

Isaac Ridgeway Trimble

Major General Isaac Ridgeway Trimble, great-uncle and guardian of MAC student Samuel Boyer Davis and known for his indefatigable fighting spirit, was the highest-ranking Maryland soldier in the Confederate Army.

Isaac Ridgeway Trimble, a native of Culpepper, Virginia, was raised by half-siblings in Ohio and Kentucky after his parents died within a week of each other when he was a young child. Noting his early interest in military endeavors, his brother, a Kentucky congressman and attorney, asked a Congressional colleague to appoint Isaac to the United States Military Academy. Trimble graduated from West Point in 1822 as an artillery officer and engineer and began his career as a member of the Army Corps of Engineers in 1824.

Over the next eight years, he was involved in surveying for the C & O Canal along the Potomac River, a national highway between Washington, D. C., and New Orleans, and the western lines of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. He also met and married Maria Presstman, a Baltimore woman, and resigned from the Army in 1832, settling in his wife's hometown. As a civilian, he became the chief engineer of the Baltimore & Susquehanna Railroad and was later named superintendent of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad.

After the Baltimore Riot on April 19, 1861, occasioned by the transfer of Massachusetts troops across the city, the Mayor of Baltimore and the Board of Police Commissioners charged Trimble with command of the local militia and maintaining order. They were determined to prevent further troop movement, for fear it would incite violence. Ordered to prevent ship movement and burn bridges that earlier he had helped to build, Trimble was careful to secure his orders in writing.

When the immediate crisis passed, and it became clear that Maryland would remain in the Union, Trimble left Baltimore to enlist in the Provisional Army of Virginia. Entering at the rank of colonel, he was assigned to design fortifications, first in Norfolk and then along the Potomac River in Virginia.

He was given command of a brigade under General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson and saw action in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign, particularly distinguishing himself in the Battle of Cross Keys and the Second Battle of Manassas. Jackson called his performance at the latter "one of the most brilliant that has ever come under my observation in the present war" in his recommendation of Trimble for promotion to major general.

Trimble had been wounded in the left knee, however, and recurring infections kept him out of battle until the following year, when he accompanied General Robert E. Lee to Pennsylvania and advised him on the geographical features of the Gettysburg area.

According to his obituary in the *Baltimore Sun*, Trimble, at 61, was the oldest West Point graduate to serve on the battlefield at Gettysburg. One of the division commanders in Pickett's Charge on the third day of fighting, he was wounded again in the left leg, this time so badly that it had to be amputated, and Trimble was taken prisoner.

He sought permission from his captors to receive visits and articles from his family, but, regarded as a highly dangerous prisoner, he was kept isolated for almost two years.

Eventually exchanged in April 1865 for two Union generals, he returned immediately to Virginia to re-enter battle, but by then, Lee had surrendered.

After the war, he and his second wife, Maria Presstman's sister Anne, returned to their Baltimore County home, "Ravenshurst." He was active in Confederate veterans' organizations until his death in 1888. He is buried in Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore.

