

**Colonel
David Alexander
Lyle
Unites States Army**

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society



In Memory of
Colonel David Alexander Lyle
UNITED STATES ARMY

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 1)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

In Memory of
Colonel David Alexander Lyle
UNITED STATES ARMY



Extract from Sixty-ninth Annual Report of the Association of
Graduates of the United States Military Academy, West Point, N. Y.,
June 13, 1933.

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 2)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

DAVID ALEXANDER LYLE

NO. 2284 CLASS OF 1869

Died October 10, 1937. at St. Davids, Pennsylvania, aged 92 years.



*"This is the happy Warrior; this is he
That every man in arms should wish to be."*

COLONEL LYLE was a distinguished officer of the Old Army, and although he reached a patriarchal age he was active until the last moment of an unusually happy and useful life. Soldier and scholar, metallurgist, inventor, etymologist, explorer, he kept in touch with a range of interests uncommon even in a service that has produced so many men of parts. It could be said of him that he never slackened in his search for knowledge, never ceased to serve his native land as best he could, giving to the task a well-stored mind and a noble and generous heart. He was always the type of the happy Warrior

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 3)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

*"Who with a natural instinct to discern
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn: * *
Who comprehends his trust, and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim; * *
Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
Looks forward, persevering to the last,
From well to better, daily self-surpassed: * *
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause."*

Some day America may realize how much it owes the military services for the work of conservation they have carried on for many years in various fields. Not destruction but protection of life has been their primary aim, and if the world is slow to recognize the fact it is none the less true. To be an officer and a gentleman were else a contradiction in terms. . . . And it can be truly said of the subject of this sketch that he was a great gentleman. Moreover, to those who go down to the sea in ships his name will long be a familiar symbol of this unregarded side of army and navy functions. In many a storm the Lyle Gun has shot out a protecting arm to those in distress. On June 7, 1877, Lyle was summoned to Washington by the Chief of Ordnance, who greeted him by saying that he had been asked to furnish the Life Saving Service with a technical officer to make some experiments for them, and he had selected him, adding, "Go down to the Treasury Department and report to that little black-eyed man of destiny, Sumner I. Kimball, and he will let you know what he wants." This he did, and after a study of the needs of the Life gun was invented. Not that he ever laid any claim to renown for it. The glory, if any, was for the service; the opportunity was his, but it might have been another's—someone who would, as likely as not, have done the job equally well. Lyle was too gifted to be influenced by petty satisfactions, too modest to attach any personal importance to his own efforts. All he cared for was the task,—to feel it had been done as well as he knew how, then the rest was with God. . . . It was not difficult to see that he was deeply religious. But that was his own affair. So he left moral platitudes to others, not caring to be sententious or to wear his heart on his sleeve. He continued to take an active part in the work of the Board on Life Saving Appliances long after his retirement, and up to an advanced age he attended its meetings accompanied by his devoted wife, a daughter of Brigadier General Darr.

With all his studious occupations and his dignified bearing Lyle was nothing if not debonair. No solemn and forced impressiveness for him! He was natural in speech and manner, without any trace of severity, and would chuckle over some

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 4)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

humorous aside that might give a comical turn to the conversation, especially if it threw a mildly satirical light on the follies of some pretentious individual. To this trait may be ascribed the fact that during his last two years as a cadet it is recorded that the unimportant rules and regulations became slightly irksome to him, and occasional disregard of them deprived him of certain cadet privileges, increasing the number of his demerits and making the well-worn path in the stone area of barracks increasingly familiar. Discipline was stern and unrelenting in those days, and if history hath it that he took part in the "Butter Riot" that put him under limited arrest for over three months, together with all of his classmates excepting three who were cadet officers in their fourth year, it does not seem to be at all likely that the Recording Angel will hold it against him or them.

