

George Windle Read

“A modern war would be finished and decided before a volunteer army could be drilled to any degree of efficiency”, declared Lieutenant George W. Read in an address to the Baconian Club at the State University of Iowa in 1890. “Some years ago the old war veterans scattered throughout the country constituted a powerful army which could be quickly called into service but most of them are now too old for service and many have passed to the land where the bugle calls no more to battle.”

Thus did the new commandant of the cadet battalion at the University state the traditional military attitude on preparedness and explain the present need for training soldiers. That he should favor a better army and a larger navy was thoroughly characteristic of the man. He would probably have held the same opinions if he had never gone to West Point. Tall, erect, keen eyed, and precise, his whole bearing proclaimed him to be a natural-born soldier. He believed in law, order, regularity, and discipline—cardinal virtues to the maintenance of which he devoted a long military career.

George Windle Read, the fifth Iowan to attain the rank of major general and the first to achieve that military eminence in time of peace, was born in Indianola on November 19, 1860. He received his ear-

ly education in Des Moines, graduating from the East Des Moines High School in 1877. The next year he took the competitive examination for admission to West Point, secured an appointment, and entered the military academy in 1879. During the last year he was first captain of the Corps of Cadets. Upon his graduation from West Point, he was assigned to the Sixteenth Infantry on June 13, 1883, but in September he was transferred to the Fifth Cavalry, with which branch of the service he was attached continuously until 1918, advancing through the various grades to the rank of brigadier general.

For six years after graduation he was stationed at cavalry posts in Wyoming and Indian Territory, busy with the routine garrison duties of a second lieutenant on the frontier. And then in 1889 he was detailed for special duty as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the State University of Iowa, assuming command of the cadet battalion at the beginning of the school year in September.

Lieutenant Read entered into his new work with his customary precision and clarity of purpose. He instituted a practice of instructing the new men in special squads, from which they were promoted to the various companies as they became proficient; he organized a company of sixteen men for exhibition drills of the silent manual; he added guard mount to the list of ceremonies at the May commencement; and he inaugurated the practice of awarding shoulder straps to the winners in individual events

at the annual prize drills. During his second year at the University, Lieutenant Read wrote a prize-winning essay on the systematic training of field troops, for which he received a gold medal and a certificate of life membership in the Military Service Institute. Probably his promotion to the rank of first lieutenant was due not only to his success as commandant at the University but to his initiative and study of military problems. It might have been expected under his leadership that the University of Iowa would be the first school to use the revised infantry drill regulations in 1891.

For four years this neatly clad and rather austere lieutenant retained the post of commandant at the University — a year longer than customary, by special request of the Board of Regents. "His remarkable military bearing, no less than his soldierly conduct inspired in the battalion new life and new activity." Inclined to be stern and exacting, he was nevertheless not a martinet. Although he was reticent with his praise, he gave it ungrudgingly when commendation was deserved.

In 1893 Lieutenant Read returned to active service with the Fifth Cavalry, being stationed at various posts in the far West during the intervening years before the war with Spain. From 1894 until 1897, he was regimental quartermaster and during the spring of 1897 acted as adjutant for the regiment. During the war he was engaged in staff duty and as corps ordinance officer. After the fighting

