

ARTICLE.

BIOGRAPHICAL.

Published in the Journal of the Military Service Institute.

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No. 16, Vol.10.

SUBJECT.

Thomas Howard Ruger.

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The First World War.



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~~MAJOR GENERAL~~ THOMAS HOWARD RUGER.

*no* *Class of 1854.*  
*Died June 3, 1907, at Stamford, Conn. aged 74.*  
Thomas Howard Ruger was born April 2nd, 1833, in Lima, Livingston

County, New York. Lima was a small town not far from Buffalo. His father, Rev. Thomas Jefferson Ruger, who had graduated from Union College, was an Episcopal Clergyman in charge of a parish there. His son was thirteen years old when he moved with his family to Janesville, Rock County Wisconsin. Judging by my subsequent knowledge of Ruger I am sure he must have had good school privileges. He had not entered any College, but he had good academic training when he came to the Military Academy just after he was seventeen in 1850. I was about two years and a half his senior in age. Professor Church, at the head of our Mathematical Division, very soon after we commenced our studies in September, began to transfer the new cadets from section to section. Ruger's name had put him in the lowest. Noticing his proficiency the Professor very soon sent him to the first section of the class. It was there that I remember to have seen Ruger for the first time. He appeared to be a very quiet lad, of medium size, light hair, fair complexion, and of healthful and sturdy appearance. His fellow cadets always found him exceedingly attentive to every requirement and noticeably studious at all times. He was so reticent and retiring that his comrades saw but little of him except when on duty. The remarkable things in his case consisted in an unusual diligence in the performance of duty and in the carefulness of his language when he spoke. The cadets, who gave a sobriquet to nearly every companion, called Ruger "Fye George". Nobody ever knew him to use oaths in conversation nor any hard words even under excitement, except when under intense emotion he would say: "Fye George, I will never do that." Where it was almost impossible to escape marks of demerit Ruger succeeded in a remarkable degree in keeping his escutcheon clear. Custis Lee, H.L. Abbott, T.H. Ruger, Thos. J. Treadwell and myself remained pretty steadily the first five in standing on the class rolls from the beginning of our course till



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the time of our graduation in 1854. In the final make-up, Ruger was third in rank. After graduation in 1854 he was assigned to the Engineer Corps of the Army and ordered to report to Captain Beauregard in New Orleans for duty. Beauregard sent him to complete some construction work at Fort St. Phillip, Louisiana. This was his only post of duty before the war. About a year from that time, in 1855, he resigned from the Army and went back to Janesville, Wisconsin. He soon fitted himself for the bar and practiced law in that city with a good name and record until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Ruger's usual modesty was shown in his acceptance of the Lieutenant Colonelcy of the 3rd Wisconsin Regiment under Colonel Chas. S. Hamilton. Hamilton had graduated from the Military Academy, served in the Mexican War, left the Army, and worked on in Civil life for many years. It was natural for the Governor to give him the Colonelcy before Ruger, but if the Governor had understood the great fitness of Ruger for command, he would certainly have started him at the head of a regiment. His regiment had hardly reached Washington before he was permanently in command, though still a Lieutenant Colonel. On Hamilton's promotion Ruger became the full Colonel the 20th of August, 1861. The 16th of September following he was sent by General Banks to arrest disloyal members of the Maryland legislature. It was rather a difficult affair, but Ruger did the work so promptly and so well as to meet the approval of his commander and of the President. It was the sort of political work that regiments were obliged now and then to do in those days in the border states.

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In all the operations of 1861 till the fall of 1862 Colonel Ruger's regiment participated and he received from General Banks, his immediate commander, and from General McClellan high commendation for the discipline and bravery of his men. The 25th of May occurred the combat at Winchester. General George H. Gordon was in command of the operating brigade of which the 3rd Wisconsin formed a part. Gordon says: "I desire to express my thanks to Colonel Ruger whose skill and courage tended so much to disconcert the enemy and hold them in check." Gordon further mentions: "The steadiness and perfect discipline which marked the 2nd Massachusetts, Lieutenant-Colonel Andrews commanding, and the 3rd Wisconsin under <sup>Colonel</sup> Ruger. x x x The 3rd Wisconsin poured into them (the Confederates) from behind a stone wall a destructive fire and then moved slowly in line of battle from the field." This was during the advance to Little Washington, Virginia, in July 1862.

