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Young cadets, old men saved the capital

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



YOUNG CADETS, OLD MEN SAVED THE CAPITOL

By HAMPTON DUNN

WOODVILLE -- This tiny community on U.S. 319, about 15 miles south of Tallahassee, is the site of the famous Battle of Natural Bridge when a brave band of college cadets joined a motley militia of old men and wounded vets to save the capital city from capture in the waning days of the Civil War.

A large flotilla of Union forces under Gen. John Newton had landed at St. Marks, planning to take the East River Bridge, destroying the railroad to Tallahassee and to capture the State Capitol itself. The alarm was sounded. The young cadets from West Florida Seminary, now Florida State University, and the old men of the town quickly formed a courageous fighting unit. They were led by Confederate Gen. Sam Jones.

The two forces clashed here where the St. Marks River disappears underground, rising to the surface a short distance to the south. The Rebels had four cannon and poured the fire to the Union attackers. The bluecoats were forced to retreat. Only three of the Rebels were killed that day; the Federals lost 148. The Southerners were outnumbered 3 to 1.

Great was the celebration in Florida's capital city. Tallahassee was the only Confederate capital east of the Mississippi that never fell into Federal hands.

Today, F.S.U. proudly displays the Confederate Battle Streamer, an honor won that day when the cadets bested the Union soldiers at Natural Bridge.

