

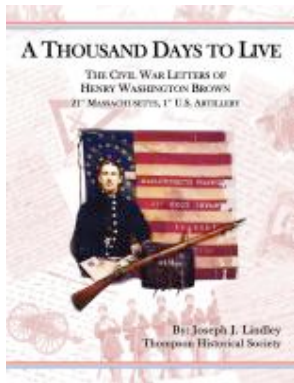
A THOUSAND DAYS TO LIVE

THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF
HENRY WASHINGTON BROWN

21ST MASSACHUSETTS, 1ST U.S. ARTILLERY



By: Joseph J. Lindley
Thompson Historical Society



Using the soldier's personal letters, A Thousand Days to Live chronicles the Civil War life of Thompson, Connecticut native, Henry Washington Brown. As a naive 19-year-old, Henry joined the 21st Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, and rapidly grew into a hardened combat veteran participating in some of the war's most gruesome battles. Few soldiers in American history have seen more death. Find out if Henry survived...or if he succumbed to the horrors of war.

A Thousand Days to Live

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The Civil War Letters of
Henry Washington Brown

Joseph J. Lindley

THOMPSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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THE BATTLE OF OX HILL (CHANTILLY) - SEPTEMBER 1, 1862



General Pope, acknowledging his situation was desperate, ordered the Army of Virginia to withdraw through the town of Centreville, Virginia, from there, to move rapidly toward the protective fortifications of Washington. Major General Jesse Reno's brigade, to include the 21st Massachusetts, was given the rear-guard assignment as shattered Union units desperately made their way east to safety.

The victorious Lee, in spite of his army's severe casualties over the past few days, sought to destroy Pope's army. To do so, he ordered General "Stonewall" Jackson to maneuver his command north around the retreating Union army and position his troops between them and the safety of Washington. Jackson sent troops belonging to Major General A.P. Hill to take and hold positions behind the withdrawing Union Army at the town of Jermantown, Virginia, located approximately fifteen miles from Manassas. Pope, seeing Lee's plan develop, ordered Major General Joe Hooker into a defensive position to allow the main body of his forces an escape avenue and time to withdraw.

Pope then moved Stevens' and Reno's divisions to establish a defensive line across Little River Turnpike located several miles from Joe Hooker's lines. As Reno and Stevens moved east, Stevens sent skirmishers north to find the advancing Confederates. They quickly met their counterparts from Hill's division probing for the Union lines. In a cornfield located approximately one half mile southwest of Ox Hill, the two forward units exchanged gunfire and the Battle of Ox Hill began.

During the morning of September 1, Henry and the 21st Massachusetts found themselves in a "pleasant spot."²⁰¹ There, expecting little trouble from the Rebels, at least for a few hours, they made breakfast and enjoyed their meal. It would be the last meal many of the men would have. Henry and his fellow Bay Staters could hear the exchange of gun fire to the east and north of their position and understood what that meant. Skirmishers and scouts from both sides were probing for the advantage, and Henry and his fellow soldiers knew if the Rebels established lines to the east and north it could mean disaster for the whole Army of Virginia. They quickly finished their breakfast and prepared for battle. They knew it would not be long before they were called into action.²⁰²

As the battle developed, "Stonewall" Jackson quickly brought his troops on line. Reno, the highest ranking Union general on the field, was severely ill and transferred overall tactical command of the Union troops to General Isaac Stevens. Stevens led a large portion of his command across a rain-soaked cornfield toward undetected Confederate positions. There, with little cover, they met strong resistance. In spite of the overwhelming gunfire, rain, and worsening overall conditions, General Stevens, leading from the front, continued to

²⁰¹ Walcott, 161.

²⁰² Welker, 111.

press his men forward, grabbing the 79th New York colors and yelling “Highlanders, my Highlanders! Follow your general!”²⁰³ He was soon shot dead by a single round to the head. With the commanding general down, staff and senior officers scrambled to establish a chain of command and a new plan.

In the meantime, the ill Reno sent the 51st New York and the 21st Massachusetts, now positioned south of Ox Hill, up the eastern side of Ox Road to establish positions on the right side of the Union line. Colonel William S. Clark, the 21st Massachusetts’ regimental commander, quickly lost sight of the 51st New York and sent men to reestablish contact. Mario Espinola writes:

Because of the thick undergrowth and limited visibility, both regiments remained out of contact throughout their advance. The rough terrain was unforgiving...thickets of thorns snagged woolen uniforms and entangled equipment...dense undergrowth and darkening skies further reduced visibility...but onward the blue line marched, resolute in their cause.

