THE DEMISE OF USMAs ENGINEER DETACHMENT AS TRAINERS OF THE CORPS:

A Result of a Victory of Athens Over Sparta at The United States Military Academy

LD 720
The American Military Experience
and the
United States Military Academy

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Tactical Officer Education Program

The Army Corps of Engineers shares a long and closely related history with the United States Military Academy. Both were founded on 16 March 1802. A bill passed by Congress in January of that year established the United States Military Academy. It read: "The said Corps when so organized shall be established at West Point, and shall constitute a Military Academy." Further, it also stated that the senior engineer officer present should be Superintendent of the Academy.[1] It is evident that, from its very inception, engineers and engineering instruction were critical and fundamental to the Military Academy and that the inception of the Corps of Engineers and the United States Military Academy were inextricably linked.

However, in addition to the classroom instruction on engineering topics and disciplines that cadets received from various Academy professors, enlisted engineer soldiers and officers who were assigned to duty at West Point provided instruction and training to cadets on practical engineering tasks and other military related skills. The history of enlisted engineers at West Point dates as far back as 1778, when its fortifications were begun as a defensive measure against the British during the Revolutionary War. For nearly its entire history, West Point has had a serving engineer unit assigned to the post. These troops have performed routine garrison duty as clerks, laborers, guards, and drivers, and in times of crisis were called away from West Point in defense of the nation. However, in terms of their significance at West Point, their most crucial role was that of providing technical and tactical instruction to cadets, and this idea of using West Point's garrison troops for cadet training quickly became an important part of the overall instruction provided to cadets at the Academy. Eventually however, this

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[1] United States Military Academy. *Records Pertaining to the Enlisted Troops at West Point, 1809-1941*. USMA Archives, West Point, NY, p.1-2.

practice greatly decreased in significance. Today in fact, the engineers and other garrison troops assigned at West Point have almost no interaction with the Corps of Cadets whatsoever.

A major change in the curriculum at the Academy in 1959, which resulted in decreased emphasis on military tactical instruction in favor of academic subjects, was the major cause of the eventual cessation of the role of West Point's Engineer Detachment of providing dedicated training and practical military instruction to the Corps of Cadets. A review of the history of the detachment clearly depicts the critical nature of the instruction, training, and support that it provided to the Corps. It describes how this role evolved, what it consisted of at its peak, and how it then changed and finally stopped altogether, suffering from an eventual death by attrition, predominantly as a result of a larger, critical debate at the Academy as to how much military training should occur during the academic year. The result of this debate in 1959 was a triumph of "Athens" over "Sparta," and it victimized the Engineer Detachment and other West Point garrison units, leading to the eventual demise of their training mission with the Corps of Cadets.

Although there is no pure lineage from the first engineer units assigned to West Point with the current platoon that is stationed here today, the history of the engineer units at West Point is nonetheless significant and unique. Joseph G. Totten, a member of the USMA class of 1805, served as the Army's Chief of Engineers from 1838-1864. Shortly after assuming his post he began a campaign to improve professional training at West Point. His goal was to amass the personnel and resources to form a company of enlisted engineers to be stationed at West Point, where it would present instruction in

practical military engineering.[2] At the conclusion of the Mexican War, Totten's plan became reality, and the instruction of cadets got underway. An act of Congress passed on 15 May 1846 authorized the organization of an engineer company at West Point in these words:

> That there be added to the Corps of Engineers one company of sappers, miners, and pontoniers, to be called engineer soldiers; which company shall be composed of ten sergeants, or master workman, ten corporals, or overseers, two musicians, thirty-nine privates of the first class, or artificers, and thirty-nine privates of the second class, or laborers, in all, one hundred men. That said engineer company shall be attached to and compose a part of the Corps of Engineers, and be officered by officers of that corps, as at Present organized; they shall be instructed in and perform all the duties of sappers, miners, and pontoniers, and shall aid in giving practical instruction in these branches at the Military Academy.[3]

Although the Mexican War delayed the onset of cadet instruction, since this time there has always been an engineer company or detachment assigned to West Point, though on several occasions members of the unit were called away from the Academy in defense of the nation. In the Mexican War, for instance, the company served with distinction under the command of Captain Alexander J. Swift, gaining valuable experience on its way through Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, Contreras, Molino Del Ray, and Chapultapec to the city of Mexico.[4] Of note during this time period, was that, back closer to the home front, the baseline standard for instruction during the academic year at West Point was that it was restricted to academic subjects except for necessary tactical drills. This was primarily the result of the influence of the Thayer System on the Academy. In

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[2] Morrison, James L., Jr. "The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866. The Kent State University Press, 1986, p.34-36.

