

## Charles E. Phelps, Brigadier General

Congressman, Supreme Bench of Baltimore, City Assoc. Judge, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient.



Adjutant and later commanding officer of the 7th Maryland Volunteers, U.S. Army, Civil War; Member of the City Council City of Baltimore,; Graduate, Harvard University School of Law; Congressman for two terms from the City of Baltimore; Commander of the Eighth Regiment; Professor of Equity Law at the University of Maryland School of Law; and President of the Maryland Association of Union Veterans.

Transcript of his letter to his half-brother Wolcott regarding the action at The Wilderness, near Spotsylvania, VA, May 1864;

No. 369 Eutaw Pl. Balto. 21 May 1864

Dear Wolcott, Your timely and welcome letter of the 14th was duly recd. Ad altho' I write withsome difficulty, shall not delay in acknowledging my thanks. I can not enter into particulars, not being in a condition to write much. In fact, this is the second letter I have attempted to write without an amanuesis. You may remember that in 1855 after my narrow escape from death by a railroad accident you wrote me fro Texs that I was doubtless preserv'd for some good purpose. The preservation seems no less marked in the recent instance, and in its incidents much more strange and unlooked for. "Of hair breadth scapes in the [missing], deadly march — Of being taken by the insolent foe and sold to slavery — of my redemption thence" [refers to being taken prisoner during battle]. The narration if it should be of any interest to you, must be reserved until our next meeting.

Meantimes, I hardly know whether to congratulate myself more upon my escape from Richmond captivity, than upon the opportunity I was afforded of participating in the grandest and most successful cavalry enterprise of the war. This part of my experiences would alone, if properly narrated, be as full of incident and romance as the Anabasis of Xenophon. While with the rebel lines, I saw the vaunted "Jeb. Stuart" with plumed hat, at the head of his [cavalry]. Little did I dream, that two days after I should be present at his last fight. This was "Yellow Tavern," within a few miles of Richmond, but after he had penned his last bragging dispatch to the Confederate authorities. I saw our cavalry fight every day for nearly a week — both on foot an on horseback—and can testify that for steadiness and intrepidity they can not be excelled by any mounted troops in the world. The hardest fight was in forcing the passage of the Chicka [missing] at Shadow Bridge. From thence, our line of march was over the field of the 7 days battle of the P— [missing] ...fighting all those battles over again in succession, tho' in [miniature?]. The "strange, eventful history" closed at Malvern Hill, when we were shelled by our own gunboats. I had a splendid horse shot under me the first day o {battle of} "Wilderness". His model would have served for a bas relief in the frieze of the Parthenon. The poor fellow became frantic with fear when the firing became close, and was shot in the head, while walking upon his hind legs. His cost was \$375. and I would not

have sold him for twice that sum. This was Thursday the 5th of May. The same day, my Adjutant was crippled, and the regt. lost many valuable officers & men.

In the next day's fight we lost but slightly. Sunday the 8th, was Spotsylvania C.H. [Court House]. Our brigade assaulted a line of breastworks. It was here that I had a second horse shot under me (being at the time in command of the Brigade), and while struggling to extricate myself from him as he lay upon my leg, recd. A rifle [missing] ball thro' the left elbow and joint, splintering the lower c [missing]. The brigade recoiled from the withering fire which was [received?] until they came up to close range, being at the same time enfiladed from both flanks. It Genl. Robinson had his leg fractured. I was too near the rebel works to make good my escape, and was consequently captures, with two other officers, & some half dozen more of my Regt. When hit, I was within 10 paces of the breastwork. The rebels had done me the honor to single me out as a target, as they told me when I was within their lines. My wound was dressed by a rebel surgeon, from Balto., formerly a schoolmate and intimate friend, Dr. Murray. You met his brother several times in my office. They treated me very well, after they found out who I was, but rather shabbily at first as they robbed me of everything I had.

[Nephew] Lawrence [Tower] has t thro' so far uninjured. He behaved with conspicuous gallantry throughout.

Very truly Your Bro. Charles E. Phelps

*Images and information courtesy of C. Deidre Phelps.*