

Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune near Culpeper House August 12, 1862

807-8; Bowen, *Mass. in the War*, p. 120.

5. Richard Cary (1836-62), William B. Williams (1830?-62), Edwin Gardner Abbott (1840-62), Richard Chapman Goodwin (1833-62), and Stephen George Perkins (1835-62).

p. 29.

10. General Gordon's official report of the battle cited Shaw and two others for "coolness under this terrific fire." Report of Brig Gen [George] Gordon, Aug. 11, 1862, *OR*, I:12, pt. 2, p. 808.

Near Culpepper Court-House, Va.

[RGS]

August 12, 1862

Dearest Mother,

I hope my telegrams and my note to Father reached you, and relieved your anxiety about myself. We have had a hard time. We marched from Little Washington on the 7th inst. On the 9th we left Culpepper, and after a march of four or five miles Banks' Corps was formed in line of battle, Gordon's Brigade on the extreme right. The fight didn't begin until four o'clock, though all day there was some artillery firing. The infantry went forward on our left and centre, first.

We were posted on an eminence, and had a good view of everything. I don't know how the troops on the left behaved; they were all new troops, and I know that, after having once given way, they were not rallied again. Crawford's Brigade (in our Division), stationed in the centre, fought like tigers, and were dreadfully used up.¹ They advanced through a wood, emerged from it, and crossed an immense field under a very heavy fire from forces far superior in numbers. After they were cut to pieces, our Brigade was ordered

up. We went through the same wood, but more to the right, and came out into the same broad field. I was with the Second Massachusetts, having been ordered to show Colonel Andrews where to go. The first thing I noticed upon coming out of the wood, was the immense number of bodies lying about the field, and then I saw a long line of Rebel battalions drawn up opposite, and almost concealed by the smoke from their pieces. The Second Massachusetts, the Third Wisconsin, and Twenty-seventh Indiana were placed on the edge of the wood, behind a snake-fence. The men were ordered to lie down until the enemy came nearer; almost all the officers kept on their feet, though.²

Just at this time I saw the last of Harry. I was about opposite to his company, a few paces in the rear, and he called out, "Hullo, Bob!" and came back to where I was. We talked a few minutes together about what was going on, and then he went back to his place and stood, pulling his moustache and looking over the field, the bullets whistling thick around him. He was perfectly quiet, but looked pretty fierce. I can't tell you how enraged I feel when I think of his being in Richmond. I have thought several times, when near the Rebel lines, of letting myself be captured too, but it would be wrong and foolish, because we have very few officers left, and I might never see Harry either. I never knew till now, how much his society had been to me this last year, nor how much I loved him. After he left me, I was in different parts of the field with General Gordon, who finally sent me back to get some artillery through the woods. It was impossible to do it, because the brush was so thick, and besides, I hadn't been gone five minutes, before the enemy got us under a cross fire, and our Brigade had to retreat. They advanced so close to the Second before the latter gave way, that it was easy to distinguish all their features. I think our regiment lost most at this time; they also inflicted a heavy loss on the regiments opposed to them. So, from what I can gather, I was saved from the hottest fire by being ordered to look for the artillery. There were four hundred and seventy-four enlisted men taken into action in the Second. Of these, one hundred and twenty were killed and wounded, and thirty-seven missing. They were not under fire more than thirty minutes. Twenty-two officers went in, and eight came out; five were killed, five wounded, four captured, three of whom are thought to be wounded. Harry is said now to have received a slight wound. It can't be much, for a private, who stayed hidden in the woods all night, saw him walking about under a guard, and getting assistance for Major Savage. I don't doubt he stayed to take care of the latter. The Major was wounded and taken prisoner. We have heard that he was in a house somewhere inside the Rebel lines, and Lieutenant Abbott sent him some money.³ I wrote

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a short note to his Father to-day. We are very anxious about him, for he may be very uncomfortable, as Harry and Quincy are carried off to Richmond.

