

Hunter's Raid on VMI, June 1864

Capt. Achilles J. Tynes Letter

About this letter:** Captain Achilles James Tynes, CSA, wrote this letter from the Headquarters of General McCausland's 5th Cavalry Brigade, encamped several miles outside Lexington, Virginia. Tynes was from "Rocky Dell," Tazewell County, Virginia. The letter was addressed to Harriet Fudge Tynes, his wife of three months. A transcription of this letter was donated to VMI in 1951 by Tynes's son. **The whereabouts of the original manuscript letter is unknown.

HdQrs. 5th Cavalry Brigade

On Lexington & Buchanan Road, three miles from Natural Bridge

Sunday, June 13, 1864

My darling wife:

I have been thus particular about our present location for two reasons, first to enable Pa to tell you precisely where I am, at the forks of the road running off to the Bridge 14 miles from Lexington & 10 from Buchanan, & secondly to test my own identity & self possession and equilibrium, which I have very nearly lost, so rapidly have events chased each other & so wearying has been the last ten or fifteen days. In all my experience of war I have never been so chased, pursued, dogged.

I have given you some little information up to Brattons, near Panther Gap on the Va. Central RR. Well, from there they chased us through Buffalo Gap where we barely made good our escape from Hunter who had beaten Jones the day before, notwithstanding we had prevented the junction of Crooks and Averill, with him. From the Gap we had a dead race to get to Middlebrook (but here I remember that I wrote you from Middlebrook) before Crooks who turned across the Mountains near Goshen Depot to strike the Valley at Middlebrook, & catch us between himself & Hunter, but in this he failed & passed on to Staunton, leaving us at Brownsburg (did I write you from this place?). Nothing daunted we turned our backward march into an forward one, shewed our Ragamuffins on the Hills in one mile of Staunton, driving in the pickets of the enemy, then falling back about six miles for the night. This so enraged them that early next morning Crooks and Averill 12,000 strong marched out against us, swearing that they would drive McCausland to Hell, & really from the way he has put us through from there to this place seems like he would be able to keep his word. On the morning of the 10th, at about 9 o'clock, he attacked us 6 miles from Staunton, & for three hours the 22nd and 14th held him in front, the 16th and 17th guarding the flanks, but what availed courage against such odds, 1400 against 12 to 13,000.

We commenced falling back, calling into the main road all our little army, they pressing us heavily in the rear and flanking us by two parallel lines, running each side of the road we were on. We were in what may be called a very tight place. If we turned our backs 'twas a ruinous rout; if we moved back fighting, slowly, the flanking columns, one, two thousand, & their other

fifteen hundred strong (cavalry) would pass & engulf us. Here was a dilemma. Of the two horns, we chose to seek the latter, keeping one little squadron well mounted, sternly & slowly getting in the road, & from one company to a regiment, as the pressure required, on foot, each side of the road, thus retreating & fighting the entire day, for thirty miles. Nearly all the balance of the command except horse leaders were engaged in scouting and skirmishing on the flanks. During the day we repelled 5 charges & made two, to keep them from closing upon our rear. Night brought us to Lexington one mile beyond which we halted, still keeping between that place & the foe, where foot sore, hungry & exhausted were determined to rest.

After seeing that the men had rations for the night, at about 11 o'clock P. M. I threw myself upon the ground, exhausted, gloomy & sad. This had been the hardest day of my experience. I had been acting as aide throughout the day beside discharging my own duties, in getting off stores from Brownsburg which I had accumulated there, & just as I had commenced one sweet dream of thee & of home, the Genl. called for me to go with him to Lexington to the Institute, to consult with Genl. Shipp, comdg. the cadet corps (250), and Genl. Smith, who had just reached the place from Richmond & tendered the services of these brave Boys. Here a long consultation ensued, through which I was only enabled to sit by frequent potations of strong (don't look cross) Coffee, handed round by Genl. Smith's fair daughter (& oh such a pretty foot, too!).

Back we went to camp and after a brief repose was roused to life by the thunder of Crooks guns close upon us. We retired across the river & made the best disposition for checking (we knew we could not whip) them we could. About 10 A.M. the battle commenced. We had three pieces, small ones, & for 4 hours we had quite a brisk time. Finding our little forces flanked beyond our reach, we fell back to this place yesterday evening, and on this Sabbath day we rested; that is the troops did.

