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W. Eric Emerson. *Sons of Privilege: The Charleston Light Dragoons in the Civil War.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005. xvii + 192 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-592-0.

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Tragic Cavaliers

During a few harrowing weeks in 1864, the Charleston Light Dragoons virtually ceased to exist. It was a quick and violent end to what had been a fairly idyllic military career for these Confederate soldiers from the Palmetto State. In their first battle on May 28 at Haw's Shop, almost half of those engaged were killed, wounded, or captured. Twenty-eight Dragoons fought along Matadequin Creek two days later, and fourteen were killed, wounded, or captured. A dozen went into action at Trevilian Station on June 11, when three died and three were captured. Their sad story mirrors that of their regiment, the 4th South Carolina Cavalry, which dwindled rapidly after it arrived in Virginia in May 1864. In this history of the Dragoons, the author provides both an intriguing narrative of their wartime career and an analysis of their place within Charleston society.

The Charleston Light Dragoons began in 1792 as a volunteer militia company, organized after Congress established a national militia. Volunteer militia, unlike line militia, were elite units, and the Dragoons played that role well. The company incorporated in 1835 and thereafter screened all applicants, charged a fee for membership, and even conducted courts-martial. Their insistence on remaining mounted, which required every member to provide his own horse and equipment, also ensured that only the right sort joined. Their duties reflected their status. In addition to regular musters for training and slave patrols, Dragoons escorted prominent officials in parades and other events, including at least one public execution and the Secession Convention in 1860. Having explained the origin of the Dragoons, the author provides some interesting, if not surprising, insights into the demographics of the unit prior to the Civil War. Almost all of the members were well-to-do Episcopalians, bound to each other by blood or marriage. Most lived in Charleston, where they belonged to other organizations such as the Masons. They produced cotton or rice, or they participated in the marketing of those commodities. Most had slaves, or their families did. Their most serious vices were excessive drinking and buffoonery. In the details about these men, the author clearly relies on impressive research concerning Charlestonians during this era, which is reflected in his extensive annotations and useful appendices.

The Civil War brought changes for the Dragoons, but not as many as some might expect. Recruiting surged during the first year, but they remained close to home. The Dragoons listened from Sullivan's Island as Fort Sumter was bombarded, then later escorted the coffins carrying South Carolina's first dead from Bull Run. They also guarded Federal prisoners sent to Castle Pinkney before hurrying to Pocotaligo, where they protected the railroad from the Federals that occupied Port Royal. Months of boredom, punctuated by outbursts of petty misbehavior, followed. Discipline was lax, drinking was commonplace, and slaves did the hard work, so there was not much to do but play cards, race horses, and get into trouble. When their year in state service expired in early 1862, many Dragoons would not re-enlist, in part because they had voted for the company to enter Confederate service.

Recruiters finally managed to assemble fifty men, the minimum required for muster as a Confederate company, but the demographics of the Dragoons shifted. Their average age increased and, as the Confederate draft began, many joined the Dragoons as a stepping stone to other service. The Dragoons combined with two battalions and another company in late 1862 to create the 4th South Carolina Cavalry, led by Benjamin H. Rutledge, a lawyer promoted from captain of the Charleston Light Dragoons to colonel of the 4th South Carolina. The Dragoons acquitted themselves well in a skirmish on the Charleston and Savannah Railroad in October 1862, but otherwise the next year remained relatively quiet. Some Dragoons grumbled when they were issued Enfields, believing instead that they should charge with flashing sabers, but

the author mentions no real conflict within their ranks. They were a remarkably healthy bunch, desertion did not happen, and only a few overstayed their leaves.

Rumors of a transfer to Virginia finally proved true in March 1864 when the 4th South Carolina was assigned to a new brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. Matthew C. Butler, who had lost his foot at Brandy Station. Stripped of excess baggage and members (all men on detached duty were left behind), the Dragoons arrived at Richmond in late May. Hungry, short of equipment, and with only 400 mounts for 987 men, the 4th South Carolina lost more troopers at Haw's Shop, only four days after its arrival in Virginia, than any other regiment. The first Dragoon died as he and his comrades advanced, on foot with Enfields in their hands, on the Confederate right. More fell when the Dragoons were mistakenly left behind when the Southerners had to withdraw. Almost surrounded by Michigan cavalry carrying repeating carbines, the Dragoons suffered heavy casualties as they belatedly bolted for the rear.

Butler was absent from Haw's Shop, and he blamed much of what went wrong there on the man who led his brigade that day: Rutledge. When the 4th South Carolina was flanked along Matadequin Creek, where the Dragoons again suffered heavy losses, Butler was in charge and again blamed Rutledge. While the Confederates ended Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's raid at Trevilian Station, that fight reduced the 4th South Carolina to less than one hundred effectives, six of whom were Dragoons. Rutledge and Butler despised each other, but the Palmetto State troopers served under Butler for the duration of the war.

The Dragoons, increased to about a dozen, followed Butler when he received orders to defend the Carolinas in 1865. Some claimed to be the last Confederates to leave Columbia when the Federals approached, and others fought with Wade Hampton against Union troops at Fayetteville. Dragoons hunted foragers with great zeal and fought savagely at Monroe's Crossroads, which reflected an obvious shift in attitude from their prewar idealism. A few served at Bentonville, but when the Confederates surrendered in the Carolinas, the Dragoons were scattered across the map. After the war, not many of the surviving Dragoons maintained their ties to their old company. When it was revived, few joined, even though Rutledge resumed command. The author closes with the scene of Butler and Rutledge exchanging warm compliments in their speeches at the unveiling of a Charleston monument to the Dragoons in 1886, when memory trumped history in the effort to honor brave service. Fortunately, in this book memory does not trump history within these pages. This is a fine work that blends military narrative with social analysis, to the benefit of both.

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