hundred acres where I could form all my regiments in one line. After marching in quick time, each regiment marched past in double-quick

to the music of its own band. It was very handsomely done, for all my regiments but one have been nearly five months in service and move on the double-quick with the regularity of veterans. They trot off with knapsack packed, canteen and haversack and cartridge box, with forty rounds of ball cartridges, as if nothing was on their backs. On the whole, you see, I am well pleased with my brigade, and what is perhaps more important, I think the brigade is well pleased with me, but this may be fancy.

We have all been expecting to move from our present position to Rockville or Frederick for winter quarters. It is rumored today, however, that we shall not go into winter quarters at present, but must hold on here to await events. We are in a sorry position. The roads, even the best ones, are almost impassable, and the new ones cut for military purposes and to get into our camps are for all practicable value quite so. In riding in yesterday from the camp of one of my regiments I found lots of mule wagons stalled in the mud, some with broken tongues and others badly disabled in other ways. If this is so while the weather is comparatively good, what may we not expect as soon as the winter days begin in reality?

So far the season has been, for a week at a time say, one day heavy rain, the next a cold, strong north wind, gradually lessening into a tolerably mild Indian summer day. This would end in another heavy north-east rain. Thus we seemed to be just in that point where a constant strife is going on between the north and south winds. Tonight we have a regular snow storm with a northerly wind. My heart bleeds for the poor fellows picketed along the river with little shelter, many without blankets, and some without overcoats. I have been unremitting in my efforts since I joined the brigade to get all this necessary clothing supplied and have sent all my colonels to Washington and some to their states to get overcoats and blankets. They have been promised over and over again. Many have been supplied, but not all.

There seems [to be] a great want of foresight somewhere, a great negligence in preparing for the future. I don't pretend to say where, but I know that our volunteers could be clothed and ought to be. Their exposure in this weather all through these stormy nights is bad enough with the best clothing, but without overcoats and blankets it is barbarous and will cost the government in pensions and hospitals ten times the

value of good warm clothing. If mittens are not provided before the winter cold comes, thousands will be disabled by frozen fingers and hands.

My regiments have very bad tents, but they are making all sorts of huts and warm shelters for winter and when inside their tents will get along pretty well, I think. Most of them have got fireplaces inside, so have regular log houses, others have mounted tents on log basements. It is quite a curiosity to go through the camps and see the various devices to keep warm. With new tents we could keep warm all winter, I think.

I fear you were too much alarmed at the Edwards Ferry affair. The exposure to me is not very great, and what I most feared in that river crossing was that we should have hard work to get back if Beauregard had sent, as he could, a large force to attack us. But he did not, and we, fortunately, did not stay to give him a chance. Leesburg is about as near Centerville (the Rebels' large army) as Washington. Of course we could hardly expect to stay long at Leesburg without a big battle.

I have not yet sent the photographs; I am waiting to get one of myself and some others. If I don't get them this week I will send those I have by express. Love to all. I have forgotten to tell you how useful we have found your "housewife." <sup>19</sup> Capt. Wilkins and Mr. Pittman <sup>20</sup> talk of you often and wish to be remembered. Capt. Whittlesey has not yet arrived; we expect him soon. I should like to send my things to Annie to be overhauled. I think she would find some things out of sort. Larned has no "housewife." Can't you make him one? I will write you again in a few days and talk about Christmas.

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### REMOVAL TO WINTER QUARTERS

Headquarters, 3rd Brigade,  
Camp near Frederick, Dec. 7th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter:

A letter from Aunt Patty received just before I left Camp at Muddy Branch says that you had not heard from me for four weeks,

If this is so, my letters must have miscarried, for the longest interval has not been over two weeks. I must have written you at least five letters from Camp Muddy Branch while we were there but about four weeks. You must not think it strange nor that you are forgotten if my letters are very irregular, for I have not only constant occupations but subjects of incessant thought. It is an easy matter for you, who have literally nothing that *demand*s daily attention, to write to your friends. If you had the care and supervision of a town of 4,000 people you would find the time for writing not easily got at.

As I wrote you in my last, we have changed camps and I am now perched up in the hills which form part of the chain of the Blue Ridge. We are westward of the city of Frederick about three and one-half miles. Back of us lies a high range of wooded hills, and as we have the southern slope on a gravelly soil, with several small mountain streams running close to us, with plenty of wood, we can say that our camp for cold weather is most eligibly located. My headquarters are in a farmer's house, nicely situated, with a two-storied corridor or stoop running the whole length of the house. We have one large room for office and eating-room, one bedroom (small) for myself and Larned, and one large one for my staff. For the first time in two months I have slept in a room and on a bed! So rapidly do we acquire new habits of life that it seems strange, and as the weather is very fine I almost regret my tent and field bed!

The country about us is exceedingly beautiful and picturesque. We are just in the first hills of the mountain range and my regiments are encamped up a narrow ravine or valley which runs east and west into the ridge, called Catoctin Mountains. East of us, perhaps fifteen or twenty miles, is another range of mountains or high hills called Parr's Ridge. Between these two ranges lies a most beautiful and fertile valley, rolling in great undulations and cultivated to the highest perfection. In the center of this valley is the ancient and rather fine-looking city of Frederick, a place of several thousand inhabitants, renowned for the wealth of its citizens and for its Secession proclivities. At a distance, its lofty spires and its long range of cement[?] buildings and other public edifices give it a very picturesque appearance. From our headquarters we can overlook a greater part of this valley, and the city, though distant over three miles, seems (especially, through the present hazy atmosphere) to be almost within a stone's throw.

So much for my location: We broke up camp on the morning of the

4th inst. (Wednesday) moving with all my regimental and brigade supply-trains of over a hundred four-horse wagons. The other brigades had moved each a day before the other. The roads had been terrifically bad, so deep in mud that we found it difficult to get forage for our numerous cattle. But fortunately the weather became freezing cold and the road hard, but as rough as the popular song makes the road over Jordan. However, I made fifteen miles the first day, bringing up wagons and everything promptly and encamping long before sundown on a superb ground on the banks of the Little Seneca, on the "Mudpike" from Rockville to Frederick.

The next morning we were on the march a little after sunrise. The day was beautiful, a veritable Indian summer day, and I anticipated a pleasant march. Before reaching the village of Clarksburg, however, we began to be annoyed by the stragglers of other regiments which had preceded us one day. Presently we overtook the wagon train of an entire regiment, which had stalled or been neglected on the way. You will think that passing a few wagons is no great matter, but if you had had a little experience in getting heavily-laden vehicles stretching out three miles or more over roads running over abrupt and rocky hills and through deep, narrow gullies and ravines you would have some appreciation of the labor and delay.

We succeeded, however, in passing the train, but as we proceeded we began to meet long lines of returning wagons. The stragglers of one regiment (the 1st Maryland) unattached to any brigade, fairly lined the road, drunken and furious with liquor and committing all sorts of depredations and outrages. In the villages especially, the rum-shops had all been taken possession of, and the most violent conduct was being exhibited. I had no empty wagons and could not encumber my command with drunken prisoners, so all I could do was to clear out and shut up the groggeries and drive the rascals out of the villages into the country.

I was necessarily annoyed all day, and as savage and angry as a tiger, especially as those drunken stragglers were most intent upon giving their rum canteens to my men and occasionally manifested their high regard by a grand discharge of loaded muskets, fired without especial regard to range or aim. On one occasion a wagon-load fired a volley at some of their comrades lying drunk by the roadside. Fortunately the balls took effect on the rails instead of the persons of their friends. I

expected to hear of wounds and loss of life, but I believe nothing was killed but hogs, dogs, and cattle.

In spite of all these annoyances and delays I reached the Monocacy Junction (three miles from Frederick) with my whole command about 3 o'clock P.M. The wagons of the regiments, with all the tents, forage, etc., did not get up at all, and these regiments were obliged to bivouac in a pretty frosty night without shelter of any kind. We found quarters in a nice house and I (for the first time in two months) had a room and a great, broad bed! All by myself! Our host and hostess were very kind and agreeable, the latter a remarkably pretty woman, and as I had not seen a passable face for a long time I enjoyed the sight as a novel entertainment.

Our trains got up in the night and we were off again soon after sunrise. I halted outside Frederick, closed up my ranks, and marched through the city in grand style, colors flying and music playing. They complimented us by saying that we made a fine show, much better than the other brigades. I rode at the head of the brigade with my staff of six. The whole population was out, and the flag of our Union was displayed very generally.

Today I have been into Frederick for a short time on business and to report to Gen. Banks, who has his headquarters there. I found the place very ancient in appearance, but with a good many elegant private residences. I hear the people are very hospitable, and that if we seek it or assent to it we shall be very generously entertained here. As for myself, I think I shall desire to keep very quiet. I have lost pretty much all desire for the *gay monde*.

I made the acquaintance yesterday of a Gen. Klemmer, who lives some ten miles east and is one of the active and prominent Union men of the state. I was introduced to a good many other gentlemen, but I was deeply impressed with the idea that while they regret the dismemberment of the Union and are willing to treat us kindly, they have, after all, no very strong feeling for our side, believing, probably, that all hope of a restoration of the Union as it was is gone. However, I shall probably be here some weeks and shall see and know more. Nobody seems to know our future destination. Of course, there are all kind of rumors; for going south and going west; for breaking up the division and sending us all ways. I think nothing definite has as yet been decided, but that

toward spring we shall be reinforced and sent down the valley of the Shenandoah, or toward western Virginia.

But this is all guess. I don't think Gen. Banks knows his future movements. He is not very communicative, even to those near him in command, and although always pleasant and courteous, he cannot be said to be a companionable person. I think he is oppressed somewhat with a position novel and untried, and full of responsibilities of a character so different from those he has had heretofore that he feels ill at ease. He is an officer of excellent judgment and good sense, but not familiar with military routine or etiquette, and he has for an adjutant general an officer who knows less of military [life] and [is] of less experience than he. I regard the whole state of things as unfortunate for Gen. Banks and, perhaps, *en consequence*, unfortunate for us who have the honor to command his brigades.

I think the army, and perhaps the political influence at Washington, is against him. You know that old army officers think that no man can be qualified to command who is not a graduate of West Point and has not spent at least fifteen years as a *clerk* in an army bureau or on duty at a frontier post as a lieutenant to a command of a dozen men, where there are no books, no drill, no military duty, nothing but a vast amount of whisky drinking, card playing, and terrific, profane swearing; and where, as a consequence, men forget in a year or so all they could learn in four years, and acquire habits of the most indolent and unambitious and dissolute kind. And yet, with honorable exceptions, such are the men who, in the eyes of one another at least, and I fear, too, of a good share of the public, are fit to command our armies or have any responsible positions in this war.

At least, the whole West Point influence is against any man who did not happen to spend four years of his life in that institution, and any man who has been there, even for a few months, no matter what his natural stupidity or his indolent, inefficient habits, his ignorance acquired or habitual, is fit for all responsibility and all power. I have seen much of these men and I confess to a most ineffable disgust with the whole thing. I begin to think that all the prominent acquisition obtained there is superciliousness, arrogance, and insolence. Of course, there are noble exceptions, men of military taste and ambition, to whom that institution has been the alphabet of knowledge they have gained afterwards and

who would have been under any circumstances good military men. But to set it down as certain that a graduate of West Point is *ipso facto* a good officer would be like pronouncing every graduate of Harvard or Yale a man of learning—or classical knowledge—or a learned lawyer, or doctor. As these graduates forget their Latin and Greek, so these West Pointers forget their tactics, their strategy, their logistics, or exchange what little they knew for skill in whist, euchre, monte, and billiards. But I have unintentionally run into a disquisition.

The other brigades of Gen. Banks' division are east of Frederick about the same distance that mine is west, so we are quite six miles apart. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### WINTER QUARTERS AT FREDERICK

Camp near Frederick, Md.,  
Dec. 18th, 1861.

My Dear Daughter:

We received an order last night, or rather early this morning, to be ready for a rapid march toward Williamsport. As we were all unpacked and housed, in fact, quite settled down in our farm-house headquarters, it created a good deal of bustle and confusion. However, we were all ready bright and early, when a countermand was received with orders to be on the alert. Our domestic arrangements, however, are left in great disorder while we await the next movement. As I may be on the road in a short time I embrace the leisure of suspended orders to write you. You will know by telegraph long before this reaches you whether we have left Frederick or not. So you can direct your letters as heretofore—“Headquarters, 3rd Brigade, Gen. Banks' Divn. near Frederick.”

We have had two weeks of very charming weather which our major general has improved by a series of reviews of all his brigade and independent regiments and detachments. My brigade was reviewed last

Friday, that is four regiments, the artillery having been detached to be consolidated into one battalion.

I see that the Baltimore papers give us a very favorable notice. I send you a slip from the *Sun*. After the review I drilled the whole brigade together in some very showy movements, such as forming squares by regiments in echelon on the double-quick; forming oblique squares of battalions; marching to the front on double-quick of battalions in mass, and divers such things which none of the other brigades had attempted. I also passed the general on the second time at double-quick, each battalion closed in mass and taking the double-quick step from its own music. On the whole, we of the 3rd Brigade think we rather excelled in the maneuvers, though the 1st had better ground and had just secured their new uniforms.

I accompanied Gen. Banks as a part of his cortege in all the reviews. His retinue, made up of the brigadier generals, his own large staff, and the brigade staff, with a large escort of cavalry, made a very showy cavalcade. Most of the officers were in full dress, epaulettes and chapeaus. I went each time in my simple shoulder straps and un-dress cap. At my own review, I came out in full feather, with my full regulation dress: chapeau, yellow sash, epaulettes, red second[?] belt, and all. As everybody seemed bent on "fuss and feathers" I thought I would show them that we were provided with the article! It was quite an accident that I had them, as I have no great fancy for the pomp of full dress, but, on the whole, I am rather glad I was prepared.

Since I wrote you, Col. Brodhead, 1st Michigan Cavalry, has joined our division. He is encamped on the other side of Frederick, about six miles from us. I have been to see him once. His regiment is finely mounted and he seems to have a fine lot of men. I fear they know, as yet, very little of cavalry drill. Indeed, I doubt if any of the large drafts of cavalry will be of much service, except as outposts, escorts, patrols, and the like. However, I suppose the government knows where to place its 60,000 cavalry.<sup>21</sup>

I have been so busy I have not seen much of Frederick or its people. I probably shall not, as I am from three to four miles away. I have, however, mounted on a bright sunny day the apex of a mountain knob, one of the highest of the Catoctin Range, and had a most extensive prospect of the two broad valleys on each side of that range of moun-

tains. The one east (in which Frederick lies) as seen from this elevation of from 1,500 to 2,000 feet was exceedingly vast and impressive. The Eastern Range, which down in the valley seems high and broken, looks from my mountain peak like a gentle and gradual swelling up of the surface into a smooth ascent. Down south towards the Potomac is the Sugar Loaf, which seems to terminate that range. All between, for miles and miles up and down, are the square lots of the cultivated farms (green now with winter wheat) and the white farmhouses, looking in the distance and in the bright sunlight very neat and attractive.

On the other side of the Catoclin we had the smaller but equally beautiful valley which lies between it and the South Range. In its center is the neat and considerable village of Middletown, and far off in the southwest the mountain gap through which flows the Potomac at Harpers Ferry. The famous Maryland Heights, which has been the scene of various conflicts, looms up just beyond the river-gap. So much for scenery.

I am sorry I shall not be able to be with you for Christmas. . . .

Love to all. Larned promised, and I thought did write you all about our Thanksgiving under canvas. It was no grand affair, but we had turkeys and chickens, and William made a big effort. . . .

Your Very Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### *A MILITARY EXECUTION*

Headquarters, 3rd Brigade,  
Near Frederick, Md., Dec. 23, 1861.

My Dear Daughter:

I wrote you a few days ago, I think, while under orders and expecting to be off at once for Williamsport, Md. Since then the order has been countermanded, but we are held subject to a movement at once when ordered. The weather, in the meantime, which has been spring-like since we arrived, has changed to the very most tempestuous, snowing, sleeting, raining, freezing, and altogether of the most un-

pleasant character. My poor fellows are badly prepared for it, as we have been expecting daily to move and but little "hutting" has been done in some of the regiments, in expectation of going away soon. Besides this, our hundreds of public horses are in the open air, exposed to sleet and cold rain, freezing as it falls. One such day will cost the government more than lumber to cover the whole army would. There will be hundreds of horses and mules dead tomorrow morning. The very high wind and low temperature will make sad havoc. . . .

