

12-27-1863

Letter from Marshall Blair Clason to his father

Marshall Blair Clason

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1 Miles South of Chattanooga,
Tenn. Rossview, Ga., Dec 27/63.

Dear Father:-

I recd your letter dated Nov^r 22^d on the return of my regiment from an expedition of over three weeks duration into East Tennessee. I suppose you had already been informed by Annie, of my safety and of my whereabouts for I know she communicates frequently with you, and always makes it a point to do so when she has any news from me of importance. Our regiment and Division were not engaged in the late battle of Mission Ridge, although on Thursday ^{afternoon} the 20th Nov^r, we had a brisk fight of an hour's duration, with the rear guard of the enemy, about 8 miles south of Chattanooga. I escaped without injury. I have been very ^{kindly} preserved amid all the dangers to which I have been exposed. In the main battle of Mission Ridge, we were posted on the left, in the rear of Gen Sherman, as a support and a reserve, but although right on the edge of battle the fight raged all day with great severity without our getting an opportunity to participate in it. It was here that the severest fighting took place, and where the resistance of the rebels was most successful. You can find a better description of the engagement in the newspapers than I am able to give, although ~~for~~ for my opportunities of observation were very limited. I will only say that the victory was a great one, and to which important results are attached. Georgia is now open to invasion, in fact is invaded for I am writing this letter on Georgia soil. By next day we will be in Atlanta, and the Confederacy will be pretty well cut up. - In my opinion, the only serious obstacle to our going to Atlanta at

present is not the want of the enemy, but the want of transportation and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of present supply of an army so far advanced from the base of supplies. Did you know that our army at Knoxville is in part supplied by steamboats that ascend from this point. When the R.R. between here and Bridgeport is completed, and more boats are built on the river, and mules and wagons are accumulated, I think this deficiency will ~~be some measure~~ be overcome. There must be ^{supplies} accumulated at Chattanooga before this expedition against Atlanta ~~should~~ ^{will} or perhaps ~~not~~ ^{should} be attempted. The army is now on short rations, and has been ever since the battle of Chattanooga, although the supplies are much fuller than when the rebels occupied Lookout Valley and the Union was compelled to go a roundabout mountain road 60 miles to Stevenson.

I wrote you a ~~few~~ letter preceding my departure from Camp in November to go into the fight, as I supposed. I most confidently expected to be in a big fight, but it seemed to be our fate to come very near to them, but not to get into them. At Ringgold we were too late to participate in what was a very severe fight, for the numbers engaged, and where, if they had only delayed until our arrival, we would have easily driven the enemy, and captured prisoners and stores. We left the neighborhood of Ringgold on the morning of November 30th to go to Knoxville, to relieve Burnside who was closely besieged by Longstreet. We were badly supplied for such a march, 110 miles. The men had not good shoes, and only 3 days rations were on hand. The weather also was quite severe. We marched with considerable rapidity. About the 3rd day, we commenced foraging upon the country for fresh beef. This part of Tennessee is the best supplied of any I have seen since I left Shelbyville. In fact I think the people are better farmers. The country is has been the source from which the rebels supplied their

Commissariat, and they say that it is indispensable to the supply of their army with food. The people throughout this country are generally loyal, and we were everywhere warmly welcomed. I kept warned from making a horse, and we were invoked to put a speedy end to the rebels so that they might no more trouble that country. In our march we passed through Charleston and Loudon, and halted on the banks of the Little Tennessee at Morgantown, about 30 miles from Knoxville. Here we stayed a day or so, and Longstreet is the meantime having raised the siege, and commenced a retreat, we were ordered to retreat our steps to Chattanooga. At Morgantown we impressed corn and mills to grind it, and the boys lived on corn bread while there and during the return trip to Chattanooga. In fact I enjoyed it much more than I did hard bread, although the meat was deficient. There was some scarcity of salt, but our mess managed to procure a sufficiency, and had plenty. I purchased some chickens at about 25¢ a piece, some sausage and fresh ham from time to time, also Sorghum molasses, which is quite generally manufactured on the farms throughout this country. These things with what I could procure from the Commissary ^{kept} me abundantly supplied. I arrived in Camp on the 1st of the present month, having been out 26 days. During this period I had no opportunity to change my clothes or wash my body. I came back tired, dirty, uncomfortable, and (you need not be surprised) lousy. I was thankful my life was saved, and I was uninjured. This campaign secures us undisputed possession of Knoxville and Chattanooga, and all East Tennessee. I have understood that some of our cavalry penetrated without molestation beyond the borders of South Carolina. The entire campaign has proved a success.

