

Op-ed Response submitted to The Atlanta Constitution of Feb. 21, 1994

Last week's allegation of harassment against Shannon Faulkner from Citadel Cadets was a calculated, unwarranted attack on The Citadel and the fine young men in the Corps of Cadets. Your newspaper's editorial completely misrepresented statements made in the courtroom with no basis in fact.

The majority of cadets do not want Miss Faulkner in the classroom because it destroys their ability to receive a single-gender education. That is what the cadets paid tuition for, and that is the methodology they chose for their educational environment. The Citadel is in the middle of a lawsuit challenging its ability to provide a public single-gender education. We have not backed down from our pursuit to remain a single-gender institution and will continue that course until the highest court in this land declares that we operate a program that is not legal, constitutional, or serves no valid governmental purpose.

Lawyers for Miss Faulkner, a day time civilian student now attending classes with the Corps of Cadets, blurted out accusations of harassment in court without any report or complaint ever having been lodged with college officials. One of her lawyers claimed that he heard a sexual slur one time only, as he was walking to a sporting event on campus. The event was held on campus at night. It is hard to imagine her lawyer's ability to identify a cadet in the dark from across the campus, as he claimed. No identification was made that the person yelling the inappropriate remark was a cadet. No report was ever made to college officials. There has never been a report of any derogatory comment made in any classroom by a cadet.

Two days prior to the unfounded claim of harassment, Shannon Faulkner reported to the Associated Press that she was comfortable in the classroom and had experienced no problems. One day prior to the unfounded claim, Shannon Faulkner was interviewed by the *Charleston Post and Courier* and stated she was doing well and had no problems in class. She was, rather, trying to deal with her perception of being a local celebrity.

~ more ~

WATTS RESPONSE 2-2-2-2

Then comes an appearance before Judge Houck for motions to be heard and, without giving any prior notice and with a courtroom full of media reporters, her lawyers claimed that Miss Faulkner suffers from continued harassment. There was not one bit of evidence submitted, not one sworn statement authenticated, or one witness called to the stand to substantiate their claims.

Despite the lack of warning of the lawyers' attack, attorneys for The Citadel challenged the outlandish claims. Brigadier General Cliff Poole, the vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college, who fortunately was in attendance at the hearing, was called to the witness stand and, under oath, refuted every claim made by Miss Faulkner. He had personally met with Miss Faulkner, and she had told him that no problems existed in the classroom. She stated only that she was unhappy with references to her in the college newspaper. Poole, on the witness stand, explained that a satirical student newspaper column had mentioned Miss Faulkner the same way it mentions cadets, faculty members and staff. Poole himself was referred to, in the same column, as Twinkle, Twinkle One Star Foole and is mentioned frequently in the column, most often in a scornful manner. General Poole referred to a principle with which you are undoubtedly familiar, that the constitution does not permit government censorship of newspapers.

The references Miss Faulkner's lawyers used to claim harassment in the student newspaper come from a satirical column written by an anonymous cadet that pokes fun at everyday life on campus. I have appeared frequently in this column, most often in a less than complimentary light. Every cadet, faculty member and employee of the college faces the possibility of being mentioned in the *Scarlet Pimpernel*. The column takes a critical look at the administration, faculty and student body as a way to express student views of the frustrations, challenges and achievements of attending The Citadel. I do not always condone the column, nor do I ever censor it. It is an often offbeat expression of the mood of the Corps of Cadets. It first appeared in 1970 and has been a regular feature of *The Brigadier* since that time.

Your editorial cited the abuse heaped on Miss Faulkner. I challenge you to

~ more ~

WATTS RESPONSE 3-3-3-3

produce any evidence that she is being abused. Until there was a room full of media reporters, Miss Faulkner claimed no abuse at all and has to this day, reported no problems to the college. Only through the accusations of her attorneys is The Citadel being portrayed in a negative tone. By their own admission, she has been treated with absolute dignity and respect by all but a small handful of cadets.

The facts of the incident do not support the editorial printed in your paper. Your readers deserve the facts. No reporter present stated that Miss Faulkner was ever called names in class. No reporter present stated that any member of The Citadel was trying to drive Miss Faulkner out of the college. No reporter present stated that the Corps of Cadets was not treating Miss Faulkner properly. Only your editorial made such claims.

The Citadel has, for the last year, held its head high and not stooped to conduct not expected of gentlemen. We are embroiled in a court battle for our very existence and do not reduce ourselves to the references made in your editorial. We deserve to be given fair treatment.

Our fight is with the lawsuit filed against us in court. We do not have a fight with Miss Faulkner and do not harass her in class, on campus or in the community. Until the court resolves the issue of public support for public single-gender programs, she will be treated no more or no less than any other student on the campus of The Citadel.

Claudius E. Watts III, USAF, Ret.
President
The Citadel