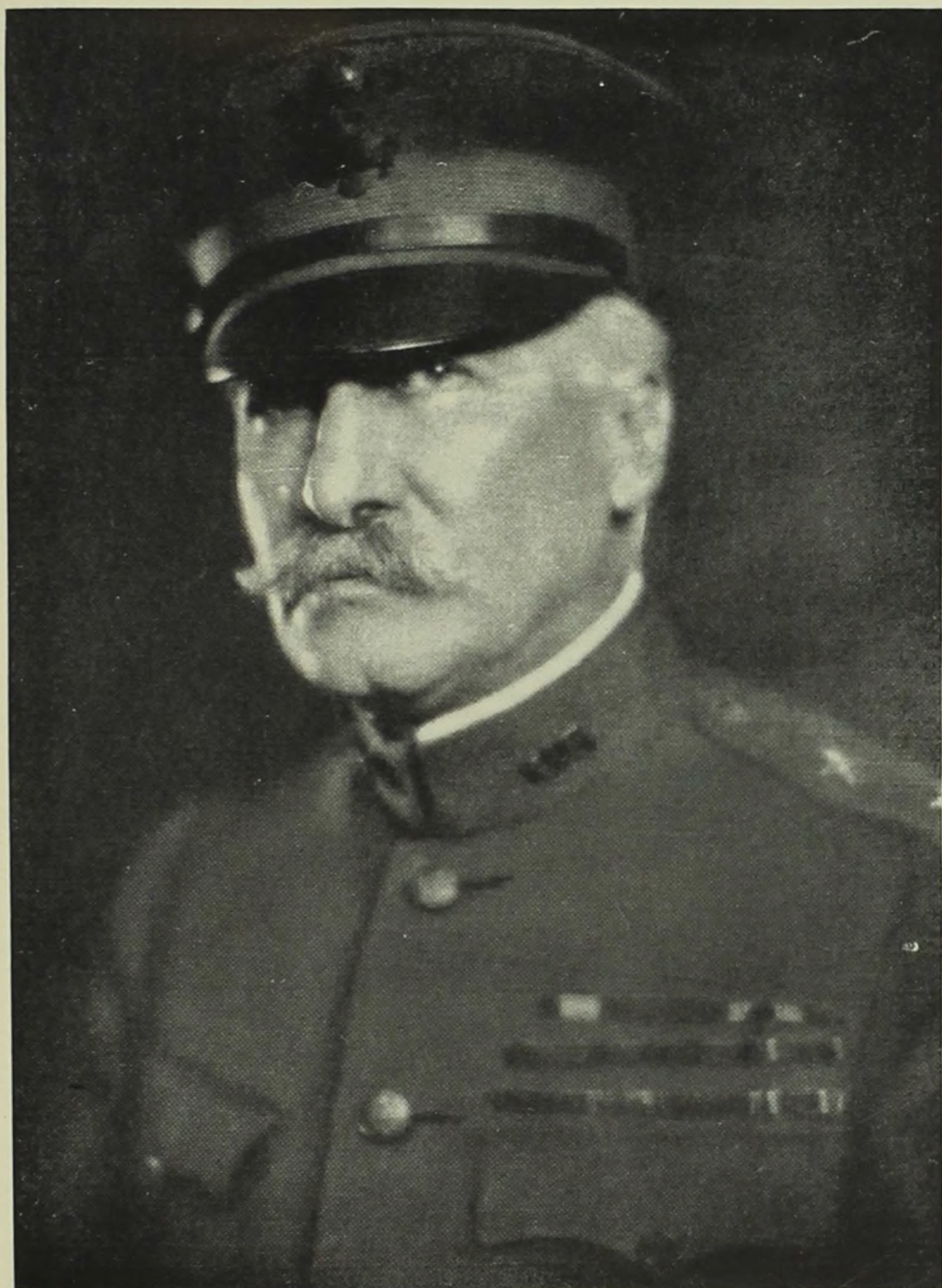
was over he remained with the Evacuation Commission in Cuba until the spring of 1899, when he was promoted to the rank of captain and made post commander at Fort Bayard, New Mexico. It was not until the intervention of 1906 that duty again sent him to Cuba. At that time, while a General Staff Officer, he was a member of the Claims Commission with the Provisional Government in Cuba. And for a while in 1908 he was Governor of the Province of Pinar del Rio.

Between the Cuban episodes, Captain Read had an unusual variety of military experience. During the latter half of 1899 he commanded a troop in New Mexico and Arizona; from January, 1900, until June, 1901, he was regimental adjutant; during the last six months of 1901 he was acting judge advocate for the Department of Southern Luzon in the Philippines; while from December, 1901, to September, 1902, with the exception of four month's service as Adjutant General of the Fourth Brigade, he saw action in the line. Back in the United States, he was stationed at the Presidio of Monterey in California at various times, served as president of a board to purchase cavalry horses in the summer of 1903, was a member of the board to make military reconnaissance of the Hawaiian Islands, went abroad on a confidential mission in 1904, and proposed a "battle sight" for the service rifle which was adopted in 1905.