The spine of the densely wooded ridge was gradually becoming more pronounced and the terrain even more broken as they continued their march to the north. Brilliant flashes of lightning would momentarily light up the woods, as nature warned of its impending fury. These hardened veterans, who had drawn first blood in the Cypress swamps of the deep south, still did not waver in their task...

During the advance, the 21st Massachusetts slowly began drifting more to the left of the ridge where the lay of the land dictated it should go. Meanwhile the 51st veered more to the right, with the highest point of the ridge acting as a wedge between both regiments. It was then that Mother Nature let loose all of her fury and might.

This same storm was recorded 20 miles away in Washington D.C. as a class 6 – the highest rating on the meteorological scale at the time. The effect of the darkened skies and torrential rain must have dampened the fears of some...who would fight in such foul weather many must have wondered? But the continued boom of cannons and rattle of musketry to the west made it more wishful thinking than expectation.

The sheer force and volume of rain caused streams of water to run off the ridge into the low-lying areas as the rocky ground could absorb no more. The 51st New York had taken the ‘low road’ to the right of the ridge, where the eastern slope steeply dropped off to the now flooded low-lying ground. As the regiment fought against the fury of the intense storm it also became increasingly disorientated. Its sister regiment, the 21st Massachusetts, was nowhere to be seen...

²⁰³ Welker, 159.

Meanwhile, the 21st Massachusetts had taken the 'high road' to the left of the ridge, between the ridgeline and West Ox Road. The ranks of the 21st Massachusetts were hopelessly out of formation as they tried to navigate their way over the rocky terrain and through briar patches. It was at this point, that the officers advanced to the head of the regiment to guide the men into line and dress their ranks.

*To the immediate front of the 21st Massachusetts the ground rose to a high point on the ridge where whatever lay ahead, was hidden and out of sight. Its right flank faced a wooded knoll crowned with pine trees being buffeted in the strong winds and rain, its left flank extending down the slope and towards West Ox Road.*²⁰⁴

George Whitman, a junior officer in the 51st New York, adds:

*...our Brigade with Stephens and Kearney's brigades were ordered to move down and engage them [the Rebels] and our Regt was ordered into a Cyprus swamp on the extreme right where the trees were so thick we could hardly walk and the rain was falling in torrents completely soaking us.*²⁰⁵

Soon, the Bay Staters came upon a line of soldiers they thought were Rebels. They opened fire and quickly heard from their targets "Cease fire!" "We're friends!" Welker reports that "The doubters in the ranks brought their muskets back to their shoulders and a sense of relief swept over the men - they had found the 51st New York after all."²⁰⁶ Espinola continues:

*With the regiment in good order, the officers stayed to the front of the regiment and continued guiding their advance along the ridge. Just as they breached the horizon of the high ground to their front, Trimble's Brigade, concealed in the thick woods and rain, poured a devastating volley into the well-dressed ranks of the 21st Massachusetts. The Rebs had silently waited, picking their targets at a close range of 30 yards and in some instances as close as 30 feet... they couldn't miss.*²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Espinola Collection found at the Thompson Historical Society. Note: Mario Espinola, an amateur forensic archeologist, constructed a brilliant website about the Battle of Ox Hill. Espinola used his research on the battle and Henry's letters to help educate Americans on the need to save Civil War battlefields, like Ox Hill, that were being lost at exponential rates due to development. Mario passed away in October of 2011. With his passing, American history has lost one of its greatest fighters. A hard-copy collection of much of his site has been preserved and is available at the Thompson Historical Society.

