

Elkhorn Tavern, Arkansas
Evening, March 8 1862

Dearest Mother,

I know delivery of this message to you is uncertain, but despite difficulties that will become evident, I shall not renege on my promise to communicate at least once a fortnight. Billy's last note said you might let him join as a drummer boy. Hold firm. He is too young for this horror.

We have seen considerable action since I last wrote. Our boys are worse for it, but not as bad off as the rebels. Oh Mother, your heart would ache for such a ragtag collection of men. Many were shoeless; bloody footprints marking their steps. They tried to capture our supply train by a flanking maneuver. The colonel countered with a brisk charge into the woods in which I now rest. The ululation of the rebel call as they countercharged will remain with me always.

When they overran our position, one stepped beside me and, in an act of Christian charity, I donated my boots. The scarecrow on the farm has more meat than most of their troops. I would have emptied my haversack to feed them, but it was pinned beneath me.

In the quiet after the fight I observed the breeze rattle the branches sounding like distant musketry fire. Above, a rough legged hawk cruised for dinner. You told me they do not eat carrion, so perforce I sent it on its way.

Hug Grandma for me.

Forever your loving son,
Sergeant Thomas Breitling
9th Iowa Infantry

The Message
By James Montgomery Jackson

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