

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY
TACTICAL OFFICER EDUCATION PROGRAM

PREPARING FOR WAR?
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO CADET MILITARY TRAINING
AT THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY
1939-1943

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The summer of 1943 was a watershed period in the development of military instruction and training at the United States Military Academy. An American nation involved in a world at war demanded more divisions, more material, more men, and more West Point graduates to lead those men. One class graduated early in January, another in June of that year. The Class of June 1943 graduated in just three years and that summer marked the beginning of the newly approved three-year curriculum at West Point. 1943 was also the first year West Point graduated air cadets to serve in the Army Air Corps. That summer also marked the first year that cadets conducted summer combat training at the new Camp Popolopen training area. Not until West Point ended the anachronistic military training known as the summer encampment on the plain of old Fort Clinton did the Military Academy begin to focus the proper amount of military training on preparing its graduates for combat leadership. World War II was the catalyst needed for the United States Military Academy to adequately focus and resource the training of cadets in military subjects relevant to combat leadership on the modern battlefield.

The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 marked the beginning of the United States' declared involvement in World War II. Over the course of the next three and a half years, graduates of the United States Military Academy led the citizen-soldiers of the nation into mortal combat across the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific Ocean. How had West Point prepared these combat leaders for the rigors of battle? More specifically, what factors contributed to the delay in conducting proper military training of cadets for combat until the summer of 1943? To answer this question properly, one must first take a look at life in the United States in the late 1930s and how the nation, the Army, and the Military Academy existed in a world that was again on the brink of global war. Despite the fact that the nation focused inward on the effects of the economy during a prolonged depression, there was no excuse for a lack of planning and

preparedness for war in the future. The focus of this in-depth examination of military training at the United States Military Academy is on factors contributing to and detracting from appropriate military preparation of graduates during the years leading up to and including World War II.

Several key elements that influenced the environment at West Point and can be attributed to the successes and shortcomings of the military training program. First, the United States' view of world affairs in the late 1930s was essentially isolationist as the country focused inward on the depression. Second, the state of preparedness of the United States Army during the inter-war years was abysmal. Third, the attitudes of the Superintendents from 1922-1943 made a significant impact upon the emphasis of military training impressed upon the cadets. Fourth, the seemingly omnipotent influence of the Academic Board on all aspects of the academy continued to impact upon the allocation and use of the cadet's time. Fifth, the bureaucracy within an institution based on over 100 years of tradition influenced organizational inertia and blunted efforts toward change. And sixth, the resources available for military training programs at or near West Point had a significant impact upon the adequacy of the cadet's training.

America in the 1930's was a nation focused inward on its economic problems and employment. In the aftermath of the bloody Great War, most Americans had a more isolationist view of the world in which America should not become involved in the affairs of Europe again. This view was easily demonstrated by examining the impact of the Great Depression and Legislation passed during the late 1930s:

The retreat from an active world policy in the 1920s turned into a headlong flight back to isolationism in the 1930s. First, the Depression made foreign policy seem remote and unimportant to most Americans. Second, the danger of war abroad when it did finally penetrate the American consciousness, it served only to strengthen the desire to escape involvement.¹

¹ Robert A. Divine, *America: Past and Present* (Illinois: Glenview, 1984), 442.

These isolationist views were further enraged by the report of Senator Gerald Nye's committee on the "merchants-of-death" thesis aimed at the big businessmen who profited greatly from industrial mobilization of World War One. Of further significant impact were the three Neutrality Acts passes in 1935-37 that banned the sales of arms to other nations at war, and mandated that loans and all trade other than munitions be conducted on a cash and carry basis. While many Americans seemed isolationist, the President was trying to bring to light the possible negative ramifications of such a narrow worldview. "FDR's strongest public statement (against isolationism) came in Chicago in October 1937; he denounced the "epidemic of world lawlessness" and called for an international effort to 'quarantine' this disease."² This isolationist stance against which the President was warning had its impact upon the West Point of 1940 as well. According to Bill Yenne, author of Black '41, "You have to remember that the United States was very isolationist at that time...and there just was not a clamoring for educating cadets in the tactics and techniques of what was going on in Europe."³