Colonel Lyle was born in Fairfield County, Ohio, on January 21, 1845, the son of David Lyle and Susan (Thomas) Lyle. He was descended from Robert Lyle, who came to America in 1740 and was of Norman-Scottish ancestry. His early education was received at Fairfield Union Academy, Baltimore, Ohio, High School and Duff's Commercial College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

He entered the U. S. Military Academy as a cadet on October 17, 1865, instead of the usual date in July. His late arrival put him to some disadvantage, but such as it was his studious habits quickly overcame it. From the beginning he was a favorite with his own class and after "plebe" year with the entire corps, and without being obtrusive he took a lively interest in the recreational side of the life at West Point. However, he was studious and not particularly devoted to athletics. His mental and physical equipment were of a quick acting nature, indicating both energy and decision, so that in gatherings for pleasure, or business, his entry always brought an atmosphere of lightness and gayety. One who remembers him as a cadet speaks of this characteristic and adds that it was true of him both as man and boy, so that all who have served with him in any capacity remember his unfailing cheerfulness and untiring activity.

Lyle was graduated on June 15, 1869, the year General Sherman delivered the address to the class and handed the members their diplomas, this being the second occasion the delivery of these had been made an official ceremony. The first time was in 1868 when General Grant delivered the diplomas. It has been the unfailing custom ever since.

Upon graduating Lyle was assigned as Second Lieutenant to the Second Artillery and was appointed a First Lieutenant of Ordnance November 1, 1874. He advanced through the various grades to Colonel March 26, 1907, and was retired from active service January 21, 1909, by operation of law, upon reaching the age of sixty-four years.

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 5)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

Upon receiving his commission Lyle served in the garrison at Alcatraz Island and was also Assistant Engineer on the Topographical Survey of the Presidio Military Reservation at San Francisco until April, 1870, when he was assigned to frontier duty in Alaska. There his mental curiosity and lingual ability resulted in his acquiring a knowledge of Chinook, so that he became the official Chinook-English interpreter in various Indian Councils for the Commanding Officer, Post of Sitka. He was also placed in charge of the indigent Russian population of Sitka and surveyed and constructed a map of Fort Wrangel, Alaska, for the Quartermaster's Department. His service in the territory, so soon after its acquisition by the United States, gave him an unequalled opportunity to study the area and its inhabitants at an important moment, and his observations of the habits and mode of living of the latter were adequately reported.

From May to December 1871, he was on duty with Lieutenant Wheeler's Expedition in connection with the geographical survey of Nevada and Arizona. In July of that year he was in command of a party that made its way across Death Valley under conditions that were extremely perilous. The members suffered severely from thirst and other hardships, although these seem to have been cheerfully borne by all owing in part to the example of their young leader. Lyle loved to talk about his companions of those days, and their peculiarities and abilities; of meetings with Indians and the life of the desert. His description of extreme thirst was always a good introduction to liquid refreshment.

After this experience he was detailed as Assistant Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy at the U. S. Military Academy. His three years in this position sufficed to make him one of the traditions. The Puckish quality, of which mention has already been made, led to many humorous passages between instructor and cadet that were long remembered. These sallies were always good-natured, Lyle as Professor only being separated by two or three adventurous years from Lyle as Cadet. Studious as he was during the whole of his career and talented as a teacher he could sympathize with a student's difficulties. His grasp of so many sciences was remarkable. The record that follows will show how indefatigable and bountiful he was in returning the debt of his nurture and education.

After leaving West Point for good, his assignments were in the Ordnance Department to which branch of the service he had been transferred. It included duty at Benicia Arsenal, California; Springfield Arsenal, Massachusetts, as Inspector of Contract Arms; Inspector of Ordnance, South Boston Iron Works; Member of various Ordnance Boards; Assistant Ordnance Officer, Sandy Hook Proving Ground; Inspector of Ordnance at the Midvale

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 6)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

Steel Works, Philadelphia, and at other works in the vicinity, being engaged on metallurgical work, inspecting materials for field, siege, and sea-coast guns, gun carriages, armor plate and armor-piercing projectiles, and general ordnance construction from 1890 to 1902.

