

## **Mission & History of the U.S. Military Academy**

The mission of the U.S. Military Academy is to educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country; professional growth throughout a career as an officer in the United States Army; and a lifetime of selfless service to the Nation.

Founded on March 16, 1802, the Academy celebrated its Bicentennial in 2002. But West Point's role in America's history dates back even earlier to the Revolutionary War, when both sides realized the strategic importance of the commanding plateau on the west bank of the Hudson River. General George Washington considered West Point to be the most strategic position in America. He personally selected Thaddeus Kosciuszko, one of the heroes of Saratoga, to design the fortifications in 1778. In 1779, General Washington transferred his headquarters to West Point. Continental soldiers built forts, batteries and defensive barriers. A 150-ton iron chain was extended across the Hudson to control river traffic. Today, several links from that chain are arranged at Trophy Point as a reminder of West Point's original fortifications.

In 1802 President Thomas Jefferson signed the legislation establishing the U.S. Military Academy to create an institution devoted to the arts and sciences of warfare. This effectively eliminated America's wartime reliance on foreign engineers and artillerymen. West Point became the nation's first engineering school and served as the model for engineering programs which were eventually established at other colleges.



Colonel Sylvanus Thayer, the "Father of the Military Academy," served as Superintendent from 1817-1833. He upgraded academic standards, instilled military discipline and emphasized honorable conduct. Early graduates were largely responsible for the construction of the nation's initial railway lines, bridges, harbors, and roads. Although the curriculum maintains its focus on engineering, in recent decades the program of instruction has markedly changed to permit cadets to major in any one of more than a dozen fields. This tradition of academic and military excellence, guided by a unique standard of moral and ethical conduct, remains the cornerstone of the West Point experience.

It is said at West Point that "much of the history we teach was made by people we taught." The Academy has produced famous leaders throughout its illustrious past: Civil War Generals Grant, Sherman, Lee, and Jackson, to name but a few. More recently, 34 of the 38 World War I corps and division commanders were graduates. World War II would see 59 out of 164 graduates reach brigadier general or higher, to include Eisenhower, MacArthur, Bradley and Patton. In more recent conflicts - MacArthur and Ridgeway in Korea, Westmoreland and Abrams in Vietnam, and Schwarzkopf in Desert Storm - West Pointers were in command. Academy graduates have also excelled in air and space exploration, and countless others went on from military service to be leaders in medicine, law, business, religion and sciences.

Since its founding two centuries ago, the Military Academy fulfills the same mission as it always has to

educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets. It accomplishes this mission by developing cadets in three essential areas: intellectual, physical and military. These developmental paths are balanced and fully integrated into the daily life of each young man and woman at the Academy.

Intellectual growth is fostered through an academic curriculum consisting of a core program of 30 courses providing a fundamental knowledge of the arts and sciences. The core program builds the foundation for electives that permits the cadets to explore in greater depth a field of study or an optional major. The four-year course leads to a Bachelor of Science degree and a commission as a second lieutenant in the Army.

Physical development is achieved through a rigorous athletic and physical education program. Each cadet participates at the intercollegiate, club or intramural level each semester. This readies the cadet for the physical demands of military life and helps teach good judgment and self-discipline, even while under mental and physical stress.

Military development begins with the cadet's first day at West Point. Most military training takes place during the summer, with new cadets undergoing Cadet Basic Training, or Beast Barracks, their first year, followed the second summer by Cadet Field Training. Cadets spend their third and fourth summers serving in active Army units around the world; attending specialty training such as airborne, air assault or northern warfare, or helping to train the first and second year cadets. The Cadet Leader Development System seeks to give the cadets increasing responsibility until they are ready to receive their commissions and assume their duties as leaders in today's Army.

Moral and ethical values guide cadets throughout their four years at West Point. Commitment to the academy's Bedrock Values, based on integrity and respect for dignity of others, begins on the first day.



Integrity is reflected in the Cadet Honor Code which states: “A cadet shall not lie, cheat steal, or tolerate those who do.” Respect denotes that cadets treat others with the same respect and dignity they themselves would expect. At West Point, it is not enough to train leaders - they must be leaders of character.

Admission is keenly competitive and is open to young men and women from each state and socio-economic level. Prospective cadets must receive a nomination by a member of Congress or from the Department of the Army. Candidates are evaluated on their academic, physical and leadership potential, indicating all-around individuals.

The life of a cadet is demanding, but leisure time does permit such activities as golf or skiing, sailing or ice skating. Intramural clubs include a cadet radio station, orienteering and Big Brother-Big Sister. A wide variety of religious activities are available to cadets from virtually all religious backgrounds.

Today's Military Academy is a vastly different institution from the small academy legislated into being by Congress in 1802. Originally just 1,800 acres, the Academy has grown to more than 16,000 acres. The first graduating class numbered just two men; today's classes graduate more than 900 new officers annually, both men and women.

With the expansion of knowledge and the changing needs of the Army and the nation, life at West Point has changed to keep pace. Ever aware of its rich heritage, the U.S. Military Academy is developing leaders for tomorrow, and its focus remains the national needs of the 21st century.