The day we came to camp we were paid up to Oct. 31st. I drew 4 months pay - I received \$508.00. I sent home to my wife \$22.

and lent \$200 to a friend of mine, who gave me his note at 60 days for \$300.00. He says he can make the investment profitable enough to pay me that interest. I have full confidence in his repaying me the loan at the time promised. Any how it is a business transaction, among my friends and I will see what comes of it. I have known the man for some time, and I know him to be a good business man.

My wife tells me that she seems to be regarded, as the cause of my being in the service, and continuing in it. Perhaps a sufficient answer to this would be that she never expressed such a desire but once, and that was in April, 1861, and I then declined. I did not enlist until September, 1862, and this was while my wife was in Europe. Because my acts accord with my wife's wishes is no reason for inferring that they are the direct result of her influence. My chief regret is that I did not follow her advice at the beginning. She saw things then much clearer than I did, at least without eyes less prejudiced. Instead of it being a matter for which she should be reproached, even gently, it should be a cause for praise. Surely she deserves praise that her patriotism and womanly pride and honor were superior to the weaknesses of her sex. I admit her for it. ~~As to her stay~~ I entered the service, as I did, unexpectedly. Still I had long anticipated it. I felt it to be my duty, and I could not resist the feeling which weighed heavier on me every day, that no young man who pretended to be anything or expected to be anything, could shrink from the duty of fighting in the great struggle for the nationality, greatness, peace and liberty of his country. It may be I felt my wife thought so, too. I guess she did. But she didn't say so. If it is to be regretted (and I have yet to see it) that I am in the army, the blame must lay on my shoulders, who generally act according to ^{my} own judgment, and somewhat on yours, who have always taught me lessons of patriotism, and have impressed me with the conviction that I should never seek the road of ease and safety, after I learned that of duty. I was never taught cowardice by you. As to my staying in the army, my wife never urges me to remain in the army. She knows I do not need it. She encourages me with kind and hopeful words. She does all she can for my comfort. In spite of her anxiety and suffering, she bears up like a true and heroic woman. I am proud of her. She has never asked me

resign. I hope she never may - I hope she will never yield to that
degrading weakness which would purchase any thing at the sac-
rifice of Honor and duty. I remain in the army, because I think my
country needs my services, and because I can't resign honorably, and in the
first place because I don't feel like it. even if I were not needed, and could
honorably resign. I could feel no pleasure at home until this work is done.
You must therefore attribute my remaining in the army to me alone. I
hope that no inadvertent words may be dropped which might seem to
blame my wife for my present position. She is sensitive on the subject -
I think mother is not careful enough in the matter. If I should be killed
put the blame on me, if you think blame is any where. Don't add
this to my wife's cup of suffering. This is not the consolation she should
receive. If I should die in this service, I could hope that your natural
regrets would be tempered with the proud consolation that I died hon-
orably in the service of my country. It will be no disgrace to your
name, and you will possibly be led to speak of it in after days,
with a sad satisfaction. Let her, then, who bears my name, not be pain-
ed by unguarded words, but rather let her be praised that in my efforts
to do my duty as a man and a patriot, she has assisted me in a man-
ner that does honor to her womanhood.