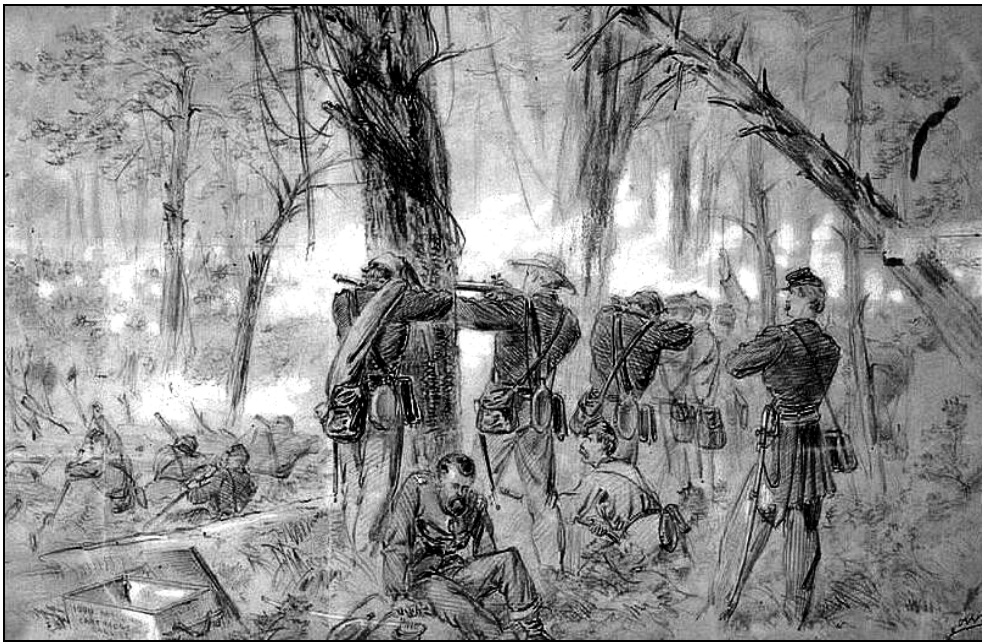
²⁰⁵ Loving, 63.

²⁰⁶ Walcott, 163.

²⁰⁷ Espinola Collection found at Thompson Historical Society.

Captain Walcott later recalled, "... while most of our poor fellows were standing with their guns at the shoulder, one of the deadliest volleys ever fired rolled upon us from our right and front. In the sudden anguish and despair of the moment, the whole regiment seemed lying bleeding on the ground..."²⁰⁸ Welker adds, "...every man not protected by a tree was cut down."²⁰⁹ Espinola suggests that the scene looked "As if a giant scythe cut through their ranks, over one hundred Massachusetts Volunteers dropped to the ground dead or wounded..."²¹⁰ Whitman finally adds his observations, "...on the left... the Mass 21st belonging to our brigade and who have stood side by side with us in all the fights we have ever had was completely cut to pieces."²¹¹

Shocked at the instant carnage, the men of the 21st who remained standing, including Henry, responded with a volley of their own, but the increasing rain fouled many weapons and prevented the returning volley from having any real effect. The 21st Massachusetts, heavily damaged, withdrew.



Above: An A.R. Waud sketch of Union troops fighting at Glendale, Virginia, located approximately 12 miles from where Henry and the 21st Massachusetts fought at Ox Hill. This sketch represents the type of fighting faced by the 21st when they were decimated at Ox Hill. (Library of Congress)

²⁰⁸ Walcott, 163.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 165.

²¹⁰ Welker, 165.

²¹¹ Loving, 63.

Welker continues:

Completely broken and in no position to fight back in an organized manner, the 21st Massachusetts melted into the woods in a disorganized mess. As they withdrew, the regiment left behind their lieutenant colonel, 10 other officers, and nearly 100 men, all fallen where they had been resting only moments before. 'We left a lot of poor fellows in that wood for whom nothing could be done but to bury their lifeless bodies,' Private Stone wrote sadly of their retreat. Another 20 or so of their comrades wouldn't make it out of the woods either and they remained prisoners of Trimble's Brigade... Once in the safety of the wood's depths, the decimated band of Bay Staters wandered back the way they had come and, once safely out of Confederate musket range, re-formed their column and marched for the wood's edge.²¹²

In the confusion of Stevens' death, brigade commander, Colonel Benjamin Christ assumed temporary command of the Union lines. By 5:00 p.m., not understanding the enemy strength to their front, the 79th New York and 28th Massachusetts, the two leading elements, withdrew and the Union line began to crumble. Within minutes, General Philip Kearney, arguably one of the Union's best fighting generals, arrived with reinforcements. He sent General Briney's oversized division to the Confederate right through the same cornfield where Stevens' command was devastated. Kearney, frustrated with the lack of coordination and progress from the retreating and arriving units, attempted to rally the 79th New York only to be told by their commander that they were out of ammunition and that they were simply no longer fit as a fighting unit. On the other side of the lines, Jackson used the lull in the action to reposition and adjust his lines, making any Union victory at Ox Hill impossible.

