

The Bengal Tiger and LSU



Capt. Alex White.
Photo courtesy of
Fort Tejon Historical
Association.



A couple of Tiger Rifles from
a painting by Don Troiani.



Maj. Chatham Wheat.
Photo courtesy of Mrs.
William Elam.



Maj. David F. Boyd, who
later became LSU's
second president.

The Bengal tiger has been the official mascot of Louisiana State University since 1936. But, how did the Bengal tiger become LSU's mascot? The choice dates back to the Civil War. As Louisiana seceded from the Union in 1861, companies of soldiers were organized to serve the Confederate Army. Company B, one of the first companies to be formed in Louisiana, under the general command of Capt. Alex White, was named the "Tiger Rifles."

The Tiger Rifles was a unique company known for its colorful and unusual uniforms that were similar to those worn by French Zouaves. The Tiger Rifles were the earliest and most famous of the Zouave units in the Confederate Army who became known for their rowdy behavior and criminal records. Many painted quotes on their caps that read "Lincoln's Life or a Tiger's Death" and "Tiger by Nature." Maj. Chatham Wheat was in charge of Company B, one of the six companies that would make up the First Special Battalion, Louisiana Volunteers. Eventually, all the infantrymen from Louisiana became known as "Louisiana Tigers." They were recognized for their incredible courage and ferociousness during battle in the Civil War and "tigers" represented their heroism. Maj. David Boyd, one soldier in the 9th Louisiana Regiment, would later become LSU's second president.

The first LSU football team was organized in 1893 by head football coach Dr. Charles E. Coates, who was instrumental in getting LSU accepted into the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (SIAA). The team became nationally known in 1896 after a perfect 6-0-0 record and the SIAA co-championship. The LSU student body soon wanted a nickname for their team. It is unclear whether Coach Coates or David F. Boyd chose the tiger as the university and the football team's symbol.



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