I have been engaged in hunting up and impressing supplies. Maj. Smith CS has joined with wagon trains but this morning the Genl. asked me to hold on as Brigade CS for a few days, & like a goose I done so, for the sake of seeing the men fed, though nothing else could induce me. I should like to write you a long letter but have no paper but will hunt up some scraps & give you some few incidents of the various fights, more particularly that of Lexington, in which you came very near being reduced several times to the necessity of hunting up another husband. Pa knows the river cliffs beyond the Institute, between which & the Institute Hill runs a deep ravine. On these cliffs were posted our sharp shooters & one piece. Here I must close for the present, the Genl. calls me.

Just in the rear is Institute and other hills rising higher than the Bluffs. About 11 o'clock the enemy commenced a severe fire from some six or eight pieces, the shells screaming, shrieking, bursting & whizzing all over the crest of the hills above mentioned. (Pa can tell you that on the opposite side of the river the country is even higher than our position & gave them the advantage). On Institute Hill was generally found the Genl. & staff, & it was here that you had like to have been a widow. The corps of cadets were thrown up here, & here were seen the officers, & here fell the shot the thickest. Sitting on my horse in a little wheat field, [illegible] on

the southern slopes of the hill, Capt. Harvie, Mr. Marshall & two others by my side, a rifle shell passed so near as to nearly take my hat off. I had only time to observe to Capt. H. that we should have to move, as they had gotten the range, when another came shrieking through the air, passing just before Jeff's head, and plunged into the ground, some fifteen feet past me, seemingly, burying itself two or three feet ere it exploded; when it did so throwing a large quantity of earth upon everything, making a grave nearly large enough to bury horse & man.

Poor Jeff, he was completely paralyzed with fright. He had been very restive all day but this was too much & he only trembled & perspired in a foam. He shook so terribly that I could hardly keep my seat, and for three hours after he was in a perfect quiver. I have never seen anything so frightened. I fear he is a coward, but he, poor fellow, need not be ashamed, for his betters, or rather his masters, considered it prudent to canter to another part of the Hill, only to await a repetition of the same, sitting upon the platform in front of the Lexington Hotel, where some of us had dismounted to breathe our weary steeds.

The rascals on the other side of the River (Pa may remember looking east, or north of east, the hills beyond can be seen) got the range of the street completely, & seeing a group of horses & men, let fly a shell among us & so fine was the [practice?] that it passed over our heads about 5 feet, passing up the street about 100 yards beyond us, striking the banister of a porch, rolled harmlessly into the street, striking the porch of course. Thus was your husband twice saved from destruction, once by the depth the shell had buried itself in the earth, and again by a bad fuse, the latter shell not bursting.

Well, here we are, & Crooks & Averill in and around Lexington with between 20 and 25,000 men. Hunter is or was at Midway, and by sunrise tomorrow we must again confront them, but to fall back: but we will fall back like Spartans of old, & fight them back into the city of Richmond. Here I shall have to stop again. I am three miles from Camp: have just ate supper. 'Tis ten o'clock. I must go to camp. Can't say when I will finish this.

It occurs to me to finish now, or rather close, for tomorrow brings sterner things. I remember you are a Soldier's Wife, hence I shall talk plain. It has always been my habit to talk plainly to those I love. Therefore do not let what I am going to say disturb or make you sad. I always try to keep my lamp trimmed as well as possible, temporarily at least.

Here, the Pay Dept. owes me from first of August 63; The QM Dept. forage for two horses, about 5 months, at Gov. prices for grain and hay, commencing first of Dec. 63 and ending with this year. Capt. N. Fitzhugh owes me \$500 - have his note. Capt. W. D. Haynes, Officer, \$200 (note). Capt. C. I. Harvie, Adj. & Insp. Gen. of 5th Brigade, \$1000 (note). Balance on my account, current, due me 1800, & some 60 or 80 odd dollars, & my vouchers for the month of May, will more than cover the amt of funds recd. from government on account of Brgd. expenses. You know nothing of what to do with this, but it would furnish data.

Accept my whole heart's devotion.

Called again

Achilles