To multiply the depth of a "blue Monday," we had an execution by hanging a private of my brigade on the parade ground today at 2 P.M. The culprit was named Dennis Lanaghan. While on a march just three months ago, he deliberately loaded a musket and shot the major of his regiment, the 46th Pennsylvania, simply because the major had compelled him to follow a wagon, and on his refusing had tied a rope to him for a short time. He was partly intoxicated at the time, but when sober was a very bad man. He has been in the hands of the provost guard of the division ever since, and after one or two trials set aside for irregularity in the order organizing the court, he was finally condemned a few weeks since.

I received an intimation for the first time yesterday that he was to be executed today, and this morning a party from Frederick began putting up the scaffold on a knoll in the center of the field we use for drills. At 12 o'clock I received the notification of the execution. The unpleasant office was performed by the provost marshal, and my brigade was present only as spectators. The day, as I have mentioned, was half-sleety, half-snowy, and with a high, cold wind. The ceremonies were very short. The rope was adjusted, a Catholic priest whispered something to the prisoner, a black fellow pulled the cord and let fall the drop. The man fell about two feet and literally died without a struggle. There was but an almost imperceptible drawing up of his legs and not a movement besides. The troops marched off leaving a small guard, and the affair was all over in ten or fifteen minutes.<sup>22</sup> . . .

On Wednesday is Christmas. I have been thinking that we have never before been absent from one another at Christmas. Rene and Larned have been away, but I think we have always been together. The day to me is full of associations. Happily for you, while you can remember the happy scenes of the past, you can look joyfully to the future. I

have reached that age when "Merry Christmas" has no cheerful sound, but is rather full of sad remembrances of the many, many dear ones who used to enjoy the festive days with me but are here no more. In short, my dear Minnie, I have got so old that I begin to live in the past and hardly take into account the future on earth. But it gives me pleasure to see you merry and cheerful, and I most cordially wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. . . .

Believe me as ever, Your Affectionate Father,

A—

1. The letter was written on both sides of a split-open envelope. Here, as elsewhere throughout the letters, as far as practicable, private and personal details have been deleted.
2. Although this letter was dated August 28, accompanying information discloses that it was actually written a month later. The official *Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (hereafter cited as *Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers*) discloses that Colonel Brodhead's First Michigan Cavalry left Detroit for Washington on September 29, 1861 and that the Eighth Infantry Regiment, mustered at Detroit on September 23, departed for Washington on the 27th of this month. General Williams' succeeding letter of October 4, announcing his then recent arrival in Washington, harmonizes with the supposition that he left Detroit on Monday, September 30. The following Wednesday, when he planned to be in Philadelphia for a few hours, fell on October 2, and the letter of October 4 states that he had spent the preceding day at the War Department.
3. From long-hand copy; original manuscript missing.
4. Daniel Henry Rucker (1819-1910) of the Grosse Ile Rucker-Macomb family. He entered the army in 1837, served in the Mexican War, and in the Civil War attained the rank of major general. The daughter of his second wife, Irene Curtis Rucker, became the wife of General Philip H. Sheridan.
5. For General Randolph B. Marcy (1812-87) see the *Dict. Am. Biog.* He was General McClellan's father-in-law.
6. Nathaniel P. Banks of Massachusetts, politician and Civil War soldier, under whom General Williams was about to serve. For a sketch of his career see *Dict. Am. Biog.*
7. A letter of General Williams to his daughter, Irene, written July 24, 1855, states that Mrs. Smith, widow of Captain E. Kirby Smith who was killed at Molino del Rey in 1847 is momentarily expected on a visit, and that "young" Kirby, evidently her son, now at West

Point, will accompany her. The son, Joseph Lee Kirby Smith graduated from the Academy in the class of 1857. He was appointed colonel of the Forty-third Ohio Regiment on September 28, 1861 and died at the age of twenty-six on October 12, 1862 from wounds received at Corinth, October 3-4. According to the *Dict. Am. Biog.*, Confederate Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby-Smith was a younger brother of Captain E. Kirby Smith and thus was an uncle of our present subject. Various allusions in the letters of General Williams disclose that Mrs. Smith was an old-time family friend.

8. The 1861 *Detroit Directory* lists George W. Dollarson, colored, as a baker, and Mrs. Dollarson of the same address as an embroiderer. One may surmise that William was their son.
9. George Gordon Meade, subsequently commander of the Army of the Potomac and victor of Gettysburg.
10. General John J. Abercrombie, a graduate of West Point in the class of 1822, a veteran of the Mexican War and of long years of frontier service, and Charles S. Hamilton, a West Point graduate of the class of 1843. For their military careers see George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. . . .*
11. Colonel Orris S. Ferry was a lawyer who had been a Republican member of Congress from 1859 to 1861. Following the war he was a member of the Senate until his death, November 21, 1875.
12. The Seventh Michigan Infantry, chiefly composed of militia companies from various towns, was mustered into service at Monroe on August 22, 1861 and left the state for the seat of war on September 5. Of its total number of enlistments throughout the war (1375) slightly more than one-half (691) were casualties from wounds, diseases, etc. Over 13 percent (183) were killed in action or died as the result of wounds received.
13. Lewis Allen of Detroit. His wife (Julia Larned Allen) and General Williams' deceased wife were sisters.
14. Edward D. Baker, prominent as an orator and politician, and a personal friend of President Lincoln. The battle of Ball's Bluff, October 21, in which he was killed, was a very minor military operation. Coming soon after Bull Run, however, and like that battle a Union defeat, it had important consequences. General Stone, who dispatched his troops across the Potomac without orders from General McClellan, was arrested, imprisoned, and officially disgraced. The popular demand for a scapegoat induced Congress to create the Committee on the Conduct of the War, which until the end of the war maintained a vigilant oversight of the Administration and its armies. As yet the nation was unaccustomed to scenes of bloodshed, and the armies were

- chiefly composed of amateur soldiers, a condition which is illustrated in the present letter.
15. This description deals with the minor engagement near Edwards Ferry on the afternoon of October 22, 1861. A relatively small force of Confederates attacked the Union force under General Abercrombie on the south side of the Potomac, abandoning the assault when it found itself outnumbered by the Northern soldiers. General Abercrombie reported a loss of one man killed by the enemy and another killed "by mistake." In addition, General Lander, who was present for some unexplained reason, suffered a flesh wound in the leg. See *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1902), Series I, V, 336-38 and 354-55, for conflicting official reports of the action. (Hereafter cited as *Official Records*.)
  16. Austin Blair, one of the active founders of the Republican party, was governor of Michigan from 1861 to 1865. Although he had been one of the floor leaders for Senator Seward at the Chicago Republican Convention of 1860 which nominated Lincoln for the Presidency, in his role as governor, Blair was a vigorous advocate of Lincoln's measures and he became not the least distinguished member of the notable group of Northern "war governors." In his inaugural address (January 3, 1861) he proclaimed the power of the Federal government to defend itself and his certainty that it would do so, warning the seceding states that it was a question of war which faced them. Under his leadership the First Michigan (three-months) Regiment was the first regiment of western troops to reach Washington, and a precursor of the vigor with which the Michigan state government supported the President throughout the war.
  17. Dr. Thomas Antisell, subsequently medical director of the Twelfth Corps.
  18. Franklin W. Whittlesey of Ypsilanti, who entered the service as a captain in the First Michigan Infantry, April 20, 1861. He attained the rank of colonel of the regiment and was honorably discharged for disability, March 18, 1863.—*Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers*.
  19. A container for keeping needles, thread, scissors, etc.
  20. Captain William D. Wilkins, assistant adjutant general, and Lieutenant Samuel E. Pittman of the First Michigan Infantry were members of General Williams' staff.
  21. General Williams' distrust of the cavalry branch of the Union army was well-founded. "Who ever saw a dead cavalryman" became a commonplace gibe throughout the army in the early years of the war. In its latter half, under the leadership of such men as Pleasonton, Kilpatrick,

Sheridan, and Custer, the Union cavalry became a fair match for its Confederate counterpart. As for the First Michigan Cavalry, after more or less arduous service in the Shenandoah Valley and around Washington, in the course of which Colonel Brodhead was mortally wounded, and in the second battle of Bull Run, August 30, 1862, it was assigned, early in 1863, to General Custer's Michigan Cavalry Brigade comprising the First, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh regiments. Under his leadership the brigade acquired a reputation fairly comparable to that of the famous foot-slogging Wisconsin-Indiana-Michigan Iron Brigade.

22. An interesting comment concerning this execution was supplied following General Williams' death in 1878 by the provost marshal who conducted it. Early on the appointed day of execution he went with a corps of workmen to erect the gallows. The severe storm of sleet and rain threatened to demolish the structure unless additional ropes to anchor it could be secured. The site was near General Williams' headquarters tent and the provost marshal applied to him for an order on his wagonmaster for the needed supplies. General Williams, however, declined, saying: "Spare me the necessity of issuing an order. You can, no doubt, find what you want." The tremulous voice and moistened eye of the general commanded the provost marshal's respect. Years later, upon meeting him, the incident was alluded to, when General Williams said he would have given his right arm if by so doing he could have spared the culprit's life.—Unidentified newspaper clipping dated about January, 1879, in Burton Historical Collection, Williams' file.

## UP AND DOWN THE SHENANDOAH

### II

## Up and Down the Shenandoah

## UP AND DOWN THE SHENANDOAH

Whatever other faults General McClellan displayed, he was a fine organizer and drill-master. Throughout the winter of 1861-62 he was busy with plans for the capture of Richmond. Meanwhile, General Banks' command would invade Virginia by way of the Shenandoah Valley. Banks was a good politician but only a mediocre military leader. Against him was pitted Stonewall Jackson, the outstanding military genius of the Confederacy. Although badly outnumbered by the several Union armies opposed to him, Jackson triumphed over all of them. He fell short, however, of his objective of destroying Banks' army, which escaped intact across the Potomac. In the letters which follow General Williams narrates the triumphant advance and subsequent retreat of General Banks' army in this first invasion of the Shenandoah Valley.

*HORRORS OF BORDER WARFARE*

Hancock, Md., Jan. 31, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I have not heard from you for nearly a month, except through Irene, that your eyes were troubling you again. I suppose this is the reason you have not written.

I have been able to write you but once since I reached this place. My hard march up found little relief here. I found the village full of new and undisciplined troops, infantry, cavalry, and artillery, without order or decency. I got my first intimation that I was to be put in command on my way up and had no instructions what to do. The weather was intensely cold and the ground so frozen that a tent-pin could not be driven. There was not a vacant foot in town, so I bestowed the regiments of my brigade in barns and in all manner of places outside, and went to work from the moment of my arrival, telegraphing right and left, and I have kept it up pretty busily ever since.

When I reached here the Rebels were in large force within ten or twelve miles, extending from the hills opposite to Unger, fifteen miles below. They have been moving about cautiously ever since, but have made no great demonstrations towards me. My patrols are sent over almost every day and go nearly up to Bath,<sup>1</sup> where the Rebels have a garrison. But I operate very cautiously, as I am under orders to hold this post and await further instructions.

But I am here where I see the horrors of this war in its worst forms. All the Union people on the other side (mostly in moderate circumstances) have been stripped of everything that could be eaten or used. Their husbands have generally fled to this side, leaving wives and children at their little homes, hoping to save their furniture or some small property to bring away hereafter. These wives fill my office daily and fill my heart with pain at the recital of their sufferings and deprivations. Many of them are living on corn meal alone and have been for weeks. I tried to help a few, but the number is altogether too great for one poor private purse and I have given up in despair. Every day male refugees arrive who have spent nights in the woods to avoid Rebel pickets. They all bring sorrowful tales of misery all through the adjoining counties. Prices of everything are exceedingly high, and want

very general amongst the poorer classes. What these poor people will do to sustain life all winter is more than I can imagine. I have sent over several armed parties to bring families away, but in most cases the parties are too far away to bring their effects to the river.

This town, since the new regiments were sent to Cumberland, is very orderly and my troops behave well. I am sorry to say that the troops who were obliged to flee from Bath behaved very badly. All the houses were deserted when the Rebels fired upon the town and had not been occupied. The retiring troops, having forded the river to their arms in extremely cold weather, seized upon the houses and destroyed a great deal of property wantonly, besides eating up all the provisions of every house. The complaints of housekeepers are very numerous, and well-founded, I fear. It annoys and frets me exceedingly.

I have now five regiments of infantry, six pieces of artillery, and two companies of cavalry, besides some unattached companies. The weather has been snowing and raining till the mud is impassable. I have over 800 horses and mules to feed, to say nothing of the several thousand men. What with the bad roads, I find it no easy job, especially as the mules are pretty much used up by exposure to cold and wet and hard work. However, we hold on and hope for better weather. . . .

Your Loving Father.



### *DIFFICULTIES OF WINTER WARFARE*

Headquarters, 3rd Brigade,  
Hancock, Feb. 3, 1862.

My Dear Lew:

Your letter by Capt. Wilkins came to hand some time ago, but I was in the midst of cares and duties of the most insistent and irritating nature. I had gone to Washington on Sunday<sup>2</sup> to meet Irene and had a very pleasant time with her and Cousin Marion on Sunday afternoon. On Monday morning, I received telegraphs and orders in hot haste to join my brigade forthwith. I started in the first train with Dr. Antisell and had a most disagreeable time from Frederick in chase of my brigade

which preceded me twenty-four hours. The march of so many men and wagons had beat the road to the condition of ice and our mules being uncalked worked all sorts of antics over the high hills which lie at right angles to the road from Frederick to this place. By dint of perseverance, we made forty miles and overtook the brigade the same night [January 6] at Clear Spring. In the meantime, I had received a telegraphic order to precede the command and relieve General Lander at this place. I made great haste to do so, and faced the anti-summer temperature of below zero in crossing the high mountain west of Clear Spring and after much tribulation was safely set down at Hancock on Wednesday 8th inst.<sup>3</sup>

I found here five regiments of infantry of the newest and most mobbish species. During the shelling of the town on Sunday previous [January 5], the people had left their houses, food, furniture and all, which our troops (some fording the river arms deep and others sent up from below) had occupied and literally appropriated to themselves. Food, furniture, forage, fuel and all had been used and destroyed without thought or decency. Three of the regiments were new and had been armed with Belgian [rifles] the day of the attack. They knew nothing of camp, garrison, or other military duty, and were literally a mob firing their loaded muskets right and left and playing the very devil generally.

I did not wait to get my overcoat off before I began a reform. I appointed a provost marshal and gave him a guard as soon as my own brigade came up of reliable men [and] ordered a report of the strength of regiments, established a grand guard and outposts four miles up and down the river, shut up the groggeries, and filled up several respectable sized rooms with arrested rowdies. Two of these regiments had lost all their camp and garrison equipage and the weather was cold to zero. Every particle of space in the whole town was crowded. Retiring citizens from the country rushed upon me with violent complaints of robbery, plunder, destruction of all their edibles, and with all the ten thousand complaints of a people scared out of their homes at a moment's notice, which a hungry and irresponsible soldiery had taken possession of.

To add to [my] tribulations up came my four regiments, three of them without winter tents and the ground so frozen that tents could not be pitched at any rate. I hardly know now how I disposed of them—

some in barns outside, some in canal boats, and some in bivouac. But the thing was done, and I went to my blankets a tired and anxious man. I had at least 6,000 men crowded into a little village, not 500 yards from the opposite bank [of the river] held by the enemy in force not less than 15,000 with twenty pieces of artillery. It seemed but a stone's throw to the high hills opposite, which looked down upon this town, which is at the foot of the hills on our side. I had eight pieces of artillery—four of smooth bore six-pounders and four Parrotts. Reports brought to me were that Jackson and Loring held Bath in great force and extended in a continuous camp up to the high hills opposite, and that they intended to renew the shelling of Hancock as soon as the weather moderated.

I was full of concern that they might begin that night. If so, we should have had a scene of confusion that I am not anxious to witness. The town, as I have said, is at the foot of high hills right on the river bank and is completely commanded by the opposite shore. So is the road approaching from below for at least eight miles. It runs along the hill-sides for all this distance, hemmed in by precipitous ridges and slopes and overlooked by the hills on the Virginia shore at not more than half-musket distance in many places, and in no place out of range. It was a pleasant predicament to be in if those twenty-odd guns had opened upon us and had enfiladed, as they could, our only retreat and the route of all our supplies. I found one road to the rear leading towards Pennsylvania, a very hard road, but I ordered my wagon train to park two miles out upon it, and made arrangements to take all the regiments as promptly as possible behind the hills and then hammer away with artillery.

There we stood for two days, while I had my scouts, civil and military, across the river and up and down to get information. I myself mounted a high ridge five miles above called Round Top from which I could see far and wide over Dixie from an elevation of 2,000 feet. But I could see nothing but camp fires extending for miles away down the valleys but behind intervening hills.

