

BRIGADIER GENERAL MICAH JENKINS

James J. Baldwin III*

This paper is taken from the author's biography of Micah Jenkins entitled, *The Struck Eagle*. Perhaps a better title for the book would have been, *The Rise and Fall of a Promising, Young, South Carolina Family*. Most of Micah Jenkins' adult life, short as it was, was involved in leading men in war, or in the preparations for war. When the War for Southern Independence finally came, it had a devastating impact on Micah Jenkins and his young family, as it did on so many other families in South Carolina.

Even the great Confederate warrior, General Robert E. Lee, would catch himself being swept up in the romance and excitement of the early years of the war and would turn and face its terrible reality. An example of this occurred on the morning of the Battle of Fredericksburg (Virginia), December 13, 1862. Generals Lee and Longstreet were standing on Telegraph Hill, overlooking the battle, as the Federal brigades began to advance against Stonewall Jackson's corps. It was a compelling spectacle for a professional soldier, the thousands of men in formation, colorful battle flags fluttering in the wind, bayonets gleaming in the sunlight. As the two generals gazed upon this panorama of war, Lee turned and said: "General Longstreet, it is well that war is so terrible - [else] we [might] grow too fond of it."

By the time General Lee made this famous statement in late 1862, Micah Jenkins had himself already begun to understand the terrible reality of the war. In fact, the wording of his letters to his wife clearly reflect his changing from a romantic idealist to a somber realist. But before I tell you how that happened, let me tell you a little about the man, Micah Jenkins.

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JENKINS' EARLY YEARS

Jenkins had to have been one of the luckiest boys in the world, growing up in the 1830's and 1840's on beautiful Edisto Island below Charleston. He was one of five children of Captain John Jenkins, who operated three plantations on or near the island. Much of his time was spent at "Brick House," the plantation on Edisto owned by Micah's uncle, Joseph Evans Jenkins. This uncle later represented Edisto Island at the State Secession Convention and made the statement, "If South Carolina will not secede from the Union, Edisto Island will."

Micah Jenkins left Edisto Island at only age fifteen to enter the Citadel, having barely met the school's minimum age requirement. His goal was to become the number one cadet in his class, which he did achieve when his class graduated in 1854.

FOUNDING KINGS MOUNTAIN MILITARY SCHOOL

During their senior year at the Citadel, Jenkins and his classmate, Asbury Coward, agreed to become partners after graduation and build a military school for boys. The Citadel cadets had engaged in a remarkably successful "March Through the Upcountry" in the spring of 1854 and had spent a few days in Yorkville (now York), South Carolina. It was on that trip that Jenkins and Coward had selected a wooded site outside of Yorkville on the road to the famous Kings Mountain Battlefield.

In January, 1855, only a month after they graduated, Jenkins and his partner began conducting classes in Yorkville in a large rented mansion. At the time they did this, they were only nineteen years old. The following year, a large building was erected on the site they had purchased on Kings Mountain Road. Jenkins had to borrow \$5000 for his share of the building, and because he was under twenty-one, his older brother had to co-sign the note. By 1861 Jenkins' school, named the Kings Mountain Military School, would be educating 150 student-cadets.

Jenkins and Coward had intended that their graduates should be able to enter the Citadel as sophomores, exempting the freshman year. In order to arrange his school's curriculum to accomplish this end, Jenkins traveled to Orangeburg to visit a founder and member

of the Citadel's board, David F. Jamison. On this trip, Micah Jenkins met and fell in love with Caroline, D. F. Jamison's eldest daughter. They were married about a year later, in July 1856, an event described in Nell Graydon's well-known book, *Tales of Edisto*.

STORM CLOUDS GATHERING

In a letter written to his brother John, just prior to Jenkins' wedding in 1856, he expressed a definite concern that war could break out between the North and South. No doubt what prompted this concern was the well-known incident between Preston Brooks and Charles Sumner in Washington, D. C., which had occurred only a few days earlier. You may recall that Brooks (from Edgefield, South Carolina) had caned Charles Sumner on the Senate floor for inflammatory remarks Sumner had made about Brooks' aging cousin, Andrew Pickens Butler. Rallies were held all over Massachusetts, where the abolitionist Sumner was from, denouncing Preston Brooks and hanging him in effigy. Counter-rallies were held throughout South Carolina to support what Brooks had done, including a rally in Yorkville, no doubt attended by Jenkins. In fact, a ball took place at the courthouse here in Greenville in support of Brooks, and a dinner was held in his honor at the Mansion House.

The bitter sectionalism between the North and South was becoming more serious than it had ever been, even during the early 1830's when the "Nullification Crisis" almost led to war. After the Brooks-Sumner incident, in Kansas there was bloodshed over the question of whether she would come into the Union as a "slave state" or a "free state," thereby affecting the balance of power in the United States Senate.

