



STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE • FREDONIA, NEW YORK 14063
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

November 14, 1973

Dr. Morgan Dowd
Dean for Graduate Studies and Research
State University College
Fredonia, New York 14063

Dear Morgan:

Thank you very much for granting me the opportunity to examine the letters of James Quilliam. The letters are valuable for the insights they furnish to the attitudes of a common soldier during the Civil War.

It is my understanding that the owner of these letters wished both to learn more about Mr. Quilliam as a soldier and about the possibility of having the letters printed. As to the former question, I would suggest writing to the Old Military Records Division of the National Archives, General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., 20402, and asking to obtain copies of Mr. Quilliam's compiled service record. The owner should furnish as much information as possible as to name and number of Mr. Quilliam's regiment, his date of enlistment (if known) and other pertinent data. The compiled service record was made after the Civil War and contains all references in existing War Department records (muster rolls, pay vouchers, etc.) to the individual's military career. It will not contain, of course, descriptions of battles, or engagements, but will provide a kind of itinerary of his life in the army that will supplement what the letters reveal about him. There will be a fee for the reproduction of these letters, of course, but it should not be a large one. The owner may also wish to inquire, when writing about the above, how to ascertain if Mr. Quilliam's widow ever filed an application for a pension after the war. If she did, and the petition still exists at the Archives, it should contain a biographical statement that would be of interest. If the original petition is on file, a copy of it could be obtained inexpensively from the Archives.

As to the latter question, while I do feel that the letters merit publication, I am doubtful that the letters can be or should be published in their entirety. I am doubtful that they can be, for a number of practical reasons. First of all, we are now approaching the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, and commercial publishers are devoting their attention to projects relevant to that. Unless the material is really outstanding, Civil War letters have to take a back seat. The possibility

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exists that a private press might be willing to undertake the publication. But this type of press operates under a contract providing that the owner cover all publication costs not met by sales, which can be a very expensive business. I am also doubtful that the letters should be published in their entirety. Mr. Quilliam was a soldier in the ranks, and his opportunities for observation were therefore limited. Some private soldiers of this nature, who had been lawyers or newspaper editors before the war, or who in some profession had acquired great perception and articulateness, have left valuable accounts. Mr. Quilliam was obviously not such a person. This is not to denigrate the value of what he has left behind; it is simply to suggest that more value would be gained by a judicious culling of the letters than by verbatim publication.

Editing the letters for publication in an historical journal offers a variety of possibilities. From the letters could be extracted a good view of the life of the common soldier in camp and field. I am especially attracted by the visit of President Lincoln, the church attendance with General O. O. Howard, and the information that the gentleman furnished each soldier in the regiment with certain gratuities in exchange for having the camp in Virginia named for him. Especially poignant are the final letters concerning Mr. Quilliam's death. Also, given the obvious concern of Mr. Quilliam about his family farm, it would be possible to use the letters to develop the theme of the Civil War Home front. Obviously, in either case, the material in the letters would have to be supplemented with material drawn from other contemporary sources, such as newspapers. But the letters should serve as the central focus of the article. To follow the latter suggestions will obviously require more labor than publication in entirety, but at considerably less cost. And it is my opinion that the final result will be much more useful to the scholar of the Civil War.

Again, let me express my appreciation for the opportunity to examine the Quilliam letters. I hope that you will also express my appreciation to their owner.

Sincerely,

David E. Meerse
Associate Professor

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