[3] Foreman, Sidney. The 1802d Special Regiment: An Illustrated Account of the Enlisted Personnel at the United States Military Academy, 2nd Ed. West Point, NY, 1951, p.19-20.

[4] McDonald, Archie. *West Point and the Engineers.* Military Engineer, (May-June 1965), p 18-19.

the early days of West Point, it was clear that the study of academics, along with a strict emphasis on discipline, was most important. Moreover, instruction in military tactics was not included during the academic year until after the Mexican War.[5] The debate between how much military training should occur during the academic year, however, was to become a recurrent and lasting theme in the history of the Academy. This debate would eventually affect USMAs garrison of engineers.

From 1853 through 1902, the Engineer Company departed West Point to undertake other duties or missions on several occasions. Examples are in the surveying of the Northern Pacific Railway in 1853, and performing the duties of pioneers (cutting roads, building bridges, etc.) with the Utah Expedition in 1858. Then on 6 August 1861, Secretary of War orders redesignated the unit as Company "A" when three additional companies were formed. During the Civil War, Company A served with the "Battalion of Engineer Troops," taking part in the Siege of Yorktown, as well as the battles of Fair Oaks, Mechanicsville, and the Wilderness, returning to West Point in June, 1865.[6] In September, 1867, Army orders prescribed the transfer of the company to Willets Point, New York, leaving only a detachment behind, which was absorbed by Company "E" upon its arrival in 1871. The majority of this company too, was eventually ordered away from West Point, serving in Cuba in 1898 and in the Philippines in 1900. During this period, instruction by West Point's Engineer Detachment necessarily declined because of the country's need for skilled engineer soldiers elsewhere around the country and the

[5] Davidson, Garrison H, LTG, to Commandant of Cadets, 11 June, 1959. Memorandum Reference Review of Cadet Instruction by Tactical Department. United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, NY.

[6] McElheny, John D. to Commanding Officer, 1802d Special Regiment, 23 September 1947. Memorandum on the History of the Engineer Detachment. United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, NY.

world. However, the frequent absence of the majority of the unit did not halt its instruction of cadets completely. The members of the detachment that remained at West Point during this time were effectively "rolled in" to the department of Practical Military Engineering, where they assisted in various aspects of cadet instruction. It was at this point that a somewhat formal and permanent arrangement of instruction of members of the Corps of Cadets by these engineer soldiers began.

Along with academic instruction on engineering related topics received from Academy professors, cadets also received instruction from West Points' own troops and units on practical, hands-on engineering tasks and other military related soldiering skills. The particular type of training was generally geared towards enabling the cadets to meet the requirements and missions of the Army and the nation during that specific time period. During the early 1900s, the duties of the engineer detachment at West Point included instruction of the cadets in field fortification, field engineering, surveying and reconnaissance on foot and mounted, signaling, and the construction and operation of lines of communication.[7] Training conducted by the Detachment of Engineers was not just engineer specific, oftentimes dealing with common soldier tasks, field craft skills, and various other events.

