Mount Gilead, N. C.
Nov. 25th, 1931

By the request of two of my dearest nieces, Louise Corpening and Lottie Stewart, I will try and give a few sketches of days gone by many long years ago.

I was born in Mt. Gilead, Nov. 14th 1845, making me 86 years old and eleven days today. My dear father was Murphy McRae. My dear mother was Mandy Williams. Six children were born to them. Alex, James Lawrence, Mary, Monroe, Nancy, and Joseph. All have passed away and I am the only one left to represent the dear little family that dear Father and dear Mother loved so dearly.

My father died in 1855. My mother died in 1857.

I only had 8 months at school, our schools at that time were almost a failure, only about two months annually free schools. The little education I have, I just picked up along the way. No doubt if my dear parents could have lived, I would have been educated and this old block of matter on top of my bean sharpened up. I might have had a position in the Capitol, or in jail any way, for the place I was best suited for.

My father owned a farm at his death of three hundred acres, and a good bunch of negroes. When my dear parents died, our property died to us, which so often the case with fatherless and motherless children. Woe unto him that deals unjustly to the widow and orphans.

WAR

In 1863 I volunteered and joined the Army of the Confederacy, not yet 18 years old. I enlisted in Company B, 28th N. C. Regiment, Lane's Brigade, Wilcox Division, A. P. Hill's Corps.

My first battle of much interest was at the Battle of the Wilderness, north of Richmond near the Potomac River. We fought there two days and one night on the same battle field. Those two great armies were pushing against each other like two mighty tornadoes. Some times we were on their and some times they were on ours. In the evening of the second day we gained the field. By some of the bravest fighting since the days of Caesar, we left fifty thousand of those heroes dead on the field.

The next move with the Federals was to try to make their way to Richmond, Va. We met them at every point. We fought on the mountains, in the valley, in the fields, in the , in the creeks and rivers, down by Gaines Mill, Yellow Tavern, where our brave General was killed. He was a brave Cavalry General. I met him and we had a few words about twenty minutes before the battle began. He was shot from his saddle in a few minutes after the battle began. Stewart (J. E. B.) was a Scotch hero.

I also had the pleasure of meeting Gen. R. E. Lee the same day and passing a few words with that great man. I had no equal as a military leader. I am sure of that for he led me not along the

still waters and flowery beds of ease, but along the pathway of death and destruction. This was blood war and temperature ran high, fighting for our homes and loved ones.

Our next big hitch from the Wilderness was Spotsylvania Court House, Va. The two great and brave armies for combat there. I think we began fighting 1st day of May '64, and fought 13 days. The Federals made a desperate effort to break through and go to Richmond. They failed for the Dixie boys stood firm as the Rock of Gibralter. I saw the most blood and the most dead men I ever saw any where during the war. I was in blood over my shoe soles, and I saw men piled four deep, and they were not all Blues, neither all Greys. They fell together bayonet fighting. If you will never tell it, I'll tell you I put some of them there. No other troops on the Confederate side were in that blood deal but Lane's Brigade. Some of the boys that helped to bury the dead said they "put sixty Federals in one ditch - - - Indian Regiment, that about cleaned up that company.

Some very interesting things occurred at Spotsylvania Court House in the way of warfare. I had some narrow escapes there. I don't like the word Spotsylvania, so hard for me to write it correctly, and I suffered so much there from cold and hunger, while the two great armies were fronting each other. There in their breast works the enemy ran a battery of three cannons on the little hill between the lines and were giving the Confederates trouble. Gen. Lee sent Gen. Lane a dispatch to take his brigade and silence that battery. In a moment our brigade was ordered over the breast works, formed in line of battle, and at them we went. We played havoc there in a few moments, for we did not have but a short while to stay in that critical position. A regiment of artillery was lying down about one hundred yards from the cannons. They rose up in line. We pulled on a dead level at that line. I never witnessed the like before. I think half of them felled at the first volley we fired. I saw a mist of blue rise up like flakes of blue snow. We then turned to the horses that pulled the cannons. I think there was about thirty of the finest iron grays I ever saw. The boys rushed on them with bayonets. They were all dead in five minutes. There was horrible grunting and kicking for a little while. Just as we were finishing the job, an army of about eight or ten thousand Yanks ran in between and over our breast works. Then business opened up at a lively rate, shooting, knocking down and bayonetting. The most of us cut our way through and got back to our breast works. They killed and captured several thousands of our boys. We got all mixed up together. They captured our flag and - captured our brave Gen. Lane, but a man named Daniel Moose re-captured him, also the two Yanks that had him. Moose belonged to Company K from Stanley County. I and Moose were special friends. He was brave and clever. He died several years ago.

