

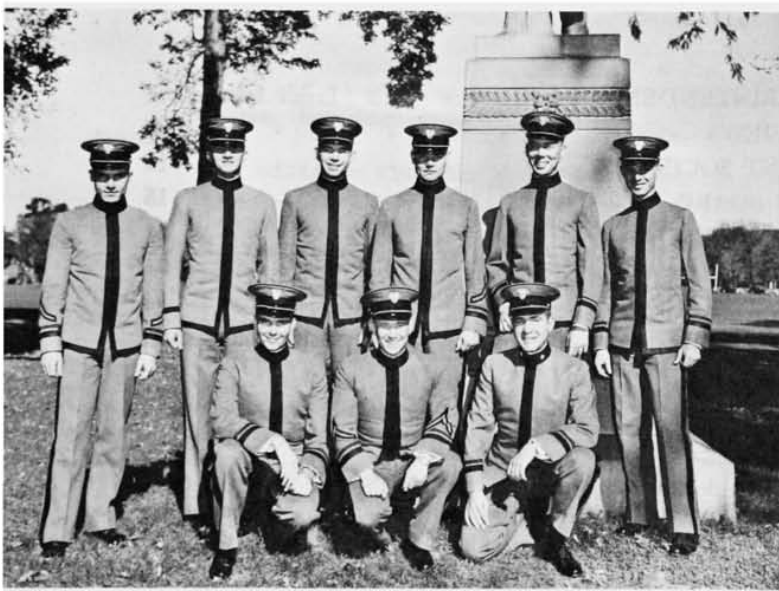
# A Brief History of USMAPS

by 1LT MATTHEW F. IGNOFFO, AGC

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*About the Authors: The author Matthew F. Ignoffo received his Bachelor's degree in English from Loyola University of Chicago, his Master's in American Literature from Northwestern University, and his Doctorate in English from Loyola. He taught at Loyola and in the Chicago Public School System, and currently is on active duty assigned to the English Department at USMAPS. His manuscript What the Civil War Did to Walt Whitman is being published by Vantage Press. Stephen L. Jacobs received his Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Maine and his Master's from the University of New York. He has taught English in Maine, New York, and the United States Military Academy Preparatory School. He has also served as an instructor in English for the University of Virginia extension courses at Fort Belvoir and the Northern Virginia Community College. He is presently employed as Head of the English Department at USMAPS.*

Cadets who attended West Point Prep School, Fort Snelling, Minnesota (L-R, kneeling): Burr, Jan '43; Curtis, Jan '43; Wehrle, Jan '43; (L-R, standing): Catlin, Jan '43; Salzer, '44; Peak, Jun '43; Dixon, Jan '43; Moe, Jun '43; Cadwallader, Jan '43.



West Point Prep School, Class of 1934-35 at Fort Scott, California.



## INTRODUCTION

This article is the first of a two part digest history of the United States Military Academy Preparatory School. The article consists of excerpts of a much longer history which is based on letters of USMAPS alumni, interviews with present and former faculty members of the school and copies of early school regulations. It is by no means final and complete. Elisions indicate deleted portions of the original text. Anyone who has further information, documents, records, reports and anecdotes about the Prep School is encouraged to write to the Commandant, USMA Preparatory School, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060.

Since 1918, the Army has given selected members of the Armed Forces the opportunity to enter West Point through a Prep program that was formalized in 1946 as the United States Military Academy Preparatory School (USMAPS). This school assists soldiers on active duty to prepare and qualify academically, physically, and militarily for appointment to West Point.\*\*\* The evolution of USMAPS, from its beginnings during World War I to the present, is a diverse and interesting addition to the history of the Military Academy. A summary history of this development will only hint at the amount of effort and trial and error that paved the way for the present Prep School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

## PHASE I: WORLD WAR I

The origins of the Prep School concept can be traced to the Act of May 4, 1916 which authorized the President to appoint enlisted men as Cadets at the United States Military Academy. From this act, the Army derived the mission of preparing selected soldiers scholastically for the Academy, and established informal schools

Headquarters, II Corps Area, West Point Prep School, 1936-37, Camp Dix, New Jersey.



Graduates are encouraged to make this information available to interested applicants.

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Current USMA Prep School Admission Information.

## USMAPS ADMISSION

### MINIMUM ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

An applicant for the Preparatory School must meet the minimum requirements for nomination to the Military Academy before he can be accepted at USMAPS.