While clashes between the isolationists and interventionists raged, President Roosevelt was slowly but surely asserting American power into the world's affairs. He expanded his idea of America as the "Arsenal for Democracy" through Lend-Lease programs and traded 50 destroyers to Britain for naval bases in the Caribbean. By the summer of 1941, the United States engaged in an undeclared naval war with German U-boats in the Atlantic Ocean. Roosevelt adeptly maneuvered between political rivals who represented both isolationist and interventionist tendencies until the Axis provided a reason for United States intervention. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor gave FDR the reason he needed to enter into declared

² Divine, 444.

³ Bill Yenne, *Black '41* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991) 42.

war. Roosevelt asked for and received a declaration of war from Congress on December 8, 1941. Germany and Italy followed by declaring war on the United States on December 11, 1941. America was embroiled in the global war whether its military was ready or not.

The Army of the 1930s was supposed to be guided by the National Defense Act of 1920 but was seriously hamstrung by a period of conflicting roles and paltry budgets. Despite the authorization of larger numbers of soldiers to man the Army and the National Guard, budget issues helped keep the Army at 130,000 and the National Guard totaling 180,000. The General Staff attempted to formulate a new organization for the future, but its plans for mobilization were a failure. In reality, all elements of the land forces entered the 1930s in a pitiable state of readiness.⁴

West Point, as the nation's military academy, was a reflection of society, and the Army. The general lack of concern for proper military preparedness for war and dwindling defense budgets produced an Army and a West Point more concerned with how to look good rather than how to win the next war. The US Army of the late 1930s was nowhere near the proficiency of that displayed by the battle-hardened Army of the mid 1940s. Said Yenne, "The army of 1938 thought of itself (not officially, of course) as a 'garrison army.' The USMA, too, was long on spit and polish and short on practicality."⁵ The generally isolationist view of the world by America as a whole, coupled with a limited Army fueled by tiny defense budgets, can help explain the framework for military training at the United States Military Academy in the late 1930s. COL(R) James T. Schwenk, a West Point cadet from 1936-1939, remarked that "there was not a great emphasis on military training at the time. We conducted our summer encampment on the plain of Clinton Field and did assembly and disassembly of 1903 Springfield

⁴ Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, (New York: Free Press), 1994, 396.

⁵ Yenne, 38.

rifles in the basement of the barracks, but the military training was pretty much 'catch as catch can'. Much of this training was limited by the increase in cadets and the poor training facilities at West Point at that time."⁶

In his 1915 treatise entitled "West Point in Our Next War" Brevet Brigadier General Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull⁷ wrote that "A nation unprepared for war must bow its head to the storm and offer its neck for the yoke of conquest."⁸ Woodhull's thesis was that no matter how good a cadet may be trained to be a junior officer, he is no good to the Army in wartime if that cadet is not a soldier in the purest term. This lack of soldierliness would result in ultimate failure on the future battlefield.⁹

The main question facing any institutional leader of the United States Military Academy in regard to military training was whether the graduate of West Point should be completely ready to fulfill all duties and responsibilities of a lieutenant of that branch upon reporting for duty. The Academic Board and part of the Army at large felt that the academy should maintain focus on a broad combination of basic skills and technical education as the groundwork for future professional training. The War Department came down on the side of the academic board at that time.¹⁰

Due to the expansion of the Corps of Cadets, new training techniques, and the improvement in range and effects of modern weapons, the physical expansion of West Point were required. An Act of Congress nearly doubled the strength of the Corps on May 4, 1916. This increase again emphasized the need for more training land and resources to train the cadets.

