The Youngs at West Point

J. Michael Hunter

Brigham Young University - Provo, mike_hunter@byu.edu

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Duty, Honor, Country—a Lifelong Pledge of Faith

By J. Michael Hunter

In March 1802, Congress established the United States Military Academy on an army site at West Point, New York. The academy's purpose was to prepare young men to serve as officers in the United States Army. Students at the academy were called cadets. To be considered for admission to the academy, a candidate had to be nominated by a government official, usually a United States senator or representative. It was considered a great honor to be nominated. It was also considered an opportunity for a young man to increase his social standing. After four years, the cadet earned a Bachelor of Science degree and received a commission in the U.S. Army.

In 1871, when Brigham Young's son, Willard, was nominated to attend West Point, Latter-day Saints viewed it not only as an opportunity for Willard, but as an opportunity for the Mormons in general to advance their social standing in the country. After Willard, other descendants of Brigham Young would attend the academy in what would become somewhat of a family tradition.

Willard Young was born in Salt Lake City on 30 April 1852. He was the third child of Clarissa Ross Young and the eleventh son of Brigham Young. At the age of thirteen, Willard asked his father if he could leave school and go to work. Brigham was an advocate of formal education, but he also believed strongly in practical education. He hoped that Willard would work for a few years and then "be willing to go to school and work hard at that." After a year of working on a farm in teaming and wood hauling, Willard was "eager enough to get back in school." Willard enrolled at Deseret University (forerunner of the University of Utah). In June 1871, the Deseret Evening News declared that Willard was
Willard was one of the first black American cadets admitted to West Point and made the national news. "Flipper" was admitted to the academy after Brigham Young suggested that Utah's Latter-day Saint delegate, William H. Hooper, be given the honor of naming a Latter-day Saint cadet. Brigham was pleased when young Willard was admitted to the academy.

Willard graduated from the Corps of Engineers and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. In June 1875, Willard was sent to West Point by Brigham Young to be commissioned as a second lieutenant. Brigham was pleased when young Willard was admitted to the academy.

Willard Young was a second lieutenant at West Point and was commissioned in 1875. He was the first Latter-day Saint to enter West Point. Willard's father, Brigham Young, was pleased with the appointment and wrote, "I will let you go, but will send you as a missionary to the academy. Brigham said, 'Will the boys permit Willard to enter the academy? Brigham thought of the possibility of a large promotion in railroad work, and arranged to receive a letter of recommendation from his uncle, Joseph A. Young, to be sent to Ford.

When Willard arrived at West Point, he was surprised to find that Harriet Beecher Stowe was living in the academy. The academy had a visiting committee of the best-looking men at the time, and Stowe was impressed by Willard's appearance and character. In another conversation, Willard was counselled to be sober and temperate in all your ways, that he has already made no small number of friends among the cadets and one correspondent writing from this city to the press. As the first Latter-day Saint to enter West Point, Willard made the national news and was widely admired. The "best relics of bar-proof that Henry passed his entrance exams. The University of Chicago Evening Post reported that Henry passed his entrance exams and was recommended for the army.

By 1877, George Q. Cannon, made his first nomination of Richard Young, Willard's second Latter-day Saint to enter the academy. Brigham was, no doubt, pleased with the appointment. In 1882, Joseph A. was called to preside over the Church in the Sevier district. Richard Young, Willard's nephew and second Latter-day Saint to enter the academy, was appointed as a territorial delegate in the Utah legislature. Richard Young's son, Joseph A., was called to preside over the Church in the Sevier district.
wanting to avoid paying officer salaries, welcome resignations from the graduates. After consulting with his Uncle Willard, Richard decided to resign from the military and pursue a law degree. Learning that it would cost him six thousand dollars to attend Howard law school, Richard secured funding from friends like Heber J. Grant. Yet Richard was soon uncertain about resigning from the army. "Hebe," he asked his friend, "insinuated as Grandfather blessed me and set me apart as an army missionary, do you think it is proper for me to resign that missionary labor without consulting his successor, President John Taylor?" Heber J. Grant recommended that he talk with President Taylor. When President Taylor told him to stay in the army, Richard did so, being assigned to Governor's Island, not far from New York City. He entered Columbia Law School and graduated with honors in 1884 and was admitted to the Bar of the State of New York.