We find Colonel Ruger's report of the part his regiment bore in the battle of Cedar Mountain August 9, 1862. He was still in General Gordon's Brigade, which was located on the right of the general line of battle. Ruger's carefulness was shown when another commander, General Crawford, ordered him to take his regiment into action. Seeing that obedience to this order would create confusion the Colonel at first replied that he was just waiting instructions from his own Chief, but he moved his regiment to such a point as would support Crawford in case of a sudden attack from the Confederates. Soon the order came from higher authority for him to report to Crawford. This he did and greatly aided in all the operations of that important battle. Though Banks, the Commander on the field, was forced to retire, yet Ruger kept his regiment together and well in hand during all the heated contest. His Lieutenant-Colonel, Crane, was killed, as Ruger says, "while gallantly performing his duty"; another



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 Captain, O'Brien, continuing in command after his first wounding, a little later received his death wound. Ruger remarks, "He was a very brave man." There is hardly a modest reference to himself in this conflict, yet the generous, fearless and sturdy character of the young commander appears in every line of his report.

The next battle was that of Antietam, September 17, 1862. The new 12th Corps had been formed with the veteran General Mansfield in command. General George H. Gordon had the 3rd Brigade in Williams Division, and before the close of the battle after the death of Mansfield, Williams took the Corps and Gordon the division. This is what he says in his report: "Colonel Ruger is entitled to the highest praise for his skill and gallantry in battle." Ruger was wounded in this engagement, but not so severely as to be obliged to take a furlough for he still commanded his regiment during the march, that <sup>soon</sup> succeeded the battle of Antietam, to Falmouth, Va.

Being properly recommended by his seniors in rank, Colonel Ruger received his promotion to the grade of Brigadier General of Volunteers November 29, 1862, so that he had the command of a brigade in the 12th Corps in all the Rappahannock Campaign. The first sizable battle after his promotion in which he was engaged was that of Chancellorsville, May 2nd, 3rd and 4th, 1863. He participated with his Corps in all its operations. He makes one remark in his report which is characteristic of him: "The Brigade came out of the action without demoralization, and with a conviction that, if a victory was not gained by the army, it <sup>(the Brigade)</sup> was superior to the troops immediately opposed to it."

Next Ruger appears, first as Brigade Commander, and a little later as Division Commander in the 12th Corps in the battle of Gettysburg. Gen. Slocum says concerning the remarkable work of his Corps: "The conduct of the entire command during this campaign was such as entitles it to the gratitude of the country. x x x At Gettysburg x x everyone was nerved



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to the task and entered upon the duties devolving upon him with a spirit worthy of the highest praise. X X X Where the battle was waged by the enemy with the greatest fury, there our troops were concentrated, ready and eager to meet them." This praise was especially due to his 12th Corps Commander, A. S. Williams and to General Ruger, who commanded his first division during all the terrible battle.

On the 15th of August, 1863, General Ruger, having assumed the command of his brigade, was ordered to proceed by way of Alexandria to New York to suppress the Draft Riots. His brigade was increased to the size of a division, having in it eleven regiments. After the General had accomplished this duty to the entire satisfaction of the administration he was returned to his Corps. When the 12th Corps with the 11th proceeded to the Middle West Ruger accompanied it, <sup>again</sup> commanding his own brigade. When the 11th and 12th were consolidated early in 1864 forming the new 20th Army Corps, Ruger commanded a brigade in the new 20th, and was particularly mentioned <sup>for his achievements in</sup> the battle of Resaca, Georgia, May 15th, 1864.

