



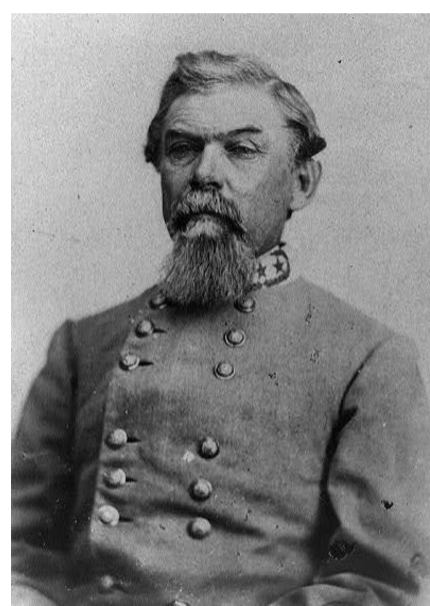
BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

A Civil War Father - Son Tragedy: General William J Hardee

By Norm Dasinger

On March 23, 1865, three weeks before Robert E Lee surrendered to U.S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse Virginia, 16-year old Willie Hardee was killed. Willie was one of nearly 750,000 Americans that died in the War Between the States. His story, however, is overly tragic.

The son of Confederate States Army General William J Hardee, Willie was in school in Marietta, Georgia in 1864 when Terry's Texas Rangers rode into town. The boy was in awe of them and immediately tried to join the rough but fun-loving Texas cavalrymen. Knowing Willie was not a normal recruit, the commander of the unit found Willie's father and turned the boy over to him. Willie was disappointed. General Hardee appreciated the bravery and enthusiasm of his son and decided to make him an officer on his staff. Willie was in the thick of the fighting around Atlanta and was present with his father at Savannah as he tried to defend that town against Sherman in December of 1864.



William J. Hardee



Those fun loving Texas Rangers!

By March of 1865, the Confederate Army of Tennessee had moved to North Carolina. This once proud organization was reduced drastically in number and their commander, General Joseph E Johnston, had little hope of stopping the massive Federal Army led by Sherman. The Hardees followed orders and met the enemy in battle around Bentonville.

General Hardee had a spectacular reputation as a hard fighter and master tactician. He was nicknamed "Old Reliable" by his comrades and had been in the War from the very start.

On March 21, 1865, Old Reliable faced an especially difficult assignment. He oversaw the defense of the Confederate left flank. Also, he was pre-occupied by the recent actions of his young son. Willie had become bored with the life of a staff officer. He encountered the men of Terry's Texas Rangers, again, and begged his father to let him rejoin his old friends. The apprehensive father agreed. On this day, General Hardee personally led an assault on the Yankees, and he was joined by, among several units, Terry's Texas Rangers. In a dramatic move, the two Hardee's tipped their caps to one another as the assault began.



Field where Willie fell charging against the Union line

Soon, Old Reliable returned with a bright face and feeling of triumph as his charge had slowed the Union advance. Quickly, however, his exultation changed to sorrow as he noticed his son was hurt. Shot in the chest, Willie was removed from his horse and his father ordered he be placed in an ambulance and taken to the Kirkland home, Ayr Mount, in Hillsborough, North Carolina. There Willie's stepmother and sister were staying with a niece. Willie lingered but died two days later. He is buried in the Matthews Episcopal Church Cemetery, Orange County, North Carolina.



The Kirkland Home, Ayr Mount, Hillsborough, North Carolina



Willie's grave marker - Willie was 16 when he was killed, but the marker has his age as 17.

The Blue and Gray Education Society will be hosting of a tour the Bentonville Battlefield and the 1865 North Carolina Civil War Campaign March 25-28, 2020. If interested in learning more about Hardee and the Civil War in North Carolina come along! Click on our website listed below for more details!

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