History Lost and Found:

Diary of CDM Broomhall, 124th Pennsylvania,

By Carolyn Ivanoff

The Cover of Sgt Broomhall's Diary

The following is an excerpt of the diary of Charles D. M. Broomhall, 1st Sergeant, Company D, 124th Pennsylvania Volunteers detailing his experiences at the battle of Antietam.

The diary was found in Milford, CT in 1989 by the Janes family. The diary was signed only by the four initials "C.D.M.B.", along with the soldier's rank and company. It was written in a composition booklet similar to the blue exam booklets used today for college essays, measuring approximately 8-1/2 by 6-3/4 inches. It was bound by thread that had been broken or rotted, and some of the pages were out of order. The diary was written in ink, and may have been recopied by the Sergeant, perhaps from a soldier's diary that would have been more easily carried in the field.

There are more details about the diary and its history following the diary text.

Sergeant Broomhall had been ill during the march from Rockville, MD which began on the 7th of September. The 124th did not participate in the battle of South Mountain, but marched over the battlefield the next day on their way to the North Woods and Miller's Cornfield at Antietam. Below, beginning with his entry for September 14, are his words with only a few obvious corrections.
September 14 [1862]

South Mountain battle was fought. Sunday. Somewhat cloudy. We were up early. Colonel put Captain__________ under arrest for going into Frederick yesterday taking a number of his men with him and imbibing at the spirit fountain too much, leaving the command, etc. Marched at 7 a.m. through the town and halted by the side of the turnpike for two or three hours. We were treated very kindly by the citizens. The rebels had left the day before. Stonewall Jackson attended church here just one week ago today. We marched over a most circuitous, rough, hilly road. We heard artillery firing at Harpers Ferry and South Mountain, Turner's Gap were fighting was in progress. About 3 p.m. we came out of the woods on top of a high hill about five miles from Turner's Gap and could see the artillery on our side at work and the last of our lines going into the woods that covered the mountain side. Shells were bursting over the top of the mountain. Cloudy. We had such a round about road, through the fields mostly, that it was 1 or 2 o'clock in the night before we reached the foot of the mountain and there only in squads. I had about a dozen with me in the morning. We slept by the roadside at the bridges over the creek. Artillery passing on up toward morning. Gen. Crawford nearly rode over us in the night. Beautiful and moonlight.

September 15

Got up about 4. John Pugh had coffee cooked and we were ready to start, wondering which way we would go, when our regiment hove in sight, turned into a field alongside of the road, stacked arms with orders to get breakfast, so we had another coffee. We were at the foot of the mountain on which the fighting was done yesterday and a lot of wounded rebel prisoners were being cared for close by. When we first got up in the morning a man came out of a house close by. We asked him were the battleground was, he said, "you are on it now. Plenty of shells flew over my house yesterday." We marched again about 9 o'clock through the mountain gap to Boonsboro, where we arrived about 3 p.m. Gen. McClellan passed us about 2 p.m. The troops cheered him all along the road. Saw many wounded rebels and some who were not wounded. We took the left hand road at Boonsboro and marched until near sunset. The army was being drawn together. Gen. Reno was killed yesterday. Burnside, Reno and Cox were engaged. Penna. Reserves were in it. They left Frederick about the time we started but must have marched as far and doubled as they did.

September 16

We started about 9 o'clock and rations short. Marched about 2 miles, came up near Antietam Creek in site of artillery firing on the Rebels. Shells bursting 100 feet up in the air. Our folks were feeling Lee's position. We halted about 11 a.m. Old Gen. Mansfield, with his white hair and beard came up. We got dinner. Remained here all afternoon. Butchered in the evening after dark. Had two bullocks assigned to the regiment. One escaped in the darkness while the boys were trying to drive him up. They ran him out into the fields and soon returned with one, but it was some farmer's bull - bang went the rifle and down dropped bull; scarcely anybody noticed his head, but I laughed out, but he was soon divided around. Fred Eckfeldt and I went up the hill above us to witness the artillery duel, but we were ordered back out of range. I found $15 of Confederate money in the afternoon. Gave it to Chriss Wall. After we lay down, Gen William's Division, to which we belonged, was ordered around to Hooker across the Antietam. We lay down about 11 ? o'clock for the night along with thousands of others who were unconsciously taking their last earthly repose. Sorrowful to contemplate it. We could hear a solitary picket shot once and awhile during the night.