⁶ Interview with COL (R) James T. Schwenk. USMA, 1939. October, 2000.

⁷ Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull served in the Army as a Lieutenant Colonel and Assistant Adjutant-General of the 15th Army Corps and Army of the Tennessee during the American Civil War and became a Brevet Brigadier General in the United States Volunteers

⁸ Maxwell Van Zandt Woodhull. *West Point in Our Next War* (New York: 1915), 102.

⁹ Woodhull, 94.

¹⁰ Sidney Forman, *West Point* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 197.

Therefore, steps were taken to purchase additional land for the West Point Reservation. "An act of Congress, approved March 3, 1931, authorized the acquisition of the necessary land, but it was not until May 15, 1936, that Congress made available a first appropriation in the sum of \$431,000 to implement the authorization. That was augmented in succeeding years and by 1944 the post encompassed more than 15,000 acres."¹¹ During the 1930s, War Mobilization Planning at USMA consisted of considering the graduation of the First Class early, not decreasing the four-year curriculum, and assigning branches early in the First Class Cadet Year in order to allow additional branch specific training.¹² As a result of this planning, the two issues of graduating the First Class early and early branch assignment seemed relatively easily accomplished during the war. However, the question of curriculum reduction met great resistance by the Academic Board and took Presidential and War Department pressure to finally arrive at the three-year curriculum.

The military training for cadets at West Point went through a great evolution prior to the eve of World War II. For several decades following the Civil War, the mainstay of summer military training for the cadet was the one-week practice march. This field exercise was to be conducted under service conditions by members of all three classes except the furlough class, which was the rising Second Class. By 1905, in addition to this summer training, the First Class cadets would visit Fort Totten in New York City to receive training on fortifications, and anti-submarine warfare. Training in minor tactical problems consisted of Infantry, Cavalry, and Artillery employment and took place on the Plain or in the vicinity of West Point proper. However, much of the training focused on movement of large numbers of men and horses, how

¹¹ Forman, 201.

¹² Theodore J. Crackel, *The Illustrated History of West Point*, (New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, 1991), 234.

to set up and run a military campsite, and conducting military drawing for reconnaissance and reporting purposes.¹³

By 1916, the Commandant of Cadets, LTC M. F. Smith, remarked that “the training during summer is satisfactory... but there is a need to encamp off post... away from social and other distractions.”¹⁴ After the increase of the Corps of Cadets in 1917, there were inadequate facilities and horses for training. This would not last long however, with the graduation of three cadet classes in quick succession: one in June of 1918 and two in November of that same year. This rushed approach to providing more commissioned officers for the American Expeditionary Force caused severe problems for the Academy, especially in regard to the fate of the most recent graduates when the war ended in November 1918. The failure of the War Department and West Point in taking a more measured approach to preparing classes for the war effort in 1918 certainly made its impact on the administrations of the Army and the Academy in 1940-43. This impact was evidenced in the efforts of Superintendents Brigadier General Douglas A. MacArthur and Major General Robert L. Eichelberger in 1920 and 1940 respectively.

In June 1920, newly arrived Superintendent Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur, USMA 1903, wrote “with the termination of the World’s War the mission of West Point at once became the preparation of officer personnel for the next possible future war.”¹⁵ MacArthur wanted to take his experience with the AEF during the Great War and turn it into better training for the cadets who would be ready to take on the rigors of modern combat. When asked about his military training as a cadet at West Point, Bill Hoge, USMA 1941, remarked that “I was

¹³ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1906, 2.

¹⁴ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1916, 17.

¹⁵ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1920, 3.

somewhat disappointed in the Academy...I think I had too many glorified ideas about the corps of cadets. I suppose my views were rather similar to those of General MacArthur when he was appointed superintendent. I have read that he used to ask his Chief of Staff. 'Chief, when are we going to quit preparing for the War of 1812?'¹⁶ While West Point was not preparing cadets to fight the War of 1812, the natural tendency of a nation was to train for the war just fought instead of attempting to ascertain the conditions of the next war and how best to train for it.