When the bulk of Lee's army left Spotsylvania, about a division of Federals were left there, while the two main armies were making their way toward Richmond. We stayed there a day or two in our works fronting the Yanks. Gen. Lee sent a dispatch to Gen. Lane for him and Gen. Scales to take their brigades and storm the Yanks in their works and then hasten on to the main army. It was a hard fight, but soon over. We went to the works in quick time. I had a dear uncle in Scales' Brigade - Uncle Alex McRae, the best [illegible]

my bunk, looked at me with a sad face, went to the Ward Master's office and told him he would not prescribe any more for McRae, he will go tonight, with the remark, "Dear Boy, I hate it, I hate it." I was as rational as I am today and detected at once he had lostbx hope for me. Next morning he came in, he saw a change for the better. He sat down on the side and talked for some time. He said, "Mac, you are going to get well, and I am going to do my best to get you a thirty days furlough." I thanked him kindly for all he had done for me. With all of his efforts, I came near missing the furlough. A number of us who were convalescing were sent up to the Board of Physicians for examinations. Men would be called in by name. Not but few got furloughs. Most of them were assigned to duty in from 5 to 10 days. My name was called and on I went, with scarcely any hope of a furlough. The old doctor looked at me, said, "Well, you look like you will be able for service in a few days." At that moment my dear little doctorMayo appeared. Then he and the doctors had it all to themselves. I stood there listening and hoping. At last the head doctor said to the clerk, "Write him a furlough for 30 days, but he will be able for service in ten days." I got better the quickest I ever did before. I was so anxious to see my dear people. I got home where I could see no blood, no dead and mangled, no roaring of muskets and cannons. Had sweated out some of the War fever and began to feel like my old self again. Got back to the Army some time in September '64, and in a few days we had a desperate battle two miles south of Petersburg, Va. I dreaded that battle the most I ever did a battle. I guess it was because I had been at home.

We commenced fighting at one o'clock in the evening and fought till five before we drove them from the field. I used a bad word just before the battle began, as we were formed in line for the battle. We had plain view of the Yankee line about five hundred from us. A dear friend of mine, Billy Ballard, bowed his head and began praying. I said to him, "No time for that now, you had better be thinking about killing those D- Yankees." He said, "You had better be praying, too." He was a good man, I knew him from a boy. We both got badly hurt in that battle. He got a flesh wound on his head, and I got a grape shot shock that layed me out for a little while, knocked me several feet, and hurt me badly. Hit my gun about the stock and turned the ball on it, would have gone through me. I never saw such destruction before or ever since then. There were sixteen of us in the bunch, all private soldiers but one lieutenant. We were charging a Yankee battery of three pieces of artillery. We were in about seventy-five yards of the three big guns heavily loaded with grape shot, iron ballsas large as a goose egg, about half a bushel to the gun. Fired all three of those cannons at the same time into the bunch of sixteen. They were literally torn to pieces, except myself. Legs and arms torn off, heads bursted, brains and intestines scattered over the earth. After I recovered a little from the terrible shock, I rose up and looked, and I never witnessed the like before. I felt like my left shoulder was broken to pieces, the Yanks in seventy-five yards of me. They never said a word to me. I expected to be shot every minute or taken prisoner. I walked away slowly across the field and made my way to my Brigade, halted about half a mile from the Yanks on the battle field where we fought that evening. Ready for the fight next morning, we charged them in their trenches and went over in five minutes. We handled them rough. We were madm because of the failure to take the works the evening before. The evening I got so badly shocked and

because my officers wanted me to go over to the field hospitalk. I objected and told them I would be able for the fight in the morning, which I was. I was eager to get another pull at them, and I got it, and it was rough. Some body got hurt that morning, but I didn't, but got paid well for my shock the evening before.

Dec. 2nd, 1931

Feeling bad today, full of cold and headache, backache, and nervous, but I am glad I am able to be on the job.

