

Charles Speakman Civil War Letters, 1861 – 1875
Manuscript Collection 157

Arranged and described by:
Shira Loev
Project Archivist

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Biographical Note

Charles Speakman was a private in the 30th Regiment, 1st reserve. The ninth of ten children of Nathaniel and Ann Speakman, he was born July 28, 1839. His sister Abigail, to whom most of these letters are written, was born May 17, 1842. Speakman mustered into the service July 8, 1861 and was discharged on surgeon's certificate on Jan. 17, 1863, having been diagnosed with dropsy. According to a note written on an envelope, probably by Abbie (Abigail) Speakman, Charles chose to rejoin the army:

After Charlie had been discharged from the regular army because of ill health, and after being home a short time, the Rebels invaded Penna. and although he was still ill he again went into the army although he was not sworn in and therefore received no pay, but as he remarks in one letter, he went for patriotism, not pay.

In 1864, Charles was appointed to the position of clerk in the office of the Quartermaster General in Washington, DC. While living in Washington, Speakman witnessed the aftermath of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, which he describes in detail in a letter written April 17, 1865 (see below). Charles died April 7, 1867.

Sources: *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, Bates; Speakman family file; Charles Speakman Civil War Letters

Scope and Content

This collection contains the letters written by Charles Speakman during his service in the Civil War. Also included are some letters written by family members or friends, as well as papers documenting Speakman's military service.

Arrangement

Charles Speakman's letters are arranged in chronological order. Letters written by other authors and military service papers are arranged separately in chronological order.

Related Materials

See photograph collections

Folder 1: Letters July – August 1861

1. Camp Curtin, July 22, 1861
 - addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - envelope illustration "The Union and the Constitution", flag
 - refers to sounding of cannons for victory at Manassas
 - getting ready to set out for Washington, DC

- describes cheering of people while passing through on train
2. Camp Carroll, near Baltimore, MD, July 23, 1861
 - addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - envelope and letter with illustration "One flag and one Government"; letter paper with patriotic verse
 - saw burnt, destroyed bridges on train ride
 - bridges are guarded 20 mi. outside of Baltimore
 - complains of colonel's inexperience
 3. Camp Todd, MD, Aug. 6, 1861
 - addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - describes conditions at camp versus camp at Annapolis
 - people being shot by "Successionists"
 - he and another soldier invited to dinner
 - describes meals at camp
 4. Camp Todd, MD, Aug. 1861
 - addressed to sister
 - describes treatment of soldiers by locals
 - lists visitors
 - sickness among men at Annapolis
 5. Camp Todd, MD, Aug. 4, 1861
 - addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - request clothes, food, paper, envelopes
 - spent time at house of locals
 - local women presented soldiers with a flag
 - have cannons
 - Gen. Edge Cope shot in the thigh while eating dinner

Folder 2: Letters Sept. – Oct. 1861

6. Camp Tennally, DC, Sept. 2, 1861
 - addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - blue ink illustrated envelope with "Loyal States, Pennsylvania"
 - arrival in DC
 - toured Capitol, praises pictures in entrance; went up to the dome and saw Smithsonian Institute, President's House, the Treasury, the War Departments; visited Senate Chamber
 - countryside is covered with tents
 - company called "Brandywine Guards"; renamed Co. A from Co. H
7. Camp Tennally, Sept. 8, 1861
 - addressed to sister

- letter paper with large illustration of United States Capitol
 - Capt. declared that men should not work on Sunday but “attend divine worship and rest themselves”
 - marched in front of Secretary of War Cameron for gala day grand inspection
 - reconnaissance balloon goes up each night; news of enemy movements telegraphed to camp
8. Camp Tennally, Sept. 19, 1861
- addressed to sister
 - had a grand review for Prince de Joinville, son of Louis Philippe, duc d’Orleans
 - Sgt. Cope went on furlough, married Bell Spackman of West Chester; promoted to Col. Clerk
 - rule adopted to take turns reading bible chapter each night
 - reference to “great battle in Missouri”
9. Camp Tennally, Oct. 5, 1861
- addressed to brother, Townsend Speakman
 - discusses health of soldiers, beliefs about sickness
 - possibility of being sent to Missouri; thinks Missouri and Kentucky will “decide this struggle”
 - read in *Chester County Times* that number of barns were burnt in county
10. Langley, VA, Headquarters M’Call, Oct. 13, 1861
- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - company detailed as bodyguards for Gen. M’Call
 - reference to victory at Hatteras Inlet (Island)
 - read that New Orleans is almost in the possession of Union

