

MG William Ludlow, USV Colonel, USA

William Ludlow was the second born son of William Handy Ludlow and Frances Louisa Nicoll. An adventurous and mischievous child who loved the freedom of life at Oakdale. After his childhood he entered the University of the City of New York and then with his father's political connections he was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point entering on July 1, 1860 at the age of 17. His first year as a cadet was difficult as his mischievous nature had him accrue 220 demerits, which normally would have meant dismissal but the coming of war with the south and the need for officers saved his army career. He was also an eyewitness to the formation when the Corps of Cadets broke up and most of the southern cadets returned home to serve the Confederacy.

While he was basically on probation due to his horrendous conduct record, he still got into scrapes. He got into an argument with a classmate and the argument deteriorated into a fist fight. A newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenant saw the altercation and instead of stopping it, told the participants to fight fair and proceeded to referee the fight. A senior officer observing the fight came over to enforce the Academy's no fighting rule. When the senior officer saw the other officer allowing the fight he placed him under report, warned the two cadets to stop and broke up the crowd that had formed. He then charged the 2nd Lieutenant and as punishment the young officer was recommended for dismissal from the service. While this seems to us as a harsh punishment the newly commissioned officer had been only reluctantly graduated and commissioned due to his dismal record at West Point. The commission of this officer was only saved due to the need for officers for the war, no matter how poor. This officer and William Ludlow would become friends – the officer's name? – George Armstrong Custer!

William Ludlow graduated in June 1864 8th in a class of 27. He had always wanted a commission in the Army's prestigious Topographic Engineers and his academics, not his conduct got him in the upper third of the class. During normal times the commission in this corps would only go to the man at the top of the class but since those ahead of him wanted to gain promotion through field service he got his wish and was commissioned a 1st Lieutenant of Engineers and assigned as the Engineer officer to the XXth Army Corps operating in Tennessee and Georgia under Major General Joseph Hooker. Here the newly commissioned engineer impressed the overall commander. William

Tecumseh Sherman, who often gave him special assignments and would eventually place William Ludlow on his staff. At the Battle of Peachtree Creek in Georgia, William Ludlow was given a brevet promotion to Captain for gallantry in action.

In October 1864, the Confederate Army in the west made a last-ditch effort to cripple the Union advance by attacking the supply depot at Allatoona Pass, Georgia, north of Atlanta on the Western and Atlantic Railroad. Here the railroad went through a deep pass which the Confederates hoped to block to disrupt the supplies supporting the Union forces and capture the supplies stored at the depot there. Sherman sent reinforcements to the garrison there to oppose the move and William Ludlow volunteered to go as an engineer and observer. The reinforcements arrived just in time and William Ludlow helped strengthen the defenses. On October 5, 1864, 2025 Union soldiers were opposed by 3276 Confederate troops in what would be one of the bloodiest engagements ever fought by Americans. With ammunition nearly depleted the final Confederate assault was repelled by fierce hand to hand combat. Both sides fought until exhaustion and at 2 PM the Confederates withdrew as they had been told that Union reinforcements were approaching. The final toll was 706 Federal and 897 Confederate casualties in only a few hours! William Ludlow, exhausted as he was, volunteered to ride to General Sherman with the battle report at the end of the engagement. In later years William Ludlow would write a monograph on the battle that detailed the events and the part played by others, but not really mentioning the important part he played in the victory.

General Sherman made him his personal engineer and William Ludlow helped lay out the route and the bridges needed for the March to the Sea and the Carolina Campaign. For his services he was breveted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was with Sherman's troops when Confederate General Joseph Johnston surrendered. At the end of the war William Ludlow remained in the Army but reverted to his Regular Army rank of 1st Lieutenant and was transferred to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri located just outside St. Louis. It was there he met and married Genevieve Almira Sprigg on April 17, 1866. To this union one child would be born.

The years between the Civil War and the War with Spain were spent in surveys and mapping expeditions of the west including the Custer led Black Hills of South Dakota survey and the Atkinson expedition to investigate the claims of Jim Bridger about the Yellowstone country. William Ludlow was one of the first conservationists and

as part of the survey of the Yellowstone country he recommended that the area be set aside as a park. He further recommended that a special department rather than the Army be set up to patrol and secure the park. He was also in disagreement with the government's policy of taking treaty lands for settlement and exploiting all the natural resources on western lands. Sadly, it was his expedition report on the Black Hills expedition which noted the presence of some gold that eventually led to the 1876 Sioux wars. His friendship with General Custer continued during this time and when Custer went with his force to the Little Big Horn it is said that the last man to talk to him as Custer left Fort Abraham Lincoln was William Ludlow who urged caution.

During this inter-war time William Ludlow was assigned to various civil engineering assignments such as the Philadelphia Water Works and navigation improvement projects. He was also sent as a military observer to report on the progress in the art of war in Europe. Many of his reports and writings are still available today. He was known to be above reproach and while many attempts to bribe him were made none was ever successful.

In 1898, when war broke out with Spain, he was promoted to Brigadier General and given command of a brigade on the opposite side of the line from the San Juan Hill area. His brigade was pivotal in the victory on that part of the line at El Caney. After hostilities in Cuba ended, he was appointed the military governor of Santiago de Cuba and later commanded the Department of Havana. While at Havana he put his engineering skills to work improving the sewage and drainage system of the city. That work remains in use today. In September 1898 he was promoted to Major General of Volunteers.

William was another member of the Ludlow family who would have a major impact on the military. In 1900 he headed a board which history has recorded as the Ludlow Board that looked at the Army and what it needed to be ready for the challenges of the 20th Century. The board assessed the officer corps and recommended retirement for many older officers still on the roster. It also made recommendations on improving what we now know as the National Guard and recommended the formation of an Army Reserve. Those recommendations insured that there would be a way to increase the Army in time of war and paid dividends in the coming World Wars.

In April 1901 he was given command of the Department of the Viscayas in the Philippines, but he served in that billet for only

a short time as the Tuberculosis that he had contracted in Cuba worsened. He returned to the United States in June of that year and died at his home in Convent, New Jersey. He was at first interred here at St. John's, but as things deteriorated between his brother Nicoll and his second wife threatening the church and cemetery, Genevieve Ludlow had her husbands remains removed to Arlington National Cemetery where they rest today. He only briefly returned home to the place where childhood adventures had prepared him for a life of accomplishment.

