

From A Camp Near Falmouth

by

George Bradley

Whenever he starts to talk about the 154th New York at Chancellorsville, I have sometimes kidded our Roundtable's Vice-President, Tim Barton, that I would someday write a column about *Famous Sprinters of the Civil War*. What follows is a letter from a man who found out all too well what it was like to run in fear for one's own life. To know what things were really like, there is no substitute for a first hand account; the trick is to find them. When looking for the past, it isn't all that uncommon to find small gems in unexpected places. The following letter appeared in the Coudersport, Pennsylvania *Potter Journal* for May 27, 1863. It gives us a clear impression of what it was like for one man to face the screaming charge of Jackson's men on that fateful second of May, 1863.

From the 154th New York
Opposite Fredericksburg
May 9, 1863

On the 15th of April we arrived at Kelley's Ford, and there we stayed two weeks and picketed. On the 20th of April, just after dark, we went down to the river, and the 73d Penn'a and our Regiment were pushed across the river to hold it until we could make a bridge for the rest of the troops to cross-- this kind of brodge is called a pontoon and is made of small boats-- we lay in the sand until it was done and the troops were over, when we crossed back and stayed until morning. The next morning we crossed again and lay there that day and night; we then started again and about noon came to a river called the Rapidan-- and it was rapid.

It was the greatest sight I ever saw in my life to see our train ford the river; the water would take the mules off their feet, they would flounce around, get tangled in the harness and then they would make the water foam. I saw one get down and they pulled him through with his head under water and when he got to shore he jumped up and pulled at a great rate. We marched until twelve o'clock and then lay down and slept until morning.

The fight commenced some distance from the place at which we were stationed. They threw a few shells and kept skirmishing all that day without accomplishing much. This was the first of May. The next evening, after being kept in the rifle pits since morning, we were immediately behind the 11th [1st?] Division, cooking our suppers, when it gave way and we were ordered to its support. We only had time to pick up our guns and "go in", we tried to form in line of battle, but our artillery ran through us, broke us up, and every man went in for himself. We fell into the rifle pits and went at it.

The Rebels came on yelling like so many devils and were so drunk that they did not seem to think we were shooting at them until they were tipped over. We held them about thirty minutes, until they had us almost surrounded, and then we had orders to fall back, when you might have seen some tall running. When we left the rifle pits we had to run about sixty rods before we reached the woods, then the Rebels had a fair sight at us and the way the bullets flew was a sin to snakes. I began to think my time had come, but my legs were pretty good and they didn't stop until I came to a pretty good tree. I stopped and found myself minus knapsack, haversack and canteen. But the Rebels didn't give me time to think, so I had to "git" again. In my "chase" this time I picked up a "canteen", two knapsacks, and a large Rebel bowie knife.

We left quite a number of our men in the rifle pits; one man that lay by the side of me was shot through the head. I am sorry to say that Wellman Nichols was killed, or at least seen to fall, shot though; and as for Peter, he was either killed or wounded and taken prisoner. Jack was not in the fight, he is all right. Peter and Wellman fought like tigers. The Company didn't consider themselves disgraced by the Potter boys they had with them.

Our Regiment lost in about thirty minutes 220 men, and our flag had 20 holes in it. The Rebels had thought they had routed the whole army, and followed us till they found themselves in a pretty hot place, and our men opened upon them and they were mown down by the hundreds. They came right up to the mouths of our cannons as tho' they didn't know they were in danger-- but there are some who will never fight us any more. They fell back; we didn't follow them, but I don't think we were whipped. We staid there two or three days and then came back to this side of the river.

TIMOTHY GLINES

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