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BATTALION COMMANDERS
AT WAR
Introduction

The U.S. Army’s junior officer corps—commissioned in the 1930s—proved to be a wise investment as the United States entered ground combat in 1942. The U.S. Army had forsaken robust technological and organizational developments in a budget-constrained decade to maintain quality in its people. Two of these soldiers were Lieutenant Colonels John Corley and George Marshall. Both of these infantry officers were West Point graduates (1938 and 1935 respectively), attended the infantry branch service school in 1940, led units during extensive prewar training maneuvers in 1940–1941, and had never heard a shot fired in anger. As the United States prepared to launch Operation Torch in November 1942, Corley and Marshall served as typical infantry battalion commanders in the U.S. Army’s invasion force. Their backgrounds were similar to the vast majority of their peers. Unfortunately, Marshall became the first commissioned officer killed during Operation Torch, while leading his battalion’s ill-fated assault on the port of Oran, Algeria. Corley led his battalion ashore later in the morning at Oran and continued to serve as a battalion commander until the end of the war. By the end of his career, he had earned two Distinguished Service Crosses, eight Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars with Valor device, and a Purple Heart. He successfully led another battalion in the Korean War and eventually rose to the rank of brigadier general before he retired in 1966. The U.S. Army relied on well-trained regular officers like Corley and Marshall to serve in the key tactical leadership positions as it rapidly incorporated millions of citizens with little or no military experience. Without these officers, the U.S. Army could not have functioned at the tactical level. As the North African and Sicilian campaigns raged across the Mediterranean basin, the U.S. Army’s investment in its officer corps produced dividends during America’s first engagements against the Axis powers.

This study examines the performance of the U.S. Army officer corps—specifically in the ranks of lieutenant colonel and major—in the Mediterranean theater of operations (MTO) during World War II. This group of officers provided the critical leadership capabilities for
an expanded army struggling to execute combat operations in four ways. First, the vast majority of these officers were career professionals before the outbreak of World War II, and their efforts reveal how the U.S. Army made the transition to combined arms operations. Second, this officer corps experienced combat for the first time in the MTO. Third, the historical narrative of the U.S. Army in the Mediterranean provides an instructive model to explain U.S. Army doctrinal, technological, leadership, and training challenges in the early stages of the ground war against the German army, then viewed as the best in the world. Finally, the U.S. Army’s rapid mobilization thrust these career professionals into the key tactical leadership and staff positions of battalions and combat commands. This project begins with an analysis of army officer experiences in the 1930s “old” U.S. Army and their roles in the expanding army of wartime mobilization. The fighting in North Africa and Sicily provides the actual combat arena of the officer corps and case studies for analysis and discussion. Ultimately, this study stands as a detailed description of the challenges endured and conquered by a pre-war officer corps’s attempt to wage modern, combined arms operations in the first stages of World War II.

Most historians use the North African and Sicily campaigns as the departure point to explain how U.S. Army improvement was a linear process throughout the Second World War. The traditional historical narrative of the U.S. Army treats the Mediterranean theater of operations as a deadly training ground for green U.S. forces. Somehow, so the narrative goes, the lessons learned on the beaches of Oran, the hills of the Kasserine Pass area, and the collapse of the Tunis bridgehead all contributed to later success in western Europe. Most authors assume that combat experience is essential for success, and that’s just what the units in North Africa needed. However, the U.S. Army did not enter an effectiveness trajectory that neatly began in the Mediterranean. Battalion leaders immediately provided effective combat leadership without any prior combat experience, also known as being “blooded.” These first units did not have the time to absorb institutional lessons learned as did the majority of the U.S. Army mobilizing for the cross-channel invasion. Regular Army officers proved to be highly trained, adaptable, and courageous in their first combat experiences in North Africa and Sicily. Their leadership proved to be essential at the battalion level.

Battalions formed the key building blocks of combat commands during World War II. At that level, battalion leaders were center stage at the tactical fight. While the tactical level of war extended all the way to corps headquarters throughout World War II, the regimental, divi-
sion, and corps headquarters mostly allocated combat resources and coordinated movement of units. Battalion leaders did some of that, but they also closed with and destroyed the enemy on a consistent basis. The U.S. Army lost only three generals to enemy ground combat action in all of World War II. In less than one week of combat in Normandy, the 82nd Airborne Division suffered a 70 percent casualty rate among its battalion commanders. This sampling gives a slight indication of the risk differential at the command levels.

American units throughout the North African and Sicilian campaigns suffered casualties typical of U.S. Army divisions in the European theater throughout World War II. The high-intensity warfare shredded divisions at frightful rates from beginning to end. Combat inflicted roughly the same casualty rates on divisions even after they had endured multiple campaigns. The actions of untested battalion leaders in the MTO did not incur higher casualty numbers as some have suggested. If the U.S. Army proved to be too green in North Africa and an organization that had to take its licks before it got better, then casualty rates should have been much higher. Against some of the most experienced units in the German Army, the U.S. Army battalions that fought from the North African coasts to Messina, Sicily, did not endure higher casualty rates than any other American units in western Europe, 1944–1945.

Up until 31 December 1943, about 5 percent of the officer corps in U.S. Army divisions were regular army. Of that 5 percent, the vast majority of these officers served on regimental, combat command, and division staffs. The Army Ground Forces had an enormous shortage of seasoned officers. To make up the shortage, the U.S. Army had to rely on its officer candidate schools to fill about two-thirds of the officer positions; most of these were lieutenant and captain positions. The company-grade officers who filled these billets would later lead platoons, companies, batteries, and maintenance sections. So, many divisions became top-heavy, with plenty of experience at the top and a significant leadership gap in the actual troop formations. Wisely, the U.S. Army placed regular officers into key leadership billets to compensate for this lack of experience. George C. Marshall, the chief of staff of the U.S. Army, and Lesley J. McNair, the commander of Army Ground Forces, conducted thorough reviews to select the senior officers for divisions, but they did not pick the regimental and battalion cadre officers.

