

JAMES QUINN OF KELLEY'S ISLAND AND A SOLDIER'S LIFE IN CAMP

By Leslie Korenko

February 12, 1862 - Camp Wickliff, KY [24th Ohio] – “Dear Sister: I received your kind letter on the 10th and was glad to hear that the folks were all well at home. ‘Home, Sweet Home. There is no place like Home.’ How I would like to go home just for one day to see the folks and I must say, eat some peaches for it is hardly the time of year for peaches yet. But there are other things that taste nearly as well to a hungry soldier. But by the way I must answer some of the many questions you were kind enough to ask in your last letter. I shall not try to answer them all this time, it would fill five pages of a newspaper to answer them all.

Just imagine yourself down on your prayer bones with your blanket spread over a piece of a wet plank and a pen that has been lying in a wet pocket until it is covered an inch thick with rust, and that is not all. Ever since I have been kneeling here trying to write there has been a great ugly Johnny Bull standing behind me eternally punching at me to hurry up and let him have this nice place to write in. He says he has not written to his ‘gall’ in three weeks. So I think it is about time he wrote to her, don’t you?

You wanted to know what is going on in and about camp. Well about the same as usual. At five in the morning we have the drummers call and then the reveille is played by the fifes and drums and in a few minutes there is the sick call. Half an hour after, the breakfast horn is blown. Then in comes the Cook of the mess and he is asked, ‘What is for breakfast?’ Coffee and pork and hard bread is most always the reply.

At 8 o’clock the drum beats for guard mounting, and at 9, drill. This is a skirmish drill, the company’s are turned out by a short roll of the drum, they are marched out by the Major with the Brass Band in front. At 11 o’clock the companies come in and 12 o’clock, dinner call, and in comes the Cook. All hands call out ‘What have you got for dinner?’ Soup of course is the Cook’s reply. Then just a half an hour to swallow your grub, and at half past 12 the Water call, and at 1 o’clock, the drum is

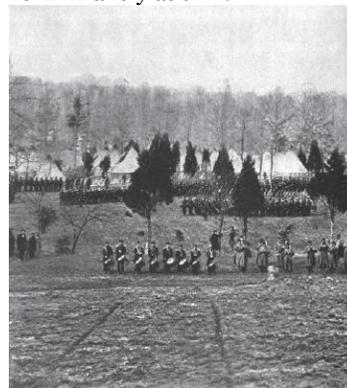
beat for Battalion drill. And at 3 the Regiment comes in and at 4 the drummers call is beat and then a short roll is called and inspection of arms and boxes. And we must have 40 rounds of cartridges and caps. Then the roll is called and if every man is not here he has to go on guard next day to pay for it. And then comes Water call again and at 8 o’clock there is another roll call and at half past 8 the drum taps, then all lights must be put out and no talking to be heard in the quarters after that. This is what we have to go through with every day except Sunday.

One of our company was wounded by the name of J. E. Taylor, but he is quite well now. The Secesh took him after he was wounded and their doctor bound up his wound and sat him up by a tree. After that they caught one of the 14 Indians that was wounded. They shoved a bayonet through his head and one through his breast, but the Indians paid them back in their own coin as soon as they got a chance.

The evening of the 6th of Feb. our adjutant read the order that the 10th Brigade was to move in the direction of Green River. We mounted guard an hour earlier when we march, it happened to be my hard luck to be on guard. I marched in the rear of the Regiment and after marching 12 miles, I had to go on guard at 2 o’clock and until 4, four hours off and two on. If you leave the guard house without permission you will get put on two hours extra duty. That is the way they make them walk the chalk here. Out of 80 men there is only 42 fit for duty. One of our men has been gone, Gilbert H. Hewit is his name, from here about 30 days. Two others are gone about 10 days and a 4th one by the name of G. Dart has been sent back to the old camp. Wickliff to be court martialed for sleeping on his post.

