

Letter From Cruikshank, Robert written Friday, July 3rd, 1863

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Soldier: Cruikshank, Robert

Allegiance: Union

Unit/Service Branch: 123rd Infantry

Date Written: Friday, July 3rd, 1863

Location: Gettysburg, PA

Correspondence Type: Letter

Subjects: Battlefield, Combat Description, Daily Life, On the March, Strategy, Tactics, Warfare, Wife/Girlfriend

This morning Colonel McDougall with the regimental commanders of the Brigade, began to reconnoiter and consider how the Brigade could get in possession of their works again. He ordered the 20th Conn. out as skirmishers, who were supported by a battery on a hill about half a mile back of them. This regiment skirmished nearly all of the forenoon, the battery keeping up a firing. The battery had to throw their shells close to our heads and for some cause some of the shell exploded back of us which killed and wounded some of the men in the 46th Penn. Vols. who were at our right. Colonel Selfridge came to Colonel McDougall saying with an oath, at the same time drawing his revolver, that he was going to see the officer in command of that battery and if another shell fell short he would shoot the Rebel gunner. There were no more shell exploded behind us after the Colonel had seen the officer. The fuse of the shell had been cut too short for the distance.

About eleven o'clock Colonel McDougall came to Major Rogers and told him that he wanted him to take the 123rd Regiment and charge and retake the works and he would have the rest of the Brigade support him. About noon we were formed behind the 20th Conn., all ready for the charge. The battery on the hill began to use every gun throwing shell into the enemy's line in front of us. We advanced into the woods and in the rear of the 20th Conn. where we could see our works, when the order came to charge. The men began to cheer and run forward, firing as they advanced, bayonets fixed. The battery ceased firing. On we went over the dead and wounded; the enemy falling back, we soon reached our works and held them. The rest of the Brigade advanced and took their old places in the line and the gap from Spangle's Spring closed.

The men commenced at once to face the works to the enemy, as they had faced them toward us when they had taken possession of them. The brush was soon on the other side and the ditch cleared of earth, and videttes sent out to watch and see if the enemy came on to us again. There had been hard fighting here; the dead lay on the ground all along the line.

After we had retaken the works there was no firing along the whole line until one o'clock when the enemy all at once, as by the signal of one gun, opened fire with their artillery and were quickly replied to by our artillery. This firing continued for two hours. It is said that the enemy had one hundred and fifty pieces, and we had full as many more, which made upwards of three hundred pieces of artillery all firing at one time with as many shells exploding. Such a terrific roar, flying of broken shell, splinters of torn trees, were never heard or seen before and probably never will again. The artillery fire ceased about as suddenly as it began and then there was one continuous roar of musketry along the whole line for two hours longer.

About four o'clock the enemy were pressing hard the line at the left of the cemetery and we were ordered out to support it. We moved to the right across the creek and were going up the hill when a sharpshooter's ball struck Captain Norman F. Weer of Company E, in the knee, opening the joint. His cry of pain was heard above every other noise. When we reached the left of the cemetery the enemy had been repulsed and were falling back, so we were ordered back to our old position.

From the time of our return until dark there would be an occasional roll of musketry and then all would be quiet except now and then a musket shot. After dark there was but little firing until about midnight. It was so quiet I told Lieutenant Culver (he being in command of the Company, Captain Crary having been taken sick the first day of the fight and we not having seen him since) that I would take off my shoes and sword belt and lie down on my rubber blanket and get some rest. I had not had my shoes or belt off for three days and nights. I had lain but a short time when Culver came and lay on the blanket beside me and soon was sound asleep. The men had also fallen asleep. I was just dropping into a slumber when I heard a single shot away to the right, then all at once it came rolling down the line. The videttes in front of the Regiment began to fire. I sprang to my feet, calling our men to fall in. I did not take time to put on my shoes, coat or belt, but caught my sword and in a minute had the men in line behind our works and they began to fire before our videttes could get in. I got them checked after firing two rounds. As soon as the men had ceased firing the videttes came in, closely followed by a number of the enemy. I asked them what they had been trying to do. They said they thought we were so worn by fatigue that we had fallen asleep and they had an order to steal upon us and surprise us, that they had crawled so close to us that when the firing began they could not get back and thought they had best come in, - that they could never catch a Yankee napping. There was a large force back of them ready to charge and turn our right wing if they had succeeded in capturing us or driving us back. This was their last hope. Lieutenant Culver slept through it all. I did not lie down again but kept a good lookout for fear the enemy might come on to us again

before daylight came.