Marshall and McNair recognized that each division needed quality battalion leadership, but they could not hope to scrub every file to ensure a fair distribution. They enforced a cadre system that required
older divisions to transfer some of their officers to newly formed units. This system did not result in a truly equal talent distribution. Units that formed first—such as the ones that fought in the MTO—had a higher percentage of quality as well as trained regular army officers and reserve officers. Specifically, the 1st, 3rd, and 9th Infantry Divisions and the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions escaped the heavier cadre levies due to their earlier deployment overseas and rigorous training program. Prior to their overseas movements, all of these divisions participated in the 1941 maneuver exercises, and the infantry divisions had conducted amphibious training. The divisions that eventually conducted Operations TORCH and HUSKY maintained the bulk of their battalion leaders whom they had trained over the previous eighteen months. The U.S. Army standardized the expansion after it met the operational needs identified in April 1942. All regimental commanders and executive officers were regular army officers. Within each regiment, the three battalion leadership positions—battalion commander, executive officer (XO), and operations officer (S3)—were usually held by an even mix of regular, reserve, and National Guard officers to lead a host of inexperienced and unproven OCS graduates. The MTO battalion leadership in North Africa and Sicily did not follow this typical cadre distribution since they were needed for TORCH. Division leadership retained the best cadre they could before the leveling imposed by Marshall and McNair. The U.S. Army that clambered ashore in Algeria and Morocco had the best crop of battalion leaders to endure the first combat in the European theater. The driving question for this analysis is: how and why did the regular army battalion leadership exercise combat command without any prior combat experience?

This book’s thesis is that the battalion leadership exercised by U.S. regular army officers provided the essential component that contributed to battlefield success in the Mediterranean theater of operations despite the deficiencies in equipment, organization, and mobilization and the inadequate operational leadership. Essentially, without the regular army battalion leaders, U.S. units could not have functioned tactically early in the war. The battalion leadership brought discipline, maturity, experience, and the ability to translate common operational guidance into tactical reality. In order to analyze this pivotal group of men, this book will address three sets of factors. First, all of these officers were shaped by prewar experiences. Institutional factors to include professional military education, unit training exercises, and commissioning source formed the foundation of how the U.S. Army prepared these officers for leadership and combat. The second set
strives to present a composite picture of the personal factors that shaped these officers. While less tangible than institutional factors, the personal factors include calmness under fire, vigor, and common personality traits. Finally, tactical factors are the “fields of battle” in which the leadership performed their profession. This last category is the most complex and includes the table of organization and equipment of their units, doctrine, the friction of combat, and enemy actions. The friction of combat must be highlighted. In war, nothing is certain, and too many factors exist to allow one factor such as quality battalion leadership to always determine success. The innumerable computations of combat could smile or frown on certain leaders regardless of capability. However, further examination of the three categories above as they played out in combat will show that these battalion-level professional officers were the critical cogs for early Allied success in the MTO.

The legends of World War II—Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton, Montgomery, Rommel—all take center stage in traditional MTO narratives, and the tactical level of war is often obscured by these larger-than-life figures. These generals often take credit for success and pass the responsibility to their subordinates for their failures. Too often, they give themselves front-page billing for how they reformed the army or their respective units. However, a comparison of the tactical level of war with operational and strategic levels is a consistent theme throughout the analysis. The issue of combat experience differs on the levels of war, and these contrasts illuminate the capabilities of the U.S. Army battalion leadership in its first campaigns. An evaluation of combat effectiveness at the tactical level is one of the objectives. This analysis also draws conclusions about the U.S. Army’s competence at the three levels of war. The battalion tactical leadership overcame lackluster operational and strategic guidance and other significant handicaps to execute the first MTO campaigns. Furthermore, some historians have concluded that battalion leadership irregularities “seem immeasurable” in the World War II U.S. Army. However, the high quality of the MTO battalion leaders suggests that a more typical group of leaders in later mobilized divisions would not have performed as well to overcome the challenges of the U.S. Army’s first campaigns.

Besides addressing the campaigns, this study would be incomplete without a thorough examination of the prewar experiences of these World War II battalion commanders, executive officers, and operations officers. Institutional factors—professional military education, unit training, and leadership development—shaped these men prior to combat. The units that fought in the MTO possessed a high number of regi-
ular army officers in battalion command and staff positions. Most of these officers had served on the Pacific frontier on the Philippines Islands, Hawaii, China, or the Panama Canal Zone in company leadership and battalion staff positions. The only non-USMA graduates commissioned in the 1930s were warrant officers, chaplains, doctors, dentists, veterinarians, two hundred Air Corps officers, a handful of enlisted soldiers, and Thomason Act officers—fifty a year—starting in 1936. From 1936 to 1939, USMA graduates still dominated the commissioning at about an 85 percent rate. West Point underwent a training and learning renaissance at the same time that it produced the majority of the new officers. Both USMA graduates and the fifty Thomason Act officers were commissioned in only six branches: engineer, coastal artillery, cavalry, field artillery, infantry, and signal corps. This study remains focused on officers who served in infantry and armor positions chiefly for two reasons. First, these positions traditionally held the key leadership and staff positions in the battalions that conducted combat operations. Second, the line officers had the responsibility to execute combined arms operations. Unlike field artillery officers, infantry and armor officers routinely engaged in direct combat with the enemy and had to synchronize the actions of all branches in combat. The lower casualty rates in artillery battalions gradually made the field artillery branch the most effective of the three (infantry, armor, and field artillery) branches as the war progressed. The technical nature of the branch and its functions coupled with the lower casualty rates produced a very different, but not less important, combat experience than infantry and armor.

Many U.S. officers shared the same “Old Army” skill sets in their early career. Across the U.S. Army in the 1930s, these officers developed familiarity with the systems and doctrine that would prove crucial in the combined arms operations of the Second World War. However, this Old Army inculcated critical components of successful officership in these young men. The 1930s cohort of officers—the future World War II battalion leaders—benefited from the diverse leadership styles of the “Hump” of officers who filled the officer corps in the wake of the Great War. The large postwar influx provided battle-experienced leaders to mentor the 1930s officers. The extremely slow promotion rates for the Hump officers produced both negative and positive role models for new officers. These familiarities provided the leadership foundation that permitted most officers at the tactical level to successfully transition from interwar doctrine to the combined arms operations. A thorough evaluation of the Carolina/Louisiana maneuvers, unit experiences, and
leadership challenges such as the Civilian Conservation Corps shows that these served as the key developmental events to explain this transition. The vast majority of battalion commanders and their staff officers participated in some fashion in one or all of these mobilization events. Every battalion commander from the 1st Armored, 1st Infantry, 2nd Armored, and 9th Infantry Divisions participated in at least one of the Army General Headquarters (GHQ) maneuvers.\footnote{12}

The U.S. Army’s robust investment in its officer corps throughout the 1930s coincided with the Roosevelt Administration’s implementation of the New Deal. The New Deal’s comprehensive engagement with the average American citizen gradually built confidence that the federal government had the ability to solve complex problems. Furthermore, the extensive programs created a more cosmopolitan society prepared to accept the American government’s authority. With the outbreak of World War II, U.S. Army mobilization rapidly absorbed millions of these New Deal citizen soldiers. As they swelled the ranks of units led by regular army officers, their prewar New Deal interactions prevented the creation of substantial barriers between the citizen soldier and the regular. Most importantly, the battalion leaders could foster a command climate conducive to organizational innovation and tactical adaptation. Doctrine and formal lessons learned took too long to disseminate for battalions on the battlefield. Officers who had learned to grasp the fundamentals of combined arms warfare in the 1930s and early 1940s found that the demands of combat required constant adjustment and improvement. Citizen soldiers and their battalion leaders worked together to improve their units’ combat effectiveness. In order to do this, battalions had to be learning organizations. The battalion leaders created environments that valued the contributions of their soldiers despite the fact that the vast majority of them had never worn uniforms a year or two before. Their shared belief in the American government’s authority prevented severe morale issues that other nations would suffer during the war, such as the British in North Africa.\footnote{13}

