



The Civil War Post

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Travails of a North Carolina Foot Soldier – James C. Zimmerman

The soldier's correspondence is between James Calvin Zimmerman (1832-1900) and his wife, Martha Adaline Spease Zimmerman (1829-1915), sometimes incorrectly seen as "Mary Ann," but which is wrong, as she clearly signed her letters Adaline. The spelling of the names varies depending on the source, but her signature appears as "Adaline." The *FindAGrave.com* memorial shows her name as Martha Adeline Speas Zimmerman, incorrectly spelling Adaline and Spease. Figure 1 shows a photo of James Zimmerman in uniform.

A farmer in Forsyth County, N.C., Zimmerman volunteered and mustered into the 57th North Carolina Infantry, Capt. J.E. Mann's Company D, Army of Northern Virginia. Two Spease brothers-in-law served in the same company, Augustin Jackson Spease and John William Spease. Their names are sometimes recorded as Spease.

Company D was officially mustered into service in Salisbury, N.C., July 17, 1862. The training camp was also the site of a Confederate prisoner of war camp. Figure 2 shows a color lithograph of Union prisoners at Salisbury playing baseball. Acting Maj. Otto Boetticher drew the scene circa 1863; it was lithographed by Sarony, Major & Knapp, New York (Courtesy of the Library of Congress).

Figure 1 (right). James Calvin Zimmerman.

Figure 2 (below). Color lithograph of Union prisoners at Salisbury, playing baseball, drawn by Acting Maj. Otto Boetticher circa 1863. Courtesy Library of Congress.

The Zimmerman correspondence has been widely published. It portrays a decidedly negative view of the war and the sorry situation of the average soldier. His Civil War letters are part of the James C. Zimmerman Papers, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library. They were published in a book in 2007 called

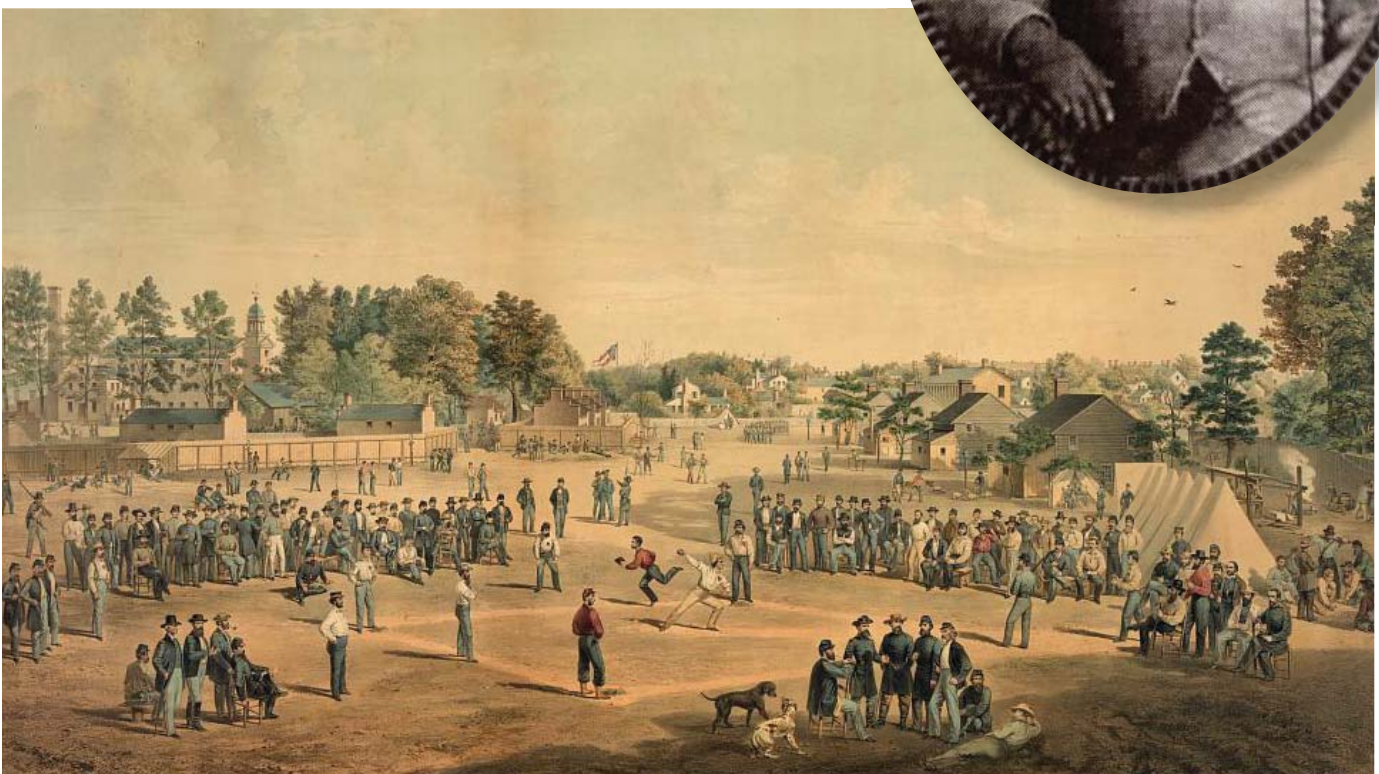
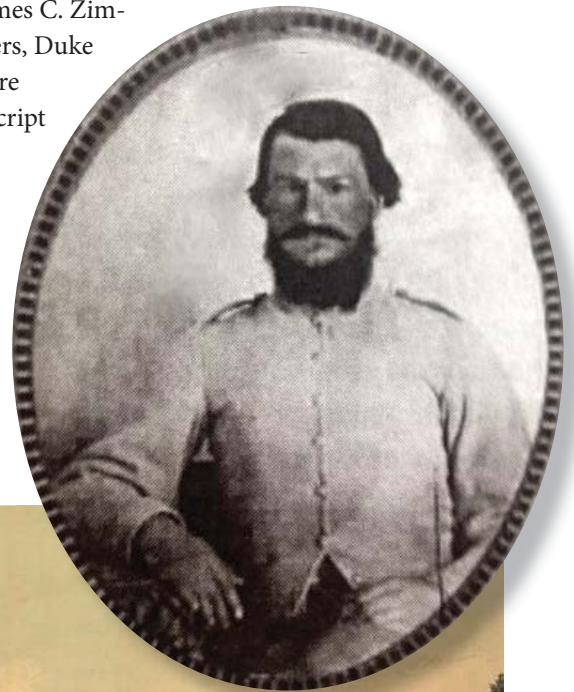




