

S.C. College Cadets Cut School To Fight In War

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The best account of South Carolina College cadets who were students at the beginning of the Civil War was written by Capt. Iredell Jones in 1901 for the Charleston "News and Courier." Jones had been a student at the college in 1860.

As an introduction to his article, Jones wrote as much as he could find on the history of student military companies on the campus.

The earliest record told of a cadet company being present when General Lafayette visited South Carolina in 1824. The company numbered about 50 cadets. The uniform coat was a dark gray swallow-tail worn with white duck trousers gathered at the knee. A band of black velvet ribbon an inch wide, with streamers on the outer leg that fell down to the ankle, decorated the trousers. The cadets wore powdered queues and looked for all the world like Revolutionary dandies.

In 1856 the governor of South Carolina disbanded the college cadets. B.J. Witherspoon of Lancaster was the last captain.

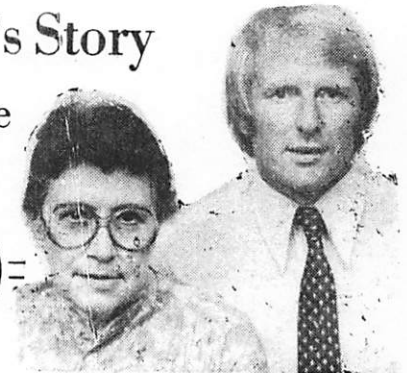
With the Ordinance of Secession came a revival of the S.C. College Cadets. A list of the company members was found and published. John H. Gary was the captain.

The student company was drilled by Hugh Smith Thompson, the captain of the Arsenal in Columbia. Thompson was later governor of South Carolina.

On April 12, 1861, Fort Sumter was fired on. Some of the faculty tried to dissuade the boys from leaving school, but the cadets could think of nothing but getting to Charleston. They offered their services to Gov. Francis Pickens. Pickens accepted them but ordered them to stand by in readiness. Meanwhile of course, they were to attend classes.

South Carolina's Story

The making of a state



The boys were convinced that the governor had used his authority to hold them at college. They decided to disband, under the assumption that if they changed their name, the governor's orders would no longer be in effect. While the faculty were debating the matter of the cadets having permission to go to battle, the boys stacked their guns in the library — for they had promised the faculty to not use weapons without faculty permission — and marched to the train station. The cadets paid their own way to Charleston.

Student Capt. Gary wired the governor from the train station that the new company of cadets had been formed and was on its way to battle. President Longstreet of the college came down to the station and wished the boys farewell and God-speed.

At Charleston it was pouring rain, but the boys marched in rank through the city to Hibernian Hall, which provided them with quarters. Some of the boys scouted about to find a way to get out to Fort Sumter. Finally Lt. L.H. Watts got to Gen. Beauregard's headquarters and came back with instructions for the company to report to Sullivan's Island the next morning at daylight.

The State Armory issued guns and ammunition to the cadets and the four top student officers each received a Colt navy revolver from the governor, who had also managed to get to Charleston.

The cadets were eye witnesses to the battle of Fort Sumter from Fort Moultrie. The boys were put up in a summer house and told to drill and guard the beach. This they did for three weeks. Then the cadets were ordered back into Charleston. There they were met by the governor, who formally presented them with the arms they had been issued by the State Armory, congratulated them, and sent them back to Columbia — and classes.

The professors were still at the college. They had lectured each day for three weeks to empty benches. The school term finished in June.

When the 1861 term rolled around in October, only a few boys reported. These requested permission to enter military duty. The governor requested the faculty to permit the boys to report to Gen. Drayton. The faculty refused but the boys left for war. South Carolina College closed for the remainder of the Civil War.