Kearney, searching desperately for additional troops to plug the rapidly developing Union gaps, saw the 21st Massachusetts emerging from the woods after their disastrous encounter with Trimble's brigade. Unaware they were heavily damaged, trying to regroup, and rejoin Ferrero's brigade, he ordered them to the center of the lines to re-engage the enemy. Colonel Clark informed Kearney that his men had already suffered severely and needed to reorganize and re-arm. Kearney, not to be denied, ordered the men to advance on the cornfield where so many Union soldiers already lay dead or dying. The battered 21st complied with his orders but were soon stopped by a heavy Confederate line. Colonel Clark, seeing nothing to be gained by a general advance, ordered skirmishers, Henry possibly among them, to the front to further determine what he faced. Welker writes:

Sitting astride his horse, watching the 21st's progress through his field glasses, Phil Kearney couldn't believe his eyes. The regiment he had ordered

²¹² Welker, 166.

to Birney's aid, to save possibly the entire Union right, was stopped dead in its tracks. If Kearney wondered what they were doing, it would not have taken long to figure out that they were deploying skirmishers to cover their move. They were given a simple order-to post on the right of Birney's line-for which they would need no skirmish line. After all, in the direction they were advancing the 21st Massachusetts was moving toward their own men, not the enemy. Kearney's temper was running out with these men. From his vantage they appeared to be either cowards or incompetents. But whatever the case, they were all he had now and like it or not, they would fight. Kearney turned to one of his recently returned staff aides and directed him to ride with all haste to the Massachusetts men and tell them to advance as ordered. Before the rider could depart, though, Kearney told his aide to warn the reluctant regiment that if his orders were not complied with, and fast, they would face a barrage from their own artillery. Armed with general Kearney's none-so-idle threat, the mounted aide dashed off.²¹³

Dumfounded, Colonel Clark complied. Within minutes, Henry and the Massachusetts men were within 20 feet of the Confederate lines exchanging devastating point-blank small-arms fire. Henry later reported the ghastly scene in a letter and stated, "It was wholesale murder to stand at the muzzle of the enemies' guns and have a volley poured into us. I had a very narrow escape of my life and being taken prisoner. A ball passed through my collar."²¹⁴

Clark's men were so close to the enemy, several of his men were able to physically grab and wrestle down two rebels, one an officer. They immediately sent the prisoners back to General Kearney in hopes that this would convince the irate general of the enemy's position and that he would finally understand the dire situation in which he had placed the battered Bay Staters.

Kearney, instead of gaining a better appreciation of the 21st Massachusetts' situation, became more enraged at "the sheer insubordination and incompetence of this officer," that stalled his advance.²¹⁵ He spurred his horse and headed for the reluctant regiment. Once Kearney reached Colonel Clark, he laid into him with a tirade, the likes of which the flabbergasted Clark had never before seen. Understanding the ramifications of disobeying a direct order from Kearney, Clark complied. Once again, under impossible odds, and now in increasing darkness, the 21st Massachusetts moved forward. But, Kearney, further frustrated with the Twenty-First's slow movement forward, rode to the front to see for himself where these imaginary enemy soldiers were located. Within seconds he was caught behind the

²¹³ Welker, 182.

²¹⁴ Brown letter, September 6, 1862. Note: Henry was not clear in his letter as to where he had these encounters. Based on the proximity of the lines and Walcott's notes, the author has assumed that Henry was nearly captured and killed in the cornfield.

²¹⁵ Welker, 184.

Confederate lines and the bold general, like General Stevens before him, was cut down and killed.²¹⁶



Above: A photo of the Ox Hill Battlefield as it appears today. Much of the battlefield has been destroyed and developed. The small piece that does remain is the result of dedicated volunteers. Henry's initial position was well to the right of this photo. The cornfield was to the far left. (J. Lindley)

Short on ammunition, all Union forces began an organized withdrawal and by 6:30 p.m. of September 1, 1862, approximately one hour before sundown, the fighting was done. By 10:00 p.m., all the Federal troops had withdrawn from the greater Chantilly area.²¹⁷

The Union march back to the safety of the greater Washington defenses gave Henry and the men of the 21st plenty of time to consider the moment. Over the last thirteen months the regiment had sustained unimaginable losses. Most of the men who left Worcester, Massachusetts in August, 1861, were lying in hospitals, sent home cripples, or dead. September 1, 1862 was Henry's 373rd day in the army - he was among the few who remained. Espinola adds the following:

²¹⁶ Welker, 186-188.

²¹⁷ Civil War Trust, Virginia 1862.