In 1875-76 he made a study of the manufacture and treatment of leather, following the processes step by step in a tannery in order to qualify himself for duty as a leather expert and inspector of leather, thus to increase his efficiency as an Ordnance Officer. He also supplemented his West Point training later on by becoming a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, taking a course in Mining Engineering in order to obtain a complete knowledge of the chemistry of metals, and to fit himself more thoroughly for the duties of an Inspector of Ordnance and of Ordnance Construction. This scientific and comprehensive course he took without being relieved of any of his duties. He was graduated from the Institute as Bachelor of Science in 1884, and from that time was retained on metallurgical work in connection with the new armament until 1902, although he performed various other duties as will be shown. It is sufficient to say of this most important part of his career that the lack of casualties and the very few fractures or mishaps that occurred with or due to the many thousands of forgings and castings passing through his hands and destined to be used in sea-coast armament speak volumes for the tireless vigilance of his inspection and his high sense of responsibility.

During this period he was sent to Spezia, Italy, to witness the Gruson Armor-plate tests and to visit certain factories in England, France, and Germany in connection with Ordnance construction. There his grasp of foreign languages stood him in good stead. He was also detailed to duty in 1889 as Military Assistant to the United States Commissioner General, General William B. Franklin, at the Paris Exposition of that year, and for his services received the Legion of Honor from the French Government.

During the Spanish-American War Colonel Lyle served in connection with the preparation of armament while on duty at Philadelphia, and from January 1902 until his retirement in January 1909 he was in command of the Augusta Arsenal, Georgia, serving also as Armament Officer, Southern Armament District, and Chief Ordnance Officer, Department of the Gulf. The Southern Armament District included all the fortifications of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, from Wilmington, North Carolina, to Galveston, Texas.

For many years he was on additional duty with the United States Life-Saving Service under the Treasury Department. He was a member of the Board on Life-Saving Appliances from Jan-

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 7)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society

uary 3, 1882, to January 28, 1915. Reference has already been made to the life-saving gun that bears his name. It was always a great happiness to him to feel that he had been the one chosen to invent a machine that has been instrumental in saving so many thousands of lives.

He wrote widely on professional, ornithological, and geological subjects. Included in these are "Report on Life Saving Apparatus", "Rockets and Rocket Apparatus", "Manufacture of Leather". He prepared a glossarial description of Files and Rasps, compiling a tri-glot synonymy (English-German-French) of Files and Rasps for the use of the Ordnance Department. He was also co-author of the work "Manufacture and Uses of Files and Rasps". His publications amount to around 83 titles in all, including co-authorship. He was a special Departmental Editor of the Century Dictionary and after his retirement from the Army was a Departmental Contributor to the Standard Dictionary, being the accepted authority on all military terms.

Colonel Lyle was a member of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and a member of the National Geographic Society. He belonged to the Association of Graduates U.S.M.A.; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Technology Club, Philadelphia, and Cosmos Club, Washington.

He was of gentle but firm disposition, of manner most courteous and sympathetic, and was always helpful and inspiring to the young men who sought his counsel. Of medium stature and build he was physically strong and until incapacitated by a slight stroke a few years ago lived more actively than many a man of forty. With only an occasional slight difficulty of speech he retained his full faculties until the day he died. On that day he was up and dressed and walking in the air in the morning, and in the afternoon passed away unexpectedly like a child falling asleep. His devoted and beloved wife was his constant companion for many years. They traveled widely together and read widely. His passing removes another of the few remaining Officers of the Old Army. His friends and neighbors will miss that kind, aristocratic face, and the warm heart that kindled a fire of genial hospitality whenever they called to see him. The knowledge of so many sciences and opportunity to be of so much public service can only come to a few in any age, and it is safe to say his name will be remembered when many a contemporary reputation has gone down into the dust.

F. R.

Colonel David Alexander Lyle (Pg. 8)

Courtesy of Fort Vance Historical Society