

Walter Paye Lane, Brigadier General 1st Texas Partisan Rangers (1817-1892)

by **Stephen L. Moore**



In his broad Texas military service from private soldier to Confederate brigadier general, Walter Lane was hell on horses. In a colorful combat career spanning nearly three decades, this early Texas Ranger had at least ten mounts shot out from under him while charging across battlefields.

Born in Ireland on February 18, 1817, Walter Paye Lane came to Texas during the revolution of 1836 and quickly carved his name deeply into Lone Star State history. He joined a volunteer company in March, obtaining "a fine horse, double-barreled gun, and a brace of pistols." Sent ahead with dispatches, Lane joined General Sam Houston's Texas Army at the Brazos River.

By April 16, young Walter Lane had joined Captain Henry Karnes' Texas cavalry company. Four days later, he and famed Texian scout "Deaf" Smith reconnoitered General Santa Anna's Mexican campground, counting tents and estimating troop strength until taken under fire.

That afternoon of April 20, Lane was among sixty-eight cavalymen who volunteered under Colonel Sidney Sherman to engage the Mexican troops. Lane's military claims show that, during this action, he was "wounded by a Mexican soldier by being knocked off his horse by a lance at the battle of San Jacinto." Lane was rescued by his fellow cavalymen. Now horseless, he fought in the main historic San Jacinto battle on April 21 as an infantryman of Captain William Patton's company.

Within three days of the great Texian victory, Lane secured a new horse and was promoted to second lieutenant of Captain Karnes' cavalry. He served through July 16, 1836. Lane lost his second horse during an Indian battle on October 8, 1838, known as the Surveyor's Fight (in present Navarro County).

Several days after departing Old Franklin with a twenty-five-man surveying party, Lane noted that a number of Indians were keeping a close watch on their work: "One of them stuck to me like a leech, and succeeded in begging a piece of tobacco from me." After taking some of Lane's tobacco, this Indian walked back to a ravine some fifty yards away. Suddenly, about forty Indians arose and fired into the Texian surveying party, killing some of their horses and wounding several men.

Along the banks of Battle Creek, a desperate fight prevailed throughout this day. The surveyors fought valiantly over the next twelve hours, but by midnight, only ten Texans were alive and five of them were wounded. Only two or three horses remained. The most severely wounded men were loaded on the horses, and the men tried to race under the moonlight for the safety of some nearby timber. The remaining horses and three Texans were killed during the escape attempt.

Four of the surviving Texans were wounded, including Walter Lane. "I was shot through the calf of the leg, splintering the bone and severing the 'leaders' that connected with my toes." Lane and several of his comrades hid in the thicket while the Indians searched for them. "They passed us by, so closely that I could have put my hands on any of their heads."

Lane returned to San Augustine to recover from his near-fatal first Indian fight. In July 1839, he joined Captain William Kimbro's company for the Cherokee War of East Texas, narrowly missing the major battle with Chief Bowles that occurred west of present Tyler.

Lane worked as a merchant in San Augustine for several years. In 1843, he sold out of his mercantile business and went to San Antonio. There is where he first met up with some of Captain Jack Hays' Texas Rangers. He made several unofficial scouts with them over the next two years until the Mexican War broke out.

In June 1846, the First Regiment of Texas Mounted Riflemen was formed under Colonel Jack Hays. His old Ranger company (now Hays' Company B) came under the command of Captain Christopher B. "Kit" Acklin and First Lieutenant Walter P. Lane. Acklin's company was mustered in on June 6, consisting of seventy-three men who had been recruited primarily from Point Isabel near the Rio Grande. When Captain Acklin stepped aside temporarily, Lieutenant Lane briefly commanded this unit from August 1 - September 12, 1846.

During the Mexican War, five more of Lane's horses were killed while he was charging into various battles. During the Battle of Monterrey on September 22, he commanded a detachment of men in the storming of Bishop's Palace. Colonel Hays' regiment was discharged after six months' service and returned to Texas.

Lane next joined Major Michael Chevallie's battalion of Texas Mounted Volunteers in February 1847. Of the original three companies, Captain Walter Lane of Company A was senior unit commander. He remained in federal service through June 30, 1848, and was promoted to major of this battalion on September 27, 1847.

