

Camp Defiance. Sund. [Sunday] 8P.M. Oct 6th

1861 --

Dearest Mother,

One of the most pleasant duties of camp life to me is to write home. It seems to bring me back again, and all the little circumstances that have happened there in past times recur to my mind, and almost make me regret they are over. I look upon the five years which were spent at the E.H.S. [Episcopal High School] as the most profitable and joyful period of my life, and the reason of this is, in a great measure owing to my religious life there, the quiet Sabbaths, the prayer meetings held amongst ourselves, -- the instructive sermons, -- the pleasant walks, -- & religious conversations. These have all to be dispensed with in camp. We seldom hear a sermon, and there are no companions such as I am used to. The soldiers' Sunday is almost invariably spent in marching, fighting, thus leaving no leisure time for religious exercises and thoughts. This morning we were favored with a short sermon from Rev. Mr. Heyden, a Baptist minister, Text; "Be ye not conformed to the world." It was conducted beneath a large tree, and a good many attended. After the service was ended a number of tracts testaments & Bibles (chiefly second hand) were distributed. The tracts are all alike the heading being "Come to Jesus", & were printed I think in Richmond.

--- This morning when we awoke, the enemy's tents had all disappeared. Gen'l [General] Lee & staff rode up on the hill attended by 4 infantry and one cavalry company, as a guard, about 8AM & shortly afterwards 5 regiments followed, with Gen'l [General] Loring, Floyd, & a number of Col's [Colonels] &c. [&etc.] They found the hill deserted, but the enemy in their haste had left behind several horses, wagons (2), cooking utensils, some guns and pistols, and I believe one or two baggage wagons. One (I know, probably all) of the regiments returned this evening, with the artillery. It is not known where the enemy have gone. One of the two following reasons, it appears to me must have influenced them in leaving. They had a long distance to haul their provisions, bad roads, and hard work to get their forage, and retired where they could have these things more conveniently. The other reason is: They may have gone to join their forces in the North-West intending to attack our men, already diminished by the withdrawal of several large regiments, before assistance can reach them. Our almost impregnable position, and force, prevented them from attacking us. It must be amusing to see Meggie knitting. It is a good plan for Charley Alexander to go to the University, being in such precarious health, though there must be serious objections to taking this step at the present time when every arm capable of carrying a weapon is absolutely necessary for the defense of our country. When you write send two sheets instead of one, and try and write every week. Pa will forward your letters from Lewisburg. On Friday evening I rec'd [received] a bundle from him, containing your letter of 25 September, and 5 "Dispatches" the last as late as 1st October. He says, he will send the Dispatch as regularly as possible. We had a very hard rain this evening. I had to stand the whole weight of it, our tents not being up. I sleep tonight on some shingles over which is my oil cloth, covering with one blanket. Yet it is very comfortable. The system of giving whiskey to the soldiers is working badly, as I supposed. Several of the men are drunk tonight and making a good deal of noise. I wish we could substitute rations of molasses, which I should think plenty and cheap enough. I will now close for tonight. Good-night. May God protect us both during the night. Monday Morning 9 A.M. I have just finished my breakfast of tough half-baked dough. We had rations of sugar but so accustomed am I to drinking my coffee without that I believe I prefer it thus. It rained during the night & is now cloudy and threatening. We will be moved somewhere in a few days. We can't

stay here long. The leaves are falling fast, and the trees are assuming their variegated colors of yellow and red, -- and on this mountain the weather is severe. It is no uncommon thing, I am told, to have snow on the 1st of October. In addition to this we have to haul our provisions from Jackson's rider the western terminus of the central railroad,-- some 62 miles distant. To prolong my pleasure, I have undertaken another sheet. Writing is almost like conversing. You seem to be holding close communication with your correspondent, and in camp there are subjects sufficient at all times for letters, making it an easy matter to fill several sheets.

[hand drawn diagram of the camp where he is and its surroundings]

You have above a wide description of our position. -- If I had continued the road on up to the top of the paper that would have represented the top of Sewell which was the enemy position. I am obliged to send my letters, postage unpaid, a privilege allowed to soldiers. There is no charge in camp or anywhere out here. You can pay postage when you receive the letters from the office.

--- When this war is over we will be able to appreciate more the value of peace, so true is it that we never know the pleasures of life until after they are passed. I have not touched a piano since I 1st entered Lewisburg about the 8th of July. I often feel very much like playing. If I could get hold of some books, histories or biographies of some kind, I could pass some of my time very agreeably. But I must again bid you goodbye. Kiss Meggie for me and tell her, "Uncle Eugene" expects and hopes to see her sometime soon. Also give my best wishes to Aunt Jane. With much devotion I am as ever--

Your loving Son

Eugene F. Cordell

P.S. Direct your letters to Pa, and he will forward them to me.