September 17

At the first dawn of the day the pickets commenced firing. The Penna Reserves division opened on our side as soon as it was light. The firing became very sharp and in a few moments it increased until quite a line was
engaged and a solitary piece of artillery banged, and the great battle of Antietam had commenced. The Penna. Reserve Division under Mead occupied a long strip of open wood land in front of which running from N.E. to South West was first an open field and then a large cornfield much spoken of afterwards. In this cornfield the rebels had deployed during the night. Opposite to the southern end of this woods, and across this cornfield, was another woods, the Hagerstown Pike ran between the cornfield and Western Woods, and continued down through Sharpsburg, one mile from the Southern end of this cornfield. Also opposite to the Southern end of the cornfield is the Dunker Church. The rebel line of battle was along this pike or in front of it in the cornfield. At the commencement of the battle at day dawn, our boys had been listening to the stray shots on the edge of the 1st named woods called the East Woods, the rebels had come through the corn and deployed pickets on the edge of the East Woods. Our pickets were deployed in the edge of this woods, consequently, at daylight the two picket lines found themselves face to face and that caused the suddenness of the onset. Our regiment was about æ of a mile to the right and rear, and our regiment was brought up to near the clear sod field first spoken of while shot and shell went fluttering over our heads like partridges for sound. We were soon formed in line of battle at right angles to the turnpike and also at right angles to the lines which were doing the fighting, about 700 yards distant. A good number of wounded were now passing to the rear and this was the first sight of battle we had seen and the blood also, and it shook the nerves of some of the boys. The shells crashing through the trees and fluttering overhead as well as the musketry in advance of the left, all contributed to mark the time, and place, fixed in one's memory forever. We now advanced to the edge of the cleared field adjoining the cornfield. There we halted for a few minutes, our right resting on or a little across the pike and in a small grove. Here old Gen. Mansfield rode up to Gen Crawford who was within a few feet of me, and told him to hold this woods as we were hard pressed on the center. Fine old man that was the last I ever saw of him, as he was shot a few moments after, but we advanced with fixed bayonets across this open field on the cornfield, with a great hurrah, and as our regiment was a large one compared with those of a year old, the rebels got out of that corn in a hurry across the fire into a field near J. [sic - CDMB must mean D.R.] Miller's barn and into the woods a little further to the South, but they had been roughly handled before we got to this part of the field we now advanced into this cornfield and were halted. Our company was among the rebel wounded. We got the order to lie down. I was so close to the rebel wounded, one in particular, that I had to separate myself from the company. One man was moaning and asking for water. Ben Green gave him some, had to pour it down him. I hadn't a drop in my canteen. The poor fellow said he was from South Carolina and had been forced into the war. He died while we laid there. It was in this corn at this time that Col. Hawley was wounded. A battery was stationed near the edge of this corn and near the barn, by the Rebs early in the morning, but had been withdrawn a ? mile westward to a hill. This battery was now on our right flank, and firing and came near raking our whole line, one shot to my knowledge passed a few feet above my head and struck the ground, then ricocheted, parallel with and about 3 feet in rear of the whole line. It would have played havoc if it had struck either rank. Scarcely any one noticed it. We were now ordered to fall back on the center a little, and three companies were pushed across the pike close West of Miller's barn, by which side stood three stacks of hay and wheat in a clover field, sloping off the western woods which had retired from the pike in the shape of an ell. Our companies in the clover field now advanced toward the woods; the land at the edge of the woods was hidden by a swell in the ground near the barn. We quickly found that the rebels were in the woods for they opened on us and we lay down in the clover and returned their fire. They were behind rails and everything they could put up, while we were out in the open field. Our men were not going to stand that so a great portion got up, dusted back behind the raise in the ground. All hands had been ordered to throw off their blankets by the barn, but I had not heard it and consequently had mine on my shoulder. After the captain run the gauntlet safely over this field, going back, I tried it with safety. As I was going back a couple of men hallowed me to help with Wm. Bittle who was shot through the leg. I threw off my blankets, the rubber and woolen, and unrolled them, and found 16 bullet holes through the rubber and 22 through the woolen one. They had been rolled up one inside the other, then the ends fastened together and hung on my neck and shoulder, and one bullet had passed through both ends. We put Bittle in one. I rolled up his pants and found the bullet sticking in his pants after going through the leg. We carried him off to the hospital and put him in an ambulance. J. [sic] Miller's house was used as a temporary hospital although it was right under the mouths of our guns and they and that rebel battery had an artillery duel at the time, and the pieces of shell were flying all around there. George Miller was brought there, he was walking although shot through the body below the ribs. I tried to bathe his wounds but being out on the ground and he sitting up I
September 18