In order to evaluate the U.S. Army and its officer corps, this study deals with how battalion leaders incorporated technological innovations into combined arms maneuver. Technological concerns normally boil down to the use of Ultra (Allied codename for signal intelligence), tank lethality, command post/radio proficiency and security, and close air support. In technological terms, the U.S. Army had a steep learning curve to overcome in North Africa. Therefore, this book addresses how well U.S. Army battalion leadership employed tank capabilities and close air support doctrine in terms of combined arms operations. Essen-
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...tially, how did a battalion commander employ the means available to his unit? U.S. Army doctrine and manuals often did not include enough detail or instruction for officers to rely on. Battalions had to develop and refine solutions.

This book also evaluates the competence of the U.S. Army officer battalion leadership in the MTO and dispels the notion that the U.S. Army had to be blooded in order to learn how to fight, mobilize, and train. As with most topics of the Second World War, the historiography is deep. This work does not pretend to be a comprehensive narrative of the Mediterranean theater by any means. The collection of divisions in the Mediterranean provides sufficient diversity for a detailed analysis. The 1st Armored Division and the 1st, 9th, and 34th Infantry Divisions will take center stage in North Africa since they did most of the fighting. The 2nd Armored and 3rd Infantry Divisions had limited action in North Africa, but participated in Operation Husky. Finally, the actions of the rangers and elements of the 82nd Airborne Division that participated in North Africa and Sicily will offer detailed examples of elite units. Based on these units, 168 battalion leaders form the starting point for analysis. Each division had approximately thirty battalion leaders in infantry and armor units. Since MTO operations predated the armored division restructure into light and heavy divisions, both 1st and 2nd Armored Division had the same table of organization. Essentially, both armored and infantry divisions had three regiments each, and every armored and infantry regiment had three battalions. Each division also had a reconnaissance squadron that included three more leaders. The study also includes the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion (North Africa), the 504th and 509th Parachute Infantry Regiments (Sicily), and the 1st Ranger Battalion (North Africa and Sicily) and the 3rd Ranger Battalion (Sicily). Each parachute regiment also had three infantry battalions. The analysis will tend to focus on offensive operations, especially those that include multiple combat arms. The large number of officers and limited primary resources prohibit a discussion of every officer, but a representative selection will present a comprehensive analysis throughout the MTO. This young officer corps developed the sophistication to handle the complexity of combined arms operations at the beginning of the war.

This work contributes to World War II historiography through its analysis of the tactical and operational competence of the Army of the United States. An ongoing debate about U.S. force capabilities rages among military historians, and most tend to depreciate American performance. However, the analysis of battalion leadership in the MTO
expands this debate to this oft-neglected group of individuals and shifts focus away from generals, the replacement system, or weapon systems. These individuals had to translate operational guidance into practice despite numerous constraints. Ultimately, this is a “history from the middle.” The Mediterranean theater of operations U.S. Army battalion leaders were the middle managers who provided the organizational solution to achieve tactical victories in the United States’ first campaigns. Their story explains how these officers mastered combined arms and tactical adaptation at the tactical level to achieve Allied strategic and operational goals.

Although no two officers shared the exact same background or career path, the sum of their diverse experiences developed them all in a similar way—a convergent evolution. Most of the officers developed similar characteristics and capabilities despite different career paths. As army officers matured in similar environments of commissioning source, professional military education, and life in military units, they developed parallel characteristics to adjust to and master their similar environments. This cohort underwent a convergent evolution to adapt to the conditions of the 1930s in preparation for World War II. In preparation for and in actual combat, this evolution occurred at a more rapid pace as time became more limited than experience and resources. The battalion leadership relied heavily on the prewar experiences to adapt on the battlefield. Once there, they worked to ensure their units continually evolved. The adaptability of U.S. Army battalions and their leaders early in the war allowed for maximum agility on the battlefield.

They often used their past experience to develop innovative solutions to battlefield conditions. A well-known example of this tactical diversity is the different solutions to overcoming the hedgerow defenses during the Normandy campaign of 1944. Three divisions—the 29th Infantry, 2nd Armored, and 3rd Armored—all developed separate tactics to overcome the *bocage* despite all being in First Army. Units and commanders surely shared lessons learned, but senior commanders required that subordinate commands develop their own solutions to tactical problems. In North Africa and Sicily, no two leaders implemented their craft in the same manner; their foundation and adaptation in combat produced successful tactics.

As Major General Ernest Harmon watched a battalion of his tanks parade past in Tunis after the fall of Tunisia, he commented: “Then came a battalion of my tanks. They were battle-scarred and dirty, and I was very proud of them.” The same could be said of the U.S. Army’s battalion leadership. Like the M-4 Shermans they commanded, the bat-
talion leaders entered combat fresh and untouched by the rigors of war. Yet, both men and machines did their job, and without either of them, the Allies could not have achieved their North African victory. Seven chapters tell their story. The first two chapters establish the pre–World War II background of the officers in this study. Further, they describe how similar experiences developed a competent officer corps that filled the critical battalion leadership positions in the MTO. The next five chapters chronicle the combat effectiveness and tactical adaptation of these leaders and their organizations throughout North Africa and Sicily. In this discussion, the combat experiences reveal how the battalion leadership employed doctrine, reacted to the stress of combat, and overcame the challenges induced by an army entering combat for the first time since 1918.

