IRAQ 2003: For Marine Air, A War Unlike Any Other

Tuliffinny Crossroads: The Corps Versus Citadel Cadets

HMLA-773 “Red Dogs” With a Bite
Wooden Ships, Iron Men
And Cadets in Gray

Since the U.S. Marine Corps’ inception in 1775, Marines have served aboard ships as infantry to board enemy vessels, protect officers from mutiny, provide security and conduct amphibious assaults. The Civil War was a crossroads between the “Old Navy” of “iron men and wooden sailing ships” and the “New Navy” of ironclads and steamships. During the Civil War, the mission of the Corps—mobile, agile and lethal power projection from the sea—was refined. In one of the largest USMC amphibious operations of the Civil War, the Marines faced the Corps of Cadets of The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina.

First Shots of the Civil War

On 9 Jan. 1861, cadets from The Citadel fired upon and repulsed U.S. ship Star of the West, commanded by Captain John McGowan of the U.S. Revenue Marine (now the U.S. Coast Guard). That ship, secretly loaded with 200 U.S. Army combat troops, attempted to reinforce Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, S.C. The cadet artillery fire struck the ship three times, and the ship’s captain wisely took evasive action and returned to New York. One of those young men, Cadet James N. Thurston, class of 1861, was the first Citadel graduate to serve in the Marines. Upon graduation, Second Lieutenant Thurston and selected former U.S. Marines were handpicked as the initial cadre of 22 officers to serve in the Confederate States Marine Corps.

The Civil War officially began in Charleston Harbor on 12 April 1861, at 4:30 a.m., when 2dLt Henry Saxon Farley, Citadel class of 1860, fired the first shot at Union forces in Fort Sumter.

The First Parris Island Marines

Marines have been a part of the Sea Islands and Beaufort, S.C., area since the Union’s first major victory at the Battle of Port Royal in November 1861. From November 1861 through the end of the war in 1865, that area of South Carolina remained under Union control. It was home to the U.S. Navy’s South Atlantic Blockading Squadron which included several detachments of Marines. Those Marines trained at Port Royal Harbor and the adjacent Sea Islands to include Parris Island.
General Sherman’s March to the Sea
And General Lee’s Strategy

During the Union invasion of Port Royal and Beaufort in November 1861, General Robert E. Lee, a brilliant military strategist, made his temporary headquarters near the Charleston-Savannah Railroad trestle crossing the Coosawhatchie River. GEN Lee directed the placement and construction of key military fortifications. He accurately predicted the strategic points needed to protect the critical Charleston-Savannah Railroad, including a peninsula of land bounded by the Coosawhatchie and Tulifinny rivers known as Gregorie Point, home for Capt John W. Gregorie, Confederate Corps of Engineers, Citadel class of 1848.

By the summer of 1864, using his “scorched earth” philosophy, Lieutenant General William T. Sherman and his massive army of more than 60,000 men burned the city of Atlanta. In a secret telegraph to GEN Henry W. Halleck, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, dated 11 Nov. 1864, LTG Sherman said: “I would like to have Foster break the Charleston-Savannah Railroad about Pocotaligo about the 1st of December.” Major General John G. Foster and Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren unsuccessfully attempted to “break” the railroad on 30 Nov. 1864 at the Battle of Honey Hill, also known as Boyd’s Neck.

To the Shores of Tulifinny

A battalion of U.S. Marines, 157 strong, led by First Lieutenant (acting Captain) George G. Stoddard, USMC, redeployed aboard Navy ships in another attempt to break the railroad. From 2-4 Dec. 1864, the Marines conducted training exercises near Beaufort and Parris Island to prepare for the next battle.

Citadel cadets were training new recruits at a military encampment in Orangeburg, S.C. The superintendent of The Citadel, Maj James B. White, Citadel class of 1849, directed that all cadets (all four classes), including the new “Plebes” (first-year cadets from the Arsenal Academy, The Citadel’s preparatory school in Columbia, S.C.), faculty and staff report to The Citadel in Charleston immediately. From 1 to 3 Dec. 1864, the entire Corps of Cadets prepared for battle on the quadrangle of the barracks and the parade deck in Charleston.

In the early morning hours of 4 Dec. 1864, the Corps of Cadets, 343 strong, consisting of Company A, Citadel cadets (upperclassmen) and Co B, Arsenal cadets (15- to 18-year-old freshmen) awoke to the sound of “Assembly.” That was the last night cadets would spend in the relative “luxury” of the Spartanlike barracks during the Civil War. Cadets marched out clad
in their gray cotton and wool uniforms, Enfield rifles with bayonets affixed, ammunition and accoutrements. The Citadel’s barracks were emptied.

One faculty officer, Dr. William Hume, an elderly professor of physics, chemistry and experimental science, remained at The Citadel. Dr. Hume was the son of a Revolutionary War veteran, John Hume, who fought the British with GEN Francis Marion.

