



## **Remember Me: William Field Rector**

**Born:** Little Rock, March 4, 1842

**Military Service:** 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, 30<sup>th</sup> / 39<sup>th</sup>  
Arkansas Infantry (Hart's Regiment)

**Death:** Mortally wounded at the Battle of  
Helena, Arkansas, July 4, 1863.

**Age when killed:** 19

### **Accounts of William Rector at the Battle of Helena, Arkansas:**

“William F. Rector was killed on top of the Federal breastworks at Helena, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1863, the first to reach the rampart; he fills a hero's grave.” – John Hallum, *History of Arkansas*, 1887.

“Lieutenant William F. Rector, adjutant of the regiment, son of Governor Henry M. Rector, was killed while mounting the breastworks, waving his cap and cheering his men.” – Fay Hempstead, *A Pictorial History of Arkansas*, 1890.

“... Surviving the withering fire, sweeping up the hill into the Federal works, they poured a destructive volley into the Union line. It was during this assault that a heroic and gallant action was taken by the adjutant of the 39<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Regiment. . . . As Lieutenant Rector – the first man on the enemy works – fell, the whole brigade rushed the fort with a while shout and drove the concealed enemy out of their rifle pits.” – Josiah H. Shinn, *Pioneers and Makers of Arkansas*, 1908.



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## **General McRae's summary of the Battle of Helena**

*Report of General McRae*

*Headquarters McRae's Brigade, July 14, 1863*

*Major: I submit the following report of the action of my brigade in the assault upon the town of Helena, on the fourth instant:*

*... Attention is called to the gallant conduct of Colonel Hart, who led his men to the assault, and, when in the fort, seized one of the guns and fired it against them.*

*Here also fell mortally wounded Lieutenant W.F. Rector, Adjutant of Hart's regiment, whose gallantry and undaunted bravery signally distinguished him in the assault.*

*Major Davie, gallantly leading his men, fell shot through the thigh in front of the fort.*

*Captain Robinson, acting Major, fell mortally wounded in front of his men.*

*There also fell mortally wounded the brave, the zealous Major Martin, of Hart's regiment, as also Major Stephenson, of Gause's regiment. There also fell Captain Garland, of Glenn's regiment; Lieutenant Eppes, of Gause's regiment, than whom a better man or braver soldier has not offered up his life during the war.*

*... Sergeant Champ, Company A, of Hart's regiment, deserves the greatest credit for gallantry, rushing in advance of his regiment in the charge.*



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### **History of the Confederate Medal of Honor**

No Confederate medals were awarded to soldiers for heroism, valor, or acts above and beyond the call of duty during the Civil War.

The Confederate government, seeking to increase morale and to recognize its soldiers, authorized medals and badges for: 1) officers “conspicuous for courage and good conduct on the field of battle” or; 2) to one enlisted soldier per regiment after each victory. This soldier was to be chosen by a vote amongst the regiment.

Disagreement and financial difficulties prevented this from happening. On July 1, 1896, General Stephen Dill Lee, one of the few remaining senior officers of the Confederate army, spoke to relatives of Confederate veterans who had gathered at Richmond to form a group to preserve the memory and valor of the Confederate soldier. In 1977, Private Samuel Davis of Coleman's Scouts became the first to be posthumously presented the Confederate Medal of Honor. Since then, many others have been presented to those whose valor went far beyond the call of duty, including William Field Rector.



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### **Confederate Medal of Honor citation:**

“Rector pushed rapidly forward during the battle and found himself alone, some fifty yards in advance of the regiment. Fearing that his men were about to falter under the excessive heat and the difficulties of the approach, Rector scaled the breastworks of the enemy, reached the top, within twenty feet of the opposing line, when he stopped, placed his cap upon his sword and held it out with his right hand, cheering his regiment and bidding them to come on. In this position his right arm was broken by a bullet from an enemy's rifle, and his cap and sword fell to the ground. With his left hand he picked up his sword, thrust it through his cap, again held it aloft and again cheered his men to action. A second bullet from the enemy struck him, passed entirely through his body piercing both lungs and inflicted a mortal wound. The regiment pressed forward and took the fort, but were soon compelled to abandon it, leaving Rector where he fell. ...”

*Valor in Gray: The Recipients of the Confederate Medal of Honor. 1996 by Gregg S. Clemer*