To be eligible for consideration an applicant must be:

A citizen of the United States.

Of good moral character.

At least 17 and not more than 22 years old on 1 July of the year he plans to enter West Point.

Unmarried and not previously married.

A high school graduate (Recommended four years English and three years Mathematics) or GED.

Medically qualified.

### SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

All applicants must be in an active duty status prior to entry into the Preparatory School.

All Regular Army and other selected applicants on active duty must attend USMAPS, in order to compete for a Secretary of the Army Nomination.

Reservists may enter on active duty for a period of two years in order to attend USMAPS provided advance authority is obtained from USMA Branch, DA.

### APPLICATION PROCEDURES

The enlisted member must have enough time remaining under his enlisted contract to assure active duty through July of the year following enrollment at the Preparatory School. Should an extension be necessary to cover this period, it will be accomplished prior to reporting to USMAPS.

### ACTIVE ARMY AND ARMY RESERVE COMPONENT APPLICANTS ON DUTY WITH ACTIVE ARMY

Application format is prescribed in AR 351-12.

The application, an indorsement by Commanding Officer, a true copy of last medical examination, SCAT form II A taken at Post Education Center, and all secondary school transcripts (and college, if any) should be forwarded to Commandant, USMAPS, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060.

### NOT ON DUTY WITH ACTIVE ARMY

The applicant should apply by letter to USMA Branch, Department of the Army, ATTN: DAPC-PAP-M, 200 Stovall St, Alexandria, VA 22332.

### OTHER APPLICANTS

Civilians interested in attending USMAPS must first apply for admission to the United States Military Academy, indicating their desire to attend USMAPS if not selected for direct admission to West Point.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

See the following individuals located at most posts and stations:

West Point Candidate Advisory Officer (WPCAO)

USMA Liaison Officer (USMALO)

For complete details, write:

Commandant

US Military Academy Preparatory School

Fort Belvoir, Virginia 22060

DA PAM 351-5, September 1974

throughout the Army. During World War I such a school was begun in the European theater under the direction of General John J. Pershing. Notices were published in several Armed Forces newspapers and bulletins instructing those desiring to take the West Point entrance exam to contact their company commanders. The requirements were as follows: high school graduate, unmarried, between the ages of 17 and 22, and in the Army.

Applications came in from the front lines, some probably from soldiers who saw the program merely as a chance to get away from the war. Some of the applicants were sent to Coblenz in Germany while others went to Beaune or Langres in France. These three facilities were hastily set up to handle the program and were administered rather informally by officers who were recent graduates of West Point.\*\*\*

In general, the program involved an intensive review of high school subjects over a period of about a month with applicants arriving at irregular intervals. Classes were conducted by teachers from both the military and the YMCA who built their lesson plans around the USMA entrance exams of several previous years. Emphasis was given to English, Mathematics, and history. The students were housed in barracks such as the *caserne* of the French Army within the old walled city of Langres.\*\*\* Corporal Harold Townsend—who later became LTC Townsend and, upon retirement, taught math in the Prep School at Fort Belvoir—was accepted for the Beaune school in the winter of 1918. He was surprised to find that his class would occupy newly completed barracks at the outpost, a unique luxury at that time. His class was made up of "fighting men," but after the Armistice they generally fought each other over gifts of girls and wines given in friendship by the French villagers. Mr. Townsend remembers that the Cadet Candidates ate canned tomatoes and corned beef along with hard tack as a regular diet and rolled their own cigarettes after chow. They wore hobnail boots which clattered like heavy horses' hoofs, wrap leggings which always seemed to unravel at reveille, and stiff high collars which forced the students to keep their chins up simply to avoid choking.

The final exams of the program included an inspection of the American part of the Langres Garrison by General Pershing; the General eliminated some whose uniforms and appearance he did not think were suitable for West Point standards. Major General George Honnen (USMA '20) recalls that he crammed for the final  
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exams at Langres using books purchased by a Chaplain in Paris at the special request of the C.O. General Honnen studied these texts in the C.O.'s dugout by candlelight since it was the only place not blacked out.