On the 3rd day I learned that the Rebels were moving away—leaving an inferior force behind—but a large camp a few miles below. Lander above had got the same news and descending from Romney he fell back towards Cumberland.<sup>4</sup> Gen. Kelley, who was still there, telegraphed me to send reinforcements.<sup>5</sup> I was but too glad to get rid of my green

ones and forthwith started all the infantry but my own brigade on the road to Cumberland. In the meantime, the telegraph line, which I had reconnected through the enemy's country for ten miles, was cut again and I was isolated from Kelley. By the aid of mounted men every five miles I established a communication by the road (forty miles). I was under orders to hold this post but to go to Lander's aid if he was attacked; so I was obliged to keep my command under marching orders with cooked rations for days, Lander being in a constant stew—at times full of fight and asking me to join him in a five-days' march, bivouacking in the open air and depending upon our haversacks for provisions. Expecting to be ordered to this service, I sent back to Hagerstown all my baggage, but the powers above (military) I think put an end to Lander's quixotic expedition, which would probably have resulted in frozen feet to hundreds, if nothing more disastrous. I confess I had no stomach for such an expedition, especially [since] with all my care many of my men were already frostbitten.

My Dear Lew: Sitting in your parlor or resting quietly snug in your warm bed it may seem very easy to talk of winter campaigns and to call out "Onward" in mid-winter. But if you will come down to these snow-clad hills and take one midnight's round to my outposts, see poor devils in rotten tents not fit for summer, talk to the sentinel on his two-hours' round without fire, see the damnable roads, figure up how much provisions it takes to feed a few thousand daily, hear the *cries* not of men only but of half-frozen animals (mules and horses) of which I have upwards of 800—half frozen and half killed by work—witness the effort it takes to get in forage, which I buy from twenty to thirty miles away, to transport subsistence stores thirty miles away, you will be satisfied that in winter months a stationary force has about all it can do to subsist itself, especially in the rain, snow, and mud we have had for the last twenty days. For while it freezes hard at night, it thaws in the valleys by day, or it snows on the hills and rains in the valleys. Altogether I have never seen such cursed weather and such devilish roads.

I should like to photograph you one day's work here. I have five regiments of infantry, six pieces of artillery, and two companies of horse. In the morning begin the reports, and with them the requisitions for things wanted. I have been four months trying to get things absolutely necessary for comfort. I have had requisitions for thousands of shoes and

have received but 500 for two months. I have hundreds of men nearly shoeless. But for supplies from the states [they] would have been absolutely barefooted. I had men who could not march from Frederick for want of shoes! I have written and telegraphed, cursed and swore, and pleaded and begged, and in return have had promises that they should be sent forthwith. But they came not. Just fancy in this age soldiers left without shoes in this war for the Union and that in mid-winter and in a campaign!

Again, but two of my regiments have Sibley tents, the only ones you can live in in winter, because [they are] the only ones in which you can use a stove.<sup>6</sup> One of the other regiments has common wedge tents used all through the three months' campaign and literally in shreds. One other has almost equally bad—wholly unfit for this season. These regiments have hutted themselves up to our march here. Now it cannot be done. I have for months had the promise of Sibley tents but they come not! I made requisition for bugles for skirmishing drill four months ago. They are needed for the efficiency of my command. I have had the promise of them fifty times, but do not get them.

Same of axes and intrenching tools—same of everything. It takes months to have a requisition filled, yet I see the papers every now and then boast of how excellently our troops are provided. It is all sham, except in rations. We have never wanted for an abundance to eat. It is the only department that is provided, or if provided makes its regular issues. In all other things the troops are woefully neglected. But for provisions made by states and for articles the men buy for themselves they would suffer extremely. Half of my men are in boots bought for themselves. I can say nothing about troops near Washington, but speak only of those at a distance. It may all be the fault of our own division departments. I know I don't fare worse than the other brigades of Gen. Banks' division. On the contrary, [I] fancy I am somewhat ahead of them in getting supplies. If I were Gen. Banks, with his political influence, I should understand in a few days where the fault lies. He seems to take it easy and make abundant promises.

I have run rather unintentionally into complaints. As it is against regulations, you will please not read [this] to others, but keep [it] to yourself. It is one of the curses of our service that no complaint can be uttered but to the proper authorities, and they regard them not. I could

tell a tale that would smash up the whole department of sleepy old-fogy quartermasters and I am sorely tempted to do so. I doubt not that there are in our depots an abundance of everything I require to make my men comfortable, but they cannot be got out under three months' time. In spite of all this my command is unusually healthy for the fatigue and exposure they have had, nor do they complain. Their eagerness to get into Dixie is amusing. I send out daily small parties as patrols. There is a great effort from all the regiments to get on this duty which though full of fatigue is full of excitement and hairbreadth escapes.

But if we have suffered some, Jackson's command has suffered more. We have reliable information that he sent back over 1,200 frozen and sick men during the few days he lay opposite. People who came over yesterday say that his sick and disabled fill every house from Bath to Winchester and that many amputations have taken place from frost-bites. His whole command was exposed to a heavy snow-storm, followed by intense cold. I see the Dixie papers confirm the reports of his disasters. He lost a good many men, too, from our Parrott guns, which were admirably served, every shot landing plump into his batteries, upsetting his guns, killing his horses, and throwing his men into confusion. A loyal man who was on that side told me that men were killed by some of the last shots thrown purposely high, at least two miles from the river bank. On their side, the firing was miserable. They literally did no damage to the town, though some shots passed through roofs of houses and some shells exploded in the streets. Not a person was wounded. Most of their shot fell short or passed high over the town into the hills beyond.

The country around this [place] is most splendidly picturesque. After the day's work, I take a horseback [ride] for a couple of hours each day to make myself familiar with the roads and the country. The day after I took command here my scouts discovered the frame of a bridge about two miles up [river] which had been all prepared for laying across the river. I supposed, therefore, that they intended to cross at that point and I was greatly in hopes they would attempt it. I could have demolished their whole 15,000 [men] in thirty minutes by close calculation. I did not disturb their bridge till the main force had left. I then sent a party over and threw it into the river.<sup>7</sup> The river here was

favorable when I arrived, but has been very high most of the time since. I found only a single flatboat, carrying perhaps sixty men. There are some canal boats, but they are too cumbersome to be served in the rapid current. I have applied for authority to build boats and could have enough in a week to carry half my command, but I have no response. So of Bath, the famous Berkeley Springs, I got reliable information that the force left there did not exceed 500 men, with one Brig. Gen. (Carson) and two or three field officers, considerable baggage and all that. I had discovered a mountain pass to their rear cutting off their retreat perfectly. I applied for permission to try it. It was an easy and sure thing, but I got no response. That cursed Ball's Bluff haunts the souls of our chiefs, and perhaps it is well it does. We are too much divided and are operating on the periphery while they stand in the center. I could plan a campaign to seize upon Winchester and relieve all the country north and northwest and open the Balt. and Ohio Railroad beyond molestation. If you will look at the map you will see how completely it is the key to the whole of the country now occupied by Jackson and Loring. It is in the most fertile valley of Virginia which leads down to Staunton, cutting their most important railroad and completely turning the entrenchments at Manassas, but I have no room, or time for more. . . . Love to all.

Affectionately,  
A.S.W.



### BOASTING OF GENERAL LANDER

Hancock, Feb. 19, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

It is so long since I have written to you that I forget when and where I left off, but it matters little, as I have been here in Hancock watching the course of events, somewhat anxious on account of the erratic movements of my next military neighbor, Gen. Lander. I see now, to my great surprise, by newspapers and his own reports that he has been doing great things, though I have been for four weeks in constant com-

munication with him at Patterson Creek, from which place he has not moved till the last week, without suspecting his glories. He talks in his report to Gen. McClellan of having opened the railroad from Cumberland to Hancock, while in fact I have had possession of all this road from Hancock half way to Cumberland for nearly four weeks, and have twice established the telegraph line over the whole route.

I see, too, he reports of the daring and successful reconnoissance of some one of his colonels as far as Unger twenty-two miles south, when in fact my patrols had been there several days before and I myself with other officers and an escort of only four mounted men had ridden nearly to the same place but two or three days before, crossing the Potomac seven miles above and returning to a point opposite this place, after a circuit of several miles. In truth, until last Sunday Gen. Lander knew nothing of the railroad or the other side of the Potomac for twenty miles above. The whole of that region has been held by my pickets, who have had possession of the railroad bridge over the Big Cacapon and below for five to ten miles. I confess my astonishment, therefore, to see in the Baltimore papers today a long account of Gen. Lander clearing the line of the railroad and opening the route for Gen. Williams' brigade to cross, and a complimentary order of the Secretary of War to Gen. Lander for his valuable services.

I belong to Gen. Banks' division of the Army of the Potomac and Gen. Lander commands a division of the Army of Western Virginia. Our boundary line is the Potomac and the western slope of the Alleghanies. I am, therefore, on the extreme right of the Army of the Potomac and cannot go beyond that line without especial orders, though I have sent my pickets far over my line. In this way I have held the railroad (Baltimore and Ohio) on the other side of the Potomac for miles, because Gen. Lander, retiring from Romney, had taken post fifty-odd miles distant at Patterson Creek. The only damage done to the road was partial injury at the Big Cacapon before I came up, which was repaired in a day and the cars can now run from Wheeling to this place, though they have been down but once.

Wednesday, February 26, 1862.

I wrote this some time ago and have been to Frederick since and just returned. . . . We shall march again tomorrow, I suppose for Williamsport and then for "Dixie." You will hear all about us by

telegram, but don't be alarmed. I think the enemy will not wait for us, even at Winchester. We shall go in strong force if Gen. Banks is not mistaken.<sup>8</sup> I will write you a line or so when I get a chance. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### *THE ADVANCE TOWARD WINCHESTER*

Bunker Hill, Va., Mar. 8, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

This is a little hamlet twelve miles north of Winchester on the pike from Williamsport. My headquarters are in a small room of a small house. I have a bedroom adjoining, which just holds my bed. The others, servants and all, occupy our office-room rolled in blankets at night. We are glad of any shelter, for the weather has been very rough, worse than our Detroit March. Indeed, I don't know when I have [not] been exposed to bad weather, but my health is good and my spirits never better.

We left Hancock on March 1st and marched to Williamsport the same day, twenty-three miles. At this point I commenced crossing the river on a single scow ferry-boat. It took me twenty-four hours to get across two regiments and their trains. Consequently, I was nearly three days in passing over my six regiments of infantry, a company of artillery and two companies of cavalry. My advance regiments took possession of Martinsburg without opposition, the Union people welcoming us and the non-Union, for the most part, running away. It was at this point that the Rebels last summer destroyed over fifty locomotives of the Ohio & Baltimore Railroad, the melancholy ruins of which still stand on the track. On Wednesday last I left Martinsburg with my brigade expecting to meet the enemy in force at this place, but he had evacuated and we found nothing but a small picket of cavalry and a few infantry. My cavalry advance dashed into the town, a few rounds of musketry were fired from the houses, we captured five or six of them, and then our anticipated battle was all over without loss to us.

I happened to be in advance with some officers and got considerable of the fever of the rush and thus was one of the early ones in.

Yesterday I sent out a reconnoitering party towards Winchester which was attacked by a considerable force in the woods. My troops drove them easily but we had three men wounded and Capt. Wilkins' fine horse (Prince), which you will recollect, was struck in the shoulder and badly hurt. We killed six of the enemy and wounded seven. They were all cavalry. These fellows are very daring. After we drove them off yesterday they came back at night and fired on my pickets. They are driving all round outside of my lines picking up soldiers on furlough and stealing horses and other property of Union men. I hope to trap some of them soon.

I have the advanced position now and on the extreme right of the Army of the Potomac. My brigade has now six regiments of infantry, six pieces of rifled cannon and two companies of cavalry, the largest command I have had, at least 5,000 men. On my left is Gen. Hamilton and beyond him toward the Shenandoah the other brigades of Gen. Banks' division. Behind late Gen. Lander's, now Gen. Shields' division is coming up, a part having arrived at Martinsburg. I don't know what is ahead, but I think we shall drive them forward without much trouble. . . .

I write you hurriedly. My little office is crowded with all sorts of men for all sorts of business. I am now really "monarch of all I survey," and all the people about, as well as my own troops, think I should supply everything and do everything. Love to all. . . .

Ever Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### OCCUPATION OF WINCHESTER

Winchester, Mar. 13th, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I have merely time to say that we are in Winchester. I left Bunker Hill day before yesterday, my brigade in advance. I skirmished all the

day with my light troops and occasionally shelling the woods with six pieces of artillery, which I held in advance. I have since learned that we killed several of the Rebels. I had but one man wounded. We encamped at night within five miles of this place, the Rebels with their artillery in full view of us. Several earthworks were observable, and we looked forward for a great battle in the morning. My whole brigade was under arms at 4 o'clock yesterday and at daylight we moved forward, four regiments in advance with nearly 800 skirmishers leading, covering the hills in a line for nearly three miles. The morning was beautifully spring-like and the sky as clear as crystal. We moved with great caution, as all the hills showed entrenchments. It was an exciting sight as our long line of skirmishers moved forward and mounted in a long row of single men towards the batteries, looking in the distance like a swarm of ants crawling up the hillsides.

We watched with our glasses as they reached the works, and observed several persons advance from them in front as they approached. Presently we saw them all going to the rear and our front line of videttes pouring over the line of entrenchments without opposition. Soon the large fort came in sight and the left line of skirmishers approached and halted and sent back word that the fort was in front and apparently occupied. They were ordered to "feel" them cautiously, and forward went the whole line, and soon we saw them tumbling over the parapets and the bayonets brightly glaring in the morning sun.

We knew then that the town was ours, and gathering up the whole command, ten regiments, two batteries (ten guns), and four companies of cavalry, we advanced on the town en masse, myself and Gen. Hamilton, who just ranks me, riding in advance.<sup>9</sup> As we reached the outskirts the mayor and council met us and surrendered the city of Winchester, asking protection to private property. We then marched most of the regiments through the town. Many of the people hailed our entrance by waving handkerchiefs and some by showing the Star-Spangled Banner. It is nearly a year since it has been shown in Winchester. . . .

I lost, in advancing from Bunker Hill, five men wounded. It is the only brigade in Gen. Banks' division which has had a man wounded. Indeed, I have led the whole advance, and yet you probably will not see my brigade mentioned. I was joined at Bunker Hill by Gen. Hamil-

ton, who ranks me on the list of generals, though appointed the same day. He sent me in advance the first day and in command the second day, and yet as he ranks me I have no doubt his name alone will get the credit. However, I court nobody—reporters nor commanders—but try to do my whole duty and trust it will all come out right. But I can't help seeing how much personal ambition is mixed up with all these operations, small fame at the expense of the great purpose we have in hand.

It took me all day yesterday to get my regiments in position, and at night I went to my camp—bed the tireddest man you can think of. I have a great many incidents I should like to tell you, but I have no time. Since we arrived, scores of generals have come up. Gen. Shields, Gens. Gorman, Abercrombie, Sedgwick, and I know not how many more. I have had amusing scenes with wives of Rebel officers and others for protection of property, and in one instance with the wife of Col. McDonald, a colonel in the Rebel army, to whom I applied for quarters.

My reputation for kindness and leniency preceded me and scores of people have come to me and said, "We hear you are disposed to treat us with kindness, and we beg you to do this and that to aid us." Indeed, I think I am looked upon as the only soft-hearted man in command, but it is a matter of congratulation to know that my soft words have made more Union friends than hundreds of harsh generals could accomplish. Indeed, I feel that all that is needed is kindness and gentleness to make all these people return to Union love. They think we are coming to destroy, and seem to be astonished when we don't ransack their houses and destroy their property. If I had time I should love to tell you of the hundreds of Union-loving people who have told me their sufferings and their grievances and how they have waited for our coming, and how their neighbors have deceived them with the idea that the "Yankees" (all of us are Yankees) were going to destroy them. . . .

Love to all,

Yours Affectionately,  
A.S.W.

P.S. Don't be anxious. I think we shall drive all before us without trouble.

A.S.W.

## FIRST BATTLE OF WINCHESTER

Strasburg, 20 miles south of Winchester, Va.,

March 30th, 1862.

My Dear Daughter: . . .

I wrote you last from Winchester, after I had been put in command of a division (three brigades) of troops and was on the point of marching eastward across the Shenandoah. One of my brigades left on Friday, the 21st, and the other two and myself on Saturday, the 22nd. We reached the Shenandoah with our long trains Saturday night, and the head of the column, including one brigade and train and part of another brigade, had passed, when the pontoon bridge gave way. It took nearly all day to repair it. In the meantime I had received information that the enemy had returned in considerable force to Winchester and were threatening an attack. Gen. Shields was there with his division. I halted my brigade, which was still on this side, and sent it back to Berryville to be ready to reinforce Gen. Shields.