MacArthur specifically wanted to abolish the "ludicrous caricature of life in the field" know as the Fort Clinton summer encampment, and expose the cadets to life in an actual field unit at an active Army post. The trouble with the summer encampment at Fort Clinton was that it did not mirror field conditions whatsoever. Simply erecting a tent city and conducting close-order drill and manual of arms does not constitute realistic military combat training. The cadets at the summer camps were more concerned with which ladies would be visiting during the summer social season rather than focusing on their trade as soldiers. MacArthur immediately instituted a summer training trip to Fort Dix, New Jersey, with impressive results.¹⁷ In his Annual Report as Superintendent in 1921, MacArthur wrote "the experience of giving the summer training of the upper classes at a large Army cantonment has resulted signally in superior training and a greater breadth of outlook for the Corps."¹⁸ The Commanding General of Fort Dix remarked positively on the effectiveness of training cadets within the context of an organized Army Division.

However, this success was short-lived as Superintendent Sladen immediately returned to the archaic summer encampment on the Plain in 1922, thus initiating a delay in the true

¹⁶ Yenne, 38.

¹⁷ Crackel, 234.

¹⁸ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1921, 13.

improvement of military training of cadets for the next twenty years. The War Department finally decided on the return to the summer encampment at West Point in an effort to cut costs by not deploying three classes of cadets to Fort Dix, New Jersey, which was undergoing major organizational changes to its tactical units that year.

Although the main summer encampment would remain on the Fort Clinton Plain, several iterations of off-post forays by the First Class Cadets exemplified the period of 1925-1939. In 1923-25, the First Class cadets, in addition to the summer encampment training, traveled to Fort Wright, New York, to conduct Coastal Artillery training so they could fire actual service rounds which was prevented at West Point proper due to range and safety considerations. These cadets also traveled to Mitchell Field on Long Island for Air Service Instruction prior to returning to West Point for their final academic year.¹⁹ Air Service indoctrination included an average of four hours of flight time for each cadet as well as several practical courses in the history of the Air Service, navigation, maintenance, armament, communications, and photography.²⁰ From 1925 through 1940, there was evidence in several writings by the Commandant and Superintendent as to the necessity of stationing a permanent infantry detachment at West Point to assist in the demonstration and training of basic infantry tactics for cadets. The impetus for this request was the need for expert infantry soldiers to assist in demonstrating and training the tactics, techniques, and procedures of infantry maneuvers. Without such a detachment, the Tactical Department and Cadet Cadre were overwhelmed by the volume of cadets and the quality of the instruction suffered.

By 1930, a regular issue raised in the Report by the Superintendent concluded that training facilities were completely inadequate to prepare cadets through proper military training.

¹⁹ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1925, 1.

During the summer training period, within the limited time and facilities available, cadets were given fundamental instruction in all arms of the Military Service. Due to the lack of facilities at West Point, First Class cadets were again sent to Fort Monroe, Virginia for seacoast artillery practice, to Fort Eustis, Virginia, for field artillery target practice, and to Langley Field, Virginia for air service instruction. If the land adjacent to West Point were made available for military training, field artillery target practice and instruction in aviation could be given at West Point.²¹

Throughout the 1930s, the general thrust of military training of cadets focused on the general understanding of combat principles and the uses of each of the branches in combined operations. "Training methods have followed on generally the latest developments at the various separate service schools. Considerable use has been made of the sand table. During the summer there has been a decided increase in the amount of marching, camping, field work and terrain exercises", the Superintendent's Annual Report stated.²² And once again, a recurring theme in the annual reports was a lack of adequate land and training ranges to conduct even the basics of rifle marksmanship required of all soldiers and cadets. The Superintendent's Report of 1934 noted, "It has been necessary to prohibit the use of service ammunition on the rifle range at West Point. As there is not a site on the present reservation where a rifle range can be constructed without excessive cost, this defect can be corrected only by the acquisition of additional land."²³

By 1937-38, the lack of appropriate training facilities and ranges took its toll in the quality of military training for the cadets in the areas of rifle marksmanship and artillery live-fire training. Some difficulty was experienced in maintaining the high standard of tactical training

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1930, 3.