Along with providing instruction to members of the Corps of Cadets on their own, Engineer Detachment soldiers also assisted certain academic departments with cadet instruction in military engineering tasks as well. The Department of Practical Military Engineering formed in August 1842 and was responsible for instruction in surveying and practical or field exercises in military engineering. Utilizing personnel from the

[7] Foreman, Sidney. The 1802d Special Regiment: An Illustrated Account of the Enlisted Personnel at the United States Military Academy, 2nd Ed. West Point, NY, 1951, p.22.

detachment and other garrison units stationed at West Point, the department instructed cadets in the construction of pontoon bridges, fascines, trenches, palisades, revetments, gunpits and platforms, and in the use of barbed wire and explosives. The department also gave instruction in signal communications, telegraphy, and reconnaissance techniques. Initially, the department trained only members of the First Class. In time, however, training extended to include all four classes.[8] An extract from the report of the officer in charge of a surveying class in 1902 describes the practical, hands on nature of the training, which suggested the benefit derived from the instruction provided by experienced engineer soldiers:

> Instruction was entirely practical and at no time were cadets requested or advised to do any reading. As theoretical instruction in the department of mathematics had been dropped, the class was entirely ignorant of the subject at the outset, and short lectures were given daily at first, explaining the construction, adjustments, and use of the instruments. Immediately after the lectures the instruments were placed in the hands of cadets and definite problems assigned, which each man was required to perform himself. Lectures were dispensed as soon as the fundamental principles were understood, and the cadets were at once divided up into squads and given definite tasks with the instruments.[9]

The department was nearly always under-staffed with officers and trainers, so the assistance of West Point's garrison soldiers became a requirement. The addition of the enlisted engineer stay-back personnel to the department during the numerous Civil war and post war related deployments of the Engineer Company assisted greatly in the overall instructional effort. Yet oftentimes, the necessities of deploying and transferring troops to and from West Point significantly interfered with cadet instruction.[10]

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[8] United States Military Academy. *The Centennial of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. 1802-1902.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

In 1922, however, a War Department Board of Officers study of the Army school system recommended the transferring and dividing of the functions of the Department of Practical Military Engineering to the Department of Tactics and the Department of Civil and Military Engineering. The Academy then adopted that recommendation, rendering the Department of Practical Military Engineering inactive; as a result, the Academy then abolished the department on 1 January 1923.[11] The reason given for these transfers was administrative ease and an effort to consolidate the teaching of allied subjects.[12] In reference to these changes, the Superintendent's Curriculum study, a "Report of the Working Committee on the Historical Aspects of the Curriculum for the Period 1802-1945" stated:

> In retrospect, these changes appear to have complicated the problem. Members of the Department of Tactics were now saddled with a course of instruction of a somewhat academic nature and found it difficult to teach the material. This is the first instance, of record, of an internal change at the Military Academy accomplished on the basis of the recommendations of an outside board. This one seems to have been ill advised.[13]

At that time, the practice of the training of cadets by USMA's own engineers and other similarly garrisoned units had still not reached its peak. However, (and almost certainly not realized at the time) abolishing the Department of Practical Military Engineering served as perhaps an initial foreboding of events to come in the future: the gradual degradation and eventual elimination of those soldiers and units as trainers of cadets at West Point. Ironically, abolishing of the Department of Practical Military

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[11] United States Military Academy. *U.S.M.A. Staff Records, No. 34.* USMA Archives, West Point NY, 1923, p.149, p.202-203.

[12] United States Military Academy. *Superintendent's Curriculum Study: Report of the Working Committee on the Historical Aspects of the Curriculum for the Period 1802-1945.* New York: USMA Printing Office, 1958, p.93.

Engineering was a part of an approved proposal by Brigadier General Merch Bradt Stewart, the USMA Commandant of Cadets at the time, for a new course of instruction within the Corps. Stewart successfully argued for increased military instruction during the academic year. Among the remarks and comments he made in a memorandum to the Superintendent are the following:

> Summarized, I should say that the arrangement of effort in this [USCC] department for the period of the academic year is about as complicated as it could well be. Moreover, in every effort to simplify it, I find myself involved in complications whose ramifications extend beyond my jurisdiction and control. This condition will continue as long as the allotment of time to this department is interlocked with that of the academic departments. It is the practice to allot to the Department of Tactics [the engineer detachment is eventually absorbed into this department in 1954] such hours of the academic day as are not desired by any of the academic departments, and work of this department, as well as recreation periods, have to be fitted into the remnants of this allotted time.
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> While never satisfactory, this arrangement has not been serious in the past for the reason that military instruction at the Academy, until recently, has been regarded as of secondary importance. However this situation no longer obtains. The mission of the Military Academy has lately been enunciated by the War Department in definite terms, which if complied with, will require not only a considerable readjustment of time and employment, but of attitude as well. In the future, the quality of the graduate will be judged by his ability to instruct and lead a platoon of his branch.
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> Since the training in the Department of Tactics is that by which the graduate's efficiency will primarily be judged, it follows that it should receive at least equal consideration with that of any other department. It is imperative that we now study the requirements of our market, shape our product accordingly, or suffer the consequences.[14]

