

**James S. Brisbin to Jane Brisbin**

Richmond, Virginia, 11 August 1862.

Autograph letter signed, 10 pages.

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In the field

Near Richmond Va

Aug 11<sup>th</sup> 1862

My Dear wife

I will now go on with my account of our advance on Malvern Hill—The next day after the battle we lay in a field close by the battle ground—Malvern Hill is where the hardest battle of all the seven days fighting took place on the memorable occasion when Gen<sup>l</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Clellen changed his base of operations from the York to the James River. I rode over the battle field and saw many long ridges of yellow clay every here and there which I was informed where the graves of our men who fell in the late battles. Dead horses where laying [*struck: of*] over the field [*struck: and*] and the stench from their rotting Carcasses was insufferable—One fine brick house on the top of the Hill [2] where the Rebel Artillery had been posted was full of Canin ball holes and all the doors and windows were knocked out—It was a beautiful place but in ruins tho Canun shot having cut and broken down many of the fine shade trees around it An air of desolation prevaded the whole place—

On the 7<sup>th</sup> I was sent out by Capt Kantz with Capt Gregg to drive in the enemies [Propiute]—Leut Kemin had been out before us but the rebel Infantry had driven him back I saw one of his poor fellows carried to the rear on some poles—he had one ball through the wrist and another through the breast—he was vomiting blood and died in five minutes There were two roads—Capt Gregg took one and I went down the other—I Sent some of my men in the wood and advanced slowly [3] I crept through the woods [*struck: slowly*] and soon found the rebels posted in the edge of a field—I got up under cover of the Woods to within One Hundred and Eighty yards of them. About 20 were standing quite [*struck: close*] at ease under a tree. The Leutenant who had command of [*inserted: them*] was quietly smoking a Cigar. The men were laughing and talking and holding their horses carelessly—I could have shot some of them but did not want to do it as I was sent to find out all I could and had orders to avoid an Engagement as

long as possible—Just ahead of me I could see the Rebels Forts I counted their guns, estimated their force and and having got all the information I desired I fell back—The rebels saw me and I heard the Leutenant give the Command to his men to “Mount but he did not attempt to follow me [4] and it was well for him he did not for as you know my men are armed with Sharpe Rifles and Know very well how to use them. I came back and reported what I had seen and Gen<sup>l</sup> Pleasantun sent Capt.-Kantz out with orders to go down to the River get on a Gun Boat and then go up the River with the Boat and shell the reble forts Capt Kantz took me with him and my Company—we reached the River in safety and Kants went on Board the boat leving me on shore—I Sent my men in a barn yard close [*struck: by*] and made the old secesh who owned the place give me some oats to feed my horses—The poor brutes had not been fed for nearly 24 hours—The old fellow lived nice and was evidently rich—I went into the house and found an old man [5] woman. It was now dark and I was going to [*struck: get*] make them get me something to eat when a man of our Regiment came in and told me the Rebels were coming. He said there were more than three thousand of the enemy between me and the Camp and that I was cut off and surrounded—I went out and could hear the rebels firing and I knew they were driving back our men I did not know what to do—I was more than 3 miles from our Army and thousands of rebels [*struckt: where*] [*inserted: were*] between me and them. I thought I was give up—I sat down on a stone to think out a plan of escape. I soon had it You know how I can “step” around (Remember our country days) I was determined to dodge the rebels—You will recollect I told you the rebels all have grey uniforms—My men all have grey shirts—I had on [6] the grey shirt you made me—I made my men all take off their blue coats and tie them behind their saddles—It was moon-light but in their grey shirts they looked for all the world like rebels—The men set out [*inserted: &*] pretended as though we were rebels and looking for the “Yankees” I soon came up with a Co of rebel Infantry but as we were going the same way, they were and had on [*strikeout: the*] our [*struck: Regents*]—Skirmishers they evidently thot we were their own Cavalry and so paid no attention to us—A little further on we came up with another lot of reble Infantry—the grey shirts took again and we went on in safety—I was now approaching our lines and would soon be safe—but Just as I was congratulating myself on my escape from the rebels Clutches I came suddenly upon a whole field full of reble Infantry and I trembled in my boots for I feared I could not “sell” so many of them. There must have been at least three thousand of them. I put on a bold [*struck: air*] [*inserted: face*] and marched along their front (they were drawn up in line)

The poor rebels suspected nothing and I passed on I had not gone 10 rods however before our own men who were Just ahead fired a volley into us and drive us back close to the rebels. I was afraid our men would take our grey shirts for rebels and fire on us and so they did I did not know what to do—I did not dare hollers to them and tell them who I was or the rebels would fire on [7] me. I saw the rebels were all lying down and I knew not a moment was to be lost for the rebels would soon fire and I expected a rebel officer to come up to me any moment and see who [struck: I was] I knew what men in our army was opposite me—it was my own [struck: men] Regiment and I [struck: could see them and] knew also that they knew I was out—So grasping my saber and Clenching my teeth, I told my men to follow and plunging my spurs into my horse and yelling at the top of my voice “friends friends dont fire” we dashed into our lines only a few of our men fired [inserted: at us] but one ball passed close by my ear and one close by my thigh. The astonished rebels as soon as they saw how they had been “sold” sprang to their feet and sent a thousand balls after us but it was to late. I had got into a little woods Just a head. Their balls flew over and around [8] us but did little harm only killing 6 men—Sargt Van Reed was knocked off his horse but escaped by hanging to another mans horse—Old Upe the tailor went up and Bugler Walton is dead Every body thought I had been captured with my whole Company and my appearance Among my brother officers created no little surprise—The sly way in which I sold the rebels created quite a talk in the Army—An old officer said to day it was one of the sharpest things that had been done in the war—If I can get a paper containing an account of it I will send it to you but papers on hand to get away down here—our object in going to Malvern Hill was to prevent the rebels from sending any more troops against Pope—we succeeded they sent down fifty-thousand troops against us that they intended sending against Pope—I was within 9 miles of Richmond nearer than any one else in the army I think We have now fell back 2 miles—We have twenty five thousand men here. We can see the rebels all day long—We do not intend to fight them, we only want to make them keep a big army here so they cant send any more men against Pope We are now lying in a woods. I write this on a board under a tree—We have no tents and but little to eat but we are contented We are all as dirty as hogs and the flies eat us nearly up If it were not on your account I would like this kind of life—If I was at home with you and yet of the Army I do not think to [9] enlist again—However since I am in for it I will “put it through” and after the war I will either get a situation where I can be with you all the time or I will go out of the Army and do some-thing else It is very hot here—I got two letters from you—I will alter my

will and make it as you wish—I am not going to get killed if I can healp it—I dont believe the rebels can kill me—I will come home all night see if I dont and then if you have been a good true wife while I was away I will never leave you again—I know you will be a good wife for you always have been—Mother writes me you are such a good girl—You must write every day—I will have to send a boy about 5 miles with this letter so as to get it mailed to you. I hope he will bring me back [10] a couple of letters from you We have to keep our horses saddled all the time so we can mount and move at a Moments notice for the rebels may come this way at any time—I was very home sick last night—Oh if I could only see you for a little while how happy I should be Be patient darling I will be home by and by and then you will think all the more of your “soldier boy” for having served his Country when it was in danger We are all delighted that the President is going to draft men—Won’t that wake up the dutch—When you write tell me all the news I heard you were in Bellefonte but only one night—Good bye my love—I will write you every day if I can

Yours now

Jim