Remembering several lighter moments of this hasty ordeal, Mr. E. Hoffman Price (USMA '23) notes that on the history exam "What I knew about Gustavus Adolphus . . . could be written on a small page with a shaving brush dipped in asphalt paint." There was also a verbal exam which required answers to rather personal questions. Asked "What do you smoke and what do you drink?" the mischievous students diligently answered, "Anything and everything." Those who survived this test were, in general, the students with enough "savvey . . . to come in out of the rain, PROVIDED that a bugler sounded a call . . ."" But in a more serious note, Mr. Price admits that the "Prep School was good." He concludes that if the present school "lacks the color of A.E.F.U., it no doubt makes up with efficiency." The labor involved in bringing young enlistees into the great tradition of West Point is, according to Mr. Price, "fine work."

Following the thorough battery of final exams, those who had been accepted—about one-tenth of the original number of applicants—were ordered to report to West Point. Prior to departure, the troops were addressed by Secretary of War Newton D. Baker and General Pershing—but little was heard since the troops wanted to get back to American soil!

Mr. Townsend recalls that General Pershing said that while the soldiers had just finished the "war to end all wars" and the war "to save democracy," they should nevertheless keep themselves physically and mentally ready—since there would be another war.\*\*\* When the new students arrived at West Point, a Cavalry escort met their train, an event which gave them a great sense of pride; however, they soon discovered that the honors were not for them but for the Chief of Staff who was giving the graduation address. The young men trudged up the hill and saw their first view of the Point just as the Corps of Cadets was passing in review.\*\*\* The new arrivals were given Honorable Discharges signed by Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur and then were sworn in as new Cadets. Following that, they were granted a three-week furlough prior to meeting the challenge of West Point.

In these early recollections can be found the very informal origins of the Prep School. The program was a rather primitive make-shift wartime attempt to bring new blood into the officer corps by encouraging experienced and enthusiastic enlistees to join the Long Gray Line.

### PHASE II: THE CORPS AREAS

The haphazard approach to the prep program continued after World War I.

Prep schools were established in each Army Corps area beginning in 1920 and operated at various times until 1943. Replacing the wartime European schools, the new prep schools ranged from Fort Devens, Massachusetts, to the Presidio of San Francisco in California, and from Fort Snelling, Minnesota, to Fort Sam Houston, Texas; there were also overseas programs at Corozal in the Panama Canal Zone, Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, and Fort McKinley in the Philippines. The schools accepted eligible appointees from the Regular Army and the National Guard; the program and the training discipline were roughly an imitation of the system of the Military Academy.\*\*\*

Each Corps Area originally selected anywhere from 15 to 100 people annually. Classes were usually reduced by halves until there would be about 5 or 6 students left to enter the Army-wide competition for West Point appointments. In general, this set-up was followed in all Corps Areas.\*\*\* In some of the more formal and complex programs, such as that at the Presidio of San Francisco, the math courses consisted of instruction in elementary and advanced algebra, plane and solid geometry, and trigonometry; English involved instruction in grammar, rhetoric, composition, and English and American literature, the history schedule included ancient, medieval, and modern English and American history, and there was a course in the French that would be covered at West Point in the fall term. Recalling the less formal programs, Colonel W.H. Schaefer (USMA '24) comments that at the Fort Benning School he was required to act as "everything from Commandant to the only instructor" in the period from 1924 to 1928. Colonel C.G. Patterson (USMA '33) remembers that the school which he attended at Fort Totten, New York, was conducted in the attic of the Post Headquarters. Colonel William Peak (USMA '43) comments that when he attended the school at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, the faculty consisted of one lieutenant and the daughter of the Post Commander. Colonel Peak recalls that the students worked mainly on their own, checking their work against approved solutions. One effect of this was that, while Peak "hadn't the foggiest understanding of geometry," he was able to recognize the questions, write down the answers, and then fill in the work leading to it from memory. He adds that this "was almost disastrous in Plebe year."\*\*\*

In most cases the schools were administratively attached to units at the various posts; this situation sometimes gave rise to rivalries between the local enlistees and the students who appeared to be living an easy life with nothing to do but study.\*\*\* Lieutenant General William A. Knowlton (USMA '43, 49th Superintendent of the USMA) attended the Hawaiian Department School in 1938; he remembers that whenever the Cadets got out of hand, an old 30-year private would stare at their formation and say, "If them's

what are going to be officers in the United States Army, God help us. I'm glad I'm retiring." General Knowlton states, "The experience always shook us a little."