On the afternoon of the 14th of May, about four o'clock, Ruger's Brigade moved to the extreme left of my line (the 4th Corps). Just as Hood's Corps was turning my left and about to capture a battery, the new division made a prompt charge. Ruger's Brigade was next to my Corps and did magnificent service. He moved his men into battle always with the steadiness of the best veteran troops. With his magnificent brigade he bore no small part in the following battles of 1864: New Hope Church, May 25th; Kolp's Farm, June 22nd; Peach Tree Creek, July 20th; and he took part in the siege of Atlanta from the 22nd of July till Sept. 2nd, 1864, when Atlanta was <sup>finally</sup> occupied; and also in the subsequent operations from Sept. 2nd to Nov. 8th. It would require too much extension of this notice to even mention the skirmishes and the battles in which Ruger was actively engaged during this Atlanta Campaign, and in which he always



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bore an honorable part. As nearly as can be ascertained General Schofield made a personal visit to General Sherman at Kingston, Georgia, before he set out to join General Thomas at Nashville, near the first part of the month of November. General Sherman wrote November 6th to Slocum, then at Atlanta, Georgia: "General Ruger has an offer of a division in the 23rd Corps. Unless you can do as well by him, direct him to come to me, and I will make an order of transfer of himself and personal staff to the Army of the Ohio." From this I infer that the order of transfer was issued at General Schofield's request, Schofield wanting a thoroughly competent commander for his campaign already inaugurated, so Ruger was assigned to command the 2nd Division of the 23rd Corps in the Tennessee campaign against Hood. He was <sup>actively</sup> engaged in all the operations about Columbia and very much so in the battle of Franklin, Tenn., November 30, 1864. Here is a little of the record: "Stewart's Confederate Corps swung around so that its right wing should support the left of Cheatham; in doing so Kimball's front was fiercely assailed, but Ruger going to his help held our left with that steadiness which valor and a high sense of honor give to a man." Schofield remarks concerning this: "A moment part of our line wavered and fell back before the desperate charge of the enemy, but Gen. Ruger rallied his men and charged the enemy who had crossed over our abandoned line of works." General Ruger was highly commended by his superiors for his courage and ability shown in this battle. For his good conduct at this time he was breveted a Major-General of Volunteers.



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After our march through Georgia and the Carolinas General Schofield's Army of the Ohio was transferred to the East and participated in the operations of Sherman in North Carolina. In support of our Battle of Bentonville, and subsequent movements there were several small engagements by Schofield's troops. One movement was up the Neuse River. Ruger was present in the action at Weir's Fork near Kinston, March 10, 1865. On that day the Confederate Commander Bragg, having been reinforced by a division, made three successive charges. The last charge struck Schofield's extreme left held by General Ruger's division. Ruger had taken every precaution and was eminently successful in repelling and following up his assailants. A little later General Ruger had the credit of receiving and repelling another attack. After the transfer of his command from one portion to another, success attended Cox's Corps, to which Ruger belonged.

After Joseph E. Johnston's surrender at Durham's Station, April 26, 1865, General Ruger was placed in command of the district and department of North Carolina from June 27, 1865, to September 1, 1866. Surely no officer of the Army could have done that work better. In September he was mustered out of the Volunteer service but reappointed in the Regular Army with the rank of Colonel in the 33rd Infantry of date July 28, 1866.

There was one more distinction that came to him. On the 2nd of March 1867 he was breveted a Brigadier General in the Regular Army for his gallant and meritorious work at Gettysburg. Following up the work begun in North Carolina, General Ruger went to Macon, Georgia, and afterwards to Atlanta, commanding his regiment the 33rd Infantry. He gave such evidence of fairness in his decisions and justice in dealing with all people in his district that he was appointed by the President Provisional Governor of Georgia the 13th of January, 1868. He quickly moved to Milledgeville, replacing Governor Jenkins, who is said to have refused to co-operate with General George G. Meade, who commanded at the time the <sup>large</sup> military district



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which embraced Georgia. He was Provisional Governor until the 4th of July of the same year when Governor Bullock, elected by the people, relieved him. A writer remarks that Ruger's performance of this delicate duty was so satisfactory to all concerned that the leading citizens of Milledgeville gave him public thanks for the worthy manner in which he had performed his trying task, and mentioned his unfailing courtesy and kindness. From this time he had different districts under his charge until he commanded the Department of the South from March 5th to May 31, 1869. Every intelligent reader knows something of the very onerous duties devolving upon a commander in the Southern states at that time. General Ruger received high credit from his Government and from all the people concerned for the eminent success of his administration.

