

H-Net Reviews

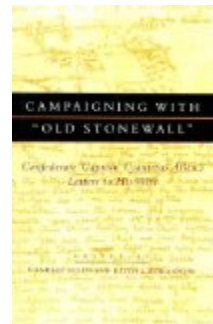
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Randall Allen, Keith S. Bohannon, eds. *Campaigning with "Old Stonewall": Confederate Captain Ujanirtus Allen's Letters to His Wife*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998. xi + 282 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2256-3.

Reviewed by Bruce Turner (Head of Archives and Special Collections, University of Southwestern Louisiana)

Published on H-CivWar (March, 1999)



Your Boy, Ugie

Thus Ujanirtus Allen signed many of the letters he sent to his wife, Sue. This compilation is the first time these letters have been available to the public since they are still held in private hands. Allen tried to write at least twice a week so there are a large number of letters in this collection. They range from lengthy and informative missives to mere notes of greetings sent off while overwhelmed with other responsibilities. In addition to his letters to Sue there are several letters to Thomas Boykin, Sr. and Thomas Boykin, Jr., members of a prominent family with which Allen had close ties.

Born in 1839, Ujanirtus Allen grew up near Antioch, Georgia in Troup County. He attended public schools, military academies, and Emory and Henry College so had considerable formal schooling (his writing style reflects his educational achievements). In 1860 he married Sue Fuller from Chambers County, Alabama. They had a son in May, 1861. At the age of twenty-one Allen inherited an estate valued at \$10,000 consisting mainly of three hundred twenty acres of land and eleven slaves.

Allen fully expected to spend his life as the owner/manager of a small plantation. However, the war intervened. A company of volunteers was raised around Antioch in April, 1861. Allen entered as a Second Lieutenant but rose to the rank of Captain. The outfit became Company F, 21st Georgia Regiment which was eventually assigned to Richard Ewell's division in Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's command. With the 21st Geor-

gia, Allen participated in the battles of 1862 Shenandoah Campaign, Gaines Mill, Cedar Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville, where he was mortally wounded.

Several large themes become apparent in reading these letters. Allen remained in the army because of his sense of duty, but he keenly regretted not being home with his family. He frequently contemplated resignation so that he could return home. These sentiments were especially strong when Sue was experiencing difficulties. Allen tried to supervise the operations of the plantation from one thousand miles away. He made suggestions about what crops should be planted and when the harvest should be sold. He also commented on and gave advice about the slaves. Because a slave left Allen's plantation to visit his wife on another plantation, Allen recommended that Sue ask a friend to whip him "from head to foot, not less than two or three hundred If he is not whipped you might as well set them all free" (18 April 1862, p. 86). On the other hand he expressed paternalistic care towards his slaves. "Remember me to the negroes; tell them that I always like to hear of their doing well, and being faithful to their business and hope they will give a good account of themselves" (27 April 1863, p. 229). Allen was concerned about the attitude of people at home towards the war effort and the soldiers. He felt that soldiers made too many complaints in letters or during visits home. Taken out of context these gave the local citizens an excessively negative picture of actual condi-

tions. At least one of Allen's letters was published in the local newspaper (probably one of those sent to Boykin, Sr. or Boykin, Jr.). Given this concern, Allen probably tempered his remarks even in the letters to his wife.

Of course many of the letters discussed camp conditions and described the life of soldiers. Shortages were a continual problem, especially clothes, shoes, and blankets. Allen often requested that his wife send him specific items he needed but could not procure through military channels. There were usually enough people traveling from Georgia to the regiment that the desired items could be hand delivered rather than being sent as unaccompanied freight. Even so, shortages persisted. Before receiving a new set of clothing supplied by the Confederate government, Allen said the soldiers looked like a "Ragged Rebels Roadway Reedy Relief set" (1 November 1862, p. 179). In 1863 he complained that the army was not supplied with knapsacks or transportation for personal effects of the soldiers. While marching through Maryland in September, 1862, Allen thought about buying supplies for his family since goods were so much cheaper there. He noted that Confederate soldiers often took items such as canteens and swords from Yankee battlefield casualties because they were of superior quality to what they had. Ironically, between the time Allen was wounded at Chancellorsville and the time he arrived at the field hospital, someone had taken his sword.

Allen did not complain about boredom in camp. In fact he felt overburdened with duties of being a line officer. He was conscientious when too many of his fellows shirked their duties. Malingering was an ever present problem. Soldiers feigned illness or simply left camp in order to avoid the rigors of military life, especially if a battle was pending. Allen did not have a high opinion of soldiers in general. "The common people [at home] do not know what an army is composed of," Allen writes. "There are men here who can put the devil to shame in the conception and execution of wickedness" (28 Sept. 1862, p. 167). Allen expressed admiration for Braxton Bragg and "Stonewall" Jackson, generals known for the strict discipline enforced against looters and stragglers. In other comments about camp life, Allen once complained about lice and once commented that prayer services were held daily. He also wrote about drills, picket duty, etc., in which the company participated. He gave some details about the responsibilities of officers of his rank and complained that he had to do the work of others who were not as dependable as he.

