

MAJOR GENERAL PRESTON BROWN, U. S. A.
1872-1948

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Louisville, Kentucky

Major General Preston Brown, retired United States Army officer, died June 30, 1948, after a brief illness at his home in Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts. His body was brought to Louisville for services, held Monday, July 5, at the family lot in Cave Hill Cemetery.

General Brown was born in Lexington, Kentucky, January 2, 1872. His father, John Mason Brown, was a son of Judge Mason Brown, of Frankfort. His mother, Mary Owen Preston Brown, was the daughter of General William Preston and his wife, Margaret Wickliffe Preston, of Lexington. The family moved to Louisville in 1873, and their home was for years a center of gracious hospitality.

Young Brown was prepared for college in Louisville by his father and at Professor Jason W. Chenault's school. Following his father's example, he graduated from Yale, receiving an A.B. degree in 1892, at the age of twenty. Later, the honorary degree of M.A. was conferred upon him by his Alma Mater and an LL.D. by Trinity College, Hartford. After graduating at Yale he attended the University of Virginia Law School, finishing his legal training in one year, and was admitted to the bar in Virginia and Kentucky. He also practiced his profession for a year in Long Island, and was sent by his firm, for work on a law encyclopedia, to California where in 1894 he enlisted in the army as a private at the United States Presidio Barracks near San Francisco. Here he received his initial lessons in soldiering from First Sergeant Joseph Heifer, a stern drillmaster of the old school. Sergeant Heifer became a loyal friend and was present at Fort Hamilton, New York, March 1897, when his pupil was commissioned second lieutenant, and again on December 10, 1925, when the officer took the oath as major general, and thirteen guns were fired in his honor.



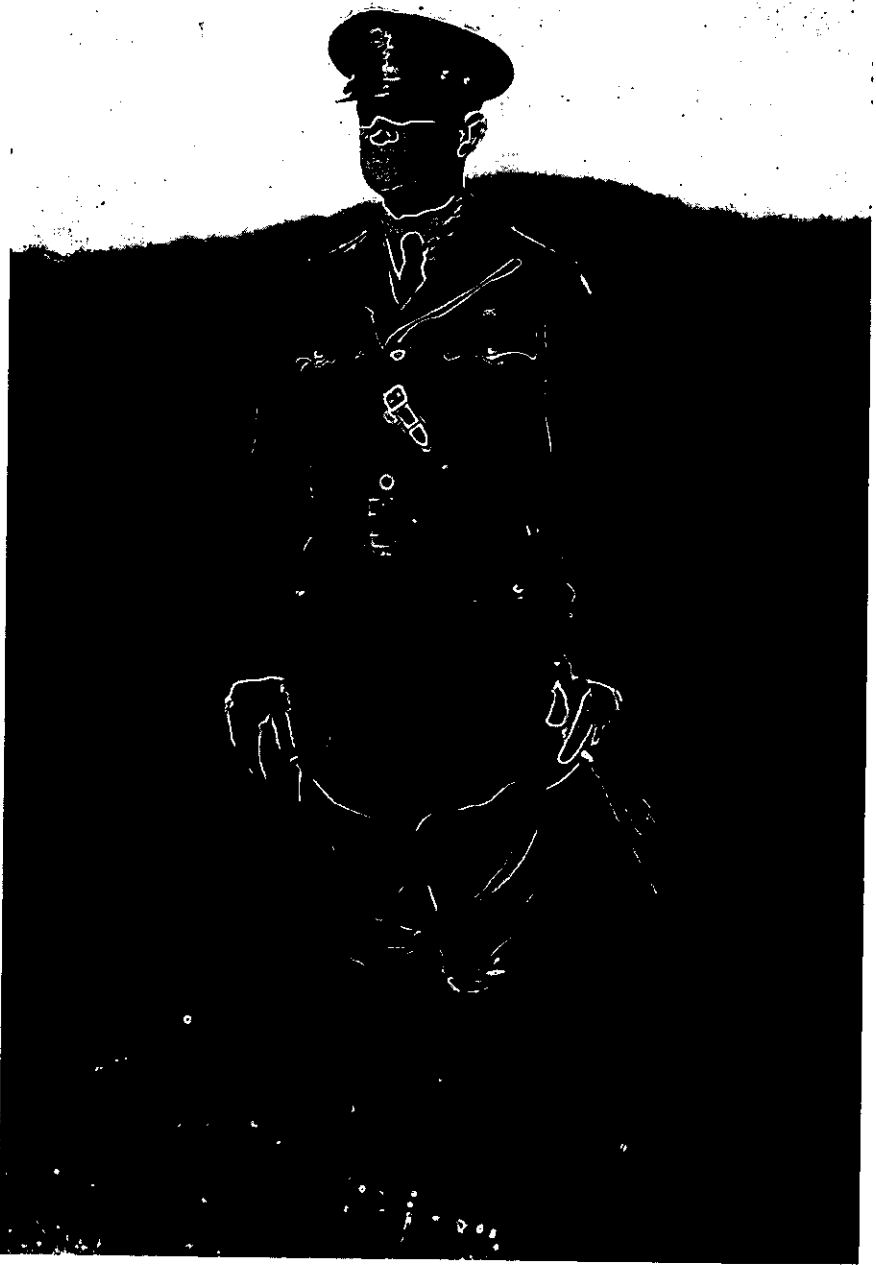
LIEUTENANT PRESTON BROWN, UNITED STATES ARMY
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Courtesy of Mrs. Preston Brown