Because competition for a political appointment to West Point during the depression was nearly impossible, the prep system was really a windfall for many young enlistees despite diverse hardships. Colonel Ellis O. Davis (USMA '34) points out that the depression had apparently coincided with an overproduction and consequent forced issue of pineapple; the students of the 1930 class at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, claimed that the mess cook put pineapple in doughnuts, lamb stew, and pumpkin pie. Brigadier General William E. House (USMA '26) says that his class's first night at the Fort Oglethorpe School in Georgia had to be spent sleeping on the lawn; the next morning, the students attacked the bunks of the ancient barracks with blow torches to destroy the bed bugs. Students destined for Fort Totten during the depression found themselves moving from the New York City recruiting station to the school by old street cars; this mode of transportation was financed by the Quartermaster in the interest of "public service." Colonel John Williamson (USMA '35) recalls that his Fort Totten class had to make its trips to West Point football games in crowded World War I reconnaissance cars because Army buses were not economically feasible; since the cars were not enclosed, these fall trips were quite chilly. Life was not easy in the early prep schools.

Reminiscing about the more enjoyable times, Colonel Sellers (USMA '33) comments that his congressman maneuvered him into the Schofield Barracks school by calling the Adjutant General and cutting tons of red tape. Consequently, Sellers' records were tabbed "Congressional Interest," and he became known in his original Infantry unit as "Captain." His friends took delight in jumping to and calling "Attention!" when he entered the barracks. Their posture was as exaggerated as that of a braced West Point plebe. Sellers would pompously strut the length of the squad aisle before commanding "Rest!" On one occasion, however, nothing happened upon his command. Looking over his shoulder, he discovered that his company commander had followed him into the barracks; after the officer left the squad area, the men could hear his uncontrolled laughter. This incident did not quell Sellers' sense of new independence, for when he returned to his unit after successfully completing his course in Hawaii, he told his First Sergeant, "I don't expect to be back long. Would you have the clerk prepare my request for a leave of two months and twenty days." Sellers was later told that the Sergeant's roar was heard throughout the company area, and that those who heard the roar expected the recipient of the wrath to burst from the orderly room as part of the debris of the explosion. Undaunted, Sellers showed the NCO a letter from

the General granting the leave. After reading the letter, the Sergeant said, "How about that!" The whole company was elated over the news of the appointment, and the NCO's broke their barrier of aloofness to gather around Sellers and congratulate him.\*\*\*

After the long grind of the prep course, appointments were usually announced in June. Mr. Ralph L. Cadwallader (USMA '43) remembers that he was ordered to drop everything and report to his commander. On entering the C.O.'s office, the candidate was told grimly, "You made it." Cadwallader had visions of all the helling around he and his friends had done at Fort Snelling, and was sure some sin had caught up with him. The officer then informed him that he had received his appointment. After that, all Cadwallader can remember of the school is the beginning of "the biggest beer bust" ever seen at the post—the men "really celebrated."\*\*\* Prohibition had cramped the style of many of the students, and, both before and after repeal, many classes experimented with all sorts of "devil's brew."

This usually led to new messes for orderlies to clean up in the morning.\*\*\*

During the 23-year period of Phase II, efforts to formalize the program brought about increasingly commendable results as the system gained more and more recognition. The prep program provided a significant input for the Officer Corps which was called upon to expand to meet the demands of World War II.

NEXT ISSUE OF ASSEMBLY—PHASE III TO THE PRESENT.



## WP Sketch Book

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ated, with nary a chevron upon his once-proud sleeve. So, how *are* they all? Not that it matters much, though, for this particular Ducrot was a much respected permanent Professor at USMA until late in the 1960's.

There is, however, one femme with whom Mr. Ducrot will always be enamored—that damned indifferent one! Some call her Victory and some call her Fame, but Mr. Ducrot knows her as "the Lady on Battle Monument." She was placed there life-sized and scantily clad in 1897. Officially she was called "Victory," but it was common knowledge that the lady was Evelyn Nesbitt Thaw. Everyone knew this because at the time the papers were screaming headlines about how Harry K. Thaw had very effectively shot Stanford White, the famous sculptor-artist who had helped design the monument. Mr. Thaw was adjudged legally insane, but before he was carted off, babbling, to Mattewan, he had informed the world that his glamour-girl wife had been mixing unauthorized activities with posing for Mr. White. Hence the target practice.

