

Fort Leavenworth Hall of Fame

Civil War to World War I



JAMES FRANKLIN BELL, Major General, USA

"I would rather die at the front than spend the rest of my life explaining why I was not there." No other words could more aptly describe the avowed professionalism and selfless devotion to duty of General James Franklin Bell.

He is recognized as one of the most brilliant and courageous soldiers of his time. He is especially recognized as an Indian fighter and as a regimental commander in the Philippines, where he earned the Medal of Honor for gallantry during the war with Spain. General Bell is known as "The Father of the Leavenworth Schools" as a result of his forceful and progressive leadership while serving as Commandant of the Infantry, Cavalry, and Staff Schools then located at Fort Leavenworth. The peak of his military career came when he was appointed Chief of the Army General Staff by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1903-1906



ROBERT LEE BULLARD, Lieutenant General, USA

During forty years of service, Robert Lee Bullard actively campaigned from the American frontier to Europe. After graduation from the U.S. Military Academy in 1885, Bullard joined the 10th Infantry Regiment at Fort Union, New Mexico, and saw action against Geronimo in 1886. In 1889, he came to Fort Leavenworth and served as a lieutenant with F Company of the 10th Infantry until 1892.

Bullard achieved the temporary rank of colonel during the Spanish-American War and subsequently fought in the Philippines. In 1911, he attended a field officers course at Fort Leavenworth and then graduated from the Army War College in 1912. During 1915-16, he served on the Mexican border.

Bullard was sent to France in World War I and commanded the 1st Division in France in its successful attack on Cantigny in May 1918. In July, he became commander of the III Corps. Soon after, he gained promotion to lieutenant general in command of the new U.S. Second Army. For his service in France, Bullard received the Distinguished Service Medal. Bullard retired in 1925.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1889-92, 1911



ADNA R. CHAFFEE, SR. , Lieutenant General, USA

General Adna R. Chaffee was the first soldier in American history to enlist in the Army as a private and then advance through the ranks to become Chief of the Army General Staff. Answering President Lincoln's call for volunteers, he joined the 6th Cavalry Regiment and participated in nearly all major cavalry actions of the Civil War.

Following the Civil War, he fought Indians and chased outlaws in the southwest territories for more than twenty years. In the Spanish-American War, he commanded the first unit to sail for Cuba and eventually became Chief of Staff of the American Command during that war.

He commanded American troops in China during the Boxer Rebellion and led the expedition that raised the siege of the legations at Peking. In Peking he upheld his reputation as a fighter and gained additional recognition as a skilled diplomat and administrator.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1896-97



PHILIP ST. GEORGE COOKE, Brevet Major General, USA

General Philip St. George Cooke, one of the Nation's outstanding military leaders of the nineteenth century, was commissioned in July 1827 at the U.S. Military Academy at the age of eighteen. General Cooke's career spanned forty-six years of service. He is best known as an expert cavalryman, explorer, Indian fighter, and author. More than thirty years of his military service were in the West. He completed the last of three tours at Fort Leavenworth as post commander from 1855 to 1856.

A native Virginian, he served as McClellan's Chief of Cavalry saying, *"I owe Virginia little, my country much, I shall remain under her flag so long as it waves the sign of National Constitution Government."* He authored the text that was used to train the entire Union Cavalry into a well-drilled, disciplined, and efficient arm of service in the Civil War.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1829-30, 1842-43, 1855-56.



FREDERICK FUNSTON, Major General, USA

General Frederick Funston began his military career in 1896 as a volunteer captain during the Cuban Revolution. When the United States declared war against Spain, General Funston organized and commanded the 20th Kansas Volunteers, and left shortly thereafter for the Philippines.

At Calumpit, he crossed the Rio Grande with 45 men and, after a desperate battle, drove 2,500 of the enemy from an entrenched position. For this feat he received the Medal of Honor. In 1901, General Funston learned of the whereabouts of the insurgent leader, Aguinaldo, and led a clandestine mission of four officers and eight men deep into rebel territory to capture him. This important event opened the way for peace negotiations that ended the insurrection.

Upon his return from overseas, General Funston held a series of important command assignments including command of the expedition to Vera Cruz. He died while in command of all US forces then engaged in the pursuit of Pancho Villa.

