

Alden Partridge

- Born 12 February 1785
- 14 December 1805: appointed a cadet in the Army and sent to West Point
- 30 October 1806: graduated West Point as a 1st Lt.
- 1806-1813: Assistant Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- Apr 1813-Sep 1813: Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Department, USMA
- 1813-1816: Professor of Civil and Military Engineering, USMA
- 1814-1817: Acting Superintendent of USMA
- 1818: forced to resign from the Army
- 1819: established the "American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy" at Norwich, Vermont
- 1833, 1834, 1837, 1839: elected to Vermont Legislature
- Died 17 January 1854, age 68

Alden Partridge was born in Norwich, Vermont on 12 February 1785. He entered Dartmouth College in 1802, but failed to graduate due to his admission to West Point in December 1805. On 30 October 1806, Partridge graduated from USMA and was commissioned a First Lieutenant in the Engineers (another such was Charles Walker Raymond (#2047, first in class of 1865; Appointed 1st Lt, skipping 2nd; OB AR 13, DAB; Asst Prof USMA 71-78)).

Lieutenant and ultimately Captain Partridge was stationed at West Point for his entire Army career. He was initially assigned as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics. He held this position until April 1813. "As an educator, Captain Partridge was far in advance of his time, and introduced many novel ideas in educational methods." In April 1813, Captain Partridge was elevated to the position of Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Mathematics Department. His tenure in this position was short lived as he was selected to be a Professor of Engineering in September 1813. From September 1813 until December 1816 he was the Head of the Engineering Department as well as Acting Superintendent in the absence of the Superintendent. Unfortunately, his administration of this prestigious position was lax and unsatisfactory. Major Sylvanus Thayer was selected to become the new Superintendent, to the dismay of Captain Partridge. Captain Partridge refused to relinquish the command and was subsequently tried by court martial on numerous charges of neglect of duty and insubordination. In November 1817, he was sentenced to be cashiered. The President of the United States intervened and the punishment was remitted. Captain Partridge resigned from the Army in April 1818.

Upon his resignation, Partridge became engaged on the survey of the northeastern boundary of the United States. While an instructor at USMA, Partridge became engrossed with a vision of his. Much of his free time was occupied with his development of a plan for military and technical education. It was his premise that "a large standing army was a menace to the country and urged rather that the nation should train a large 'citizen soldiery' in the art of war." In September 1820, Partridge opened the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy at Norwich, Vermont. This was the first purely technical and military school for the training of citizen soldiery in the world. It had an initial enrollment of one hundred cadets. His academy developed a reputation for having an excellent academic program embodied in a tough, disciplined military

environment. Partridge "was one of the few military engineers who by virtue of his remarkable mathematical ability, long service at West Point, and practical field work was competent to train engineers and in laying a foundation for engineering work of his students he gave a course in mathematics equal, if not superior, to that offered by any other institution in America."

It was thought by some that Partridge's views on military defense were years ahead of his time. During the War of 1812, he had the opportunity to witness the appalling results of neglect of military training. As part of his plan of training the citizen soldiers, he founded the following military schools: Virginia Literary, Scientific and Military Academy at Portsmouth, Virginia (1839-1846), Pennsylvania Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy at Bristol, Pennsylvania (1842-1845), Pennsylvania Military Institute at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (1845-1848), Wilmington Literary, Scientific and Military Academy at Wilmington, Delaware (1846-1848), the Scientific and Military Collegiate Institute at Reading, Pennsylvania (1850-1854), Gymnasium and Military Institute at Pembroke, New Hampshire (1850-1853) and the National Scientific and Military Academy at Brandywine Springs, Delaware. Each of these schools was administered by former Norwich graduates as the institutions became endowed with high standards of scholarship. "Partridge may fairly be regarded as the founder of the system of military academies of elementary and secondary grade."

In addition to his educational work, Partridge was a renowned politician and author. He served as Surveyor-General of Vermont in 1822-1823, and served in the Vermont legislature in 1833, 1834, 1837 and 1839. Three times he was an unsuccessful candidate for Congress. He was one of the most prolific military writers of his day. He lectured on military science and historical and scientific subjects in most of the large cities of the United States.

Publications:

"Observations Relative to the Calculation of the Altitude of Mountains, etc, by the Use of the Barometer" (1812)

"Method of Determining the Initial Velocity of Projectiles" (1812)

"Account of Some Experiments on Fire of Artillery and Infantry at the Military Academy in 1810 and 1814"

"Newton's Binomial Theorem" (1814)

"Meteorological Tables" (1810-1814)

"A General Plan for the Establishment of Military Academies" (1815)

"Reports of the National Academy" (1814-1817)

"Lectures on National Defense" (1821-1827)

References:

Anonymous, "Partridge, Alden," *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Volume XVIII, pages 322-323. USMA Library: REFERENCE COLL-FL 1, [E176 .N27](#) .

Cullum, George W., Biographical register of the officers and graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., from its establishment, in 1802, to 1890 [microform] : With The early history of the United States Military Academy, Boston : Houghton, Mifflin, 1891, 3d ed., rev. and extended. The entry on Partridge is in Volume I, pages 69-70.

Spaulding, Thomas M., "Partridge, Alden," *Dictionary of American Biography*, Volume VII (Mills to Platner), pages 281-282. USMA Library: REFERENCE COLL-FL 1, [E176 .D563](#). In the USMA copy there are two paginations in this volume; the cited article is in the second, Volume VII Part II (Oglethorpe - Platner).

Errors corrected in the references, January 31, 2002 by V. Frederick Rickey. The original was written about 1989 by a team of Mathematics Faculty at USMA.
