

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

Local regiments fight on CULP'S HILL

To mark the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, we are reprinting letters by soldiers who were there. Their accounts are in the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

In this excerpt from an "interesting Letter from Chaplain Bowdish of the 149th Regiment," published July 14, 1863, in the *Syracuse Journal*, the chaplain of the volunteer Infantrymen from Onondaga County relates the defense of Culp's Hill at the Battle of Gettysburg.

"Editor of the Syracuse Journal: The battle of Gettysburg commenced July 1st, and on the first day of the engagement our forces fell back about a mile and a half, where they made a stand and maintained that position till the last.

We moved to the position on the right of the line of battle ... and commenced energetically the work of entrenchment. The men did work with a will. Our regiment completed the breastworks behind which they fought so bravely, in about two hours. These strong works were the means doubtless of saving the regiment many noble soldiers.

Our flag which was presented to the regiment by the Salt officers, has eighty-one distinct bullet holes in it and the flag staff seven. An attempt was made by a brave Orderly Sergeant to capture our colors, and when within two feet of his desired object, he was instantly killed by Corporal Frost, color guard from Co. B, and at about the same time others [fired] at the unfortunate man. Some of our men counted five bullet wounds in his head and breast. Col. Barnum cut off his chevrons and they will be kept as a remembrance of the affair.

A VISIT TO THE BATTLEFIELD
The day of our National Independence, I spent in walking over the battlefield in front of our Corps. It will be impossible for me to write my feelings of all that came to my notice. I have heard people talk about "the killed being piled" but never saw the like before. Men wounded in every conceivable way, and lying in every conceivable position. Some in the very act of "tearing their cartridges," some "ramming cartridge," some capping their guns and others are killed in the position of cheering the men on to the contest. I saw an Adjutant General whose name was ascertained to be C.T. Leigh. He was a noble looking fellow, and rode a splendid war horse, and both lay side by side in cold death. Poor fellow! thought I. "He that hardeneth his heart and stiffeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." ...

A HAPPY CIRCUMSTANCE
During the engagement a portion of our brigade was relieved by a portion of the 6th Corps, and it was soon discovered that the 122nd and the 149th were standing side by side in the contest. Each regiment cheered the other, and both gave three cheers for "Old Salt Point," and then went at it again with a will. ...

SATISFACTION
Our men all say "that they have had satisfaction this time." At Chancellorville the regiment suffered without satisfaction. At Gettysburg, they suffered with satisfaction. The bugle sounds the "fall in" and I must close.

*More anon,
A.C. Bowdish, Chaplain
P.S. — I have time to mention one fact. Prisoners who came within the lines of our brigade say that "Stonewall" Jackson's brigade was never whipped before. They were handsomely repulsed by our brigade, and almost annihilated. — A.C.B."*

This dispatch by "M.S." was dated July 4, 1863, and sent from "headquarters, 149th Regiment, in the field." It was published July 9, 1863, in the *Syracuse Standard* under the headline "The sword and the pen." It recounts the Onondaga County Infantry regiment's defense of Culp's Hill during the Battle of Gettysburg.

*"Dear Standard —
I can scarcely contain myself — Hurrah!
There, the effervescent excitement found vent,*

and I feel more composed.

I write to you on the glorious anniversary of Independence, to inform your readers of the triumphant success of the Union arms, and the important and honorable part performed by the 149th Regiment, not forgetting the 122d, which came later in the field, and fought with valor side by side with our men ...

The Third Brigade, with which our regiment is connected, was called into action about 6 o'clock on Thursday, July 2d. The 149th took its position and hurriedly threw up semi-circular breastworks, which proved of great importance as a means of defence. — Skirmishers were thrown out, and in a few minutes firing commenced. The skirmishers fell back to the breastworks, followed closely by the famous Stonewall Brigade, when the dance fairly commenced to the music of whistling bullets and the cannon's roar. The rebels advanced, and a perfect storm of lead was poured into them, mowing them down like grass; but the rascals stood their ground well and returned our fire



A Confederate sharpshooter lies dead at Devil's Den after the battle of Gettysburg. (Cortis Images, July 1863)

with interest. — Our men, however, were protected by their breastworks, and consequently suffered comparatively little.

For several hours the fight continued, a perfect sheet of flame blazing between the combatants, until every man of our regiment had fired away his 60 rounds of cartridge, when they were relieved by another regiment, and retired to supply themselves with ammunition. As soon as the want was supplied, our boys moved forward again with cheers for the old Salt Point, and relieved those who held the trenches; and thus they alternately fought and fell back nearly all of Thursday night, holding the enemy at bay and strewing the field with rebel dead ...

On Friday morning [July 3] the dance was continued to the same music. The enemy advanced upon our men in a column, but they were repulsed at every advance. They came forward with their peculiar rebel yell, which can be compared to nothing earthly, and were received by our men with cheers and leaden messengers of vengeance. The fighting was continued, almost without cessation, all of Friday until 11 o'clock at night, when the rebels ceased firing, and retired, leaving our boys masters of the field.

To-day (Saturday) no rebels are to be seen, and our troops are making arrangements for pursuing the impudent rascals, and either driving them out of the country, or what is still better, making prisoners of the whole force ... We are holding a mighty dull Fourth of July here, but we intend to make up for lost time when we return home, and in the meantime I remain

Yours for the Union, M.S."