

# Letter From Norton, O. W. written Wednesday, November 11th, 1863

Generated on May 31st, 2020 3:42 PM from SoldierStudies.org

Soldier: Norton, O. W.

Allegiance: Union

Unit/Service Branch: 83rd Infantry

Date Written: Wednesday, November 11th, 1863

Location: Kelly's Ford,

Correspondence Type: Letter

Subjects: Camp Life, Commanders, Comrades, Eastern Theater, Family, Politics, Warfare

Headquarters Third Brigade,

Dear Sister L. : —

I have another name to put on my battle pin ( when I get it), that of "Rappahannock Station, November 8th." Soldiers have a fashion of counting up their battles, with an honest pride when they reach a certain number, and I will count up mine and then tell you a little about the last. Hanover Court House, a battle then, a skirmish now, Mechanicsville, Games' Mill, which no one calls less than a battle even now, Savage Station, White Oak Swamp, Glendale, Malvern Hill, then the greatest battle of America, Second Bull Run, Antietam, Shepherdstown Ford, Fredericksburg, the slaughter pen, skirmish at Richards' Ford, Chancellorsville, Loudon Valley, Gettysburg. Jones' Cross Roads, and Rappahannock Station.

Quite a little list, and as I have always been there when the Third Brigade has, I do not feel ashamed of my record. About four o'clock last Saturday morning the reveille sounded and in half an hour the camps of our division were all astir, brilliant with fires, bristling with preparation for the march at daylight. Daylight came and we began the march toward the river. The day was cold and windy and very dusty, but we marched rapidly and by noon we reached the rebel pickets, or our advance discovered them a mile from the river. We halted for an hour or two, while the generals made their dispositions, and then formed in line. Our division came next to the railroad, on the south of it. On the other side was the Sixth Corps, Second Division of the Fifth Corps on our left and Third Division in reserve. At 2 :30 p. m. the line advanced. The skirmishers soon ran on to a cavalry picket and fired, and the way the rebs did "git" over the little hill was a warning to slow horses. We advanced steadily and soon came to a line of rebel skirmishers thrown out to meet us. They fired and fell back and soon the artillery opened on our line, but oh, such firing ! Shells burst all around and over us, but hardly one in the right place. On our side of the river just above the railroad was a fort mounting six or seven guns and the opposite bank of the river was bristling with field batteries. Griffin's battery (our favorite) got into position to send a message to the nearest fort and our skirmishers advanced. The rebs opened on them and the aforesaid pet opened on the rebs, and over the rampart went our boys and out went the rebs. Some of them jumped into the river up to their necks, but they had to come back. The result was sixty-five men and five officers prisoners, and seven guns (all in the fort). The paper states that the Sixth Corps took the fort. It may be so, but men who were the first in say that only one sergeant and one officer from the Sixth were there, and I know that the Eighty-third and Forty-fourth took the prisoners, because I saw and counted them myself and heard

Colonel Connor's report when he brought them to Colonel Chamberlain.

Well, that was about all of it. It was after sundown when the fort was taken and we could not cross the river till morning. Our casualties were very small, twenty killed and wounded in the brigade, three wounded and none killed in the Eighty-third.

We went back into the woods to bivouac. No fires were allowed, but a good many were made, nevertheless, and I made out to get a cup of coffee. I tied my horse to a fallen tree and lay down close by him, and the rascal kept me awake half the night. He pulled my haversack out from under my head, pulled my blankets off, and once I woke and found him with my bugle in his mouth chewing the tassel.

By daylight we were on the move down the river to Kelly's Ford, crossed on pontoons and back into the country three miles and bivouacked. Monday we lay all day in bivouac and at sundown got up and came back this side the river. Our First Division did. The rest of the corps remained. We had big times that night for fires. We had no wood, camped on a plain where there had been an old camp, and not a stake for our horses or stick to burn could we find. The wind blew furiously and it began to snow. The mounted orderlies and I after unsaddling put out and finally found a pole thirty feet long half a mile away. We took that, carried it up and laid it on the ground to tie to. The other boys had got some brush afire and we got coffee and lay down. That night it snowed an inch deep on our blankets. Next morning we moved back into the woods, where we are now and expect to stay a few days to watch guerrillas.

I have heard nothing from the War Department yet. Begin to think I am rejected. Write again soon.