In the ongoing struggle of Athens versus Sparta, the military training proponents had secured a victory in the debate over the amount of training conducted both during the academic year and overall and represented a major change to the established baseline of military training provided to cadets. Thus began a period of increased emphasis on

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[13] Ibid.

[14] USMA Staff Records, No 35, 1923. United States Military Academy Archives.

military instruction and training of cadets at West Point. The fact that the time frame of this change roughly coincided with that of World War I only aided the Commandant's cause. Aside from his argument for more training time, the fact was that the actual content and type of instruction in military tactics and engineering generally fluctuated with the times, reaching peaks during and immediately following wars and tapering off as these wars receded into the past.[15] The peak of training of cadets by West Point's engineers and other garrison soldiers reached its pinnacle in parallel fashion, with a substantial increase and subsequent decline during and just after World War I, and an even greater increase during the onset of World War II.

During World War I the training in field engineering was materially increased and many new features were introduced from the experience of the Army in Europe. During the years of peace following the war, the detachment continued the instruction of cadets while contributing to the improvement of the post by working on construction projects such as Howze Field, an enlisted man's swimming pool, and an Air Corps hangar.[16] Those and other similar post improvement projects were always a secondary mission of the West Point engineers.

With the onset of World War II, the military instruction of cadets increased dramatically yet again. The Engineer Detachment itself necessarily increased in size and also gave considerable "branch instruction" to those cadets who had selected the Corps of Engineers as their branch. After the war, the summer instruction of the Third Class took

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[15] Davidson, Garrison H, LTG, to Commandant of Cadets, 11 June, 1959. Memorandum Reference Review of Cadet Instruction by Tactical Department. United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, NY.

[16] Foreman, Sidney. *The 1802d Special Regiment: An Illustrated Account of the Enlisted Personnel at the United States Military Academy, 2nd Ed.* West Point, NY, 1951, p.23.

place at or near Camp Buckner. The engineer detachment provided instruction to cadets on such subjects as the M2 Treadway Bridge, the 1938 Footbridge, the M4 aluminum pontoon bridge, assault boats, infantry support rafts, mine warfare, booby traps, road layout and construction, airfield construction, and the management, maintenance, and operation of bulldozers, graders, and power-shovels.[17] This immense level of training provided to cadets by West Point's Engineer Detachment, conducted both during the academic year and during the summer months represented the height of such training by garrison soldiers. The significance of this training role was summed up quite well in this excerpt from a memorandum in 1947 from the commander of the engineer detachment, Lieutenant Colonel John D. McElheny, to the commander of the 1802d Special Regiment USMA on the history of the Engineer Detachment:

> The Combat Engineer Detachment, which traces its lineage and tradition back for more than a century, now instructs cadets by using complex engineer machines and processes undreamed of by "the old company." The detachment has been preparing the cadets of West Point for the job of defending the country.... The record of West Pointers and the Engineers in the two world wars is proof of a job well done. A portion of the credit rightly goes to the officers and men of the Engineer Detachment who helped train the cadets of the past, and look forward to the task of training future military leaders with an enthusiastic "Essayons.[18]

As enthusiastic as McElheny and his soldiers were about their mission, the few years that followed witnessed a gradual slow-down in the role of training and instruction provided to members of the Corps of Cadets by West Point's garrison units. In 1954, USMA's Department of Tactics absorbed the Detachment of Engineers as a section, and it existed there along with the sections of infantry, armor, artillery, and signal in what was

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[17] Ibid.

