

REPORT ON THE MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT, U.S.

(BY LIEUT.-COL. FLETCHER.)

Before commencing a report on the Military Academy at West Point, I would wish to draw attention to the very able Memorandum submitted to the Royal Commission on Military Education in 1868, by Colonel, now General Macdougall, and which appears as an addenda to the report of the Commission. General Macdougall deals so fully with the subject, and details so clearly the system of education pursued at the Military Academy, that there is little in these respects to add to his report, especially as it has received the approval of those who are connected with the Academy, and who are consequently best qualified to judge of the correctness of the statements and of the accuracy of the information. As, however, General Macdougall's report was drawn up with an object somewhat different to that which occasioned my visit, I propose whilst alluding to the subjects of which he has already so ably treated, to enlarge somewhat more fully on certain portions of the organization and system of the Academy, and to direct attention to points which from a Canadian point of view appear to deserve attention.

If I am correct in my conclusions a short account of the formation and gradual growth of the Military Academy will not be out of place, as it will show how the institution was almost contemporary with the first formation by the United States of a defensive force, and how its growth has proceeded *pari passu* with its demands and requirements.

As early as 1776 at the outset of the Revolutionary War, the want of trained officers was much felt, and a Committee, appointed to report on the state of the army, recommended the formation of a Military Academy for the instruction of officers. Nothing at that time was done to carry into practice the views of this Committee, and the subject was brought up again and again without result, until gradually, as the Artillery and Engineers, consisting in 1794, of four battalions, became better organized, steps were taken for the instruction of the cadets attached to these corps: books were bought, and in 1795, when an additional regiment of the same arm of the service was raised, and when the cadets numbered fifty six four teachers were appointed.

The ground work of a Military Academy in connection with a Military force has thus been laid, but it was not until 1802 that an Act of Congress was passed dividing the Artillery and Engineers into two corps, and allotting forty cadets to the former and ten to the latter. These corps were to be concentrated at West Point and were to form a Military Academy. The selection of West Point was due to its importance as a frontier fortress, its command of the Hudson River at the narrowest portion of its channel, and guarded one of the most important lines of approach from

the British Possessions. In 1783, the cadets were increased by 146, and in 1812, their limit was fixed at 260, the strength of the army being at that time over ten thousand men; four professors, in addition to the officers detailed for instruction, were also appointed to the staff of the Academy. Thus a foundation was laid for the training of the officers of the small army with which it was deemed necessary to supplement the State Militia.

Much, however, remained to be done to bring the Academy to its present efficient condition, and it was not until 1818 that a system, which with little modification has been followed to the present day, was finally determined upon. The cadets were declared to be soldiers, subject to Martial Law, two general annual examinations were ordered, and steps were taken to train the young men during the summer months in camps of instruction. Since then, although many improvements and changes may have occurred, the organization and method of training and discipline have remained in principle as in 1818, the growth of the institution depending partly on the interest shewn in its welfare by the successive Secretaries of War more on the qualities of its superintendents, and somewhat on the tone of the army, which it feeds and from which it draws its life. It would seem invidious to select from the many able superintendents the names of those who have more especially influenced the destinies of the Academy; but to Major Thayer in 1817, and to Major Delafield in 1838, appear to be due many of the improvements which have led to its continued success; whilst in 1852 the presence of Colonel Robert E. Lee could not fail to have exercised over all who were brought in contact with him, an influence which was subsequently felt in a more extended sphere.

Such given very shortly has been the history of the Academy from its commencement in the war of the Revolution—when the need of educated officers was felt as soon as an army had been organized, up to the present time, when the experience of those who have seen much service in the great war of 1861 is brought to bear on the training of the future officers of the United States Army.

The situation of the Academy, selected at first on account of its suitability as a fortress, when the garrison of an important frontier post served as the training school for the cadets, has proved to be one of the best that could have been chosen, even had nothing excepting its desirability as a site for a college, influenced the choice. Standing on a lofty plateau over looking the great river which serves as one of the main arteries of the commerce of New York, it embraces both in its immediate vicinity and in the surrounding country, scenery which can scarcely be surpassed in beauty. Its isolation affords means of carrying out the discipline which forms part of the system of its instruction, whilst the various and changing features of the landscape prevent the feeling of loneliness which might otherwise be oppressive. Perhaps, unknowingly, but none the less surely, must the scenery around West Point, exercise a beneficial influence over the young men who pass with little intermission four of the most susceptible years of their life in contact with some of the driest details of education, and yet surrounded by the most beautiful scenes of nature. The healthiness of the situation is evinced by the absence of sickness among the cadets, and by the fact of its being chosen as a summer resort

of visitors from all parts of the United States. The area in the hands of the Government includes a little over 2,100 acres. Much of this is wood and rock, but there is sufficient plateau to allow of a large exercising ground, used in summer for encampments, in addition to the space required for the several buildings. These include barracks for about 300 cadets, class rooms, mess rooms for the cadets and for the officers: offices, a library, chapel, hospital and a riding school. The officers mostly live in detached houses in the vicinity, and the small garrison of 250 men, viz.:—75 cavalry, 75 engineers and 100 laborers drawing the pay of artillery men, are quartered in barracks about half a mile from the College, and below the plateau on which it stands. Without being architecturally beautiful, the buildings appear fitted for the purposes for which they are intended, excepting the gymnasium which is small, and the chapel which, judging by the exterior, partakes of the character of most garrison chapels.

The Academy is capable of containing 300 cadets, but the actual number under instruction seldom amounts to more than 250, the present number being 246.

The staff of instruction, discipline, and general supervision, consists of the Superintendent, "Brigadier General Ruger," professors, thirty three instructors, assistant instructors, and assistant professors, also an Adjutant, Treasurer, Quartermaster, two medical officers, and a Sword master. Of these, all excepting the professor of ethics, who is also the Chaplain, the professors of drawing and Spanish; the Sword master and the two medical officers are graduates of West Point, and, barring the professors are actually serving in the army. The professors are commissioned as such, and draw the pay of Lieutenants and Colonels. The Superintendent is an officer of high rank, and selected for his especial capacity for office. On him devolves in great measure the arrangement of the studies as well as the discipline of the Academy. Although appeals may be made from his decision to the Secretary of War, it is generally considered as final, and he has the power of assembling courts martial for the trial of serious offences. The educational staff is not concerned with the discipline of the cadets, except during their attendance in the class rooms, or as it is termed at repetition, when any irregularities of conduct are recorded and reported. The instructors, assistant instructors, and assistant professors, are detached from the army, and are selected for their acquirements and qualifications. They remain the appointment for four years, and then return to regimental or staff duty.

The discipline is more especially under the command of cadets in his capacity as commanding the battalion formed from the four companies into which the cadets are divided. He is assisted by company officers as well as by the cadet officers who act under them. The duty is carried on in a manner similar to that of any other battalion allowing the modifications necessary for young men undergoing scholastic instruction. During the months of July and August, when the cadets are under canvas, and when studies are suspended, the discipline is exactly similar to that of soldiers, only somewhat more strict. They are divided into four companies, according to their size, the flank companies comprising the tallest. To each company a certain portion of the barracks is allotted, and from the senior or first class, cadet company officers are appointed, from the