

## George Horace Morgan 1855-1948

Compiled by June Gossler Anderson Anoka Chapter DAR

**Birth:** January 1, 1855  
Quebec, Canada  
Entered Service: 1880  
Hennepin Co. Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Branch: U.S. Army  
3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Cavalry  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant/Colonel  
**Conflict: Indian Campaigns**  
Big Dry Fork, Arizona  
July 17, 1882  
Presentation Date: July 15, 1892  
**Death:** February 14, 1948  
Washington DC  
Burial: Arlington National Cemetery



### Early Years

On January 1, 1855 in St. Catherine, Quebec, Canada, George Horace Morgan was born to Delia Elizabeth Warner Morgan and Brigadier General George Nelson Morgan who became an American citizen and commander of the 1st Minnesota Volunteers during the Civil War. George was a year old when his family moved to St. Anthony, Minnesota, a small town, whose falls were to attract first a milling industry and then a change of name—Minneapolis. He was twenty-one years of age and a school teacher when he passed a competitive examination and was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1876.

### War Years

George Horace Morgan graduated from the US Military Academy, Class of 1880. These were the days of the Indian Wars, and young Lieutenant Morgan learned about the Utes and the Apaches and joined the 3rd Cavalry at Fort Washakie, Wyoming as a second lieutenant in the United States Army. Having a way with animals, human and otherwise, he was a popular officer. He knew horses, which was well for a cavalryman, and he also had a pet bear. "Best pet I ever had," he said. "It terrified a young lady alighting from a stage to visit friends at the Post. I rescued her gallantly and she later became my wife."

Lieutenant Morgan's first service was frontier duty at Fort Washakie, serving as a scout from October 1880 to May 1886. He spent the summer of 1882 in the field and at Whipple Barracks, Arizona. In the spring of 1882, a party of about 60 White Mountain Apache warriors, coalesced under the leadership of a warrior called Na-tio-tish. In early July some of the warriors ambushed and killed four San Carlos policemen, including the police chief. After the ambush, Na-tio-tish led his band of warriors northwest through the Tonto Basin. Local Arizona settlers were greatly

alarmed and demanded protection from the army which immediately sent out fourteen companies of cavalry from forts in the region. The ensuing Battle of Big Dry Wash was fought on July 17, 1882, between troops of the United States Army's 3rd Cavalry Regiment and 6th Cavalry Regiment and members of the White Mountain Apache tribe. Although the location of the battle was called "*Big Dry Wash*" in the official report, later maps called it "*Big Dry Fork*," which is how it is cited in the four Medal of Honor citations that resulted from the battle

The first shots were fired around 3:00 pm and the battle lasted until nightfall, when a heavy thunderstorm struck, bringing rain and hail. Chief scout Al Sieber, together with fellow scout Tom Horn and soldier Lt. George H. Morgan, slipped to the banks opposite of the Apache line, and provided rifle fire for the cavalry. On the ridge overlooking the wash Lieutenant George H. Morgan, commanding the first major engagement of the battle, was exposed to enemy fire. A bullet ripped through his arm and into his body. He carried the bullet near his heart for the rest of his life.

Pressured and outgunned, the remaining Apache warriors, under the cover of darkness and the storm, slipped away on foot and retreated to a nearby Apache reservation, about 20 miles away. The site of the battle is now a historical park, in Coconino County, Arizona.

The citation accompanying George Horace Morgan's Medal of Honor reads: "For distinguished conduct in action against hostile Apache Indians at the Big Dry Wash, Arizona, July 17, 1882, by gallantly holding his ground at a critical moment and firing upon the advancing enemy until himself disabled by a shot; while 2nd Lieutenant, 3rd Cavalry, and serving as a volunteer with Lieutenant West's command of Indian scouts and Troop I, 6th Cavalry"

The lead that disabled him was a dumdum; he carried it for the rest of his life and, in the end, it killed him after all. The Indian? "When he got me," Morgan said, "he was so pleased he started to jump around and do a sort of victory dance. He was an easy target."

George Morgan was presented the Medal of Honor on July 15, 1892.

### **Post War Years**

George Morgan's marksmanship, that had proved so valuable that day, distinguished him in many a rifle competition from Arizona to Texas, for after he had recovered from his severe wounds—a convalescence that enabled him to continue his courtship and wed Molly Brownson of Omaha, Nebraska,—Lieutenant Morgan's duty with the Third Cavalry took him to most of the frontier posts of an expanding United States. During that time, from 1883 to 1896, five children joined the family.

Morgan served in the Spanish American War, Philippine Insurrection, Mexican Intervention, and World War I. From October 10, 1891, to October 1, 1895, he was Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the University of Minnesota. He was student as well as teacher for during this time he studied law and was admitted to the Minnesota Bar in 1895. The following year he was promoted to Captain, commanding Troup H of the Third Cavalry, which he led up San Juan Hill in the Spanish War on July 1, 1898, winning a Silver Star for gallantry and a promotion to Brevet Major.

In January 1899, he rejoined his troop and regiment at Augusta, Georgia, where he was instrumental in quelling a mutiny of volunteers. Then followed a few months of comparative quiet in assignment to Fort Myer, Virginia.

On November 23, 1899 Morgan arrived in Manila in command of the 1st Battalion, 28th U.S. Volunteer Infantry and for the next two years was in almost continual action. At Putol Bridge, Luzon, Morgan he again distinguished himself and won his second Silver Star.

After he had been mustered out of the volunteer service with his regiment, Morgan rejoined the Third Cavalry. He was aide to General Bell and Chief Commissary of the brigade in the Malavar campaign, December 1901 to April 1902. In April, he returned home and the following year was assigned as Major, 9th Cavalry, to Fort Assiniboine, Montana.

For the next two years, Major Morgan was again Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the University of Minnesota. Then he rejoined his squadron of the 9th Cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas on October 3, 1905. While on duty there, he was member and President of the Cavalry Board, President of the Cavalry Examining Board, and at times director of the school.

From the following June until August 1909 he performed a tour of duty in the Philippines as Adjutant General at Fort William McKinley and as Justice of the Peace. Back in the United States he received his lieutenant colonelcy in the 11th Cavalry on 3 March 1911, and after a tour of duty at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, he was assigned to Fort Leavenworth to take the Field Officer's Course, and then in August 1913 to the Army War College.

Promoted to colonel on April 26, 1914, he commanded the 15th Cavalry at Fort Bliss, Texas, until August, when he was assigned first to the 7th Cavalry and then, in October, to the 8th Cavalry.

Morgan was chief of staff of the 13th Militia District from December 1915 until August 1916, and when the United States entered the First World War he was in command of a provisional cavalry regiment of the 10th Provisional Division. Although he was greatly disappointed that he was unable to take a regiment overseas, Colonel Morgan's experience in past wars made him invaluable in training the rapidly mobilized troops. Training and selecting cantonment sites occupied his energies, and in 1917 he again assumed command of a regiment, the 17th Cavalry at Douglas, Arizona, a command he held until his retirement on New Year's Day of 1919, five short years before the death of his beloved wife.

After retirement George Morgan settled in San Diego, California where his wife, Molly, died in 1924; then he moved to Washington, DC. He died there at age 93 when the bullet he received in the 1882 Battle of Big Dry Wash moved and struck his heart. He is buried in Section 3 of Arlington National Cemetery. The US Army honored him in 1998 by naming Camp Morgan in Bosnia after him.



Sources:

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