**Amphibious Landing and Surprise Attack**

At dawn on 6 Dec. 1864, Marines, sailors and soldiers successfully landed on Gregorie Point unopposed. Union troops captured the Gregorie Plantation home, quickly moved toward the Charleston-Savannah Railroad and surprised the 5th Georgia Infantry, capturing its colors.

The Corps of Cadets, located nearly four miles away at Pocotaligo Station, heard the intense fire and marched at the “double quick” (double time, run) to meet the enemy at Gregorie Point. The engagement lasted only about 10 more minutes, and the Union troops moved to their defensive positions before the cadets arrived.

“Major John Jenkins, whom I had sent forward to ascertain the position of the enemy, was conducting the battalion of cadets under Major White into action, and that gallant body of youths was moving at double quick, manifesting an eagerness to encounter the enemy, which they subsequently so handsomely sustained in action, and would in ten minutes have opened fire on the enemy’s right, when our line gave way, and the cadets were withdrawn to the railroad.”

—MajGen Samuel Jones, CSA

**Charge Them Boys! Charge!**

On 7 Dec., before daylight, Colonel A. C. Edwards received his orders from MajGen Samuel Jones, CSA, “Attack the enemy vigorously … carry out these instructions promptly and with spirit.”

At dawn, the entire Corps of Cadets and three companies of the Georgia Infantry formed a skirmish line and mounted a surprise attack on the center of the Union position. The Union forces included the 127th, 144th and 157th Infantry regiments all from New York. Companies A and B of Stoddard’s Marines were in the center of the Union line, supporting the Army and Navy field artillery batteries, and Co C was positioned on the far left near the Coosawatchie River.

According to Maj White, on “December 7, I was directed by Colonel Edwards, 47th of Georgia, to take Company A and Company B of the Battalion, with other troops, and advance upon the enemy in order to ascertain his exact position and determine the propriety of attacking him with the forces at hand.”

As the cadets silently moved forward, Union troops hidden behind some bushes fired upon them. Cadet Private Farish C. Furman, Co A, a 19-year-old third classman (sophomore), remembered seeing “a stream of fire shoot out from the bushes in front of me, accompanied by the sharp crack of a rifle. … The ball fired at me[,] missed my head by a few inches and buried itself in a tree close by.”

Furman’s classmate, Cadet Allen J. Green, was hit in the jaw and fell to the ground, unconscious. One lucky cadet had a ball penetrate his loose-fitting jacket without wounding him. Cadets Joseph W. Barnwell, Edward C. McCarty, Stephen F. Hollingsworth, Albert R. Heyward and William A. Pringle lay wounded on the battlefield. Cadet William B. Patterson, a junior, was killed in action. Maj White immediately gave the command “Charge!” and with a loud and chilling “rebel yell,” the cadets quickly returned fire and mounted a spirited bayonet attack upon the Union troops hidden in the bushes.

Maj White stated that as the cadets advanced, “steadily driving them back upon their entrenchments, Company B relieved Company A (its ammunition having been exhausted) so that the entire Battalion became engaged.” The young cadets from Co B, who were lying flat on the swampy

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ground to avoid being hit, moved to the front lines, while the cadets from Co A replenished their ammunition.

Cadet Private James H. Boatwright, a Co B fourth classman (freshman), was struck in the chest and fell to the ground. Dazed and gasping for breath, Cadet Boatwright was fortunate that the ball was lodged in his Bible, which was in his breast pocket, saving his life. Two other freshmen, Cadet Jacob C. Lyons (only 16 years old) and Cadet Waddy Thompson Jr., also were wounded.

Maj White was close enough to determine that they were outnumbered, and it was clear that he did not have enough troops to dislodge Union forces from their fortified positions. An orderly retreat was directed, and the cadets “fell back in perfect order.”

First Lt Amory Coffin, class of 1862, a professor and cadet veteran of the “first shots” in 1861, realized that several cadets lay wounded on the field. He yelled out, “Don’t let us abandon our boys!”

Seconds later, a sniper’s bullet struck Lt Coffin in the forehead. He fell to the ground and appeared lifeless and unresponsive with blood all over his face. Two young fourth classmen, Cadet Charles E. Coffin, his younger brother, and Cadet Eugene Stone, carried Lt Coffin to safety through a hail of bullets. Lt Coffin regained consciousness on the ambulance wagon and survived.

**Union Counterattack**

As Union forces prepared to counterattack, Maj White surveyed the open field ahead and ordered his cadets to stay low and concealed behind some fortifications with the 47th Georgia Infantry Regt. First Lt Benjamin S. Williams, adjutant of the 47th Georgia, was quite impressed by “the splendid bearing of the Cadets under fire.”

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More than 300 leveled rifles fired a devastating barrage of lead balls across the field, inflicting several casualties on the attackers with deadly effect.

Robert Heriot, a Confederate artilleryman at Tulifinny, said: “The Cadets fought as if in Dress Parade. Their firing could be distinguished above the roar of battle by the regularity of their discharges.” A veteran of the battle praised the young cadets, “Dang if they don’t fight like Hood’s Texans!” A reference to the highly disciplined Texas troops under the command of GEN John Bell Hood, the comment was high praise! After suffering many casualties, Union troops withdrew to their trenches.

