



**John C. Groome**  
Photo courtesy of the Photo Unit,  
Pennsylvania State Police

# John C. Groome, PMG, AEF

By Master Sergeant  
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*During the three years of U.S. involvement in World War I, General John J. Pershing appointed four men to serve as provost marshal general (PMG) of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), beginning with the appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Hanson E. Ely on 20 July 1917. Ely, who was an infantry officer, was assigned to Pershing's staff and stationed in Paris, where he was in charge of one officer and eleven enlisted men. Their primary mission was to study the British and French systems of policing, with a view toward adopting such a system.<sup>1</sup> However, the AEF eventually adopted its own system, which evolved through trial and error.*

The second PMG appointment was made on 24 August 1917, when another infantryman, Colonel William H. Allaire, succeeded Ely. The staff was increased; and although the AEF headquarters moved to Chaumont in September, the PMG remained in Paris. In addition to the duties of his office, Allaire was placed in command of all U.S. troops in Paris.<sup>2</sup> In December, Allaire was ordered to rejoin the headquarters in Chaumont, leaving an assistant PMG in charge of Paris operations.

In May 1918, Lieutenant Colonel John C. Groome joined Allaire (who was then a brigadier general) and his staff; and on 29 June, Groome was appointed assistant PMG. By that time, the office was comprised of several sections, including sections that dealt with personnel control (leaves and passes), prisoners of war, the Division of Criminal Investigation, and other issues. On 10 July 1918, Groome succeeded Allaire as PMG; in September, Brigadier General Harry Hill Bandholtz, in turn, replaced Groome.

In an earlier work,<sup>3</sup> I erroneously stated that Bandholtz was the only one of the four PMGs who had any previous police experience. However, Groome's military and police background was actually extensive—even equal to that of Bandholtz.

John C. Groome was born to Samuel W. and Nancy Connelly Groome on 20 March 1862 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Groome was raised and educated in Philadelphia, and he held a variety of jobs there. For example, he drove stagecoaches, entered the wine business, and tried his hand at banking. He was also an equestrian, playing polo and participating in "Four-in-Hand Coaching." It may have been his fondness for horses

that prompted him to enlist in the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry (FTPCC)—a unit of the Pennsylvania National Guard.<sup>4</sup> He joined the FTPCC in 1882 and served in the unit for 28 years, rising through the ranks until elected as commander.

The lineage of the FTPCC (which currently remains active as Troop A, 1st Squadron, 104th Cavalry, Pennsylvania Army National Guard) dates back to 1774, when the unit formed a portion of the Colonial Army under General George Washington. The FTPCC often performed ceremonial duties, such as escorting visiting dignitaries to Philadelphia, but was also called upon during periods of civil unrest.<sup>5</sup>

In 1884, Groome married Ms. Agnes Roberts of Philadelphia; they had three children—Agnes, Martha, and John Junior.

During the Spanish-American War, the FTPCC was called into federal service. The troop was ordered to report to their armory at 5 a.m. on 28 April 1898. Mounted, armed, and fully equipped, they left within hours for Camp Hastings—a training and induction point located at Mount Gretna, Pennsylvania. Although they later deployed to Puerto Rico, an armistice had been reached while the unit was being formed into battle lines and they did not experience combat.<sup>6</sup> As a troop commander, Lieutenant Colonel Groome was highly regarded; his leadership during the deployment to Puerto Rico was exemplary.

When 150,000 coal miners went on strike for better pay and benefits in 1902, the country became crippled. As is often the case, the strike turned violent. The governor of Pennsylvania called upon that state's entire National

Guard force—including the FTPCC—to control the situation between the miners and the coal company police. A presidential commission brokered a settlement between the miners and the coal companies, but was very critical of the coal company police organizations. This criticism prompted the Pennsylvania legislature to establish the first organized state police agency in the United States—the Pennsylvania State Constabulary (later known as the Pennsylvania State Police)—in 1905. The governor of Pennsylvania appointed Groome as superintendent of the constabulary.<sup>7</sup> Groome traveled to Europe to study police organizations, eventually choosing to pattern the Pennsylvania State Constabulary after the Royal Irish Constabulary. Groome's constabulary became a very effective police organization that, in turn, served as a model for other states. In October 1917, Groome was granted a leave of absence from his position as superintendent of the constabulary, enabling him to serve with the U.S. Army Signal Corps.<sup>8</sup>