Folder 3: Letters Nov. – Dec. 1861

11. Langley, VA, Nov. 1, 1861
- addressed to sister
 - had election for officers
 - Lieut. Hooton elected Captain
 - Lieut. C.W. Wiolds elected 1st Lieutenant
 - lists other promotions
 - anecdote about runaway slave
 - request for food: butter, sausage, scrapple, cakes, preserves
12. Langley, VA, Nov. 12, 1861
- addressed to sister
 - reference to victory of Gen. Nelson at Piketon, KY

13. Langley, VA, Dec. 2, 1861
 - addressed to sister Priscilla Speakman
 - thanking for package
 - refers to skirmish at Drainesville
 - predicts Union will have Leesburg by New Year's
 - anecdote about wounded Union and Confederate soldiers in hospital who fought each other and died
 - had teeth filled
14. Langley, VA, CSA, Dec. 6, 1861
 - addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - thanking for package
 - foraging parties bring back corn, hay
 - had an Ambrotype taken
15. Camp Pierpont, Dec. 11, 1861
 - addressed to mother, Ann Speakman
 - rebels made an advance the night before
 - Dillwyn Parker recruits troops from West Chester
 - foraging parties
 - was issued new clothing
 - hopes rebellion will be crushed by summer 1862; will not return to civil life until country "restored to peace and prosperity"

Folder 4: Letters Jan. – Apr. 1862

16. Camp Pierpont, VA, Jan. 8, 1862
 - addressed to sister
 - loves to receive letters with news of home
 - describes Christmas – he was on guard; others played around, visited friends
 - received pay, \$26
 - [page missing?]
17. Camp Pierpont, VA, Feb. 5, 1862
 - addressed to sister
 - discusses reasons for war
 - possibility that an acquaintance might be a rebel
 - women of New London, Chester County sent soldiers a "box of comfortables" – stockings, etc.
 - Col. Baird sick from being shot with poisoned arrow by an Indian during the "Indian Wars"
18. Langley, VA, Feb. 15, 1862
 - addressed to sister

- letter paper with raised seal "Union", red and blue border
- series of victories accomplished; plan made to overthrow other important places; refers to victory at Fort Donelson
- victory unexpected because fleet supposed to have been badly damaged by storms
- saw group of about 50 contrabands
- was vaccinated

19. Langley, VA, Feb. 23, 1862

- addressed to sister
- letter paper with raised seal "Union", red and blue border
- some regiments were read Washington's farewell address by colonel
- requests candles, india meal

20. Langley, VA, Feb. 26, 1862, 8:00 PM

- addressed to sister
- letter paper with raised seal "Union", red and blue border
- received marching orders for Leesburg and Centreville

21. Langley, VA, March 2, 1862

- addressed to sister
- did not march because not needed to support Gen. Banks in crossing river
- expects to move soon because Gen. Banks is "stirring the rebels up" and regiments are being "hardened to marching"
- received new pants
- soldiers now have trumpet for drilling

22. Camp near Alexandria, VA, March 18, 1862

- waiting to move South
- Alexandria abandoned except for soldiers
- visited the Marshall House and place where Jackson shot Ellsworth

23. Manassas Junction, April 13, 1862

- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
- describes march with 100 lb. knapsack
- reference to Bull Run
- skirmishing
- road from Centreville to Manassas rough – houses burnt down, wagon-bed wheels, dead horses
- some soldiers visited Bull Run battleground

Folder 5: Letters May 1862

24. Falmouth, VA, May 6, 1862

- addressed to sister

- camp at Washington's childhood farm, thinks owners are inclined toward Confederacy
- says Virginians are mostly enemies of the Union
- refers to Gen. Bliker's men who passed through VA and stole everything
- naval warfare
- discusses the comforts of smoking
- bridges built across river

25. Camp Washington near Falmouth, VA, May 11, 1862

- addressed to Abbie Speakman (?)
- movements depend on whether or not Gen. McClellan needs reinforcements
- have two pontoon bridges over Rappahannock
- anecdotes about local girl crying because she thought father was unionist and about people praying in church for Union soldiers to die
- refers to charges made against Gen. M'Call; Charles says they are false
- Washington childhood home half hospital, half ruins; refers to *apple* tree/hatchet story