For more information on General Funston, visit the [Major General Frederick Funston Home and Museum](#) web site.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1908-1911



BENJAMIN H. GRIERSON, Brigadier General, USA

As the regimental commander of the 10th Cavalry, the famed Buffalo Soldiers, Benjamin Grierson witnessed and participated in the settlement of the American West. As a frontier commander, he fought hostile Indian tribes, supported civilian law enforcement, and developed transportation and communication networks.

General Grierson's military career began with a commission in the 6th Illinois Cavalry in 1861. Within a year, Grierson, who did not like horses, was the regiment's commander. His courage and leadership led Grant to describe him as one of the best cavalry commanders in the Army. His successful raids through Mississippi gained national attention and promotion to brevet major general in 1865.

General Grierson's skill as a tactician and leader was matched by his concern for his black troopers. He championed their rights as men and soldiers and never hesitated to call attention to their dedicated service. His leadership of the 10th Cavalry spanned twenty-three years, from his formation of the regiment at Fort Leavenworth in 1866-67 to his promotion and retirement in 1890.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1866-67



WINFIELD SCOTT HANCOCK, Major General, USA

Winfield Scott Hancock began his distinguished military career in 1840 with his appointment to West Point, where he graduated in the Class of 1844. After initial service on the frontier, he won a brevet promotion for gallantry in the Mexican War. Later, he participated in actions against the Seminole Indians in Florida and in operations quelling disturbances along the Kansas-Missouri border. In 1857, Hancock prepared and participated in the Utah expedition that effected a peaceful settlement with the Mormons in a dispute over governmental control in Utah.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Hancock moved east, where he served prominently in the Army of the Potomac. As a brigade commander at the Battle of Williamsburg, on the Virginia peninsula, he gained everlasting fame, earning the sobriquet "Hancock the Superb." He subsequently led his division, and later corps, through the bloody fighting at Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg (where he was severely wounded), the Wilderness, and Petersburg.

Following the war, Hancock returned to the frontier and served as commander of the Department of the Missouri. In this capacity, he directed an expedition in 1867 to establish an army presence on the turbulent plains.

In his many years of service to the nation, his hallmark became a quiet professionalism marked by superb leadership.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1857-58, 1866-67

JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON , Brigadier General, USA-General, CSA

As an officer in the US Army, Joseph E. Johnston saw action in both Seminole Wars, the Mexican War, and the Indian Wars on the Plains; he was often cited for bravery. In 1859, after thirty years of service, he was appointed the Quartermaster General as Brigadier General, Staff.

Though he remained aloof from the sectional debate until his native state, Virginia, seceded, he then resigned his commission and offered his services to the Confederacy.

Holding significant commands during the war, he commanded at First Bull Run and Fair Oaks, where he was wounded. Then he was assigned to command the Department of the West; he effectively coordinated the defense of his three subordinate departments. His most important assignment came in 1864 when he was ordered to defend North Georgia and Atlanta. Although heavily outnumbered, Johnston skillfully denied Sherman a victory for several months. Later, in command of forces facing Sherman in the Carolinas, Johnston was finally forced to surrender in 1865.

In 1891 Johnston was an honorary pallbearer at Sherman's funeral. The February weather proved too much for Johnston, who caught cold and died the next month.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: Jun 1855-Apr 1857, Sep-Dec 1857



ROBERT E. LEE, Colonel US Army-General, CSA

General Robert E. Lee was one of the greatest military leaders in all history. A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, who later became its Superintendent, he distinguished himself as an engineer and educator during his thirty-two years in the US Army. During the Mexican War he was cited for gallantry in action.

In 1861 General Lee was offered command of the Union Army. He responded, ". . . *though opposed to secession and deprecating war, I could take no part in an invasion of the Southern States.*" After resigning from the US Army, General Lee accepted command of the Army of Northern Virginia. During the period 1861-65 he achieved brilliant feats as a commander of Confederate forces. His strategy and tactics are studied today as classics of military art.

After surrendering his sword at Appomattox, General Lee became President of Washington College to help build through education a future for a reunited nation.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1856



ARTHUR MACARTHUR, Lieutenant General, USA

Arthur MacArthur's career in the U.S. Army spanned forty-six years, during which time he served in the Civil War, Indian campaigns, and the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars. As an infantry captain in 1886, his leadership skills resulted in his assignment to the School of Application for Cavalry and Infantry at Fort Leavenworth. There, he taught infantry tactics and lectured on Civil War battles, as he assisted in officer education and professional development.