All was bustle and hurrying getting something to eat in the morning, bright and clear. We lay quiet all day wondering why fighting was not commenced. The field was strewn with guns, blankets, haversacks, canteens, dead men and dead horses. I was over the part we occupied at first, before the sun set last evening and got hard tack, coffee, a blanket, a canteen, in fact Joel Hollingsworth (corporal) and I laid in a supply. A little thunder shower of rain came up about 5 p.m. while I was at a spring getting water at a spring near the ground.

September 19

Above: Alexander Gardner's stereo photograph #561, in the Library of Congress, is of a burial party on the Miller Farm adjoining the Hagerstown Pike. According to William Frassanito's magnificent photographic study of the battle, this photograph was taken on September 19. "...the three bodies to the left that are not covered by blankets, indicates they were Northerners. Many Federal units suffered casualties on this ground ... including three companies of the 124th Pennsylvania Volunteers." (Frassanito, pp. 144-147)
We kept the same position in the East Woods until some time in the fore noon we got orders to move out to the front more. It was now ascertained that the rebels had gone. That they had gone to the river and crossed yesterday and last night. I was directed to take forty men and assist in burying the dead. It took the men out. It was very clear and warm, but I could not find tools to work with and left the men on the fence along the pike and I roamed over the field for picks and spades. First directed to report to this general, then to that battery and then somewhere else until I gave it up, but I got a good view of the battlefield and the terrible havoc wrought on the armies. The Rebs pretended to bury their dead but they buried so some said 500. There were a great many left unburied and where they were exposed to the sun they were as black as darkies. We returned and as we came in we met the brigade coming out onto the pike on the way to Maryland Heights. It was 4 p.m. and we had not had dinner. The Adjutant told me which way to follow. I heard some heavy firing over the Potomac, where our men were making a recognizance [sic] after the enemy. We got our suppers and followed after, and what a march we had. I undertook to carry Joel Watson's gun as he complained of his back being struck by a nail yesterday, and I liked to have given out with my load. We had one man mortally and six others variously wounded yesterday. Quite a number of people came down from Pennsylvania to see the battlefield. A number were emergency men from 6 to 8 miles back, and who ran off from their free and easy commanders and who had but little knowledge of the discipline required in times of war. Dr. Vernon was one of them who came with Dan McClintock. Some from West Chester. Some of our wounded were shipped direct to Harrisburg and Junes[?] Brooke got them off with the aid of Fred Fairlamb to Chester Hospital. On our march tonight we passed through Sharpsburg, across Burnside's bridge and about 8 or nine miles to Brownsville where we stopped and lay down to rest. I had caught up with our company long before this. When I caught up to them they were as lively as a set of crickets. Laying by the roadside, fires lighted, cracking jokes, etc. We passed through Rogersville and through the mountains.

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History of the Diary

The Janes family of Milford, Connecticut, found this diary among their deceased father's papers, but they had no idea where the diary came from or why it was in their father's possession. After it was found the diary's author remained a mystery to the family who held it. After they referred the diary to me in 1995, I located Charles D. M. Broomhall's identity through his pension records in the National Archives. Then I put the project away because of the demands of my job. I took it up again in 2003.

Discovering Charles D. M. Broomhall

The handwriting seems to be his based on the small amount of his handwriting located in the pension records. To my knowledge none of this man's writings have been published before, and the diary's existence was basically unknown since Broomhall's death.