It was a wonderful, juicy scandal, and Mr. Ducrot felt enormously proud to have the Toast of Cafe Society perched up there on his very own monument, waving her wreath and blowing her horn, goddess of all she surveyed—which was practically the whole of West Point. Immediately all plebes were required to bone up on the titillating tale and sound it off with embellishments upon demand. Through the years it has gained considerably in the telling until it now describes how Mr. Thaw chased Mr. White thrice around the Plain, brandishing a snow-white shotgun, while Mrs. Thaw cowered atop her lofty perch, shivering in her bronze nightie and crying, "Stop, Harry, Stop! Stanford only did it for art's sake!" The local Women's Christian Temperance Union was aghast that a statue with such a tawdry background should be so prominently displayed at a national academy and predicted dire happenings, yet there she stands to this day, Mr. Ducrot's beloved Evelyn, the one and only official concession to womanhood at West Point.

West Point hops have always been an important part of cadet life and one of the few activities affording Mr. Ducrot some measure of genuine pleasure. The incorrigible snakes and spoonoids (archaic cadet slang for a lady's man) in the corps are always to be found at the hops, but unless Mr. Ducrot is dragging the only attraction of these affairs might be some free boodle. Many a kaydet has been willing to get all dressed up for the sake of a dish of ice cream. He invariably goes through the feed line several times but then heads back to the sack.

Most important about West Point hops, however, is their perpetual, irresistible appeal to the ladies. It takes a woman's eye properly to appreciate a West Point hop, and fortunately several lady writers have held forth ecstatically on the subject through the years. Space here precludes full or even adequate recording of their impressions, but we still are grateful for their glimpse into Mr. Ducrot's social life. A Miss Leslie wrote in *Graham's Magazine* for April, 1842, about one of the early hops. The period she describes is either the early '20s, when she lived with a brother stationed there, or about 1833 when she was again visiting West Point, this time with another brother, the Professor of Drawing.

The particular ball in question, or Cotillion Party as they were termed officially at that time, was held on New Year's Eve in the large room over the Old Mess Hall, scene of "The Great Wine Binge of 1817" (another story, another time). Miss Leslie writes: "The cadets had spent days decorating" the place with "festooning evergreens" and "converting each window recess into a bower of thickly-woven foliage." Around the central pillars were stacked stands of muskets "with very bright bayonets." These decorations were obviously the result of many plebe-hours of labor, but one wonders if the overall atmospheric effect might not have

been that of a fantastic obstacle course!

The orchestra (piano, fife, fiddle, and oboe) played the hot jive of the period from beneath a canopy constructed from the big garrison flag, its "stars and stripes ingeniously disposed," while overhead waved the National and Corps colors "suspended from pillars." Illumination came from candles set around the wall in tin sconces, the very ones used at Washington's Great Illumination of 1782, given at West Point in honor of the new-born Dauphin of France. These had been withdrawn from storage and shined up for the occasion.

Miss Leslie goes into great, society-page detail in describing the gowns of the ladies present, some of whom had come up on the steamer from the Big City and others from across the Hudson in a rowboat (some women will go great distances to show off a new gown). One woman is described as tall and fair and willowy, of "lovely figure." She wore a white satin creation, "its skirt and sleeves looped up with small white roses" (which Mr. Ducrot probably did not appreciate), further "set off to great advantage by an extremely well-fitting bodice of transparent pink zephyr" (which he unquestionably did!).

The writer goes on to tell how cleverly the cadets disguised themselves in "native costumes" and how the assemblage was entertained by a skit, in which a "captain" in resplendent parody of officer full-dress drilled an awkward squad armed with "sticks, cornstalks, and shut umbrellas."

Miss Leslie advises her readers to avoid the predicament in which the New York contingent of femmes found themselves. It seems these young ladies, to avoid ruining their finery on the smoky steamboat trip, had arrived wearing their very oldest attire. But in the excitement of arrival and debarkation, they had left behind their suitcases full of evening dresses! So during the hop, while their pretty gowns proceeded up to Albany, while the music played invitingly upstairs and while their escorts vainly tried to coax them up to the ballroom, these foolish virgins huddled disconsolately below decks "in their dishabille of shawls and calashes," ashamed to make an appearance!

The occasion was not soon forgotten. After the hop the Across-the River contingent, whom Miss Leslie praises lavishly for their pulchritude and grace, said goodbye to their cadets and reembarked for the homeward voyage in the middle of the cold winter night. At daybreak their little rowboat was discovered icebound out in midstream. Rescuers finally managed to cut a path through the floes and get the ladies ashore, "benumbed with cold and indeed nearly dead."

Miss Leslie concludes her dramatic account by stating that no sooner had they been brought to safety after this terrible ordeal than "they were said to have declared that they would willingly go through a repetition of the same for the