In 1898, President William McKinley ordered the Army to defeat Spanish forces in the Philippines and to establish a governing authority over the country. As commander of the 3rd Expeditionary Task Force, MacArthur helped plan the American assault in Manila and led his brigade in the attack. Soon thereafter, he became a division commander. When hostilities erupted between American and Filipino forces around Manila in February 1899, MacArthur's troop broke out of the encircled capital and, subsequently, participated in conventional operations against the insurgent forces. In May 1900, as a major general, MacArthur became the U.S. military governor in the archipelago, a position in which he helped plan America's successful counterinsurgency effort and the transition to U.S. civilian rule in the colony.

Service at Fort Leavenworth 1889-89.



WILLIAM McBRYAR, SGM, USA; 1LT USV

William McBryar was born in Elizabethtown, North Carolina in 1861. He completed three years of college before enlisting, joining the 10th Cavalry in Arizona. McBryar “earned his stripes” in the saddle, rising quickly to Sergeant. In 1890 he was one of ten men sent to capture a group of Apaches that had escaped the reservation and murdered a civilian. After failing to shake the Soldiers over a five day, 200 mile pursuit, the Apache killed their mounts and retreated to a cave. McBryar maneuvered under fire to a position where he could ricochet his bullets into the cave and forced their surrender. He was recognized with the first Medal of Honor awarded in the 10th Cavalry. The medal was issued in ten weeks, underscoring the unique nature of his actions.

Although a First Sergeant in the 10th, McBryar transferred to the 25th Infantry as a private. There he rose quickly to Quartermaster Sergeant. During the Spanish American War McBryar led a platoon in several actions against “galling fire,” was cited for skillful and brave leadership and, with the enthusiastic recommendation of his regimental officers, was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Eighth Volunteer Infantry. When the Eighth mustered out in early 1899 McBryar reenlisted in the 25th and was Regimental Sergeant Major when he received a commission in the 49th Volunteer Infantry late that year. He served two years Philippine combat duty, eventually commanding a company, but was discharged when the unit mustered out.

McBryar spent years trying to return to the Army as a commissioned officer, but eventually reenlisted in the 9th Cavalry as a Private. At Fort Leavenworth his Troop served with the College. At 44 years old he was medically discharged. He worked at many jobs, but he always longed to return to the Army. He offered his services repeatedly, but the government felt he was too old. He died in 1941 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: Corporal, 9th Cavalry 1905-06



WESLEY MERRITT, Major General, USA

Major General Wesley Merritt's service to the Army and to his country spanned forty years and three wars. For more than twenty years, General Merritt was a cavalryman. His association with that branch began with his commissioning in 1860 and ended with his promotion to brigadier general in 1887.

He had a distinguished record in the Civil War, ultimately commanding the 1st Cavalry Division in the Shenandoah campaign in 1864. Following the war, General Merritt served with the 9th Cavalry and commanded the 5th.

In 1887, he came to Fort Leavenworth to command the Department of the Missouri. After more than ten years on the Plains, he accepted command of troops of the Philippine Expedition. His administrative and organizational skills brought order to the chaotic efforts in the Philippines.

General Merritt was a product of the Old Army. He effectively helped lead it into the twentieth century where national and global challenges exceeded even those of the Civil War and the settlement of the American West.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1887-90



NELSON A. MILES, Lieutenant General, USA

General Miles saw action in every battle fought by the Army of the Potomac except Gettysburg. His record of gallantry and leadership led to his promotion from lieutenant to major general during the Civil War. At age twenty-six he commanded a division and later a corps.

His greatest fame came in quelling Indian outbreaks. After the Little Big Horn, General Miles conducted a campaign against the Sioux and forced the surrender of Chief Sitting Bull. His capture of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce was one of the most brilliant feats of the Indian wars. General Miles pursued

Geronimo and the Apaches relentlessly for five months, forcing them to keep moving until they finally agreed to peace. His terms for surrender were firm but fair, and as Commander in the West, he insisted that the government uphold its part of all Indian treaties.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1871-76, 1885-86



WILLIAM "BILLY" MITCHELL, Brigadier General, USA

As a general officer in the U.S. Army, William "Billy" Mitchell pioneered the use of military air power. He also sought an independent air force capable of waging and winning air campaigns against enemy nations—a cornerstone of modern U.S. Air Force policy.

