

= George S. Greene =

George Sears Greene ( May 6 , 1801 ? January 28 , 1899 ) was a civil engineer and a Union general during the American Civil War . He was part of the Greene family of Rhode Island , which had a record of distinguished military service to the United States . He first served in the Army from 1823 to 1836 after graduating second from his class at West Point . As a civilian , he was a founder of the American Society of Civil Engineers and Architects and was responsible for numerous railroads and aqueduct construction projects in the northeastern United States .

After 25 years as a civilian , he rejoined the Army to fight in the American Civil War . Despite his age , he quickly rose up the ranks and was appointed a brigadier general in early 1862 . During the war , he took part in the Northern Virginia Campaign , the Battle of Antietam , and the Battle of Chancellorsville . His most notable contribution during the war was his defense of the Union right flank at Culp 's Hill during the Battle of Gettysburg . He returned to engineering work after the war until his death in 1899 .

= = Early life = =

Greene was born in Apponaug , Rhode Island , one of nine children of Caleb and Sarah Robinson ( Greene ) Greene . His family had roots in the founding of Rhode Island and in the American Revolutionary War , including General Nathanael Greene , George 's second cousin . Caleb was a financially shrewd ship owner and merchant , but the Embargo Act of 1807 , which prohibited U.S. vessels from carrying goods to other countries , and the War of 1812 left his family in financial difficulties . Young George attended Wrentham Academy and then a Latin grammar school in Providence and hoped to attend Brown University there , but his impoverished father could not afford it , so he moved to New York City and found work in a dry goods store on Pearl Street .

In the New York store , Greene met Major Sylvanus Thayer , superintendent of the United States Military Academy , who recommended him to the Secretary of War for appointment to the academy . Greene entered West Point at age 18 and graduated second of 35 cadets in the class of 1823 . Classmates of Greene 's included future Union Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas , Joseph K. Mansfield , David Hunter , Dennis Hart Mahan , and Albert Sidney Johnston . Top graduates of the academy generally chose the Engineers as their branch , but Greene decided on the artillery and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the 3rd U.S. Artillery Regiment . However , due to his excellent academic performance , he stayed at the academy until 1827 as an assistant professor of mathematics and as a principal assistant professor of engineering . One of the students he taught during this period was Cadet Robert E. Lee .

In the summer of 1828 Greene married Mary Elizabeth Vinton , sister of his best friend at West Point , David Vinton . Elizabeth gave birth to three children over the next four years : Mary Vinton , George Sears , and Francis Vinton Greene . While assigned to Fort Sullivan in Eastport , Maine in 1833 , tragedy struck Greene 's family : Elizabeth and all three of their children died within seven months , probably from tuberculosis . To ease the pain on his mind and to escape the isolation and loneliness of peacetime Army garrison duty , he immersed himself in study of both the law and medicine , coming close to professional certification in both by the time he resigned his commission in 1836 to become a civil engineer .

Greene built railroads in six states and designed municipal sewage and water systems for Washington , D.C. , Detroit , and several other cities . In New York City , he designed the Croton Aqueduct reservoir in Central Park and the enlarged High Bridge over the Harlem River . He was one of twelve founders in New York City of the American Society of Civil Engineers and Architects . While on a trip to Maine for railroad surveying , he met Martha Barrett Dana , daughter of Samuel Dana , a prominent Massachusetts politician . They were married in Charlestown , Massachusetts , on February 21 , 1837 . They had six children together , including four sons ( three of them later served in the military ) , one daughter , and one son who died in infancy .

= = Civil War = =

Despite being over 60 years old and having been out of the Army for 25 years , the crisis of the Union compelled Greene to seek to rejoin the service . He was essentially apolitical and was not an abolitionist , but he was a firm believer in restoring the Union . He was appointed colonel of the 60th New York Volunteer Infantry on January 18 , 1862 . The regiment of upstate New Yorkers had been dissatisfied with their colonel and the company commanders had petitioned for his removal . Governor Edwin D. Morgan , although initially reluctant to appoint Greene because of his age , saw his 13 years of regular army experience as a solution to his political / military problem . During this period , Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts was also prepared to offer Greene a regiment , but Greene chose to serve New York . The officers of the 60th were dismayed when the elderly , gray @-@ haired man reported for duty . They had requested that their lieutenant colonel be promoted , which would have raised many of them in rank themselves .

