

PRIVATE WILLIAM BARBER, CSA
by Louise Pettus

Many Civil War generals left their memoirs. Officers down through the rank of lieutenants might keep a journal or write long letters--letters that have survived. Few privates kept any records at all. If their memories were ever recorded it was usually by some relative or an occasional newspaper reporter. Even then, the accounts rarely go beyond that which could be found in the public records: name, rank, major battles, whether wounded or not, and a tribute to General Lee.

In 1927 a local correspondent from Clover, James Stanhope Love (also known as "Ben Hope") wrote a column for the Rock Hill Record titled "A Confederate Veteran of Clover." The veteran, William Barber, was a private in Company G of the 18th S. C. Volunteers under Gen. N. G. Evans. Most of Company G. was raised in Kings Mountain district of York County.

Private Barber was from Clark's Fork; others in his company enlisted from the communities of Bethany, Hickory, King's Creek, Hoodtown, Zadok, and Stump. William Barber's father was George Barber and his mother a Miss Neil from North Carolina. His mother died when he was five and he had few memories of her but could recall a happy childhood on a farm.

General Evans' troops were independent of other units in the army, described by Barber as "freelance." Consequently, Barber in three years time served and fought in engagements from the Mississippi River to northern Virginia.

Although frequently in the thick of very heavy fighting, Barber was never wounded. In one battle, he recalled that he was the only soldier in his unit who was not wounded or killed. He did contract pneumonia after swimming in the Pearl River in Mississippi. And he got whooping cough while on furlough in York County.

Looking back, Barber believed that the Confederate War (as Hope called it) was "an ill-advised conflict." Hope pointed out that Barber was proud of his role in the war but that, at the same time, Jefferson Davis "kept the war going too long after it had become evident...that defeat was inevitable."

Especially, Barber believed that the South should not have fought to perpetuate slavery. Barber thought the whole slave system was "rotten" at the time he enlisted. Why, then, did he fight for it? Barber said there was nothing else for him to do at the time--that the South had to fight for her right to govern herself. He was convinced that the North would have had slaves if the conditions for slavery there had made it profitable.

When asked if he ever killed a Yankee, Barber replied: "I don't know whether I killed a man or not; I only know that I did some mighty close shooting." After describing the battle in which he was his company's only unwounded man, Barber added, "Yes, it was a scrap, and one time in such a thing is enough for any man."

In the last months of the war many of Barber's comrades deserted. Others tried to tempt him to quit but Barber steadfastly refused. He said it was bad luck to start anywhere and then turn back at the last.

Ben Hope reported Barber as saying: "Once when I was home on furlough, and expressed my opinion that the war would soon be over and the South whipped,--though some of the folks at home just would not believe it then,--one of my friends advised me to hide out for a while until it was all over with. And I could have done so; but I would not, and now I am glad I didn't."

Barber was captured at Dinwiddy Courthouse near Petersburg, Virginia on April 1, 1865 and kept a prisoner at Point Lookout, Maryland until June 16. He said that he had no unpleasant memories of prison camp.

After the war, the Ku Klux Klan was very active in York County. Barber refused to have any part in it saying that he had already seen enough of strife and bloodshed.