

MAJOR GENERAL RALPH VAN DEMAN

US Army, Retired (Deceased)



Born in Delaware, Ohio, on 3 September 1865, Ralph Van Deman had his first military experience with the Ohio National Guard when he participated in controlling the Cincinnati riots of 1885. He received a Bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1888, studied law one year, and then entered medical school. Commissioned in the US Army in 1891 in the branch of Infantry, he took time out to complete his medical studies. The MD was conferred on him by Miami Medical College, Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1893.

LT Van Deman attended Fort Leavenworth's US Infantry and Cavalry School in 1898 before going to his first assignment in the Mapping Section of the newly created Military Information Division of the Adjutant General's Office. As part of his mapping duties, he shipped out to Cuba and Puerto

Rico to gather information. In April 1899, Van Deman was reassigned to the Philippines. He was involved with both terrain analysis and mapping, which led to a promotion to Captain and reassignment to Manila. From 1901-1903, Van Deman served in the Military Information Division of the Philippines Department under GEN Arthur MacArthur (the father of Douglas MacArthur). This gave him the opportunity to practice counterintelligence, which would become his lifelong focus, and was a turning point in his life. Van Deman used undercover agents to keep MacArthur informed about guerilla activity, and in the process uncovered a plot to seize Manila and assassinate GEN MacArthur.

Van Deman attended the first class of the Army War College in Washington, DC in 1904. After graduation, he returned to the Philippines where he worked on a cover mission to China to map the lines of communication radiating from Peking. He had to return to Washington before the project was completed as the Army needed him to serve as the Chief of the Map Section on the General Staff. In 1910 he again returned to the Philippines where he persisted in his mapping work until the Japanese government complained about his presence and had him expelled.

When the clouds of war moved towards the US in early 1917, Military Intelligence personnel available to the Army Chief of Staff consisted of MAJ Van Deman and one

clerk. Van Deman, who was in the Military Information Section of Army War College, tried again and again to persuade GEN Hugh Scott, Chief of Staff, to reestablish a military intelligence service. Scott was not convinced of the need.

When time ran out and President Wilson declared war against Germany on 6 April 1917, Van Deman made a daring move. Through two intermediaries, a woman journalist friend of Secretary of War Newton D. Baker and the Washington DC Chief of Police, another Baker acquaintance, the Secretary was told of the need for such a service and the present lack in the Army.

Van Deman was called to the Secretary's office to tell his story; within 48 hours, on 3 May 1917, a Military Intelligence Branch of the War Department was formed with Van Deman at its head. The new section managed intelligence collection, espionage, and counter-espionage. It was a brilliant victory for Van Deman and Army Intelligence. The small organization grew under Van Deman's leadership due to the demands of war.

The problem of security was intense. Van Deman was critically concerned with sabotage and espionage against the United States and within the Army itself. With the help of COL Dennis E Nolan (HoF 1988), the G2 of the American Expeditionary Forces in France, Van Deman directed the creation of the Corps of Intelligence Police on 13 August 1917. This group of 50 French-speaking specialists in intelligence and security was the predecessor of the Counter Intelligence Corps, the only Army intelligence organization that survived the war. Van Deman also hired Herbert Yardley (HoF 1988) to head up the Codes and Ciphers Section known as MI-8.

In 1918, COL Van Deman was ordered overseas as a replacement for COL Nolan. Then, after the war, he was the senior American intelligence officer and Chief of Allied Counterintelligence for the Paris Peace Commission. He returned to the Military Intelligence Division in 1919 and then commanded the 31st Infantry in Manila. He held a number of positions through the 1920s before retiring in 1929 as the Commanding General, 3rd Infantry Division, at Fort Lewis, Washington.

MG Van Deman passed away at home in San Diego in 1952 at the age of 87.

Known as "the Father of American Military Intelligence," he was posthumously inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1988. In 1962, the Army Reserve Center in San Diego was dedicated as the MG Ralph H. Van Deman Hall. The Van Deman Gate (East Gate) at Fort Huachuca is also named in his honor.



MG Ralph Van Deman during his service to the American Expeditionary Forces, 1918