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General Brown fought the Cheyenne Indians in 1897, served in the Spanish American War, and was in the Philippines from 1915 to 1917, advancing constantly in rank. Attending the Army Service Schools at Fort Leavenworth, he was graduated from the Army Staff College in 1914. Promoted to lieutenant colonel in August, 1917, he left for Europe in December to become actively engaged in World War I. A colonel in February, 1918, and brigadier general later in the same year, he served as chief of staff of the Second Division of the American Expeditionary Force and also as commanding general of the Third Division. For his accomplishments he was decorated as commander of the French Legion of Honor, personally recommended by Marshal Foch; and of the Belgium Order of the Crown. He was presented with the United States Distinguished Service Medal by General Pershing for his work in the creation of the American Army in France and its successful assault on the German lines. General Order No. 12, U. S. War Department, Washington, January 17, 1919, published the citation as follows:

“Brigadier General Preston Brown, United States Army. For exceptionally meritorious and distinguished services. As chief of staff of the Second Division he directed the details of the battles near Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, and at the St. Mihiel salient with great credit. Later, in command of the Third Division in the Argonne-Meuse offensive, at a most critical time, by his splendid judgment and energetic action, his division was able to carry to a successful conclusion the operations at Clairs Chenes and at Hill 294.”

In November, 1918, he was assistant chief of staff of the A.E.F. at Advanced General Headquarters in occupied German territory. After the Armistice, having led the Third Division into Germany, he returned to the United States, and from 1919 to 1921 was director and acting commandant of the Army War College in Washington, D. C. He commanded the First Corps Area (Boston) 1926-1930; the Panama Canal Department 1930-1933; and the Second Army and Sixth Corps Area (Chicago), until his retirement, November 30, 1934, ended forty years of service.

General Brown is survived by his wife, the former Miss Susan Ford Dorrance, of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, whom he married February 8, 1905. Their only son, Dorrance, died in June, 1936. He is also survived by a sister, Mrs. Henry M. Waite (nee Mary Mason Brown), of New York, and a niece and nephew, Mrs. J. Wooster Lambert and John Mason Brown, of New York, children of a younger brother (John Mason Brown, deceased). His nephew, the well known author and dramatic critic, was born in Louisville, July, 1900, and started his literary career by writing for the Louisville *Courier-Journal*. He now resides in New York where he is a member of the staff of the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Active in World War II as lieutenant USNR, he received the Bronze Star for service on the staff of Vice Admiral Allen G. Kirk during the invasion of Sicily and Normandy.

Preston Brown, tall and stately, with a commanding presence and courtly manners, was a favorite with all who knew him well. His rise from a "buck" private to the rank of major general was due to sheer ability and hard work. He was a student of history, interested especially in the campaigns of Napoleon and the Civil War, and also in genealogical lore. He belonged to the Society of Cincinnati and delighted in the deeds of his ancestors, among whom he found many soldiers and statesmen whose lives were dedicated to their country and to the development of Virginia and Kentucky. Rating high in his estimation were his great-grandfather John Brown, Kentucky's first United States Senator; William Hancock, an incorporator of the Colony of Virginia; and Col. Wm. Preston, a founder of Washington and Lee University.

He was devoted to his father, whose life he reviewed in an article in *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, of July, 1939, entitled "John Mason Brown, 1837-1890, One of the Founders of The Filson Club." The father's death, January 29, 1890, while the son was still at Yale, was a civic loss. An outstanding lawyer of the firm of Brown, Humphrey and Davie, John Mason Brown, if he had lived would shortly have been appointed an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, according to his close friend and Yale classmate, Chauncey M. Depew, erstwhile senator and Republican party

leader. He was also an author of note. As indicated, he was a founder of The Filson Club and wrote its valued publication *The Political Beginnings of Kentucky*, reading it as a paper at the last Club meeting which he attended. At the time of his death he was busily engaged in procuring a public park system for Louisville. He drew the bill passed by the Legislature May 6, 1890, under which lands for the system were purchased. His name will always be associated with the beautiful woods surrounding the city which now offer recreation to its teeming population.

REFERENCES: *Who's Who in America* 1948-49; *Who's Who in Kentucky*, edited by M. Y. Southard, 1936; *The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy*, Vol. 1, p. 230; *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1942), "The Brown Family of Liberty Hall," by Bayless Hardin; *Memorial History of Louisville*, J. Stoddard Johnston, Chicago and New York, 1896, Vol. 2, pp. 611-613, "John Mason Brown"; *Kentucky In The World War 1917-1919 Special Honors* (typed), Vol. 4, pp. 1895, 2405; Letter from the United States Adjutant General to the author, September 1, 1948; *The Courier-Journal*, December 25, 1925, July 1, 1948; *The Louisville Times*, December 24, 1925, July 1, 1948; *The New York Times*, July 1, 1948; General Preston Brown's Scrapbook; Chauncey M. Depew to Maj. Gen. Preston Brown, June 30, 1926; Court Orders (certified copies) admitting Preston Brown to practice law in Virginia (1893) and in Fayette Circuit Court, Kentucky (1894); copy of Yale University citation awarding honorary M.A. degree to Preston Brown (1920); Letters of Mrs. Preston Brown to The Filson Club, July-September, 1948.