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West Point Evolution

On 13 June 1933, a cadet captain graduated 177th out of his 346 West Point classmates. He had attained his cadet rank of captain, but other than that, his tenure at the academy seemed unremarkable to his classmates, professors, and tactical officers. After seventy-four days of leave, he arrived at Fort Bliss, Texas, as a newly commissioned second lieutenant in the field artillery. Over the next seven years, he would serve at Fort Riley, Kansas, Fort Lewis, Washington, Fort Hoyle, Maryland, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He attended the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for nine months in between his assignments at Fort Bliss and Fort Riley. He held every company level, billet up to battery commander. During the 1940 mobilization and expansion of the U.S. Army, this officer was mentored by a World War I Medal of Honor winner and participated in the Fleet Landing Exercise No. 7 in Puerto Rico, and the Third Army maneuvers in Louisiana. In January 1942, the U.S. Army assigned him as the aide-de-camp to the 34th Infantry Division commander, Major General Russell P. Hartle, and they both left for Northern Ireland to assist with the Operation bolero buildup. He was quickly recognized as a quality leader by General Hartle and reassigned to another unit. As the war raged throughout the Mediterranean theater of operations, this officer would lead a battalion, then an infantry regiment, and eventually become an assistant division commander. He earned two Distinguished Service Crosses and a Silver Star, and established one of the most famous combat formations in the U.S. Army and the world: the U.S. Army Rangers. William O. Darby epitomized the ultimate battalion leader while leading the 1st Ranger Battalion in North Africa and Sicily. While not all of his peers achieved as much as Darby, most of them all started their journey at West Point and had similar careers in the 1930s interwar army. Their story begins at the United States Military Academy.
From the National Defense Act of 1920 until 1935, all newly commissioned officers on active duty came from the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point. From 1935 until 1940, USMA graduates still accounted for 85 percent of all new officers. In World War II units, graduates prior to 1929 primarily served at the regimental level and higher, due to seniority and age; however, graduates after 1929 mostly served at the battalion level. As the U.S. Army rapidly mobilized from 1940 forward, these regular army officers with a decade or less of service formed the nucleus around which the army congealed. The vast majority of these officers were commissioned from only one source: West Point. The pivotal role of this primary commissioning source requires examination. Their journey as officers began at a time when the academy vastly revitalized its approach to officer development. The academy improved and diversified intellectual development at all levels. Furthermore, it geared its military training more and more to expose cadets to combined arms warfare. The physical fitness program paved the way for young officers to lead and inspire soldiers. Finally, the academy’s commitment to bring officers back to the academy after service in field units offered improved role models to the cadets.

After World War I, Douglas MacArthur assumed duties as the superintendent of the United States Military Academy and instituted a major curriculum overhaul. As one historian remarked, paraphrasing the nursery rhyme, “when he was good, he was very, very good and when he was bad, he was horrid.” Fortunately, he was good in 1920. His 1920 annual report framed the new vision for the academy to meet the challenges of the post–Great War world. Essentially, MacArthur recognized that West Point was too hidebound and dogmatic. In the future, he claimed, “improvisation will be the watch-word. Such changed conditions will require a modification in type of officer, a type possessing all of the cardinal military virtues as of yore, but possessing an intimate understanding of the mechanics of human feelings, a comprehensive grasp of world and national affairs, and a liberalization of conception which amounts to a change in his psychology of command.” The sixty-four-page 1920 report easily eclipsed the fourteen-page average posted by his predecessors and successors. It laid the foundation for the future to develop adaptable leaders prepared for modern war. Like most visions, however, it would take significant time and resources to fully implement. It would also have to overcome 120 years of tradition. MacArthur’s wide-ranging reforms alienated many traditionalists and alumni, especially abolishing the summer encampment. General John
J. Pershing, army chief of staff, replaced him and sent him to the Philippines. His successor reversed some MacArthur reforms, but the seeds had taken hold. From 1929 to 1939, the academy had finally fulfilled MacArthur’s guidance with a comprehensive curriculum grounded in sound tactical instruction, academic balance, and physical development.

By 1929, the academy recognized its pressing need for land to sustain MacArthur’s vision as well as train cadets. Superintendent William R. Smith submitted a request to the War Department to acquire approximately 15,000 acres adjacent to USMA to obtain an adequate water supply, establish an airfield, construct small-arms and field-artillery ranges, and maintain maneuver areas. Seven years and three superintendents removed from MacArthur, Smith maintained that the mission of the Military Academy is to train a cadet to think clearly and logically and to do so habitually; to teach him discipline and the basic principles applicable to the various arms in the Military Service; to develop his physique and above all his character; and to teach him to approach all of his problems with an attitude of intellectual honesty, to be sensible of the rights of others, to be inspired by a sense of duty and honor, and unhesitatingly to lay down his life in the service of his country should the occasion arise.

To fulfill this charge, Smith required more land, and he got approval to enlarge the post in 1931. The 71st Congress authorized the purchase of 15,135 acres to expand the military reservation. Besides negating the need to beg for water from the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, the acquisition permitted the academy to conduct quality small-arms, machine-gun, and field-artillery firing as well as maneuvers within ten minutes of the cadet barracks area. A work in progress, the new area required extensive construction and development. The academy slowly acquired chunks of the 15,135 acres as the decade progressed. Tied up in litigation and appropriations, almost all of the land—no doubt accelerated by World War II—finally became part of West Point. The academy utilized the land to train the cadets throughout the 1930s, but it still augmented first-class training with training trips away from the academy until 1939. The academy was expanding its ability to develop cadets while the army successfully fought a 2,000-officer reduction initiated by a budget-slashing House of Representatives. The U.S. Army protected its “training nucleus” and invested heavily in its officer devel-
Chapter One

opment throughout the 1930s. In 1936, the Congress authorized West Point to increase its class size by about 150 cadets to meet the new 14,000-officer goal. The academy’s expansion served as the last key resource to institute the curriculum envisioned in the wake of World War I and the National Defense Act of 1920.

With the dawn of the 1930s, USMA liberalized its instruction. Military training and classroom instruction witnessed the most significant evolutions. General MacArthur’s initial sports emphasis stuck, and the academy sustained his emphasis on “the fields of friendly strife” after his departure. Gradually, the academic quality increased. Starting in 1929, the academy began a program to send its humanities instructors abroad on yearlong sabbaticals. For example, the professor of the Department of Economics, Government, and History traveled to New Zealand and Australia to study labor conditions and the results of “socialistic legislation.” It also sent instructors, especially those who taught in the sciences, to technical schools or universities in the summer months. Language instructors spent time, some up to a year, in Madrid and Paris, every chemistry instructor attended summer courses at civilian schools, and law instructors went to Columbia University. Also, the USMA library expanded its collection exponentially. Beginning in 1929, the library acquired an average of 1,500 new books annually. Instructor quality improved and approached the standards of civilian institutions such as Harvard. In 1933, West Point defeated Harvard in a head-to-head mathematics competition. A decade previously, West Point had endured harsh criticism for undereducated instructors and cadets. The studies abroad, summer classes, and relevant library not only put those criticisms to rest, but offered an education balanced between the arts and the sciences. Congress’s 1933 approval for conferment of bachelor of science degrees to academy graduates validated the reforms.

