

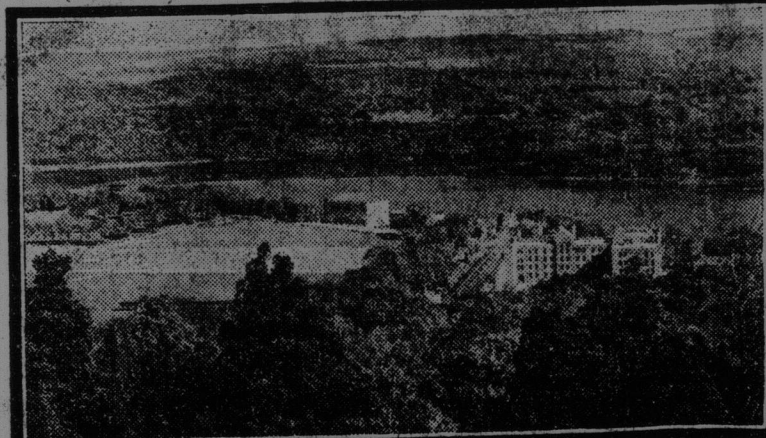
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MAKING A SOLDIER

BY A. R. PARKINSON JR.



West Point from Fort Putnam

Future Generals, Just Graduated

THE charge has frequently been made within the past few years that this is an era of militarism, and, furthermore, the name of President Roosevelt is simultaneously mentioned as the "arch conspirator" to bring about these conditions, unprecedented in our history, except in time of war. Whether this be true or not, one fact stands boldly forth; almost superhuman efforts have been and are being made to recruit our standing army up to its full strength, as prescribed by congress. This, of course, means that a much larger complement of officers of all grades is necessary to command the various companies, troops, batteries, engineering corps, regiments and battalions which go to make up the various arms of the service. While arguments are being indulged in as to the enormous cost of maintaining so large, well-trained, well-fed and well-clothed body of fighting men, the work at the "School for the American Soldier," at the United States Military Academy at West Point, N. Y., is in every particular, goes steadily on and each June several hundred young men are graduated with the rank of second lieutenant. No institution in the United States, perhaps, occupies a warmer place in the affections of the people of this country than the military academy to so tersely perched on the beautiful bluff overlooking the sweep of majestic landscape through which the silver Hudson threads its way. Here it is that those young men desiring to dedicate their lives to the god of war—and what American boy has not at some time in his life been fired by the ambition to wear the chevrons of an American general—come to swear allegiance to their country, pledging themselves to ever uphold the Constitution and present themselves as candidates for a four year's course of training in the art of war. For four years these young men receive a course of instruction—physical, mental and physical—second to none in the world, and when at the end of this prescribed four years his commission is handed to him on graduation day the transformation of the awkward, gawky candidate of four years ago into the finished product—the American officer—is almost beyond recognition.

The demand for officers has been so great within the past few years that several graduation classes from the Point have been robbed of the climax which they had looked forward to with such yearning hearts. Graduation week at West Point is a never-to-be-forgotten epoch in the lives of every graduating cadet. Thousands upon thousands of visitors, made up for the most part of the mob, charming bits of femininity, swarm over the post to see their respective heroes leap from the chrysalis form of cadet to that of the full-fledged officer in Uncle Sam's service. Such a week it is! Every girl has a book of uniformed and brass-buttoned admirers in her train, and were those six days made up of 60 hours each it would be impossible for her to fulfill all the engagements that are thrust upon her. Walks to Trophy Hill, Crow Nest, Storm King and other romantic spots are ever in order, and a cadet is proverbial for the ardor and celebrity of his love-making. Every girl visitor to the Point declares that three questions are propounded to her by the special cadet who constitutes himself her escort before he has known him an hour. "Is this your first visit to West Point?" "How do you like it?" and "Do you love me?" Is it any wonder that they return year after year for commencement week?

This year's class and the three preceding it, however, were graduated in February, and whereas summer camp is now on and the Point is just as attractive as a summer resort as ever, yet commencement week will not be known at the Point again until our standing army is offered in its entirety. Already hundreds of vacancies exist, and the service is as badly handicapped in this respect as is the navy, which is notoriously short of officers. Perhaps the most interesting and amusing sight to be seen at West Point is the reporting in June of each year of the young men who are to form the fourth, or "plebe" class. New cadets they are officially designated as soon as they have made their initial report to the Adjutant, and while their newness is apparent to the most casual observer, it is almost a year before they begin to look anything like the natty, well-starched, ramrod-like body of cadets who form the third, second and first classes. Their wearing apparel exhibits a wide variety of cut, style and texture; their bearing and address reveal a culture which may be that of the playboy or that of the finest product of a modern drawing-room; their physiques, at one extreme, disclose the hard-handed laborer or the stoop-shouldered student; and at the other the trained college athlete, but in every case their walk and carriage bear no resemblance to those they are destined to acquire a few months hence. Before a cadet can march properly he must be taught to walk; before he can stand easily and gracefully erect he must be taught to overcome the stiffness and rigidity of certain muscles and to use others correctly, and before he can appear to advantage in the street he must acquire perfect bodily control and alertness of eye and ear and a power to concentrate his entire attention on the work of the moment. Of course, this perfection is brought about by a constant course of training beginning with the "setting-up" exercises, then on through the various evolutions of the march, manual of arms and cavalry and artillery practice. Four years of such work readily transforms the playboy candidate into the easy, graceful, polished and finished soldier, thoroughly equipped to grace and drawing-room or the courts of any of the world's crowned heads.