26. Camp Washington, Falmouth, VA, May 16, 1862

- addressed to sister
- skirmishes; Ira Harris cavalry captured a lieut. and 11 men; 1100 men beat Union back to Fredericksburg
- describes Bucktail Camp
- fall of Norfolk; sinking of Merrimack
- Confederate Army "demoralized"

Folder 6: Letters June 1862

27. Headquarters Gen. M'Call near Falmouth, VA, June 2, 1862

- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
- rebels advancing on Fredericksburg
- refers to achievements of Gen. Shields against Gen. Jackson
- Gen. McClellan awaiting their arrival to strengthen force before attack
- praising Home Guards
- thinks war will not last another winter; thinks govt. should enlist 200,000 more men
- anecdote about woman complaining about her slaves
- Gen. McDowell disliked because not considered loyal

28. Camp 5 miles from Richmond, VA, June 19, 1862

- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
- boat trip down Rappahannock
- daily fighting; fighting on Chickahominy

- McClellan orders no drums, trumpets, bands because noise gives away position; rebels play drums
- balloon reconnoitering

29. Chickahominy, McClellan's Headquarters, June 28, 1862

- addressed to brother, Thomas H. Speakman
- heavy fighting June 26 – 27, commenced in Mechanicsville, heavy losses, lost knapsacks

Folder 7: Letters July – August 1862

30. City Point, July 4, 1862

- addressed to sister
- lists casualties among officers
- men have confidence in McClellan

31. Camp near Harrison's Landing, VA, July 11, 1862

- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
- "first engagement"
- detailed description of the fighting

32. Camp near Harrison's Landing, VA, Aug. 6, 1862

- addressed to sister
- shelled by rebels; rebels repulsed by gunboats
- cut trees, burnt down houses – are constructing fort
- fight at Malvern Hill – several thousand rebels taken prisoner, rebel gun boat "Young America" captured
- soldiers pillaged abandoned homes
- Capt. Biddle dead

33. Camp near Harrison's Landing, VA, Sunday morning, Aug. 10, 1862

- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
- describes fatigue duty
- fort being built
- took a ride on Steamer John A. Warner
- Capt. Neff, Co. E and Sgt. McCracken, Co. B died

Folder 8: Letters Sept. – Nov. 1862

34. Sharpsburg, MD, Sept. 21, 1862

- addressed to sister
- detailed description of fighting at South Mountain
- complains that division has not had ambulances or stretchers for months
- victory – took field

- revels stole provisions from locals
 - Sept. 17, fighting at Sharpsburg
 - describes carnage of battle – dead men, animals; stench of decay
35. Camp near Sharpsburg, MD, Oct. 4, 1862
- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - discusses loss in numbers due to casualties
 - Sharpsburg houses damaged by battle
 - Rev. Moore of West Chester delivered sermon for soldiers
36. Camp near Sharpsburg, MD, Oct. 12, 1862
- addressed to sister Abbie Speakman
 - rebels in PA – Chambersburg and Mercersburg
 - women visiting troops get lodging in nearby houses; lodging scarce because houses used as hospitals
37. Bivouac on the road to Culpepper, Nov. 15, 1862
- addressed to sister
 - got supplies (coats) from captured
38. Bivouac on the road to Culpepper, Nov. 16, 1862
- addressed to Phil [Price]
 - discusses new leader, loss of old leader
 - soldiers have marched 100 mi. since leaving Sharpsburg, back to where they were last August near Rappahannock Station
 - criticizes unpreparedness for winter fighting/winter quarters, lack of soldiers; did not receive fresh clothing, horses
39. Bivouac near Stafford Court House, VA, Nov. 19, 1862
- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - wonders why they are in this location, will they ship out or encamp to await supplies
 - persimmons are abundant, water is readily available

Folder 9: Letters Dec. 1862 – July 1863

40. Division Hospital, 3 mi. below Fredericksburg, Dec. 22, 1862
- addressed to sister
 - he is sick; complains that wounded get attention but sick do not
 - hospital in isolated location
 - division is at Belle Plain Landing on the Potomac putting up winter quarters
 - plans to apply for permanent discharge
41. Hospital 1st Regt. PRVC near Camp Belle Plain, VA, Dec. 30, 1862

- addressed to sister
- diagnosed with dropsy
- shuffled to various locations, sometimes in ambulance, sometimes walking in snow; sick mostly unattended; wounded able to be sent to Washington, DC for care
- during engagement of the Dec. 13, sick had to lie within range of enemy fire

