

Camp Houghtaling - June 13th

My dear little Niece:

I will try and write you a few lines in answer to yours of the 4th of the present month; although I have but little of importance to write you but suppose if I do not say a few words to you after writing to your Ma such a long letter, you would think I did not care anything about you. I can assure you that it gave me great pleasure to receive your very interesting, though short, letter and hope you will write me again upon the receipt of this. I have written to your Mother all of the news I could think of and if I fail to interest you it will be for the reason that there is nothing transpiring here that would pay you for the trouble of reading. I will say that I am well and enjoy myself first rate. We have lots of fun down here in Cairo, such as taking boat rides on the big Mississippi River, playing ball; hunting and fishing, shooting cannon balls and grape shot into the river and across into Missouri, going down town to the dress parade. We have a violin and several good players and every night when we get through drilling we have a cotillon dance; and there being no ladies we tie a white handkerchief around the arm of one-half of the men to distinguish them from each other and the dance goes bravely on, I tell you! Day before yesterday we received by Lieut. Chas. C. Campbell from the hands of the Ladies of Ottawa our Havelocks or what might be more appropriately called Sun Bonnets. You ought to see us when we are on parade with them on. We look like a parcel of old grannies but we don't care for the looks for they are so comfortable on a hot day that nothing would induce us to part with them. They also serve us greatly in protecting us from the bite of the mosquitoes which are very large and numerous and have been frequently reported to be so large as to stand flatfooted and drink out of a quart cup. I guess that is hardly true but I have seen a great many of them that would weight a pound. Ha! Ha! Ha! Pomeroy and three more of our men have gone to the magazine (not Harper's) to guard it. He went this morning at nine o'clock and will be gone 24 hours. He has just sent down for the mosquito bars and says that he was laying on a plank with a keg of powder for a pillow (not General Pillow) when suddenly it rolled out from under his head and looking up, he espied four mammoth mosquitoes rolling it away on the keen trot towards a flat boat in the river and concluded they are "Sea Sassaengers" trying to smuggle munitions of war to their friends down the river. Ha! Ha! Ha! I don't believe this story, either, but I will tell you what I know to be "strictly true" ...I have seen them climb up a tree and bark! Mr. Raugh of Ottawa has just come to see us. I must go and see him as soon as he gets through talking to the officers. The Steam Ferry Boat "Manchester" is just passing up the river to the cemetery with the corpse of a soldier aboard. A Large number of his comrades are accompanying him to his last resting place on earth. They are all armed and equipped and their polished muskets glisten in the rays of the summer's sun. Hark! They have arrived at the place of burial and are now firing their pieces over his grave as a last tribute of respect. He was drowned in the Ohio River last night while bathing and was raised this morning by the firing of cannon. This is two that have been drowned within two weeks. Two of our men have just returned from Camp Hardin. They saw your Pa and he was well. They say that all the soldiers who refuse to join the army for the war are being discharged and sent home. I just saw Mr. Gregg who just came from Villa Ridge and he says there has been no one discharged as yet and that only thirty-five had signed the three-year's roll. He thinks your Pa will go, not, however, until he makes you a visit. I don't know as I shall go, can't tell for a while yet. The soldiers in camp a few steps from here (The Belville & Edwardsville Cos.) are out on Parade and make a fine appearance stepping to the music of the fife and drum. If you will get the last issue of the Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's Illustrated News you can see a very correct drawing of Cairo and Camp Defiance, Camp Houghtaling, Camp Barker, Camp McAlister and others, a view of the two great Rivers Islands Birdspoint, etc., etc. I must close as we are ordered to go to town and see the artillery parade. Give my love to Grace and Menzo and as many more as you wish, not forgetting yourself and little Ella and Arthur. Write me soon and I will try to do better next time. Pom will answer you soon. No more at present. Good bye - From your dear Uncle Chet.