Allen was dedicated to the Confederate cause. He

attributed the war solely to Northern aggression. He lamented that if the South lost, "we would be disfranchised, dishonored, murdered, and our property taken away from us" (11 Sept. 1861, p. 39). Allen felt that the conflict had implications far beyond the borders of the CSA and USA: "The War may be the death knell of true republicanism and civil liberty. Again our position was such among the nations of the earth that the war is not only a great national calamity but is seriously felt by all civilized nations" (27 April 1863, 229). Allen believed the North continued in the war because its citizens were being duped by Lincoln. He felt the North did not have the same fighting spirit as the South. On 21 June 1862 he wrote, "I find one thing from all the Yankee prisoners. Soldiers and everyone are tired of the war. They have no idea of subjugating us. Nothing but their pride keeps their courage up" (p. 111). A month later he averred that Lincoln would be removed from office or assassinated if Northerners knew the true status of the war effort. Allen also had some comments and complaints about the conduct of the war by the South. News of military events elsewhere obviously reached the troops in northern Virginia. The Georgian commented several times on the possibility of European intervention, but he was not hopeful, saying that "Slave holders have no friends thar [sic]" (19 Dec. 1861, 70). Allen wrote about the fall of Ft. Pulaski at Savannah two weeks after it happened. Several times he mentioned the position of Confederate armies in the West (and criticized their seeming inactivity.) In May, 1862 he mentioned that Beauregard had gathered forces at Corinth, Mississippi, but he said nothing about the battle of Shiloh or the capture of New Orleans by Union forces. During the Fall, 1861 and Spring, 1862 especially Allen complained frequently that line officers and soldiers were never informed about military plans or strategies. They seemed to be involved in endless marches and repositioning to no real purpose. After the regiment was placed in Jackson's command, Allen did not express this discontent, perhaps because he had so much confidence in Jackson's leadership. Curiously, a letter dated 21 June 1862 stated that Joseph E. Johnston was still commander of the Confederate army around Richmond. Actually Robert E. Lee had replaced Johnston on 1 June.

The 21st Georgia regiment was involved in a number of battles while Allen was with it. He missed one [Second Manassas] due to illness. For the others his letters reflected only the experiences of the regiment. He knew his wife would read full accounts of the battles in newspaper dispatches. The one exception was Cedar Mountain where the regiment was held in reserve on a moun-

tain overlooking the battlefield. From that vantage point, Allen was able to report about the troop movements during the engagement. He even drew a map.

Despite Allen's dedication to the Confederacy and commitment to the war effort, he did not try to glamorize warfare or soldiering. After the Seven Days engagements he complained about the stench from unburied bodies. He frequently criticized aspects of a soldier's life: the marching; the shortage of rations, clothing, and pay; and the poor mail service. He never believed in the glory of military life, declaring "True we may imagine ourselves heroes immortalising [sic] ourselves by deeds of valor on the bloody field, but this is only the dream of the enthusiast, fit only to be disapated [sic] by a single night march or bomb" (1 Nov. 1862, p. 180). Expressing the moral ambiguity of armed conflict, Allen wrote, "I can shoot them [Yankee soldiers] as deliberately and eagerly as ever I did game; but I can not pass a wounded man without doing what I can for him, if it is nothing more than a sympathizing word or look" (17 Dec. 1862, p. 197). Allen's harshest statement about battlefield carnage combined his innate humanism with his anti-Union sentiments: "If Lincoln and his cabinet could see one battlefield, the mangled forms, blackened and distorted countinences of the dead; hear the piteous mouns [sic] of the wounded, see them reeling to and fro in their agony and dying in their own gore; their hearts would quake fearing the wroth of a just and avenging God, let us alone, and bring peace to the miserable millions of a once happy country" (28 Sept 1862, p. 168).

The editors, Randall Allen and Keith S. Bohannon are Troup County Archivist and author of several papers on Georgia history respectively. They divided the letters into eleven sections and provided an introduction for each. In these they comment on the campaigns in which the 21st Georgia regiment was involved. They also discuss the sometimes intense rivalry among its officers. Although Allen was involved, little about these difficul-

ties were mentioned in the letters. The editors also provide brief biographies of everyone who enlisted in this company. They give information about almost any Georgian mentioned in the letters. The bibliography is heavily weighted to Troup County and Georgia sources. The index is excellent for proper names and places but weak for objects or concepts. For instance, Allen frequently complained about the difficulty obtaining shoes, but these passages can not be found through the index. For prominent individuals index subdivisions refer to these more abstract matters. Under Ujanirtus C. Allen there are subsections on "advice to wife," "desire to leave army," "patriotism," etc.

These letters do not provide a coherent narrative of the war. They are frustrating because many times Allen seems to be answering letters from his wife point-by-point. Since those letters no longer exist, it is like listening to one half of a conversation. This volume will be most useful to readers interested in Georgia and the war, especially Troup County. However for those willing to search, the letters contain valuable insights concerning war time conditions, army life, and the reaction of a sensitive, educated individual. The most lasting impression from these letters is the willingness of soldiers to sacrifice everything, often including their lives, despite the fact that they were tired of war and longed to be home with family and friends.

The book is well designed and well printed (on alkaline paper). The price seems excessive because it will preclude use as a supplemental reading assignment in college courses. This book should be obtained by any researcher or library interested in Georgia and the war. It would also be useful for libraries aiming for comprehensive collections regarding the war.

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-civwar>

Citation: Bruce Turner. Review of Allen, Randall; Bohannon, Keith S., eds., *Campaigning with "Old Stonewall": Confederate Captain Ujanirtus Allen's Letters to His Wife*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. March, 1999.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2880>

Copyright © 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for

nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.