²² U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1934, 4.

²³ Ibid.

due to the increase of the corps of cadets without a corresponding increase in facilities. The summer training program was materially handicapped by the lack of a target range and a combat range.²⁴ As Hugh Foster, USMA 1941, of Cadet Company A described it, "the army was a 'poor man's army'. The cadets trained with stovepipes (for weapons), and the army itself was not in very much better condition, even in 1941."²⁵ Due to these training distractors on West Point, the first class cadets continued to travel to other Army posts to include Fort Benning, Georgia for infantry and combined arms training demonstrations, Fort Monroe, Virginia for coastal and anti-aircraft artillery firing, and Mitchell Field, Long Island for Air Corps Training. During the period 1938-39, a new effort was made to balance the benefits of conducting branch training at locations away from West Point, with more training time in leadership positions at summer encampments at West Point. According to the Annual Report of the Superintendent in 1940, "The summer training schedule for the past year stressed more than ever before the exercise of command and leadership on the part of First Classmen, with very beneficial results. The development of individual proficiency in the technical duties of the various arms cannot be attained in the time available and must be left to post-graduate work."²⁶

The evolution of military training for cadets throughout the 1920s and 1930s was set in the framework of an isolationist America focused inward on the economy. The results of these two decades of military training at the Academy portray the environment in which the ensuing superintendents would have to operate. Brigadier General Robert L. Eichelberger and Major

²⁴ U.S. Military Academy, West Point, *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1937, 6.

²⁵ Yenne, 39.

²⁶ U.S. Military Academy, West Point, *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1940, 4.

General Francis B. Wilby attempted to bring the Military Academy from an institution of substandard military training to a premier training program. These efforts resulted in graduates prepared to lead soldiers into combat in Europe and the Pacific.

By late 1940, war clouds lay heavily on the horizon. Brigadier General Robert L. Eichelberger, class of 1909, who succeeded BG Jay L. Benedict as Superintendent, arrived in November 1940 committed to saving West Point from the fate it had met during World War I. To do so he believed that he needed to increase the emphasis on military training.²⁷ First, he had to spur the Academy to overcome the inertia so commonly found in organizations. There was a reluctance to change. "To many, the Academy didn't take the war seriously at the start. 'Our curriculum and training did not change,'" said Jack Murray, USMA 1941. "For example, we spent untold hours on the backside of horses and none inside of a tank. Except for Professor Colonel Buekema and a few officers in the Military History program, things went on as usual – just as they did in the rest of the country."²⁸

Superintendent Eichelberger initiated the renewed emphasis on military training espoused by General MacArthur two decades earlier. Eichelberger's efforts prodded the organization to begin to consider important issues regarding change at the Academy. He focused on what direction to take West Point to train its graduates in military subjects in order to prepare them for combat. He persuaded the Academic Board to consider the possibility of curtailing academic classes in order to allow more time for training cadets. Brigadier General Eichelberger wanted to terminate the academic work of the first class in late April and give them some intensive military training in the branches they had chosen. In addition he suggested evening lectures 'on leadership, soldier psychology, mess management, and kindred subjects which must be met by

²⁷ Crackel, 232.

²⁸ Yenne, 42.

the young officer on joining his first command.”²⁹ The early successes of these lectures paved the way for follow-on lectures in the ensuing years to include officers returning from overseas to brief cadets on operations in their respective theaters.

