



Officers Quarters, Parade Ground and Barracks,
Fort Caswell, near Wilmington, N. C.

Photos contributed

Parade grounds and barracks of Fort Caswell (Source: North Carolina Collection: UNC at Chapel Hill)



Headstone of Pvt. Cecil Smith.

WWI Profile Pvt. Cecil Smith Pierce 1896-1918

By NORMA ECKARD

Cecil Smith Pierce was born in Hallsboro, Columbus County, N.C. His parents, Jonathan Smith Pierce and Jeanette Council Pierce, died several months after his birth in 1897; cause unknown.

The 1900 Census shows he and his brother Lonnie Middleton Pierce, living with their grandparents in Columbus County. His grandfather died that year.

The 1910 Census shows Cecil and his grandmother living with an uncle, Albert Sidney Pierce and his family. His brother Lonnie lived next door with another uncle, Alvah Willis Pierce. Both worked on the family farms.

Cecil was not yet 21 in 1917 when men were required to register for the WWI draft. His brother Lonnie's draft registration shows he was single and working as a clerk at Pierce & Co, a general store in Hallsboro. Lonnie was eventually called to service on July 6, 1918, and served at Camp Greenleaf, Ga., in the medical department until January 1920.

On Jan. 23, 1918, when Cecil was 21 years old, he enlisted

at Fort Caswell, Brunswick County, N.C. He served in 5th Company Coastal Artillery Corps (CAC) until Feb. 12, 1918, when his unit became Battery B, 2nd Trench Mortar Battalion (2nd Division). (The Fort Caswell Rifle Range was not completed until May 20, 1918, which means Private Pierce never used it for training.)

Private Pierce trained less than two months at Fort Caswell before his death of pulmonary tuberculosis on March 5, 1918. His death certificate indicates his tuberculosis was active and affected both lungs. The attending physician stated that he attended Private Pierce from Feb. 10 to his death on March 5.

A previous post gave details on the Army's approach to tuberculosis. It was not an automatic disqualification for service because of the lack of knowledge of the disease.

The following was published on the front page of The Wilmington Morning Star on March 8, 1918.

Died at Fort Caswell

Death claims Cecil S. Pierce, soldier from Hallsboro.

The remains of Cecil S. Pierce of Hallsboro, who died at Fort Caswell, were brought to the city yesterday under military escort and this morning were taken to his home at Hallsboro where the funeral will be held today.

Private Cecil Smith Pierce was laid to rest in Elbow-Pierce Cemetery in Hallsboro, Columbus County, N.C.

If you would like to help us honor Pvt. Cecil Smith Pierce or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range at ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com or go to www.caswellriflerange.com.

Another Roll Calling event will be held Saturday, April 6, at the rifle range in Caswell Beach starting at 11 a.m.

A future fundraiser is scheduled for Saturday, May 4, at the Caswell Beach Town Public Service Facility Building to raise funds to publish the book of Brunswick County men and women that served in WWI and also to continue restoration on the rifle range memorial. There will be a dinner with jazz music by Three to Get Ready, a Churchill Downs Derby and dance with music by Trilogy. Call 278-7584 for tickets or more information.