

Elmira N.Y. Dec. 9th 1861 11 1/2 P.M.

My Dear Sister,

There is so much to do just at present that to write to you at all I must write tonight.

We expect to start tomorrow P.M. and all is confusion and bustle. Nothing but preparation. To add variety to my own labors I am Officer of the Guard tomorrow and have the Guard duties to look after in addition to my own packing and etc.

With what truth I know not, but it's generally understood here that our first stopping place will be in Arlington. Everybody is in good spirits over the prospect of starting. All are heartily tired of the monotony of our present life and want a change. I will know and realize that we are just ending the boyhood – the play spell of a soldier's life. Very few of the boys however can form any idea of tent life, much less of field life in the winter. My old experiences at camping, shantying etc. is now valuable to me.

I cannot tell you the strange feelings that almost overpower me at times when reflecting upon the probable events of the next few months. The prospect of immediate service gives rise to an exultation bordering extasy to such a feeling of exalted purpose and determination as one may sometimes believe actuated the Puritans of Cromwell. I am at a loss to understand myself. Nothing can be more foreign to my whole nature- to my ideas of the ends and purposes of this life than contention and bloodshed and yet I rejoice at the prospect of soon meeting my fellows amid the wild tumult of a battlefield. There is no hesitation, no wavering, no vacillation, but instead, a purpose and a trust complete in itself, in the justice and rightfulness of my course, in the triumph of the cause I am laboring to advance and in the loving care of Him who doeth all things well.

It may be my lot to fall in battle, or waste by disease but my life is as nothing to the welfare of countless generations, to the triumph of a single principle of truth. I do not believe that such will be my lot.

Intuitions sometimes are imbued with a spirit of prophecy and without knowing why or wherefore, I cannot but feel that I am to go through this war. There is a sense of foreknowledge about my sensations that I cannot overlook if I would. But I cheerfully accept all the risks, in the hope of being able to strike a blow for the eternal good of my race.

Your letter reached me Saturday night. I need not tell you how rejoiced I was to receive it. It was like a visit home. In future letters endeavor to give me a sort of history of the everyday life at home and among my friends. You cannot imagine how anxiously we all look for the relation of all the little things that seem perhaps to you to trivial to be noticed. Recollect there is no home in the camp. That sentence expresses it fully. Darwin writes me Dora is well and perhaps without real cause I am filled with anxiety. Without much show of it perhaps I am making an idol of her in my heart. God grant she may not be taken from you. My own health continues to improve, though I gain no flesh. Give my love to all the folks. Kiss Dora many, many times for me.

Good bye – Affectionately yours,

J. M. Pettit