A New Approach in the Classroom

This scholarship infusion positively impacted the cadets’ instruction in every way. The first-class course in military transportation became a practical education course since the academy finally constructed an adequate laboratory with automotive equipment. Furthermore, the class went to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Frankford Arsenal, Midvale Steel Works, Ludlum Steel Company, and Watervliet Arsenal to gain an appreciation for ordnance development and testing. Social science
injection emphasized more lessons in modern history and events. The third-class history course experimented with a Near East regionally focused history course. The third-class cadets also completed a special course in historical research. Military history and engineering course hours totaled 112 hours for the first class, which exceeded the formerly dominant civil engineering course by 8 hours. The academy’s academic board even strived to ensure that the entire program reinforced learning objectives. For example, the fourth- and third-class French course textbooks included campaign descriptions of the Battles of Austerlitz and Waterloo to introduce the cadets to military history. Departments devised learning objectives that did not duplicate the work of other departments. The Department of Civil and Mechanical Engineering’s military engineering course devoted time to pontoon bridge load calculations, but did not venture into the bridge’s construction since the Department of Tactics covered this topic. This detailed lesson planning synchronized a time-constrained curriculum. An analysis of the history program provides an instructive illustration.

West Point slowly adapted its military history curriculum to prepare future officers for combined arms operations. An evolutionary process began after the Great War. The Department of Tactics and the Civil and Military Engineering Department jointly taught a military art class to only the cadet first class. One forty-hour block in the fall term represented the total military history time that first-class cadets received. Three case studies evenly distributed among the class periods drove the thirty-five classes. Surprisingly contemporary, the Russo-Japanese War and World War I led the semester with a heavy focus on Port Arthur and Verdun. Oddly, the Civil War—Grant and the Overland Campaign of 1864 taking center stage—rounded out the course. While a welcomed improvement from the pre–World War I era, the effort remained insufficient to ground the budding young officers. Gradually, the Civil and Military Engineering Department sacrificed some course material and time from its civil engineering and military engineering courses to its military history program. In 1935, for example, the military history course increased by twenty-two periods that included lessons on the Franco-Prussian War, the Russo-Japanese War, and more World War I campaigns.

The Department of Civil and Military Engineering’s objective for its military history course aimed to institute a “basic knowledge of military history” that would serve as a foundation for future professional reading and the instruction given at the branch service schools. The department hoped that this basis would provide context to the case
studies and vignettes employed at Forts Riley and Benning. Cadets enjoyed—a professor could hope—112 hours of military history instruction throughout their senior year at West Point. Instructors led small-group discussions to emphasize the significance of readings as well as practical lessons learned that the cadets could extrapolate to contemporary operations. Department guidance also stressed that instructors must highlight the personal attributes of the great captains. With texts such as Great Captains and Life of Napoleon, combat leaders often took center stage. A free-thinking atmosphere that got “the cadets to think” and talk provided the engine for these classes. An operational and strategic levels of war theme acquainted cadets with major campaigns and periods of conflict. The tactical level of war received little attention. The department strived to avoid overlapping instruction with the Department of Tactics. Instead, cadets digested the principles of operations and strategy. They acquainted themselves with combat maneuvers to conduct campaign analysis.

Even while stressing the military history classics and great captains, instructors strove to remain innovative. After two months of Caesar at Pharsalus, Gustavus Adolphus’s victory at Breitenfeld, Frederick the Great’s defeat of the French at Rossbach, and careful study of Clausewitz and Schlieffen, the military history course spent two weeks on the 1937 Sino-Japanese War. Using restricted official documents, the lesson authors wrote a monograph to present the lessons. This case study employed an interdepartmental approach to illuminate how the Japanese achieved success against their enormous foe. To broaden understanding, cadets not only studied the war’s strategy and operations, but also received a lecture on Far Eastern economics. They also received instruction on the Japanese tactics employed in the Chahar and Suiyuan operations—designed to strengthen defense against the Soviet Union—from the Department of Tactics. In each classroom hung an enormous map of China that depicted railroads, major routes, terrain features, and port facilities. By the end of the two weeks, cadets had conducted a thorough campaign analysis. The same interdisciplinary approach based on restricted documents dissected the civil war in Spain. An erudite conclusion on the Spanish civil war lessons emphasized “constant maneuvering” and “motor transportation.” The Guadalajara offensive served as the case study to showcase a motorized envelopment to cement this point. Although the conclusion does not rule out the use of the horse in modern war, the analysis revolves around the employment of ground transportation, tanks, artillery, and aviation. Most
importantly, instructors stressed that no “secrets of success in modern war” existed for a simple formula.\footnote{27}

West Point’s intellectual development of cadets kept pace with the branch schools and the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). Both schools incorporated Sino-Japanese and Spanish civil war studies into their curriculum. The branch schools remained fixated on the more practical application to tactics. CGSC included conflict updates and analysis of both wars in almost every quarterly issue of \textit{Military Review} from 1936 to 1940. Typically, these updates varied in length from four to seven pages and presented an operational overview thin on analysis. Actually, the case studies at West Point addressed all aspects of the campaigns more thoroughly than any of the other army schools. Each school did recognize the value in the study of contemporary operations. However, the USMA’s rapid integration of current conflicts indicates a sense of urgency among the faculty to prepare cadets for the modern battlefield. It also gave junior officers a common frame of reference with their superiors who studied the same conflicts.\footnote{28}

\section*{Forging Cadets into Soldiers: Tactical Training}

The two charts in this section represent the typical time the Department of Tactics dedicated to tactics, leadership, administration, individual training, and physical fitness. While only one training year, 1933–1934, is used here, the allocations are very similar from 1930 to 1940. The department usually had about 1,500 hours to instruct cadets over their four years. In this example, the cadets had 1,513 hours of training. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the entire academy allocated more hours to training at the expense of drill, ceremonial procedures, parades, and other administrative tasks. The summer training time almost doubled. Prior to World War II, the academy did not possess the same budget or sense of urgency, but the charts indicate a fair commitment to tactical training. The academy’s commitment to about 200 hours of ceremonies seems to be a colossal waste of a future officer’s time. The department could have used the time better in the field or on the rifle range. The instructors did try to use this ceremonial time to instill discipline and present the cadets with leadership opportunities. Like it or not, the instructors and cadets were the public face of the U.S. Army. As the pie graph displays, the time spent on field training almost equaled the time spent riding and conducting ceremonies.
West Point never escaped the requirement to maintain nickel-plated tin soldiers on parade until the outbreak of war, but it managed to still focus on preparing proficient cadets.

