

Confederate Collectanea



By Gen. Patricia A. Kaufmann

Hillyer Correspondence Delivers New Finds

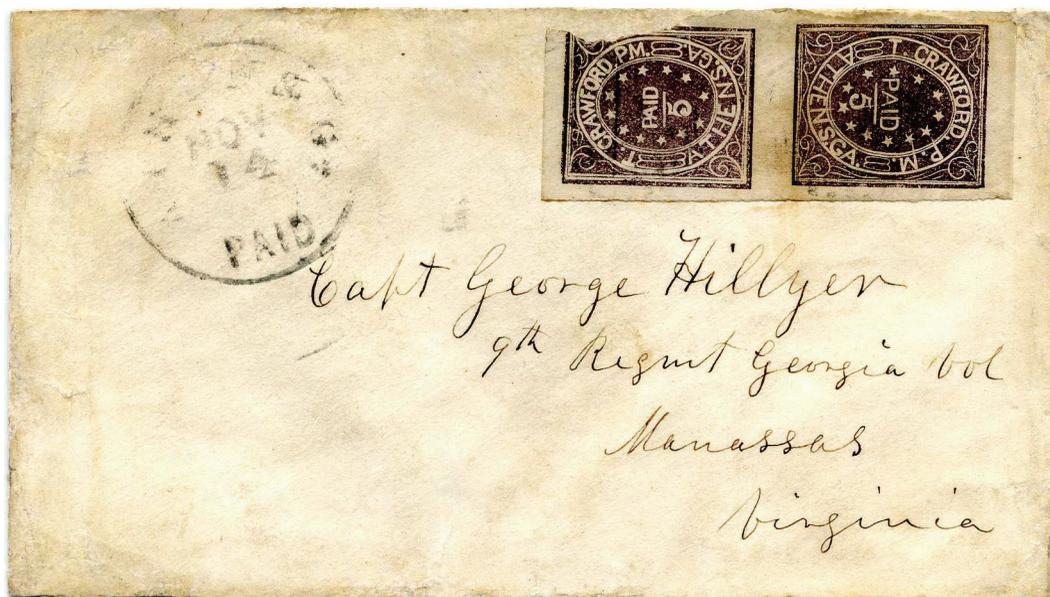


Figure 1. Newly recorded Athens, Georgia postmaster's provisional tête-bêche pair on cover, addressed to Capt. George Hillyer, 9th Regmt Georgia Vol., Manassas, Virginia. At the time, the 9th Georgia was part of the 3rd Army of Northern Virginia. This is only the fourth such recorded pair used on cover.

A small handful of covers from the correspondence of George (son) and Junius Hillyer (father) has produced two newly recorded treasures for Confederate collectors. The most significant find is a 5¢ purple Athens, Georgia postmaster's provisional *tête-bêche* (foot to foot) vertical pair on cover, addressed to "Capt. George Hillyer, 9th Regmt Georgia Vol., Manassas, Virginia" by his father, Judge Junius Hillyer. (Figure 1)

The Athens provisional stamps were issued during postmaster Thomas Crawford's term and bear his name. They were printed on white wove paper from a form consisting of two similar but distinctly different woodcut designs. This results in all pairs showing both types. The pair was created by the work-and-turn printing method, as opposed to an inverted cliché among subjects on the plate.¹ All are extremely rare.

Of special note on the left stamp of the pair in Figure 1, there is a **transient printing variety**—a dark horizontal line of color below the top two stars. The dark line does not cross the colorless areas.