Figure 3. From Private James Zimmerman to his wife, this cover is fashioned from wallpaper due to shortage of envelopes and paper.

The Fighting 57th North Carolina: The Life and Letters of James Calvin Zimmerman,¹ available online. It is a thought-provoking look at the struggles of the ordinary soldier.

In a letter dated Oct. 5, 1862, James tells Adaline that,

about two thirds of our regiment is sick (he was one of them) there is 30 in our company able to do duty

At home, Adaline was ill as well, with no relief while caring for their children. They had three children when he went off to war, not knowing that she was pregnant with a fourth. Their fourth son was born on Feb. 28, 1863.

Zimmerman's Dec. 2, 1862, letter laments,

I don't think old Jeff Davis can feed us much longer and we will all have to starve or come home.

He relates that they often marched for days at a time with no rations whatsoever. Nor were soldiers paid regularly; sometimes the men were not paid for months.

Despite being a God-fearing man, Zimmerman and many other soldiers turned to theft to survive. Officers had a far easier time of it. It is no surprise that desertion was a huge problem, but that invited immediate execution. At the bottom of the ranks, Zimmerman felt he had no choice but to survive as best he could.

As is often seen in letters of the ordinary Civil War soldier, the phonetic spelling is atrocious and punctuation is almost non-existent. James' Aug. 14, 1862, letter home tells Adaline to, "*sell the mewl and the mair.*"

A pair of Confederate typographed (letterpress) issues (Scott CSA 7) pays the postage on the cover shown in Figure 3, which is fashioned of wallpaper. Such covers are arguably the most popular of what collectors refer to as "adversity covers" because of adverse conditions that caused correspondents to use any available source of paper to create envelopes.

The wallpaper cover, which is addressed to Zimmerman's wife at Sedge Garden, Forsyth County, N.C., is dated Dec. 17, 1862. Sedge Garden is today a popu-

Figure 5. POW cover from Zimmerman to his wife shows postal markings of both North and South.

