

Camp Big Chestnut

October 12, 1861

Dear Brother,

Your favor of the 9th inst. was duly received this morning and it was truly welcome. The election news I was very anxious to see and it pleased me immensely. I thought I had my Company all right but five men deceived me. However, I have an idea that I know who they are. They dare not acknowledge it before the balance of the men as they would be ridiculed to death. One satisfaction, however, not one man from Sunbury voted the "Secesh" ticket. They were all polled by residents of other parts of the county. But I think I did pretty well any how considering. I came out last night to this encampment with the tents and blankets for the men. They have been on a steady line of duty ever since Wednesday morning with nothing to protect them from the weather but their overcoats. On Wednesday our Brigade marched out about six miles to Langley beyond Lewinsville, took possession of an eminence that commanded the country all around and our Regiment went to work and threw up an earth work about five feet high and dug a six foot trench behind it, first driving about six hundred cavalry from the position. We got it done about 9 o'clock in the evening when we marched over to an adjoining field and laid on our arms. I had hardly got my first nap when the order was whispered along the line to fall in. We immediately formed and marched about a mile north of Langley where we took a South East direction towards Falls Church. It was as dark as Erebus and an awful road for about two miles but I had had 210 men under my command on picket there and knew every foot of the ground so we got along very well. The left wing of our Regiment got lost, however, and we had to stop for them. About one o'clock we halted at the outside pickets and were told to rest our men. A corn field in which the stalks were still standing was on my right so I just filed my Company into it and we soon had a rousing fire made of the best chestnut rails. I soon cut down a dozen stalks and took a fine sweet pumpkin for a pillow, wrapped my fine blanket around me and slept soundly only once in a while some of the boys what had found a potato field and some roasting ears would come in with a haversack full and having roasted them would go stumbling about among

the men to get their messmates to help them eat some. Some even indulged in stewed pumpkin. In the morning having cooked a cup of coffee we moved into a wood near by and built some bivouacs for to sleep. But Thursday evening we again started and marched nearly two miles further south, the enemy moving before us. I, however, was sent to the Fort after the Regiment equipage. The men remained in a woods near by until they got their tents and blankets but they did not get time to put them up until this morning. Last night my Company and, in fact, the whole right wing of the Regiment were on picket about 2 miles out and within 1000 yards of their outpost. We could see their mounted pickets riding around to within about 200 yards of our line to a house and barn belonging to one of their number. We could hear the jingle of their sabers and once in a while even the sound of their voices. But it was one of the darkest nights I ever saw and raining just as light as ever it did in the world. Besides we dare not fire first on pickets but I venture to say that if they had not left when they did they would have caught it as the whole reserve on duty would have been brought to the post in a short time. This morning the sound of their drums reached us quite plainly. This morning we were relieved and the men pitched their tents, slept but were roused up once and formed to receive the enemy. This afternoon 25 men of each Company are at work cutting a road. So you see we have plenty to do but notwithstanding the exposure, etc., the men are in good health and spirits. Ian Oyster and Al Hunter have the diarrhea but not serious. Neither are confined to bed. I think in about 3 days we will have about 10,000 of the enemy in as neat and close a trap as ever you heard of. I cannot see how they can escape us for we have men enough to eat all Virginia. We are 12 miles from Washington but still direct your letters to there and they will come all right to us. Now, Mother, do not be alarmed. I will take the best care of myself possible and so will my men. But they would follow me to Richmond if I said go. I love them as I do my life and I feel satisfied it is not wasted. I do not think any man in the Regiment can boast of more confidence being placed in him by his men. The other day we were encamped near a house when we caught 2 blamed good looking girls making signals to the enemy. We had to threaten to hang them to make them stop. I had a notion to take and send the younger one home for Ed to take care of. She was pretty.

This morning I received a letter from Kate [unreadable]. She says all the family is well and that is all she says about them. Write often and tell all friends I would be glad to hear from them. I get no Gazettes at all and will write no more letters for it. Tell Wilbur I will write him a long "tale" the first time I am off duty long enough. Tell Skinner Beck that I am under the impression he owes me a bottle of wine or is it a jug. I forget which one or the other. Mr. Rizer would be in good chance to send it down. Father, if Ed Easily touches you, walk away and let him alone until I get home. I want to attend to that man, not you. Bill and Hunter are well. Bill just came into my Markoe. He has written to his "gal" and wants an envelope. All my "boys" have been vaccinated. I have no word from Boulty today. Will go tomorrow to see him. God bless you all.

Yours,  
Shindel