After four years on the General Staff, Captain

Read was promoted to the rank of major in 1910 and assigned to the Philippines where he was inspector general of the Department of Mindanao. But in 1912 when trouble on the Mexican border developed he returned for service with the cavalry in Arizona and in 1914 was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. That same year he also graduated from the War College and was made adjutant general again, serving in that capacity with the Second Division in Texas and later in the War Department. Meanwhile, in 1916, he became a colonel.

When the United States declared war in April, 1917, Colonel Read was placed in charge of recruiting and disciplinary barracks. He immediately expanded the recruiting service and prepared regulations for war prison camps. But he craved more active work and a chance to join the Expeditionary Forces, so in August he was made a brigadier general in the national army and appointed brigade commander at Camp Upton. Three months later he was promoted to the rank of major general and, while temporarily in command of the Seventy-seventh Division, was assigned the duty of organizing and commanding the Fifteenth Cavalry Division at El Paso. There he remained until April, 1918, when he was placed in command of the Thirtieth (Old Hickory) Division of national guard troops from the Carolinas and Tennessee, was ordered to France immediately, and went into the training area on the British front.



MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE W. READ

After a brief period of observation of front line methods and conditions, General Read was placed at the head of the Second American Army Corps, consisting, after July, of five divisions. His task was to administer the units in the British zone and superintend their instruction. During July and August, 1918, these Americans were given some front line experience, and then three of the divisions were withdrawn, leaving only the Twenty-seventh and Thirtieth under the immediate command of General Read. In September, they were incorporated in the Fourth British Army, under General Henry Rawlinson, to participate in the grand offensive that was to end the war.

It was on September 29th that the attack was launched in the St. Quentin sector, with the Second Corps going over the top. A heavy fog which favored the surprise, made the mopping up very difficult. Moreover, the ground in front of the Twenty-seventh Division, bristling with defenses, was crossed in every direction by deep trenches, sunken roads, and subterranean passages. While the Americans were struggling forward to reach their objectives, the Germans lay concealed until the wave broke and then leaped out to engage, under cover of the mist, in a confused hand-to-hand combat. Nevertheless the impregnable Hindenburg Line was smashed that day at one of its strongest points. To the Americans went the credit for the initiative in the battle and the capture of the formidable tunnel

system. Their "splendid gallantry and devotion" won the highest admiration of their veteran Australian comrades.

After a short rest the Second Corps again went into the front line on October 6th. Continuing the steady offensive, these valiant troops pushed up to the Selle River where they encountered powerful resistance. But the Thirtieth Division, at the apex of the salient, was not to be halted. By the twentieth of October the ground dominating the Sambre Canal was attained and the Corps was again withdrawn for rest. While the losses had been appalling, the victory was glorious indeed. In three weeks they had advanced sixteen miles, captured a dozen villages, and taken six thousand prisoners.

"Called upon to attack positions of great strength held by a determined enemy," wrote Marshal Haig, the Second Corps "displayed an energy, courage, and determination in attack which proved irresistible." The "precision with which all staff arrangements" were performed appealed particularly to General Rawlinson, and in November, when the Second Corps was relieved from duty with the British army, he was pleased to say that the "efficient direction of the Corps Headquarters and the Divisions coupled with the surpassing gallantry" of the men "contributed very materially in winning the decisive victory".

The battle on the Hindenburg Line at St. Quentin was the climax in the military career of General

Read. For his leadership in the World War he received the United States Distinguished Service Medal; he was made Knight Commander in the Order of the Bath by Great Britain; and by France he was designated Commander in the Legion of Honor and decorated with the Croix de Guerre with a palm.

After the armistice the Second Corps was sent to Le Mans to await embarkation. From February to April, 1919, General Read was in command of that embarkation center, but was then assigned to the command of the Rainbow Division and returned to America. Upon arrival in the United States, he was made commandant of Camp Jackson, South Carolina; in 1920 he was promoted to the rank of major general in the regular army and given the duty of organizing and commanding the Fifth Corps Area; and his last service was in command of the Philippine Department from 1922 until 1924 when he retired on November 19th, being that day sixty-four years old.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS