1862
May 8

Camp near Williamsburgh
May 8th 1862

Dear Mary -

I dispatched you a short note on Tuesday to say that I was unhurt - I hope it will reach you as soon as the news of the battle of Williamsburgh. I will now try to give you a narration of the affair as far as it came under my observation. Last Saturday afternoon I rode with an officer of engineers to the advance works before Yorktown - Roads had been built - earthworks thrown up - guns mounted and in short the whole face of the country changed by the labor day and night of Porter and Heintzlemans army corps - 50.000 men. Dismounting we crept to the advance sheilding ourselves by the works - in the trenches we got and peeked through embrazures and loopholes at the enemy's front and works. A pretty active bombardment was going on - between our battery No 1 down by York river - throwing 100 pound shells and one gun 200. and the enemy who unable to reach battery No 1. opened from their different works firing all sorts of missiles everywhere they supposed us to be - The shrieking of a shell is a strange unpleasant sound, (as loud if the shell is a large one (and something like, but shriller) ~~xx~~ than the noise of an express train at high speed. To see them burst high up against the blue sky is beautiful - of their nearer bursting and its consequences I have had hitherto no experience. As we returned every body said - "The ball will open on Monday" And

The loss of our brigade is 25 per cent of their whole effective force -

Say to L.L. Hartwell Esq that I have received his letter and have read it, with interest -

so we ~~were~~ would have been all ready by that time. During the night the firing of the enemy kept me awake, and on rising I heard first the rumor and then the assurance that Yorktown was evacuated - By 9 o'clock A.M. we had orders to move immediately - Such a hurry and bustle you never saw. A sudden movement is hard on the Medical department. Sick men are to be left behind, a hospital in the rear extemporised. The claims of each to stay or go decided, and I am sure to hear of ever so many new ones saying Doctor how am I to carry my knapsack?- how am I to go? quite enough to distract one. I was detained in getting off my sick, till almost night, and then found the road so blocked up that it was almost impossible to get my ambulances along. By the greatest exertions, galloping forward to make way - and, back to show it, representing my needs to quartermasters in charge of trains, we reached by nightfall the baggage train of our regt, and as the ambulance horses were getting used up I left them and pressed on. An hour brought me to the 5th They were waiting for way to be made in front - Three hours of weary march and more weary delay advanced us three miles.. It was late - Our longest delay was in a very muddy place. ~~My~~ My horse sunk almost to his knees - Our weary fellows threw themselves down, without regarding it. We camped. Without baggage - without food for officers (the men had two days rations in their haversacks) without water except ~~the~~ a very little we tied our thirsty horses and with saddles for pillows spread our blankets, and lay on the ground to be bitten by wood-ticks and all sorts of creeping things till morning. It grew colder, toward morning it began to rain. As soon as it was light to horse

gentlemen said the colonel - I put my wet ~~[illegible]~~ saddle on my horse and mounted - We had turned off the road on which Porters corps were gone, and were the advance of Heintzelman. The rain poured - the men staggered on through the puddles of water - the regiment lengthened - had to stop to close up. It was a ~~long~~ narrow road through a swamp - the woods impracticable for horsemen - Soon we came where a skirmish had been during the night. Some advanced cavalry, had been worsted by the enemy. The trees were scarred with balls and a dead horse and trampled ground marked the place. A half mile further we overtook some batteries, two I believe of regulars, who had come up by another road. The 5th was ordered to their support and they advanced. I rode at the head of the column with Col Starr - who led the advance. Soon firing began, from field artillery in the woods - The rebels overtaken had turned at bay. Dr Fisher came up and ordered me to dismount and with the other surgeons of the brigade to form a depot for the wounded. We fastened our horses in the thicket, and selected a little higher and less muddy place ~~for~~ for operation. Immediately the wounded of the 5th began to come in. I dressed them as well as I could. Our batteries opened - the 6th 7th & 8th passed on in turn, the firing became sharp and the action general and severe - A strong rear guard of the enemy were posted in fallen timber in front of us, and concealed were disputing our passage. The Jerseymen advanced to the fallen timber and, deployed as skirmishers, fought the rebels after their own fashion - It was a continual roar and rattle nobody could see anything even in front - every one fired when he could find a mark. One of our officers says it was the most unsatisfactory thing he ever saw in his life. No body to be seen, and bullets flying everywhere. We sent forward our bands to bring off wounded - Soon they came in thick and fast. Many severely wounded some horribly mutilated. Shell wounds are very ghastly. We all worked with every energy we possessed. Two capital operations were performed at our depot one by Dr Wiley of the 6th the other, amputation at the shoulder, by myself. ~~By this~~ I operated kneeling in the wet with my man on the ground - a shelter tent over him - throwing its water down the back of my neck, Made my flap from the deltoid cut the circumflex humeral - secured it - sawed off the bone ~~about~~ two inches from the shoulder joint cut my internal flap at a sweep and seized it instantly compressing the axillary as it spouted its full tide of blood in my face. It was practicing surgery under super-human difficulties - We determined to dress the best we could and amputate no more. I lopped off a leg indeed with one sweep of a knife where a shell had nearly done it before and I believe an arm - Fingers hopelessly shattered were cut off with a sweep of a knife leaving the fringe of flesh the bullet makes for flap and with the order "there - go wrap it in a wet rag" the next patient was ~~[illegible]~~ turned to. The wounded accumulated beyond all possibility of giving them even such attention. When lint & bandages gave out we tore the shirts off the men to dress their wounds - We became expert at cutting clothing to pieces to get at wounds. Ball extracting required the most care of any thing attempted during the afternoon