

APTITUDE
FOR THE
MILITARY SERVICE

A program of career guidance
in the Corps of Cadets

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OBJECTIVES AND PROCEDURES

Since the over-all mission of the U. S. Military Academy is the development of leaders, it is essential to have techniques for measuring the leadership qualities of cadets and for giving them career guidance. To effect these purposes, the Aptitude System wets instituted with the object of (1) determining the cadets who possess outstanding leadership ability and who are capable of occupying positions of responsibility within the Corps of Cadets; (2) identifying those cadets who are weak in leadership attributes and determining their specific areas of weakness with a view to improving them; and, (3) providing a fair basis for separating those cadets who, after receiving special assistance over a reasonable period of time, appear to be misplaced in the military service.

The Department of the Army has anticipated the necessity of eliminating cadets who are deficient in certain essential attributes to the extent that they are unlikely to be successful or happy in the military service by providing for their separation under Par. 9.08, Regulations for the U. S. Military Academy:

“9.08 DEFICIENCY IN APTITUDE FOR THE SERVICE: - If any cadet, as determined by periodic ratings, shall be found lacking in Aptitude for the service, he shall be reported to the Academic Board by the Superintendent for such deficiency, and the Board shall act upon the deficiency as in a case of deficiency in studies.

If the Academic Board recommends separation from the Academy for such deficiency, a full report of the facts shall be made to the Department of the Army for final action.

Cadets recommended under this provision for discharge at any time during the six months period just prior to the date of graduation of their class shall normally be permitted to graduate, provided they are otherwise qualified, and shall then be honorably discharged without commission."

In setting up a procedure for the application of the foregoing regulation, the Military Academy has called upon successful military leaders and experienced psychologists to assist in creating the current Aptitude System. The difficulties of measuring leadership potentialities in young men still in the formative period of their lives are well recognized and there is no hope of being able to reduce the problem to precise mathematical formulas. However, the present system is based both on common sense and on approved psychological theory. Its procedure is divided into two phases: the first, to identify the cadets of doubtful aptitude for the service who should receive special attention; the second, to analyze the personality and character of this small group of doubtful cadets in order to form an idea of their ultimate suitability for the military service.

The first phase requires each cadet to rank every other cadet in his company (about 100 cadets in all) in the order of his estimate of their leadership ability. Thus, each cadet is ranked in terms of his own class, not only by his classmates in his company, but also by all other cadets in his company. It is quite apparent that the traits and characteristics which enter into such an estimate will be varied. Such factors as intelligence, personality, temperament, and physique will all color the impression which a cadet creates among his fellows. However, it is common to hear in ordinary conversation an expression of opinion such as, "Bill Smith is the best man in my class." The aptitude rating system simply required every man to rate all the "Bill Smiths" in order of "best man." From this system no great accuracy of ranking in individual cases is expected. However, experience shows that within a cadet company there is a general consensus as to the top ten percent and the bottom ten percent in that particular group. It is this latter group which receives careful scrutiny under the second phase of the aptitude system.

All ratings and standings from the ratings are confidential and the utmost care is taken to prevent disclosures which might prejudice future ratings. A cadet and his parents are informed of his standing within classification groups graduated from A to E inclusive. Group A includes about the top 10% of the class and Group E, about the bottom 10%. Belonging to Group E indicates marginal or doubtful proficiency and should be a cause for concern to cadets and parents alike. The Commandant of Cadets keeps parents informed of all particulars in cases of inaptitude.

It is necessary to pause for a moment to consider an important agent of the aptitude system -- the Company Tactical

Officer. This man is a carefully selected Army or Air Force officer who has been notably successful as a leader in his military service. His principal job is to know intimately the cadets of his company whom he serves as advisor and mentor. It devolves upon him to study all members of his company closely in order to have an authoritative of their worth as potential officers. He is required to have frequent informal interviews with every member of the company in order to know the cadets and their problems. He is always anxious to correspond with parents regarding the progress of their sons or, preferably, to arrange personal interviews with them to discuss all aspects of individual cases.

In the application of phase two of the Aptitude System, the Tactical Officer plays an important part in studying the deficiencies of the cadets who have been rated low in his company. In order to analyze the characteristics of these cadets, he causes a special evaluation report to be made out by certain key cadets in the company who are favorably situated to observe intimately the weak cadets in question. The Tactical Officer himself makes out a similar evaluation report, the form and content of which have been prepared by the Department of Military Psychology and Leadership, U. S. Military Academy. From the results of these special evaluation reports, it is determined whether or not the cadet is so weak in aptitude for the service as to create real doubt concerning his desirability for the military service. If this doubt exists, the case is referred to a Brigade or a Regimental Aptitude Board consisting of experienced senior officers. The senior board, the Brigade Board, considers the cases of all cadets who have been conditioned in aptitude at a previous rating while the junior board, the Regimental Board, considers only those cadets who are appearing for the first time. An aptitude board holds hearings with the cadets and investigates thoroughly all aspects of the case. It then declares that the cadet is either proficient or deficient in aptitude and so reports him to the Commandant of Cadets. If the cadet is reported as deficient, the Commandant recommends a probationary or conditioning period or dismissal from the Academy. He forwards the case for final action by the Academic Board, consisting of the Superintendent and the heads of all Academic Departments. The approval of the Secretary of the Army is necessary in cases involving dismissal.

Normally a cadet is not recommended for dismissal for inaptitude before he has completed his Fourth Class Year and has had one rating as a Third Classman. If at the completion of a rating, the cadet appears to be of doubtful proficiency in aptitude, he is required to appear before an Aptitude Board. At this time he

is given instructions and advice as to how to correct his shortcomings. He is closely observed during the following period and is constantly counseled by his Tactical Officer and, where indicated, by the Staff Psychologist. If at the end of this probationary period he is again considered of doubtful proficiency, he will in all probability be investigated with a view to his eventual discharge from the Military Academy. In all cases, everything possible is done to help the cadet correct his deficiency as soon as it is brought to the attention of the authorities. Final action in dismissal cases, so far as the Academy is concerned, is taken by the Academic Board which recommends to the Department of the Army the dismissal of a cadet found deficient in aptitude.

It is the earnest desire of the Superintendent that cadets and their parents understand fully the Aptitude system. It may be noted in passing that a cadet's aptitude for the service may not be directly related to his performance in other aspects of cadet training. For example, the number of demerits he receives is not necessarily relevant to his aptitude standing as a respect for regulations reflected in a low number of demerits may not counterbalance an absence of such qualities as force and initiative. In every profession there is some combination of traits and characteristics most favorable for success. The military profession is a highly specialized one, requiring attributes differing in quality and degree from the requirements of many civilian callings. A young man may conceivably be inapt for the military service and have great promise for some other profession.

The Aptitude System is necessary not only to protect the government from spending time and money on unsuitable officer material, but also to protect a cadet from entering on a career for which he is not qualified and from which he will probably receive little satisfaction. The problem of discovering this inaptitude in time is one which should be met through the cooperative efforts of the authorities of the Academy, the cadets themselves, and their parents.