

## General Lucius E. Polk



Lucius Eugene Polk, a descendant of US President James Knox Polk and nephew of CSA general Leonidas Polk, was born July 10, 1833 in Salisbury, North Carolina. After graduation from the University of Virginia in 1852, Polk became a cotton planter in Helena, Arkansas and befriended future Confederate General Patrick Cleburne.

When the war began in 1861, Lucius Polk volunteered as a private in Company B, 15th Arkansas Regiment. As a member of the “Yell Rifles” he came under the command of Captain (later Major General) Patrick R. Cleburne. The two were devoted to each other and Cleburne prized Polk as a subordinate. They served together throughout the war until Polk’s as Polk quickly rose in rank to lieutenant. He won recognition for bravery and ability at the Battle of Shiloh, where he was wounded. A few days later he became colonel of the Fifteenth Arkansas Regiment as Cleburne moved to brigade commander.

In the Kentucky campaign in the fall of 1862, Polk excelled although badly wounded by a minie ball in the Battle of Richmond and wounded again at Perryville in October. On December 13, 1862 the Confederate War Department commissioned him brigadier general, and later that month he led Cleburne’s old brigade into battle at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Beginning with that battle and continuing through the Battles of Chickamauga and Missionary Ridge, Polk received continual praise not only from Cleburne but also from his corps and army commanders. Polk’s enlisted men and others echoed the compliments of his superiors. Sam Watkins described Lucius Polk in 1864 as a man “with long black hair that curled, a gentle and attractive black eye that seemed to sparkle with love rather than chivalry, and were it not for a young moustache and goatee that he usually wore, he would have passed for a beautiful girl. In this manner he was as simple and guileless as a child, and generous almost to a fault.”

An incredibly successful brigade commander, Polk inspired confidence and that confidence inspired determination and victory. Polk’s brigade (consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Arkansas, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Tennessee, and 5<sup>th</sup> Confederate regiments) was the pride of Cleburne’s division and that division was the pride of General William J. Hardee’s corps and the Army of Tennessee. Characteristically, in late June 1864, during the Atlanta campaign, Polk’s brigade held the most exposed position in the Confederate line. The enemy opened a furious cannonade, killing many of Polk’s men and virtually severing one of Polk’s legs. That fourth wound ended his military service.

After the war Polk returned to Maury County, Tennessee and, although crippled, resumed farming. A staunch Democrat of the day, he was elected to be a delegate to the National Convention in 1884 and he entered the Tennessee Senate in 1887. Lucius Polk died on December 1, 1892 at his home in Tennessee. He is buried in St. John’s Churchyard at Ashwood, near Columbia, Tennessee where he fills a hero’s grave.