

Life In The 1920's At
The Wenonah Military Academy

Linda Haegele
COM 102-06
Dr. Baer

During the 1920's, military academies were held in high esteem as an institution of learning. Even though World War I ended during 1918, patriotism still ran high in the country, and as a result, military academies flourished (Jay Scott, personal communication, March 7, 1989). One academy in particular was a roaring success, as demonstrated by the loyalty and love its alumni hold for it; namely the Wenonah Military Academy (WMA).

Fortunately, some of the former cadets of the WMA were willing to share some memories they have of life at the Academy. Edward Bayuk, Richard S. Beebe, Edgar W. Holton, and Robert Q. Hinckle attended the Academy during the early 1920's, and Percy Wise, Jay Scott and Joseph A. DiLemmo were students during the later 1920's. Even the wife of one of the teachers, Kathryn Knight, supplied invaluable information on life at the Academy. They each provided a deep insight into the loyalty and affection that developed there, as a result of the rural surroundings, the military training, the faculty and schooling, sports events and the various social activities in which the cadets vigorously participated.

The WMA opened its doors in 1902, and grew in popularity until, due to the Depression, it was forced to close in 1935. It was founded by Stephen Greene, a wealthy printer from Philadelphia who, while driving through Wenonah, saw the potential in the old Wenonah Inn for a military academy (Richard S. Beebe, personal communication, March 31, 1989). In the early 1900's, Wenonah was a small town with only one thousand people, according to Jay Scott (1989). He says that the town was surrounded on all sides by woods. Warner's Lake, used for swimming and skating, added to the peaceful, secluded setting (1989). To Stephen Greene, it was the perfect place for a military academy (Beebe, 1989).

The Academy was situated on the block opposite Wenonah Park. It consisted of a main building, gymnasium, two cottages, two athletic fields, and stables for their horses. The main building, three stories high, contained the lobby, a large dining hall, a kitchen and bakery, a library and reading room, the Science Hall, an infirmary with six beds, and sixty rooms which made up the dormitory section and classrooms (Joseph A. DiLemmo, personal communication, February 22, 1989). Next to the main building was the gymnasium, which was considered to be the largest gymnasium of a New Jersey school at that time (Quigley, 1986). This building was used as a drill hall, shooting range, during Commencement exercises at year end, and for the Mid-Year Drill and Spring Dance (DiLemmo, 1989). The two cottages, Charles H. Lorence cottage and the Clayton A. Snyder cottage were used by the junior and senior class, and officers of the class (O'Neill, 1963). Situated nearby was a five acre athletic field, which was used for football, baseball and track, and a twelve acre field used for lacross and polo (Pituk, 1976).

The cadets who attended the WMA were, on the most part, from wealthy families (Kathryn Knight, personal communication, February 13, 1989). They came from Delaware, Pennsylvania, NY, Ohio, NJ, and as far as South America, Mexico, and Puerto Rico (Scott, 1989). They comprised grades five through twelve, with the junior grades (five through eight) kept separate from the older boys (Hansen, 1954). The student body enrollment averaged about 125 students during the peak years of the Academy (Scott, 1989).

A military atmosphere pervaded every aspect of life at the Academy. Military training was under ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) regulations, and under the supervision of a U.S. Army Officer (Edgar

W. Holton, personal communication, March 2, 1989). It was taught in accordance with the U.S. Army Infantry Drill Regulations (Beebe, 1989). According to Edward Bayuk (Personal communication, 1989), "all formations were in a military manner," and cadets were expected to stand erect at all times, and salute their officers. "Proper arrangement of all articles" were also required, says Mr. Bayuk. Rooms were inspected every day for dust and dirt, and properly made beds (1989). The U.S. Government assigned guns, ammunition, and equipment to the cadets, which had to be returned at the end of the school year (Beebe 1989). Each cadet was therefore responsible for the maintenance of his equipment (1989). To ensure that the cadets were on their toes, an inspection of rifles, bayonets, uniforms and shoes was performed every week, and dirty equipment earned extra duty for the offending cadet (Bayuk, 1989).

Extra duty consisted of walking guard duty at 128 steps per minute in the cadet's spare time (Scott, 1989), polishing the Civil War cannons at the campus entrance (Bayuk, 1989), or walking around the track in the athletic field with rifle in hand (1989). Several violations earned extra duty in addition to dirty equipment; insubordination, visiting friend's rooms without permission, fighting, and smoking in your room (1989). Smoking was considered the worst offense; it earned fifty hours of extra duty, and a two week suspension (1989).