**The Final Union Assault At Tulifinny Crossroads**

On 9 Dec. 1864, Union forces made one final assault against the Confederate defenses. The Marine battalion formed on the far right of a 600-man skirmish line. To the right of the Marine battalion was the Tulifinny River. Camp Tulifinny, where the cadets were encamped, was directly ahead of the Marine position.

In his official report, acting Capt Stoddard stated that his Marines came within 50 yards of the railroad tracks near the Tulifinny River. Stoddard’s report mentions that the 127th New York Volunteers on their left began a retreat while the Marines on the extreme right near the banks of the Tulifinny continued forward.

He reported: “I found myself unsupported and nearly cut off. I faced my men about, but having no means of telling proper direction, kept too much to the right and struck the Tulifinny River. This turned out to be fortunate, as the enemy pursued our left and through the river, taking several prisoners.” Cadets pursued the Marines and the other Union forces during their retreat, following them to their position south of the old road to Pocotaligo.

**Results and Significance of the Battle**

On Christmas Day 1864, LTG Sherman sent a telegraph to President Abraham Lincoln, saying, “I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the City of Savannah, with
The Corps of Cadets served on the field of honor for more than six months. Cadets fired the last shots east of the Mississippi River at Williamston, S.C., on 1 May 1865. One month after GEN Lee’s surrender on 9 May 1865, the cadets received their final orders from the governor on the front steps of the County Courthouse in Newberry, S.C., and were the last Southern military unit to disband east of the Mississippi River.

On his way home, Cadet William M. Parker encountered a group of Union soldiers who shot and killed him on 9 May 1865. He was the last cadet killed in action. Cadets fired the first and last shots of the war.

**Bulldogs, Devil Dogs and Double Dogs**

Since that historic meeting on the Tulifinny Battlefield nearly 150 years ago, relations between the two Corps again have become one of shared common values, ideals and the same mascot—the tough, tenacious and loyal bulldog. For more than a century, The Citadel has produced generations of Marine officers, affectionately known as “Double Dogs,” who served with distinction in the Spanish-American War, with the “Devil Dogs” of World War I, “Banana Wars,” WW II, Korea, Vietnam, Beirut, the Gulf War, and the global war on terrorism.

In 1970, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps selected The Citadel to be the first Marine-oriented NROTC unit in history, and it also was the first to establish a Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program (MECEP) in the nation. The Citadel commissions an average of 60 Marine officers per year, second only to the U.S. Naval Academy.

Editor’s note: The authors report that relations between the two Corps (USMC and The Citadel Corps of Cadets) have been much friendlier. Please refer to our January 2011 Leatherneck to see the current state of the kindred relationship of the Marine Corps and The Citadel.

LtCol Walter Mcternan, USMC (Ret), a 1972 graduate of The Citadel, retired from active duty in 1994. He currently is serving in Kabul, where, during his off-duty hours, he enjoys researching and writing about military history.

Lt Col Andrew D. Kullberg, USAF (Ret) is a 1983 graduate of The Citadel and also earned a master’s degree from Webster University. A command pilot, he flew the B-52, C-141 and C-5 during his 20-year career in the Air Force. He has written several articles and a book about The Citadel in the Civil War.

The Battle of Tulifinny Crossroads also represented one of the most successful deployments of Marines as an infantry battalion during the Civil War.

By the end of the war, 14 cadets died in service, and at least twice as many were wounded in action on the field of honor.

**A Legacy of Duty, Honor, Courage**

“The noncommissioned officers and privates have all behaved in a most gallant manner and I am sure that by their bravery they have added both with the Navy and Army to the high reputation the Corps already enjoys,” said acting Capt George G. Stoddard, Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Battalion, Tulifinny Crossroads.

First Lt Stoddard was promoted to brevet captain, USMC, and the date was made retroactive to 6 Dec. 1864, the date that the Marines fired some of the first shots of the Battle of Tulifinny.

“Every cadet acted with conspicuous gallantry, and showed that the discipline of his Academy made him a thorough soldier for the battlefield. The privations of the succeeding months proved him as well prepared for the hardships of the march and camp.”

—Maj James B. White
Superintendent of The Citadel

Casualties on the Confederate side were approximately 200. The U.S. Marines suffered 12 casualties. One was killed in action, and one Marine was missing in action and is believed to have drowned in the Tulifinny River. The Corps of Cadets suffered eight casualties with one KIA. Some of the cadets wounded in action at Tulifinny succumbed later to their wounds and battlefield disease.

One veteran of Tulifinny, Cadet Richard F. Nichols, a senior, completed requirements for graduation and died of “disease, hardship of service, and exposure” while serving in the field with the Corps of Cadets on 14 Feb. 1865. Cadet Nichols received his Citadel diploma posthumously.

U.S. Marines in dress uniform at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., in 1864.