During the Battle of Ox Hill, the 21st Massachusetts had the unfortunate distinction of having suffered the highest number of casualties of any regiment both north and south. It was also the regiment's highest casualty rate of the entire war. Out of less than 400 men who were present for duty, fewer than 200 were left standing after the battle. The total number of reported casualties was 38 killed, 98 wounded and 26 captured. A week after witnessing such a terrible loss Henry wrote that "The boys are gradually getting over the terrible Battle of Chantilly. It was a scene I shall never forget. It was wholesale murder to stand at the muzzle of the enemies' guns and have a volley poured into us."

Given the fact that the regimental report was either lost or never filed after the Battle of Ox Hill, it's possible that the casualty numbers may have actually been higher.²¹⁸ Two weeks later, just before the Battle of Antietam, the regiment was only able to muster 85 men. Whether the regiment had sustained higher casualties at Ox Hill, or there had been a lot of stragglers, it was little more than 10 per cent of its original strength when it fought at Antietam. After the battle was over, Henry noted that new recruits began to arrive which eventually brought the regiment back up to strength of about 400 men.²¹⁹

Late summer and early fall of 1862 was a dark time for the soldiers of the Armies of Virginia and the Potomac. Morale was low and the Union government seemed to have few answers to the Confederate threat. Lee seemed to have out-generaled every Union leader he faced and the disposition of the war, after approximately 175,000 total casualties, was clearly in the Confederate's favor.²²⁰

Over the days that followed, the deteriorating Union morale was further aggravated by newspaper reports of the rivalry that existed between Pope and McClellan. These stories in turn fed the anti-war movement, giving many of the soldiers fighting the war a deeper sense of despair.²²¹ This combined with daily supplies and food shortages, the intense combat, the battlefield deaths, and illnesses of their friends, made the situation unbearable and many soldiers deserted.²²² The Hartford Courant reported that, "Richmond became a gaping hell, from which myriads of infuriated devils have been poured forth, breathing

²¹⁸ Note: This statement might have been Espinola's assessment up to this date. Other units suffered higher casualty rates when considering the entire war.

²¹⁹ Espinola Collection.

²²⁰ Greer, *Counting Civil War Casualties, Week-By-Week, For The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum*.

²²¹ McPherson, PBS, *American Experience*.

²²² Walcott reports that thirty-nine men from the 21st deserted over the course of the war (page, 490). Cutler reports that at least twelve men from Thompson, Connecticut, Henry's home town, deserted, most toward the end of the war.

slaughter and death.”²²³ It goes on to say that this, “has dashed our cup of exultation to the ground just as it touched our lips and closed the door of victory just as our feet were upon the threshold.”²²⁴

A New York diarist, according to McPherson states, “The Nation is rapidly sinking just now. Stonewall Jackson [is] about to invade Maryland, 40,000 strong. General advance of the rebel line threatening our hold on Missouri and Kentucky. Cincinnati in danger... Disgust with our present government is certainly universal.”²²⁵

Adding to this depressing mood was the ill feelings and destructive rivalries that developed between the Union troops, created by Union leaders. Walcott reports that as the Massachusetts men withdrew from Manassas they passed members of the Army of Potomac who “...expressed their delight at the defeat of Pope and his army.” Walcott continues, “To these men (and there were plenty more of the same sort) the 15,000 Union victims of the second Manassas were but as dust in their joy at the downfall of the braggart rival of the great soldier of the Peninsula [McClellan].”²²⁶

Several historians suggest that McClellan not only hoped for Pope’s failure, he made certain it happened. Pope’s own opening acts, his letter of admonishment dated July 14, 1862, his “snide denigration” of his new command, and his well-known poor opinion of McClellan probably contributed as much to the overall problem as did the Union’s miserable war record.²²⁷ Pope told anyone willing to listen that McClellan was incompetent.²²⁸ Soldiers, like Henry, paid the price for such self-centered egotism and pettiness with their lives.

Lincoln knew of McClellan’s blatant inaction but understood that as the country’s commander-in-chief he had to make a change. That change, made on September 7, 1862, and much to the surprise of many, was to re-instate McClellan and banish Pope to Minnesota to fight Indians. Lincoln was “...greatly distressed by having to do it.” He stated that while McClellan, “acted badly in this matter... he has the Army with him... We must use what tools we have. There is no man in the Army who can lick these troops of ours into shape half as well as he... If he can’t fight himself, he excels in making others ready to fight.”²²⁹

Pope summarized the withdrawal from Chantilly, but his less than accurate account did little to save his job. He states:

²²³ Washauer, 80.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ McPherson, 532-533.

²²⁶ Walcott, 150.

²²⁷ McPherson, 524.