By far the most serious event that occurred between the North and South during the 1850's was John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry in October of 1859. Financed by wealthy Northern abolitionists, for the purpose of creating a slave rebellion in Virginia, Brown's raid sent shock waves throughout the South.

Jenkins and many other men in the South could now see war on the horizon. Throughout South Carolina volunteer military companies, which could train more often than the state militia, were established. Micah Jenkins formed such a company in Yorkville,

called "The Jasper Light Infantry," only a few weeks before John Brown's raid. Occasionally Jenkins would drill his volunteer company in combination with the cadets at his military school, which was quite a spectacle for the people of Yorkville.

A few months after John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, the Democratic National Convention was held in Charleston, South Carolina. After several days of disagreement over the party's platform, almost all of the delegates of five Southern states walked out in protest. Only two South Carolina delegates remained with the convention, and one of these was Benjamin Perry from Greenville, who opposed secession. With the Democratic Party now split along sectional lines, the door was opened for Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. Most of the political leaders in South Carolina felt that the Southern states should secede if Lincoln was elected. In fact South Carolina's governor, William Gist, called for a special convention in this state to consider the issue of secession as soon as Lincoln was elected.

Of course, Lincoln was elected in November 1860, and South Carolina did hold its Secession Convention only six weeks later. The delegates included Micah Jenkins' brother, John, and uncle, Joseph E. Jenkins. On the fourth ballot the delegates elected as the president of the Secession Convention Micah Jenkins' father-in-law, David F. Jamison. When the Ordinance of Secession was passed by a vote of 169 to 0, Jamison declared that South Carolina was a sovereign nation. This, of course, raised the thorny issue of the Federal installations in Charleston, most notably Fort Sumter.

Seeing the possibility that South Carolina might have to defend herself from a possible Federal invasion, the Legislature immediately called for the raising of ten infantry regiments of volunteer troops from all over South Carolina. The top three (field) officers in each of these regiments were to be elected by the troops themselves. Two months after South Carolina seceded, Micah Jenkins was elected colonel of the Fifth South Carolina Volunteers, a regiment of more than one thousand men from the districts of Spartanburg, Union and York. One of the ten companies in Jenkins' regiment was the one he had formed in Yorkville, the Jasper Light Infantry. About the same time his regiment was formed, Jenkins

resigned his elected position of intendant of Yorkville.

WAR FINALLY COMES

When President Buchanan refused to turn over Fort Sumter to South Carolina, the fort quickly became the flash point of the coming conflict. When Lincoln took office and sent the Federal fleet into Charleston Harbor to reinforce and resupply Fort Sumter, the conflict finally erupted during the second week of April, 1861.

Jenkins and his men left their homes to defend the state on April 13, 1861, one day after the Battle of Fort Sumter had begun. They arrived in Charleston by train on the day after the Federals had finally surrendered Fort Sumter to General Beauregard, the Confederate officer in command of the forces in Charleston. D. F. Jamison wrote to his daughter, Caroline (Micah's wife), saying he had attended the surrender ceremony with Beauregard and Governor Francis Pickens, and he described the ceremony for her in interesting detail.

Jenkins and his men in the Fifth South Carolina Volunteers remained on Sullivan's Island for the next five weeks, diligently preparing to repulse any Federal invasion along the coast.

In late May it became clear that the initial Federal invasion would come in Northern Virginia and not in South Carolina. Jefferson Davis called for as many volunteers as possible to be sent by the Confederate states to Virginia. Jenkins and most of his men converted their State enlistments into Confederate enlistments and were sent to Richmond on three trains during the first week in June, 1861. A few days later they were ordered on up to Manassas Junction, where a major battle was expected to take place, and Jenkins reported to the army commander there, General Beauregard.

On Sunday night before the battle occurred, one of Jenkins' sentinels shot an intruder in the dark who had refused to identify himself. The intruder turned out to be a large milk cow, and the sentinel, Private Calvin Cook, from near Spartanburg, was arrested for destruction of private property. Cook's defense was so convincing that Colonel Jenkins soon ordered his release. Cook claimed he thought the intruder was "a Yankee in a cow skin."

The Battle, called First Manassas by Southern historians,

occurred on July 21, 1861, and resulted in an utter rout of Federal forces, sending them reeling back toward Washington. Jenkins and his regiment performed admirably in their first test under fire. In the following months, Jenkins and his men were assigned to the division of General James Longstreet. Jenkins was to become Longstreet's favorite brigadier general in the coming battles.

Ten months after the First Battle of Manassas, the Federal Army was within only several miles of Richmond. On May 31, 1862, the two armies collided at Seven Pines, about six miles due east of Richmond. Jenkins was in command of three regiments (a half brigade) during the first day of the battle and they performed so well that Jenkins received many accolades from his superiors. Longstreet said that "[t]he distinguished ability of [Jenkins], and his brigade on the field, far surpasses any conduct of troops [thus far] during the War." A few weeks later, General Robert E. Lee, the new Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, wrote to Jefferson Davis recommending Jenkins' promotion to brigadier general. Lee told Davis that Jenkins' "conduct at Seven Pines was worthy of all commendation" and Davis had him promoted on Lee's recommendation.

