

THE ROAD TO GLORIETA



COLONEL WILLIAM STEELE



On September 12, 1862, shortly after the Confederate Army of New Mexico's return to San Antonio, William Steele was raised to the rank of Brigadier General. After the promotion, he turned over command of Sibley's 7th Regiment to Colonel Arthur Pendleton Bagby, and for a while his war-time experiences parted ways with the Sibley Brigade. (1)

For most of 1863, General Steele was the ranking Confederate officer in the Indian Territory. The posting, in what is today Oklahoma, was previously turned down by several other officers before Steele accepted it. The reasons quickly became obvious. Troops placed under Steele's command were tired and jaded, and junior officers were insubordinate. In addition, nearly half of his force consisted of Cherokee and Choctaw Indians. Although excellent soldiers in sudden offensive dashes, Steele considered them unreliable as troops of the line. Resources in the Territory were scarce and morale was low. On more than one occasion, Steele needed to send details into Arkansas or Louisiana to forage or to collect deserters. Troops chosen for these assignments had a distressing tendency to be attached to other commands and never return. In December of 1863, Steele, at his own request, was relieved of the command. Issuing the order, Kirby Smith commended the Brigadier General on a job well done under difficult circumstances. (2)

In early 1864, General Steele returned to Texas, and for a time held charge of the Galveston defenses. In the spring of the same year, he led a brigade of Texas horse, 700 strong, to reinforce General Richard Taylor in Louisiana. Arriving shortly before the clashes at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, Steele's cavalry was initially assigned to support General Camille Armand Polignac's infantry division. Following the battles, General Steele was praised for his conduct at Pleasant Hill. (3)

When General Thomas Green was killed at Blair's Landing (See Thomas Green Epilogue), General Steele, as senior brigadier, was temporarily given command of Taylor's cavalry. Until superseded by Major General John Wharton, William Steele was briefly reunited with the Army of New Mexico and the men of his old command. (4)

For the rest of the war, Steele remained with Taylor's army and proved himself a capable cavalry commander. When the Union army retreated from Grand Encore, Steele's brigade drove their rear guard from Natchitoches. Capturing some prisoners, he continued the pursuit to the Twenty-four-mile Ferry. On the 23rd of April, 1864, "after a sharp action, he pushed the enemy's rear below Cloutierville, taking some score of prisoners." "At McNutt's Hill on the 26th Steele's horse was joined by Bee's horse; and together under Wharton, they attacked the enemy in the valley and drove him, with loss of killed and prisoners, to the immediate vicinity of Alexandria." (5)

Following the demise of the Confederacy, General Steele returned to Texas. From 1866 to 1873, he lived in San Antonio and was engaged in the mercantile business. In 1874, he moved to Austin and assumed the office of State Adjutant-General. He remained at this post for eleven years, serving in the administrations of Governors Coke and Hubbard. During his tenure in office, Steele reorganized the Texas Rangers and made them into one of the most effective law enforcement agencies in the United States. William Steele died at San Antonio on January 12, 1885, and was buried in the Oakwood Cemetery at Austin. Having lived to age sixty-four or sixty-five, he was the only regimental commander of the Confederate Army of New Mexico to survive the Civil War. (6)

Footnotes (See *The Road to Glorieta* for bibliography)

1. Wright, *Texas in the War*, p.93; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, p.289; Collard, *Reminiscences*, p.10.
2. Wright, *Texas in the War*, p.93; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, p.289; Webb, *The Handbook of Texas*, p.665.
3. Steele's brigade was composed of the 12th Texas Cavalry, Col. Parsons; 19th Texas Cavalry, Col. Walton [Watson?]; and the 21st Texas Cavalry, Col. Carter. Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, p.182; Wright, *Texas in the War*, pp.16 & 93; *Generals in Gray*, p.290.
4. Wright, *Texas in the War*, p.93; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, p.289; Webb, *The Handbook of Texas*, p.665.
5. Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, pp.182-183.
6. Wright, *Texas in the War*, p.93; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, pp.289-290; Webb, *The Handbook of Texas*, p.665.



[The Road to Glorieta; A Confederate Army Marches through New Mexico](#)



Is available in trade paperback and many eBook formats from: Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple, and other popular online outlets.