

# H-Net Reviews

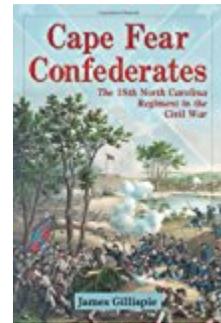
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James Massie Gillispie. *Cape Fear Confederates: The 18th North Carolina Regiment in the Civil War*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012. 240 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-4847-0.

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Commissioned by Hugh F. Dubrulle



## Story of the “Bloody” Eighteenth: Adequate But Not All There

In recent years, there has been a profusion of published regimental histories. That’s good news, particularly for those with an ancestor in the unit’s ranks, living in the area where the unit was raised and organized, or simply interested in the history of such a unit. James Gillispie has written a history of one of the more storied and unfortunate fighting regiments in the Army of Northern Virginia, the 18<sup>th</sup> North Carolina. As a component of the famous all North Carolina Branch-Lane Brigade, A. P. Hill’s renowned Light Division, and Third Corps, the Eighteenth figured in most of the battles fought by the Confederate army from the Peninsula Campaign to Appomattox, under Robert E. Lee. During this period, the regiment won an enviable reputation as one of the most hard-hitting commands in the Confederate army. Unfortunately, it also found itself front and center in one of the more famous and tragic incidents of the war: the “friendly fire” incident at the Battle of Chancellorsville which wounded Stonewall Jackson and ultimately led to his death. If there is any bad news here, it’s that although command changes and the personalities of some officers are covered, this book presents basic facts and follows the regiment throughout the war without discussing the “who” of those comprising the ranks.

The author traces the unit’s initial organization and composition before describing its first experience of “seeing the elephant” at Hanover Court House, where it took heavy casualties and earned its “bloody” moniker. Recruited from the more secessionist-leaning Cape Fear

area of North Carolina, the regiment attained veteran status the hard way and eventually developed into one of the best units in the Army of Northern Virginia, fighting all the way through the war until surrendering at Appomattox with an aggregate of eighty-four men and officers. Along the way, Gillispie does cover the wounding incident at Chancellorsville yet adds nothing new to the record, recounting the standard tale of how Jackson and his staff’s returned through the Eighteenth’s picket line and, understandably, were mistaken for Union cavalry in the darkness and heavily forested terrain.

When discussing battles and campaigns, the author refers to the regiment as a unit rather than drawing attention to the individuals in its ranks. The reader gets no real idea or intimation of just who served in the regiment. Many regimental histories include a roster of those serving yet Gillispie includes no such roster, except for two appendices listing those men who surrendered at Appomattox and those who served in the unit the longest, respectively. Even though he consulted quite a few primary sources, other than some of the papers and diaries of James Lane and a few others, there are no letters, diaries, or journals cited to reveal the attitudes, experiences, trials, and tribulations of the enlisted men. Nor are there any photographs of these soldiers. In effect, the reader has little opportunity to get to know the men who did the living, fighting, and dying over the course of the war. Who knows? Perhaps those absent letters and diaries contain additional information relevant to Jackson’s

wounding.

The illustrations provided are relatively few and far between. Those of the unit's battle flags, three of which were captured and demonstrate the unit's participation in the most furious combat, are a highlight and show the Eighteenth's many battle honors. They are especially emblematic of the unit's combat prowess and the reliance placed on it by the Confederate high command when there was hard fighting to be done. In addition, there are no maps included in the book to indicate where

the Eighteenth was in any particular battle. Such maps might have helped illustrate the unfortunate tactical situations in which the regiment found itself and which caused many of the unit's casualties early in the war.

With so many regiments still needing their story told, it is incumbent on writers and historians to continue the trend. If one wants to read about the 18<sup>th</sup> North Carolina, *Cape Fear Confederates* is a basic and adequate effort but a more in-depth treatment of its membership and story should be considered in the future.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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