Other changes that initiated Eichelberger were: increasing summer training time to include military training in both the morning and afternoon, increase in branch specific instruction, increased physical training during the winter, and increased training on motorized vehicles.³⁰ The tenure of Eichelberger was short-lived as General MacArthur summoned him to the Southwest Pacific Theater in November 1942 to inject new leadership into the already bloody New Guinea campaign. Eichelberger only served 14 months as Superintendent, and although he had the right ideas to make organizational changes necessary to improve the military training program, his speedy reassignment to an operational command delayed some of the more far reaching changes until during the Wilby superintendency.

Despite Eichelberger’s efforts to save West Point from the failures it incurred during World War I, even basic military marksmanship was inadequate. “The training given by the Tactical Department wasn’t very imaginative,” Bill Hoge, USMA 1941, remembered. “For example, the Class of 1941 did not once fire the M1 service rifle while at the Academy. We got all our marksmanship training with .22 caliber weapons (training rifles).”³¹

Major General Francis B. Wilby, USMA, 1905, replaced Eichelberger in January 1942, and quickly set about the work necessary to make an informed decision as to how the war would affect West Point. In order to make the changes necessary to improve the military training, first the Superintendent would have to deal with the pressures coming from above at the War

²⁹ Crackel, 234.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Yenne, 39.

Department, and second, with the pressures within his own organization from the Academic Board. For years the Academic Board had given the Superintendents opposition in their internal power struggle over determining the fate of policy at the Academy. In this instance, several boards of inquiry were established at the urging of the Superintendent to determine the most efficient curriculum to prepare the cadets in meeting all of the requirements for their broad education as well as an increase in military training for war. This technical procedure was yet another contributing factor toward the delay of instituting appropriate military training programs for cadets at West Point. However, this approach was likely in response to the debacle of the World War I class graduation rates and lack of preparedness for combat. Much of the delay and lethargy evident throughout the process was due to the interaction of the Academic Board, the Superintendent, the War Department, and finally the President.

Within two weeks of assuming his post as the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy amidst a Second World War, Wilby convened a board to examine the advantages and disadvantages of shortening the curriculum to three years or less. On January 24, 1942, the curriculum committee recommended a change to a three-year program if shortening the standard curriculum was necessary. Within three days, Wilby was summoned to the office of the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR gave Wilby explicit marching orders for changes at West Point. He expected the Superintendent to minimize the discharge of cadets due to deficiencies in their studies, and bring the Academy up to date in everything-particularly in air corps and tank instruction. The President also directed that they would continue intercollegiate football until instructed otherwise.³² It was unfortunate to have

³² Crackel, 236.

to wait for the President of the United States to tell the Superintendent of the nation's military academy how to prepare its cadets for war. The bureaucratic balancing act between providing a broad liberal arts education and preparing military leaders for war had just begun. Cadets at West Point were losing precious time in preparation for combat leadership in a war that they and the nation had hoped they would not become involved in.

The fact that Wilby initiated a board to explore the different possibilities of a shortened course was fortunate in that by March 1942, the War Department requested a recommendation on a shortened course of instruction. The Academic Board report that eventually went to the War Department included outlines of one, two, and three-year courses, however, it displayed typical academic board inclination and recommended keeping a four year course of instruction with minimal changes to the curriculum.³³ The members of the War Department deliberated and in late August 1942, asked Congress to authorize the President to reduce the curriculum at West Point for the remainder of the war. A major concern of the War Department and the Army was that young men were being hurried through and even pulled from college programs in order to provide more officers to lead the Army to war. "We do not like to have West Point become subject to the criticism of being a place of refuge, where boys can go for four years and not be shot at," the War Department members told the lawmakers. The main concern was that other young men of that age group were quickly being drafted, trained, and sent off to fight the war.³⁴

Two key pieces of legislature passed Congress during the summer of 1942 that would greatly affect West Point. The first was the authorization to increase the size of the Corps of Cadets from 1,960 to 2,496.³⁵ The other was on October 1, 1942, when the President ordered

³³ Crackel, 236.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1943, 1.

the course at West Point reduced to three years. These two efforts, while meant to increase the contribution of trained West Point graduates toward the war effort, further exacerbated the strain on training time, resources, and range capabilities. By October, the United States was involved in the declared war for nearly a year and just then received approval to reduce the curriculum while increasing military training time. The fruits of these efforts would not begin to be realized until the summer of 1943. However, by that summer, two cadet classes already graduated early in January and June without the benefit of an adequate military training program.

