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## **The Young Lions: Confederate Cadets at War (review)**

Keith E. Gibson

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

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*Keith E. Gibson*

*The Young Lions: Confederate Cadets at War.* By James Lee Conrad. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. ISBN 1-57003-575-X. Maps.

Assessing the military and educational role played by the four major military colleges of the Confederacy which remained active throughout the Civil War is a challenge, historically speaking. The destruction of their campuses often means records are fragmented or destroyed, leaving plenty of opportunity for legends of youthful exploits to take the place of fact. The purpose of Jim Conrad's *The Young Lions* is to, as he puts it, "scrape away some of the romantic varnish" and give the reader a reasoned, contextual view of the role played by the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), Georgia Military Institute (GMI), The Citadel, and the University of Alabama during the Civil War. Conrad's well researched and tightly written narrative provides a clear picture of the Southern cadet's dual and torn existence of academic pursuit punctuated with periods of active field service.

Conrad provides a brief antebellum history of the four colleges as well as a description of the wartime routine. All four of the military colleges examined by Conrad stayed under state control for the duration of the war. All of them would see their daily routine interrupted as Northern forces moved into their communities. All four would engage the enemy. Collectively, the military schools would lose thirty cadets during field service—VMI losing ten cadets in one engagement. Three of the campuses would be burned or severely damaged before the end of the war. **[End Page 844]**

The desirability of turning to the Southern military schools to secure officers for the Confederate army was apparent to President Davis and the Confederate Congress, yet the ability of the schools to meet their charge was hampered in a number of ways by the national government. Conrad effectively argues that the four schools he examined provided vital leadership to the Southern armies in spite of an environment curiously complicated by Confederate regulations. For example: fearing the military schools would become a haven for draft dodgers, the corps of the military schools were not exempt from conscription. Although the

Confederate government did not insist upon inducting the student bodies of the state-owned schools—which would have effectively closed their doors—it did not create a special category of service for the state cadets, thus leaving them in a legal limbo.

The Confederacy would never realize its early war intention of creating a national military academy—a "West Point of the South." Perhaps seeking to avoid alienating sensitive state leadership, Jefferson Davis refused to officially designate any of the schools as the Confederate Military Academy. Instead, the Confederate Congress established an unsatisfactory system of "Confederate States Cadets" who were appointed to company positions in the field—a sort of on the job training where mistakes quickly became fatal disasters.

Beyond the service of their alumni, Conrad points out that the greatest assistance rendered to the Confederate effort by the four military colleges is found in the use of their cadets as drill instructors in the early months of conflict. VMI cadets alone trained an estimated 15,000 raw recruits over a three-month period in 1861. With the exception of the VMI cadets' participation in the Battle of New Market, cadets never altered the outcome of any battle in which they served.

James Conrad's *The Young Lions* is a balanced and informative examination of a neglected aspect of Confederate military preparedness and Southern higher education. It is a sound addition to the Southern studies bookshelf.

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commanding general from the work of the chief of staff did not “set a precedent for modern army organization” (p. 197), for this reverses the relative seniority of all field commanders to the chief of staff that has prevailed since the Austro-Prussian War of 1866.

Within his chosen context of modernity, it is curious that Marszałek devotes little attention to the evolution of Halleck’s views about the nature of the Civil War. In 1862 he agreed with McClellan that the war should not touch private property, especially slavery, but a year later he encouraged Grant to live off the country. Marszałek should have developed this idea that Halleck played a central role in coaching other field commanders, such as Ulysses S. Grant, into accepting a more punitive form of warfare. But such a perspective would have required him to develop an explanatory structure that is sadly lacking in this rather restricted (and perhaps restrictive) conventional biography.

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*The Young Lions: Confederate Cadets at War.* By James Lax Conrad. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. ISBN 1-57003-575-X. Maps. Photographs. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 198. \$16.95.

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