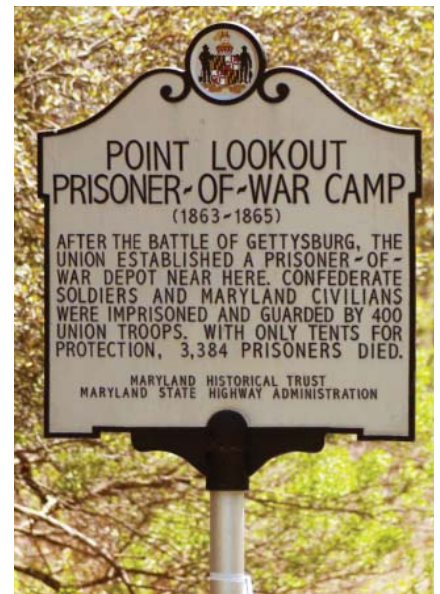


Figure 4. Historical marker for Point Lookout prisoner-of-war camp.

lated place located within the City of Winston-Salem.

While I found no record in his military records of Zimmerman being wounded, he writes to Adaline from Fredericksburg on Dec. 14, 1862, that he received a small wound in the right hand disabling him for duty. He sadly reports that they lost nearly all their company,

out of fifty eight over half was killed or wounded.

He lists them by name, as well as their wounds and status. That included her brother, John, who was wounded in the bowels. James reports 15 amputations and that,

one bullet passed through my hat and one cut my blanket on my shoulder

He regularly complains of his swollen hand, but that does not stop him from writing to his beloved Adaline. Not surprising from the relentless marching of an infantry soldier, his painful feet are high on the complaint list as well.

The next day, John Spease was taken to the hospital in Richmond and died there on Dec. 17, the day the wallpaper

cover was posted. But that cover did not carry the awful news to Adaline. On Jan. 10, 1863, he wrote to Adaline that he just heard that John died of his wounds. He observes,

No one has any assurance of his life here a man had just as well prepare for death...they die one most every day and one don't know but what his time will be next.

Captured

Zimmerman was captured at Rappahannock Bridge, near Brandy Station, Va., Nov. 7, 1863, and was exchanged at City Point on March 17, 1864. According to the National Park Service, 1,670 Confederates were killed, wounded or captured in this conflict, more than 80% of those engaged. By contrast, Union casualty figures were few, at only 419.

Although casualties for the 57th North Carolina were only six killed and four wounded, more than 280 men were captured. The 275 who escaped capture were assigned to the 6th North Carolina. The only member of D Company killed was Samuel Flynt. Twenty-two members of D Company, including James Calvin Zimmerman, were captured.² They arrived at the Union prison camp at Point Lookout, Md., on Nov. 11, 1863. Figure 4 shows a historical marker at Point Lookout.

The cover and two-page letter in Figures 5-7 were sent from “Point Lookout, Maryland, Feb the 22nd 1864,” only a few weeks before he was exchanged. In closing, Pvt. Zimmerman implores his wife to “Wright soon.”

The subject cover was posted with the large CSA Catalog³ type A (PWH-16) censor marking of Camp Hoffman (Point Lookout, Md.), which was used from October 1863 to April 1864. It is the showiest and most desirable of the examined markings from that prison, a large oval reading “APPROVED / J.A. PATTERSON (in script) / Capt. & Provost Marshal / Point Lookout, Md.” Not all flag-of-truce mail bears a censor marking. Most such markings were manuscript. The few recorded handstamped markings are all from U.S. prisons and provost marshal districts. Southern prisons did not use handstamped markings.

Instructions by individual Union military commanders in charge of exchange points were that prisoners’ letters were to be limited to personal matters and written on one side of the page. Note that Zim-

Point Lookout Maryland
Feb the 22nd 1864.
Dear and Affectionate Wife
Your kind letter of the 5th of January come to hand safe, I was truly glad to here from you all, and that you was well, I am enjoying good health at this time, but have had the rumatic very bad, they pester me some yet I have recd two letters from you which give me great satisfaction I have sent word to you in several letters how I was. All of Co D is in fine health and is looking forward with hope of a soon liberation which although appears distant and gloomy. We have had some cool weather here for the past week. But considering we have had a favorable winter so far (no snow of consequence) you wished me to send you some stamps they are hard to get without money. I will send you some more when I get them I want you to find out where Joseph Penning's po is held folks ma know, I wrote to you for some clothes & tobacco, perhaps I will get some clothes as they give out clothing here.

I must cirtinly close my few lines hoping they will come to hand safe and find you all well so no more but remain your affectionate husband
(Wright soon)
J. C. Zimmerman
(Wright where Jackson is &c)
and if you have any person staying with you
Ch. Zimmerman

Figure 6 (top). First page of letter headed “Point Lookout Feb the 22nd 1864,” written while in captivity.

