



## Well Satisfied with My Position: The Civil War Journal of Spencer Bonsall

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*Well Satisfied with My Position* offers a first-person account of army life during the Civil War's Peninsula Campaign and Battle of Fredericksburg. Spencer Bonsall, who joined the 81st Pennsylvania Infantry as a hospital steward, kept a journal from March 1862 until March 1863, when he abruptly ceased writing. Editors Michael A. Flannery and Katherine H. Oomens place his experiences in the context of the field of Civil War medicine and continue his story in an epilogue.

Trained as a druggist when he was in his early twenties, Bonsall traveled the world, spent eight years on a tea plantation in India, and settled in Philadelphia, where he worked in the city surveyor's office. But in March 1862, when he was in his mid-forties, the lure of serving his country on the battlefield led Bonsall to join the 81st Pennsylvania Infantry as a hospital steward.

Bonsall enjoyed his life with the Union army at first, comparing bivouacking in the woods to merely picnicking on a grand scale. "We are about as jolly a set of old bachelors as can be found in Virginia," Bonsall wrote. But his first taste of the aftermath of battle at Fair Oaks and the Seven Days' Battles in Virginia changed his mind about the joys of soldiering—though he never lost his zeal for the Union cause.

Bonsall details the camp life of a soldier from firsthand experience, outlines the engagements of the 81st, and traces the Battle of Fredericksburg and the Peninsula Campaign. He records facts not available elsewhere about camp conditions, attitudes toward Union generals and Confederate soldiers, and troop movements.

From the end of June to late October 1862, Bonsall's illness kept him from writing in his journal. He picked up the record again in December 1862, just before the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in which the Union suffered a staggering 10,200 casualties and the 81st Pennsylvania lost more than half its men. He vividly describes the bloody aftermath. Bonsall's horse was shot out from underneath him at the battle of Gettysburg, injuring him seriously and ending his military career. Although he was listed as "sick in hospital" on the regiment's muster rolls, he was labeled a deserter in the U.S. Army records. Indeed, after recovery from his injuries, Bonsall walked away from the army to resume life in Philadelphia with his wife and child.

Published for the first time, Bonsall's journal offers an unusually personal glimpse into the circumstances and motives of a man physically ruined by the war. Seventeen illustrations, including some drawn by Bonsall himself, help bring this narrative to life.



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