[18] McElheny, John D. to Commanding Officer, 1802d Special Regiment, 23 September 1947. Memorandum on the History of the Engineer Detachment. United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, NY.

called the Combat Arms Detachment.[19] Slowly the Department of Tactics became less and less involved with military training and instruction, particularly by enlisted members of the department. On 15 May 1956, a reorganization of units occurred. From this, the 1st Regimental Combat Team (1st Battle Group) was formed, and the orders further assigned West Point's garrison units to that command, including a headquarters section, the Combat Arms Detachment, Military Police, Cadet Mess, Preparatory School, and Airborne Detachment.[20] The 1st Battle Group's missions were to assist in the practical military training and instruction of the Corps of Cadets, provide military assistance required for the operation of the installation, Garrison West Point, and to conduct a continuous training program for enlisted personnel to maintain their proficiency.[21] It was at this point that the Tactics Department began to team with the 1st Battle Group in order to provide training to the Corps of Cadets.

Overall however, the amount of academic year tactical training continued to decline slowly. A review of the Annual Report of the Superintendent from 1956 through 1958 provides for an interesting comparison of the amount of military instruction provided to cadets by the Department of Tactics and the 1st Battle Group. It shows a marked decrease in the level of training conducted by class each year (eventually, in 1960, the heading "training" ceases to even exist as a category under the Department of Tactics column).[22]

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[19] United States Military Academy. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*. New York: USMA Printing Office, 1955, p.47.

[20] United States Military Academy. General Orders Number 4, Reorganization of Units, 14 May 1956. USMA Archives, West Point, NY.

[21] United States Military Academy. *Report of the Tactics Curriculum Study.* New York: USMA Printing Office, 1959, p.B-2.

[22] United States Military Academy. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*. New York: USMA Printing Office, 1960, p.73.

Several reasons exist for the significant decline in military training and instruction provided to cadets. Of immediate and obvious significance was the fact that this time period represented a definite valley in terms of the established pattern of training buildup and draw down in conjunction with conflicts in which the United States was involved. World War II and the Korean War had long since ended by 1959, and the country was yet to become heavily involved in Vietnam. However, the most significant reason by far came about as the result of the re-emergence at the Academy of the debate how much military training should occur during the academic year- the Athens versus Sparta debate. USMA Superintendent Garrison H. Davidson was a strong proponent of academic reform geared towards, among other things, a vast reduction in the amount and magnitude of military training overall, as well as the shifting of additional training to the summer months. In a memorandum to the Commandant of Cadets, Brigadier General John L. Throckmorton, Davidson, while directing a review of the entire program of instruction in the field of Military Science conducted by the Tactical Department, made his views on the subject succinctly evident:

> At the present time, the balance between the military and the academic portions of our curriculum is too heavily weighted in the direction of the former (45.5% / 54.5%). Particularly this is true when the future is going to require a much better educated officer and every minute must be extracted for scholarly pursuits from the time available during the academic year. It is desired that you review the entire program of instruction in the field of Military Science conducted by the Tactical Department with a view toward:
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> a. Reducing the vocational training during the academic year to a minimum.
> b. Reducing the training toward "individual proficiency in the technical duties of junior officers of the various arms" to the minimum essential to provide an adequate base for "gradual development, the responsibility for which devolves upon the

> graduates themselves and upon the commands and schools to which they are assigned after being commissioned.[23]

The academic reform effort initiated by General Garrison was far reaching. He had initiated an extended era of curriculum consideration and revision. Never since Thayer had a Superintendent's efforts at academic reform produced such an enduring impact.[24] Though almost certainly unintended from the outset, one result of this effort would be a lasting and negative impact on the engineer detachment and all other garrison units in their role as cadet trainers.

In response to the Superintendent's request, the Commandant formed a Tactics Curriculum Study Committee. In its analysis of the entire program of Military Science instruction, the committee concluded that in was necessary to overhaul the curriculum and to establish an office of Military Science within the Department of Tactics.[25] This was a major step towards relieving NCOs and soldiers from the 1st Battle Group of their cadet training mission. The majority of the burden of military instruction would now fall on the Tactical Department, specifically the Company Tactical Officer, in a shift at the Academy toward utilizing officers as trainers. An excerpt from the Curriculum Review stated:

> Time available for professional subjects during the academic year will be reduced to a considerable degree. The Department of Tactics will be required to absorb instruction presented by other departments. The [new] program, through better organization and correlation, is considered to be a better program than that presented in the past. The graduate will be better qualified for further military education and professional development.

