

Camp near Martinsburg, Virginia, July 12th, 1863

Dear Mother,

You will see by this that we are once more on Virginia Soil, and I do sincerely hope that we will never cross the Potomac again, unless we have transportation sufficient to keep us supplied with ammunition—for it was the scarcity of it that prevented General Lee from following the retreating columns of the enemy and made it necessary for him to fall back to Hagerstown and await patiently the advance of the enemy. We remained there a week, when it was found out that we could not subsist on the enemy's country, and that it was impossible to obtain subsistence from across the river, which by the frequent heavy rains has swollen to a greater depth than it has done for several years. The fords opposite Williamsport which are generally not more than knee deep, swam horses three days ago, and yesterday when we crossed, it swam a great many mules and damaged some ammunition. Several small mules were drowned by the wagons striking large rocks, while they (the smaller mules) were in swimming water and they were so exhausted before they could be gotten out of the harness that the current, which was very rapid, swept them down stream. Several wagon bodies floated away also. These I suppose will bring up against our pontoon bridge which is four miles below Williamsport. Most of our troops crossed the bridge last night, the rest are crossing this morning. I see in our papers extracts taken from Northern Journals claiming a great victory at Gettysburg and also giving an account of that disorder and confusion attending our precipitate retreat. Their right to claim a victory I will dispute below, and will only say that so far from our movement being conducted in the manner stated by them, that we took our time, marching forty miles in ten days, that we brought away some four or five thousand of our wounded, also forty-five hundred prisoners including one Brigadier General, and a great many field and staff officers. We paroled about the same number, but these refused to be, as they preferred taking their chances of getting away. I hope they will have a pleasant time marching to Richmond. We brought off a great many horses and beef cattle. We lost some twenty or thirty wagons that were destroyed by their cavalry. Our line of battle in the three days fight fronted South-east and on Friday night and Saturday Gen. Lee changed his line so as to front north. To do this he withdrew the left wing of his army and advanced the right, by this move the left wing which heretofore extended through the out skirts and north-east of town, now extended a half mile south of town and consequently threw our wounded that were in town in the enemy line. Their papers state that they occupied the town by twelve o'clock Friday night. This I know to be false for I was at our Division hospital all night, leaving there some time after day light. There was no fighting on Saturday and on Sunday our army was in motion. Alex Bull [Alexander L. Bull, 5th Florida], who was on picket Saturday night, says that there were no enemy to be seen on Sunday morning. We have had no fighting since Friday with the exception of several cavalry engagements in one of which General Wade Hampton of South Carolina received three sabre cuts across the head. I have just seen a Richmond paper of the 10th inst. confirming the report of the capture of our "gallant little city of the Hill." It is certainly a very severe blow to us, for in all probability our communication with the West will be certainly cut off by the evacuation of Port Hudson. This will also cause the greater part of Mississippi and Alabama to be evacuated by our forces. Its fall at this time was very unexpected, for we have had such encouraging news from there, and some from officers

high in command that there was a supply of provisions sufficient to last until October, that we were sanguine as to the result. The only benefit they will receive from its fall will be the moral effect, as it will have a tendency to encourage their administration and pacify the Northwest. This will only be for a short time as they will see that nothing can navigate the Mississippi with any safety but their ironclad gunboats. The operations of our forces in the west have been but a series of disasters with a few exceptions. Taking away the operations of the army of Northern Virginia and our Record will be dull indeed. If they had performed their part as well as we have ours, there would now be a bright prospect for peace, but as it is, there is none whatever. I am very anxious to get my commission but doubt very much if I get it for several weeks. When we passed through Charleston on our march from Front Royal to the Potomac, I stopped and saw Gov. Brown's family. They were very kind and insisted upon my coming to see them, and gave me an urgent invitation to stay with them if I got wounded or was taken sick. They wanted me to stay all night with them but I could not. Mrs. Brown gave me a lot of coffee and sugar to take with me for our Brigade numbers from 250 to 300 men for duty. We have lost heavier than any other. The Northern papers speak of the desperate charge of our center on Thursday and Friday. They think that Longstreet's forces were in the centre. I suppose that you are now enjoying fine watermelons—if so—eat an extra piece for me every day. Tell Sal that she must eat an extra saucer of curd and charge it to me. Give my love to all the young ladies, Mrs. Ames' family, Mrs. Croom's family, and tell Hardy to write me. Tell Cousin Mary Footman that George was slightly wounded in the foot. He was with me at the wagons until Friday night when all the wounded were ordered to be sent into the hospital. I wanted him to remain with me, and if they had permitted him to do so, he would not have been taken prisoner, and in all probability would be [ready] for duty. George says that this fight sacrifices him. Alex was uneasy all the time we were in the enemies' country. It was impossible for me to get him two hundred yards from the road. He is more delighted the farther South we go. I will now, clos[e] with love to all friends and relations. Accept the same from

Your affectionate son,
D.E. Maxwell

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