We hear to-day that the enemy have retired to some distance. If true, we may soon hear more of our missing. Goodwin, Cary, Choate, and Stephen Perkins were all quite ill, but would not stay away from the fight. Choate was the only one of the four not killed.⁴ Goodwin couldn't keep up with the regiment, but I saw him toiling up the hill, at some distance behind, with the assistance of his servant. He hardly reached the front when he was killed. All our officers behaved nobly. Those who ought to have stayed away, didn't. It was splendid to see those sick fellows walk straight up into the shower of bullets, as if it were so much rain; men, who until this year, had lived lives of perfect ease and luxury. Oh! it is hard to believe that we shall never see them again, after having been constantly together for more than a year. I don't remember a single quarrel of any importance among our officers during all that time.

Yesterday I went over the battle-field with the General. The first man I recognized was Cary. He was lying on his back with his head on a piece of wood. He looked calm and peaceful, as if he were merely sleeping; his face was beautiful, and I could have stood and looked at it a long while. Captain Williams we found next. Then Goodwin, Abbott, and Perkins. They had all probably been killed instantly, while Cary lived until 2 o'clock P.M. of the next day.⁵ His First Sergeant was shot in the leg, and lay by his side all the time. He says he was very quiet; spoke little, and didn't seem to suffer. We found a dipper with water, which some Rebel soldier had brought. They took everything from him after he died, but returned a ring and a locket with his wife's miniature to the Sergeant. His was the only dead body I have ever seen that it was pleasant to look at, and it was beautiful. I saw it again in Culpepper late that night. All these five were superior men; every one in the regiment was their friend. It was a sad day for us, when they were brought in dead, and they cannot be replaced.

The bodies were taken to town, and Lieutenant Francis and I had them packed in charcoal to go to Washington, where they will be put in metallic coffins.⁶ I took a lock of hair from each one, to send to their friends. It took almost all night to get them ready for transportation.

I wrote Annie a short note to-day, and told her that Harry was reported slightly wounded.⁷ I was going to write to Uncle George, but you had better send him this, for there is a great deal of work to be done, and I have been writing so much, that I have little time left.⁸ I shall keep a sharp lookout all

the time to get news of Harry, and will send him money whenever I can; \$14 went yesterday, and I think it will reach him safely. I shall return to the regiment very soon now. Officers are very scarce there. I have just received a note from Susie, enclosing one for Harry from Emily.⁹ The latter I will keep, and if another flag of truce goes over, will send it. It will be a consolation to him to hear from them. It makes me choke to think of him, especially since that inhuman order of Davis' concerning Pope's officers.¹⁰ I don't think it will make a great deal of difference in the treatment of them; but it will be an excuse for neglect. I can't help wishing I were with him.

Gordon's Brigade was the only one that was kept together, and remained in position all night and the next day. The others scattered,—were collected the day after, and went into camp.

Banks had about seven thousand men, and was greatly outnumbered. We had a good many more in reserve, but they were not brought up for some reason. Whose mismanagement it was, I don't know. Opinions differ. Troops have been coming in pretty fast ever since, and we have a strong position. I have just heard decidedly that Harry was *not* hurt, and I believe it myself,—please let Annie know. I am sorry to send so many different accounts, but it is impossible to get at the truth immediately. Love to all, dear Mother, and God bless you!

Your ever loving son,
Robert G. Shaw

1. Brig. Gen. Samuel Wylie Crawford (1829–92) joined the army in 1851 as a surgeon, but made the transition to line officer in 1861. His First Brigade lost half its men at Cedar Mountain. Faust, *Encyclopedia*, p. 191.

2. These three regiments made up Gordon's Brigade. They met Jackson's men at the edge of a freshly mown wheat field, three hundred yards wide. Report

moted to captain on Aug. 17, 1862.

He resigned on Oct. 31, 1862, due to disability. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

5. Twenty-six-year-old Roland S. Williston had been a corporal in Cary's company from May 25, 1861, until his promotion to first sergeant on May 10, 1862. Roland S. Williston file, CMSR; Morning Reports, Bound Record Books. Second Massachusetts Infantry,