In 1904, after serving in Cuba, the Philippines, and on the Mexican border, Mitchell became the post signal officer at Fort Leavenworth and served on the faculty of the Staff College and School of the Line. After American entered the Great War, he was sent to France, where he won the Croix de Guerre, and Distinguished Service Cross, was promoted to brigadier general and ended up commanding all U.S. air units.

In 1919, Mitchell was appointed deputy chief of the Army Air Service. A tireless proponent of air power, his ardent criticism of the U.S. military leadership's failure to properly exploit the capability of modern air power led to his 1925 court-martial and suspension from the service. Mitchell resigned in lieu of this suspension and for the next decade continued to promote the capability and utility of air power. After his death, he was awarded a Special Medal of Honor for his "foresight in...military aviation."

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1904-06, 1908-09.

JOHN FRANK MORRISON, Major General, USA

Major General John Frank Morrison played a significant role in the early history of the Command and General Staff College.

After service on the plains, in Cuba, the Philippines, and as an observer during the Russo-Japanese War, General Morrison was assigned to Fort Leavenworth. He was an instructor in the Infantry and

Cavalry School, and then senior instructor in the Department of Art, the Army School of the Line. Concurrently, he was the Associate Commandant, and later, the Acting Commandant.

It was at Fort Leavenworth that General Morrison wrote his observations about the education of officers. In short, he stated: *"The main need of our officers is a knowledge of the fundamental principles of tactics and how to apply them. This knowledge is to be gained, not by studying rules, formulas, or 'normal schemes,' but by practice in solving problems. Such practice, combined with knowledge of human nature and common sense, is what makes a tactician."*

A prolific writer, with a wide range of experience, General Morrison moved the study of tactics from the theoretical level of textbooks to the practical level of the Fort Leavenworth Map Problems thereby contributing significantly to the methods of instruction of the Command and General Staff College and that institution's influence on the entire United States Army.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1883-1885, 1906-1912



ELWELL S. OTIS, Major General, USA

Major General Elwell S. Otis, first commandant of the School of Application for Cavalry and Infantry at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, organized and developed the school which now stands at the center of military education for the Army.

General Otis's service in the Army was characterized by his gallantry as demonstrated in the Battles of Spotsylvania and Chappel House for which he received the brevet rank of colonel and brigadier general of Volunteers, respectively. A dedicated soldier, scholar, lawyer, and diplomat, General Otis's services included being Commander of the Departments of Columbia and Colorado and the Department of the Lakes.

As Commander of the Department of the Pacific and Military Governor of the Philippines, the adaptation of Spanish law to new conditions worked out under his direction still stand as the basis of Philippine administration. For military skill and distinguished service in the Philippines, General Otis was promoted to major general.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1881-85

(Photo courtesy of Ron Irwin)



JOHN F. REYNOLDS, Major General, USA

John F. Reynolds, a Pennsylvanian, graduated from West Point in 1841, receiving a commission in the Artillery. He was honored for his gallantry in action during the war with Mexico. In 1854, and again in 1858, Reynolds served at Fort Leavenworth where he raised two expeditions, one to quell Indian hostilities and the other to maintain peace in the wake of the "Mormon War."

Reynolds played critical and conspicuous roles in early Civil War actions, in particular at Mechanicsville, where he was captured but released in a prisoner exchange. Offered command of the Army of the Potomac in June 1863, Reynolds declined but then received orders to take charge of the leading wing of that army, a three-corps force. On 1 July 1863, Reynolds' cavalry screen encountered Confederate forces in strength near Gettysburg. He made the decision to accept battle there. As Reynolds directed forces into the line, he was killed by enemy fire.

Contemporaries on both sides in the Civil War rated Reynolds one of the best leaders in the Army of the Potomac. He was regarded as a master of his profession and the bravest of commanders.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1854 and 1858

JOHN M. SCHOFIELD, Lieutenant General, USA

As a soldier and servant of the nation, John M. Schofield devoted forty-six years of service to the country he loved dearly. Though a West Point graduate and a Regular Army officer, he accepted a volunteer appointment at the outbreak of the Civil War and later participated in Sherman's Atlanta Campaign.