I am glad that your business is so prosperous. When I proposed that
business arrangement (buying out King) to my wife, she entered into it so readily,
and obtained the co-operation of her mother so fully, that I could have raised
\$25,000.00 in cash. If a favorable time should occur, and I be prepa-
red, I would like to both assist you and benefit myself. - x - I had
an offer of a library of 450 selected lawbooks, for \$2000.00 cash. Many of
them had never been opened. The original library cost \$2,000.00. I offered
my land and \$1000.00 cash. I have received no reply. The books will sell as
well as the land if I should never return to use them.

I heard George was in this seeking a situation. How did he succeed. He was after

after a passenger train of I understood what my wife wrote he was to receive \$100. a month if he got the situation. I hope George may succeed. I think, though, he had better remain in Milwaukee. I am glad he was not drafted. I do not think the army is suitable to George. - x x x I am glad my friends in Milwaukee have such a favorable opinion of me. I will try to do them and you no discredit. - x x I am sorry mother's health is poor. I did suppose it would begin to improve at this period of her life. She is now past 50. I hope she will begin to recover, and will live to a good old age. Tell her I think very often of her, and would like to see her very much, and if I come home, will assuredly do so. However, the chances of a leave of absence are very slim at present. The Department is overburdened with applications, and the vast majority are returned disapproved. The thing is a lottery. If I try it, I will wait till after the rush. I will try to come home on detached service. This is the least expensive, although a man's motions are more restricted. And thus it is hardly proper for me to leave at present. My company has no other officer but myself. Both my lieutenants are commanding companies destitute of officers. One company has no officers.

We were in ~~quarters~~ quarters in a camp on the opposite side of the river from Chattanooga. We had occupied that camp for 3 months. I had built a log cabin, roofed it, and made it in other respects a very comfortable habitation. We left that camp yesterday, much to our regret. We are now, in what we are informed will be our permanent camp, until we make the projected campaign against Atlanta. I do not think we will leave here before the 1st of April. We are ordered to prepare winter quarters. The boys have already commenced getting out their timber. I have a good tent, but I shall build a cabin, too. As soon as the men get their quarters up, some of them have promised to build me a cabin. In the mean time I will be very comfortably situated. I expect to enjoy myself very much this winter if I remain in camp. If I should be so lucky as to come home, I would enjoy myself much more. I will not let a favorable opportunity

pass. - x x In coming to this camp, which is about 7 miles south of Chattanooga on the Ringgold road, we passed the battle ground of Mission Ridge. The rebels had ^{done} little in the way of fortifications. They had 2 lines of ^{very cheap} fortifications, but our men would erect as large ones over night. I only saw one fortification, and it would ill compare with some of the magnificent earthworks, with which Chattanooga is ^{surrounded}. Nothing they have equals ours. I must confess their soldiers are hardly surpassed. In crossing the ridge, and passing the abandoned camps, I could hardly persuade myself to believe that over this plain and up these heights, ^{but a month since} men struggled, bled and died. But this spot will always be memorable in history as the scene of one of the most gallant and successful charges known in war. I would have liked to have participated in it. But I should not tempt Providence. -

From the signs of the times I think this war is beginning to approach its end. We are now on the northern border of the Gulf States. We are but ^{half} way for supplies, to advance into their heart. We will occupy 1/2 of these States in one week after the forward movement commences. What the rebels will do then, must be left to conjecture. Their armies can not be supported, when such a small strip of country is left them. They will fall to pieces. We will be able to go stay, where we will be able to go. I hope to see the end of this contest, before the next Presidential election, but I do not think our armies will be recalled before that period. I think a large number of troops will be required to hold the country, assure peace, protect public officers and suppress guerrillas who will abound in great profusion. I hope to have laid aside my sword by the 1st of January, 1865, and that I shall never be called upon to take it up again. But I believe that the time does come and may again come, when there is ^{more} sin in leaving it rest in the scabbard than in drawing it. I fear bad results from this army remaining in the field beyond the next Presiden-

trial election, our national troubles being unsettled.
I desire to get settled, and commence practice and establish myself. I
have no doubt of my success. I have a head well fitted for legal subjects. I
may have deficiencies as a lawyer, but I wish to overcome them
in time. My opinion on all matters of military law stands well in camp.
I was Judge Advocate on a Brevet Hospital, and my record was
approved throughout. This was quite a compliment.

Remember me kindly to Mr. and Mrs. Leister and all my friends -
My love to mother. Tell her I am well, and that by God's grace I
expect to see her again. Tell her not to be anxious about me. I take
good care of myself. War is not so dangerous as many imagine.
It is strange how few bullets hit. My love to George and Floretta. I would
advise George to stay in Milwaukee. His chances of promotion are better.
His expenses will be less, and he will have more influential friends.
I hope he has made a good record. I think his ambition should be to be-
come a freight agent, and if he has the capacity, to become a Rail Road
Superintendent.

Write me often.

Yours son

M. B. Clason

Your letter enclosed stamps -
which were welcome.

With what will be due me Jan'y 1st 1864. I will have some \$1100
laid up, my savings since I came into the army. Should my letter en-
compass exceed \$100.00 more will be added. My wife's income meets all
her expenses, and a surplus remains. She and I have a nice little investment
in Govt 5-20's.

M. B. Clason

7 miles South of Chattanooga,
Near Rossville, Ga., Dec. 27/63.

Dear Father: —

I rec'd your letter dated Nov. 22^d on the return of my regiment from an expedition of over three weeks duration into East Tennessee. I suppose you had already been informed by Annie of my safety and of my whereabouts for I know she communicates quite frequently with you, and always makes it a point to do so when she has any news from me of importance. Our regiment and Division were not engaged in the battle on Mission Ridge, although on Thursday afternoon the 26th Nov^r we had a brisk fight of an hour's duration with the rear guard of the enemy, about 8 miles south of Chattanooga. I escaped without injury. I have been very kindly preserved amid all the dangers to which I have been exposed. In the main battle of Mission Ridge, we were posted on the left, in the rear of Gen. Sherman, as a support and a reserve, but although right on the edge of battle the fight raged all day with great severity without our getting an opportunity to participate in it. It was here that the severest fighting took place, and where the resistance of the rebels was most successful.— You can find a better description of the engagement in the newspapers than I am able to give for my opportunities of observation were very limited. I will only say that the victory was a great one, and to which important results are attached. Georgia is now open to invasion, in fact is invaded, for I am writing this letter on Georgia soil. By next May we will be in Atlanta, and the Confederacy will be pretty well cut up.— In my opinion, the only serious obstacle to our going to Atlanta at present is not the bayonets of the enemy, but the want of transportation and the difficulty, if not the impossibility (at present) of supplying an army so far advanced from the base of supplies. Did you know that our army at Knoxville is in part supplied by steamboats that ascend ^[[the river]] from this point. When the R. R. between here and Bridgeport is completed, and more boats are built on the river, and mules and wagons are accumulated, I think this deficiency will be overcome. There must be 3 months supplies accumulated at Chattanooga before this expedition against Atlanta will or perhaps should be attempted. The army is now on short rations, and has been ever since the battle of Chattanooga, although the supplies are much fuller than when the rebels occupied Lookout Valley and the teams were compelled to go a roundabout mountain road 60 miles to Stevenson.

