



Go Gators: The Confederate General Who Helped Establish the University of Florida

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"View from the summit of Little Round Top at 7:30 p.m. July 3, 1863," painting by Edwin Forbes | LOC

In the movie *Gettysburg*, one of its most visually dramatic combat scenes involved Union Col. Joshua Chamberlain and his 20th Maine defending Little Round Top. Who were those Confederates the Maine men were killing? The answer is Gen. Evander M. Law's Alabama Brigade.

Many years later, that same General Law would play a role in establishing the current University of Florida.



Gen. Evander M. Law in the 1860s | LOC

Law was from Darlington, South Carolina, and his family had been active in the American Revolution, fighting with the "Swamp Fox" Francis Marion. Law attended the South Carolina Military Academy (now the Citadel) and, upon graduation in 1856, became a teacher. For two years he was employed at the Kings Mountain Military Academy in York County, South Carolina, and by 1860 had moved to Tuskegee, Alabama. Here, he worked to establish his own military academy, but the year 1861 came, and his life's plans were changed forever.

Instrumental in the formation of the 4th Alabama Infantry, Law soon became the leader of this regiment. By the way, it was the 4th Alabama to which General Bee was speaking when he remarked: "There stands Jackson like a stone wall, rally 'round the Virginian" at the battle of First Manassas in July 1861.

By 1863, Law had been promoted to command an all-Alabama Infantry brigade under the leadership of Confederate First Corps Commander James Longstreet. In the movie, Jeff Daniels—as Joshua Chamberlain—defiantly yelled, "Bayonets!" then led a charge into Law's 4th, 15th, 44th, 47th, and 48th Alabama regiments down Little Round Top.

Law and his brigade would go on to participate in the battle of Chickamauga, Georgia, and the Knoxville Campaign. Law had a "falling out" with Longstreet in late 1863 and eventually would end the Civil War commanding cavalry in North Carolina, opposing Union General Sherman and finishing his military service as a major general.



The last remaining building of the South Florida Military College | CC

He returned to Tuskegee but could not reestablish his military school. In fact, it would be Law's former school's structures out of which the modern Tuskegee University would grow. Later, the former Confederate general saw an opportunity and moved to Bartow, Florida, in 1881, where in 1894 he would establish another military school modeled after The Citadel. It would be called the South Florida Military Institute. The school stressed scientific and technological studies, especially engineering. Law would head his new school until 1903, when he resigned to become a newspaper editor. He died in 1920 as the oldest surviving Confederate major general and is buried in Bartow. What about that University of Florida connection?

In 1905 the state passed the Buckland Act, which ordered the consolidation of six colleges into four. Therefore, Law's military school was closed, but it would be selected as one of the founding members of a new school in Gainesville—the University of Florida. In fact, it was the superior faculty and equipment from Bartow that became the basis for the school of engineering at the new university.

What became of the former campus of the South Florida Military Institute? Law's house—the former school's headquarters—still stands. In 1927, the Summerlin Institute would relocate to Law's former school site. In 1968, it was integrated with the all-Black Union Academy to become Bartow Senior High School.

The history and traditions of both schools—therefore Law's institute as well—make up the personality and heritage of the modern Bartow Senior High School.



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