Two factors that greatly altered the physical conduct of improved military training for the cadets were the use of resources available to aid in training, and the structure of the military training program of instruction. For decades West Point commandants and superintendents alluded to and noted that the military training facilities on or near West Point were inadequate and new land would be necessary to build appropriate marksmanship ranges, maneuver ranges, obstacle courses, and most recently motorized and mechanized training and air corps training. Despite the Congress' authorization to purchase over 15,000 acres of land west of West Point in 1931, the acquisition was a result more by the need for additional water sources rather than due to the planning of additional training areas and ranges. Due to the failure to appropriate the funds to purchase this land, only 526 acres were acquired by mid-1939. Once again, bureaucracy and a measly depression era budget superceded the needs of sufficient training facilities to prepare cadets for combat.³⁶

Finally, by late summer of 1942, an additional 10,500 acres of land was acquired and a new training camp for cadets opened at Lake Popolopen.³⁷ Eleven years after the congressional approval to purchase the land so desperately needed for training, West Point finally ended the

³⁶ U.S. Military Academy. Department of Economics, Government, and History. *Wartime History of the United States Military Academy, Vol. I*. West Point, NY: Academy, 1945, 26.

outdated summer encampment on the plain at Fort Clinton. These improved training facilities were not ready for use until the summer of 1943. By that time "the new training facility boasted twenty-four target ranges, a cleared artillery impact area, concrete pillboxes, two moving target ranges, a pontoon and amphibious training area, a 200-yard-long assault course, a mock freight train, and a highly realistic town in which cadets could train for combat within cities. The construction of facilities at Camp Popolopen made possible tactical training and instruction in the use of combat weapons far beyond anything that had ever been done before at West Point."³⁸

The other great improvement in facilities for West Point military training was the acquisition of Stewart Field in Newburgh, New York in 1942. The class of January 1943 was the first class to graduate with designated air corps cadets receiving their Air Corps pilot wings upon graduation. Between 1943 and 1946, West Point commissioned 1,033 cadets into the United States Army Air Corps.³⁹ This rapid transformation of training fully qualified air corps pilots at West Point was again only made possible due to the dire war emergency, and despite over twenty years of hand-wringing about where to conduct proper introduction and training of Air Service cadets.

The second key component of facilitating proper military instruction to cadets in preparation for wartime duties as company grade officers was that of the program of military instruction. Not until the period of July 1, 1942 through June 30, 1943, was the military training of cadets sufficiently resourced to prepare graduates for war. A significant number of modifications were made to the overall military training program. First, the Corps of Cadets was reorganized from a single regiment of three battalions to a brigade of two regiments consisting of

³⁷ Crackel, 237.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Forman, 206.

two battalions each. This was a result of the increase of the number of cadets authorized by the 1942 legislation. Second, the class of 1943 graduated early in January, while the class of 1944 graduated in June of 1943. This early graduation coincided with the institution of the three-year curriculum. For the remainder of the war, there was no Second Class at the Academy. Also, despite the loss of an entire year's worth of training time available, a total of 2,178 hours devoted to military training in the three-year course as compared to 2,544 hours designated during the four-year course. Much of the difference came from reducing cadet leave time and increasing the number of hours in the summer training day. Cadets also received more courses in Physical Fitness to include Watermanship and Judo. The focus was to make cadets physically fit to meet the demands of combat.

