

Frederick, Maryland

November 5, 1862

My Dear Brother,

I promised to give you my experience of the battle of Sharpsburg. We arrived Tuesday. We lay still, the rebels throwing a few shells at us—just enough to remind us that man is mortal. Tuesday night we took position on the extreme left of the army, with Antietam Creek between us and the enemy. Wednesday morning they discovered us and commenced throwing shell and soon made it so hot for us that our [2nd] brigade was ordered to march by the left flank, file left, to get a position less exposed to the enemy's fire. They peppered us well as we filed by in full view of their batteries. One shell burst so close that the wind of the explosion fanned my cheek most delightfully.

We did not again come under fire till afternoon when we forded the creek [at Snavely's Ford], driving the enemy back to some cornfields and wood where he again made a stand. We were ordered to advance and drive him from this. We charged up the hill which rises from the creek and came upon an open plain in front of their lines where we were ordered to halt and fire. In this the rebels had had all the advantage as we were standing up in plain sight while they were squat behind walls and fences and in cornfields and woods. The sun—now low in the west—shone full in our eyes, preventing any sight at them which we might otherwise have had, while their batteries sent shot and shell tearing through our ranks or shrieking overhead.

I had short time to make these observations for all at once everything became dark and I seemed to be whirling through the air with lightning speed. Being somewhat uncertain as [to] my latitude, I felt about and was much gratified to find myself still on terra firma and not making a flying trip through the regions of space. Our [3rd] division soon fell back, the Eighth [Connecticut] having half its number killed or wounded, and the rebels soon came up.

A number of them spoke to me—all kindly—and one spread my blanket over me and fixed a rude pillow for my head. In consequence of my wound, I could neither speak my thanks nor ask his name—but I shall always remember him. Of course there are some rascals in every army and it was one of these that searched my pockets, taking my money and other articles. As to the one who wanted to take my shoes, I can forgive him as I suppose the poor devil needed them bad enough for I saw a number of them the next day without any.

I remained on the field through the night and the next day I was able to get to a barn ¹ a few rods distant where were a large number of our wounded in the care of the secesh. They treated us very well and paroled us before retreating that night, leaving a couple of their men to take care of us till friends should come up, which was not till the morning after. You may believe I looked hardly presentable. My head was swelled so that one of my own company did not know me, and my hair, beard, and clothes were saturated with blood and dirt.

Friday afternoon I succeeded in getting carried to a hospital, and having my wound dressed. Our fare here was hardtack and coffee in the morning, hard bread and soup at noon, and hard bread and coffee at night. This was what you may call hard living—especially when one's jaws and throat are so he can neither chew nor swallow anything hard. Had it not been for the kindness of one of my company who was a nurse of the hospital, I think the doctors would have done what he secesh could not—that is, deprive the country of a soldier and yourself a brother. ²

— L. A. Barber

Leonidas A. Barber

Leonidas was born in Hopkinton, Rhode Island, the son of Weeden Barber (1802-1884) and Tacy Card (1807-1881). In 1860, the Barber family lived in Westerly, Washington county, Rhode Island, where Leonidas was employed as a machinist's apprentice. He may have been residing in Stonington, Connecticut, at the time of his enlistment in 1861. The regiment participated on the Burnside Expedition to North Carolina and spent several months there before being recalled to Virginia and then the Maryland Campaign.

They proceeded up the slopes towards Sharpsburg to attack the Confederates, finally being repulsed by reinforcements under Gen. A. P. Hill at the close of the day's fighting. Leonidas survived his head wound, recuperated, and was transferred to the Invalid Corps on 1 September 1863.

¹ The barn may have been John Otto's Pennsylvania-style bank barn where many of the wounded members of Col. Harland's Second Brigade were treated. See John Banks' Civil War Blog of 12 May 2013.]

² Leonidas Barber survived his "dangerous" wound but his older brother, Alfred Clark Barber (1835-1862), did not. Alfred was killed in the Battle at Murfreesboro on 31 December 1862. Alfred Barber "left Westerly in November 1859 to engage in the book business at the South. After pursuing that business several months, he went in March, 1860, to Carrollton, Green Co., Illinois, where he was engaged in teaching. In August, 1861, he enlisted in the 59th Regiment Illinois Volunteers, and was in active service with them until his death. He had often expressed a determination to fight for his country until treason should be crushed, unless sooner overtaken by death."