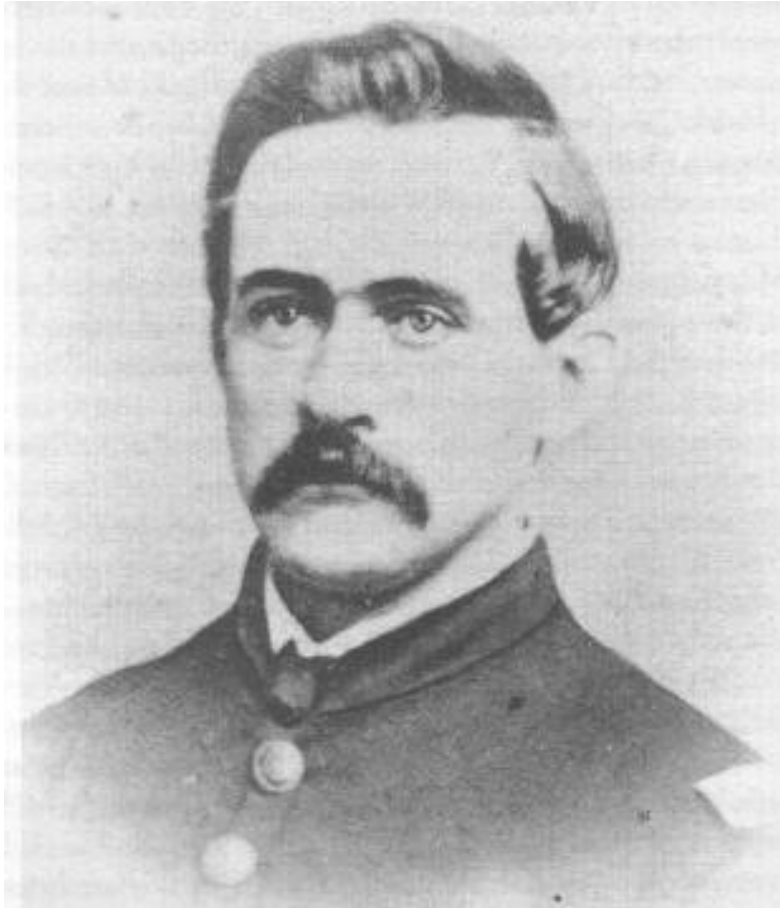


The Life of Colonel George W. Cole (1827-1875)



**Commander, Second US Colored Cavalry
Regiment**

This narrative relates what is currently known about the life of Colonel George W. Cole in the hope that others may be able to provide information that fills in the unknown part of his life In Mora, New Mexico.

In telling his story, we start at the end of his life. On a small hill overlooking the town of Mora, New Mexico, is a grave site with the tombstone stating "Col. Geo. W Cole, 2 US C. CAV." Col. Cole died on December 9, 1875. His obituary ran in the Daily New Mexican Santa Fe on December 27, 1875 as follows:

"Dr George W. Cole died at his residence in Mora New Mexico on the 9th instant. He was buried with Masonic honors on the 12th he being a member of Union Lodge No 450. A large concourse attended the funeral ceremonies. Doctor Cole was a Brigadier General of volunteers in the Union Army during the late war serving with distinction throughout. He came to New Mexico about three years ago and lived in Mora since last January. He was greatly loved and respected by all who knew him and was noted for his kindness to the poor, giving them his medical attendance without charge. He leaves a wife to mourn his loss."

His grave is immediately adjacent to the family cemetery of Ceran St. Vrain, a prominent frontiersman, Santa Fe Trail wagon master, and during the last ten or so years of his life, a successful business man in Mora. Ceran St Vrain died in 1870, five years before Col. Cole's death.