General John Wool often used Major Lane's Rangers as scouts who patrolled in advance of the United States troops. Lane led his rangers on a major raid against Mexican guerrillas who were attacking American supply wagons. At Cerralvo, he and his men captured guerrilla chief Juan Flores, who was given a speedy trial and executed.

Major Lane and U.S. General Zachary Taylor did not see eye to eye on how to handle certain situations. When one of Lane's Rangers killed a fleeing Mexican horseman near the town of

Madelina, Taylor placed Major Lane under arrest. One of the U.S. regulars who had accompanied Lane on this mission finally confirmed to General Taylor that Lane's Rangers had acted properly. "Old 'Rough and Ready' sent for me," recalled Lane, "relieved me from arrest, and made a grumbling kind of apology that he had been too hasty." According to Lane, General Taylor did not care much for the Texas Rangers or any Texas volunteers, remarking: "On the day of battle, I am glad to have Texas soldiers with me, for they are brave and gallant; but I never want to see them before or afterwards, for they are too hard to control."

While scouting near La Encantada, Lane and about sixty of his Texans encountered some one hundred and twenty Comanches who had stolen hundreds of Mexican horses and mules. Lane's battalion pursued the Indians for more than three hours, gradually overtaking them. The Comanche leader, sporting a red and white scarf tied around his neck and arm, finally turned his Indians into battle line to fight Lane's men. During the ensuing fight, Major Lane killed one Comanche who was about to finish off a wounded Ranger. "Being at full speed, I shot the Indian through the breast, and, running my horse against him, knocked him a distance of ten feet." At least thirty Comanches were killed in this fight, and a number more were wounded. Lane lost four Rangers killed and fourteen wounded.

During the return from one scouting mission in Mexico, Major Lane took his men to the prison at Salado where the Texan Mier Expedition prisoners had been executed five years before. His Rangers retrieved the bones of those unfortunate Texans who had drawn the fatal black beans from a jar of colored beans. Lane had their bones transported back to La Grange in Texas for a proper burial.

After the Mexican War, Lane returned to Virginia for several months to visit relatives. He went west in 1849 to try his luck in the California gold mines. "I mined there four years, with varied success, sometimes having thousands and again flat broke," he wrote.

When the Civil War broke out, Lane was a merchant working a store in Marshall, Texas. He joined Colonel Elkanah Greer's Third Texas Cavalry and was elected its lieutenant colonel. At the battle of Oak Hill (also known as Wilson's Creek) in Missouri on August 10, 1861, Lieutenant Colonel Lane lost his eighth horse during a charge on one of the Union Army's batteries.

Lane's next big fight was known as Chustenalah and was waged against the Pin Indians in the winter of 1861-1862. During this time, Lane had yet another horse killed out from under him. On March 7, 1862, General Ben McCullough was killed in the battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas. Lieutenant Colonel Lane lost his tenth horse during this engagement.

During his regiment's reorganization in May 1862, Lane declined an election to become colonel of the Third Texas Cavalry. He continued to lead the regiment for another month. His men were cited by General P. G. T. Beauregard for their valor at the Battle of Franklin, Mississippi.

Walter Lane returned to Texas to organize the First Texas Partisan Rangers, which went on to fight in Louisiana during 1863 and 1864. He was seriously wounded by three shots at the Battle of Mansfield on April 8, 1864, his last major combat of the Civil War. After recovery, he rejoined his regiment at Hempstead, Texas, and rose to the rank of brigadier general before the war's end.

After the war, Lane resumed his mercantile business in Marshall, Texas. He also served as a deputy federal marshal and helped found the Texas Veterans Foundation.

Following his death on January 28, 1892, General Lane's was the first military funeral held in Marshall. Governor James Hogg ordered the flag lowered to half-mast on the Texas Capitol in his honor. In 1893, Lane's fellow Marshall citizens erected a ten-foot stone-and-marble grave marker at his burial site. Moved to serve, destined to lead, and hell on horses, Walter Paye Lane was a true Texas Patriot.

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Many have asked why the Orange Camp 1745 is named for W.P. Lane when there is another camp in Longview named after him, and Lane's ties are to Marshall. The answer is with the charter members of Orange Camp 1745; they voted to name the camp to honor Lane. The details might be lost, but we suspect that many of the veterans who lived in Orange after the war had either served with Lane or knew of him, and respected Lane so much that they chose him as the Camp's namesake.

The current members of Camp 1745 are proud to continue honoring W.P. Lane.