²²⁸ Ibid. Pope quoted by Chase in David Donald ed., *Inside Lincoln’s Cabinet: The Civil War Diaries of Salmon P. Chase* (New York, 1954), p.97.

²²⁹ McPherson, 533.

We have had a terrific battle again to-day. The enemy, largely reinforced, assaulted our position early to-day. We held our ground firmly until six o'clock P.M., when the enemy, massing very heavy forces on our left, forced back that wing about half a mile. At dark we held that position. Under all the circumstances, both horses and men having been two days without food, and the enemy greatly outnumbering us, I thought it best to move back to this place at dark. The movement has been made in perfect order and without loss. The troops are in good heart and marched off the field without the least hurry or confusion. Their conduct was very fine.

The battle was most furious for hours without cessation, and the losses on both sides very heavy. The enemy is badly whipped, and we shall do well enough. Do not be uneasy. We will hold our own here. The labors and hardships of this army for two or three weeks have been beyond description. We have delayed the enemy as long as possible without losing the army. We have damaged him heavily, and I think the army entitled to the gratitude of the country. Be easy; everything will go well

*John Pope,
Major-General.²³⁰*

Henry was unable to write to his family during the time leading to, and during the Battles of 2nd Manassas and Ox Hill. The Browns, back on their Brandy Hill farm in Thompson, had not heard from their son since his August 16, 1862 letter, and were certainly anxious for any information about his condition. Day after day they waited, scouring newspapers for news from the front, praying not to see Henry's name among the dead. Their fears would not be alleviated until nearly a week after the battle when they, most likely on September 9 or 10, received Henry's September 6, 1862 letter explaining the events leading to Ox Hill.

Two days later, Henry wrote his parents another letter, but in this letter, the reader can sense a noticeable reluctance. How do you explain to your loved ones how frightened a man can become when staring death in the face, or how you shook uncontrollably when the fight concluded? How do you explain the dead and dying, the dismembered men begging for friend or foe to end their suffering, or the terrible site of a distraught and confused man attempting to pack his own entrails back to where they once belonged? How do you explain the nerve it takes to stand your ground yards away from an enemy as they discharged their weapons at pointblank range, and the absolute relief that you have when you realize that you were not the soldier on which the sights were placed? How?

Henry's struggle is obvious when reading his September 8, 1862 letter. He could not find the appropriate words and only provides one short paragraph, sixty-three words, to

²³⁰ Ropes, 145.

describe the most horrific battle in the regiment's history, one in which he nearly was killed and captured. Espinola suggests that Henry was not the only person from the regiment struggling with what they had experienced. He writes:

There is something dark about what happened at Ox Hill... Even officers, who had written voluminous reports both before and after Ox Hill, fell strangely silent. This day, September 1st, 1862... was the most painful day that the 21st Massachusetts would ever endure. At the beginning of the battle it had close to four hundred men who were present for duty. When it ended, less than two-hundred were left standing...the regiment's heaviest loss of the entire war.²³¹

Henry's letter reads:

*Pvt. Henry Brown, 21st Mass. Vol.
Leesboro, Md. September 8, 1862*

Dear Parents,

I thought as I had an opportunity today I would write to you. We left our encampment on 7th Street today at eleven. We kept on the same road. We marched till about five and stopped for an hour to rest. We went about a mile and stopped for the night. We came about a mile farther this morning and encamped again. It is about noon now. There is no telling how long we shall stay here. It will be safe enough to send your likeness now. Direct your letter to Washington.

While at Washington, our Captain got some stuff from the Sanitary Committee: woolen blankets, shirts, towels, handkerchiefs, Castile soap, brandy, wine pickles, bags of needles and pins, thread, buttons and all matter of trinkets useful to a soldier. These things were very acceptable. As I told you before, I threw away my woolen blanket before we got to Culpeper. At that place I bought a very nice woolen blanket for two dollars. At Bull Run we were ordered to take off our knapsacks and pile them up. I had no knapsack but I could not work well with my blanket and haversack, so I left them with the rest. We had to retreat and never got them.

At Centreville I got me a first rate, good woolen blanket and have got it yet. At Centreville, the knapsacks of the 34 New York, which was cut up bad at Bull Run, were brought and piled up on the ground. Everyone pitched in and got what we could. I got a bundle with two towels, two haversacks, three razors, three pairs of shears, a syringe, three pocket knives, two pillow

²³¹ Espinola Collection.

cases, a razor strap and a lather brush. I made a haversack of one pillow case. When we left I took three days rations of sugar, coffee and hard tack. When we met the enemy at Chantilly, we were ordered to take off everything heavy to fight better. I had to leave my haversack but I kept my blanket. Our company is pretty well off for clothing and blankets now. Not many have rubbers. These are the most useful a thing a soldier has.

