

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Boone County's
General E. R. S. Canby

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Killing of General From Boone County Is Told In Magazine Story

The Saturday Evening Post for March 5, 1960, carried the story of the killing of a United States Army General who was born in Boone County, Kentucky.

The Post has been publishing a series of picture stories under the title of "What's Going On Here?" The story of March 5 tells of the killing of Brigadier-General E. R. S. Canby by the Modoc Indians.

General Edward Richard Sprigg Canby was the oldest son of Dr. Israel I. Canby and his wife, Elizabeth (Betsey) Piatt. They were married in Boone County on January 17, 1817. Record of the marriage is found on page 29, Marriage Book A, in the office of Mr. C. D. Benson, County Clerk, at Burlington.

Dr. Canby owned land in Boone County in 1816. In 1817 he was appointed a member of the Boone Fiscal Court. He resigned shortly afterward. In 1830 he was living in Montgomery County, Indiana. At one time he ran for Governor of Indiana on the Democratic ticket.

E. R. S. Canby is believed to have been born on November 9, 1817. One account gives the year as 1819. There seems to be no records of his brothers and sisters. There is record of Louise Canby, a Samuel Canby, and a Benjamin Canby, in Boone County. They may have been sister and brothers of E. R. S. Canby.

It is not, at this time, known just who Elizabeth Piatt was. There were Piatts in East Bend and other Piatts on the hill above Petersburg. General John Parker Hawkins, in his book on the Hawkins family states that E. R. S. Canby was born at East Bend.

E. R. S. Canby married Louise Hawkins, in Crawfordsville, Indiana, in 1839. She, born on December 25, 1818, was the daughter of John Hawkins and Elizabeth Waller, who were married in Bourbon County, Kentucky, on January 31, 1816.

John Hawkins was born in Culpeper County, Virginia, in 1787, and was about one year

old when his father moved to Kentucky. He first settled at Bryan's Station, and afterwards near Georgetown, where he lived until after 1805, and then moved to Boone County.

John Hawkins was a private in Captain James Ellis Company, 16th Kentucky Militia, in the War of 1812, from September 10, 1814 to March 9, 1815.

John Hawkins died at the age of fifty-four and his wife died about three years later. They are believed to have left Kentucky, to live in Indiana, because of their opposition to slavery.

E. R. S. Canby graduated from West Point in 1839 and served in the army for thirty-five years, passing through all the grades to Brigadier-General of the Regular Army.

He served his early years of service in the Florida war and in the Mexican war. He accompanied Riley's brigade of General Scott's army in Mexico. He was present at the siege of Vera Cruz, the battle of Cerro Gorda, Contreras, and the taking of the City of Mexico. He was twice cited for bravery. He served on assignments in San Francisco and in Washington.

The outbreak of the Civil War found him on duty in New Mexico. He opposed General Sibley in Texas and New Mexico. Sibley's object was the invasion and occupation of California. Canby's force was small and composed largely of unreliable local volunteers. He fought and lost the battle of Valverde, in January, 1862. He, thereafter, avoided combat, using hunger, thirst, and heat as his weapons, as he drew Sibley away from his supplies. Sibley's command lost about half of its strength and failed in its efforts to occupy California.

In 1863, Canby was in New York City at the time of the riots caused by the drafting of men for the army.

At the close of the war he was in command of the Military Division of the West Mississippi. He directed the campaign which resulted in the occupation of Mobile and Montgomery. In May, 1865, he received the surrender of the

forces under Generals R. Taylor and E. K. Smith. These were the last two Confederate armies remaining in the field. During this period he was painfully wounded.

In 1869 he was appointed to the command of the Department of the Columbia. When he assumed this post there seemed to be peace in the area. However, the Modoc Indians began to cause trouble, and on April 11, 1873, General Canby, and several other officers, were killed by the Indians while in Council with them in an effort to settle the difficulties.

The General and his companions had come to the Council without an escort and unarmed, in an effort to show their feeling of good will. They brought gifts to the Indians. During the talks the Indians attacked and killed the officers on the lava flats of Northern California, near Tule Lake.

General Canby left his widow, Louisa Hawkins Canby, but no children. Louisa had accompanied her husband in all the many changes of location usual in army life. Both are buried in Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Indiana. An oil portrait of General Canby is reported to be hanging on the walls of Cullom Hall, West Point, New York.

He was tall and soldierly in appearance, kind and courteous in manner, utterly devoid of selfish ambitions. His superiors and subordinates knew him as a great commander.

It is believed that he is the only man from Boone County to acquire the rank of General in the United States Army.

A more complete account of the Canby family is to be found in "Memoranda Concerning Some Branches of the Hawkins Family." The only known copy of the book in this area is to be found in the Cincinnati Public Library. Biographical sketches are found in numerous reference books.

Mr. Ezra J. Warner, La Jolla, California, is compiling material for a book on the life of General Canby.

William Fitzgerald, of Florence, is publishing a volume on "Boone County and The Civil War." An account of General Canby's career will be included.