Wright Prescott Edgerton

- Born 14 November 1852
- 17 June 1874: graduated USMA and promoted to a Second Lieutenant in the Second Artillery Regiment
- Aug 1882-Aug 1887: Principal Assistant Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- Jul 1888-Jul 1888: Acting Quartermaster of Army and Navy General Hospital at Hot Springs, Arkansas
- Jan 1889-Jul 1893: Assistant Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- Jul 1893-Jun 1898: Associate Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- Jun 1898-Aug 1898: engaged in the Puerto Rican campaign
- Oct 1898-Jun 1904: Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Mathematics Department, USMA
- Died 24 June 1904, age 51

Wright Prescott Edgerton was born in Tallmadge, Ohio on 14 November 1852. Edgerton's childhood days were filled with excitement and adventure. He had the opportunity to develop character at an early age. In 1863, his father, Sidney Edgerton, was appointed Chief Justice of Idaho. The family journeyed for four months as they crossed the plains traveling from Omaha, Nebraska to Bannock, Idaho. This trip was undertaken during the days of Indian Massacres in the midst of the Civil War when the sentiment in the "new West" was so violent. Edgerton was able to attend public school until his admittance to West Point in July 1870.

"At the Military Academy, he was beloved by all his classmates, not only for his social qualities, but for his gentleness that is always a proof of true courage of manhood. He had a keen sense of justice, duty and honor; loved and sympathized with his fellowman in all grades of life and was tolerant and charitable to the errors and faults of others. Love of humor and repartee were two of his principal characteristics. His room was the ‘rendezvous’ for the brightest, cleverest and best men of his class and many hours that should have been devoted to study, were whiled away in storytelling, jokes and innocent fun." Cadet Edgerton graduated fourteenth in a class of forty-two on 17 June 1874. He was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Second Artillery Regiment.

During Edgerton's first eight years of active duty service, he served on garrison duty at ten different stations located in six states including tours of duty at the Artillery School at Fort Monroe, Virginia and the Engineer School of Applications at Willet's Point, New York.

While serving in garrison at Washington Barracks, D.C., he was one of the officers who guarded Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield. "His duty at so many posts in nearly as many states gave him an unusually wide acquaintance both in and out of the Army and supplied him an excellent observation, keen intellect, and ready perception made full avail. This army experience proved of the greatest benefit to him in his academic career."
In August 1882, Edgerton returned to USMA as the Principal Assistant Professor of Mathematics, where he remained for five years. After spending fifteen months with his Artillery Regiment at Jackson Barracks, Louisiana and serving as Acting Quartermaster of the Army and Navy General Hospital at Hot Springs, Arkansas, once again, Edgerton returned to West Point to serve as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics. In July 1893, Edgerton was appointed as an Associate Professor of Mathematics. Edgerton was the first officer to fill this position created by President Grover Cleveland's administration.

Edgerton's "continued interest in active service is shown by the fact that as soon as his academic duties were completed, in June 1898, he, by persistent effort, succeeded in being assigned to duty in connection with the transportation of troops from Port Tampa to Cuba." He then became engaged in the Puerto Rican campaign as a voluntary aide de camp attached the Headquarters of the Commander of the Army of the United States. During this period he "sowed the seeds of disease" that would ultimately lead to his death.

In October 1898, Edgerton was appointed Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Mathematics Department; the position he held until his untimely death in June 1904. Professor Edgerton was a man of broad culture and much reading, fully appreciating the past, but at the same time an advocate of all possible beneficial changes to the present. Professor Edgerton introduced two important changes in the mathematics curriculum at West Point. Prior to 1900, Algebra and Geometry had been taught in the order named, to completion of each; after this date the two subjects were studied simultaneously, with recitation in each on alternate days. Furthermore, Professor Edgerton adopted the method of having written tests for the general reviews, thereby allowing students proficient in the written tests to be exempt from the final end of semester examinations. Professor Edgerton was a great advocate of athletic sports at the academy, as witnessed by his eight year presidency of the athletic association. He was a very compassionate, humble, and modest member of the faculty who was well respected and liked by anyone who had contact with him. "It may be truly said that Colonel Edgerton's services have been among the strongest and most virile and valuable influences at the Academy for a generation."

**References:**

Annual Reunion of the Association of Graduates, 13 June 1905, page 57.

Cullum's Register, Volume III, page 227.

West Point General Orders #15, 24 June 1904.