In the meantime, the river was rising and the bridge bid fair to go away altogether, leaving my command on two sides. I stood by the bridge to watch its safety, expecting to cross the other brigade the next day. At daylight in the morning, however, a messenger brought the word that there had been a fight before Winchester, that Gen. Banks had left for Washington the same day, and that Gen. Shields had been wounded in a skirmish the day before. I was much wanted. I mounted my horse and with a small escort of cavalry set out in hot haste for Winchester. My 1st Brigade was already on the march for the same place. On reaching Winchester I found that Gen. Banks had returned and assumed command and was then following up the retreating enemy. I stayed long enough to order my brigade to follow, and to feed myself and horse, and started for the front.

I overtook Gen. Banks seven or eight miles out. The enemy was in sight, with a strong rear guard of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, but retiring from one strong position to another. We followed them all day till near sundown. At their last stand a battery from my brigade was brought up and they were driven helter-skelter from their position, leaving behind several killed and wounded, with tents, etc. The troops of Gen. Shields' division had been engaged in battle the day before <sup>10</sup>

and had marched fifteen to twenty miles after a night-watch on the battlefield. My brigade (the old third that I commanded for so many months, now commanded by Col. Donnelly, senior colonel) had marched thirty-six miles since the preceding evening and with but two hours' rest.<sup>11</sup>

We could follow no farther, so the whole command bivouacked on the field, many a poor fellow supperless. My wagons were thirty miles away with no order to follow, for I did not expect to follow so far, but I found comfortable lodgement in a farmhouse and sufficient to eat. I do not give you any description of the battle or the battlefield, where at least four to five hundred lay dead, nor of the wounded which filled the houses of Winchester and all the little villages on our march this side.<sup>12</sup> You will see pictures enough, often greatly exaggerated, in the newspapers. We came and occupied this place and five miles in advance on Tuesday last and are waiting certain events for future operations. Two of my brigades are now here. The third is over the Shenandoah. Which way we go next is not decided, but I think you'd better direct to me, "Comdg. 1st Division 5th Army Corps (Banks), Winchester."

This place is most beautifully situated in a narrow valley, where the spurs of the Blue Ridge terminate in bold, precipitous bluffs on one side, and a regular unbroken ridge bounds the other. My fatigues the last week have been immense and my responsibilities and anxieties beyond description. If I had been one day later in marching from Winchester I should have had command in the battle and I think could have done a good deal more than was done. Indeed, the wound of Gen. Shields and the absence of Gen. Banks left the whole thing in charge of a colonel, and those who ought to know say the matter managed itself pretty much and the victory was gained by simple hard fighting under great disadvantages of position and movements. Whether true or not, it is quite certain that men do better when those who have been their chief commanders are present. In this view of the case, with only my old brigade to assist, I think I could have captured all Jackson's guns and been a major general! The last thought is rather selfish, but it seems to be a very prominent (too much so I fear) motive in all hearts hereabouts. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.

## FRATERNIZING WITH THE ENEMY

Camp near Edinburg, Va., April 9, 1862.

My Darling Daughter:

I have been reading over your letter of latest date (received March 14) and wondering what has become of the many you have written since, for I know full well that you write me weekly. I wrote you last from Strasburg a week or so ago. On the 1st we moved to this place, banging all the way at the rear guard of the Rebels. There was not much loss, I fancy, on either side as the artillery had the whole work at long range. We lost one killed and some wounded by bursting shells. Long before reaching this place we saw the heavy columns of smoke from the burning bridges over the considerable stream that flows just in advance of the town, one a road and the other a high railroad bridge. They burned all the bridges on the railroad; one just back of this, a monstrous piece of trestle work over a hundred feet high across a chasm of many hundred feet.

The day was beautifully spring-like, the finest we have had, and what with the banging of big guns, the long lines of troops and baggage wagons, it was quite a day of excitement. Many of the shells of the Rebels burst hundreds of feet in the air, giving the semblance of pyrotechnics got up for our entertainment. When, however, a piece from one of them struck a poor fellow sitting quietly on some railroad ties, splitting his skull and dashing his brains in all directions, the poetry of the shelling was changed to a sad realization of these dangers.

We found the stream (Stony Creek) too deep for fording and the whole command encamped on this side. Our advance occupies the town of Edinburg and for several miles along the ridges which lie this side of the stream, while the Rebel advance is for the most part in plain sight on the opposite ridges and in the woods beyond. Every now and then the big guns on both sides open on one another with tremendous noise. After awhile the Rebels withdraw and all is quiet except an occasional popping of the advanced pickets. We have had several skirmishing parties across the stream to protect our bridge builders and we generally drive them back, but they appear again as insolent as ever as soon as our troops retire. We have lost one man only in all this banging and shooting, though several of their shells have fallen in unpleasant

vicinity to our quarters in Edinburg. My headquarters are a mile back from the town and we are in comparative quiet, except the noise of the guns.

We are still following up the valley of the Shenandoah. On the left of the road is one of the ridges of the Blue Ridge, running in an almost uniform altitude of fifteen hundred feet. Occasionally a "gap" opens through the ridge, which is always evidence of a cross-road leading toward Warrênton, Culpeper Court House, or some other considerable town east of the Blue Ridge. On our right is a more unequal ridge of the North Mountain, broken into peaks and sending off spurs into the valley, contracting sometimes to a narrow space. We passed one but a few miles back called the "Narrow Passage," where there is only a kind of natural bridge, just wide enough for a road over a very deep ravine. It is the same place where the high railroad bridge was burned. The pike and the bridge are close together. It is a very strong military position, and we expected great opposition to its surrender. At a house close by, elegantly furnished, owned by a young lady, Gen. Jackson had his headquarters for some time. The place was abandoned very soon after our artillery opened on it from a distant hill. The young lady with a sister remain at home, though the house is in part occupied by one of my brigade commanders as headquarters. The place is called Willow Glen Cottage. It has a very picturesque location with two mountain streams coming from the west and the Shenandoah flowing far down in a deep valley on the east and winding away to the base of the Blue Ridge. The night after we arrived I went to call upon the brigade commander and met the band of one of his regiments coming to serenade me. I took them back to Willow Glen and gave the young ladies the benefit of the music. They were very pleasant and chatty but rank Secessionists, having brothers and other friends in the Rebel army. The scene from the house was exceedingly beautiful. The troops had marched without tents and one brigade had bivouacked from the road far up the hillsides and built a very large number (countless as seen from the piazza) of camp fires. There was just enough of the new moon to make "darkness visible" and to give a magical effect to the whole scene. I don't know as I have ever seen a sight more striking and impressive, especially as the music of the band—the murmur of the thousand voices from the bivouac and the occasional cheer from the men as some patriotic air struck their fancy, taken up and carried on

away to the far off ridges—gave additional effect to the eye picture. This, however, is the occasional poetry of war.

Our marches for the past month, and, indeed, before, have been generally in sleet, snow, and cold rain, after bivouacking in storms,—almost always, on the march without tents. Today and for three days past the weather has been fit for the middle of winter. Snow, rain, sleet and freezing, till every tree is covered with ice and the ground white with snow. After several warm days it comes with especial severity. The men are for the most part in tents, excepting always the large force which in front of the enemy are obliged to keep on picket and other guards. The poor animals are fairly shriveled up with the ice and sleet. Forage is very scarce, in fact, all stripped off from this section, and what is worse, our long marches over wet roads have destroyed fearfully the poor shoes issued by the government. I have at least 4,000 men in my division who are shoeless completely, or so nearly so that they cannot march. Shoes issued to my men in Winchester are already entirely worn out! Such is the fraud that contractors are permitted to put upon poor soldiers! I can hardly conceive of a crime more fitly punished by death. We should be far in advance but for these constant draw-backs, which fairly unfit an army for march[ing]. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### A MILITARY PAGEANT

Camp near Sparta, 4 miles south of New Market, Va.,  
April 20, 1862.

My Dear Rene:

We have made another forward movement. The command left our camp near Woodstock Thursday morning at daylight and reached New Market about dark. The day was unusually warm and we had the customary amount of banging of big guns and an occasional pop of small arms. At Mt. Jackson we halted for several hours to give time for a flank movement of two brigades. Across a stream in front of the town is the strongest position we have met, and at this point we sup-

posed the Rebels would give battle. We had contrived, by a dash of cavalry, to save the covered bridge over the North Fork. After shelling the ridge occupied by the enemy we drew up our entire force on the broad river bottom on both sides of the road, covering the columns by a cloud of skirmishers extending several miles. Cavalry and artillery were intermingled in masses amongst the infantry. The field from the high riverbank on the north could be overlooked for miles, and every corps could be distinctly seen. It was a splendid spectacle, the finest military show I have seen in America. Indeed, I have never before seen a single plain upon which so many troops could be displayed, this side of our western prairies.

I watched the advance for some time from a high bluff, as the troops were obliged to march slowly over the soft wheat-fields. Before they reached the foot of the hills in front, I mounted and rode forward on the road, but the enemy had vanished. They fired only two guns and limbered up and sped. We saw nothing more of them till we reached New Market. Ashby, who commands the Rebel cavalry, early had his horse killed and came near losing his own life, as the ball passed through his saddle.<sup>13</sup> My brigades had the advance all day. They passed through New Market after dark and encamped on the south side, or rather bivouacked on the ground. The next morning we moved forward four miles to a small stream on which we are now in bivouac.

The rascals fought us all the way out and we had some beautiful practice with rifled guns. We chased them some three miles in advance of this. They burned every bridge, even to the little culverts, and made a tremendous bonfire of their camp some miles ahead of us. But as they know the country and have fine roads they are too fast for our infantry. As for the cavalry, it is good for kicking up a dust, doing foraging, capturing horses and stealing them, and for not much else. The material is good enough, but they are poorly drilled and poorly mounted. The horses have not been over half-fed during the winter and of late have been severely handled. The Rebel cavalry seems much better drilled and have better horses. At any rate, they scale the fences most beautifully and show themselves very fearless till our rifled guns open, when they put out rapidly.

We contrived to capture two lieutenants and a few privates. The night before we left Edinburg four companies of infantry from my division captured fifty-odd—a whole company—of Ashby's cavalry,

officers and all. They were conducted by a Union man and they were fairly surrounded before they knew of our approach. As I write, eight prisoners are brought to me. Deserters are very common. But this is a great country and a beautiful one. I have never seen so beautiful and apparently so fertile a valley. It improves greatly as we advance. There were points on our march on Thursday that one never tired looking at. We have still the same mountain ranges on either hand, perhaps six miles apart, and the same rolling valley between, but the ridges are more broken into peaks and gaps and the valley is occasionally traversed by spurs and dotted by solitary peaks, which rise like sugar loaves from an even surface.

Some of the wives and daughters of officers have followed us as far as Edinburg, amongst them, Mrs. and Miss Copeland, Lt. Col. of the 1st Michigan Cavalry. I think, however, that they are out of place and must be a source of great anxiety and annoyance. For example, an order to march usually comes at midnight and the troops are expected to be under arms before daylight. Everything must be packed and placed in wagons. As we carry all our cooking utensils and mess furniture, to say nothing of the office desks, table, etc., etc., we find enough to do without looking out for the effects of wives or daughters. However, *chacun à son gout*. It may all be very fine, "but I don't see it." I prefer to think of you as safe in Philadelphia.

We are under orders to move forward again. Our men's shoes are following somewhere in rear of us, but we seem to keep in advance and many men are fairly shoeless. I hope they will catch us soon. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### THE ADVANCE TO HARRISONBURG

Harrisonburg, Va., April 29, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I wrote you from camp near Sparta last week. This camp was about four miles below New Market. My 1st Brigade moved down to within four miles of this place a week ago and the second came down on

Thursday last, and both advanced and took position in front of the town on the road running eastwardly toward Gordonsville, upon which Jackson's forces had retreated. I was obliged to ride about ten miles a day through pelting rain, sleet, and snow before we left our last camp to attend a board for examination of officers. In consequence I caught a terrific cold all over and have had my first ill day since I have been in the service. We have had the most infernal weather, such as I never saw in Michigan in the month of April. The hills were, till yesterday, quite white with snow in spots, and while at our last camp we had two heavy snow-storms and rain enough to make a young deluge, I was out of sorts only a day, but I was obliged to ride over twenty miles on a pretty hard-going horse with sore limbs and aching head. However, I kept my feet all the while and am now quite well again. There is nothing like my universal remedy-diet.

This valley thus far continues to be beautiful—even more so than farther "down," as they call toward the north, more diversified and picturesque. We have reached the end of the ridge that has hemmed us in on the east, and now the valley spreads out in that direction to the Blue Ridge, while the loftier and irregular tops of the Alleghanies are plainly visible on the west, stretching far away toward the south. The intervening valley is broken into many conical-shaped knobs, which give a most singular appearance to the view as seen in the late afternoon from a high hill east of town. The town is beautifully situated in the bottom of the valley and has around it many elegant country seats. It is altogether the most attractive-looking town I have seen in the valley.

Our cavalry were sent forward toward Staunton a few days since but found the bridges burned over the streams below, which were not fordable just now. Jackson's army is east of this from fifteen to twenty miles on the slopes of the Blue Ridge. He has a very large bridge between us and him. It is said that he has it ready for burning. We fear he has been largely reinforced and intends to turn upon us here or wait for us in his present strong position. We have had several pretty strong skirmishes with him and taken several prisoners; lost one ourselves, and several killed and wounded.

The road toward his present camp is in a wretched condition. I think we shall be obliged to remain here some days. I hardly know what will be the next movement. We are now pretty well advanced into the

interior and are a long way from the base of our supplies. As we have neither railroad nor water transportation we find it no small task to keep our force supplied in rations, forage, and clothing. I contrived to get shoes for most of my division at the last camp, but our wants are still many. The troops have had to bivouac much of the time in rain and snow with such shelter as they could put up out of rails, boughs, etc., but it is wonderful how inventive and ingenious they become in providing for themselves. I am sorry to say, however, they do not always respect private property, though persons are seldom molested.

The Negro population increases as we go south, and although they all understand that the rear is open to them, very few leave their masters. Indeed, many of them are afraid of us at first, probably from big stories of our cruelties that are told them. They seem glad at our coming and probably think some great benefit is to accrue to them, but they show very little desire to quit their present homes. In truth, they are much attached to localities, and but for the fear of being sold south I don't think a dozen could be coaxed away. As it is, probably fifty have come in and are employed by our quartermasters. If the abolitionists could see things as they really are here they would have less confidence in the aid the Negro is in concluding this war. Their masters say that they become more insolent and lazy on our advance, and that is the only good we are likely to do them. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
W.



### RETREAT TO STRASBURG

Strasburg, Va., May 17, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

You will see that we have made a retrograde movement. I cannot explain the reason, because I really don't think there *is* any. If there be one, it is unknown to us here and is confided to the authorities at Washington. We regard it as a most unfortunate policy and altogether inexplicable, especially as we had the game all in our hands, and if the

moves had been made with the least skill we could easily have checkmated Jackson, Ewell, and Johnston, instead of leaving them to attack and drive back Milroy, as we hear they have done.<sup>14</sup>

I cannot explain to you, and I am not permitted to complain, but if the amount of swearing that has been done in this department is recorded against us in Heaven I fear we have an account that can never be settled. But here we are with a greatly reduced force, either used as a decoy for the Rebel forces or for some unaccountable purpose known only to the War Department. Imagine our chagrin in marching back, like a retreating force, over the same ground that we had driven the Rebels before us, and having the galling reminders of our defeat, and that without a gun being fired or a man killed. But all this is private and not to be repeated outside of your home. The worst part is that we have put ourselves in a most critical position and exposed the whole of this important valley to be retaken and its immense property of railroads and stores to be destroyed.

I have had a wearisome march of several days through heat and dust most intolerable. All our vast trains of stores, etc., had to precede us, and we followed in the fine powder that these miles of wagon wheels pounded up for us. We have finally come to a stand here; that is, my decimated division is here and a few other troops, while others have been detached on some wild-goose chase after the enemy. I am getting terribly disgusted and feel greatly like resigning. How a few civilians at a distance can hope to manage this war is inconceivable. I sometimes fear we are to meet with terrible reverses because of the fantastic tricks of some vain men dressed in a little brief authority. If we do not, it is because the Almighty interposes in our behalf. . . .