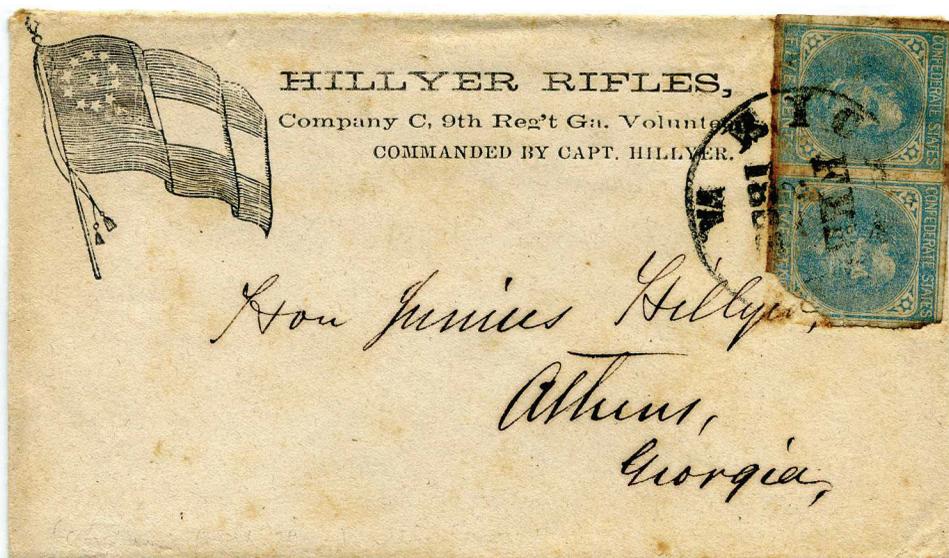


Figure 2. Patriotic cover, CSA Catalog type F11-17, with newly recorded military unit designation of the Hillyer Rifles, Company C, 9th Reg't Ga. Volunteers, Commanded by Capt. Hillyer.

The Athens stamp is a woodcut, so the colorless areas correspond to those portions of the woodcut that were cut away. It was likely from a hair that picked up ink and then fell on the surface of the woodcut. The hair, or whatever caused the line of color, was spotted and removed. This would have left the line of ink on the “high” surfaces of the woodcut but not in the cut away areas.

Although an *American Philatelist* article in April 1888 reported that the stamps were printed at the Broad Street office of *The Banner Watchman*,² we do not know who printed these stamps. The *Banner Watchman* did not exist during the war. It was formed after the war by the combination of two papers. More detailed information on these rare provisionals has been printed in past issues of *The Confederate Philatelist* as well as other publications.

Only three *tête-bêche* pairs on cover had been recorded until this fourth one surfaced in late 2012. The find came from an old-time Atlanta collection with a purchase receipt for the cover from that collector in 1959, hence it was “off-the-grid” during the period when serious record keeping was taking place. There was another cover known at one time, but the pair was soaked off the cover.

Capt. George Hillyer (1835 – 1927)

George Hillyer was one of nine children³ of Judge Junius and Jane Selina Watkins Hillyer. He graduated from Penfield College (later Mercer University) in 1854 and was admitted to the bar in February 1855. In 1857 he was elected to the Georgia legislature in which he served for two years. He was Clerk of the Georgia House of Representatives 1859-1860. In 1860 he was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, as well as in 1884 and 1892.⁴ He left his law practice to join the Confederate Army and in June 1861 raised a company known as the Hillyer Rifles.

Another wonderful find in the Hillyer correspondence is a Confederate patriotic cover (Figure 2) with the previously unknown military unit designation of “Hillyer Rifles, Company C, 9th Reg't Ga. Volunteers, Commanded by Capt. Hillyer.” It is franked with a pair of CSA-7-R, 5¢ local prints tied by a February 25, 1863 Richmond postmark and addressed to Capt. Hillyer’s father, the Honorable Junius Hillyer in Athens, Georgia.

The cover came with a telegram (Figure 3) inside from Capt. George Hillyer to his father with a report of those in the Hillyer Rifles who had been wounded or “killed in the battle yesterday.” Although the date is not easy to interpret, it does not correspond to the later dated postmark on the cover. The Richmond prints were not placed into service until the second half of 1862.