Following the Civil War, General Schofield was sent to France to convince Napoleon III to end French interference in Mexico. He then served as Secretary of War in the final years of President Andrew Johnson's administration, providing stability to the cabinet in those turbulent years.

As Commander of the Department of the Missouri, General Schofield established a School of Light Artillery at Fort Riley, Kansas. Moving on to the Division of the Pacific in 1870, he recognized the strategic importance of Hawaii and especially Pearl Harbor and urged the establishment of a base

there. His appointment as Commanding General of the Army was the culmination of a dedicated and innovative career.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1869-70



PHILIP H. SHERIDAN, General, USA

General Philip H. Sheridan was a cavalryman who inspired soldiers by his dashing leadership, courage, and personal magnetism. He distinguished himself as a combat leader and tactician early in the Civil War. While commanding the 2d Regiment, Michigan Volunteer Cavalry, he defeated a numerically superior Confederate force at Booneville.

General Sheridan later commanded the Cavalry Corps, Army of the Potomac, during the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Courthouse, and Cold Harbor. He accomplished a daring and brilliant feat by leading his command completely around General Lee's Confederate forces to cut their lines of communication. In 1864 General Sheridan greatly reduced the effectiveness of the Confederate forces by his campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. He became "the cutting edge" of General Grant's final offensive until the surrender of General Lee at Appomattox Courthouse.

General Sheridan was instrumental in establishing the Infantry and Cavalry Schools at Fort Leavenworth.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1867-69



WILLIAM T. SHERMAN, General, USA

Concern for learning and regard for experience mark the career of William T. Sherman. Upon his graduation from West Point, he sought service in the Seminole War and later in the war with Mexico. Forced to resign from the Army in 1853 because of low pay and increasing family obligations, Sherman undertook a variety of civilian endeavors: banking, practicing law, and teaching. He served as the first superintendent of what would become Louisiana State University.

The secession of Louisiana forced the anguished resignation of Sherman. He went to St. Louis where he answered the Union's call to arms. His military skills and prowess of leadership made his role in the Civil War one of ever-increasing responsibility—from Shiloh and Vicksburg, through Chattanooga, to Atlanta, and the march through Georgia and South Carolina.

Sherman became Commanding General of the Army in 1869. He wanted to keep alive the fighting spirit of the Army in peacetime and keep it abreast of the latest developments. To create an Army with sufficient experience to preclude the deadly mistakes of the Civil War, he established the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry, the forerunner of the Command and General Staff College. General Sherman watched the school closely in its formative years, supervised its organization and curriculum, and instilled in it the sense of excellence and service to the Army for which it has become famous.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1852



JAMES E. B. STUART, Captain, US Army-Lieutenant General, CSA

Captain James E. B. Stuart graduated from West Point in 1854 and quickly established a reputation as a daring leader and commander during the Indian wars that were associated with the opening of the West.

He resigned his commission in the US Army to join the Confederacy in 1861 and became one of the most successful and colorful cavalry commanders in military history. From the time his cavalry distinguished itself at the first battle of Manassas, General Stuart provided the Confederate Army with a spectacular series of successful cavalry engagements.

His heroism at Chancellorsville, his daring raids deep behind Union lines, and his masterfully-executed security and reconnaissance operations during General Lee's northward march are legendary. General Lee regarded him as the "eyes of the Army" saying, "He never brought me a piece of false

information." General J. E. B. Stuart's fighting spirit and colorful leadership have been an inspiration to succeeding generations of cavalrymen.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1855-57



EDWIN V. SUMNER, Major General, USA

An imposing figure in the turbulent frontier Army before the Civil War, Edwin V. Sumner served as Commander of Fort Leavenworth a number of times. During each assignment, he saw new chapters of the nation's development unfold. In Indian campaigns against Chief Black Hawk and later the Cheyenne, in national expansion during the Mexican War and the developing Santa Fe trade, and in the bitter struggle over slavery in the Kansas Territory, General Sumner served the nation as soldier and statesman.