I wrote to Aunt Patty some time ago, I fear a very blue letter, for I have been hugely out of sorts for some time. With all our victories, I do not feel we are gaining much. There is so much jealousy and detraction, in and out of Congress, so much selfishness, such a struggling after self-aggrandizement, so little pure and disinterested and ingenuous patriotism, that I shudder for the future. If we have a reverse, God help us! You do not see it as I do, and perhaps I am morbidly alive to it. But I am so surrounded by its presence, I see it so palpably in Congress, in the heart-burnings and bitterness of our commanding generals, in the divisions and sub-divisions of our forces to give com-

mand to favorites, in the sacrifice of power which lies under our hand, just to checkmate some rival or to destroy some dreaded popularity, that I tremble at some great disaster. Was the whole government, civil and military, united and actuated by one great and engrossing and fine purpose, this rebellion would be destroyed in two months. As it is, I fear it may yet destroy us.

But enough of this. I am disheartened just now by events transpiring about me and probably look on the dark side of everything. But when I see three military departments lying side by side divided and powerless, which if united might combine an irresistible force which could march to Richmond, I feel disgusted and heart-sick. Such are the departments commanded by McDowell, Banks, and Fremont. The latter has literally done nothing, and is in a position to do nothing. Banks could do but little because his force has been taken away for the others. McDowell is drawing away other troops to make a great show and bluster. If these forces were all in one column they could drive all before them out of Virginia. But this is a grumbling letter, written late at night. Perhaps I'll write in better humor tomorrow.

How long we shall be here and where go next, I can't say.

Goodbye, Love to all,

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### *PERPLEXITY OVER THE RETREAT*

Strasburg, Va., May 21, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I received yours of the 16th this morning. I have already explained to you in a previous letter why we are here. The whole of this is unexplainable, especially as we occupied a position from which we could in one movement have interposed between the commands of Jackson and Ewell and thus have saved Milroy and Schenck from being driven back with loss. But the whole movement comes from the highest command and we are neither authorized to criticise nor complain. I

could say much more, but it is not advisable. I trust we shall be safely extricated from a dilemma, that, to speak mildly, was unnecessarily brought about. I have no idea how long we shall be here or where [we will] go next. I probably know as much as General Banks. . . .

I am glad you are doing something for the comfort of the sick and wounded soldiers. You can hardly imagine how these little matters comfort the sick and the dispirited; how they are remembered in after years. The smallest attentions—a simple kind word falls often with wonderful influence upon their hearts and will be repeated to you years hence, if you should chance to meet them. . . .

My headquarters are at a large brick house just outside of Strasburg, a very old and very stately mansion of an old Virginia family. The lady is a widow with a pretty large family of girls, children and stepchildren. She has a governess from Massachusetts, a very pleasant young lady who has been here during the whole Rebel war and is, in fact, quite a Secessionist. So the officers say. I have had very little to say to any of them. The young men have very pleasant concerts with the family every evening. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



*SECOND BATTLE OF WINCHESTER AND  
FAILURE OF THE CAMPAIGN*

Williamsport, May 27, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I can fancy your anxiety after the recent telegraphic tidings from Banks' column. I therefore telegraphed you yesterday that I was safe here. We have had a very unpleasant time through anxious and laborious days and sleepless nights, such as I fancy would make old age come prematurely.

On Friday evening last<sup>15</sup> we got conflicting rumors of an attack upon our guard at Front Royal, a small village about twelve miles east of Strasburg where a considerable valley, parallel with the valley in which Strasburg is, crosses the Shenandoah. Through this valley is a

stone pike, and there are several mountain gaps through which good roads at this season connect with the stone pike from Strasburg to Staunton. As there is a good road from Front Royal to Winchester, the Rebels with sufficient force at Front Royal could easily intercept our line of march and cut us off from our supplies, especially as the occupation of Front Royal destroyed the railroad line that connected us with Washington.

I think I have several times written you that I regarded our position as very critical. It was in reference to this very matter, all which has taken place, almost exactly as I feared. Ewell's division, estimated at from 10,000 to 15,000 troops, had been joined in the valley below Front Royal by Jackson's brigade of 8,000 to 12,000, and they moved with great rapidity and secretly upon and actually took by surprise, the regiment (1st Maryland) doing guard duty there. I do not think fifty men escaped, and the few who did passed the night in the woods on their route to Winchester. It was near midnight, therefore, before we knew the extent of our disaster.

By some strange fatality a large quantity of clothing and other public stores for the use of the department had been placed in depot there, and it is rumored a considerable number of excellent arms. All this was grabbed by the hungry Rebels. By a singular coincidence the 1st Maryland of the Rebels was the leading infantry regiment in the attack on the 1st Maryland of our service. The Rebel cavalry, in which arm they are very strong, did the business, however, and, I fear, committed fearful and outrageous slaughter. The stories told by the escaped and the runaways on these occasions are not always to be believed. If they were, one would be obliged to think men turned to brutish beasts, such instances of bloody and monstrous butchery of wounded and unresisting men are narrated. Amongst the killed was Col. Kenly of Baltimore, who commanded the regiment. He was a marked character, a most perfect gentleman and as brave a soldier as ever wore a sword. Amongst the many friends in the service who have fallen within the past few days, I know of none whose death has so deeply touched me. His regiment was attached to my old brigade while I was at Hancock, and at his own earnest request. I have, of course, seen much of him almost daily since. I shall not soon forget his cheerful face and courteous bearing.<sup>16</sup>

But to my narration of events. When the fact was patent that a very

large force had possession of the railroad and was crossing the river towards Winchester, orders were immediately issued to start our immense trains of wagons, commissary, quartermaster, ordnance for division brigades and regiments—several hundreds—toward Winchester, and the command to hold itself ready to follow. As you have never seen, you cannot appreciate the difficulties of moving these long mule-trains or the impediments they make to a rapid march, especially in retreat, when hurry and confusion, frightened teamsters and disordered teams, break-downs and collisions and ten thousand nameless things conspire to make up the turmoil and increase the disorder. The great wonder is that they ever get off, but they do move, and under all the circumstances with wonderful expedition.

Our trains on this occasion (as we were moving all our supplies) reached for miles, indeed, almost a continuous line of wagons from Strasburg to Winchester, twenty-two miles. The troops marched about 10 o'clock A.M. Guards had been sent with the wagons, but anticipating an attack in force, we were obliged to hold our forces together as much as possible to meet it. The rumors of large forces of Rebels gathered as we marched, till it became almost a certainty that Winchester was in possession of the Rebels in force, at least 20,000 men. These rumors were corroborated by the frequent attacks upon our trains by cavalry at different points, creating much disorder and no little loss of mules and vehicles. Wagoners are proverbially scary and on the first alarm they cut traces, mount horses, and decamp. This is often done when not an enemy is within miles, and it is a singular fact that our losses on this march were at a long distance from the actual points of attack. Still, under all the difficulties, we succeeded in bringing through our long line of wagons with wonderful success, but the labor to the men was very great and our rear guard was engaged with the Rebel skirmishers till long after midnight.

As we approached Winchester we were agreeably surprised to find that the enemy was not before us, and that the flag of our Union was still flying from the public buildings. The regiments encamped on the elevations just outside of town so as to cover the two roads leading towards Front Royal and Strasburg. I had been up all the night before, and what with the excitement and responsibilities I was weary enough, but the rumors of approaching forces were too reliable and the proba-

bilities of an unequal contest the next day, as well as the hurrying and necessary preparations for the events that were sure to open at daylight occupied my mind and time until midnight.

In the meantime the booming of artillery and crack of the outpost muskets kept up as if the Rebels knew we were sleepy and were determined to keep us from rest. I had been in bed, it seemed to me, not half an hour before a terrible rapping at my door roused me from the deepest sleep. In rushed a bevy of staff officers with Gen. Crawford, who has just joined us, just from Gen. Banks, with positive information that the Rebels were before us (probably around us) in tremendous force of not less than 20,000 infantry, cavalry, and artillery. The General must see me at once to arrange the program for the morning. Of course I was obliged to lose my second night's sleep. The General had information that we should be attacked in the morning by a superior force, and the question of our best position to defend our trains and stores, as well as to keep ourselves from annihilation, had to be discussed.

It was decided to make a fight as we were, in front of the town. I had but 3,500 infantry and ten pairs of Parrott guns with six useless brass pieces to resist a force estimated by nobody at less than 15,000 and by most (prisoners and citizens) at 25,000 troops.<sup>17</sup> The prospect was gloomy enough. That we should all be prisoners of war I had little doubt, but we could not get away without a show of resistance, both to know the enemy's position and to give our trains a chance to get to the rear. I hurried up my own wagons and sent them off to get the advance, if possible, and after sundry preparations and a hurried cup of coffee found the daylight coming on.

The Rebel guns opened fire at the earliest dawn and the banging to and fro became incessant. Larned came up for instructions as the heavy gun-firing began and I, of course, ordered him to put out with Capt. Whittlesey's wagons without delay. He seemed very cool for him, and probably did not realize the difficulties that surrounded us. He says now that the Parrott shells make a terrible noise and he does not like them at all. He seems to think he has been in imminent danger, though I think no shell came within half a mile of him.

I shall not undertake a minute description of our fight. By direction of Gen. Banks I joined him at his headquarters and we rode to the front. The sun was just rising, but the heavy smoke from the guns so ob-

scured a cloudless sky that it smelt sulphurous and looked dismal. I rode to the center of the brigade on the right, which occupied a series of knobs, on the highest of which one of our batteries was playing away manfully. The whiz of the Parrott shells going and coming kept the air quite vocal and, strange to say, had an exciting effect upon my unstrung nerves. I felt rather exhilarated than depressed. There is a singular fascination and excitement about the banging of guns and rattling of musketry with the pomp and circumstance of war.

After riding along this brigade and examining the front through my field glass for a while, I rode to the left where three regiments of my old brigade were posted. They had already been warmly engaged with the infantry and had gallantly repulsed them, almost annihilating a North Carolina regiment. Their dead and wounded lay thickly scattered along the front of one of our regiments. Some of our officers went out and talked with them. They all expressed regret that they had been fighting against the Union. I was rejoiced to find my old brigade doing so well. Every man seemed as cool and cheerful as if preparing for a review. They lay in order of battle behind the crests of hills ready for another attack. Away off the hills were seen the moving masses of the enemy, evidently preparing to out-flank us and get to the rear while their batteries were opening in new directions and fresh troops were constantly coming up. The colonel in command of the brigade had already counted *nine regimental colors* that were moving up to crush out this small brigade of only three regiments, numbering not over 1,500 men.

The case certainly looked hopeless enough, but officers and men seemed composed and defiant. Fearing that we were about being turned on this flank, I started for the right wing to get reinforcements. I stopped a few moments to confer with Gen. Banks, and pushing on had hardly reached the valley which intervened between the two wings when a furious fusillade began on the right. Their cannons opened with tremendous vigor and apparently from a dozen new batteries. As I was obliged to ride across the line of fire of most of them, it seemed to me that I had become a target for the whole Rebel artillery. Several shells passed in most unpleasant proximity to my head with a peculiar whizzing sound that made one involuntarily bob his head.

I dashed on as fast as my horse could carry me, but before I could reach the front I saw our artillery were limbering up and that a regiment on

the right (the 27th Indiana) was getting into confusion and many men running back. I dashed at them with such of my staff as were with me and made all sorts of appeals to rally them. The men would stop for a while, but before I could get them in line a new batch of fugitives would break all my efforts. Presently the whole regiment came pouring back in a confused mass. I saw the case was hopeless with them, and directing an officer to rally them behind a stone wall in the rear, I pushed to the right, where were posted four companies of the 1st Michigan Cavalry. I saw near the head of the column Maj. Town, who came forward to meet me with zeal and spirit. I ordered him to dash up the hill and if a chance opened to charge and hold in check the enemy who were rapidly rushing up to the position deserted by our Indianians. Town took his men to the crest of the hill gallantly and I went forward with them to get a look at the position of the enemy.

As we reached the brow of the hill a most terrific fire of infantry was opened upon us from a long line which extended beyond my extreme right. The air seemed literally to be full of whizzing bullets, which stirred up currents of wind as if the atmosphere had suddenly been filled with some invisible cooling process. The cavalry could do nothing before such an overwhelming force and it went down with great rapidity. I stopped just long enough to know that I could see nothing of value through the smoke in front, and looking to the left I saw the whole line of the brigade retiring in order and yet rapidly to the rear. I put spurs to my horse, descended partly down the hill and was beginning to think I should spend a time in Richmond if I did not hurry, especially as I was penned in by a heavy stone wall. I dashed my horse at a point where two or three stones appeared to have been knocked off the top and although he is a pretty heavy beast (not my favorite gift horse) I think he appreciated the occasion for he cleared the wall most gallantly and carried me safely over into a narrow lane. At this moment all my staff officers were away on duty except Capt. Beman, who also took the wall.

As this lane was well under cover I thought it my duty to make a second effort to get a look at the enemy and consequently turned up the hill again but had not got far before the colors of the Rebels, infantry and cavalry, appearing on the top warned me I had no time to lose to withdraw the two brigades. I therefore sent word to Col. Donnelly,

commanding the 1st Brigade, to retire by the east of the town and Col. Gordon, 5th Brigade, to pass his regiments through the town to the pike to Martinsburg. It was hurrying times, as you can well imagine, with the very large force that was pressing us on all sides. I rode through one of the side streets and was saluted by a shot from a window which came near finishing Capt. Beman. It was necessary to make great efforts to stop a stampede, especially as the early fugitives had been joined by several unarmed sick from Shields' division, who were scattering alarm with great vigor. These, with a great number of wagons of sutlers and citizens and some army conveyances were whipping and hallooing and creating great alarm.

I overtook, after a while, one of our batteries, which I got into position. I then seized upon every straggling officer and began to reassure the men by forming them in squads, but the difficulties of calming men in such condition is enormous. You can have no idea of the confusion. All of the regiments but one were fortunately passing to the rear in pretty good order, some of them admirably; but still the fugitives continued to increase and the danger of a rout was imminent. There is a strange sympathy in courage and in fear, and masses seem to partake of one or the other feeling from the slightest causes. For instance, on reaching the first woods, with several other mounted officers, I succeeded in getting quite a line of fugitives established and ready to make a stand. Just at this time, down came a company of Michigan cavalry, running their horses at full bent. My line of brave fellows broke at once and went off in double-quick. On the other hand, but a few moments afterward two companies of other cavalry came from toward Martinsburg riding toward the enemy and shouting with drawn sabers. Our fugitives received them with cheers and seemed at once to recover from their alarm.

From this onward to Martinsburg even the leading rabble marched coolly and in quiet. The artillery was placed in position at all good points and the main force of the cavalry, kept in the rear by Gen. Hatch, with the infantry columns on either flank, protected us from much injury, though the assaults by cavalry and battery were frequent. One column of two regiments of Donnelly's brigade followed a parallel road on the right flank and did not join us, but crossed the River Potomac some seven miles below. One other mixed column of cavalry

and infantry with twenty-odd wagons, having been cut off on Saturday night, took the road towards Hancock and crossed the Potomac at Cherry Run, all sound. The rest of the command halted an hour or more at Martinsburg and then resumed the march toward Williamsport, where it was supposed the river was fordable for men.

Our whole train (nearly 500 wagons) had preceded us to the river and I began to congratulate myself that we were well out of a bad scrape and that I should get a sound sleep in Williamsport that night. Judge of my disgust, then, when within three or four miles of the river I came upon the rear of our train and was told that the river was not fordable except for horse-teams and horsemen, that it was between four and five feet deep and of great rapidity. With a heavy heart and weary limbs I began to work my way to the ferry through the jam of teams and wagons and guns and caissons and forges, intermingled with straggling cavalry and mounted men. It was already dark and the road, which winds through gullies and descends a series of steep hills to the river for miles, it seemed to me, was not easily followed with my poor eyesight, but after hard labor and a great deal of swearing, I fear, I reached the plateau by the river.

Here it seemed as if all the wagons of the army were in "corral," that is, drawn up in close lines and packed together almost in mass, covering acres of ground. I worked my way to the ferry and found the single scow-boat (by means of which with my brigade alone I was three nights and days in crossing over in March) busy at work taking over the sick and wounded. I was cheered, however, by hearing that my personal baggage had arrived early and was across the river. Hoping to get some relief by the prospect at the ford, I worked through the crowd of mules and vehicles down to the point where the river is entered. Big fires had been built upon both sides to guide the crossing, and horsemen and horse-teams were struggling in the river to get across. The river here is over 300 feet wide and the current exceedingly rapid, especially where the water is the deepest.