Richard was later assigned to Fort Douglas in Utah. In 1888 while visiting with Heber J. Grant in his office, President John Taylor told him, "I see by the morning paper that your dear friend Richard W Young's term has expired at Fort Douglas and he is about to go East. You may tell him that the time has now arrived for his missionary labors in the army to end, and he is at liberty to resign." Richard resigned that year and took up a private law practice in Salt Lake City. His Uncle Willard would retire from the army three years later to take a position as the principal of what was called Young University in Salt Lake City.

In April 1898, a conflict broke out between the United States and Spain over the liberation of Cuba. The conflict escalated into the Spanish-American War. When "the trouble broke out between the United States and Spain," Heber J. Grant wrote, "I was visiting Richard in his office. He remarked that as a graduate of West Point it was his duty to volunteer again to enter the army." Heber J. Grant advised Richard to consult with President Wilford Woodruff. Richard replied that President Woodruff "is one of the most tender-hearted men in the world... I feel sure he would not advise me to volunteer." Heber J. Grant replied, "Do you accept me, Richard, as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, with authority to call people on missions?" Richard replied, "I accept the call." Heber J. Grant said, "All right... I call you on a mission to go to President Woodruff, and ask for his advice." Richard said, "Darn you, young man," and was surprised when Richard returned from his interview with President Woodruff and reported, "President Woodruff told me to fight as an egg is full of meat. He remarked, 'If you don't go back to the army, Brother Young, after graduating from West Point, you will disgrace the name you bear, and it will be a reflection upon your dear, dead grandfather, President Brigham Young.'"

Richard enlisted as a volunteer and was made captain of Battery A, Utah Light Artillery. Two months later, he was appointed a major, commanding Utah Light Artillery. Richard participated in the capture of Manila and twenty-five other engagements in the Spanish-American War and the Filipino Insurrection. From May 1899 to June 1901, Richard served as associate justice and president of the criminal branch of the Supreme Court of the Philippine Islands.

Richard's service would earn him the Medal of Honor.

Willard Young also volunteered for the war. He was assigned as colonel of the Second Regiment of the U.S. Volunteer Engineers in Havana from May 1898 to May 1899. President McKinley commended Willard for valiant service in connection with the provision of sanitary works in Cuba. After the war, Willard served as president of the National Contracting Company, supervising the construction of the Niagara Falls Power Company, the drainage works of the city of New Orleans, the tunnels of the Boston subway, the Boston sewer system, and the Hudson River Power Company dam. In 1906, the First Presidency called Willard to be president of the Latter-day Saints University in Salt Lake City. In 1915, the First Presidency called him to serve as a counselor in the Logan Temple Presidency. Meanwhile, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Richard to the Board of Visitors at West Point in 1902. Richard also served as Regent of University of Utah (1905-1917), trustee of Brigham Young University, President of Brigham Young College, and President of International Army Congress (1912-1918). He also served as president of the Ensign Stake and on the general board of the YMMA. During this time he continued to practice law in Salt Lake City.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Willard and Richard again volunteered their services. The army appointed Willard as United States Agent in charge of all military engineering work on the Missouri River. He served from 1917 to 1919. The army made Richard a brigadier-general in charge of training soldiers at Fort Kearney. Richard W Young died from complications following an appendectomy on 27 December 1919. At his funeral, Heber J. Grant said, "I have referred to him, all my life, in public and in private, as my most intimate, my nearest and dearest friend!... He was my near and dear friend because I never discovered in him a thought or a desire that I did not feel in my heart was a desire to do the right thing.

Willard Young returned to Salt Lake City and served the remainder of his life as Superintendent of Church Building Construction. He died in Salt Lake City on 25 July 1919 at the age of eighty-one. He had been the oldest surviving son of Brigham Young.

The Salt Lake Tribune stated, "He was courageous and he was determined. When he set his eye upon a goal he was determined to reach it. His West Point days were attended by jibs and jibes from his classmates which would have conquered a less determined soul.

The Young legacy lived on at West Point long after the deaths of Willard and Richard. Willard's son, Sidney Hooper Young, attended, as did Sidney Hooper Young Jr, The Military Academy motto of "Duty, Honor, Country" became a lifelong pledge of faith exemplified by the descendents of the Young family for years to come.