

RICHARD GILLESPIE'S CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCES
by Louise Pettus

Richard Gillespie had finished Ebenezer Academy and was planning to attend the University of Virginia when the Civil War broke out. He enlisted on April 9, 1865, three days before the firing on Fort Sumter.

As a member of Co. E, 6th SC Regiment under Gen. Micah Jenkins, one of the founders of the Kings Mountain Academy, he arrived in Virginia on July 4th. The first land battle of the Civil War, First Manassas, was just ending when Gillespie's company arrived. He didn't fire a gun but toured the battlefield.

Gillespie's first battle was at Drainsville, about 15 miles from Washington. The battle was considered a draw. Shortly afterward, Gillespie witnessed his first execution. A Zouave from New Orleans cursed his officer, was tied to a stake and shot by his own company.

After the war, when Gillespie wrote his reminiscences for the S. D. Barron Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, he reported numerous battles. A typical short account told what happened at the battle of Seven Pines, ". . . we surprised the Yankees preparing dinner. We put them to flight, ate the dinner and captured stores, shot up the whiskey barrels, and helped ourselves."

He wrote of being on the sick list and going to Richmond to recuperate along with his cousin, Brown Garrison. Their landlady had a beautiful daughter and an equally beautiful niece. The boys had a "splendid time."

Richard Gillespie had a body servant named Sandy Gillespie with him. At Franklin, Virginia the man disappeared and Richard never saw him again.

Two of the company deserted and went home. "They were ignorant men, and did not know the dangers of desertion." The brigade commander found that the men had returned to their York county homes and sent a detail of soldiers to arrest them and take them back to Virginia.

A military court tried the deserters and condemned them to be shot. A short time later the brigade was marched into an open field and lined up. The condemned men were made to march up and down in front of their company while carrying their own coffins. They were tied to two stakes. A dozen men were selected. Half of them were handed guns with bullets; half without. No one knew who did the killing.

In the fall of 1863 the brigade was ordered to Chattanooga, Tennessee. At Look Out Mountain Gillespie received his only wound of the war. "A spent ball struck my ear and fell into my hands."

In Tennessee, as in Virginia, when rations got scarce the boys went foraging for chickens, geese, fruit or anything that was handy. They never hesitated to take what they wanted from civilians.

At Fredericksburg Gillespie did picket duty along the river. Union and Confederate troops agreed not to fire at each other. The soldiers talked across the river and exchanged jokes. "Some of our boys would make little pine bark boats and send tobacco across and receive coffee in return."

At Petersburg, Company E was given the task of building breastworks. A single shot was fired from some distance away. The shot hit and killed Gillespie's mess mate. Gillespie said that in the battle of Seven Pines, the slain soldier had shot, in cold blood, a Yankee who had surrendered. Gillespie said it was no accident and, "I always felt that the stray bullet, apparently from out of space, was a judgement sent upon my friend."

Gillespie was at Appomatox when Lee surrendered. The date was April 9, 1865, four years to the day from his enlistment.

Company E marched to Danville where Gillespie and Dr. Joe Miller, also of Ebenezer, climbed on top a freight car and rode to Charlotte. Relatives gave them a good dinner but their condition was such they declined to sleep in the offered beds and instead slept under a chinquapin bush on the outskirts of town. The next day they walked to Rock Hill.