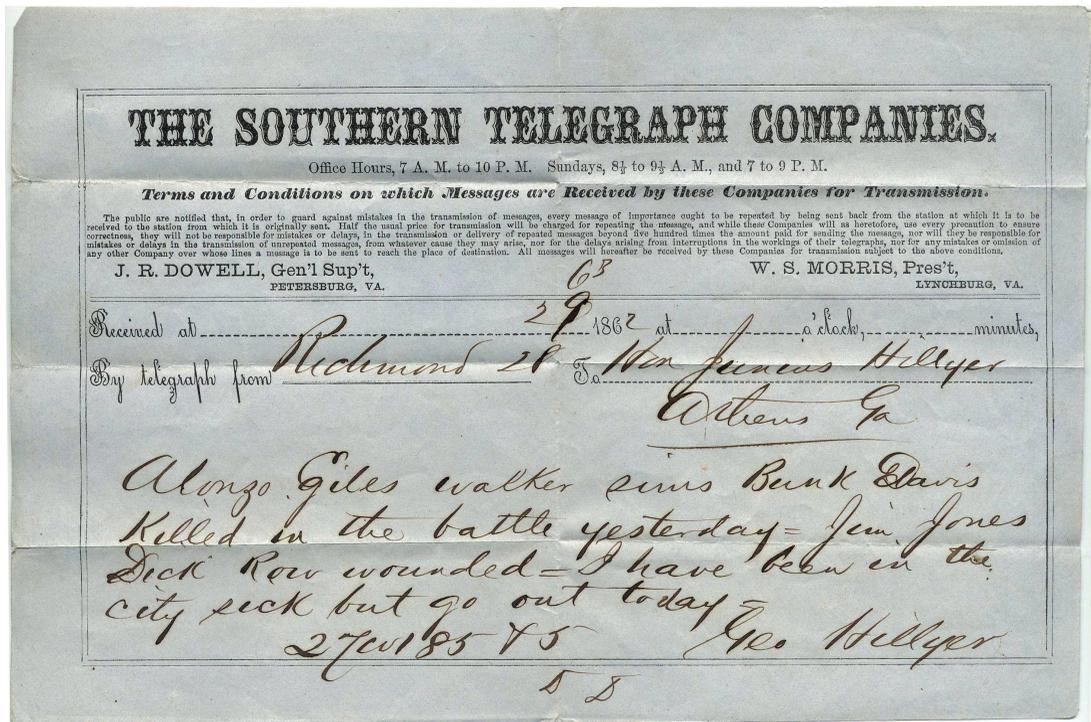


Figure 3. Telegram dated [June] 29, 1862 from Capt. George Hillyer to his father, Hon. Junius Hillyer, with a report of those in the Hillyer Rifles who were wounded or killed in the battle at Garnett's Farm on June 27, 1862.

The date on the telegram was further corroborated with the names noted by Capt. Hillyer. Although the names were not separated by punctuation and he used their nicknames, military records⁵ confirm that 3rd Sergeant Alonzo Church Giles (noted on the telegram as Alonzo Giles) was killed at Garnett's Farm on June 27, 1862. The Battle of Garnett's and Golding's Farms took place on June 27 and June 28, 1862 in Henrico County, Virginia as part of the Seven Days Battles of the Peninsula Campaign.

Two others were noted by Hillyer as killed in action—Walker Sims (Private Walker P. Sims) and “Bunk” Davis (Private Warren H. Davis), both confirmed by military records as killed at Garnett's Farm. The two noted as wounded were Jim Jones (Private James B. Jones) and Dick Row (Private Richard F. Rowe), also shown in military records as wounded at Garnett's Farm. It is clear from this and other correspondence that the captain routinely delivered news home to be passed on to loved ones who waited and worried or to be published in the local papers.