I have had one letter from Jacob Rush and one from John Moneyhan [Monaghan] of the 3rd Ohio Cavalry. They are well in their quarters. I want you to write often and let me know all about the Lyceum, and singing school, and all the news. I must now bring my words to a close

Drilling was a big part of a soldier's life. This is the 74th New York Infantry at drill.



for this fellow is still standing behind me punching me up to hurry, so he can write to his gal. So I will have to comply with his wishes for my limbs are tired, kneeling in one position so long. I hope we will have one of the biggest battles we have had yet, before long. I want the worst way to be pitching into them Secesh. Tell the folks all to write to me for there is nothing that does a Soldier so much good as to hear from home. James Quinn”

Jacob Rush (3rd Ohio Cavalry), who shared accounts of his own time in the army, took the time to provide a biographical sketch of his friend. “James Quinn was born at Marblehead, Ottawa Co., Ohio on the 13th of July 1842. His family afterward moved to Canada, thence to Kelley’s Island, which is still their home. It is the purpose of the writer to give a sketch of his soldier life in the great ‘War for the Union.’

Mr. Quinn enlisted April 24th, 1861 at Sandusky, being the first volunteer for Kelley’s Island. He enlisted as private in Co. C under Captain Weller of the 24th Ohio Infantry and was afterward made Sergeant [on December 31, 1862]. The Regt. was first enlisted for the three months service, but before leaving the State, reenlisted for three years. After a few weeks drill at Camp Chase, Columbus O., the Regiment was ordered to Washington and assigned to the Army of the East where it took part in the battle of Cheat Mountain. [The Battle of Cheat Mountain, W. Virginia resulted in 9 Union soldiers killed, 12 wounded and 60 missing.]

During the winter of 1861-62 they suffered greatly from cold, the snow being from 4 to 16 ft. deep and at one time they were encamped in one place several weeks, unable to move. Tents were used for bedding and houses were made of snow and there they remained until early in ‘62 when they were ordered to join the Army of the West.

They arrived at Camp Cillicoffee Ky. in February and there awaited the army, which was getting ready to move from Louisville Ky. The 24th was one of the Regiments which pursued Gen. Zollicofer in his retreat through Ky. where he met with his death. [One island soldier, Julius Kelley, was present when Zollicoffer’s body was brought into camp at Somerset.] When the army arrived at Nashville, Tenn., the 24th was assigned to

Gen. Nelson’s Division. Gen. Nelson was one of the bravest officers in the army, and the Division did not lack any of the soldierly qualities which it saw in its Commanders. Though the Gen. was as rough and crusty as he was brave, he well upheld the honor of the name of Nelson, the hero of the Nile and one of the bravest officers in the English navy.

The 24th arrived at Savannah, a small place situated on the Tenn. River seven miles below the place where the Battle of Shiloh was fought, on the morning of the 7th of April. Transports were waiting their arrival. You all well remember that on the day before, ‘Sunday, the 6th of April,’ our army was driven back to the bank of the River. The 24th was one of the first to cross and took an active part in fighting that day memorable in the history of our nation.

Mr. Quinn called on the writer and the rest of the Island boys about 9 o’clock on the morning of the 7th. He had been left back with the wagon train the day before and did not arrive in time to cross with his regiment. He tried several times during the day to get on board of one of the transports but without success, as none but detachments or regiments were allowed to cross.

The next time I saw Mr. Quinn was on the 4th of July of the same year. As usual, well and hearty. A few days before he had been in a lively engagement at Athens, Alabama which lasted several hours, which resulted in their favor, though they lost several in killed and wounded... James Quinn served in the army three years and three months and undoubtedly saw the most hard fighting of any of the Island boys. Jacob Rush.”

Private Woodford camped under severe winter conditions.



Woodford had been left behind with the wagon trains.



This was high praise from Rush who also saw a great deal of fighting. By the end of next year, Quinn would stand acquitted at a court martial at Murfreesboro, Tenn., fight at the Battle of Chattanooga, and take an active part in the battle of Missionary Ridge.

Leslie Korenko is the author of six books. This excerpt appeared in Kelleys Island 1862-1865, The Civil War, the Island Soldiers and the Island Queen