I wrote you a letter preceding my departure from camp in November to go into the fight, as I supposed. I most confidently expected to be in a big fight, but it seemed to be our fate to

come very near to them, but not to get into them. At Ringgold, we were too late to participate in what was a very severe fight, for the numbers engaged, and where, if they had only delayed until our arrival, we would have easily driven the enemy, and captured prisoners and stores. We left the neighborhood of Ringgold on the morning of November 30th to go to Knoxville, to relieve Burnside who was closely besieged by Longstreet. We were badly supplied for such a march, 100 miles. The men had not good shoes, and only 3 days rations were on hand. The weather also was quite severe. We marched with considerable rapidity. About the 3^d day, we commenced foraging upon the country for fresh beef. This part of Tennessee is the best supplied of any I have seen since I left Shelbyville. In fact I think the people are better farmers. The country has been the source from which the rebels supplied their Commissariat, and they say that it is indispensable to the supply of their army with food. The people throughout this country are generally loyal, and we were enthusiastically welcomed. Flags waved from many a house, and we were invoked to put a speedy end to the rebels so that they might no more trouble that country. In our march we pressed through Charleston and Loudon and halted on the banks of the Little Tennessee at Morgantown, about 30 miles from Knoxville. Here we stayed a day or so, and Longstreet in the meantime having raised the siege, and commenced a retreat, we were ordered to retrace our steps to Chattanooga. At Morgantown we [[?]] corn and mills to grind it, and the boys lived on corn bread while there and during the return trip to Chattanooga. In fact I enjoyed it much more than I did hard bread, although the meal was unsifted. There was some scarcity of salt, but our mess managed to procure a sufficiency. I had plenty. I purchased some 8 chickens at about 25 cents a piece, some sausage and fresh ham from time to time, also Sorghum molasses which is quite generally manufactured on the farms throughout this country. These things with what I could procure from the Commissary kept me abundantly supplied. I arrived in Camp on the 19th of the present month, having been out 26 days. During this period I had no opportunity to change my clothes or wash my body. I came back tired, dirty, uncomfortable, and (you need not be surprised) lousy. I was thankful my life was saved, and I was uninjured. This campaign secures us undisputed possession of Knoxville and Chattanooga, and all East Tennessee. I have understood that some of our cavalry penetrated without molestation beyond the borders of South Carolina. The entire campaign has proved a success.

The day we came in camp we were paid up to Oct. 31st. I drew 4 months pay. I received \$508.00. I sent home to my wife \$225 and lent \$200 to a friend of mine, who gave me his note at 60 days for \$300.00. He says he can make the investment

profitable enough to pay me that interest. I have full confidence in his repaying me the loan at the time promised. Anyhow it is a business transaction, among my first, and I will see what comes of it. I have known the man for some time, and I know him to be a good business man.

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this to my wife's cup of suffering. This is not the consolation she should receive. If I should die in this service, I could hope that your natural regrets would be tempered with the proud consolation that I died honorably in the service of my country. It will be no disgrace to your name, and you will possibly be led to speak of it in after days with a sad satisfaction. Let her, then, who bears my name, not be pained by unguarded words, but rather let her be praised that in my efforts to do my duty as a man and a patriot, she has assisted me in a manner that does honor to her womanhood.

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I heard George was in Ohio, seeking a situation. How did he succeed. He was after a passenger train. If I understood what my wife wrote he was to receive \$100.00 a month if he got the situation. I hope George may succeed. I think, though, he had better remain in Milwaukee. I am glad he was not drafted. I do not think the army is suitable to George. xxx I am glad my friends in Milwaukee have such a favorable opinion of me. I will try to do them and you no discredit. xx I am sorry mother's health is poor. I did suppose it would begin to improve at this period of her life. She is now past 50. I hope she will begin to recover, and will live to a good old age. Tell her I think very often of her, and would like to see her very much, and if I come home will assuredly do so. However, the chances of a leave of absence are very slim at present. The Department is overburdened with applications and the vast majority are returned disapproved. The thing is a lottery. If I try it I will wait till after the rush. I will try to come home on detached service. This is the least expensive, although a man's motions are more restricted and then it is hardly proper for me to leave at present. My company has no other officer but myself. Both my Lieutenants are commanding companies destitute of officers. One Company has no officer.—

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