

Virginia Tech Cadets in Spanish-American War

Tension between the United States and Spain had been building up since October 13, 1873 when a sailing vessel, the "Virginius," flying the American flag, was seized by the Spanish war steamer "Tornado" on the suspicion that it was conveying munitions to Cuban insurrectionists.

A revolt against Spain erupted in Cuba in 1895, and as the fighting dragged out over the subsequent years, concern in America increased. As a protective measure for American interests, the United States, in January 1898, dispatched the battleship U.S.S. Maine to the harbor of Havana. On the fateful night of February 15 a tremendous explosion sent the U.S.S. Maine to the bottom of that harbor. Two hundred and sixty-six officers and men of the United States Navy met sudden death in the twisted wreckage. News of the catastrophe sent shock waves all over America. Already provoked by the prolonged colonial misrule in Cuba, public sentiment was ignored.

In view of the impending threat of war, the Adjutant General of Virginia, by General Orders dated April 19, directed all units of the state militia to ascertain which of their officers and men would volunteer for service with the volunteer forces of the United States in the event of mobilization. The V.P.I. Battalion of Cadets was a unit of the Virginia Active State Militia. A V.P.I. Corps meeting was called on the evening of April 20 and the situation was discussed. By unanimous vote the following communication was sent to the Governor of Virginia on the next morning:

His Excellency J. Hoge Tyler, Governor of Virginia

Sir,

We hereby tender to the State of Virginia the services of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute Corps of Cadets, consisting of four companies of Infantry, one light battery of Artillery, commissioned and non-commissioned Staff and Band, for the defense of our country in the event of war.

We respectfully petition that if called into service, the United States War Department is requested to detail First Lieutenant D.C. Shanks, of the Eighteenth United

States Infantry, United States Army, as Commandant of the Corps.

(Signed) Jno. B. Danforth, Captain, Co. D
Julian Ashby Burruss, Captain, Battery E
Benjamin Harrison, Jr., Captain, Co. B
Edward Graham, Captain, Co. C
Jno. S.A. Johnson, Captain, Co. A

The Governor declined the offer with a letter expressing his "high appreciation of the patriotic spirit which promoted the cadets of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute to tender their services to the State in the event of war." He expressed his "profound thanks" and stated that "their tender of service was worthy of the highest commendation."

On April 22, 1898 the Congress of the United States declared the existence of a state of war between the United States and Spain. A congressional act of April 22, 1898 (30 Stat. 361) provided that "the organized and active land forces of the United States shall consist of the Army of the United States and of the militia of the several States when called into the service of the United States." In time of war the Army was to consist of the Regular Army and the Volunteer Army of the United States. Under that act, a call was addressed to the governors of the states for 125,000 volunteers, and subsequent acts authorized a brigade of Engineers and a force of 10,000 men who were immunized against tropical diseases.

The first American Volunteer Army (militia) had been created during the War of 1812, by statute, which left the states in control of the recruiting of regiments and the appointment of officers. A similar force was authorized during the Mexican War and during the Civil War.

In the rapidly developing mobilization, the Regular Army officers who were on duty with colleges were ordered back into active war assignments. First Lieutenant (state militia Colonel) David Carey Shanks, the Commandant of Cadets at V.P.I., was ordered from V.P.I. to Camp Lee in Richmond for duty as mustering-in-officer to receive the state volunteer forces into federal service.

The Second, Third, and Fourth Regiments of Virginia Volunteers (Infantry) were ordered to rendezvous at Camp Lee when fully recruited. The Second Regiment was the first to achieve full strength and to request orders to enter the service of the United States. Lieutenant Shanks was

promoted at Camp Lee to the grade of Major in the Volunteers and assigned to the Second Regiment as commanding officer of its Third Battalion.

The War Department having authorized the organization of bands of twenty-four pieces for the volunteer infantry regiments, Major Shanks wrote to Major James Patton Harvey, Director of the V.P.I. Cadet Band, requesting him "to prevail upon his Band to join the Second Virginia as its regimental band." Since service specifically as a V.P.I. unit had been denied, along with the lettered units of the battalion, Major Harvey and fifteen cadets of the Band resigned from the college and enlisted as individuals with the Second Regiment. Four V.P.I. alumni and five members of the Glade Cornet Band (until 1893 the post band of the V.P.I. Battalion of cadets) also enlisted as bandsmen with the Second Virginia Infantry. Mr. Harvey was appointed Chief Musician and Leader of the new organization. The Second Virginia's new Regimental Band was a V.P.I. organization constituted as an Army unit.

Following their highly regarded commandant, more than a dozen additional cadets of the lettered companies of the Cadet Battalion resigned at that point and enlisted as rifleman in the various line companies of the Second Virginia, particularly in Company G (Roanoke Light Infantry).

After seven months of arduous training, the Second Regiment of Virginia Volunteers (Infantry) was mustered into federal service at Camp Lee on May 21, 1898, and was transferred to Camp Cuba Libre at Jacksonville, Florida, on June 2, 1898, and became unit of the Third Brigade of the Second Division of the Seventh Army Corps.

At Florida, the Seventh Army Corps was mobilizing and training twenty-eight line regiments, along with the attendant technical service units. That mobilization and training had almost been completed at the time Spain surrendered and accepted the American terms.

The Second Regiment of Virginia Volunteers was mustered-out of its federal service during the period of December 13 - 20, 1898. The Regimental Band was mustered-out at Salem, Virginia and its personnel were discharged on December 16.

Although the Regiment did not see action, it was fully prepared and eager to serve in combat at any time that duty and the country might so ordain. It volunteered before the President's call for troops and ended only after the conclusion of hostilities and the reinstatement of peace.