From 1929 to 1939, West Point executed a comprehensive summer training program for the cadets. The under-three classes spent considerable time on individual tasks such as rifle marksmanship or radio communications. The third class, for example, spent five days on radio communications where they established regimental networks, both wire and wireless. They gradually built on the individual tasks up to platoon-level events such as the “rifle platoon in attack.” Of all the classes, the first-class cadets received the most intensive and relevant summer course. Firsties could expect to conduct numerous trips away from the academy. As technologies improved and units deployed to different garrisons, the destinations and duration changed. There were usually two significant deployments. First, the cadets spent approximately a week at an airfield such as Mitchell Airfield, Long Island, and three days at an ordnance post such as Picatinny Arsenal, New Jersey, for technical exposure to flying, maintenance, and ammunition. Second, firsties traveled to Forts Eustis, Monroe, and Benning for hands-
on maneuver and weapons training. Instructors and cadets alike lauded the professional development of all the trips.

The weeklong first-class trip to Mitchell Field in 1935 showcases the exposure to the U.S. Army Air Corps. Cadets spent a total of nine and one-half hours on actual flying missions. By the end of the week, each cadet received familiarization and navigation flights and carried out interception and bombing missions. On the missions, the budding pilots operated observation cameras, camera guns while dogfighting, dropped bombs on targets, and had to navigate their air frame. When not flying, cadets received instruction on aircraft logistics, maintenance, and parachutes at the airfield’s working facilities. This training was not merely a recruiting stunt to draw officers into the Air Corps. The Air Corps had no problem meeting its quota from West Point. More importantly, the army made a serious investment in every future officer. Any officer worth his salt understood that air power would be an essential element in any future conflict. As such, USMA ensured that all the cadets knew airpower capabilities.³¹

The three-week tactics and weapons trip represented the principal
exposure to the army’s capabilities. On 13 June 1931, the first class—organized into three battalions—departed West Point for a three-week trip to Fort Monroe, Langley Field, and Fort Eustis. Each battalion was rotated among the posts and devoted five days to training at each location. Langley Field units presented close air support and mechanized force demonstrations and exercises to the cadets. Cadets not only witnessed the tactical employment of tanks, armored cars, artillery, aircraft, and machine guns, but also received detailed instruction on the weapons’ capabilities and limitations as well as their use together. The tank section even illustrated the tanks’ ability to overcome field obstacles. The time at Fort Meade revolved around ordnance instruction and more tank demonstrations. At Fort Monroe, the battalion divided into sections to fire 8-inch artillery and antiaircraft weapons that included 3-inch guns and .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine guns. The cadet battalions kept score, with 2nd Battalion establishing itself as the clear winner.32 They even learned how to employ the antiaircraft weapons at night. The chief of coast artillery commented on the cadets’ surprising accuracy in a letter to the commandment of cadets. Besides the chief of coast artillery, both the superintendent of USMA and the commandant of cadets observed training at Fort Monroe and Langley Field. The trip even included a side journey to Norfolk Navy Yard, where cadets toured an aircraft carrier, a cruiser, and the battleship Arizona. Throughout the trip, cadets participated in athletics from polo to tennis. While many had families in the local area, the officer-in-charge denied all requests for cadets to spend nights away from the posts. The senior officer observation and strict cadet management indicate how serious USMA officers considered this summer trip to be. The academy viewed this trip as the critical exposure to the regular army for cadets.33

By the academic year of 1935–1936, this major summer deployment shifted mostly to Fort Benning, with a short stop at Fort Monroe. The shift south reflected the growth of the Infantry School and the slow death of the coastal artillery. Furthermore, the cadets’ training had become even more detailed and practical since 1931. In addition to the air training at Mitchell Field, cadets witnessed a whole day of air power at Benning, to include machine-gun strafing, bombing attacks, chemical attack, smoke screens, parachute bombs, air aerobatics, and air-to-air combat courtesy of four different squadrons.34 Cadets received instruction and conducted practical exercises for ten days at Fort Benning.35 Demonstrations on the new M1 Garand and antitank weapons exposed cadets to emerging technologies. They also witnessed tanks, mortars,
and light and heavy artillery in action. The coup de grâce was a battalion combined arms attack. This final demonstration exhibited the synergy of all the nine previous days. By the end of the ten days, the cadets had witnessed the latest tactics and technologies. They also were exposed to the officers, NCOs, and soldiers of the U.S. Army. Many remembered the trip as the most useful experience of their cadet careers.

Once the battalions returned to West Point, they ventured into the Hudson Highlands for essential field training. Back at the academy, they participated in two one-week field problems grounded in field artillery and cavalry tactics at the company and battalion level. As the academy slowly acquired the authorized 15,000 acres throughout the decade, this field training achieved more. The artillery field time included day and night employment of both motor and horse-drawn batteries. The cavalry maneuver offered a weeklong field exercise that culminated in an 80-mile night march. During this maneuver, the cadets rotated positions between rifle, machine-gun, and armored-car platoons.

The five-day maneuver included applicable training for future officers. Cadets exercised leadership, conducted tactics, appreciated the difficulty of communications while on the move, and grasped the capabilities of both horse and mechanized cavalry. Instructors produced detailed scripts that outlined the notional combat situation, opposing forces, and learning objectives. The cadets attacked and defended as both mechanized units and horse-mounted cavalry. They even conducted a zone reconnaissance with a rigorous reporting regimen designed to teach the cadets how to use and manage wireless communications. The most important aspect was that the instructors conducted problem critiques—now commonly referred to as after action reports (AARs) or “hotwashes”—immediately upon completion to identify key learning points. The whole exercise incorporated the latest technological developments with an intense introduction to movement and maneuver.

When cadets were not in the field or away from West Point, the Department of Tactics’ curriculum utilized the classroom for winter training. From October to April of each academic year, the department instituted a building-block approach to its instruction. The under-two classes were drilled in map reading, combat principles, and squad tactics on sandtables. The second class, nicknamed “cows,” had a substantial block of platoon tactics instruction named “minor tactics” and a rigorous course in field artillery. Cows had to solve approximately ten tactical problems. They also had to pass nine written and practical exams on artillery employment. Tactical situations grew more com-
plex for the first class. A combination of terrain exercises, map, and sandtable problems fused the previous three years’ training into sophisticated scenarios at the company and battalion level. After observing the local area on terrain walks, cadets were issued maps, a notional combat situation, and a mission. In one example, the general scenario placed the cadets as part of the 2nd Infantry Division that had crossed the Hudson River in the vicinity of Newburgh and had to attack south to seize Highland Falls. As the unit moved south, the instructors fed notional intelligence collected from the air corps and advance guard units. Based on their terrain knowledge, maps, intelligence, and training, each cadet had to solve various situations as part of the 2nd Infantry. In Situation No. 1, “Rifle Company with Machine Guns in Attack,” the cadet had to write a very brief operations order of how his company would seize the Central Valley–Highland Falls road junction held by an enemy force with heavy machine guns. The situations varied the unit and weapon types to ensure maximum exposure to all of the combat arms. Instructors then reviewed the students’ solutions to lead class discussions about the varied techniques used by the cadets. Beyond the tested situations, classes included extensive lectures and testing on the air corps. The firsties even received command and control training for battalions and regiments. To accomplish this, the department used an innovative command-post demonstration and practical exercise.