I had a strong "impression" (but no substantial evidence) while transcribing the diary that it had been recopied by CDMB from perhaps a soldier's diary that would have been more easily carried throughout his service. Where that original book is, if he did indeed recopy the original, remains a mystery as does so much surrounding this man.

He seems to have vanished from the historical record except as a name on regimental rosters appearing in such sources as Bates' History of Pennsylvania Volunteers. His identity is noted briefly in passing in such sources as Ashmead and the Broomall genealogical records maintained by distant cousins who have graciously shared what little information they have about him.

CDMB's writing and descriptions are prosaic. His handwriting is neat and legible, he spelled accurately, his observations were hardly ever emotional, and he rarely mentioned religion. Nor does he indulge in any
descriptions of what motivated him to enlist and fight. His narrative describes the facts of the battle as he saw or knew them. He takes an almost Joe Friday approach to giving "just the facts" as accurately as he is able.

This is what he saw, did, and heard, and it is accurate from his personal experience. The diary seems to align well with other sources about the battle and the role of the 124th Pennsylvania Volunteers (i.e., Priest, Frassanito, Bates, Dyer, and the OR).

I have transcribed his writing as closely as possible and have checked the spelling of the names he writes wherever possible in the regimental roster. The spelling of civilian names, especially where CDMB's writing is difficult to decipher, and the names cannot be checked easily, are my best guess.

Throughout his nine months of service he consistently kept his diary. He must have felt something compelling about his army service to record not only the important happenings, but the day to day routine of Army life that makes up the bulk of the diary. Why or who he wrote for so consistently remains a mystery. He was orphaned as a very young boy, and he died a bachelor in a boarding house in 1902 in Media, PA. However, in these few diary excerpts about the Battle of Antietam, today's reader is able to achieve a clear picture of what Charles D. M. Broomhall, an Everyman in the Army of the Potomac and a member of the 124th Pennsylvania Volunteers, faced directly before, during, and after America's bloodiest day.

The Diary Project Continues

Though I have been able to piece together parts of CDMB's life, I have been unable to locate a photograph of him. I keep trying. In the meantime, I would like to think that he is part of the burial party in Gardner's photograph above, or perhaps his labor is represented there, because I want some tangible form to give to his name. CDMB and his experiences were lost and now I hope they have been found.

My hope is that this excerpt will bring more information to light. My ultimate goal is a project that presents CDMB's diary in its entirety, using photographs from public archives among its entries, (along with commentary) so that readers can experience the life of this nine-month volunteer, this citizen soldier and "everyman" of the Army of the Potomac not only through his own words, but by viewing the places and sites he saw and wrote about during his service using contemporary photographs of the war. It is my goal with this article and diary excerpt to help others who are interested in the experiences of the common soldier in the battle of Antietam. Perhaps readers will view the day of September 17, 1862 through a different lens, a lens that has been lost for a very long time.

Citizen soldiers like Charles D. M. Broomhall have passed. They are gone but they are not forgotten. "Generations that they knew not and that know not of them" are grateful to remember their sacrifices and to preserve their memories. We must never forget, and we must strive to understand.

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I would like to thank the Janes Family of Shelton, CT who referred the diary to me and have allowed me the privilege of researching it and using it for this article. They have been patient and gracious about my phone calls and inquiries, and appreciative of any answers I have found regarding their questions about the diary. -- C.I.
Bibliography and References


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Antietam on the Web  ::  Home | Overview | Battle Maps | Participants | ORs | Gallery | Exhibits | Sources

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Lost On April 4, 1943, a B-24D Liberator nicknamed Lady Be Good took off from Soluch, an airstrip located near Bengazi, Libya, for what would be her first and final mission. During that fateful trip, Lady Be Good carried nine members of the 514th Squadron, 376th Bomb Group, 9th Air Force. Their names: 1st Lieutenant\ldots By the end of WWII, the loss of Lady Be Good remained a mystery. Her story was not necessarily unique, as she was just one of many aircraft and crew to go missing during the war. However, unlike others to go missing, the story of Lady Be Good and her crew would eventually be pieced together. Found.