Figure 7 (above). Back page of the POW letter, asking Adaline to “wright.”

Macon Arsenal May 1st 1864
Mr. J. J. Ingraham
As I will be absent on Pay Day
you will please draw my
Pay and Oblige yours Respt
J. C. Zimmerman

Figure 8. In the National Archives is a note from Zimmerman headed “Macon Arsenal May 1st 1864,” asking another to draw his pay in his absence.

merman's letter was on two sides of the page and was passed by the examiner despite that.

The envelopes were to be endorsed by the prisoner, and Confederate postage was to be prepaid. Letters were to be enclosed in an outer envelope and were to be addressed to the commander at the exchange point. As is evident from the subject POW cover, this was not always the case. The "DUE 10" marking, applied in Richmond, Va., was for soldier's postage due mail, with the postage to be paid by the recipient. Anxious family and friends were happy to pay the postage.

Of interest to postal historians may be that he notes:

You wished me to send you some stamp[s] they are hard to get without money. I will send you one & more when I get them ... All of Co. D is in fine helth (sic) and is looking foward (sic) with hops of a soon liberation which although appers (sic) distant and gloomy.

Sutlers charged extortionist rates for postage stamps. Usually, we find letters from soldiers asking for stamps, not the other way around.

After he was returned to service, on May 1, 1864, a dated note signed by Zimmerman at Macon [Ga.] Arsenal states that he will be absent on payday and asks Mr. J.I. Ingraham to please draw his pay. (Figure 8)

Captured Again

It wasn't long before James was again a guest of the Union prison system.

A muster roll for November and December 1864, shown in Figure 9, revealed Zimmerman was captured again at Winchester, Va., July 20, 1864, at the Battle of Rutherford's Farm (also known as Carter's Farm and Stephenson's Depot, a small engagement, which was part of the Valley Campaigns).

On the muster roll, Zimmerman is described as "33 years of age, measuring 5'8" tall with a dark complexion, dark hair and dark eyes." He was sent to Camp Chase, Ohio, July 27, 1864, from Wheeling, W.V., where he was held briefly at the Atheneum Prison. On March 2, 1865, he was transferred to City Point. I could find no record of when he was mustered out.

On April 1, 1865, General Robert E. Lee ordered the evacuation of Richmond and Petersburg. His army, including the 57th North Carolina, headed southwest. By this time, the unit was reduced to about 125 men. Lee and his army surrendered

Confederate

James Zimmerman
 Prisoner 57 Regt N.C. Inf 60th

Appears on a List
 of Prisoners confined in Military Prison at
 Wheeling, Va. (also known as Atheneum
 Prison).

July 24/64

Age 33 years; height, 5 ft. 8 in.
 Complexion dark; eyes dark; hair dark
 Occupation Farmer
 Residence:
 Town Foggysth
 County F.W.
 State W.V.

Arrested:
 By whom Genl Brooks
 Where Winchester Va
 Date July 20, 1864.
 Charges
 Remarks Sent to Camp Chase July 27/64

Reg. No. 96, Dept. West Va., page 211

Copyist

Figure 9. Military record showing Zimmerman's capture at Winchester, Va., July 20, 1864, confinement at Wheeling, W.V., Atheneum Prison and transfer to Camp Chase, Ohio, Prison Camp.

at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. Of the 128 men who served in D Company, eight surrendered there, including A.J. Spease. A.J. and his family moved west after the war, first to Indiana and then to Missouri.

Final Thoughts

While Zimmerman was not a man with higher education, he was astounded how few soldiers could write. He implored Adaline to send the boys to school and to:

Give them all the instruction possible in the way of learning and manners. I can see every day the kneed of aducation a great many here cant eaven wright and have to get some one to do it for them when they want to wright to their people and friend.

Adaline's letters are also poorly written, sometimes a challenge for the modern reader to understand. Nevertheless, husband and wife did not fail to communicate in vivid terms.

While Zimmerman was not an English major, his detailed and descriptive letters capture the tenor of the day; we are fortunate to have them written in the uncensored voice of the foot soldier.

Trish is always happy to hear from readers. You may write to her at trishkauf@comcast.net.

Endnotes

1. William R. Hartley III and David J. Zimmerman, *The Fighting 57th North Carolina: The Life and Letters of James Calvin Zimmerman*, 2007, self-published.
2. Ibid, Page 157.
3. Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., Jerry S. Palazoloz, editors, *Confederate States Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, 2012, Confederate Stamp Alliance, www.csalliance.org, Page 492.

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