Additionally, an Armored Force Detachment was permanently established at West Point in order to effectively instruct cadets in armored warfare rather than sending them out to other camps. Sixth, the Signal School at Fort Monmouth sent a detachment to West Point to assist in training the cadets in the most up to date forms of field communications in the Army. Seventh, the local field training facilities rapidly expanded to include 24 separate ranges and 12 training areas in the Popolopen Area. These new facilities were for combat training of the Third Class during the summer of 1943. And finally, the Corps of Cadets participated in Annual Field Training Maneuvers. The cadets deployed to Pine Camp, New York (now Fort Drum, NY) where they engaged in combined arms field exercises. The cadets were then integrated into the units of the 4th Armored Division, then training at Pine Camp, for a division size field exercise.⁴⁰ LTG (R) John Cushman, USMA 1944, stated that by the time of his First Class Summer (1943) "the quality of combat training had significantly increased and cadets were participating in very

realistic combat training at Camp Popolopen and Pine Camp, New York.”⁴¹ An additional measure taken to increase the quality of military training introduced in 1943 was the Tactical Department’s policy of “sending its officer instructors to the various branch and staff school courses to keep them abreast of the latest in training doctrine and methods of instruction.”⁴²

It appears that once the President and Congress authorized Wilby to change to the three-year curriculum, the Academy underwent significant adjustments in order to attempt to accommodate the large influx of more cadets and adequately prepare them for their experience in the war. West Point had to complete these tasks, yet maintain some semblance of a broad educational background and character training that was key to the West Point experience. The United States Military Academy needed the period from late summer of 1942 to the spring of 1943 to turn the focus at the United States Military Academy from that of the usual academic rigors to preparing a broadly educated Army Officer capable of graduating directly to a war and leading men in combat. A period of eighteen months elapsed between the United States declaration of war in December 1941, and the commencement of a retooled military training program conducted on adequate facilities such as those at Camp Popolopen. This may seem relatively rapid in comparison with the usual pace of change seen throughout West Point’s 200-year history. The urgency with which the nation had to respond to the Second World War and the leadership, soldiers, and resources that it entailed, provided the major catalyst needed to overcome organizational inertia so prevalent in a peacetime military.

Despite the reasons for such slow change, there was no excuse sufficient enough to explain away the general malaise toward preparing cadets through proper military training for

⁴⁰ U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1943, 12-13.

⁴¹ Interview with LTG (R) John Cushman, USMA 1944, 10 November, 2000.

their primary purpose in war. That purpose was to lead and train the rest of the nation's Army to go to combat and win. That was the most basic purpose of the United States Military Academy.

Douglas MacArthur had attempted to initiate change in the military training program at West Point in 1920 by ending the outdated summer encampment on the plain at Fort Clinton. However, his abolishment of this antiquated military training program was quickly reversed by the summer of 1922.⁴³ During the period 1922 through 1942 the United States, its Army, and its Military Academy maintained a generally isolationist stance in its attitude toward preparing for the next war. Not until Superintendent Eichelberger's tenure twenty years later was there a renewed emphasis on implementing appropriate combat training designed to prepare the graduates of West Point for the war in which they were about to engage. Eichelberger "arrived in November 1940 committed to saving West Point from the fate it had met during World War I."⁴⁴ But it was Major General Francis B. Wilby, Eichelberger's successor, who finally guided this renewed emphasis on preparing cadets for the demands of combat leadership to fruition in 1943. The Academy accomplished this despite the organizational bureaucracy and inertia, and was prone to reacting to a national emergency in time of war. World War II had certainly provided the catalyst great enough to enact the changes necessary to prepare cadets for war through proper military training. The results of this renewed focus on training the future leaders of the Army to lead in combat can be seen throughout the annals of the United States Army history of World War II and the Korean War.

⁴² U.S. Military Academy, West Point. *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, USMA, West Point, NY, 1944, 15.

⁴³ Crackel, 205.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 232.

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