Hillyer served as the fourth regimental commander of the 9th Georgia Infantry Regiment, Longstreet's I Corps, Hood's Division, Army of Northern Virginia. He commanded the regiment at Fredericksburg, Virginia December 13, 1862 and his unit sustained heavy losses in the July 1863 Battle of Gettysburg, where he lost over half of his men. He assumed command of the regiment after all officers above him had fallen in battle. He made the official report on actions at the famed “Wheatfield” on 2 July 1863. (Figures 4a and 4b) The detailed battle report is available online in its entirety. The Confederate Government Roll of Honor for recognition of valor in battle was awarded to ten men from the 9th Georgia for their actions which were described as “dauntless, unyielding courage in the face of overwhelming odds.”

The afternoon of July 2, 1863 left the “Wheatfield” and nearby woods strewn with more than 4,000 dead and wounded Union and Confederate soldiers. Thousands of troops fought in this area and veterans compared it to a whirlpool--a stream of eddies and tides that flowed around the 19-20 acres of wheat owned by farmer George Rose; it is said to have changed hands six times.



Figure 4a. Confederate dead on Rose Hill, 200-300 yards Southwest of the Wheatfield, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

“There were many officers and men who displayed a degree of daring and heroism which challenges admiration in the very highest degree, and the whole regiment behaved with its customary steadiness and devotion, as the loss of 189 out of 340 carried into the field will testify.”-- Capt. George Hillyer from the battle report in the Official Records.⁶

A letter from Captain George Hillyer was published in the July 29, 1863 edition of *The Athens Southern Banner* with an introduction that reads, “I send you for publication the enclosed letter from my son, Capt. George Hillyer. It will be interesting to a great many persons who have friends in the 9th regiment. Permit me to state that it was written hurriedly on many scraps of paper with a pencil, under circumstances of great personal discomfort, and without any expectation of its publication. Junius Hillyer” It is an emotional first-person account of the Battle of Gettysburg written July 11-12, 1863 only a week after the events; it is chock-full of amazing detail.⁷

Years after the war, *My Gettysburg Battle Experiences* by Captain George Hillyer, 9th Georgia Infantry, C.S.A., was written by a then distinguished judge. It was compiled and edited by Gregory A. Coco with maps by Curtis J. Musselman and published by Thomas Publications in Gettysburg only recently in 2005. It includes a battlefield walking tour to retrace the steps of the gallant captain. This small book is full of the pathos and first-person detail written as only someone who has lived it could do.

Hillyer’s servant Alex accompanied him in the field for twenty-eight months and remained a lifelong and trusted companion.⁸ Before the war, Captain Hillyer was a successful and privileged man, but in 1861 he became just another soldier trying to stay alive.

Another cover in the correspondence, franked with two 5¢ blue lithographs, includes a long letter from Judge Hillyer to his son dated Athens July 29th, 1862. In it he states that he has spoken to Governor Joseph E. Brown, clearly a friend and colleague, and that he will do everything in his power to get George a solicitorship as soon as Col. Thurmond resigns. The elder Hillyer includes a signed letter from Governor Brown dated July 27th, 1862 in which he says, “It will afford me very great pleasure



Figure 4b. Valley of Death and the Wheat Field, Gettysburg. Detroit Photographic Co. 1903. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

to appoint George in his [Thurmond's] place if the Col. resigns his office...I have every confidence in George and have for him the warmest friendship." (This cover and letters will be the subject of one of my monthly columns, "The Confederate Post", in a forthcoming edition of *The American Stamp Dealer and Collector*.)

Col. Thurmond, referred to in Governor Brown's letter, was undoubtedly Samuel Pinckney Thurmond (1820-1887), Solicitor General of the Georgia Western Circuit from 1855-1868.⁹ Judge Hillyer told his son that Judge Thurmond was willing to resign his office in deference to Capt. Hillyer but only if he first resigned from the Army. Clearly, for whatever reason, that did not happen.

