

BAND OF BROTHERS

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Fighting and arguing among the northern and southern cadets of the United States Military Academy at West Point was very common during the 1850's. Robert E. Lee was the superintendent of the academy. He tried very hard to convince the cadets that they should live together in peace and harmony. He continuously reminded them that they were a "Band of Brothers".

Even though the cadets constantly fought over northern and southern issues, they did however, agree on some issues. For instance, when Fitzhugh Lee, who was Robert e. Lee's nephew, was listed for dismissal for going over the wall too many times, the whole corps stuck together in getting the charges against him dropped. They succeeded.

Even after Robert E. Lee's resignation in 1855, the fights continued among the "Band of Brothers". It didn't matter how big or small they were, the northern cadets stood up for themselves against the southern cadets and their insulting remarks. When a fight broke out between southern cadet Wade Hampton Gibbs and northern cadet Emory Upton, Upton being the smaller of the two, Upton's roommate, John Rodgers of Pennsylvania stepped up to defend him. Morris Schaff, a cadet from Ohio, described this incident as being the moment when the south saw what iron and steel there was in the northern blood once it was up.

Once Lincoln became president, the southern states decided on secession. This caused a lot of the southern cadets to withdraw from the academy even though it was a sad decision for them to make. Even though they fought amongst each other, they did live together and a lot of them became friends. There were 278 cadets at the academy on the day Lincoln was elected and 65 out of the 86 who were southern went back home to the south. This caused many emotional goodbyes.

When the war finally broke out, many of these West Point graduates, southern and northern crossed each others paths throughout many battles. Once Custer became brigadier general, he found himself charging cavalry that was commanded by his old friend Tom Rosser. One particular time Rosser found himself and his cavalry in full view of northern sharpshooters commanded by Custer. Custer made his line hold their fire and the next day under a flag of truce, sent a message to Rosser telling him not to be exposing himself so openly because the day before he could have killed him.

When the war was finally over, some of the West Point graduates rode off in search of old friends. Custer went into a confederate camp looking for some of his old friends and General George Meade went to visit his old friend Robert E. Lee. On June 9, 1902, thirty-seven years later, the still living veterans of both sides went to the West Point Academy to celebrate its 100th anniversary. At this celebration, Edward Porter Alexander was one of the chief speakers. In giving his speech that day he said, "It was best for the south that the cause was lost. Whose vision is not so dull that he does not recognize the blessing it is to himself and to his children to live in an undivided country?"

I think the title for this story is good, but if I were the writer, I think I would have added to it. I would have titled it "Band of Brothers, Friend, Foe, or both". The southern graduates of this academy either stayed with the union for some reason or another, or went home to stand by their own. All in all, a lot of them became friends regardless of being northern or southern. They did their job, sometimes looking out for each other along the way, and when it was over, returned to being friends once again. I liked very much what Edmond Porter Alexander said in his speech at the academy's 100th

anniversary celebration. I'm very thankful to be living in an undivided country where people stand together.