The descent into the river from the bank is very muddy and each wagon, as it went in, stalled on the start and then the poor animals would struggle and flounder in the rapid stream, which reached nearly to their backs, till many a horse and scores of mules were drowned. I saw it was a desperate chance for getting our teams over, and as for

the men, who were busily building large fires along the hillsides and cooking their suppers, I felt most sadly for them, for not one could possibly pass through that fierce current of a broad and gloomy river.

The poor devils had been without anything to eat, as the fight began in the morning before they had cooked breakfast, and they had marched thirty-five miles without an ounce to eat in their haversacks. I thought of the desperate confusion of horses and wagons and men should we be strongly attacked after it was known that at least five to one were after us; of the demoralized condition of our troops, consequent upon a march of sixty miles (with but one meal) in two days and an almost constant succession of combats and one heavy battle; of the probabilities that we should be followed to the river and attacked, at least by daylight, before a tithe of our men could be crossed and while all our immense train was parked ready to deepen the awful confusion that must follow.

I saw I had another sleepless night before me, and as I had been fasting all day my appetite, as well as my philosophy, prompted me to seek sustenance without delay. So I made for a small house, which I found full of sick and wounded, and the surgeons were actually dressing a horrible arm mutilated by a shell, while others were waiting to be cared for. But the horrible and the careless are strangely mingled in war. A private soldier recognized me as I entered and said he had just made some coffee which he would cheerfully share with me. We sat down to the same table. I found bread and sugar, while he drew from his kit butter and his sugar rations, remarking that he always took care of the subsistence; that while he had enough to eat he could march forever.

The small room filled with hungry officers and men, and it became almost a fight for our small pot of coffee. It shows how discipline works, for my friend, the private, was quite sure to announce my name and rank to save his coffee pot, and it is to the credit of tired and famished men that they always gave way on the announcement. But as I had given up my horse to a wounded soldier during the afternoon, the matter, after all, was only reciprocal. Ah! Rene, the experience of that long, sixty-mile march and the deaths and wounds which a few hours brought under my notice seems now as a great and horrible nightmare dream. My great responsibilities and anxieties I could not then realize, and I felt as cool and collected as on a common march. But they

come back to me now, and I just begin to realize under what a tremendous pressure of feeling and rapid thought I was all the while acting. I had no time to think of myself, because I was so filled with the great danger that surrounded the thousands who looked to me for direction.

All Sunday night I walked from the ferry to the ford and then to Gen. Banks' quarters—in wagons by the way—to see what could be done to hasten the safe transportation of our men. Fortunately we had dragged back two pontoon boats which were launched, and a scow was found, and we began about 2 o'clock the morning of Monday to get our men rapidly over. The wagons, too, were getting slowly over the ford, but some wagons stalled and mules drowned and the white-covered boxes stood in the river, some times three and four together, as monuments of danger to those who followed.

The men all dropped to sleep as if dead. The campfires, which blazed briskly on our first arrival, died out. Nothing was heard but the braying of mules and the rolling of wagons moving toward the ford and the occasional obstreperous cursing of some wagon-master at the unruly conduct of his team. We had pushed forward towards the rear a section of artillery and some infantry and cavalry to watch the approach of the Rebels, but so convinced were our men of the vastly superior force of the enemy that they were poorly prepared to resist an attack. I waited impatiently, and yet mostly anxiously, for daylight. The regiments not on duty were brought down to the front and stood quietly waiting their turns to cross. We sat there for hours around the campfires of Gen. Banks, talking of the past and discussing the probabilities of the morrow; the major general and four brigadier generals, Banks, Williams, Hatch, Crawford, and Greene. The last-named two had joined us just before the retreat to command brigades, then commanded by colonels.

I had my horse unbridled and fed from oats picked up from the thrown-away forage, and I unbuckled the martingale and fixed my sword and pistol and other weighty traps so that I could be ready to swim the stream after I was satisfied that further efforts were useless. I was determined to trust to my horse, and as I knew the ford would be over-crowded I decided to take the deep current and trust to the swimming qualities of my horse. So I tied him near the bank with Lt. Pittman's [horse]. Capt. Wilkins and Beman had got separated from us,

and Whittlesey was with his train and St. Augustine, ordnance officer, was with his wagons, ready to destroy the ammunition in case of necessity.

My escort of cavalry was reduced to half a dozen who had followed me vigorously all day, and especially one black-eyed boy, who seemed to be, through the fight and even afterwards, like my shadow. He never quit my side, but with a quiet, determined manner was always ready to answer when I called. His name is Lemcke, and he is from Michigan. I have not yet had time to look him up and reward him for his devotion.<sup>18</sup>

At length daylight came. The river had fallen half a foot but the mule-trains were constantly balking and the mules drowning, till there were dozens of wagons and two pieces of artillery in the stream, blocking up the way and increasing the difficulties. So we went to work with ropes to draw them out and succeeded so as to open the way again. Then down came the cavalry to try the ford. With all my fatigue, I could not but laugh at the scene. The strong current would take some away down stream. Others would ride fearlessly over and with little trouble. Several got so confused that they lost the ford and swam away down the river in the middle of the stream. Each horse seemed to have some peculiarity. Now and then a rider would be thrown and would disappear, floundering in the water. Some would run against the stalled wagons, and altogether the scene was most confused, and in spite of its real seriousness and danger was in fact laughable.

But the enemy came not, and after a while, what with fixing the ford entrance and what with improvised facilities of transportation, matters began to be more hopeful and cheerful. At 9 o'clock or so, being satisfied all was safe, I crossed on the ferry. Most of the men were then over, and the wagons were getting along rapidly. I hoped to get some rest, but on this side I found so many things to attend to that it was hours before I could throw myself on a bed. After three days and nights of incessant fatigue and without sleep, you may be assured I slept soundly, and yet awoke unrefreshed. But I am now pretty well again, and yet not over the soreness of muscle and general debility consequent on such long efforts.

I cannot tell you now what our loss has been; probably 800 in killed, wounded, and missing. My infantry force was not far from

3,500 men. The cavalry is made up of so many incongruous organizations that I can say nothing of it, except that it did nothing for us, except as a part of the rear-guard under Gen. Hatch. With him they were useful and efficient, but there were so many straggling and running here and there to the great confusion of order and discipline that I regretted they were not all away.

To sum up, Rene, we have marched sixty-odd miles in two days, with nearly 500 wagons and have brought them all in with the exception of perhaps 50; have fought numerous combats and one severe fight, in the face, and in spite of the best efforts of from 15,000 to 20,000 Rebels. A successful retreat is often more meritorious than a decided victory. We were certainly very successful in our defeat, for which I think "good luck" should have the main praise. We have got off in pretty good order, but if you were a politician I could tell you how easily all this could have been avoided and how, instead of being a defeated and dispirited army, we ought now to be in Staunton or beyond, with Jackson and Ewell defeated fugitives and the whole Rebel crew driven back far beyond the line of Richmond. A singular blunder, a division of our forces and a neglect to send to us troops which were there in this valley has led to all this disaster and unhappy loss of life, property, and territory.

I write this under constant interruptions and have no time to revise. As I am only half recovered to my usual condition you must make it out the best way you can. . . .<sup>19</sup>

As ever,

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### REASONS FOR THE DISASTER

Williamsport, June 2nd, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I wrote a long account of our "skedaddle" (new but very expressive phrase in the army) to Rene and told her to send it to you. I hope you

have received it before this. We had a most disagreeable retreat, marching nearly seventy miles—some of the troops more—in two days, fighting two-thirds of the way with one severe battle in front of Winchester, and passing three nights without sleep. We brought off nearly 500 wagons containing all the supplies of the department. We were attacked by at least 20,000 men. We had to oppose them only two [illegible] brigades of my division of about 3,600 infantry, 10 Parrott guns, and 6 smooth-bore guns, and perhaps 1,500 scattered, discordant, and unorganized and very poor cavalry that literally did nothing but make an occasional show of a portion of themselves. Five hundred of them separated from us and took a different direction and several hundred more fled and spread enormous reports of our destruction. As we were separated from our provision wagons, our men had but one meal in two days, except what they picked up on the way. Our loss in killed, wounded and missing is pretty large, being at least one-fifth of the command. Considering the force attacking us, it is less than might have been expected.

I believe I have several times told you that I thought we were in a critical position. If I have not, it was because I did not wish to alarm you. But the War Department seemed determined to strip Gen. Banks of his whole command to make new departments and new armies at points where there was no enemy. For instance, Gen. Fremont lay directly in our rear and without a possibility of meeting an enemy unless we were driven back. Yet the War Office gave him an army of 30,000 men [and] Gen. McDowell an army of 40,000 or more, while Gen. Banks' command was reduced to the number above stated, in face of two columns of the enemy not less than 10,000 each and but one or two days' march from us.

In order to get us somewhat out of the way (I suppose), we were ordered to return to Strasburg, a three days' march, and here we were obliged to hold the debouches of two valleys (at both points large public stores were in deposit) twelve miles apart. The two columns of Ewell and Jackson were one in each of said valleys and good stone pikes led directly to our valuable deposits. How anybody of common sense could have expected any other result than what followed, I cannot imagine. But the wise "powers that be" at Washington, whose policy seems to be to divide our forces into the weakest and smallest

commands, and in this way give time and chance for the Rebels to combine and overwhelm us, did not seem to think we were in danger. On the contrary, they were every day spreading us out over a long railroad line, making us thinnest where we were most exposed and where by a sudden attack our railroad communication could be broken and the rest of our command isolated and surrounded. . . .

The War Department has undertaken the management of the whole war from its bureau in Washington and it has a chronic trepidation that Washington City is in danger of being attacked. If we are not wholly destroyed by its policy, it is because Providence interposes to save us. We have under Banks, McDowell, and Fremont at least 80,000 troops which could be united in one week and overwhelm everything by a movement up this valley to Staunton and to Lynchburg, and from that point move directly on the flank of the Rebel army at Richmond. Not a Rebel enemy would dare to remain behind us either in western or northern Virginia. This movement could and should have been made two months ago, while we were at Harrisonburg, before we were ordered to retrograde. Two brigades of my division and Gen. Shields' division numbered probably 14,000 men; Blenker's division and other troops within a few days' march (at Winchester), numbered 12,000. A part of my division, at least 5,000 men, were east of Strasburg, two days' march. At least 30,000 men could have been concentrated within five days.

We had then before us Ewell's division, 12,000 strong or less, at the crossing of the forks and of the Shenandoah south-east of us, twenty miles off. Jackson's division [was] marching to Staunton with 12,000 more and 4,000 of Johnston's, and massing to attack and defeat, as he did, on Gens. Milroy and Schenck in the mountains. A march of twenty miles would have placed us at Staunton between Ewell and Jackson's divisions, pinning up Jackson in the mountain passes, from which he could not possibly escape, and forcing Ewell to run away if he could, which I doubt from the then condition of the roads. Just at this very moment Shields' division was sent to McDowell and we were ordered back to Strasburg, and Blenker was sent from Winchester away up to Romney and then round to Franklin to join Gen. Fremont!! Marching hundreds of miles out of the way and away from the enemy to get to a place not forty miles from Harrisonburg where we were!

In truth, the War Department seems to have occupied itself wholly with great efforts to give commands to favorites, dividing the army in Virginia into little independent departments and creating independent commanders jealous of one another, and working solely for their own glorification and importance. If we had had but *one general* for all these troops there would not now be a Rebel soldier this side of the railroad from Lynchburg to Richmond. But enough of this. Tell Uncle John that the regulations do not permit me to grumble nor criticise, and he must not compromise me with this information.

Love to all,

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.

1. Bath, better known as Berkeley Springs, is in Morgan County, West Virginia, some five or six miles southwest of Hancock.
2. Actually on Saturday, January 4.
3. That is, on January 8.
4. General Frederick W. Lander, killed on March 2, 1862.
5. General Benjamin Franklin Kelley.
6. The Sibley tent was conical in shape, like the tepee of the Plains Indian tribes, and large enough to house several soldiers in relative comfort. A ventilation device at the top permitted the use of a stove or other fire at the center of the tent.
7. This bridge had been constructed by General Jackson on January 5, for the purpose of crossing the Potomac to capture Hancock. Upon learning of the arrival of Union reinforcements there, he abandoned the project, preferring to direct his force to the recapture of Romney. See his report in *Official Records*, Series 1, V, 392.
8. General Banks was about to launch the first invasion of the Shenandoah Valley. General Jackson was in possession of Winchester at this time.
9. Charles Smith Hamilton, a West Point graduate in the class of 1843. At the opening of the Civil War he was appointed colonel of the Third Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, and on May 17, 1861 was commissioned a brigadier general, on the same day as General Williams.
10. The battle of Kernstown, March 23, 1862, in which General Jackson was defeated. For a comprehensive account of the battle and the succeeding operations by General Nathan Kimball, who in the absence of General Shields commanded the Union army, see *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (reprint edition, New York, 1956) II, 302-13.

11. Historians still comment with admiration on the feats of Jackson's infantry who marched "thirty miles in twenty-four hours." The letters of General Williams disclose that when properly led, Union soldiers were quite capable of meeting the best efforts of Jackson's famed "foot-cavalry."
12. "I did not stop, in my haste to get to the front, to visit the battlefield in front of Winchester, but from some of my officers I hear it presented a horrid sight. The dead (several hundred) lay pretty much all in a small space where the fight had been thickest. They were unburied on the second day, at least the Rebels were. The wounded were taken in early. They filled all of the public and many of the private buildings in Winchester, and all along our route they were in villages and houses. Some wounds made by our shells were ghastly enough.  
 "The ladies of Winchester for the first time made their appearance in the streets, carrying comforts to their own wounded, [but] *not to ours*. I am much disgusted with the samples I have had of female Secesh. It has been my endeavor to treat them all courteously and kindly, but their manners, even under the gentlest language and [illegible] are anything but maidenly or ladylike. I say this after making all allowance for wounded pride and bitter feelings."—Letter to daughters, March 27, 1862.
13. Turner Ashby was a native of Fauquier County, Virginia, and a somewhat notable leader of Confederate cavalry in the early months of the war. He operated chiefly in the lower Shenandoah area in 1861–1862 until he was killed near Harrisonburg on June 6 of the latter year.—*Dict. Am. Biog.*
14. General Jackson had defeated Milroy at McDowell on May 8, 1862, compelling the latter to retreat northward toward Franklin, West Virginia. This letter indicates that as late as May 17 General Williams had but little, if any, knowledge of the defeat.
15. General Jackson captured Front Royal on Friday, May 23, 1862. The letter discloses that General Williams learned of the affair late on the same day.
16. The report of his death was unfounded. Although wounded, Colonel Kenly survived to serve throughout the war and to die peacefully on December 20, 1891.
17. As commonly in warfare, the strength of the Confederate army is exaggerated. Yet Jackson had twice as large a force as General Banks' army, which was, in effect, General Williams' division, and the successful withdrawal of the Union army across the Potomac marked an important failure for General Jackson. According to one admiring biographer the failure was caused by the ability of the vanquished Unionists to retreat faster than the victorious "foot-cavalry" could follow them—an apparent reflection upon the marching capacity of

the latter.—Allen Tate, *Stonewall Jackson: The Good Soldier* (New York, 1928), pp. 150-51.

18. August Lemcke from Marquette, who enlisted in Company B, First Michigan Cavalry on August 23, 1861. He was discharged for disability, January 9, 1863.—*Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers*, Vol. XXXI.
19. Not the least remarkable thing about the battle and the retreat of the Union army was the writing by General Williams of this 5,000-word account of it on the day following his escape.

## CEDAR MOUNTAIN AND SECOND BULL RUN

### III

## Cedar Mountain and Second Bull Run

## CEDAR MOUNTAIN AND SECOND BULL RUN

Despite the fact that in the Seven Days' Battle before Richmond McClellan had inflicted much heavier losses upon the Confederates than his own army had sustained, his inaction following their conclusion made clear to the world that the campaign had ended in failure. Still seeking a general who would lead the Army of the Potomac to victory, President Lincoln offered its command to General Burnside, who promptly declined the responsibility. In his desperation the President now called General Pope from the West, to whom was entrusted the direction of the newly-formed Army of Virginia. Boastful, vain-glorious, and incompetent, Pope promptly led his army to humiliating defeat and a retreat behind the defenses of Washington. Once more General Williams' command, badly outnumbered, stood face to face with Stonewall Jackson's grim soldiers. At Cedar Mountain on August 9 he fought desperately, despite the blundering of the higher command, sustaining one of the heaviest losses, for the numbers engaged, of any battle of the war. The letters which follow fairly disclose the practically unanimous condemnation of the leadership and character of General Pope.

