

Brigadier General William Henry Fitzhugh Payne



William Henry Fitzhugh Payne was born January 27, 1830 at "Clifton" in Fauquier County, Virginia. Although christened as above, he always signed his name as W. H. Payne explaining it was difficult to write the 'F' flowingly. At the age of eleven, Payne was reading Caesar at a private school. Entering the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington, Virginia on August 18, 1846, he was admitted to the third class of four. In 1848, Payne entered the University of Virginia where he studied law and in 1851, was admitted to the bar. W. H. Payne married his half first cousin once removed, Mary Elizabeth Winston Payne, daughter of William Richards-Hooe Winter Payne and Minerva West Winston. Mary Elizabeth Winston Payne was born July 25, 1831.

Approximately three years before the start of the Civil War, Major John Scott and W. H. Payne raised the Black Horse Troop which became Company H, 4th Virginia Cavalry, J.E.B. Stuarts Corps. Although very young, Payne was a member of Governor Wise's Staff and could have joined the Black Horse Cavalry with any rank he wished. However, he enlisted as a private on April 17, 1861 and was commissioned Captain April 27, 1861; Major September 11, 1861; Lieutenant Colonel June 17, 1862; Colonel September 1, 1862 and Brigadier General November 1864. Payne was recommended as Major General to succeed Major General Fitzhugh Lee who was to be promoted to Lieutenant General, but the promotion was prevented by the sudden evacuation of Richmond.

Captain Payne commanded the Black Horse Troop at First Manassas where they captured 16 pieces of artillery. In May of 1862, he was desperately wounded by a ball through his jaw and tongue which exited through his neck. A physician found him and held the bleeding vein until he was taken to the hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonel Payne commanded cavalry combat at Kelleysville on March 17, 1863. He commanded the 2nd North Carolina Regulars at Chancellorsville in May, 1863, at Brandy Station on June 9, 1863 and at Hanover, Pennsylvania where he was wounded in hand to hand combat, captured, imprisoned on Johnson's Island and finally exchanged. He commanded the 4th Virginia in a series of skirmishes from Trevilians to White House Landing.

General Payne commanded a brigade at Winchester on September 19, 1864, at Cedar Creek on October 19, 1864 and at Five Forks on March 30, 1865 where he was again badly wounded and evacuated to Richmond. Having served from the attempt to surprise Harpers Ferry in April of 1861 until wounded at Five Forks in 1865, he served with honor and dignity. When commanding the 4th Virginia Cavalry in the Valley Campaign with General Jubal Early, he took his brigade, which numbered only 500 men, and attacked the Federal Post at Cedar Creek, Virginia capturing 829 prisoners including the commandant of the post, many horses, and valuable equipment and supplies. For this daring feat, General Thomas L. Roesser presented General Payne with a very handsome sword for 'Distinguished gallantry in the field November 28, 1864'

During the evacuation of Richmond, he failed to reach his brigade and took refuge near his home in Warrenton, Virginia where he was captured on the night of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination. He was taken into Washington that night and placed in the Old Capitol Prison. One of Lincoln's assassins, having assumed the name of Payne, caused General Payne to be assumed as the assassin and to narrowly escape violence at the hands of the populace. At every lamp post the crowds shouted 'Hang him!' and tried to lasso him and pull him from his horse.

After the war, General Payne achieved a brilliant career as an orator and lawyer, becoming general council for the Southern Railroad and leaving a distinguished military record behind. Although he disliked politics, he served in the Virginia Legislature for one year and was nominated by Fitzhugh Lee for governor of Virginia which he declined. General and Mrs. Payne

had ten children: William W. (1855), Arthur A. (1856), Henry F. (1857), John W. (1858), Richards R. (1859), Minerva W. (1860), John D. (1861), Sarah R. T. (1862), Virginia S. (1863) and Charles B. (1864).

The reunions with his old comrades-in-arms at his home in Warrenton were momentous events in the life of this village which was famous for its lawyers, soldiers and sportsmen. Something of the esteem in which he was held may be seen in a quotation from a Warrenton paper, written during his life: "General Payne belongs to that class of men, whose ambition is to so live as to reflect credit on the memory of those who have preceded him, not to claim recognition for what his kinsmen may have done." Equal to his bravery was his loyalty his friends and his state of Virginia. The Calendar of State Papers contains a letter from Payne to the governor of Virginia, dated February 24, 1865, asking that his brigade be supplied with a Virginia flag. He promised the governor it should not be disgraced by those who marched under its folds and spoke with love for the Confederacy, but especially of his devotion to his state.

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