On April 28 , 1862 , Greene was appointed brigadier general of volunteers and served on the staff of Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks in the Shenandoah Valley campaign against Stonewall Jackson . At age 61 , Greene was one of the oldest generals in the Union army and his troops took to calling him " Old Man " or " Pap " Greene . ( There were actually 17 general officers in the Civil War older than Greene . ) However , his age did not keep him from being one of the most aggressive commanders in the army . He commanded the 3rd Brigade , 2nd Division , II Corps , of the Army of Virginia at the Battle of Cedar Mountain during the Northern Virginia Campaign . Attacked by a Confederate force three times the size of his own , Greene and his men refused to give ground , holding out until the neighboring Union units were forced to withdraw . His division commander , Brig. Gen. John W. Geary , received a severe wound during the action and Greene took command of the division temporarily .

Greene was again temporarily elevated to command of his division , now designated part of the XII Corps of the Army of the Potomac , at the Battle of Antietam . His division 's three brigades were led by junior officers who had survived Cedar Mountain . Even though XII Corps commander Brig. Gen. Joseph K. Mansfield was killed shortly after the fighting began , Greene led a crushing attack against the Confederates near the Dunker Church , achieving the farthest penetration of Maj. Gen. Stonewall Jackson 's lines than any Union unit . Under immense pressure , Greene held his small division ( only 1 @, @ 727 men engaged at the start of the day ) in advance of the rest of the army for four hours , but eventually withdrew after suffering heavy losses . While the division was posted to Harpers Ferry , Greene took a three @-@ week sick leave . Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard speculated that Greene , like many of his fellow officers , was sickened by the stench of dead and wounded at Antietam . When he returned , there was a new division commander , Brig. Gen. Geary . Greene was disgruntled that Geary , with only a few days seniority over him , was selected for the post ; Geary had been wounded at Cedar Mountain and his combat record was not as good , but his political connections and a sentiment that a wounded officer should not be set back in his career unnecessarily , gave him the nod .

Greene resumed command of the 3rd Brigade , which was involved in minor skirmishes in northern Virginia and not engaged at the Battle of Fredericksburg in December . At the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863 , his brigade was in the center of the line . When the Union right ? the XI Corps ? collapsed , Greene 's brigade was subjected to enfilade artillery fire and then infantry assaults . He had ordered his men to fortify their positions 200 yards ( 180 m ) to their front using abatis and trenches and they were able to hold out against several Confederate assaults , although losing 528 men of 2 @, @ 032 engaged . During part of the battle , Greene once again assumed temporary command of the division when Geary was wounded again .

= = = Gettysburg = = =

The Battle of Gettysburg was the highlight of Greene 's military career . On July 2 , 1863 , Maj. Gen. George G. Meade shifted almost the entire XII Corps from the Union right to strengthen the left flank , which was under heavy attack . Greene 's lone brigade of 1 @, @ 350 New Yorkers ( five regiments ) was left to defend a one @-@ half @-@ mile line on Culp 's Hill when an entire Confederate

division attacked . Fortunately , Greene had previously demonstrated good sense ( as befits a civil engineer ) by insisting that his troops construct strong field fortifications , despite a lack of interest in doing so from his division commander , Geary , and corps commander , Maj. Gen. Henry W. Slocum . In Greene 's finest moment of the war , his preparations proved decisive and his brigade held off multiple attacks for hours . He was active the entire engagement rallying his men to defend their positions in the darkness . Brig. Gen. Alpheus Williams , acting corps commander on July 2 , commended Greene for his " skill and judgment " in this defense , especially in his using the " advantages " of his position . Late at night , the rest of the XII Corps returned to Culp 's Hill . The fighting resumed the next morning and raged for over seven hours , but the Union troops held Culp 's Hill . They regained some of the lost ground and thwarted renewed Confederate attacks . The battle for Culp 's Hill included the two oldest generals in each army , Greene at 62 and Brig. Gen. William " Extra Billy " Smith at 65 .

