



The Civil War Journal of Private Heyward Emmell, Ambulance and Infantry Corps: A Very Disagreeable War

Jim Malcolm

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On October 1, 1861, nineteen-year-old Heyward Emmell took the first step that led him onto the front lines of the American Civil War for the next three years. He served, first, as an infantryman in the 7th Regiment, New Jersey, Volunteers, for twenty-two months and, then, as a stretcher bearer in the Ambulance Corps for fourteen months. Emmell witnessed and recorded virtually all the major events and battles of the Army of the Potomac from the Peninsula Campaign to Gettysburg to the Siege of Petersburg. This book presents what he saw in his own words-sometimes emotional, sometimes humorous, and always forthright. Emmell's account of his experiences is rich in detail, often noting aspects that are not reported in other Civil War diaries. He describes a wide variety of events, from the Southern sympathizers' attempt to poison Union soldiers with a gift of arsenic-laden cake, the suicides of a general accused of cowardice and a soldier too exhausted to continue, to the technologies employed in the war effort such as observation balloons and trip-wire mines.

Emmell's description of the gruesome realities of war-slaking his thirst by drinking water from a puddle contaminated with the blood of the wounded and boiling water on a fire made from the dried bones of casualties-present a chilling picture of life in war-torn Northern Virginia. Emmell describes not only the life of a soldier, but also the world such men lived in as around them life moved on. Emmell's older brother, George, a frequent visitor to the front, dies. A young lady from Phillipsburg, New Jersey, weary of waiting for her fiancée to come home on furlough, travels with her wedding party and marries in the Virginia wilderness. Balls are held between battles. Young men play practical jokes on each other. This journal, which has never been previously published, is the only known day-to-day eyewitness account of life as a stretcher bearer in the Ambulance Corps.



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