I was taken prisoner the morning of April 2nd, 1865, seven days before Lee surrendered, carried to Point Lookout at the entrance of the Potomac River into the Chesapeake Bay, twenty thousand when I went there, but thousands of them died there. I was there from April to August. I got the terriblest cussing that morning I failed to drop my gun when asked to surrender. One plunged at me with bayonet on his gun, I dodged the gun. The other one told him to hold, he would fix me. I heard the hammer on his gun click. He pressed the musket of the gun to my head. I dropped my gun. He said, "Just in time, Johnny." He caught the hammer and let it down. Then the cursing began by both of them. I never - - a bit, didn't think it a very appropriate place I felt like it. I just stood and listened. If I could have had them to themselves, it would have been different, for I would not have taken the abuse the devils put on me. They said the reason they were so rough with me, they thought I was from South Carolina. It was some time before I could convince them that I was not a South Carolinian. They cursed me and threatened to knock me in the head if I denied it. They said they had been fronting S. C. troops there all the winter, which they had.

At ten o'clock the night we moved to the position where McGowan's S. C. Brigade had been all the winter, McGowan's troops moved farther to the right. They had not discovered that. I told them if they would allow me, I would explain it to them, that I belonged to Lane's North Carolina Brigade. They then said, "You North Carolinians are fully good boys, but you are hard fighters, we dread you in battle." I said that was what we were out for. They were bitter against S. C. They begged pardon and told me they were the state of New York, asked me if I had any thing to eat. I told them I had two little pones of corn bread. They asked me if I would let them have a piece of it for crackers. "Yes", I said, and glad to exchange. They took one piece only and I divided it. Said that was the first they had seen since their mamma cooked it. They filled my haversack with crackers, which I was glad to get. They were tall, fine-looking men and had the appearance of brothers. They asked me if I wanted one of them to go with me over to their lines. I told them I didn't think it necessary.

Thousands of Confederate prisoners were going on. I crossed over our breast works, went over the dead and wounded, and just in front of where our Company was in front of our breastworks. The Yanks were picking up their wounded. They had a young Yankee boy carrying him from the field. He was suffering awful. His knee was burated by a ball. He asked me for water. I gave him a drink from my canteen. He thanked me and asked me if I would help them carry him. I said yes. I may have been that wounded you. You were picked up in front of

where my company fought." I helped carry him from the field. We laid the boy down in a tent. Just at that time a cannon ball came whizzing from our fort, called Battery G regular, went through the top of the tent. I said, "Good-bye, I don't want to be killed by our balls. They were charging that Fort Battery Greg at that time and a terrible slaughter. The Yanks conquest the fort sixteen deep, and after a desperate slaughter, captured it. We had another fort nearby, called Fort 45. They took it also. These forts were just outside the city of Petersburg, Va. Our brave Corps Gen. A. P. Hill was killed that morning the 2nd day of April 1865. Our Gen. Lane had a button shot from his cap, but made his escape. Lane was never wounded but one time, that was near Richmond, Va. at Cold Harbor or Turkey Ridge, the place had two names. Lane was near me when he was wounded. We had driven them from the field when a sharpshooter shot him through the leg. He was in the hospital for several weeks. We had hard times in the war and a lot of fun. It was laughable and interesting to see the boys catch fowls as we passed farm houses. We were not allowed to break ranks. At times we would march four to six abreast. The boys would carry corn in their pockets, fish hooks, and long lines. A hook to the line and an ounce ball of lead, they could pitch it 30 feet with a grain of corn on the hook. The fowl would pick it up and he was sure to be caught. He would pull the old turkey up to him in the road and away they would go, the turkey flopping at his feet, the old woman hollering, "Stop, Mister, and let me catch him. He won't hurt you." "I'm not going to stop and let that old turkey bite me" he said. "He won't hurt you." "I know he will bite me if I stop." "No, he won't. I never knew him to run after any body before. Go on, then! I don't care if he kills you. You old fool, you had no business running after him."

Many funny things happen in war and really in battle. A spent ball hit a soldier by my side on his neck. He dropped his gun and did some lively cutting-up. The ball never broke the skin. He tried to stick his finger on the bullet hole, then he got out of the fight by running like a scared buck. It tickled me, I believe he was scared.

