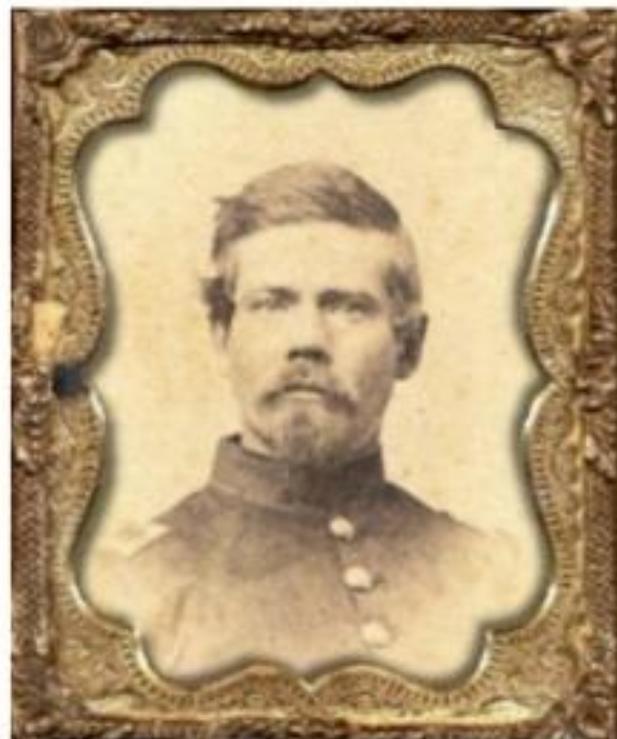




Envelope of Charley's letter



Portrait of Elisha G. Buss, Co. C, 15th Mass. Death mentioned in letter.

P.S. You must tell Mr. Jerome and Mary Ann that I would write to them if I had a moment's time, but we are very busy. This does not hinder them writing to me. They must write. My love to all of you.

Our boys sent home a box of extra clothing, Hosiery, Houghton, Feltoville. Here was a shirt and a pair of socks for you. He will send them to you for you.

Yours truly
C. Long

 Camp Pike, near Kedgesville
Sunday, September 21st 1862
Dear Parents
It is now about a week since I last wrote you and I am now about fifty miles, by a direct route from Knoxville.
I mentioned in my last about starting immediately but for some reason we did not start until Wednesday morning and after marching all day with knapsacks on we halted about two miles beyond Damascus we were all tired and so every company hired a team to carry our baggage for the rest of the trip.
We started early the next morning and after passing through several

towns among which were Monrovia, New-Market, and  Frederick city and at last halted for the night just outside of Frederick. All the above towns are very pretty places in anything but war times, but now they are used as prisons for rebels, and hospitals for our wounded.
We started early the next morning and Monday Sept 22nd we were about eight miles from where I commenced writing. I will begin where I left off.
We started early the next morning and will soon pass the mountains which I think are the Blue Ridge, the scenery is truly splendid but we had

but little time to stop and admire it. We stopped for the night about a mile beyond Middletown on a beautiful alley. The next day we went through Boonsboro and stopped at noon in Kedgesville near the battleground. After resting a while I started off to see what might be seen.
The first place I came to was a barn (all the barns and houses around here are used as hospitals) and there I saw Gilman Gathe wounded through the calf of his leg, not seriously. Henry Heave wounded likewise. Otis Cogood in ~~an~~ arm between elbow and wrist. he is afraid he will lose his arm. Passing to another barn I saw it was

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“Camp Forbes”

near Keedysville, [Maryland]

Sunday, September 21st 1862

Dear Parents,

It is now about a week since I last wrote and I am now about fifty miles by a direct route from Brookville. I mentioned in my last about starting immediately but for some reason, we did not start until Wednesday morning [17 September] and, after marching all day with knapsacks on, we halted about two miles beyond Damascus. We were all tired and so every company hired a team to carry our baggage for the rest of the trip.

Up early the next morning [18 September] and off, passing through several towns, among which were Monrovia, New Market, and Frederick City, and at last halted for the night outside of Frederick.

All the above towns are very pretty places in anything but war times, but now they are used as prisons for rebels, and hospitals for our wounded.

We started early the next morning and...[ended mid-sentence]

Monday, September 22, 1862

Well, I am now about eight miles from where I commenced writing. I will begin where I left off. We started early the next morning [19 September] and were soon crossing the mountains which I think are the Blue Ridge. The scenery is truly splendid but we had but little time to stop and admire it. We stopped for the night about a mile beyond Middletown in a beautiful valley. The next day [20 September] we went through Boonsboro and stopped at noon in Keedysville near the [Antietam] battleground. After resting awhile, I started off to see what might be seen.

