

Letter written by Lucius E. Bidwell, 14th Connecticut Infantry, on the Battle of Morton's Ford in February 1864. Bidwell's account gives a glimpse into an action that is often overlooked. Transcription and images from auction site Museum Quality Americana,

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In Camp on North side of Rapadan, Feb. 7th, 64

My Dear Mother:

Our heavenly father has again saved your son Lucius safely through another battle and one of the worst kinds of a battle too. It was a night fight. Yesterday morning about 5 o'clock we were routed out of our beds with the orders to pack up and fall in. We took up our line of march for the River Rapadan at about 9 o'clock in morning and reached the River about an hour after. We crossed the Rapadan about noon by fording it. We had to ford it, it was up to most our breasts and it is a very rapid stream so much so that if we had accidentally slipped we would have been carried down stream and stood a good chance of finding our graves at the bottom there. But as far as I know there was no accident of the kind happened only now and then one would slip as he was crawling up the opposite bank which was very steep. But no serious harm was done to my knowledge but giving them a good dunking and wetting their cartridges.

The water was very cold it makes a fellow's feet and legs ache I tell you. But go it we must, we must follow our leaders through fire and water. The Regt known as the Garibaldi's Guards a New York Regt composed of Dutch, Irish and Italians refused to wade because they said it was too deep, but Gen Hays knowing of it just jumps from his horse without saying a word and left his horse this side of river and waded across to the other side picking out good footing and then waded back after his horse. They saw that he got over safe so they finally plunged in and arrived safe on the other side. I tell you what he is a regular tiger. I suppose you have heard of him before, he is in Command of our Division and goes by the name of Fighting Alick. He rides along the lines of skirmishers with his hat in his hand cheering on the men crying, Give them hell boys, give them hell. O he is an old tiger, he is most always a little tight when there is fighting going on and then he is in his glory. He thinks the Old 14th is about right. He is always praising us up. He was with us in the thickest of the fight crying out give em hell 14th, Bully for you, Bully for you, go in boys, go in 14th and so on – the balls flying around his head like hailstones without flinching in the least. He is a regular dare devil.

We marched to a hollow facing the Rebel Breastworks and remained there until about 5 o'clock within Rifle Shot of their Rifle Pits. They sent a few shells over to us but most of them passed over harmless, but two or three took effect killing three or four and wounding several. They only fired several shot when it was ascertained that the Rebs had a very strong line of Skirmishers or I should say a solid line of battle

advancing on us. We were ordered to advance, the bully 14th taking the lead and charged on at a double quick time. They met us half way and poured an everlasting fire into us which caused us to wave for a moment and with a deafening yell we made a rush pouring a volley of blue pills into them which they won't soon forget and put them to flight and drove them to their rifle pits.

By this time it was dark as pitch, we could not see our foes until we met them face to face. Some rushed at one another and knocked each others brains out with the butt of the muskets. We were fighting in squads most of the night, each man for himself.

Comp B and G were to the left and met a strong party of Rebs skirmishers but we charged on them with our little rifles and with deafening yells we loaded and fired and drove them back to their rifle pits. We then skulked under the cover of the darkness to within a few rods of their rifle pits and then popped away at them until we were sent for to go and support our boys on the right, for the Rebs were trying to flank us.

We went at a double quick over fences over ditches, we charged on a cluster of two or three houses which were full of Rebels. They swarmed in great numbers around the building firing from the windows and around the corners and out houses, but we made a rush on them driving them like sheep dragging their wounded along with them. The houses were full of them. We and several others smashed in the doors which were closed and fastened, we rushed in and some of the Rebs grappled with us. But we soon overpowered but strange to say we only succeeded in taking but one prisoner. They made their escape out of the windows before we were aware of it. They then retired behind their breastworks and we stretched out a long line of picket and remained so until we were relieved about one o'clock in the morning by 1st Division and recrossed the Rapadan on a sort of a bridge which was built for us. The rest of the troops recrossed the River again soon after.

The Rebs never molested them. After we left, it was a daring undertaking in leading just this division over there into such a nest. I don't see why we were not all captured, for we only numbered about three thousand men, but it must be that the Rebs did not know how strong we were after dark or they must have come down on us in a strong body and drove us into the River and cut us all to pieces. But we got off very well after all.

I think the Rebs felt the weight of our bullets before we parted with them. We had no artillery to support us on that side the River, we all alone with only our rifles. I don't know the exact number of killed and wounded yet. They say we must have lost over one hundred. Our Color Sergeants body was brought into camp and buried by the Regt with the band. He was a noble fellow and fell doing his duty. One of my tent mates a fine young man was shot through breast, it is thought, he will die. He is a sailor and a native of Germany. I thought a great deal of him. He was carried to Washington, his name is Harrison.

