

= Zenas Bliss =

Zenas Randall Bliss (April 17 , 1835 ? January 2 , 1900) was an officer and general in the United States Army and a recipient of the Medal of Honor . He formed the first unit of Seminole @-@ Negro Indian Scouts , and his detailed memoirs chronicled life on the Texas frontier . He was the father of Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor Zenas Work Bliss .

Bliss was a native of Rhode Island and graduated from West Point in 1854 . He served most of his thirty @-@ seven @-@ year career on the Texas frontier , and served in the Union Army during the American Civil War . During the Civil War he was captured by Confederate forces and held as a prisoner of war . Bliss received the Medal of Honor for his actions while leading his regiment at the Battle of Fredericksburg .

= = Early life and military career = =

Bliss was born April 17 , 1835 in Johnston , Rhode Island to an upper @-@ middle @-@ class family . His parents were Zenas and Phebe Waterman Randall Bliss . He received an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point , New York , in July 1850 when he was only fifteen years old .

He graduated from West Point in 1854 and served the next six years in Texas . He was stationed at Fort Davis and Fort Quitman , but his first assignment was as a brevet second lieutenant in the 1st U.S. Infantry regiment at Fort Duncan .

He was promoted to the full rank of second lieutenant in the 8th U.S. Infantry on March 3 , 1855 and subsequently promoted to first lieutenant on October 17 , 1860 . Following the outbreak of the Civil War , he was promoted to captain on May 14 , 1861 .

= = = Civil War service = = =

When the American Civil War began on April 12 , 1861 Bliss immediately saw action . He was captured by Confederate forces and spent eleven months as a prisoner of war , first in San Antonio , Texas , and later in Richmond , Virginia .

He was finally exchanged and sent back to Union lines where he subsequently took command of the Tenth Rhode Island Infantry . He received a commission in the volunteer army as a colonel in May 1862 . The 10th Rhode Island served for only 90 days and was used in the defenses of Washington , D.C. After the 10th Rhode Island was discharged , Bliss assumed command of the Seventh Rhode Island Infantry on August 21 , 1862 .

In October 1862 the Seventh Rhode Island joined the First Brigade , Second Division , Ninth Corps , Army of the Potomac . The regiment saw action in December 1862 at the Battle of Fredericksburg , during which Bliss performed actions that earned him the Medal of Honor several decades later . When IX Corps was sent West , it participated in the Siege of Vicksburg . The Seventh served under Major General William T. Sherman in the capture of Jackson , Mississippi .

In April 1864 the Seventh rejoined the Army of the Potomac . Bliss became commander of the First Brigade , Second Division , Ninth Corps . His brigade fought in the Battle of the Wilderness . Bliss was badly injured by a horse at Spotsylvania , but he returned to lead his brigade in the Siege of Petersburg and the Battle of the Crater . The court of inquiry following the fiasco at the Crater censured Bliss , but he remained on duty .

During the Civil War , Bliss received a brevet (honorary promotion) to major dated December 13 , 1862 , for " gallantry and meritorious service " in the Battle of Fredericksburg . He was later breveted to lieutenant colonel on May 7 , 1864 , for " gallantry and meritorious service " in the Battle of the Wilderness .

Bliss was mustered out of volunteer service on June 9 , 1865 and reverted to his Regular Army rank of captain .

He was awarded the Medal of Honor on December 3 , 1898 , for valor during the Battle of Fredericksburg .

= = Postbellum career = =

Bliss remained in the Regular Army after the Civil War and was promoted to major of the 30th Infantry Regiment on August 6 , 1867 . He was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the 19th Infantry on March 4 , 1879 , and to colonel of the 24th Infantry (a unit with black soldiers and white officers) on April 20 , 1886 .

Bliss was promoted to brigadier general in the Regular Army April 24 , 1895 , and to major general on May 14 , 1897 . He retired from the Army eight days later on May 22 . Including his four years at West Point , Bliss had served 46 years , 10 months and 22 days in uniform when he retired .

Bliss was a member of the District of Columbia Commandery of the Loyal Legion and was assigned insignia number 2601 . He was also a member of the Grand Army of the Republic , Society of the Army of the Potomac and the Order of the Indian Wars .

Zenas Bliss died in Washington , D.C. January 2 , 1900 , at age 64 . He is buried alongside his wife at Arlington National Cemetery at Arlington , Virginia . His grave can be found in section 1 , lot 8 @-@ B.

Bliss and his wife had four children , two of whom lived to adulthood . One of his sons was Zenas Work Bliss (1867 - 1957) who served as lieutenant governor of Rhode Island from 1910 to 1913 .

There is a life sized portrait of General Bliss at the Benefit Street Arsenal in Providence , Rhode Island .

= = Medal of Honor citation = =

Rank and organization : Colonel , Seventh Rhode Island Infantry . Place and date : At Fredericksburg , VA . , 13 Dec 1862 .

This officer , to encourage his regiment ; which had never before been in action , and which had been ordered to lie down to protect itself from the enemy 's fire , arose to his feet , advanced in front of the line , and himself fired several shots at the enemy at short range , being fully exposed to their fire at the time .