The boys are gradually getting over the terrible Battle of Chantilly. It was a scene I shall never forget. It was wholesale murder to stand at the muzzle of the enemies' guns and have a volley poured into us. I had a very narrow escape of my life and being taken prisoner. A ball passed through my collar.²³² Our Lt. Colonel was killed.²³³

The 35th Massachusetts Regiment has joined this brigade. It numbers over 11,000 men. It is as large as the rest of the brigade. There is a great many rumors about the Rebels being in Maryland but we don't mind much about them.

Write as soon as you get this. Send your likeness and the weekly newspaper. I got one the other day. The payrolls have come. I guess we shall get paid soon. Goodbye for this time. My love to you all.

*From your son,
Henry Brown*

One bright spot during the Battle of Chantilly was Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross. Barton, known as the "Angel of the Battlefield" for her tireless efforts with Civil War wounded, was born in Oxford, Massachusetts, less than 15 miles from Henry's home in Brandy Hill. Barton later recorded her thoughts about the Battle of Chantilly, and wrote, "... all of a sudden, air and earth and all about us shook with one mingled crash of God's and man's artillery. The lightning played and the thunder rolled incessantly and the cannon roared louder and nearer each minute. Chantilly with all its darkness and horrors had opened in the rear."²³⁴

Barton was no stranger to the 21st Massachusetts. She cared for their wounded in numerous battles to include 2nd Bull Run, Antietam, Chantilly, and Fredericksburg. She held a number of their dying men as they slipped away. Her comfort and unselfish care was the last experience many soldiers had on this earth – it was something the surviving veterans would never forget. On September 13, 1911, forty-nine years after the battle of Chantilly, Charles Frye, President of the 21st Massachusetts Regiment Association, sent the following

²³² Note: With the caliber of the bullets used during the war any movement toward center mass would have been disastrous for Henry, likely costing him his life, a fact in which he was well aware.

²³³ Note: The Lieutenant Colonel noted was Joseph P. Rice.

²³⁴ Barton, 185.

letter on behalf of the few remaining survivors – most of the veterans were well into their seventies. Barton died seven months later at the age of ninety.

The survivors of the Veteran 21st Massachusetts Regiment, assembled in "Odd Fellows Temple in the City of Worcester," wish to put on record the day of your coming to us at Bull Run and Chantilly, when we were in our deepest bereavement and loss; how your presence and deeds brought assurance and comfort; and how you assisted us up the hot and rugged sides of South Mountain by your ministry forty-nine years ago to-day, at and over the "Burnside Bridge" at Antietam, then through Pleasant Valley, to Falmouth, and in course of time were across the Rappahannock and storming the heights of Fredericksburg; were with us, indeed, when we recrossed the river and found shelter in our tents — broken, bruised, and sheared. With us evermore in body and spirit, lo, these fifty years. The prayer of the 21st Regiment is, God bless our old and tried friend. It was also voted that we present to Clara Barton a bouquet of flowers.

Charles E. Simmons, Secretary

It is impossible to know if Henry ever met Clara Barton. He was not among the wounded during the battle, so there was little chance of him and Clara being in the same areas after the battle. It would be nice to imagine, however, a young Henry marching past Barton's hospital area, catching the eye of this extraordinary woman from Massachusetts working feverishly to mend the shattered men, and tipping his hat in a gesture of thanks.

It is important to note that General Kearney's assessment of Colonel Clark, and the 21st Massachusetts, during the battle of Ox Hill, was at best, ill-deserved. While both Generals Stevens and Kearney had reputations of being great fighters, so did the 21st Massachusetts. Of the two Union generals lost on September 1, 1862, Espinola writes:

The Union had [sic] lost two of their most respected generals in as many hours. Lincoln could ill afford to lose both Kearney and Stevens, especially after General Pope's dismal performance at Second Manassas. Not only were these two generals experienced commanders but they were also being considered for higher commands. Had Kearney not been killed, he would have most likely at one point become the commander of the Union Army.²³⁵

While considered great generals, this author suggests that both had a hand in their own demise. Both men left their commands and led from the front, a task that, while noble,

²³⁵ Espinola Collection.

Joseph J. Lindley

belonged to the junior officers. Historians can now only speculate about the impact both could have had on the balance of the war had they survived.



