

**Guide to the William Byrns Letter, 1862 May 15
MS0414**

**The Mariners' Museum Library
at
Christopher Newport University**

Contact Information:
The Mariners' Museum Library
100 Museum Drive
Newport News, VA 23606
Phone: (757) 591-7782
Fax: (757) 591-7310
Email: library@MarinersMuseum.org
URL: www.MarinersMuseum.org/library

DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners' Museum Library

Title: William Byrns Letter

Inclusive Dates: 1862 May 15

Catalog number: MS0414

Physical Characteristics: One eight-page letter and one envelope.

Language: English

Creator: Byrns, William

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Byrns was a first lieutenant in Company B, 1st Michigan Volunteers. Nothing else is known of him. On May 10, 1862, the 1st Michigan Volunteers were part of the Union force under the command of Major General John E. Wool that landed at Ocean View, a short distance from the city of Norfolk.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This letter was written by William Byrns to Miss Florence Clark of Mount Morris, New York on May 15, 1862 from the Gosport Navy Yard in Portsmouth, Virginia. Byrns was part of the Union forces occupying the Navy Yard after the Confederate evacuation. In the letter, Byrns describes the destruction of the Navy Yard and the relatively good condition of the Marine Hospital. He also gives his thoughts on booby traps, which he calls torpedoes, and mentions seeing the damaged bow gun from CSS *Virginia*. Byrns incorrectly attributes to US Steam Battery *Monitor* the damage to the gun.

Significant portions of this letter tell of Byrns's interactions with local residents and the hostility he perceived from them, especially from women. Byrns also describes at length his feelings about serving in the Union army and outlines reasons for which he will not leave the service.

The vessel Byrns mentions transporting Union prisoners is the *William Kent*, built in 1848 as the *Ansonia* at Brooklyn, New York.

The letter is organized into a single folder.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Accession Number

MS0414

Accession Date

2008

Restrictions

The collection is open to all researchers.

Publication Rights

Copies of any materials may not be reproduced, published, or distributed in any form without the expressed permission of The Mariners' Museum.

Preferred Citation

William Byrns Letter, 1862 May 15, MS0414, The Mariners' Museum Library

Note to Users

Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with prescribed archival practices.

RELATED MATERIALS

A digitally-enhanced reproduction of the letter is stored with the letter in a separate folder. It is available for use in the Library only.

FILE GUIDE

Folder 1 Correspondence, May 1862
May 15, 1862: Gosport Navy Yard Va.
Eight-page letter and cover.

Folder 2 Correspondence, May 1862
Digital print of the May 15 letter only.

SOURCES CONSULTED

Elwin Eldridge Collection, 1800-1964, MS0091, The Mariners' Museum Library.
Gibson, Charles Dana and E. Kay Gibson. *Dictionary of Transports and Combatant Vessels, Steam and Sail, Employed by the Union Army, 1861-1868*. Camden, ME: Ensign Press, 1995.
The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Volume XI. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884.

SUBJECTS

United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Personal narratives
Portsmouth (Va.)-History-Civil War, 1861-1865
United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Social aspects
United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Naval operations
Norfolk Naval Shipyard (Portsmouth, Va.)
Booby traps
William Kent (Transport : 1861)
Virginia (Ironclad : 1862)
Monitor (Ironclad : 1862)