During the cadet's preliminary period he is receiving instruction of another kind, likewise of the highest value. "A place for everything and everything in its place" is the rule at West Point. Bedding, when not in use, must be folded and piled in a particular place and in a particular manner; shoes must be neatly aligned at the foot of the bed; clothing must be carefully folded and kept in prescribed places and everything must be scrupulously clean. To enforce these requirements, which have to do with dress and personal appearance, numerous inspections are made, and those from the first the cadet is taught to pay the strictest attention to the neat and orderly care of his rooms and belongings and to habits of wholesome cleanliness. Swimming and dancing are taught shortly after the cadet's entrance to the academy, since it had been found that both forms of exercise aid materially in overcoming the awkwardness glaringly apparent in the candidate. Fencing, of course, is in the curriculum, and that, too, not only aids in hardening muscles, but adds the freedom of movement, and grace so essential.

Boxing and wrestling are freely indulged in but always under the eye of a professional trainer and instructor, and this course is continued throughout the four years during the period of academic instruction when outside drills are suspended—November 1 to March 15 of each year. It is not until the second year at the academy that instruction in horsemanship is taken up, and this is continued up to the time of the "graduation ride" before the board of visitors. Feats in horsemanship frequently eclipse those seen in Wild West shows and circuses in points of grace and daring. Along this line is the instruction received in field artillery drill. Here they are instructed to perform not only the duties of the officers, but those of the noncommissioned officers and enlisted men as well, and, as drivers, to be able to handle a pair of the six horses assigned to a field gun, to guide the gun through the various evolutions of the battery and to bring it into any position at any gait from a walk to the fiercest gallop. During the summer encampment all academic work is suspended, and the cadets go into camp and their entire attention is given over to military duties and exercises. Infantry, cavalry and artillery drills, target practice and long practice marches fill up the working hours, while hope and concerts, golf, tennis, riding, boating walks and numerous flirtations furnish recreation and add a spice of gaiety to a season that passes all too quickly. As September approaches plans for breaking camp and the return to winter quarters are made. By this time the plebe has had an opportunity to accustom himself to the radical change of environment. His shyness has disappeared. He has been mildly teased and formed friendships which will ripen as the years go by, lasting until shoulder to shoulder, they climb the ladder of promotion, to be halted at that rung where the age limit prescribes that soldiers 62 years old must step aside to make room for those below. The average cadet, no matter what his actual learning might have been before entering West Point, leaves that camp inspired by the ambition to rise, take a leading part in class functions, both as to studies, deportment, sports and the drill, that he, too, might win the much-coveted chevrons of the cadet officer, which only falls by grace of merit. September 1 sees the plebe well grounded in the evolutions and the manual of arms, and for the succeeding three years and nine months the training of the mind goes steadily on.

The study period begins with the return to barracks, and from then until the first of the following June it is safe to assert that the average time spent in study each day is far in excess of that spent by the students of any civil institution in the country. As a general rule the course is identically the same for all, the only exception being that a few men at the top of the class are sometimes required to do more extended work along certain lines than is demanded of the others. Thus it can be seen that competition is keen, for the men graduating at the top of each class are assigned to the highest arm of the service—the engineer corps. Thoroughness is the keynote at West Point, and a system that has become known as "Every man every day in every subject" has been handed down from class to class since the days when Lee and Grant were humble plebes at the Point. The division of time is carefully made. Certain hours are allotted to study, others to recitation, others to physical and military exercises, others to sleep and meals, with still others to recreation. Every minute in the 24 hours of day and night are accounted for, and with unvarying punctuality the beginning and end of each period is announced by the roll of a drum or the blast of a bugle. In this elaborate process of instruction and development there is little rest and no turning aside. Only once—and this at the end of the second year—does an entire class get a furlough to return to their homes for a few brief weeks of change and relaxation. The four years spent at West Point are years of unremitting toil and unrelenting discipline. Habits of study are formed and become so firmly fixed that they are never outgrown. The knowledge of how to study gained is never forgotten and a capacity for work is acquired that seldom, even in the most trying circumstances, is put to the full test.

Four years of life under this environment and course of instruction must be productive of the highest and best results. That these results are appreciated by the people at large is attested by the fact that in a spot made grand and inspiring by nature and hallowed by patriotic remembrances of the struggle for unity and national existence, Congress has made a more than generous appropriation for reconstructing the home of the soldier on a scale commensurate with its national and even international importance.

The bill for the prohibition of the manufacture and sale of absinthe in France has been laid on the table of the senate and present France drinks more absinthe than all the rest of the world.

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- 200 GIRLS' SUNSHADES all colors worth 75c, for 58c.
- 100 SHADES GIRLS' SUNSHADES all colors worth 50c, for 38c.
- 100 LADIES' UMBRELLAS worth 85c, for 65c.
- 50 LADIES' UMBRELLAS worth \$1.25, for 78c.
- LADIES' UMBRELLAS from 85c to \$5.00.
- LADIES' LUSTRE SUITS worth \$12.00, for \$7.98.
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