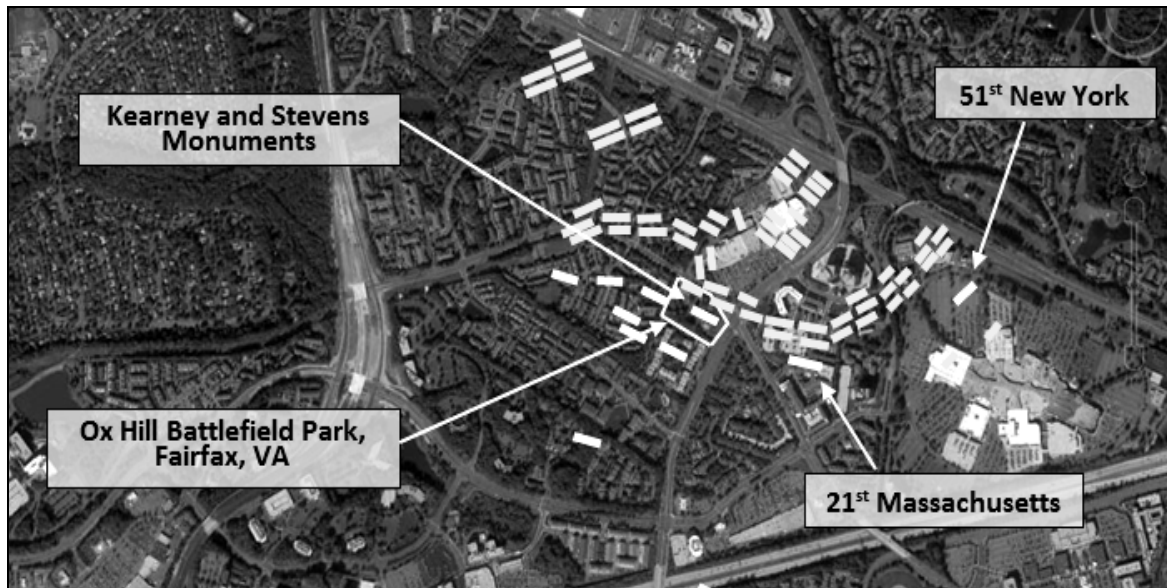
Above: A 1915 picture of the Kearney and Stevens monuments at the Ox Hill/Chantilly Battle Field. This picture shows how undeveloped the area was at that time. (Newark Public Library)



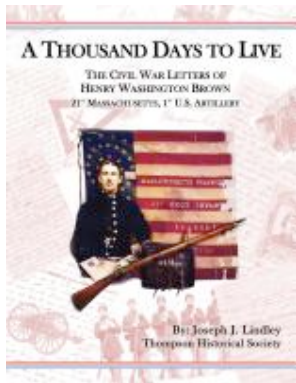
Above: A current picture of the Kearney and Stevens monuments at the Ox Hill/Chantilly Battle Field. (J. Lindley).

Lincoln's gamble that a hard-charging, successful Western general could defeat Robert E. Lee had failed. Pope's order for his men to return to Washington was among his last as commander of the Army of Virginia. As Pope's men crossed into the Army of the Potomac's, and McClellan's command area, so did Pope's control of his army.

Whether or not Ox Hill could have changed the course of the war is unknown, and best left to the speculation of the experts. Had Pope been able to turn the Confederates, or if Jackson was able to outflank Reno's forces and establish strong Rebel positions behind the Federals, the battle would have certainly had a different and more costly outcome. What is apparent is it did not need to be the disaster it was for the 21st Massachusetts and the Union forces, and if nothing else, it was a lost opportunity, for both sides.



Above: An overlay of the Ox Hill Battlefield area. This picture shows the approximate positions of the Rebel and Union forces at 4:30 p.m. on September 1, 1862. The overlay was created to show how little of the actual battlefield remains, less than ten percent, and how developed the area has become. What has been preserved is due to the efforts of dedicated individuals to include Mario Espinola. The grey rectangles mark the Confederate positions, the white the Union. (Satellite view courtesy of Google Earth, overlay courtesy of the Thompson Historical Society)



Using the soldier's personal letters, A Thousand Days to Live chronicles the Civil War life of Thompson, Connecticut native, Henry Washington Brown. As a naive 19-year-old, Henry joined the 21st Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, and rapidly grew into a hardened combat veteran participating in some of the war's most gruesome battles. Few soldiers in American history have seen more death. Find out if Henry survived...or if he succumbed to the horrors of war.

A Thousand Days to Live

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