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Fairfield County Museum
Winnsboro, South Carolina 29180

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Dear Madam/Sir,

Enclosed you will find a copy of an article I had published in *Military Images* magazine some time ago and an April 1996 revision of my SDGS and SDHS presentation, both on Colonel James Henry Rion. I cannot recall if I have previously provided you copies of them for your files. I do believe your copy of the presentation is a previous, May 1995, revision, which should probably be discarded to prevent any confusion.

The lead picture of Colonel Rion, on page 9 of the *Military Images* article, which you will notice is one in your possession, was captioned by me as "James H. Rion as a young officer in the 25th Regiment, South Carolina Militia." This was because of my interpretation of the "6" inside the bugle ornament on his hat as referring to the 6th Brigade, South Carolina Militia, of which the 25th Regiment was a part and what appeared to be the oak leaves of a major or lieutenant colonel on his shoulder straps, not a colonel's eagles.

I have recently acquired a copy of a letter, which I have also enclosed, written by Colonel Rion on 8 May 1861, which I think invalidates that identification. I now believe the caption should have read, "James H. Rion as the Colonel of the newly formed 6th South Carolina Volunteers." You will see the description of the uniform, cap and cap ornament match those in the picture. The gold "6" in the "silver bugle" represents the 6th South Carolina. Had there been oak leaves on the shoulder straps, they would have been in the same position as the captains bars shown in his letter.

What is centrally mounted on the shoulder straps is still in doubt. One would normally expect an eagle if they conformed to those prescribed for U.S. Army officers, as the captain's do. However, the 1861 South Carolina uniform orders, as described in the *American Civil War Armies (4): State Troops of the Osprey - Men-At-War Series*, states that "colonels were to wear a gold Palmetto tree instead of an eagle." This could explain why it doesn't look like an eagle.

However, not all the descriptions in the letter, nor in Rion's picture, are consistent with the 1861 orders as given in *Osprey*. "Officers, according to the 1861 orders, were to wear dark blue frock coats and trousers like those of US Army officers. [The letter says pants are light blue.] The trousers were to have a 1 1/2-in.-wide stripe for field grade officers and above, and an inch-wide stripe for company officers. Stripes were to be gold for generals and divisional and brigade staff officers; silver for field-grade officers and

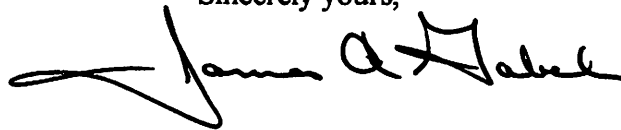
regimental staff, and white for company-grade officers. [The letter says the stripes for this company-grade officer was 1/8-inch and dark blue.] Coat buttons were to be gilt for generals and staff officers and silver for regimental officers. (In fact, all state buttons appear to have been gilt.)” [The letter agrees with the silver Palmetto buttons.]

“ Hats varied. ... Company-grade officers had blue wool kepis with a silver Palmetto tree badge in front, with regimental number on the left as viewed, and the letter ‘R’ on the right. This style of cap was to be worn in undress by all officers; however generals and staff officers were to wear a gold wreath surrounding the letters ‘SCV’ as their cap badge, while field officers were to wear their regimental numbers within a silver wreath. Regimental staff officers wore the wreath around the letters ‘A’ (for adjutant), ‘Q’ (for quartermaster), ‘C’ (for commissary), or ‘S’ (for surgeon).” [The letter says dark blue Zouave (sic) with the gold regimental number inside a silver bugle, and this was for the regimental surgeon.]

With my new assumption that the picture is of Rion as Colonel of the 6th South Carolina, the time frame for when it was taken is considerably narrowed. Rion was commissioned Colonel of the 6th SCV by Governor Pickens on 19 February 1861, the same day he was elected Colonel. However, he did not acknowledge his receipt of this commission until 28 February 1861. From April 12 to early-June, he was on duty at Battery Island in the Charleston Harbor area and is unlikely to have had time to get his picture taken. Then, after the regiment relocated to Summerville, he resigned his commission on June 15, 1861, before the regiment went into Confederate service.

I hope this will add some insight into the background of your picture of Col. Rion. I hope the next time I visit that part of the caption that says, “This portrait hangs in the Fairfield County Historical Society Museum in Winnsboro, South Carolina.” is once again correct. When I last visited it had been “temporarily” misplaced, but I understand it has since been found.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James A. Habel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.