

Garrett, Thomas Miles ^[1]

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by James Elliott Moore, 1986

13 June 1830–12 May 1864

Thomas Miles Garrett, attorney and Confederate officer, was one of three children of Jesse Garrett and his wife, Cynthia Rayner. His father died relatively young and his mother married Wiley Hayes, by whom she had two children. Garrett was reared near Colerain in [Bertie County](#) ^[2] and prepared for college by [John Kimberly](#) ^[3] at Buckhorn Academy, Como, in neighboring [Hertford County](#) ^[4]. In 1848, Garrett entered [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[5] where he soon made a name for himself. He joined the Philanthropic Society the same year and eventually finished second in scholarship and deportment. From June 1849 to November 1850 Garrett kept an [interesting diary](#) ^[6], which is now in the Southern Historical Collection at Chapel Hill. He was graduated with the A.B. degree in 1851.

Afterwards, Garrett became an attorney and established a practice at Murfreesboro. In 1854, he was involved in a highly controversial case. A Hertford County committee for the [Know-Nothing party](#) ^[7] sued one of its members for \$10,000 after he became disenchanted with the organization and printed a violent denunciation of it in the *Murfreesboro Gazette*. Garrett was one of four attorneys engaged to represent the defendant. The political committee lost the case and Garrett's client was awarded a token payment of a few dollars.

Early in the [Civil War](#) ^[8] Garrett enlisted in the Confederate Army and on 16 May 1861 was appointed captain of Company F, which became part of the Fifth Regiment of North Carolina State Troops. He soon ran into trouble, for on 23 December he was arrested and accused of submitting false reports of those absent without leave. At the same time, it was charged that he had established headquarters in a house intended for the regimental commander and then had disregarded orders from his superior to vacate the residence. Garrett was detained until 7 Mar. 1862 and not formally cleared of charges until 9 December. However, he had rejoined his company in time to take part in the Battle of Williamsburg on 5 May 1862, when he was wounded in the arm and captured by the Union forces. He was treated first at Fort Monroe, Va., and later transferred to Fort Delaware, Del. After his release in August, he returned home to recuperate until September. He next saw action in the Battle of Sharpsburg on 17 Sept. 1862, when he was slightly wounded in the foot.

Garrett, who had been active in [Whig](#) ^[9] politics, was elected to the state senate from Bertie County while a prisoner of war. However, finding that the demands of a legislative seat conflicted with his duties as an officer, he resigned in a letter to Governor [Zebulon B. Vance](#) ^[10] on 20 Oct. 1862. Upon his return to duty, he became embroiled in a dispute with Captain Peter J. Sinclair, his rival for the post of colonel of the Fifth Regiment. Earlier, Garrett had been passed over for promotion to major. In a letter of 1 Sept. 1862 to Governor Vance, he complained that he was being discriminated against because of his former Whig affiliations. The officers of the regiment clearly favored Garrett. Consequently, Vance appointed Garrett commander and Sinclair resigned.

Governor Vance's choice was vindicated as Garrett proved to be an excellent commander. He was wounded in the leg at Chancellorsville on 2 May 1863 and did not rejoin the regiment until late July or early August. Colonel Garrett was cited for bravery and recommended for promotion to brigadier general by General Robert E. Rodes, but no action was taken. Again Garrett was ignored when General Alfred Iverson was relieved of his command after mismanagement of his brigade at Gettysburg. Instead, Colonel [Robert D. Johnston](#) ^[11] of the Twenty-third North Carolina Regiment was made brigadier general. This state of affairs prompted Governor Vance to charge in a letter of 9 Mar. 1864 to President Jefferson Davis that, because of their pro-Union stand at the opening of the war, Garrett and other deserving men were being passed over in favor of avowed Secessionists. Davis denied that he had been influenced by political considerations in promoting officers.

Garrett's history of discrimination doubtlessly caused him to remark on the eve of the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House that he would "come out of the fight a brigadier-general or a dead colonel." He was killed in battle on 12 May at the "Mule Shoe" during the Battle of Spotsylvania. The next day, Garrett's commander received a dispatch from Richmond promoting him to brigadier general. Nevertheless, he had died a colonel. He was unmarried.

References:

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Daniel L. Grant, *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina* (1924).

[John W. Moore, *History of North Carolina from the Earliest Discoveries to the Present Time* \(1880\).](#) ^[13]

Additional Resources:

Thomas Miles Garrett Diary, 1849-1850 (collection no. 01171-z). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/g/Garrett,Thomas_Miles.html [6] (accessed March 13, 2014).

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#). [26]

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