Southern Presidents

Despite the fact that the Maryland legislature threatened to withhold public monies from MAC “in case of the occupancy of the professorship or presidency of said college by any man who has been in the confederate army,” the Board of Trustees hired a series of southern military figures as college president in an attempt to recruit more students.

In addition to Admiral Franklin Buchanan, MAC president from 1868 to 1869, three other Confederate officers served as president between 1867 and 1883. It was a period of post-war instability for the college, with frequent changes in leadership, fluctuating enrollment, financial problems, and curricular change.

Charles L. C. Minor, a native of Virginia and graduate of the University of Virginia, was appointed president in 1867, when Major General George Washington Custis Lee declined the position. Minor stayed for one year.

A school teacher in Virginia when the war broke out, he enlisted as a private in an artillery unit, then transferred to the 2nd Virginia Cavalry, participating in General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s Shenandoah Valley Campaign. Promoted through the ranks to captain, he eventually reported to Major General Samuel Jones, who would follow him at MAC. By the end of the war, he was executive officer at the Richmond Arsenal.

After his MAC presidency, he served as the first president of the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, now the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, from 1872 to 1879. In post-war writings, he held fast and publicly to his Confederate views, penning a harsh criticism of Abraham Lincoln, entitled The Real Lincoln. He died in 1903.

Major General Samuel Jones was elected to the presidency of MAC in 1873 and stayed for two years. Also a native Virginian, he graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1841. After graduation, he taught mathematics and tactics at West Point, served along the Canadian border and in Texas, and was on the staff of the Judge Advocate of the Army. He was promoted to second lieutenant.

When war erupted, he resigned his federal commission and became a major in a Virginia artillery unit. He served as chief of artillery and ordinance, eventually achieving the rank of major general. For several years, he commanded the Department of Western Virginia. During the last few months of the war, he was the commander of the Department of Florida and South Georgia and was forced to surrender at Tallahassee in May 1865. After his MAC presidency, he was a clerk in the federal war department. Jones died in 1887.

Of these three southern presidents, Captain William H. Parker headed MAC the longest, from 1875 to 1882.

Born in New York City in 1826, he made his first cruise as a midshipman at the age of 15 and later graduated first in his class from the United States Naval Academy. He also returned to Annapolis as an instructor several times.

A lieutenant at the outbreak of the war, he resigned his commission and joined the Southern navy, commanding the gunboat Beaufort in several engagements, including the Battle of Hampton Roads on March 8, 1862, in which fellow MAC president Admiral Franklin Buchanan also participated. Promoted to captain, he organized and became the superintendent of the Confederate Naval Academy, while simultaneously commanding the ironclad Richmond on the James River.

After the war, he captained a commercial steamer between Panama and San Francisco before being named MAC president in 1875. He was the author of several books, including Recollections of a Naval Officer, 1841-1865, which he wrote while at MAC. He died in 1896.