The 54-year-old Groome was initially appointed chief of intelligence for the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. However, not long after his arrival in France, his police background became valuable to the fledgling Military Police Corps. Shortly after attending an 8 June 1917 luncheon with General Pershing, Lieutenant Colonel Groome was appointed assistant PMG.<sup>9</sup> On 10 July 1918, he was appointed PMG. He was subsequently relieved by General Bandholtz on 20 September 1918.<sup>10</sup>

During Groome's brief appointment with the military police, the organization of the Military Police Training Department at Autun and construction of the main prisoner-of-war enclosure near Tours were well underway. Groome reportedly worked diligently on both projects. According to Harry G. Toland,<sup>11</sup> Groome set up the Military Police Training Department and went on to supervise the construction and operation of the prisoner-of-war enclosure. While this may be true, that information is not reflected in the PMG report submitted after the war. The report states that the order establishing the Military Police Training Department was dated while Groome was PMG, but the Training Department did not become operational until a month later. The facility officially opened on 21 October 1918, but the first class of student instructors began coursework on 10 October 1918. During five months of operation, about 4,000 officers and enlisted men trained for military police duties at the Military Police Training Department. Groome's own son, Lieutenant John C. Groome Jr., served as an instructor and as adjutant of the Military Police Training Department from July to December 1918.

Upon the appointment of Bandholtz as PMG, Groome, who had been promoted to the rank of colonel, was transferred to serve as chief of the Officers' Leave Bureau, France—a position for which he was awarded a Distinguished Service Medal.

At the end of the war, Colonel Groome was assigned to the American Relief Administration, which provided food and medical supplies to the Baltic countries. Groome and his men distributed 53,554 tons of food and 4,179 tons of clothing and medical supplies.<sup>12</sup>

Groome set sail for home in October 1919. Two months later, he returned to his position with the Pennsylvania State Police. He retired from that agency in 1920.

But Groome was again called into service for the state of Pennsylvania in 1923—this time as warden, Eastern State Penitentiary. He remained in this position until 1928, when he became involved in a land-speculating operation—the Spanish River Land Company, Boca Raton, Florida.

However, Groome's health began to fail in 1930; and in April of that year, he died of prostate cancer at the age of 68. His funeral service was conducted at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, with burial in Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia. His funeral escort was provided by the FTPCC and a contingent of the Pennsylvania State Police.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>*Report of the Provost Marshal General, April 15, 1919*, Government Printing Office, 1942.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Patrick V. Garland, *A Forgotten Soldier: The Life and Times of Major General Harry Hill Bandholtz*, Infinity Publishing Co., 2009, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>Philip M. Conti, *The Pennsylvania State Police: A History of Service to the Commonwealth, 1905 to the Present*, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1977.

<sup>5</sup>Harry G. Toland, *Gentleman Trooper: How John C. Groome Shaped America's First State Police Force*, Heritage Books, Inc., 2007.

<sup>6</sup>Patrick McSherry, "A Brief History of the 'First Troop, Philadelphia City Cavalry' Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry," *The Spanish-American War Centennial Website*, <<http://www.panamwar.com/FirstTroopPACav.htm>>, accessed on 29 November 2010.

<sup>7</sup>Toland, 2007.

<sup>8</sup>Conti, 1977.

<sup>9</sup>John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the First World War*, Volume II, Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York, 1931.

<sup>10</sup>*Report of the Provost Marshal General, April 15, 1919*, 1942.

<sup>11</sup>Toland, 2007.

<sup>12</sup>Toland, 2007.

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*Master Sergeant Garland retired from the U.S. Army in 1974. During his military career, he served in military police units and criminal investigation detachments and laboratories. At the time of his retirement, Master Sergeant Garland was serving as a ballistics evidence specialist at the European Laboratory. He remained in this career field until retiring from civilian law enforcement in 1995.*