

Thompson, Alfred Correspondence

Alfred Thompson Correspondence

1862-1863



Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Revision Description

2020-09-08	Finding aid notes updated to new department standards. juliags
2021-03-11	LM Rozema added missing notes for an unprocessed collection, added FA title and filing titles, added FA date from EAD, and added component with instances previously attached to collection level.

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.1990.004

Unit Date

1862-1863

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

Nine wartime letters written by Alfred Thompson, a soldier in Company H (and later Company A), 49th Pennsylvania Infantry during the American Civil War, from various camps in Virginia, addressed to David May of Spruce Creek, Pennsylvania.

Creator

Thompson, Alfred

Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

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Source of Acquisition

The Alfred Thompson Correspondence was purchased by Special Collections and University Archives in 1990.

Processing Information

The processing and description of the Alfred Thompson Correspondence commenced and was completed in August, 2022.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Alfred Thompson Correspondence, Ms1990-004, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

Alfred Thompson, son of Samuel Thompson, was born in 1836. The 1850 census lists a 14-year-old, Pennsylvania-born Alfred Thompson living in the Columbiana (Centre County), Ohio home of Samuel and Nancy Thompson, together with five other Thompson children. By 1860, the Thompsons were living in Franklin Township (Huntingdon County), Pennsylvania, where Alfred Thompson was employed as a farm laborer. Thompson enlisted as a private in Company A, 49th Pennsylvania Infantry at Camp Griffin, Virginia on November 24, 1861, and was mustered in with the regiment three days later. (Thompson's letters suggest that scandal or misdeeds forced him into joining the army.) He was promoted to sergeant on November 26, 1862 and transferred to Company A on January 11, 1863. Wounded in May, 1864, he died of pneumonia at Martinsburg, West Virginia on November 30, 1864, and was buried in National Cemetery, Winchester, Virginia.

Scope and Content

This collection contains nine wartime letters written by Alfred Thompson, a soldier in Company H (and later Company A), 49th Pennsylvania Infantry during the American Civil War. Addressed to David Wray (or David Ray), Thompson's letters focus heavily on personal matters. He writes disjointedly, sometimes cryptically, of past misdeeds; he also frequently refers to his duty, his enjoyment of army life, and the possibility of his death, all while boasting of his skills as a soldier and a writer, comparing himself to Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Burns. (The letters suggest that Thompson had a poem entitled "Keystone Volunteers" published in *Forney's War Press*.)

Elsewhere, Thompson comments upon his wartime experiences, describing his regiment's participation in one battle, listing the items that he carries on the march, and describing his weapons ("an Austrian rifle 900 yards' a seven shooter 40 yards, and an opera glass --- yards, these two latter articles I purchased on my own hook the latter to be sure I was right; the former to go ahead with"). He likens soldiering to prostitutes: "[W]hen I see men turning 'double summerselts,' standing patiently to the knees in 'mud puddles,' 'breakfasting' on 'hard crackers and water,' sleeping on the hard ground: and ready at a moments notice to be set as a Target for the foe, it remiinds me somewhat of those people who make a business of selling their

charms for a cost." He occasionally mentions incidents of camp life, including outbreaks due to poison ivy, an owl in his tent, and the cost of newspapers, but the focus throughout the letters remains his past experiences, his personal situation, and his hopes for redemption and reconciliation.

Keywords

Civil War

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

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Description of Subordinate Components

Correspondence

Unit Date 1862-1863

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