

Camp Near Yorktown, Virginia, April 25th [1862]

Dear Mother,

I have not written for some time as our Regt. has been in the entrenchments ever since the fight commenced and have had no time to write. I hear that letters are not allowed to leave here now, but I will write a few lines and run the risk of its going, as I know that you will be uneasy if you do not get a letter from me. There is no chance of our getting home until the war is ended, and and [sic] we will organize new companies and Regt. in forty days from the day the Conscript Bill was pass [passed]. I don't know who will be Col. but I am afraid that Col. Ward [George Talliferro Ward] will be thrown overboard. Capt. Brevard [Theodore Washington Brevard, Jr.] will be Major or Lieut. Col. beyond a doubt. I have no idea who will be our Company officers, but I think that our present Third Lt. [Lieutenant] will be Capt., for I know that he can be elected to any position he aspires to. He and Capt. Brevard are the only ones that could be re-elected. If he should be elected Mess No. 1 will apply for a transfer. Don't say anything about what I have said.

The long talked-of and looked-for attack on Yorktown is at hand and judging from the preparation the enemy are making "the Waterloo" of the war will be fought on the peninsula. On Saturday (the 5th) the enemy made their appearance before our Breast works and threw a perfect storm of shell and round shot into our lines until 4 o'clock P.M., when they drew off for the night, pretty well convinced that our gunners unstood [understood] throwing shell. As the fight was kept up at long range and our boys were behind breastworks, only one of our side was hurt. (A Lt. of Artillery stationed at Wynn's Mill.) The loss of the enemy must be great as they had no protection against the shell thrown from some twenty or thirty pieces of our artillery.

Shells were pretty freely exchanged for several days but nothing of interest occurred at our post until the following Friday when Col. Ward with his Brigade (our Regiment and the 2nd Miss. Battalion) drove away the enemies' sharpshooters, who had their rifle pits behind the fence enclosing a very fine peach orchard, which was about six hundred yards in front of our lines. We succeeded in driving them away, burning five or six houses that were occupied by their officers and the fence, and cutting down the peach trees. It was a pity to destroy such a fine orchard, but it was a protection to the enemy and we were in danger all the time they were near.

We had two men wounded at camp which is about twelve hundred yards from them. I see by their account of the fight that they had two killed and four wounded and that we were busily engaged the next day burying our dead. (We had four wounded, one from our regiment and three from the Miss. B.) They have been pretty shy since then and I hear that they (the sharpshooters) are down at Damb [Dam] No. 1, where there are separated from our forces by a pond. We can't get at them and our cannoniers are in danger all the time of being taken off. On Wednesday (the 16th) they attempted to charge our works at Dam No. 1 three different times, but were repulsed with great loss. They commenced shelling very early in the day and kept at it until three o'clock P.M. when they charged. This and the next attempt were easily defeated, as they seemed only to be feeling our

strength The following attempt was their only chance and they fought like men who were determined to carry their point. They took a redoubt in which were three Companies of the 2nd Lou [Louisiana] Regiment. The 15th North Carolina soon came to their assistance and drove the enemy out. It was in this charge that Col. McKinney of the 15th N. C. Regt. was killed. In charging the redoubt after the enemy had taken it, he saw that the right wing was rather slow and he rode up to them waving his sword and urging them on. This of course pointed him out as being our officer and sharpshooters fired at him, thinking that if he was shot it would throw confusion into his regiment, and give them time to reinforce themselves, but this only made them more determined. We took two prisoners on Thursday night while they were trying to cut the dam, and they said that out of four hundred of their Regiment (Vermont) that was in the fight on Wednesday only twenty got back to camps. If this is the loss of one regiment, what must be the loss of their whole force engaged? Our loss was twenty killed and seventy-five wounded. They tried to cut the dam three times on Saturday night but were driven off.

There has been no general engagement as yet, but shells are thrown at us every day. I saw one that is thrown from their gunboat at Yorktown; it measures 22 inches in length and 6 inches across. It is shot from a 42 pound rifle cannon at a distance of three and a half miles. Frank Baltzell [First Sgt. Franklin Baltzell] has just received a letter from his father saying that Laurie Anderson [Laurie M. Anderson, Company D, 1<sup>st</sup> Florida] was killed at the Battle of Shiloh. It will [be] a dreadful shock to his family. Cousin Coe Footman was here day before yesterday. He only stopped a short time as he was in a hurry to get back to Richmond where George Footman [George Nathaniel Footman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Florida] is. He is looking very badly, and I believe he was sick several days at Williamsburg.

We were relieved two days ago and go back to the entrenchments this afternoon. I think that it is hard that we should be kept so hard at work when there are thousands of troops doing nothing. I have the worst cold that I ever had. Don't you think that the Conscription Act will slightly get Mat Passy? Give my love to all friends and relations and accept a large share from

Your affectionate son,  
D.E. Maxwell

Transcribed by Christopher A. Baker, University of Florida, 2008.