General Sumner was assigned to the First Dragoons Regiment immediately upon its creation by Congress in 1833. He trained or commanded dragoons, the regiment of mounted riflemen, and cavalry units. He saw detached duty at the School of Cavalry Practice and later toured Europe where he studied cavalry tactics. The culmination of thorough professional development appeared in his appointment as Colonel of the First Cavalry Regiment in 1855.

In the Mexican War, General Sumner distinguished himself in the battles at Cerro Gordo and Molino del Rey. Early in the Civil War, he was called East to command a corps in the Army of the Potomac. He campaigned on the Peninsula, at Antietam, and at Fredericksburg. He died in 1863 en route to the West where he was scheduled to command the Department of Missouri.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1836-40, 1849-51, 1855-57



EBEN SWIFT, Major General, USA

Commissioned from West Point in 1876, Eben Swift began his military career in Indian campaigns in the West. After 17 years with the 5th Cavalry, he came to Leavenworth as assistant instructor under Arthur Wagner. Here Captain Swift made his major contribution to military education, the five-paragraph field order, the classic delineation of which is his 1897 essay, "The Lyceum at Fort Agawam."

After four years here, Swift served in Cuba and Puerto Rico until assigned to the Adjutant General's office in 1903. Returning to Leavenworth in 1904, he worked as senior instructor of military art and as assistant commandant. After graduation from the Army War College in 1907, he was its director for three years, introducing methods earlier perfected here. Promotion to Brigadier General cut short his 1916 Leavenworth tour as commandant. Besides duty in the Philippines and observing the Russo-Japanese War, he commanded the 2d Cavalry Division on the Mexican Border, the 82d Division at Camp Gordon, and, for a few months in 1918, American forces in Italy. Mandatory retirement came in May, 1918.

Besides his own prolific writings, Swift translated several Prussian military treatises. His contributions, to both Leavenworth and the War College, were profoundly instrumental in forming the modern Army's approach to battlefield problems. He was a remarkable combination of analytical scholar, stimulating teacher, and professional soldier.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1893-97, 1904-06, 1916



ARTHUR L. WAGNER, Colonel, USA

Commissioned from West Point in 1875, 2LT Arthur L. Wagner served with the 6th Infantry Regiment on the western frontier, including campaigns against the Sioux (1876-77) and the Utes (1880-81). In 1882, he was assigned as Professor of Military Science and Tactics at East Florida Seminary where he made his first serious contribution to US military thought. His essay "The Military Necessities of the

United States and the Methods of Meeting Them" won the Gold Medal of the Military Service Institution in 1884 and stimulated attempts to improve the military establishment of the United States.

In 1886, ILT Wagner joined the Department of Military Art at the School of Application. For the next eleven years, he contributed directly to the development of tactical doctrine and to the qualitative improvement of the school by introducing applicatory instruction methods, map problems, tactical rides, and exercises with troops. His emphasis on the systematic rendering of orders after thorough analysis of the situation was shown in his writings on Koeniggratz and other battles. Wagner's method was widely emulated.

He campaigned in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines (1900-1902). In 1904, his preeminence as a military educator led to his appointment as Director of the Army War College where he served until his untimely death in 1905.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1886-97, Nov-Dec 1903

SAMUEL B. M. YOUNG, Lieutenant General, USA

Samuel Young began his career in the Army by enlisting as a private in a company of Pennsylvania volunteers right after the first shots were fired on Fort Sumter in 1861. After distinguished service in the Civil War, he entered the Regular Army and spent nearly seventeen years as a captain (typical at the time). Young served in the frontier cavalry for fifteen years until 1882, when he was assigned as an instructor at the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry.

In 1898, as a brigadier general of volunteers, Young commanded the 1st Brigade of Major General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry division in Cuba during the Spanish-American War (though he was incapacitated by malaria soon after the first actions). Young next commanded brigades in northern Luzon during the Philippine-American War at the turn of the century.

In 1902, Young was appointed president of the War College Board until he was promoted on 9 August 1903 to lieutenant general, succeeding Nelson A. Miles as commanding general of the U.S. Army. Six days later, under the auspices of Secretary of War Elihu Root, he was made the first chief of staff of the U.S. Army. Young holds the distinction of being both the last commanding general and the first chief of staff of the U.S. Army.

Service at Fort Leavenworth: 1882-85