The desperate fighting on the Union right flank was as important as the more famous defense of the Union left flank on July 2 , by Col. Strong Vincent 's brigade on Little Round Top . In fact , given that the Union line was only 400 yards ( 370 m ) from the vital Union supply line on the Baltimore Pike , it can be argued that it was more important . However , Greene 's contribution to this critical battle have never been widely heralded , principally because of a dispute between Meade and Slocum over the filing of their official reports . But a member of Greene 's brigade wrote :

Had the breastworks not been built , and had there only been the thin line of our unprotected brigade , that line must have been swept away like leaves before the wind , by the oncoming of so heavy a mass of troops , and the [ Baltimore ] pike would have been reached by the enemy .

= = = Western Theater = = =

In the fall of 1863 , the XII Corps was transferred to the West to reinforce the Union forces besieged at Chattanooga . At the Battle of Wauhatchie , during a surprise night attack by the Confederate forces , Greene was wounded in the face , with his jaw crushed and some teeth carried away . Subsequent surgery was not able to correct his condition and he suffered from the effects of his wound for the rest of his life . After six weeks of medical leave , he was assigned to light court @-@ martial duty until January 1865 , when he was sent to join Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman 's army in North Carolina . Initially Greene voluntarily served on the staff of Maj. Gen. Jacob D. Cox participating in the battle at Kinston , where he had his horse shot out from under him . At the very end of the war Greene was in command of the 3rd Brigade in Absalom Baird 's 3rd Division , XIV Corps , and participated in the capture of Raleigh and the pursuit of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston 's army until its surrender .

= = Postbellum career = =

After the war , Greene served on court @-@ martial duty for a year and then returned to civil engineering in New York and Washington , D.C. From 1867 to 1871 he was the chief engineer commissioner of the Croton Aqueduct Department in New York . At the age of 86 , he inspected the entire 30 @-@ mile Croton Aqueduct structure on foot . He served as president of the American Society of Civil Engineers from 1875 to 1877 and president of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society . He was appointed to West Point 's Board of Visitors in 1881 .

By 1892 , Greene was the oldest surviving Union general and the oldest living graduate of West Point . He petitioned the United States Congress for an engineer captain 's pension that would be of help to his family after his death . The best that Congress was willing to do was arranged by Congressman and Gettysburg veteran Daniel E. Sickles of New York , a first lieutenant 's pension , based on the highest rank Greene had achieved in the regular army . On August 18 , 1894 , Greene took the oath of office as a first lieutenant of artillery and became , at 93 , the oldest lieutenant in the U.S. Army for 48 hours . Veterans in the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States ( MOLLUS ) declared that he was the oldest lieutenant in world history .

= = Legacy = =

Greene died at age 97 in Morristown , New Jersey , and was buried in the Greene family cemetery in Warwick , Rhode Island , with a two @-@ ton boulder from Culp 's Hill placed above his grave . He is memorialized with a statue erected in 1906 by the State of New York on Culp 's Hill in Gettysburg National Military Park .

Greene 's wife Martha died in 1883 at an age of 74 . Their oldest son , Lieutenant Samuel Dana Greene , was the executive officer on the ironclad ship USS Monitor during the Battle of Hampton Roads . Another of their sons , Francis V. Greene , commanded a brigade at the Battle of Manila during the Spanish ? American War . A third , Charles Thurston Greene , was a lieutenant on his father 's staff at Culp 's Hill . Later in 1863 , Charles was wounded by an artillery shell and his leg was amputated , but he remained on active service until 1870 . George Sears Greene , Jr . , volunteered to serve but was not allowed to do so by his father so he could survive and carry on the family name .

A memorial tablet honoring Greene was approved by the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1910 at a sum of 460 dollars . The bronze plaque hangs inside the south entrance of the Rhode Island State House .

A description of George Sears Greene from Lt. George K. Collins of the 149th New York Infantry sums up the general :

He was a West Point graduate , about 60 years old , thick set , five feet ten inches high , dark complexioned , iron gray hair , full gray beard and mustache , gruff in manner and stern in appearance , but with all an excellent officer and under a rough exterior possessing a kind heart . In the end the men learned to love and respect him as much as in the beginning they feared him , and this was saying a good deal on the subject . He knew how to drill , how to command , and in the hour of peril how to care for his command , and the men respected him accordingly .