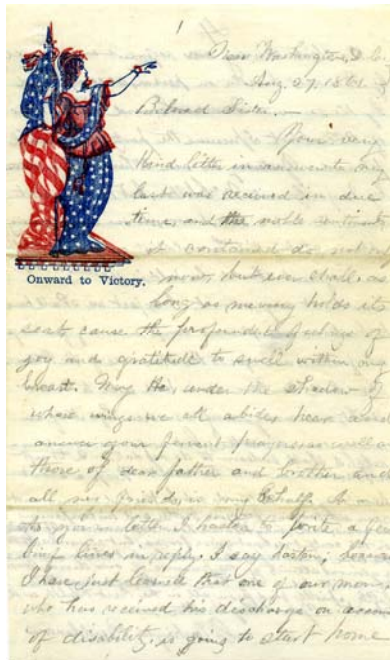


Guide to the George Washington Beidelman Collection



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections & College Archives

Processed by Kevin Luy
April 2002

MS – 043: George Washington Beidelman Collection

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Provenance: Purchased June 2001 from Charles Apfelbaum

Biography:

George Washington Beidelman was born in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania on March 26, 1839 and raised there by his mother and father, Jacob Beidelman, a local lawyer and businessman. George's first known employment was with the *Star*, a Bloomsburg newspaper. Feeling he had learned all he could there, he moved to Norristown, Pennsylvania to apprentice under the printer of the newspaper, the *Watchman*. Around 1858, he relocated to Philadelphia where he worked as a bellman and salesman. Unable to find a suitable position, he placed himself under the tutelage of Charles T. Bonsall, a Philadelphia lawyer, in March of 1861.

On May 21, 1861, he enlisted as a private in Company C of the 71st Pennsylvania Volunteers and remained a private for the duration of his service. George trained at Fort Shuyler near New York City, and then camped near Washington, D.C. and Fort Monroe. George experienced his first gunfire when his regiment crossed the Potomac in September of 1861. Sickness and a subsequent trip to the hospital kept him out of the 71st Pennsylvania's first battle at Ball's Bluff, Maryland. When he returned to the regiment, he marched up the Peninsula, but saw no action. His first battle experience came immediately following the Battle of Fredericksburg, when his unit was attacked while on picket duty in late December 1862.

George also saw action at the Battle of Gettysburg. He was shot in the right leg during the fight and was sent to a hospital in Philadelphia. While recovering from this injury, he was ordered to Chelton Hills, Pennsylvania, where he worked for the Quartermaster and Commissary Department and later worked in the adjutant's office. He died March 14, 1864 after contracting typhoid pneumonia.

George's regiment, the 71st Pennsylvania (nicknamed the "California Regiment"), was recruited predominately from the Philadelphia area by Senator Edward Baker. The Oregon Senator was commissioned by President Lincoln to recruit a regiment and was the unit's first Colonel. Originally the regiment mustered in both Pennsylvanians and New Yorkers and was treated like a regiment in the regular army. It was not until after the unit's first major fighting at Ball's Bluff that it was officially recognized as a Pennsylvania unit.

The 71st participated in many significant battles from the war's beginning to its end. In its first engagement, Ball's Bluff, it suffered a devastating defeat, losing about sixty percent of its men. In 1862, the regiment fought in the Battle of Fair Oaks, the Seven

Days Battle and the Battle of Antietam. That year's final conflict was Fredericksburg, where the 71st was forcefully attacked while positioned at the extreme front of the Union line where they again suffered heavy casualties. The unit was present at the Battle of Gettysburg, situated in close proximity on the Angle on the battle's third day, and fought in the Wilderness and Cold Harbor. The 71st Pennsylvania was mustered out of service on July 2, 1864.

