

## MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE E. LEACH (1876-1955)

*A Featured Veteran from Minneapolis, Minnesota*

*Major General George E. Leach was an extraordinary man with a distinguished record of service in the military, in politics, and even in the Olympics. His son, Bill, remembers him as someone who never met a minute of the day he didn't want to fill.*

**Early years.** George Leach was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on 14 July 1876. His father had served as the adjutant for the famous 1st Minnesota Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War. Leach was raised in Minneapolis, attended public schools and graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1897, after which he started a career in the insurance business by inspecting grain elevators in

Minnesota and the Dakotas.

**He becomes an artilleryman.** His military experience began in 1905 when he enlisted in "B" Battery of the 1st Minnesota Field Artillery, Minnesota National Guard. He quickly received a commission to Second Lieutenant and was promoted to Captain in 1908. He completed Command and General Staff College in 1916.

On 18 June 1916 the Minnesota National Guard was ordered to active federal service to help deal with problems on the border with Mexico, and was sent to Camp Llano Grande near Mercedes, Texas, on 19 July. Leach, now a Major, commanded the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Minnesota Field Artillery Regiment. In August he was given command of the whole regiment, where he distinguished himself through his leadership to train the regiment into a first class unit.

Leach and regiment returned to Minnesota in late February 1917, but with the declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917, they were quickly ordered to state service and then into federal service. The unit was re-designated as the 151st Field



George Leach as Chief of the National Guard Bureau, 1931.



Col. George Leach (center) about to receive the Distinguished Service Cross in September 1918 from AEF commanding general, John "Black Jack" Pershing. To Leach's right is Brig. Gen. Douglas McArthur; to his left is Lt. Col. William "Wild Bill" Donovan. A distinguished group indeed!

Artillery Regiment and assigned to the new 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division, composed of four regular Army regiments and National Guard units from 26 states. The 42<sup>nd</sup> was one of the first American divisions to reach the battlefield. Under Leach's leadership, the 151<sup>st</sup> rendered distinguished combat service in France, earning five campaign stars: Defensive Sector (Lorraine), Champagne-Marne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne. While with the 42nd Division, the regiment worked under General Douglas McArthur, who regarded Leach as the finest artillery officer in the Army. In WWI Leach was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart; the French government awarded him the Legion of Honor, its highest distinction.

After the war, Colonel Leach remained in command of the 151st FA until 1921 and resumed his work in the insurance business as a manager for the St. Paul Fire & Marine Insurance Company. In 1923 he was promoted to Brigadier General and given command of the 59th Field Artillery Brigade, Minnesota National Guard.

**Six-time mayor of Minneapolis.** Leach was elected mayor of Minneapolis as a Republican for six two-year terms: in 1921, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1937, and 1939. He twice ran for governor (1926 and 1938) but was not elected. While mayor, Leach fought hard against the spreading influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Minnesota.

**The Olympics.** Leach was a first-rate athlete and an excellent skier. He managed the very first U.S. Olympic Ski Team in 1924, and was the National Ski Association representative to the ski congress, which met during the Olympics and led to the creation of the International Ski Federation. He was inducted into the National Ski Hall of Fame in Ishpeming, Michigan, 14 years after his death.

**Chief of the National Guard Bureau and president of the National Guard Association.** In 1931 Leach was given the temporary rank of Major General and appointed Chief of the National Guard Bureau in Washington DC. He served until 1935 when he resumed his rank of Brigadier General and returned to Minnesota to again assume command of the 59th Field Artillery Brigade. In 1937 he was elected president of the National Guard Association of the United States.

**Command of the 34<sup>th</sup> Division.** From 1940 to 1941 Leach commanded the 34th Infantry Division and was again promoted to Major General. While he commanded the

division, the 34th received its notification of federal activation and underwent rigorous training and preparations for its eventual participation in WWII. He retired from the Army in 1941, highly regarded by the many soldiers who had served with him over the years.

**Business.** Leach owned George E. Leach, Inc, a vending machine company. He also served as Chairman of the National Automatic Merchandising Association.

In 1924 Leach married Anita M. Churcher, whom he met in Germany after WWI while serving on occupation duty and she served with the Y.M.C.A. They had two children. He passed away in Los Angeles, California, on July 17, 1955, age 79, and is buried at Ft. Snelling National Cemetery.