

Lieutenant Benjamin A. Wingate

Charter Member of Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M.

by George F. Winters, Historian

Benjamin A Wingate is born in Indiana during 1838 to parents Hiram Wingate (1798-1875) and Elizabeth Norton Wingate (1799-1870). Benjamin has 5 siblings, Enoch Wingate (1824-1829), Miriam Samantha Wingate (1828-1906), Eliza Jane Wingate Hardy (1830-1908), Harriett Ellen Wingate(1835-1864), and William N. Wingate (1843-1866)¹.

Unlike many of his fellow officers, Benjamin Wingate started his career in the Military, as a private attached to the Mounted Rifles about 1847 while the unit was engaged in the Mexican American War and he is quickly promoted to Sargent². During that war, eleven troopers were commissioned³ and it appears that Benjamin Wingate was one of them, because on the 1848 muster rolls, he is listed as a 2nd Lieutenant⁴. By October 1854 he is listed as a 1st Lieutenant attached to the 5th U.S. Infantry.

The fifth Infantry spent 1849–50 in Arkansas and the neighboring Indian Territory, then replaced the 7th Infantry in Texas. In 1851 they were stationed mainly along the upper Brazos River; by 1854 they had moved to Fort McIntosh outside the city of Laredo. Many of the Brothers that were to be at Camp Floyd 1858-1860 were together in these campaigns including Robinson, Stevenson, Ruggles, Brotherton and Archer. Not only the men, but many of their families joined them at some of the posts.

In early 1857 the 5th moved to south Florida, where they spent several months skirmishing with Seminoles in the area around Fort Myers. The 5th left Florida in June for Fort Laramie in modern-day Wyoming, where they took part in the Buchanan administration's expedition against the expected Mormon rebellion.

Benjamin Wingate arrived in Utah Territory with the fifth Infantry and after settling at Camp Floyd, he was one of the signers on the request to form a Lodge. He signed his name to the request and indicated he was a Master Mason and therefore received his degree prior to traveling to Utah. Wingate remained at Camp Floyd until 1860.

In 1860, Fort Fauntleroy was established at Bear Springs (Ojo del Oso) as an outpost of Fort Defiance. Benjamin Wingate is listed on the first Post Muster Roll dated September 1860. He is listed as a Captain in command of Company D.⁵

The 5th Infantry spent the Civil War in the territory of New Mexico. The regiment was ordered to concentrate at Albuquerque in the spring of 1861 for a move east, but the department commander persuaded Washington to leave the 5th on the frontier. The Post Return of Fort Defiance dated January 1861, located in Canyon Bonito about 60 miles northeast of the Zuni villages in Apache County. North of Gallup, New Mexico lists Benjamin Wingate being transferred.⁶

The U.S. 5th Infantry was one of the units engaged against Confederates at the Battle of Valverde, also known as the Battle of Valverde Ford, fought on February 20 and 21, 1862. Wingate, now a Captain with the 5th, was severely injured on the 21st, one of his legs badly shattered from the knee down during the

fighting and he laid on the battlefield until he was carried back to Fort Craig. He refused to allow his leg to be amputated, stating, "He had been wounded in the same leg in the Mexican War, and that wound had healed without an operation⁷." He was Brevetted Major for gallant and meritorious service during the battle⁸, Unfortunately, the wound festered, and Captain Wingate died 100 days later on June 1, 1862 before the promotion was approved.

Fort Wingate (1868-1993), located near Gallup New Mexico, was named in honor of Captain Benjamin A. Wingate, an infantry officer who had served at Fort Lyon, and who died of wounds suffered during heroic conduct in the Battle of Valverde. The site chosen for the fort was at Ojo del Gallo (Chicken Spring), near the present-day village of San Rafael. Construction began on September 30, 1862.⁹

Originally buried at Fort Craig, he was moved to Santa Fe National Cemetery, Santa Fe, NM 87501, Section E Site 287¹⁰.

¹ Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/51238787/person/152005714462/facts> visited 6/18/2021

² Ancestry.com, U.S., Army, Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914, 1846 July-1850 October, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1198/images/MIUSA1798_102881-00264?usePUB=true&_phsrc=dtU447&usePUBJs=true&pld=383811 visited 6/18/2021

³ Blood and Steel! The History, Customs, and Traditions of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, 2008 Edition Page 5

⁴ MILITARY RECORD OF THE Army and Civilian Appointments IN THE United States Army, By Guy V. Henry, 1873 page 359.

⁵ Ancestry.com, U.S., Returns from Military Posts, 1806-1916, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1571/images/32169_126348-00017?usePUB=true&_phsrc=dtU447&usePUBJs=true&pld=5770645 visited 6/18/2021

⁶ Ancestry.com, U.S., Returns from Military Posts, 1806-1916, New Mexico, Fort Defiance, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1571/images/32169_125985-00251?usePUB=true&_phsrc=dtU447&usePUBJs=true&pld=6496525 visited 6/18/2021

⁷ A Civil War History of the New Mexico Volunteers and Militia, By Jerry D. Thompson, University of New Mexico Press, 2015 page 135

⁸ MILITARY RECORD OF THE Army and Civilian Appointments IN THE United States Army, By Guy V. Henry, 1873 page 359

⁹ THE HISTORY OF FORT WINGATE BY HAROLD L. JAMES, available online, <https://www.ftwingate.org/docs/pub/The%20History%20of%20Fort%20Wingate%20H.%20James.pdf> visited 6/18/2021

¹⁰ Ancestry.com, U.S., Burial Registers, Military Posts and National Cemeteries, 1862-1960 for Benjamin Wingate, New Mexico, Santa Fe, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/3135/images/40447_2421402106_0605-00314?pld=330431 visited 6/18/2021