## TRAPPING STONEWALL JACKSON

Williamsport, June 3rd, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I shall go over the river as far as Martinsburg tomorrow probably. Our men have not been supplied with lost blankets, knapsacks, etc., but Gen. Banks is very impatient to get into Virginia again. . . . Our troops, one of my brigades, are in Martinsburg again and it is rumored that McDowell or Fremont is in Winchester. I suppose we are to do over the old story and go a third time through the valley. When we get well up we shall again be left alone to be driven back. The government seems determined to play the game of fast and loose. . . .

Some of our officers taken at Winchester have returned on parole. The Rebels had left the town and paroled all the officers. Col. Kenly, 1st Maryland, is alive but wounded, not dangerously. Col. Murphy is a prisoner, not wounded. Our prisoners are well treated since the fight. They contrived to pick up a good many stragglers and sick men, but took very few able-bodied men who stayed by their colors.

Where we shall go next is very uncertain. I shall be better able to tell you at Martinsburg. The B. and O. Railroad was not much damaged. Indeed, the Rebels seem to have been on a rapid foray for stores, unless they have gone back to try fortunes with McDowell and Fremont. If these officers have made a junction, Jackson can never get out of the valley. If they have kept separate, as I fear, he will be apt to beat them *seriatim*. Our commanding generals are fishing so much for personal popularity that I think they care but little for the general cause, when it conflicts with private interest.

I am quite well and over my fatigue. Indeed, I see nobody quite as tough as I am. . . .

Love to all,

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



*FAILURE TO TRAP STONEWALL*Winchester, June 16, 1862.<sup>1</sup>

My Dear Daughter:

Your letter of the 10th reached me yesterday. I came up from Williamsport to Martinsburg on Thursday last, spent a pleasant evening with the family of Commodore Bornman, U.S.N., consisting of several daughters and other female relatives, all very agreeable and strongly for the Union. The next day I came on here and now have quarters in a fine old house built on the site of old Fort Loudon of the French and Indian War times. The family is thoroughly Secesh but very civil to me, probably for the reason, given by one of the ladies, that she had heard that I treated all with great kindness and politeness. I wonder if they will remember this if I am taken prisoner.

My troops are scattered from this place to Front Royal. I was glad to meet on my arrival several officers of my 2nd Brigade, which has been absent since our attempted march to Centerville. They had come up as a committee to see Gen. Banks and get an order restoring them to my command again. They have been under Gen. McDowell and are terribly disgusted with him. I felt much pleased at the preference shown for my command. Gen. Banks telegraphed to Washington, but the War Department under some unaccountable influence of Gen. McDowell refuses to order them back to my division.

The pretense is that Gen. McDowell is about to do some great operation. I hope he will. He made a great failure in pursuing Jackson. Officers of his command report that he marched to within four miles of Strasburg and heard the guns of the first fight between Fremont and Jackson, when he ordered a halt and subsequently counter-marched to Front Royal and started, himself, forthwith for Washington. If he had followed closely he could have destroyed Jackson. Instead of that, Jackson seems to have cut up pretty badly Shields' division (a part of McDowell's) sent to intercept him at Port Republic bridge. Matters were very unskillfully managed, or Jackson's army would now be among the things that were.

Indeed, I am heart-sick at the want of common sense in all the management of affairs outside of McClellan's army in Virginia. In this valley it would seem that we are to be the sport of changing policy. I

would I were well out of it, even in the hardest place of the army. I can stand anything except the gross stupidity that someone is guilty of. You must not be surprised to hear we are all travelling over the Potomac again, though we have troops enough in West Virginia, if properly combined, to drive away everybody this side of Richmond. We have too many district commands and too many independent commanders.

I am greatly pressed for time. All my regiments are yet unsupplied with things lost on the retreat, knapsacks, blankets, haversacks, canteens, and the like. Three weeks have gone, and we ought to have had everything in three days. I feel sick when I think of the suffering and sickness which these insincere and wicked plays [?] do and will cause among our men. . . . I am wearied, annoyed, tired, and distressed to death, and yet my tough constitution stands it all as if made of iron. Alas, this fearful responsibility which others direct and you cannot control where you are most responsible. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### A PROPHETIC FORECAST

Near Front Royal, Va., June 22, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

I wrote you last from Winchester. We came down here on Thursday last and met a warm reception from our old companions. The men of my old brigade turned out en masse and cheered me vociferously. Some of them remarked that I was a re-inforcement equal to a brigade. This is very flattering, for perhaps I prefer the love of the men to the favor of the government. We are now on the spot where the 1st Maryland Regiment was attacked before our retreat, and the camps are nearly at the place where the last stand was made. I trust we are not to go through the same disaster, though I confess to you I have my apprehensions, so badly are we overlooked and neglected and so confident am I that the Rebels intend to make a desperate effort for this valley. If the government is wise it will direct its fears this way

and not toward the fortified front of the capital. If Maryland is ever invaded, it will be through this valley—mark my prediction.<sup>2</sup>

We have received a great acquisition of prominent officers, and have here and hereabouts generals enough to command an army four times our number. Shields and four or five brigadiers have just gone off, but Fremont, Banks, and Sigel, major-generals, and Crowder, Greene, Cooper, Slough, and several others besides myself still flourish in this little army. One would suppose the government was determined to scare the Rebels by a show of general officers. . . .

I have not had a line from you since you left Philadelphia, but our mails are very irregular. We are now literally in the field. There are few dwellings hereabouts; the few are very large, but have a run-down air—very a la Virginia. It is not easy to account for, but this whole beautiful valley with its productive soil presents very few indications of prosperity. Houses and appurtenances have an air of neglect and dilapidation. I think they are all in debt and spend yearly more than they raise. . . .

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### BATTLE OF CEDAR MOUNTAIN

Culpeper, Aug. 17, 1862.

My Darling Daughter:

I have not found time to write you a line since our battle on the 9th, and it was with much difficulty that I could get a telegraph through.<sup>3</sup> Gen. Pope for some reason shut down on everything and thousands of anxious people were kept anxious for days waiting a single line.

We came up here from Washington Court House in a two days' march, dusty and hot in the extreme. Being in the rear, I did not reach this place till after midnight on the night of the 8th (day before the battle) and as I was obliged to see my divisions in camp, it was after 2 o'clock before I got to sleep in a small room of a small toll-house outside of town. There were a dozen or so of us jammed into one room.

At 10 o'clock the next morning news came that the enemy was

advancing in force upon one of my brigades which had moved the night before six miles or so to the front. We left everything standing and moved off to their support. We found the brigade just beyond a little stream called Cedar Run and within a mile of a mountain whose northern side slopes gradually up into a considerable elevation. The country was much wooded, with intervening strips of cultivated land. The position was a bad one and I immediately wrote back to Gen. Banks to that effect. He came up, however, soon afterwards, about the time my second brigade (Goodwin's), which I had gone ahead of, arrived. The enemy had opened with his cannon the moment I arrived, but was soon silenced by ours. From this to 3 o'clock, there was no firing. After my brigades were put in position, our cook got us up a good lunch of coffee, ham, etc., and I invited many field officers of my old brigade to join me. After lunching, we all lay down under a shade [tree] and talked over the events of the ten months we had been together, and everybody seemed as unconcerned and careless as if he was on the lawn of a watering place instead of the front of a vastly superior enemy. Col. Donnelly of the 28th New York, a great joker and full of humor, was in excellent spirits and cracked his jokes as joyously as ever.

Sorrow and misfortune seemed far away and yet of all the field officers of these three regiments (mine) not one, five hours afterwards, was unhurt. Everyone was either killed or wounded. Col. Donnelly, 28th New York, mortally wounded; <sup>4</sup> Col. Knipe, 46th Pennsylvania, twice wounded and nearly insane from a wound in the head; Col. Chapman, 5th Connecticut, wounded and a prisoner; Lt. Col. Brown, 28th, New York, lost his arm; Maj. Cook killed, and Lt. Col. Stone, 5th Connecticut, killed; Maj. Blake, a young man graduated at Yale last year, badly wounded and a prisoner. Two of the adjutants were killed and one wounded. Nearly all the sergeants killed. In the 28th New York every officer in action was killed or wounded. In the 46th Pennsylvania five lieutenants only escaped, in the 5th Connecticut six lieutenants escaped.

The 10th Maine, a new regiment in this brigade, was almost as badly cut up. In Goodwin's brigade the loss was not so great, but in the 2nd Massachusetts, a regiment whose officers are of the Boston elite, four captains were killed outright, all of them young men of great fortunes

and of the highest standing. The major was also wounded. Lt. Col. Crane of the 3rd Wisconsin was killed. He was a most excellent man and very popular. Out of the 3,400 infantry of my division at least 1000 were killed, wounded, or missing, but few missing.<sup>5</sup> This does not include the slightly wounded who returned to duty.

The battle was opened by artillery about 3 o'clock. At 5, I had placed my brigade in the woods and orders were sent to push through and if possible take a battery which was doing great mischief to our left (Augur's division). It was in this effort to pass the open ground, which was successfully accomplished, and in the woods beyond where they had concealed their reserves, that we suffered so severely. For two hours the volleys of infantry were incessant and the roar of artillery seemed hushed in the din of small arms. By the aid of the 2nd (Gordon's) Brigade we held on till dark, though it was every moment apparent that we were greatly outnumbered and exposed to flank movements. We then slowly withdrew to our old position, wondering what had become of the 12 or 15,000 of our troops (Rickett's and part of Sigel's corps) which we had passed in the morning on our way out, not over four miles from the battlefield. If they had arrived an hour before sundown we should have thrashed Jackson badly and taken a host of his artillery. As it was, they came up some time after dark and took up a position that greatly relieved us.

We had, however, several instances of tremendous cannonading and the Rebels tried once seriously to force our lines. I came very near being caught in it. I was riding towards a road in front of which I had been directed to mass my division, or what was left of it. When but a few rods off, a spirited fire of infantry was opened upon us. Just in front of me was Gen. Gordon and an escort of cavalry. Fortunately we were in a small hollow and the balls passed over us. There was, however, a general stampede of officers and dragoons. Just behind us Gens. Pope and Banks were sitting dismounted with a good many staff officers and escorts. This was a hurrying time with them and altogether the skedaddle became laughable in spite of its danger. In front of the woods not over 500 yards off was an infantry regiment just come up, which opened fire with very little regard to friend or foe, and I fear killed some of our horses if nothing else.

I contrived to get beyond the line of fire pretty soon. The Rebels

almost immediately opened with a heavy fire of artillery to which two of our batteries (twelve pieces) on the flank promptly responded. It was a grand sight, especially as our batteries were well served and knocked the Rebels to pieces rapidly. Finding the Rebel shells passed far over me, I stood on a little knoll and enjoyed the sight vastly. It was a flaming pyrotechnic display. In the morning, I counted over twenty dead Rebel horses, and they left one lieutenant and several men killed on the position of their battery. They didn't stay long after our guns got the range and quiet reigned the rest of the night.

It was a glorious moonlight, too, but what with fatigue and excitement and extreme thirst I can't say I was in the best frame [of mind] to enjoy it. I had sent my escort away in the afternoon to search the woods on the right, and after dark, all my staff officers to search for stragglers. So after riding with Gen. Banks to the river after water, I picked up a bundle of wheat or rye straw, took my horse to a fence near the front, unbridled him, tied the halter about my arm, and went to sleep while he munched straw.

After an hour or so I woke up and rode to the rear again to find water and see if my stray companions could be found, but I discovered nothing but two bareheaded[?] staff officers of General Banks and so I came back to my old stand and dozed till daylight. As the first streaks of light appeared, I discovered two haystacks, and hoping for a few for my horse went over to them. Here I found a strange medley of general and staff officers and privates all mixed up in the straw. Amongst others, Gen. McDowell appeared to me as I had taken a roost for a small nap before the fight was renewed, as I was assured by Gen. Pope it would be by sunrise. I wish he had kept his promise, for I feel confident we should have punished them badly. I found, too, that my troops had gone to the rear and that all the other troops had been massed in columns of brigades. I had heard the rumbling of vehicles, which I dreamed or imagined to be ambulances with wounded, but which was the moving of artillery. Everything was solemnly still except this rumbling and an occasional suppressed tone of command.

I found my troops and all my staff (except Captain Wilkins) a mile or so to the rear. They had been looking for me almost all night, but not so far to the front. Poor Wilkins was missing. He was seen safe after the fight coming from the right where I sent him. He probably was run upon by the Rebel pickets when alone and captured. We heard

the next day he was a prisoner and several have since come in who saw him. He is not wounded. I miss him greatly now, for Gen. Banks was run against by a horse in the skedaddle and on the following day turned over the command to me and went into town. I have since been incessantly at work till after midnight. I contrived to finish a hurried letter to Rene yesterday and now I am writing you at midnight. The applications I receive from all sources for everything, for telegraph, transportation, protection, etc., and the thousand reports and returns, the looking after the broken troops of two divisions, the numberless papers to be endorsed and forwarded, the hundreds of matters to be examined and approved, you cannot imagine.

We have a new general, too, who has new rules, with a new staff just from the bureau that make all the trouble and vexation possible. I pray for Gen. Banks to get well. To add to all, the adjutant general of the corps was wounded (Maj. Pelouse). My adjutant general and the adjutant general of the 2nd Division were both taken prisoners. I have nobody on my staff to help me but Lt. Pittman, who is adjutant general and aide. The quartermaster and commissary have their duties outside. . . .

I was ordered with the remnants of our corps into town on Wednesday last, and have command of all the troops here and about. How long we shall stay here I can't guess. A good many troops are in advance, but not as many, I fear, as the Rebels can bring up from Richmond. I hope to see the day we shall meet them with at least equal numbers, and on fair grounds. But our generals seem more ambitious of personal glory [than] of their country's gain, at least some of them. . . .

As ever, Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



### THE SECOND BULL RUN CAMPAIGN

August 26, 1862.<sup>6</sup>

My Dear Daughter:

I am now near Fayetteville, about seven miles from Warrenton. For ten days I have not been able to change clothes and only now and then

to wash my face—sleeping under trees or on the unsheltered earth—and generally vagabonding up and down the Rappahannock. I have not been able to write you for two good reasons. 1, I have had nothing to write on. 2, A general order has stopped all letters going out. I might add a third—that day and night we have been literally under arms, liable at any moment to be called into action or into a fatiguing march. If I ever get settled, I will give you a detailed history of the last week. I have had hard service and hard traveling, but I think the past week's experience puts all other labor and privations to the shame. All our baggage has been forty miles from us and we have been at times, officers and men, literally with[out] bread or meat. Every minute came a new order—now to march east and now to march west, night and day.

Such a vagrant-looking set of officers from the major general down was never seen. We have been on the march today, having left Waterloo Bridge yesterday. I find here an officer who is going to Washington, and I use him to smuggle through a note.

I don't know if we shall get mails up or not but I suppose we shall, as I received a letter yesterday, but none from you for ten days. Where all this will end, I cannot guess. We are getting some reinforcements but nothing to what we should have. A few of us—my division reduced in the late battle to half its muster and almost without officers—are compelled to do an immense duty, enough to kill iron men. We have been under fire of shells almost continuously and at times most incessant and tremendous. After hard labor and great losses of life we are back where we were when Gen. Pope published his famous order that we must look to no lines of retreat and that in his western campaigns he never saw the backs of his enemies. In short he boasted greatly, at which we all laughed and thought he would do better to stay where we then were till he got men enough to do half what he threatened. But I have room for no more. Say to Minnie that I will write her by my first private chance.

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.



Camp near Rockville, September 8, 1862.

My Dear Daughter:

With the exception of my short pencil note, I have not been able to write you since the fight at Cedar Mountain but once I believe. . . . For two weeks, we were without knowledge of the outer world. To look back upon those two weeks of anxiety, sleepless nights, long marches, and almost incessant battling, it seems like a long nightmare when one wakes up feverish and exhausted, and but indistinctly can recall what has happened to him.

A few days after our Cedar Mountain battle, the command of the army corps was turned over to me by Gen. Banks, and I was ordered to move the corps to Culpeper and take command of all the troops there. We were there several days but most incessantly and vexatiously occupied. I was almost always up till after midnight. The loss of so many general and field officers threw matters into confusion.

I had got the books and papers of the corps together and was getting matters straightened when orders came for us to pack up for a sudden march on Rappahannock Crossing. We had our tents pitched in [the] large front yard of a Dr. Herndon and I was most comfortably located. But on the 17th ult. at 2 p.m. we were obliged to pack up and start our trains, but the corps was to remain as a rear guard to all of McDowell's wagons. Mine were got out of town early, but McDowell's and Sigel's came lurching by all night while myself and staff were watching and waiting. It was 10 o'clock the next morning before I could put my column in motion.

