

Winnsboro diary shows Civil War

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soldiers unready for war in '61

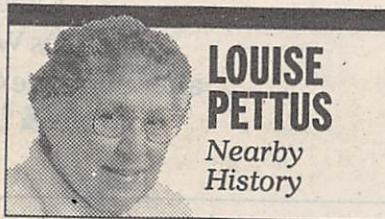
On a January day in 1861, Dr. Charles Bowen Betts, an ARP minister, doled out 85 cents in Winnsboro and bought a book with blank pages.

The book became his diary, and today it offers vivid insights on the first year of the Civil War in South Carolina.

Betts (1828-1903), a Tennessee native, was an Erskine seminary graduate. Recently, one of Betts' descendants, a retired Rock Hill medical doctor, Robert W. Patton Sr., transcribed and published the diary titled "The Civil War Diary of the Rev. Charles Bowen Betts, D.D."

The 240-page book covers the first year of the war, to Feb. 23, 1862.

The diary reveals life on the



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farm: constructing fences, raising pigs, cutting sprouts, buying seeds.

"I feel my love for manual labor is about to interfere with my studies. Have not written a word this week on my sermon . . ."

On March 8 Betts wrote: "Spoke to Col. Rion he gave me the appointment of chaplain." On April 2 Betts had his name put on the roll of Boyce's guards.

On April 11 Betts rose early, put on his uniform for the first time

and went into the town of Winnsboro to board the train for Charleston with his fellow soldiers.

The following day's entry told of the attack on Fort Sumter. His company was quickly moved to Fort Pickens Battery Island.

"The men had no tents, took the weather, rain all night. I with a few others was under shelter."

Aug. 15, Betts describes in detail the most harrowing experience of his life. He and three other men in a small boat went on a two-hour trip to Fort Palmetto. On their return, ". . . a flume struck our sail and capsized the boat."

The men were able to hold onto the boat but could not maneuver it to shore. In agony they drifted a mile and a half past their camp. But

their cries were heard, and four or five men come to their rescue. The four had been in the water for three hours and Betts lost his coat and cap.

On the April 24, Betts was back in Winnsboro with his family on leave until May 8. The entries for the month of May reveal a great deal of confusion and little training for the demands of war.

By May 25, Betts is compelled to write: "Considerable disorder in camp today, the men are perplexed, not knowing what is required of them."

The captain and first lieutenant of the Fencibles resigned, and some 200 of the men were on furlough.

By the end of May, the mosqui-

toes were unbearable in the Low-country swamps. Betts' company went back to Charleston. Other than preaching sermons on Sunday, Betts had little to do and wandered over the town and the countryside.

On June 14 Betts asked Capt. E.J. Means to receive any money due him.

"So ends my camp life. Two months and three days. What good I did I know not, I hope I did no harm."

He brought candy for his children and caught the train for home.

Betts returned to his church and farm work. Then on Sept. 26 he went back to camp, visiting his old company at Lightwood Knob

(present-day Fort Jackson). Returning home, he was asked to participate in night patrol.

On Oct. 17, Betts was called back into service. This time he went to Virginia but still managed to get home for Christmas and to stay until Jan. 9 before returning to the battlefield.

Betts' diary, above all else, illustrates how woefully unprepared South Carolina troops were for a war that they overconfidently thought would last only a few months.

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