

“ . . . I was ordered to Kings Mill Wharf . . . in charge of all sick of our Regiment . . . ”

Letter from Lt. Richard Watkins, Co. K – 3rd Virginia Cavalry to his wife Mary

Charles City County
May 11, 1862

My own Dear Mary

I have only time to write a very few lines this morning by a gentleman going to Richmond. It is the very first opportunity I have had since we commenced our retreat from Yorktown nearly a fortnight ago. I have undergone very great privations and exposure and passed through a fiercely fought battle but God in his infinite mercy still spared my life and health. . . . I have been able to perform my whole duty on this perilous retreat. Have remained with the troop all the time in the extreme rear of the army [rear guard] . . . We are now on the Chicahominy [Chickahominy River] near the Long Bridge about twenty miles of Richmond. No members of our troop has been killed. for although we were on the battlefield the whole of Monday in view of the contending forces with bombs bursting . . . and minnie balls in great abundance passing over our heads yet we were not called into direct action . . . On last Friday week before the rear guard of the army took up its march I was ordered to Kings Mill Wharf on the James [River] in charge of all sick of our Regiment. There I witnessed one of the saddest scenes ever witnessed in the army. Twenty nine hundred sick men were lying on the cold wet ground awaiting the boats. I had forty or fifty under my charge which I succeeded in getting off very soon but my orders were to remain . . . and I had to stay till Sunday. . . . On Sunday I left for Williamsburg in company with detachments from various companies who had been sent to the Wharf to forward Commissary stores. When within a few miles of Williamsburg an aid of Genl Stewart [Gen. J. E. B. Stuart] came by at full speed saying that his entire command has been cut off including our regiment . . . fortunately before going far we met the General and all were safe. The next day the battle commenced in earnest about daybreak and raged until nearly sundown . . . The next day we commenced our march again and have been right closely pursued . . . It can hardly be called a pursuit for we travel only 3 or 4 miles a day and the enemy very often in sight . . . I must close for want of more time . . . Oh I do want to see you too bad . . . since the battle Andrew Venable has been separated from me having been detailed with others to go in advance & get provisions . . . Good bye my precious one. Give much very much love to all.

Yr

Richard 1

1. *Send Me a Pair of Old Boots & Kiss My Little Girls – Jeff Toalson, Bloomington, 2012, p. 87-88.*