While I was waiting, sleepy and impatient, soon after sunrise a cavalry officer brought up and delivered over to me Maj. Fitzhugh, a general of Gen. Stuart's Rebel cavalry. He was well dressed and a very gentlemanly young man. I invited him to take coffee with me, as it was just ready, and afterwards I took his parole not to attempt to escape. He was mounted on an elegant horse, a present of his wife, parting with which seemed to be his great grief. He rode with me all day. I gave him a dinner on the road. I crossed the Rappahannock before sundown at the railroad crossing and took up a line of battle on the south side of the railroad along the river and bivouacked. My wagons had all gone back on some quartermaster's orders and our best shelter was the woods, to which we took with our prisoner. I kept him till

the afternoon of the next day, took his parole to report to Gen. Halleck in Washington, and then shipped him on the railroad. He almost shed tears when I took him aside and offered him such funds as he might need for present uses. He acknowledged most warmly my kindness, which he had not expected, and seemed sincerely affected. So strangely are the extremes of friend and foes brought near. So strangely does war mix our passions and our better feelings.

The enemy opened his big guns upon us the next day, Wednesday, but harmed only the forces (McDowell's) on our right. Thursday night we moved down towards Berry's Ferry to support [Gen.] Reno. Slept within woods in a big rain storm, ordered back next morning, stayed in woods.

Friday, 22d, ordered up river to support Sigel. Encamped near Beverly Ford, terrific shelling all day. Moved troops to woods in rear of Sigel, who attacked the enemy with infantry. Gen. Bohlen was killed.<sup>7</sup> Sigel lost badly, though I see the newspapers give him the false reputation of having taken 2,000 of the Rebels! In the morning (Saturday) the woods we were in were shelled and several fell close to us. A 12-pound round shot passed directly over our impromptu breakfast table just as we left it, whereupon we mounted our horses and moved out of range.

Saturday, 23d, followed Sigel's corps towards Warrenton Springs along the Rappahannock. It was a day of very slow marching over very bad roads. Sigel had a long train with him and we were obliged to lie in the road for hours for his command to go by. . . . Reno's corps followed us. Just before night a tremendous cannonade began in front followed by heavy volleys of musketry. It was dark before we halted for the night. Sigel was in advance up[on] a narrow, bad road. Reno some miles in the rear. The enemy was reported in force across a narrow creek. We were crowded into a small open space surrounded by heavily wooded hills. I went forward to see Sigel. Found him in a farmhouse full of Dutch staff officers and several general officers: Gen. Carl Schurz, Milroy, and Schenck were there. All anticipated a big battle next day.

I got home through a horrid road by the light of a lamp carried by a mounted orderly about 2 o'clock in the morning. The next day we reconnoitered early towards Warrenton Springs—got the column on

the road following Sigel about noon. As soon as we reached the hills overlooking the Springs, the Rebels opened firing[?] with their guns. Ours were soon in position and for hours we had the fiercest artillery duel that has happened in this war. While it was going on, I was obliged to march my division along a wooded hill directly in the rear of our batteries and under the direct range of the Rebel guns. The shells whizzed and burst over us and the cannon shot cut the trees and branches like rattling hail, and yet strange to say not a man of the 1st Brigade that I was leading was injured. In the midst of the wood we found a lady (the wife of one of Sigel's staff) and two officers closely hugging the side of a big tree. As we came up one officer (an old German of most military aspect), alarmed apparently by a shell bursting near, threw himself flat upon his saddle and spinning his horse by ferocious kicks high on his rump, he skedaddled in about as laughable a way as can be conceived. None of us could help a grin quite audible even though all probably would have been glad to emulate his speed.

We passed safely through these woods and obtaining an open space in a deep hollow, we halted for an hour or so while the duel of big guns kept up. Finally, a corps of pioneers reached the bridge over the Rappahannock and set fire to it. We marched off up the Warrenton Pike till we reached a cross road towards Waterloo Bridge which crosses the river between Warrenton and Springville, our old route when we first began the campaign under Pope. We encamped on the road about two miles from the bridge. Sigel in front of us still and his eternal trains all night as they had all day stopping our march. The next morning, we marched towards the bridge, but soon fell into Sigel's confused ranks. I was leading the corps, and as we were ascending a hill Sigel appeared in his long cloak and broad-brimmed hat, looking as if he might be a descendant of Peter the Hermit. He was terribly enraged that Gen. Banks should order his corps to march through his ranks. He lifted his arms up and spread out his cloak as if he was about to give a benediction. It was a tremendous cursing in mixed German and broken English. Altogether the scene was very laughable, and we all laughed heartily as soon as we could get our faces away from the enraged general. I calmed his resentment in a short time by assuring him that Gen. Banks had intended no disrespect, and that I would take the responsibility of moving the corps back and uncovering his troops, which I did in five

minutes. I saw the enraged general soon afterwards expending his surplus wrath on a very black Negro, whom he was having soundly thrashed, probably for neglecting his breakfast.

Same day, Monday, the 25th, we received orders to march in all haste towards Bealeton Station, about three miles from the Rappahannock. It was rumored that the Rebels were moving towards Thoroughfare Gap to cut our communications. We marched some miles, passing McDowell's corps, or part of it, on the way. We were halted for the night in a fine camping ground. At last I halted the corps there as Gen. Banks was absent in Warrenton. The next morning we moved forward, but were halted in the woods after a few miles and stayed all night. Wednesday (27th) we again moved forward to Bealeton and followed up the railroad towards Warrenton Junction. We encamped at night with[in] a mile of Warrenton Junction. Fitz John Porter's command were ahead of us and thousands of his stragglers covered the route.

The next morning (28th) we marched to Kettle Run near Catlett's Station. There we halted over night and had time to look at the battleground of Gen. Hooker's division, which took place the day before.<sup>8</sup> Gen. John C. Robinson (Capt. Robinson of Detroit) was one of his brigadiers. As I came up with the rear of Porter's corps in marching out in the morning, I came across the 16th (Stockton's) Michigan Regiment. Capt. Tom Barry, formerly a clerk at Tillmans, was commanding the regiment.<sup>9</sup> I found several officers I knew, among them Robert Elliott. We left Kettle Run and marched to Bristow Station and Manassas Junction. All day before we had heard the sound of heavy firing northwest and north of us, but no order came to move nor did we hear a word from Pope. Today we could see from the fortifications of Manassas the fight going on—the smoke of cannon and of infantry firing.<sup>10</sup> About 3 p.m., just as the cloud of smoke seemed thickest in the center, and when, too, it seemed that our troops were receding (as afterwards proved true), we were ordered to march back four miles to Bristow Station. All night we were without information save what came from rumor with its thousand tongues. We were away off on one flank with a little decimated corps of not 6,000 fighting men. If our troops were driven our chances of getting away were small. I had taken the corps back by order. It was nearly dark when we reached our

camping ground. I could not find Gen. Banks and so made my dispositions for the night as best I could. I slept soundly in spite of uncertainty and doubt and anxiety.

Early the next morning Gen. Banks sent for me and showed me an order to burn all public property and march via Brentsville. The railroad bridge had been burned by the Rebels, leaving on the south side hundreds of our wounded and sick, besides miles of cars full of army stores and provisions. The wounded and sick we had taken off to Centerville by wagon, but the goods were there and the torch was soon applied and a tremendous bonfire, whose smoke went up high into the heavens, broke out for miles along the railroad. At the same time our ammunition wagons were set on fire and many of our ambulances. Explosions followed like salvos of artillery. I had for my headquarters carriage an ambulance and one wagon, which we had contrived to secure to carry our forage and food. These I determined to keep. I got them off safely and have them yet. Gen. Banks burnt up his private baggage almost wholly. We saved a good many ambulances. The day was rainy and the road we took to Brentsville muddy and heavy.

At Brentsville we turned off to the left and after [marching] up hill and down we came out on the plains near Manassas and crossing Bull Run we encamped on the hills near Blackburn Ford. This is the point where your Gen. Tyler and our Gen. Richardson began the attack on Thursday before the unfortunate battle of Bull Run. The affair was considered a failure, and I believe (justly or unjustly I can[not] say) both Tyler and Richardson were considered censurable. We remained here guarding the bridge over the ford that night and part of next day. It was here that we began to get some definite intelligence of the disasters of the fights on Saturday. We heard, too, the death of poor Fletcher Webster, who had spent a day and night with me at Culpeper on his return from leave at Marshfield. He was in great spirits there and was anxious that the battling might begin. Here, too, we heard that Col. Brodhead was wounded and a prisoner. He has since died and his body sent home.<sup>11</sup> Col. Roberts, too, of the 1st Michigan [Infantry] was reported killed.<sup>12</sup> Fifty of my personal acquaintances and friends were reported killed or wounded. Such is war. Our troops had fallen back and lay as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa in rear of the bare hills of Centerville.

In the afternoon, we were ordered towards Fairfax Station by a road

running parallel to the pike from Centerville to Alexandria. We had nearly reached a cross road to Fairfax Court House when a heavy fire of infantry opened on our left, apparently not half a mile distant. We had just been ordered by a staff officer to halt and there we lay on the road while the musketry rattling and cannon now and then boomed out above the rattling din. Amidst it all began the most furious storm of thunder, lightning, and rain I have ever been exposed to. The firing slackened somewhat, but in each lull of the storm it would begin again furiously. Then the thunder would begin again and such lightning, apparently striking the trees in our very midst. All this kept up until dark, when guns and thunder all stopped and the silence was oppressive. I crawled into my ambulance and slept soundly from fatigue. In the morning, we learned that Gens. Kearny and I. S. Stevens had been killed in the fight near us and that we had lost several hundred killed and wounded. The enemy were forced back, but it cost us valuable lives, two of the best officers in the service.<sup>13</sup>

After waiting half a day in the road, we were finally moved forward with orders to proceed to the forts near Alexandria. This was Tuesday (2nd inst.). It was midnight before we got into bivouac on the hills behind the forts near Washington. We groped about for hours before we could find a place to stop, trying to find Franklin's corps.<sup>14</sup> We fetched up in the grove of a gentleman's country seat. I fear as the night was cold that our long [illegible] in the Rebel land did not prepare our troops to abstain as they should from burning the man's fences. It was very cold, strangely so, and our men for over two weeks had been days without rations, marching without shelter, bivouacking in storms and wearied and fretting beyond endurance. Indeed, Rene, I should not be willing to try a description of what our men were exposed to in this terrible seventeen days. Our trains had all been sent away and we were always finding forage and subsistence burnt up just as we were getting near it.

All this is the sequence of Gen. Pope's high sounding manifestoes. His pompous orders issued in Washington and published in the daily telegraphs all over the country with great commendation of the press and apparently of the people greatly disgusted his army from the first. When a general boasts that he will look only on the backs of his enemies,

that he takes no care for lines of retreat or bases of supplies; when, in short, from a snug hotel in Washington he issues after-dinner orders to gratify public taste and his own self-esteem, anyone may confidently look for results such as have followed the bungling management of his last campaign. A splendid army almost demoralized, millions of public property given up or destroyed, thousands of lives of our best men sacrificed for no purpose. I dare not trust myself to speak of this commander as I feel and believe. Suffice it to say (for your eye alone) that more insolence, superciliousness, ignorance, and pretentiousness were never combined in one man. It can with truth be said of him that he had not a friend in his command from the smallest drummer boy to the highest general officer. All *hated* him. McDowell was his only companion and McDowell is disliked almost as much, and by his immediate command he is entirely distrusted.

But enough of this. We were allowed a day's rest near Fort Albany and then ordered to the front and have led the advance up to this point. We are now within a few miles of where I began my service with the old brigade a year ago. What a contrast. The three regiments of that brigade (one has been transferred) are here yet in name, but instead of 3,000 men they number altogether less than 400 men present! Not a field officer nor adjutant is here! All killed or wounded! Of the 102 officers not over 20 are left to be present! Instead of hopeful and confident feelings we are all depressed with losses and disasters. Instead of an offensive position the enemy is now actually in Maryland and we are on the defensive. What a change! After such vast preparations and such vast sacrifices. This has been called a "brainless war." I can't tell you of the future. We are accumulating troops this way and shall doubtless have some severe conflicts. If we fail now the North has no hope, no safety that I can see. We have thrown away our power and prestige. We may become the supplicant instead of the avenger. . . .

The trains left us at Culpeper, and we did not see them again till we crossed the river. They luckily escaped the raids at Catletts and Fairfax. . . .

I am again in command of the army corps and worked to death. Gen. Banks seems to get sick when there is most to do. I see that the 24th Michigan, Col. Morrow's [regiment], is ordered to this corps.

Four other regiments are ordered to us, but they are so green in officers and men that little can be expected.

Love to Auntie and children. I will write as often as I can.

Your Affectionate Father,  
A.S.W.

1. Reproduced from a typewritten copy. The original letter is missing.
2. General Lee's two invasions of the North, ending respectively at Antietam and Gettysburg, were by way of the Shenandoah Valley.
3. The battle of Cedar Mountain, August 9, 1862, the first encounter in the Second Bull Run campaign. In it, General Banks' command, 8,000 strong, fought desperately General Stonewall Jackson's 20,000 men, being driven in retreat toward nightfall, as General Williams relates.
4. Colonel Dudley Donnelly, wounded on August 9, died at Culpeper, August 15, 1862.
5. General Williams' Second Corps bore the brunt of the battle and sustained all but a minor fraction of the Union losses (2,216 men in a total for all units engaged of 2,381). Of the total loss reported, 585 are ascribed as "captured or missing." General Williams, however, states that the missing were but few, leaving the implication that almost all of the 585 were either captured or killed. General Jackson's report of the battle acknowledges a loss of 1,314 killed, wounded, and missing, and adds that this was "probably" about one-half the Union loss. Since the latter were outnumbered two to one, the proportionate Union loss was correspondingly greater. Jackson was so gratified over the victory that he ordered a divine service to be held in the army on August 14, to give thanks for past victories and to implore the continued divine favor for the future. See *Official Records*, Series I, XII, Part 2, 136-39 and 181-85.
6. A penciled note written on scrap paper. The Second Bull Run campaign was now approaching its climax in the defeat of General Pope's army and its withdrawal within the defenses of Washington on August 29-30, 1862. A second letter of similar tone was written on the same day by General Williams to his other daughter.
7. General Henry Bohlen, a native of Germany, was appointed colonel of the Sixty-fifth Pennsylvania Infantry on September 30, 1861. He was commissioned a brigadier general, April 28, 1862, and was killed in the battle of Freeman's Ford on August 22, following.
8. The battle of Kettle Run on August 28, 1862 was another Union defeat. For General John C. Robinson's report of it see *Official Records*, Series I, XII, Part 2, 421-22.
9. Thomas B. W. Stockton of Flint, a West Point graduate of the class of 1827, served as colonel of the First Michigan Regiment in the Mexican

War 1847-48. In 1861, at the age of fifty-nine, he became colonel of the Sixteenth Michigan Infantry. He was captured at Gaines' Mill in the Peninsular campaign, June 27, 1862, and was exchanged on August 12, following. Thomas J. Barry of Detroit was commissioned captain of Company A, Sixteenth Regiment, on August 1, 1861. He was wounded in the battle of Manassas on August 30, 1862.—*Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers*, Vol. XVI.

10. The first day's battle of Second Bull Run, Friday and Saturday, August 29-30, in which General Pope unsuccessfully attacked Jackson's force.
11. Colonel Brodhead was wounded in the action of August 30 and died on September 2.
12. Horace S. Roberts of Detroit entered the military service (three months) as a captain in the First Michigan Infantry Regiment on April 20, 1861. On August 10, 1861 he was commissioned lieutenant-colonel of the re-organized (three-year) First Michigan Regiment, of which he became colonel on April 28, 1862. He was wounded at Gaines' Mill, on June 27 and was killed on the second day of Second Bull Run, August 30, 1862.—*Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers*, Vol. I.
13. This was the battle of Chantilly, September 1, 1862, in which General Jackson unsuccessfully sought to gain the road by which General Pope's defeated army was withdrawing toward Fairfax Court House. For the careers of General Isaac I. Stevens of Washington Territory and General Philip Kearny, see *Dict. Am. Biog.*
14. General William B. Franklin, whose military career proved stormy. The conduct of his corps at the Second Bull Run battle provoked a testy exchange of letters between General Halleck and General McClellan, the former accusing someone (presumably McClellan) of disobedience to orders and the latter replying with a tart request for definite instructions, since he resented being accused of disobedience when he had "simply exercised the discretion you imposed in me."—*Official Records*, Series 1, XII, Part 3, 723. For General Franklin's career see *Dict. Am. Biog.*