From September 1, 1871 to September 1, 1876, five years, General Ruger was in command of the Department of West Point and Superintendent of the Military Academy. Ruger while at West Point maintained the discipline at <sup>a</sup> high standard, both of the soldiers stationed there and of the cadets pursuing their course of study. Some efforts were made by a cadet's father, whose son had been disciplined for misconduct, at one time to have Ruger's station changed on account of an allegation that he was a martinet and not a proper man for Superintendent. General Grant, who received the accusation, endorsed the paper sending it back to Ruger with the remark: "It may amuse you, -do with it as you please." Undoubtedly Ruger required and enforced strict obedience to orders, but no soldier, cadet or officer ever knew him to be discourteous or unkind. He began that series of improvement in the buildings and grounds which have raised West Point to its present beauty and grandeur. He was here relieved from duty at his own request and placed again in command of the Department of the South until July, 1878. Next he had his turn at frontier duty, having the district of Montana till May 13, 1885. On account of his peculiar fitness



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he was placed over the Cavalry School at Ft. Leavenworth from June 1885 to April 1886. Being promoted the 19th of March, 1886, to the rank of Brigadier General in the Regular Army Ruger was sent to the Department of Dakota.

He made one remarkable expedition against Chief Colorow, who with his Indian braves was on the war-path. Ruger himself took the field with a small command of infantry and cavalry. He came upon the Indians very soon and at once notified Colorow of his presence and sent him word that he gave him two hours to surrender. Colorow failed to come to time and Ruger attacked at once as soon as the two hours had expired. The Chief fell at the first volley and the Indians were badly beaten. They had expected to have further talks, but they were disappointed. Ruger gained the name amongst them, and among all Indians with whom he had to do, of "The-man-who-talks-once". Knowing this, Ruger had no further trouble with the Indians while he was in command of that Department.

In April, 1891, he was placed over the Military Division of the Pacific until that Division was discontinued. He then remained in charge of the Department of California until 1894 and had the credit of putting down serious railway riots in Sacramento and San Francisco.

Next we find him in command of the Department of Missouri where he received his promotion to the grade of Major General November 9, 1894. His last Department was that of the East nearly two years, ending April 2nd, 1897, when becoming sixty-four years of age he was retired according to the law.

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For over two years, he was travelling abroad with his family visiting every part of Europe except Spain and Russia. After his return to the United States he went with his family to live at Stamford, Conn. Here he resided until his death the 3rd of June, 1907. During his retirement he was President of the Military Service Institution and took great interest



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Next we find him in command of the Department of Missouri where he received his promotion to the grade of Major General November 8, 1894. His last Department was that of the East nearly two years, ending April 2nd, 1897, when becoming sixty-four years of age he was retired according to the law.

Following his retirement for over two years he was travelling abroad with his family visiting every part of Europe except Spain and Russia. After his return to the United States he went with his family to live at Stamford, Conn. Here he resided until his death the 8th of June, 1907. During his retirement he was President of the Military Service Institution and took great interest



in everything that concerned its welfare. He belonged to the Military Order of Foreign Wars and to the Loyal Legion of the United States, and was an honorary member of many societies, civil and military. Notwithstanding so much publicity, which his companions rather forced upon him, Ruger was of a domestic turn, very fond of his home, his books, his garden and the quiet social life of a small circle.

Ruger was married before the war in 1857 to Miss Helen L. Moore of Beloit, Wisconsin. There were two children, still living. They are Mrs. Thomas A.H. Hay of Easton, Penn., and Miss Anna M. Ruger.

I notice in a transcript of Ruger's record this remark: "After retirement, Ruger's vigorous mind was actively employed for the betterment of the Army, and his masterly knowledge of military science and affairs, and dominant characteristics of justice and firmness, made him the natural choice for President of the Military Service Institution, which position he occupied from January 1901 until his death." Very little is said of him by his companions or friends with reference to his religious convictions. He usually attended the Presbyterian service, when it was practicable, with his wife and family. However, every element of uprightness appeared in all his life and conduct, and as a classmate I am glad to say of him that he was able, faithful, patriotic and noble, and an honor to his family, his class, his companions of service, and his country.

Burlington Vermont,  
January 14<sup>th</sup> 1908

Don Howard  
Maj - Gen. U.S. Army  
(Retired)