It was in this fighting around Richmond, during the summer of 1862, that Jenkins clearly showed his ability to lead men in battle. But it was also that same fighting that changed him forever. In one of his battles, his newly formed regiment (the famous Palmetto Sharpshooters) entered the fight with almost 400 men. The next morning only 125 could answer the morning roll call - more than sixty-seven per cent of their comrades had been either killed or wounded. It was after this battle, called Frayser's Farm, that Jenkins was observed walking over the smoking battlefield, searching for his fallen men and weeping like a child. One of those seriously wounded was Jenkins' young brother-in-law, John W. Jamison, brother of Jenkins' wife Caroline.

Only two months later, in almost the same spot the fight had taken place a year earlier, the Federals met Lee's army again at Manassas, Virginia. Once more the Federals suffered a defeat and withdrew from the field, but here Jenkins was wounded in the chest and left shoulder and came very close to losing an arm. He was sent

home by train to Yorkville, South Carolina, for his recovery but not before General Lee had personally wished him well.

In September, 1863, Jenkins and his brigade were assigned to John Bell Hood's division and sent toward Chattanooga, Tennessee. Jenkins stopped in Yorkville long enough to say goodbye to Caroline, who was pregnant, and to check on his youngest son, Whitemarsh, who was very ill. After he had been in Tennessee for about two weeks, Jenkins learned that his son had died. He needed to be home, but he had no choice but to leave his pregnant wife there to deal with the funeral by herself. He was learning that the war could be just as difficult on the families back home as on the sons, fathers and brothers who were off doing the hard fighting.

JENKINS' LAST BATTLE

Longstreet's corps, including Jenkins' brigade, returned from Tennessee to Lee's Army of Northern Virginia just in time for the Battle of the Wilderness, a few miles west of Fredericksburg. It was during this battle, on Friday, May 6, 1864, that Jenkins and General Joe Kershaw (from Camden, South Carolina) were riding together with Longstreet who was giving them orders for the next phase of the attack. Unfortunately, this mounted party was mistaken, by troops from Virginia, for Federal cavalry and was fired upon. Jenkins was hit in the head, Longstreet in the chest, and a member of Kershaw's staff was killed. Longstreet was knocked out of the war for almost six months, but Jenkins' head wound was mortal. He died at sunset that Friday afternoon. His body was sent first to Richmond, where members of the Confederate Congress attended a memorial service in his honor.

Tradition has it that Caroline and Micah's four little sons learned of his death the next day at the depot in Yorkville, when the train from Chester pulled into town with the bad news. Micah was buried in Summerville beside the still fresh grave of his mother, who had died only two months before. Neither one could be buried on their beloved Edisto Island, because it was still under the control of Union forces.

About five months after her husband's tragic death, Caroline Jenkins also lost her father, who had become a military judge for the

Confederacy. All of this tragedy came on top of the loss of her youngest son a year earlier, and she had to endure these cruel blows as a twenty-seven year old widow with four little boys.

So, you can see that the story of Micah Jenkins does not have a happy ending. His young family had lost almost everything.

WHY THE TITLE - *THE STRUCK EAGLE*

When Micah Jenkins was killed at the Wilderness, very near the spot where Stonewall Jackson had been killed by his own men a year before, Asbury Coward was devastated. He had been Jenkins' best friend and business partner and had led a regiment in Jenkins' brigade. Coward, at Jenkins' side when he was dying, wept bitter tears over one whom he felt was a great man killed by "stupid blunders." He said that Jenkins' death by mistaken fire of the Virginians reminded him of a verse from a poem by Lord Byron, which reads:

So the Struck Eagle, stretched upon the plain,
No more through rolling clouds to soar again,
Viewed his own feathers on the fatal dart,
And winged the shaft that quivered in his heart.
While the same plumage that had warmed his nest,
Drank the life-drop of his bleeding breast.

Analogous to Byron's eagle, Micah Jenkins had been killed in tragic irony with a bullet from troops in his own army.

CONCLUSION

Coward returned to York after the War and reopened the Kings Mountain Military School. There he educated all four of General Jenkins' sons, free of charge. Two of these boys went on to West Point and one attained the rank of major general. In later years, the military school in York was closed. The site is now occupied by "York Place," the Episcopal Home for Children. Caroline died in 1902, some forty years after her husband's tragic death. She never remarried and none of her letters to her husband have been located. Like many young women widowed during the war, she had somehow

found a way to raise her family in war-torn South Carolina. Micah would have admired Caroline's courage and he would have lamented the fact that she was left to face such difficult times by herself. Caroline's story is one we shall have to save for another day.