One cannot blame the Captain for trying to escape the brutal realities of war, especially as their correspondence indicates George had health problems. But that did not cause him to shirk his duty. General Hooker called Hillyer "a most able, efficient & gallant officer," and said that the captain was "competent to command a Regiment, [and] but few Regiments in the Service will be under better discipline than the one he is honored with the command of." Because the Ninth elected its officers, the captain realized he would never attain higher rank which he explained in a letter to Richmond authorities. He thus sought permission to organize a cavalry regiment in order to secure a colonel's commission. It was quickly approved by General Evander Law but Generals Longstreet and Lee overruled Gen. Law, probably because they needed their best men to remain with the Virginia army.¹⁰

Capt. Hillyer eventually was named Auditor of State-controlled Western & Atlantic Railroad on October 17, 1863. This position was tendered before his resignation as Captain, the Governor stating he needed a military man for said position, as the Western & Atlantic Railroad was main supply to Johnston's Army. One of the W&ARR locomotives was "The General", the subject of the Great Locomotive Chase April 12, 1862 (Andrew's Raid) when it was commandeered by Northerners. It's no wonder Brown felt he needed a military man in this position. Early in 1864, Hillyer organized the State [Rail] Road Battalion and was placed in command with the rank of Major. He surrendered at Atlanta on May 10, 1865.

From 1870 to 1874, he was a member of the Georgia State Senate and later became Mayor of Atlanta for one term. He also played an active role in the establishment of the Atlanta University System to provide higher education to the freed slaves. Helping the poor and educating the young, both black and white, were two of his favorite causes.¹¹ He remained a Trustee of the Spelman School of Theology, a black institution, until his death at age 92.¹²

Considering the dangers he survived during the war, the cause of his death was unusual. While feeding some chickens behind his house in Atlanta, a rooster jumped up and pecked his ear which became infected. The infection spread to his brain and he died two weeks later. Thousands of mourners attended his funeral the following day including the Governor of Georgia, the Mayor of Atlanta, family, friends and a large contingent of former soldiers. The rites were conducted in the Second Baptist Church where he was a member for sixty years.¹³

“The best four hours of fighting ever done by anyone, anywhere...” Lt. Gen. James Longstreet, upon observing Hood’s Division at Gettysburg on 2 July, 1863.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Francis J. Crown, Jr. for peer review.

Endnotes:

¹Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown, Jr., and Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.

²“Athens, Georgia - “Thomas Crawford, Postmaster”, <http://siegelauctions.com/enc/pdf/AthensGA.pdf>, accessed 2012.

³Trees.ancestry.com

⁴“Judge George Hillyer”, *Atlanta Centennial Year Book 1837-1937*, <http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/georgiabooks/pdfs/gb5093.pdf>, accessed 2012.

⁵Muster Roll of Company C, 9th Regiment Georgia Volunteer Infantry, Army of Northern Virginia, Walton County, Georgia, Hillyer Rifles; <http://files.usgwarchives.net/ga/walton/military/civilwar/co-c9reg.txt>; accessed 2012.

⁶*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Vol. xxvii*, <http://9thgeorgiainfantry.org/wheatfield.html>, accessed 2012.

⁷Capt. George Hillyer, *Athens [Georgia] Southern Banner*, 29 July 1863; transcribed by Neal Griffin August 4, 2002 for <http://9thgeorgiainfantry.org/southernbannernewspaper.html>

⁸Captain George Hillyer, *My Gettysburg Battle Experiences*, 2005, p. 44.

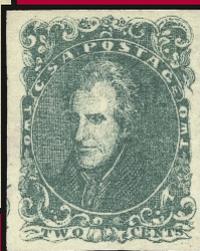
⁹Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Samuel Pinckney Thurmond papers, <http://hmfa.libs.uga.edu/hmfa/view?docId=ead/ms273-ead.xml>, accessed 2012.

¹⁰G. Hillyer, p. 42.

¹¹G. Hillyer, p. 45.

¹²Bernard W. Wolff (great grandson of Capt. George Hillyer), posted May 20, 2002 on The Ninth Georgia Infantry, CSA Forum/Message Board, <http://pub15.bravenet.com/forum>, accessed 2012.

¹³G. Hillyer, p. 47.



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