The first place I came to was a barn (all the barns and houses around here are used as hospitals) and there I saw Gilman [W.] Laythe wounded through the calf of his leg—not seriously. Henry [Gilbert] Howe wounded likewise. Otis Osgood in the arm between elbow and wrist. He is afraid he will lose his arm. ¹

Passing to another barn I saw it was full of men with arms and legs off. I will not attempt to describe the scene. Some were having legs taken off. The surgeon administers chloroform and then goes to work like a butcher. He is only four minutes to amputating a leg and you can judge how carefully he works.

After leaving the hospitals I went to the battlefield. O God. Pen cannot describe the sight. I can only say that there was about six of the nasty grey-clad cusses dead to our one. They were mowed down in heaps and in windrows some twenty rods long and it is a singular fact that the rebs were all black and awfully bloated. It is said that the cause of this is drinking gunpowder and whiskey before fighting. I think this is very probable for our brave fellows are not found in such a condition. ²

The fight occurred last Wednesday and the line of battle was fifteen miles long. It truly was the most terrific battle on record. Two regiments have been hard at work ever since the fight and not half are yet buried.

The Union boys who are recognized have a slab erected to mark the spot where they are buried but the rebs are planted "unwept, unhonored, and unsung." I could only wish that there were a thousand times as many more of them to be sunk in the earth. I cut some buttons off the dead skunks' coats and have a lot of little relics but I have no means of sending them home. I could relate sights that I saw on that field that make your blood run cold but time will not permit. If ever I see you again, I will give you a full account.

After spending an hour or so on the field, I crossed over to the grounds occupied by the gallant 15th [Massachusetts]. There I saw Henry [A.] Putnam, Archibald Wright, George [T. D.] Putnam, Elisha [G.] Buss and others and from them I learned that Charley [E.] Holbrook was shot dead on the field. [George] Frank Osgood is in one of the hospitals wounded in the arm but not severely.

I could not find the place he was in. I was sorry for H. may wish to see him. Isaac [P.] Connig, who is reported killed around here, is in one of the barns with a bullet in his leg. But I must close.

I commenced this letter in Keedysville but I am finishing it in Sharpsburg about five miles beyond. We are in Gen. Willcox's Brigade and expect to start to cross over into Virginia very soon. ³ I received your letter. I still work for the Captain who is a good friend to me. Keep up good cheer. The death blow to the rebellion is struck and I shall be safe at home in a few months. I am tough and hearty. Write soon.

Your absent son, — Charley

P. S. You must tell Jerome and Mary Ann that I would write to them if I had a moment's time, but we are very busy. This does not hinder them writing to me. They must write. My love to all of you.

Our boys sent home a box of extra clothing to Mr. George Houghton, Feltonville. There was a shirt and a pair of socks for you. He will send them to you. Yours truly
&c. — C

¹ It was Saturday afternoon, September 20th (three days after the battle), when Charley visited the field hospital set up in the barn where he found Gilman W. Laythe, Henry Gilbert Howe, and Otis Sherman Osgood. Charley does not identify the owner of the barn but it was most likely the Widow Hoffman's farm that was located near the Keedysville Road. [See John Banks' Excellent article entitled, Antietam: Echoes from Susan Hoffman Farm hospital] Gilman, Henry, and Otis were all members of Co. C, 15th Massachusetts Infantry and several wounded members of that regiment were known to have been taken to the Hoffman farm. All three soldiers survived their wounds and were discharged for disability from the regiment in 1863.

² The notion that rebels turned black almost immediately after death because they drank a concoction of whiskey and gunpowder was a widely held belief among Union infantrymen. Scholarly articles have dispelled this theory. It is reported that the stage at which a corpse becomes discolored and bloated and releases a foul stench occurs three or four days after the time of death. Discoloration may occur earlier depending on the weather. For example, in the days following the Battle of Antietam, the weather was warm and it rained the night before the battle, possibly leading to a faster decomposition. [See The Civil War Diet by Matthew Brennan]

³ Once the 36th Massachusetts arrived in Sharpsburg, they encamped near Gen. Burnside's headquarters just beyond the village. It was here that they were assigned to the Third Brigade of the First Division of the Ninth Corps. The brigade consisted of the 45th and 100th Pennsylvania regiments. Col. Welch of the 45th Pennsylvania, commanded the brigade and General Orlando Bolivar Willcox, commanded the division.

Bio of Charles Henry Howe

Born on 4 May 1845 in Lancaster, Massachusetts. He was the son of Ebenezer Wilson Howe (1817-1885) and Sarah Ann Blanchard (1823-Aft1900) of Clinton, Worcester, Massachusetts. Charley begged his parents to let him enlist, and when they finally consented, he enlisted on 15 August 1862 in Co. I, 36th Massachusetts Infantry.

In Rutledge, East Tennessee, during the pursuit of Longstreet, after the siege of Knoxville, the foraging group of nine Charley took part in was captured by Confederates all of the prisoners were sent to Andersonville Prison in Georgia where all of them died except 1 who survived and was paroled a year later. Charles Howe died on 27 August 1864 and was buried at Andersonville.