Scope and Content Notes:

The George W. Beidelman Collection holds its most significant information in letters written by George to his father, Jacob. In these letters, George shares his political opinions, religious beliefs, and camp-life descriptions. The core of the collection is the correspondence from August 1, 1862 until November 18, 1862, in which George writes diary-like entries to his father, recounting each day's activities. Accounts of the fighting at Ball's Bluff and Fredericksburg are the most detailed battle descriptions. However, the collection's strength is in George's astute observations regarding camp life and the political aspects of the war.

In addition to letters written by George to his father, the collection includes letters to George from his father, brother, friends and fellow soldiers; various Army and United States Government documents pertaining mostly to George's death; a newspaper clipping of a letter to the editor written by George; and the creative writings of George.

The collection is arranged chronologically with the bulk of the material being from 1860-1864.

Box/Folder

1/1	1841-1858	5 ALS. Norristown: political/physical description of Norristown, apprenticeship, 1857 snowstorm, "Kansas question."
1/2	1/10/60-3/29/61	5 ALS. 1126 Girard St.: religious atmosphere, Harper's Ferry incident, 1860 election politics.
1/3	5/15/61-6/26/61	5 ALS. Ft. Shuyler, New York: motivation to enlist, formation of the 71 st PA, Senator Edward Baker, camp life.
1/4	7/5/61-7/12/61	4 ALS. Fortress. Monroe, Virginia: his life insurance plan, march through Philadelphia.
1/5	7/25/61-8/14/61	4 ALS. 3 from George's friends; home front opinions of war, camp life and fellow soldiers.

1/6	8/16/61-9/17/61	4 ALS. 3 from his friends: rumor of move to “other side of Potomac.”
1/7	9/26/61-10/30/61	5 ALS, Ball’s Bluff account, construction of Ft. Baker, first action, George’s illness.
1/8	12/21/61-2/28/62	4 ALS. Camp Observation, Maryland: recovery, camp life, Chaplain, Harper’s Ferry.
1/9	3/11/62-4/7/62	3 ALS. 2 from friends: life in Philadelphia, public opinion, march south.
1/10	4/10/62-5/2/62	5 ALS. Chesapeake Hospital, Fortress Monroe, Va.
1/11	5/18/62-6/9/62	4 ALS. St. Joseph Hospital, Virginia: details of illness.
1/12	8/1/62-8/8/62	2 ALS. Day-by day accounts: Rations, Ball’s Bluff info, Camp Curtain, religion, reasons for fighting, draft, fellow soldiers, Company C update, sutler and paymaster, McClellan’s resignation.
1/13	8/15/62-9/29/62	2 ALS. Day-by-day accounts: Peninsular Campaign, life on the march, Yorktown, Va., coffee, officers of the 71 st , camp life, newspapers, political commentary, President Lincoln’s visit to camp, effect of war on civilians.
1/14	10/8/62-10/23/62	4 ALS. Bolivar Heights, Va. Day-by-day accounts; picket duty, Jeb Stuart, pay day, mail service, camp life.
1/15	10/29/62-11/23/62	3 ALS. Harper’s Ferry; army movements, rumors, food and rations, “Stonewall” Jackson, McClellan’s farewell address, Army chaplains, Burnside vs. McClellan.
1/16	12/4/62-12/14/62	5 ALS. Fredericksburg; battle account, construction of winter quarters.
1/17	12/21/62-4/3/63	3 ALS. Falmouth, Va: Falmouth, skirmish, picket duty, defense of Gen. Burnside.
1/18	7/8/63-8/21/63	2 ALS. Hospital; wounded at Gettysburg, hospital conditions.
1/19	10/10/63-2/11/64	6 ALS. Chelton Hills; letter to editor regarding slavery, new job in adjutant’s office.
1/20	3/11/64-5/16/64	5 items. George’s death, letters of condolence.

- 1/21 1867-1870 4 documents. Retrieval of George's bounty and back pay.
- 1/22 Miscellaneous 8 items. Poetry and prayer penned by George, American
Mechanic's funeral dirge, letter fragments.
- 1/23 Compiled Military Service Records