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[23] Davidson, Garrison H, LTG, to Commandant of Cadets, 11 June, 1959. Memorandum Reference Review of Cadet Instruction by Tactical Department. United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, NY.

[24] Crackel, Theodore J. *The Illustrated History of West Point.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990, p.213.

[25] United States Military Academy. *Report of the Tactics Curriculum Study.* New York: USMA Printing Office, 1959, p.3.

> However, he will not be as well qualified as now in specific techniques of any of the combat arms branches.[26]

This plan effectively moved most, if not all, instruction into a classroom type environment, all but divorced the enlisted soldiers of the Battle Group from the Corps of Cadets, and transferred several of its officers to the Department of Military Science so that they could assist with instruction. As for the remainder of the officers of 1st Battle Group, the review committee proposed:

> These officers would remain responsible for the proper training of the men of the Combat Arms Sections, and the security and maintenance of the equipment. Additionally, they could be called on periodically to be instructors under the Director of Military Science as required.

No mention was made to the mission of the remainder of the 1st Battle Group, other than to provide periodic instruction as needed, and to continue with their mission of maintaining the post. Some respondents to the committee proposal recommended a reorganization of the Battle Group's enlisted strength to compensate for the fact that the requirement for enlisted instructors would be greatly diminished. Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Cameron, commander of the 1st Battle Group, reviewed the report of the Tactics Curriculum Study Committee and offered the following opinion in a memorandum:

> I would greatly regret the adoption of any procedure that would eliminate the present responsibility vested in this organization for the planning, writing, and the presentation of tactical instruction to the Corps of Cadets. This activity represents the most satisfying duty performed by this command. Personnel of all ranks take a justifiable pride in the production and execution of superior instruction so as to contribute materially to the USMA program and the development of the Corps of Cadets. The loss of the mission type responsibility for certain training as presently placed upon the 1st Battle

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[26] Ibid.

> Group, 1st Infantry, by the Commandant of Cadets, would I am certain, be most detrimental to the present high morale of this organization.[27]

The subsequent approval of the curriculum change proposal signified a victory of Athens over Sparta, and a defeat for USMAs Engineer Detachment. After that major blow, the detachment's involvement with the Corps of Cadets continued to wane gradually. It provided less and less instruction during summer training, and its presence during the academic year became virtually non-existent. Additionally, by this time, much of the upper-class cadets' summer training (seven weeks) was being spent at various Army or Air Force installations such as Fort Belvoir, Monmouth, Eustis, or Benning, Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), Maxwell AFB, or Norfolk Naval Base. At each station the cadets received an orientation on the roles and missions of that branch or service and the latest developments and trends in doctrine and employment.[28] This training, though important, replaced the previously given instruction by West Point's garrison units.

The eventual shift to utilizing outside agencies and Army organizations to assist with cadet training was both needed and of benefit to the Academy. The size of the Corps increased, the composition of the garrison units changed, and the missions and requirements of the Army became greatly diversified over time. The growing necessity to train cadets on military and soldiering skills other than engineer tasks became obvious. Additionally, as the nation's infrastructure grew, there was less of a need for a strict emphasis on engineer specific tasks.

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[27] Cameron, Robert C, LTC, to Assistant Commandant, USCC, 3 August, 1959. Memorandum in Response to Report of Tactics Curriculum Review Committee. United States Military Academy Archives, West Point, NY.

[28] United States Military Academy. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*. New York: USMA Printing Office, 1958, p.62.