Seth Andrews, a dear friend of mine, born the same year, raised neighbor boys, went to the war together, a brave soldier.

In May at Cold Harbor near Richmond, we had a hot scrap with the Yanks. We soon gained the field. Seth Andrews, my dear friend, was by my side. I heard the ball when it crashed through his canteen. He dropped his gun and said, "Oh, Lord!" I said, "Seth, are you badly hurt?" "Yes," said he, "my bowels are shot out, no time for me to stop." The battle was lively for a little while. As soon as the battle was over, I was put on Scout and Sharpshooting duty. Pursuing the enemy that evening, night came on, and we in a pine thicket, and the Yankee Scouts were about 75 yards in front of me. We were behind trees for protection. We could not have lived there two minutes. There were two behind the tree against me. Late in the evening when would get glimpse of each other, we would fire. Before sundown, one of them dropped his gun, made a frightful holler, and ran. He must have had a sudden attack of jawache. The other one ceased firing at me in about one hour. In the night our Orderly Sergeant came out to the Sharpshooters with orders to get out at once, that the Yanks were maneuvering to surround us. I said, "But I am going on the battle field not far

behind and hunt Seth Andrews. He was mortally wounded, from his actions. He said, "You had better look out for yourself or the Yanks will get you." I said, "I am going to get him from the field if wounded, and if dead, I am going to try and bury him." I looked for him, but failed to find him. I hurried on and found Lane's Brigade about three miles from there, standing around camp fires, got in there where some of my company were. I asked, "Boys, who all are missing?" They began to tell me. I said, "Seth Andrews, dear boy, is on the field badly wounded or dead. I failed to find him." He was at a fire not far from me, and heard me. He came hurriedly to me, and said, "No, by golly, Mac. They near killed me." Removing some of his clothing, he showed me a red mark across his stomach. He said, "That ball burnt like a red hot iron." Said he thought he was shot through the bowels and the water pouring from the canteen he thought was his bowels. He went cooped over, he said, to hold them in and live as long as he could. Dear old comrade. He passed away several years ago in Wolf Pit Township, Richmond County, N. C. I never had the pleasure of seeing with him but little after the war. He married. The three brothers of them, Tom, Seth, and Sie. Sie was the first man killed in our Company F, 28th Regiment, N. C. troops. Sie was killed at the battle of Seven Pines near Richmond. Tom was killed at Manassas, a grape shot hit him in the stomach, killed him instantly, and never broke the skin. He, too, was a dear, brave boy.

On the morning of March 25th - the Yanks blew up a Confederate fort near Petersburg, Va., cut a tunnel several hundred feet to the fort, put fifteen hundred pounds of powder under the fort. The Confederates had the largest Seige gun there ever used on land. It was very destructive to the enemy troops. It was so large it was said it took sixty horses to pull it there. It lay in the crater till the war ended. It was an awful shock when that blew up. Some of the chimney tops were thrown to the ground, glass windows broken. During the time an army of negroes charging the Confederates, hollering "Hurrah! Hurrah! No quarters for the Rebs! Remember Fort Pillow!" That was the death yell for them, for not one of them ever escaped death on the field. Gee whiz! If ever men's blood boiled, it did then. The negroes didn't intend taking any prisoners. So there were no prisoners in that battle, but a lot of bloody - wool and brains, while they hollered, "Remember Fort Pillow." Fort Pillow was on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River, above Memphis, Tenn. Gen. Forrest with his cavalry crossed the river to the fort cavalry, dismounted, charged the fort, occupied mostly by negroes, another clean-up of negroes.

I could give more sketches of the past, but I am feeling so badly, I must close. I hope that these few sketches will be of some interest, as I have done about the best I could under the circumstances.

With true love to all friends and relatives, and for the dear old land of Dixie.

J. L. McRae

Dear Louise and Lottie,

This is so badly written and spelt. Get you some good tablet paper. Each one of you take a duplicate of it, straighten up all. Write in a more proper style.

I feel so bad and nervous, and my eyes so weak, I can't fix it up as I wish to. So nervous, can't use pen and ink. When I am feeling better and not so nervous, I will give you more little stories to add to the little history.

Mt. Gilead, N. C. Dec. 1931