

1861
Oct. 1

PERSONAL LETTER from Alexander Declouet, in Richmond,
Virginia, to his son, Paul Declouet, in West Virginia.

Richmond, October 1, 1861, 9 P.M.

My dear son,

You will be surprised to learn that I am still in Richmond. I am lingering here waiting from day to day from hour to hour for further news from you. I don't know what to do. Every day I propose to leave the next for New Orleans and every night as I attempt to pack up and make my little preparations my heart fails me and I cannot make up my mind to go farther and still farther away from you without the certainty that you are comparatively out of danger and that you have escaped unhurt from the casualties of battle and skirmishes which I see from newspaper accounts have taken place in the mountains where I left you. I deferred all day writing to you in the hope of learning something by this afternoon's mail - but it seems that it will be opened and distributed tomorrow morning only and if I hear from you I will add something to these few lines then. A few days after my arrival here I wrote to you to inform you of what I had been able to do for you. Since then I have reflected a great deal on the subject and made many other efforts to bring about a change for the better in your position, but I must say that to my great mortification I have not been able to accomplish any thing which I can consider definite and satisfactory. In that letter I mentioned to you two choices of a transfer which presented themselves: one of a sub-lieutenancy in Col. Marigny Regiment and the other the joining of the Washington Battalion of Artillery as a private with an understanding with Major Walton of a fair probability of promotion sooner or later. I intimated what I thought of the first position and I have since understood that an office or commission

1861 in that Regiment would be based upon a consideration, that is a sum of _____.
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(con't.) As far as money is concerned that is nothing at all to me if the position suits you, but if I am not mistaken you will perhaps feel as I do: the idea of purchasing promotions is somewhat repugnant to my sense and judgment of what military advancement should be. It is however an ordinary and usual practice and I may be misled by a false delicacy. You can judge for yourself and decide. Let this however be all between us. As to a transfer to the Washington Battalion that can be easily accomplished as I stated to you and repeat now in case you should not have received my first letter. All that is to be done is to obtain the written consent of your captain approved by the colonel or commanding officer of the Regiment, and forward the same to Major Walton or to the acting Secretary of War Benjamin who would then order your transfer. I have thought since that we might perhaps have cause to regret the change of your present enlistment from 12 months to that of the Washington Artillery which is for the war, and, as there is besides some remote probability that your company may be disbanded or at least transferred east or to some more eligible point than West Virginia, I think, that it would be highly advisable to pause and consider well and maturely before we determine upon a change which after all may not be for the better. I know moreover, that if your company and regiment are now, and to be for some-time to come, in presence of the enemy and engaged in active operations that you would not think of insisting upon an immediate transfer. I have reason to believe that a strong effort is about to be made to drive the enemy from Western Virginia before winter lets in, and a transfer just now would perhaps be leaving the field of action, of excitement and glory - for the drill monotony

1861 of camp life. Let us ponder well over all this before we come to a final
Oct. 1 conclusion. -----
(con't.)

Col. Robert Taylor (son of Gen. L. Taylor) who is here sick has also offered me to take you in his Regiment as a private but with the promise of having an eye to your advancement. I think a great deal of him as a man and as an officer.

Capt. Larose, one of my friends of the 8th La. Regiment (Al DeBlanc Regiment) arrived here yesterday and informs me that Alcibiode has been quite sick of the jaundice but that he is getting better. Capt. Larose tells me that there is or soon will be a vacancy of a 2nd or 3rd Lieutenancy in his company and that he would be happy to use his influence to obtain it for you. I would be highly pleased to see you in the same Regiment as my friend Alcibiode. There is nothing certain in all this but still it is well to consider and weigh all the chances which turn up.

Good night, when I think of our camp bed I cannot enjoy with any satisfaction the fine one in which I am about to repose. According to the news which I get tomorrow I will leave for Louisiana or for Camp Defiance the day after.

Wednesday, Oct., 2, 1 P.M. - No letter, no news by yesterday's Western mail! And God only knows where and when this letter may ever reach you! I have just had a long talk with Capt. Larose who is on a sick furlough and he had positively promised me to look to you for a 3rd lieutenancy which is about to be vacated in his company. You will understand of course that the prospect of securing an officer's commission does not preclude the transfer above mentioned, to the Washington Artillery. Should it be your

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(con't.)

desire and final determination to be removed as soon as possible from the service in Western Virginia for your election to the rank of a commissioned officer would again entitle you to another transfer. I am as you may well imagine in a great perplexity of mind.

Time is passing away fast and I am extremely deserving to go and spend a few weeks at home before the meeting of Congress on the 18th of next month - and on the other hand my anxiety will be increased tenfold in proportion as I shall be further removed from reaching you in case of sickness or accident. If I could only hear from you oftener and in less time! I could more easily come to some determination, but your letter of the 22nd was received on the 28th only, over 6 days! Just think of the eternity which it will take to hear from you in St. Martinville. I have met here with Capt. Farish who seems to believe that the Wise Brigade will be transferred to North Carolina. But I do not see any probability of that, for reinforcements being needed in the west it cannot be the policy of the government to remove any troops from that section, especially with such scanty means of transportation!

My last news from home are by a letter from Clouet (Alexander Declouet, Jr.) who informed me that your mother (Marie Louise Benoit) and Blanche (his sister) had returned home from Tonton's (Josephine Declouet de l'Homme) and had entirely recovered from their indisposition. He says that it has rained a great deal and that he does not think that the cane will be ripe enough to make sugar before the 15th or 20th of this month. Noemi has had a little girl and Albert her little boy has been very sick but was out of danger. That letter as well as one of the 17th which I here enclose came by way of

1861 Staunton (Virginia) and were forwarded by Mr. Gay who informs me that his
Oct. 1 son Erskine is better and better and is expected home in a few days.
(con't.)

Say to Gussy to be in no trouble about his children, that I will attend to their wants myself on account of his not being there to do it himself. I hope he is doing well. I do not remember having mentioned to you in my other letter that I had conversed with Mr. Hunter about the University Company and that he had promised to do his best to have it disbanded or transferred. Benjamin the acting Secretary of War is as strict and inflexible as can be. I had a little friendly quarrel with him but could make nothing out of him either for you or for the company. I have cultivated here with great satisfaction the acquaintance and friendship of Mr. W. H. Macfarland, M. C. and in case of need you can apply to him as well as to Benjamin. He has a farm near Malcolm Bluff and I may perhaps go there with him in a few days if I do not go to New Orleans. From there I could ride out to see you. The temptation is very strong both ways and I am almost like "un ane entre deuce bottes de foin". I feel as if I could write to you all day long, but the time to bid you again farewell has come! I almost regret to anticipate your separation from your kind, courteous and gentlemanly officers as well as comrades in the ranks - and under other circumstances I would greatly prefer to see you remain with them. Present them all my most friendly regards. Write as often as possible. I will drop you a line tomorrow or day after to let you know my departure for home should I conclude not to return to the west. God bless and protect you, my heart is with my hand in saying again farewell.

Your father - Alexander Declouet

Handwritten in English. Original on file at Dupre Library at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, La.