However, USMA's shift in training methods was not problem free. The plan to have tactical officers present the majority of military training eventually withered, leaving a void that was slowly taken up by academics. West Point then conducted a study in the 1980s, called "Project Proteus," in order to examine the early career preparation, experiences, and commitment of USMA graduates. Data was gathered from recent graduates who were currently serving on active duty in the Army. Among other topics, the survey asked respondents to assess military leadership training at West Point.[29] Among the problems cited by respondents was that there was a need for training in the areas of supply, accountability, maintenance, specific branch training, additional duties; training that was considered to be "more useful" in terms of teaching the job of a platoon leader than that which they received.[30]

Other feedback from Project Proteus in the military training arena revolved around cadet interaction with enlisted soldiers, such as how to deal with soldiers and Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs), what to expect from them, and how to effectively deal with unmotivated soldiers or those with similar problems.[31] The problems associated with a lack of cadet interaction with enlisted soldiers has recently been echoed by several seniors personnel at USMA, such as the current Commandant of Cadets, and from feedback received from commanders of troops units in the Army. USMA's eventual response to the problem was to create the position of Tactical NCO, but this position does not adequately suffice, perhaps due to the NCO's positions and the cadets' perception of

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[29] United States Military Academy. *Project Proteus: Early Career Preparation, Experiences, and Commitment of Female and Male West Point Graduates, Volume II.* New York: USMA Printing Office, 1988.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

them as being more of an authority figure than an actual teacher, trainer, or coach. Finally, the Project Proteus study concluded that consideration should be granted to the comments of the graduates who responded, noting that strong thought should be given to changing the curriculum in order to improve the performance of junior officers, as well as improving satisfaction with the overall course of instruction.[32]

The removal of the Engineer Detachment however, as cadet trainers represented an unintended waste of a precious resource. Whether fit into an extremely tight schedule during academics or participating as a representative during summer training, this home grown unit could be an invaluable asset to both the corps of Cadets and the Academy. The benefits derived from increased cadet interaction with enlisted soldiers here on post would be invaluable. It would serve to fulfill the desires of the cadets (as suggested in Project Proteus) and would undoubtedly aid the enlisted soldiers as well, who feel generally outnumbered, isolated, and almost an afterthought here at West Point. Additionally, training provided by these soldiers would serve to assist them in maintaining proficiency in their MOS's, a task that is difficult at best for many here today. They possessed large amounts of engineer equipment that they maintain here on post, always available for numerous types of training, such as, hands-on instruction maintenance instruction, or perhaps even as an aid in a class on the proper conduct of change of responsible officer inventory. Additionally, many of the soldiers in the unit are experienced in their craft and can offer invaluable, year-round lessons, guidance, and advice to future lieutenants. They are available throughout the year, and perhaps even throughout a cadet's tenure at the Academy and can assist in the problem of a cadet developing a relationship with the ordinary soldier. Cadets today come into so little

[32] Ibid.

contact with enlisted soldiers, and it shows. Comments from the cadets themselves as well as feedback from various battalion commanders in the field express that cadets are "out of touch" with how to deal and to effectively interact with soldiers on a day to day basis.

Today, the USMA Engineer Detachment provides virtually no training to members of the Corps of Cadets. Further, there is nearly no interaction at all between the two organizations at all, except in encounters during various post support missions of the engineers. There is virtually no military training conducted during the academic year, and nearly all summer training is conducted by regular Army units, augmented by National Guard units and select USMA faculty members.

The significance of cadets receiving hands on training on military tasks was important in the early days of West Point and is critical today. While it is impossible for the small garrison of engineers and other West Point soldiers to be the sole trainers on military tasks for the entire Corps of Cadets, it is evident that they are both underutilized, and that cadets would benefit from increased interaction with these soldiers, as well as additional training on military tasks received from them. While acknowledging the difficulty of finding available time for the conduct of this training, the benefits far outweigh the potential cost. The engineer's role of post support at West Point may be important, but perhaps it should be performed by civilian personnel within the DHPW, as is done on nearly every other U.S. Army installation in the world. Utilizing this organization to prepare cadets to be commissioned officers in the Army is more critical and useful function. The soldiers of the USMA engineer platoon and of the other garrison units were unintended victims in USMA's debate over academics and type and

amount of military training – between Athens and Sparta. The result of their demise was that all of those involved lost. The soldiers of West Point's Engineer Detachment and other garrison units should play a more significant role in this critical cadet education process.

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