From his military records, we know George Cole was born on March 26, 1827 in Lodi, Seneca, New York. His was a prominent family. His grandfather fought in the Revolutionary War; his father in the war of 1812. His older brother Cornelius Cole later served as a US Senator during the Lincoln administration. He studied medicine and graduated from the Geneva College of Medicine in 1850. He married Mary Barto and settled in Syracuse, NY, in 1857. He and Mary had two daughters. It is not clear if he had an active medical practice while in Syracuse. (1)

He entered military service on May 13, 1861, with the 12th New York Infantry Company H. His occupation at the time of his enlistment was listed as "Physician". On July 4, 1861, he was commissioned as a Captain. He was promoted to Major on December 31, 1862, and less than a year later, on December 10, 1863, promoted to Colonel, apparently in conjunction with his forthcoming duty with the 2nd Colored Cavalry. In 1865, Col Cole received brevet promotions to Brigadier General and then to Major General. (Brevet promotions are mostly honorary, often given in recognition of bravery or exceptional performance. There is no additional authority or pay, but the recipient is entitled to be addressed by his brevet rank).

Even though Col. Cole was a Doctor, his military service was as an Infantry and Cavalry officer and he often saw combat. A description of one action in which he played a part is from the account of Brigadier General Edward Potter's raid on Greenville, Tarboro, and Rocky Mount, North Carolina, July 19-23, 1863. Then Major Cole commanded three Companies of the Third NY Cavalry in fighting at Tarboro on July 20. (2)

One thing that sets Col. George Cole apart from the many other officers in the Union Army during the Civil War is the fact that on February 1, 1864, he was "Commissioned as

Officer in the US Colored Troops 2nd Cavalry Regiment S". This was after he was promoted to full Colonel and mustered out of the regular Army on December 10, 1863. (3)

The 2nd Cavalry Regiment was formed on December 22, 1863, in Fort Monroe, Virginia, under the Command of Col. Cole. It initially enlisted 1,162 recruits and after a 60 day training period, the regiment was deployed in the Fort Monroe-Norfolk area of Virginia. It participated in several military actions through the remainder of the Civil War, most notably the battle of New Market Heights in September, 1864. In June, 1865, the regiment was transferred to Brazos Santiago, Texas. A large part of the regiment was detailed to build the railroads in Texas between Brazos and Brownville. In February 12, 1866, the unit was disbanded ("mustered out"). Col. Cole was with the Regiment the entire time and he was also mustered out at that time. (4)

As straight forward and impressive as Col Cole's military service was, there was a dark side to his life. After he returned from military service, he discovered that his wife and his best friend, L. Harris Hiscock, had had an affair while he was in the Army. Feeling betrayed and with his honor at stake, Col Cole shot and killed Mr. Hiscock. At his trial he pleaded temporary insanity and the result was a hung jury. His second trial resulted in an acquittal. After his trial, he and Mary remained apart. George for a time worked in the Registers Office of the New York City Post Office. (5)

It is not clear when he first came to New Mexico; according to his obituary, it would have been in 1872. It appears he was seeking out and investing in land. He apparently came to Mora in January, 1875 and practiced medicine. He died of pneumonia in December, 1875.

Questions from the current time (2014) and place (Mora, New Mexico):

How did George Cole Come to settle in Mora? However, that may not be much of a mystery since Mora at the time was a prosperous community with Fort Union only a few miles away, so Mora was relatively well known.

Why practice medicine, something he apparently hadn't done in several decades?

How was it that George Cole was buried at the St. Vrain family cemetery, the only non-family member buried there? He came to Mora several years after Ceran St. Vrain's death, although being a doctor and a prominent figure in Mora, he almost certainly would have been acquainted with St. Vrain's surviving family. Did the fact that both were Masons play a role?

Sources

1. Marsha Smith, "George Washington Cole" The Backbone, Summer 2013, a publication of the Backbone Ridge History Group of Schuyler and Seneca Counties (New York)
2. David Norris, North Carolina Historical Review, January, 1996
3. Ancestry.com – George W. Cole –Army - Military Page.
4. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, "History of Tidewater's African Americans in the Civil War".

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5. Marsha Smith, ibid

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