42. Camp near Chambersburg, PA, July 12, 1863

- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
- envelope with description of Charles's discharge and re-entry into service
- local men not defending town, not providing food for soldiers
- went to Lutheran church service
- ate meal at Indian Queen Hotel
- troops heard fake report that Richmond was captured and Gen. Lee surrendered; report faked to raise morale

Folder 10: Letters March 1864 – June 1865

43. Quartermaster General's Office, Washington, DC, March 12, 1864

- addressed to brother, Townsend Speakman
- sending home grapevine cuttings for planting
- boarding in Washington, DC
- William Saunders, who designed Gettysburg Natl. Cemetery ground, is in charge of grounds at boarding house
- attended President's Levee, saw Lieut. Gen. Grant
- does not have confidence in Gen. Meade

44. Quartermaster General's Office, Washington, DC, June 5, 1864

- addressed to sister
- PA Reserves stopped in DC en route home; Charles visited with old friends
- calls regiments "skeleton" regiments because troop numbers have fallen sharply due to casualties
- hopes to return home, attend Sanitary Fair

45. Quartermaster General's Office, Washington, DC, Dec. 28, 1864

- addressed to sister
- describes Christmas day; was invited to dinner
- had teeth filled at dentist
- saw play at Ford's Theatre, "Frank Drew" and afterpiece, "Mazeppa"

46. Quartermaster General's Office, Washington, DC, Dec. 13, 1864

- addressed to sister
- got Abraham [Lincoln's?] autograph, wants to collect more

47. Quartermaster General's Office, Washington, DC, April 17, 1865
- addressed to sister Abbie Speakman
 - describes Lincoln's assassination, Booth's actions, the pursuit of Booth and \$30,000 reward for capture
 - houses draped in mourning
 - describes state of Washington, attitude of people; mob trying to kill rebel officers
 - describes attack on Seward, rumor that John Surratt was captured disguised in women's clothes
 - funeral procession to take place, body will be sent to Illinois; Lincoln will lie-in-state in White House
48. Quartermaster General's Office, Washington, DC, June 9, 1865
- addressed to sister, Abbie Speakman
 - 15,000 soldiers mustered out on Saturday, 8-10,000 every day since
 - went to choral concert with no patriotic songs scheduled because of pro-confederate audience; describes reaction when "Vive l'America" was performed
 - has forwarded 2 vols. of the "Diplomatic Correspondence"

Folder 11: Letters, various authors, 1862 – 1875

49. Edward [Speakman?], Newport News, March 11, 1862
- addressed to brother, [Charles?]
 - describes naval battles
50. Dr. Charles D. Meigs, undated
- addressed to Dr. Brinton
 - asking doctor to use influence to get Charles Speakman discharged due to illness
51. Dr. Charles D. Meigs, Philadelphia, January (?) 7, 1863
- addressed to Dr. Hammond
 - asking doctor to use influence to get Charles Speakman discharged due to illness
52. A.G. Curtin, Pennsylvania, Executive Chamber, Harrisburg, PA, Feb. 4, 1864
- addressed to "The President"
 - handwritten copy; approved by John Potts, Chief Clerk War Dept.
 - recommending Charles Speakman for clerkship in one of the departments in Washington, DC
53. Charles D. Meigs, Astor, Delaware Co., Aug. 27, 1863
- addressed to ?

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- handwritten copy; approved by John Potts, Chief Clerk War Dept
 - recommending Charles Speakman for employment by Postmaster General
54. J.W. Howland, Indianapolis, May 9, 1867
- addressed to Edward Speakman
 - consoling Edward about brother Charles Speakman's death
55. Rebecca W. Taylor, Cedarcraft, Jan. 4, 1869
- addressed to cousin Priscilla Speakman
 - regarding family, friends, visiting
56. Thomas H. Speakmen, Liverpool, Aug. 22, 1875
- addressed to sister Priscilla Speakman
 - describing trip to Europe

Folder 12: Military Service papers, [1861] – 1864

57. Military history of Charles Speakman (incomplete), undated
58. Document forming volunteer company, [1861]
22 signatures, incl. Charles Speakman
59. Appointment as Temporary Clerk in the office of the Quartermaster General, War Department, Washington, DC, Feb. 13. 1864
60. Notification of \$4.00/mo. pension allowance, Pension Office, Feb. 17, 1864
signed Joseph H. Barrett, Commissioner
61. Appointment as Clerk, Class One in the Office of the Quartermaster General, War Department, Washington, DC, April 14, 1864