While the Hudson Highlands winter blasted West Point, cadets continued to hone their tactical skills in their classroom confines. When the snows receded, they carried these lessons forward to their summer training. The summer training for first-class cadets exposed them to the vast array of career opportunities for a young officer. For most, it was the first time they encountered the “real” army. The trip shaped them all differently, but they had made up their minds about what branch seemed like the right fit. No cadet became an expert in any one branch or weapon system. The cadets, however, did see the combined effects. When they were not in the field practicing their future profession, they reflected on it and thought about tactical problems during their winter curriculum. Given the facility and budget limitations of the day, the academy developed relevant ways to prepare the army’s future officers.

**Into the Gym and onto the Fields**

Physical training and instruction formed one of the key pillars for cadets at West Point. The athletic training cards of James D. Alger, a
member of the USMA class of 1935, offer a comprehensive guide. The card cataloged body measurements, physical tests, membership on athletic teams, and section for qualifications. Twice a year, the office of physical education measured each cadet’s height, weight, chest (normal, deflated, and inflated), right and left arms and forearms, and right and left thighs and calves. The spring and fall curriculum included biannual grading in gym apparatus, fencing, wrestling, boxing, track and field, swimming, and leadership bearing. At the end of each semester, the cadet received a ranking in his class. Alger’s card reflects a 10-pound weight gain, minor increases in chest, arms, and legs measurements, his participation on the corps squad (varsity) track team and the intramural lacrosse and football teams, a standing of 34 for the fall semester and 99 for the spring semester, and a qualification as a Red Cross Life Saver.

The office of physical education kept athletic training cards for every year of a cadet’s tenure. The daily curriculum included these physical fitness classes, and each semester had dedicated intramural and equestrian periods.

Alger, who would lead a tank battalion at Sidi Bou Zid, Tunisia, and his classmates endured an intense physical fitness evaluation and program. The academy maintained a rigorous intramural program for the fall and spring semesters and throughout the summer training period. The fall semester had a team sport focus that included football, lacrosse, basketball, and track, while the spring semester developed the individual with gymnastics, swimming, cross-country, and pentathlon. If a cadet had mastered swimming and gymnastics then he could participate in team sports like baseball and soccer for the spring semester. The summer training period differed for each class, but the training schedule allowed for both team and individual athletics after military training was complete. To almost a man, cadets thoroughly enjoyed the intramurals. They thrived on the competition and viewed the games as a tremendous release of the pressure of academics and military training. More importantly, it prepared them to lead, as one officer remembered:

I had the thought [that] the intramural program was terribly important because as quickly as the officers went to their regiments, they had to coach, referee, and deal with problems of athletics and sports in their outfits. So, I thought it was really a great thing to prepare the young lieutenant to the point where he could deal with the men out of high school, or out of college that were in the enlisted ranks and understand them better. If he was
nothing but a bookworm, he would have trouble getting through to some of these people.49

Besides inspiring most to a lifetime of physical fitness, this program encouraged physical toughness, leadership, teamwork, and endurance.50

The USMA emphasis on physical fitness prepared future officers for service in an army committed to athletics. The first Army-Navy football game—1 December 1890—ushered in a mandatory physical fitness program at the academy. MacArthur’s post–World War I reforms made athletics and intramurals mandatory for every cadet. This acceptance of athletics as a fundamental tenet to cadet development rapidly bled over to the whole army. To abolish high incidences of drunken behavior, venereal disease, and, above all else, desertion, officers implemented extensive sport and athletic programs. The World War I trench warfare confirmed the importance of physical fitness to survival on the battlefield. So, while competitive sports like baseball and volleyball continued to expand, every soldier practiced combatives, boxing, jumping, and vaulting. Officers and soldiers embraced organized athletics and physical fitness as proper training for combat, a way to build camaraderie and cohesion, and a critical component of leadership development.51

Sports became even more important to units in the interwar period, especially for those guarding America’s Pacific possessions and the Panama Canal. The officer corps played polo, golf, and tennis in the afternoons after they finished their official duties in places such as Fort Stotensburg and Fort McKinley, Philippines. Officers—mostly cavalrymen—even credited polo as the catalyst for officer retention in the interwar years as well as the development of aggressive and highly adaptable officers.52 In an era of brutal budget constraints, the officer corps found professional development, discipline, and fun in organized athletics.53 The Sports Carnival in the Philippine Islands represented the high-water mark. This three- to four-day event combined every conceivable sporting event with social activities to determine the best athletes and, of course, socialize.54 More importantly, the U.S. Army’s attachment to athletics demanded officers to maintain appropriate levels of physical fitness throughout their careers. This created proper role models for enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers to follow.55
Role Models

Constant exposure to army officers offered the most profound leadership lessons for cadets. The Martin “Marty” Mahers were few and far between at West Point. Very few civilian instructors, especially outside of the athletic department, were NCOs or civilians like Maher. Cadets encountered officers of all types throughout the entire day. Through their interaction with officers, cadets took the full measure of the weak, mediocre, and outstanding. From the classroom to the cadet barracks to summer training, the cadets absorbed the officers’ leadership. Regardless of the leadership quality, cadets shaped their concepts of what makes a good leader by seeing many in a short time period. Per academic year, cadets usually took six to seven classes and had, at a minimum, twelve to fourteen different instructors. The actual number was usually much higher since academic subjects often “resected” after the first thirty days to place cadets of equal ability in the same classrooms. When the course resected, cadets received another instructor. Beyond the classroom, each cadet had a company tactical officer. Many company tactical officers doubled as Department of Tactics instructors. So, throughout the summer and winter tactics curriculum, most cadets saw every company tactical officer as well as the branch detachments that augmented this training. Academy officers also served as coaches and assistants for athletic teams, offering another exposure outlet. The rapid turnover of officers—each department usually rotated two to four officers a year back to the army—contributed further to a high turnover rate. After only two years, for example, John Waters replaced Omar Bradley as a tactical officer. Some officers had more impact than others on cadets based on time, experience, and personal identification. A few cadets did not “recall anyone that was inspiring,” but they remembered being “impressed” with certain officers. A conservative estimate determines that the average cadet had significant contact with at least sixty officers over his four-year tenure.

