

8-16-1861

Arthur McKinstry to Mother

Arthur McKinstry

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Camp Caldwell Aug 16th 1861

Dear Mother,

I have just got and read through Frank's letter of the 14th. I find that the report among you is that Oscar Ames is dead. If so his ghost is a voracious one and eats regularly once and a half its live weight of roasting ears and other delicacies of the season. He is fat as a hog and about as useful as that animal would be in harness. We have at last got our knapsacks and haversacks and are fully equipped for war. I had quite a compliment yesterday. While engaged in some conversation with my comrades, the Adjutant, Doyle, beckoned me to one side and proposed that we should go together and visit the outposts of our regiment - which extend to

Alexandria - and that I should make good use of my pen and record whatever we should see worthy of note, being as he was pleased to term me a "writing man," that our friends at home might have the pleasure of reading from a country paper some incidents of our first actual service. - we are the outer post in this direction - and get some idea of our actual duties and situation. This will require a pass from headquarters but it is very possible that Doyle may get it.

I am I believe at present the only regular reporter from our company. I am on the sick list to day from the weakening effects of diarrhea. Very few suffer from any other disease. I feel better and intend to go on drill again to-morrow. The right and left companies of our regiment have mini rifles and no doubt we shall all get them in time.

Our drill is a very severe one and tests the strength of the men to an unnecessary extent. It would do at Dunkirk very well but a commander ought to know better than to work his men so hard in a hot climate where they drink new water. If the drill was reasonable I should not have gone on the sick list yesterday nor to-day but I won't drill so when weak from diarrhea. When that we are to go out before daylight to relieve Capt. Austin's company who have been out scouting for the last five days. I like the idea first rate. We must of course get more freedom and we can rely upon the negroes who would never suffer the enemy to approach without warning us. They would do us anything in

their power. One of our boys asked
a negro who had been telling
of the secession sentiments of his
master how old he might be.
"Old enough to be free" replied
the gray-headed old man.

Tell me that the negroes are
a happy contented race and I
will believe it as well as if you
said that powder would not ignite
when brought in contact with flame.
The very mildest existing form of
slavery is found here but there is not
a negro to be found, of whatever age,
who does not feel like this one, who
had grown gray in servitude, "old
enough to be free." To be a northern
soldier is to be the object of the
friendliest feelings in a negro breast
and when alone they speak in the
most unreserved manner of their
masters and betray in every look
and word their hatred of bondage
and their rising hope of freedom.
I must stop in a word to Newton so
with love to all and hoping to soon
hear from you Good bye Arthur



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Mr Austin Chapin
Forestville, Chaut. Co.
New York.