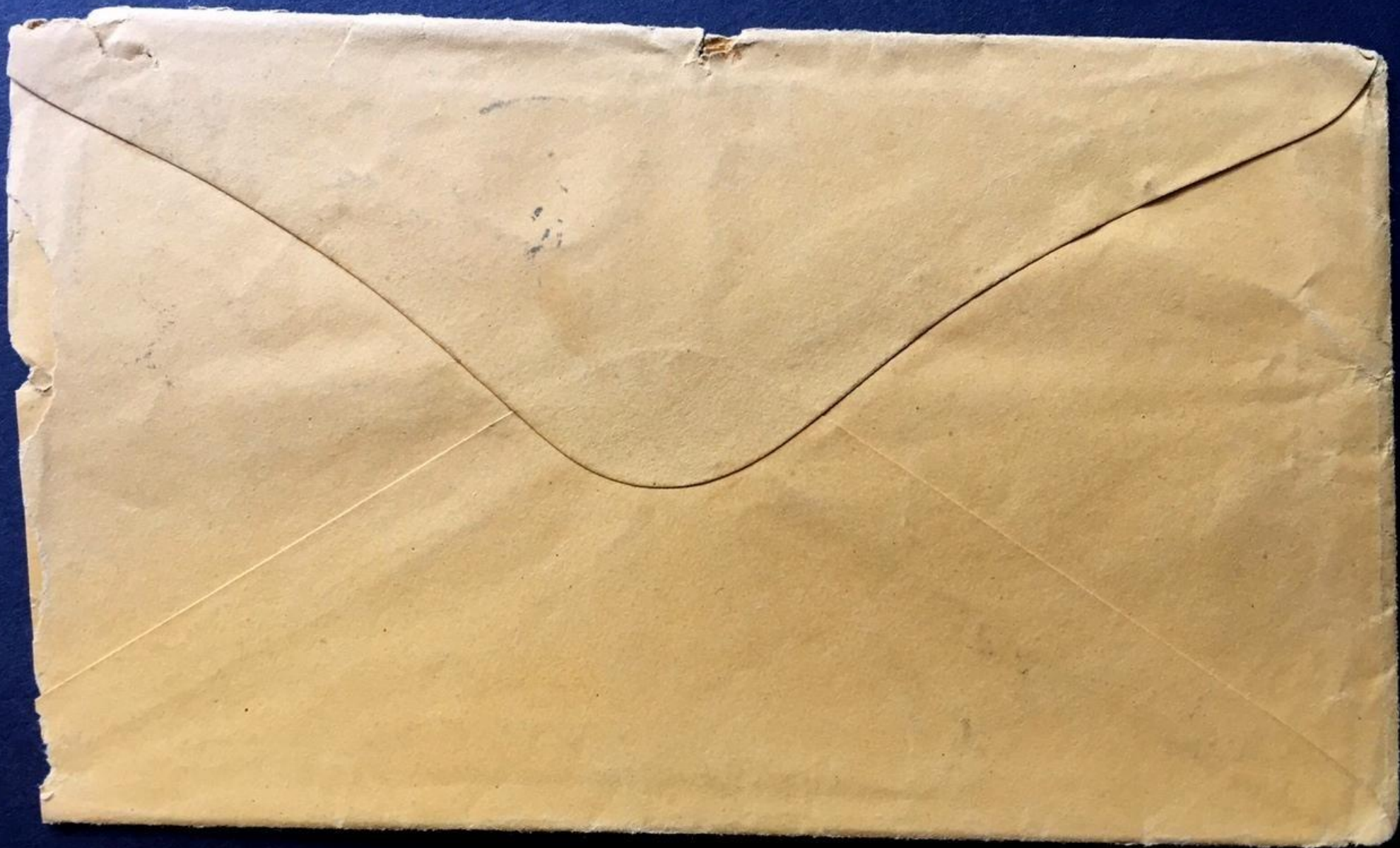
James Inglis was hit in the leg and a man by the name of Weeks in our Comp and another German was shot through the head named Steinheil and another tent mate of mine was slightly hurt in the ankle. Our Major was slightly wounded in leg. Capt John Broatch I hear, had his finger shot off but I have not seen him yet. I hear he is detailed to go after recruits but I don't know how true it is. I must stop for room. Lieut Russell is all right. He was very brave during the fight. I will write more soon.

So I will bid you good bye for the present and subscribe myself your affectionate son, L.E.B.

P.S. Since I began this we have returned to our old camp, after being on picket 24 hours after we arrived from the fight. McClusky is unhurt and very well and sends his respects to you and all. Tell Mrs. Rogers that I guess she will have the pleasure of beholding us again after all. Give all the neighbors our love.



Mrs Mary M Bidwell
Middletown
Connecticut



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and Camp on North side of Rapadon Feb 7, 44

My

Dear Mother

our heavenly father has
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yesterday morning about 3 o'clock we were
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^{his name is Harrison} James Ingle was hit in the leg
and a man by the name of
Wicks in our camp, and another
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mate of mine was slightly hurt in
the ankle, our Major was slightly
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