As is often the case in leadership, the negative leaders shine brighter than the positive ones. West Point proved no different. In one incident, a cadet detested the cavalry branch from his one interaction with his riding instructor, a cavalry officer. The instructor—a Captain John Fryerson—exhibited unbridled cruelty toward the riding horses in front of the cadets. He consistently abused the horses, even whipping them while someone held the reins tight. The cadets uniformly hated this man and by association, his service branch. The academy, however, assigned two young cavalry officers (one of them was John Waters) the
next year to eradicate the negative cavalry branch image. Both officers quickly gained reputations as tough but fair and impressive leaders. The cadets thirsted for quality role models, and the younger officers could provide constructive examples of how to lead and not to lead.\footnote{61}

The three charts in this section characterize the USMA officer composition throughout the 1930s. To ensure an even sampling, three years—1930, 1934, 1938—were selected to represent the officer distribution for the entire decade. The three years are typical when compared to the other years. The data are extracted for seven different departments to give a sense of what type officer a cadet would encounter throughout his four-year career. The branch detachments, U.S. Corps of Cadets tactical officers, and Department of Tactics conducted all gymnastics, winter and summer training, and disciplined the cadets throughout the year. Regardless of academic year, every cadet encountered these officers on a daily basis. History, modern languages, mathematics, and civil and military engineering included subjects taken by every class. The academic courses selected relate not only the curriculum breadth, but they represent the subjects taken by all four classes at any time. While no fourth-class cadet studied engineering, for example, since it was mostly a first-class subject, all fourth-class cadets took mathematics and French. All the instructors hailed from nine branches: infantry, field artillery, cavalry, engineers, coastal artillery, air corps, signal corps, quartermaster, and ordnance. The branch type and vast distribution indicate the cadet exposure to every officer type. Infantry, field artillery, cavalry, and engineers tended to dominate this population, while air corps, signal corps, ordnance, and quartermaster officers were a small minority. The charts do not reflect the rank, but approximately 60 percent of the officers were first lieutenants and 30 percent were captains.\footnote{62}

These data indicate that cadets interacted mostly with combat arms officers with less than fourteen years of service. The constant exposure to role models ingrained positive leadership traits and repudiated negative qualities. Academics and the longing for graduation could consume cadets.\footnote{63} The frantic pace often prevented them from forming lasting mentorship bonds beyond one or two officers. Wherever they went, officers stood ready to instruct and evaluate them: in the riding hall, during a sandtable exercise, or while reciting French. The myriad of officer-cadet combinations eludes a definitive quantitative or qualitative role model analysis. The data do suggest that cadets had ample opportunity to form opinions about their own leadership style. Most found the cadet leadership wanting, silly, and cruel, so many looked to
When the cadets finally graduated, they had seen a vast array of officers to form their opinions about what type of leader they wanted to be.

By the 1930s, USMA had settled into the practice of bringing officers from the army back to West Point to instruct. Prior to the MacArthur reforms and the academy’s slow and reluctant adoption of his changes throughout the 1920s, the school had relied on retaining newly graduated second lieutenants to teach subjects they excelled in during their cadet tenure. This practice had many drawbacks, including immaturity, limited scholarship outside of the academy, and, critically, no real ability for officers with practical experience to serve as role models for the cadets.

A few future MTO battalion leaders such as John Inskeep and John Waters returned to the academy after their first couple of assignments. Inskeep taught math to fourth- and third-class cadets, and Waters served as a tactical officer. A 1931 graduate, Waters returned to West Point in 1936. The commandant initially turned down Waters’s request for assignment since there were no vacancies, but a month after the initial request, Waters’s request was approved. He served a year as a transportation officer and three years as A Company’s tactical officer. As a tactical officer, Waters assumed complete responsibility for the disci-

1930 USMA Officer Distributions. All data compiled from Official Register of the Officers and Cadets, United States Military Academy, years 1930, 1934, 1938, USMA Special Collections. To ensure fair sampling, the same data were compared with years 1929, 1931–1933, 1935–1937, and 1939–1940. The results mirrored the three years displayed here.
pline, training, and leadership of 90 to 100 cadets. A 1931 graduate and a tactical officer from 1937 to 1940, Waters witnessed the academy’s continued evolution. The increased emphasis on mechanization and adoption of new weapons forced Waters to grasp these new concepts since he had to teach the new tactics and procedures to cadets almost every day. From the more ceremonial duties at his first Fort Meyer post to the Cavalry School and now to West Point, Waters continually improved his understanding of combined arms warfare and watched as the regular army did the same. During a 300 air corps fly-by and the armored force tour at West Point, Waters recollected, “They (the cadets) began to get a feel, as I recall then, that this Army is changing now. Look at what we are going to get. Look at those airplanes up there. Look at those vehicles.” As reluctant as any cavalrymen to give up his horses—he owned six—Waters grasped the mechanization and combined arms concepts. The spread of global conflict infected the instructors and students with an attitude of “seriousness” when they tackled military training. Waters simultaneously developed future leaders and himself. He serves as one example of the many role models for the cadets on the banks of the Hudson in the 1930s.

The typical junior officer before World War I engaged in stability operations across the Pacific empire. Army units rarely conducted major combat operations in any form. West Point recognized this

1934 USMA Officer Distributions. All data compiled from Official Register of the Officers and Cadets, United States Military Academy, years 1930, 1934, 1938, USMA Special Collections. To ensure fair sampling, the same data were compared with years 1929, 1931–1933, 1935–1937, and 1939–1940. The results mirrored the three years displayed here.
The dilemma in the cadets’ professional development. The cadets’ intense study of general war proved to be a way to introduce them to high-intensity experiences. Course study at the branch schools as well as the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth continually built on this foundation. As extreme ideologies permeated the globe, officers recognized that a combat experience chasm had developed in its company-grade officers. Aggressive advances in Africa, China, and Europe in the 1930s raised suspicions of a major conflict in the future. A shift in focus to educate cadets less in the science of war and more in the art signaled a strong break with the academy’s traditional math and science curriculum.

Overall, the cadets’ time at West Point proved essential to their professional development. The academic renaissance dramatically improved the classroom instruction, the curriculum, and the instructor quality. Cadets graduated with grounding in languages, engineering, history, philosophy, law, mathematics, and economics. Physically, the program developed leadership qualities in the cadets that prepared them to lead athletics in their future units. The military training did suffer at times from resource constraints and distractions that included excessive emphasis on close-order drill and ceremony. Beyond these limitations, the training, in and out of the classroom, built the foundation on which cadets could expound in their future assignments and duties. The
Departments of Tactics and Civil and Military Engineering incorporated the latest developments into the instruction whenever possible. The constant contact with role models—both positive and negative—provided cadets an opportunity to develop their leadership qualities. Whatever the shortcomings, the cadets witnessed the changes in modern warfare. While they were not totally prepared to execute and endure all of its challenges, their minds were sown with the potential.