

Iowa's Early West Pointers

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IOWA'S EARLY WEST POINTERS

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By 1865, many men had studied within the gray ramparts of West Point and entered the United States army, on the way to honor and fame, but it was not until that year that Iowa's first native born son was graduated.

On July 1, 1861, just twenty days before the battle of Bull Run, Satterlee Clark Plummer matriculated at the academy. He had a strong military background, for his father, Joseph B. Plummer, had graduated from that school in 1841, and at this time was a captain in the 1st Infantry. The father served with credit during part of the Civil war; was colonel of the 11th Missouri Volunteers, then brigadier general in the volunteers, and finally major in the regular army, but his promising career was cut short by his death in August, 1862, while on active service near Corinth, Mississippi.

SATTERLEE CLARK PLUMMER

On June 23, 1865, Satterlee Plummer was graduated and commissioned both second and first lieutenant in the 17th Infantry.

The following year saw him in garrison in New York and then as Acting Assistant Inspector General of the Department of Washington. Somewhat later he started on a two year tour of duty in Texas where he was stationed at Galveston, San Antonio, Austin, Prairie Lea, Lockhard and Brownsville.

In 1868 he came back to Washington for duty in the chief signal office. Here he was promoted captain and assigned to the 26th Infantry. But his stay east was short, for in 1869 he was sent to Fort Union, New Mexico, and was there transferred to the 7th Cavalry, later to become famous as the regiment of George A. Custer.

Back, Plummer came to Fort Leavenworth and Fort Wallace—both in Kansas, then to Kit Carson and Fitz Meadows in Colorado, in 1870, and once again to Kansas, to Fort Harker.

It was while at the last named post that he asked for and received his honorable discharge from the service, December 15, 1870.

Just what occupation Plummer then followed is unknown, but in 1876 he returned to the army as a second lieutenant in the 4th Infantry. Although many men left the service for a period of civil life, it was quite unusual for one to return and receive such a reduction in rank.

The massacre of Custer's small force took place at the Little Big Horn river on June 25, 1876, and on July 6, Plummer took part in the Big Horn and Yellowstone expedition in which he served until October. In the following year he was at Fort Steele, Wyoming, and in April, 1877 was placed in arrest, and was subsequently dismissed from the service on July 1, 1877.

Thus the career of Iowa's first graduate of West Point was brought to an unhappy conclusion. Plummer died in Washington D. C., November 14, 1881, at the age of thirty-seven years.

JOHN MITCHELL JOHNSON

But if Iowa's first graduate was not so successful, her second was quite different. John Mitchell Johnson served faithfully as a private in the 20th Iowa in the early part of the Civil war. He fought in Missouri and Arkansas under Generals Curtis and Schofield, at the siege of Vicksburg under Grant and in Banks' expedition in Louisiana.

About four months after the fall of Vicksburg, Johnson was appointed to the Academy from which he graduated in 1867. He was a second lieutenant and then a first lieutenant in the 7th Cavalry in Kansas, Missouri, Colorado, and the Indian Territory. In 1870 he asked for and received his honorable discharge and settled

down to the more tranquil life of a farmer in Stone county, Missouri. In 1880 he moved to Zamora, Kansas, where he went into business, and twelve years later we find him practicing law at Colorado Springs, Colorado. In 1898 he was attorney for El Paso county and from 1899 to 1901 was inspector general of the state national guard.

The remaining years of his life were apparently spent in this place for he died in Colorado Springs, June 23, 1913, at the ripe age of seventy years.

ABRAM EPPERSON WOOD

Iowa's third graduate, Abram Epperson Wood, had a long and successful career in the army. He was graduated from West Point in 1872, saw much Indian frontier service, and taught cavalry tactics at the Academy from 1876 to 1878. He again saw action against the red men, in Texas, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and the Indian Territory, and was breveted captain for gallantry in 1878 at Sand creek and Punished Woman's Ford, Kansas.

Like Johnson, Wood had been appointed to the academy from the army, for he had served in the Iowa Volunteers at Shiloh, Corinth and many other places in the west, and took part in all of the operations of General Sherman in 1864-65.

The "Last Tattoo" sounded for Wood at San Francisco while on duty as captain in the 4th Cavalry. On April 14, 1894, after twenty-six years of faithful service, he passed to the Eternal Camping Ground to which so many of his comrades of the Union blue and West Point gray had preceded him.

NAME SHIP FOR IOWAN

One of 29 cargo vessels acquired by the army transportation corps which are to be renamed in honor of Congressional Medal of Honor winners killed in World War II will be named for an Iowan. The Becket Bend will be renamed for Pvt. John F. Thorson, son of John F. Thorson, Eagle Grove, Iowa.

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