Clothing was also regulated by military rules. The cadets wore uniforms that alternated between the khaki of the U.S. Army, and the grey of West Point Academy, until the late 1920's (DiLemmo, 1989, Bayuk, 1989). After that, the uniforms stayed the same as the ones that the U.S. Army wore in WWI; khaki puttees, high laced shoes, jackets that buttoned at the neck, and overseas caps (a tall, neat cap worn by French soldiers)" (Scott, 1989).

A typical day for the cadets was militarily structured from morning to night. At 6:00 am, reveille was called, signaling raising of the flag and setting up exercises (Beebe, 1989). Exercises consisted of calisthenics, which developed muscles and lungs, and the Butt's Manual, which developed shoulders and back muscles (The Sabre, 1922). After exercises, cadets dressed for breakfast and ate in the dining hall (Percy Wise, personal communication, April 3, 1989).

Classes started at 8:00 am, with a twenty-five word spelling test (Bayuk, 1989), and finished at around 2:00. From 2:00 until 4:00, drills took place out in the park or in the field, practicing field manuevers (Wise, 1989). At 4:00, some of the cadets had sports practice (1989), while the other cadets were allowed to socialize around the local drug store, or on the Academy steps (Beebe, 1989).

Formal assemblies were held every evening before dinner (Scott, 1989). According to Bayuk, "the cadets assembled in front of the Academy, and with the band playing, marched in parade formation for Retreat- the lowering of the flag" (1989).

Dinner, at 6:00, was held in the Mess Hall (Beebe, 1989). After dinner, until 9:00 pm, cadets studied in their quarters (1989). From 9-9:30, cadets who had permission from their parents were allowed to go to the smoking room (1989). At 9:30, there was a call to quarters, when the cadets prepared for bed (1989). Final room check was called at 10:00, and taps was sounded to signal the end of the day (1989).

This strict military regimentation at the academy extended into the scholastic atmosphere. The curriculum was also strictly regimented, as the "Secretary of War directed that the WMA" was permitted "to devote 1½ hours daily in instruction in branches not devoted to the military department of the Academy" (War Department, Adjutant General's Office,

Washington, D.C., Letter to WMA, February 24, 1913).

Classes were small, with only eight to twelve students in each class (Wise, 1989). The faculty was considered excellent by the former cadets. Teachers were expected to stay close to the cadets; for example, "each faculty member had his own group of boys. Officers lived with his group, and ate in the Mess Hall with his group" (Pituk, 1976). During study hours, the faculty members were close at hand for any help that the students might need (Beebe, 1989).

The cadets did not receive letter grades (Pituk, 1976). Instead they were divided into four classifications (1976). These classifications, Distinguished, Honor, Proficient, and Unclassified, were based on the cadets averages in conduct and scholastics, with added emphasis on Military Science and Tactics (The Sabre, 1922). The classes were posted quarterly, and decorations were awarded, to be worn only while the class standing was attained (1922). In addition to decorations, cadets maintaining a B average with no infractions were placed on the Honor Roll, which allowed them certain privileges, including the privilege of reporting in late on Saturday night (Bayuk, 1989).

In addition to maintaining the full, rigidly structured day of military drills and classes, the cadets of the WMA found time for extracurricular activities, such as sports, social events, and clubs. For instance, sporting events were essential to the boys, and they excelled in more than their share. WMA was referred to as the West Point of New Jersey, because of their consistently superior polo team (Robert Q. Hinckle, personal communication, 1989). In fact, in 1927 the WMA's polo team traveled to West Point to play their freshman team, and won (Wise, 1989)! The WMA played other preparatory schools and some college

freshman teams in baseball, basketball, and football, as well (Hinckle, 1989). For instance, in 1923, they won the University of Pennsylvania Scholastic Basketball Tournament (Bayuk, 1989). Also, "one year, the football team was undefeated and untied. It was unscored upon until the final season game against National State Farm School, who blocked a kick behind a goal" (Scott, 1989). And, on November 22, 1930, President Herbert Hoover met the cadets at a White House Reception for the Football team in Washington, D.C. Naturally, there were many first place banners hanging on the assembly room walls at the WMA (Beebe, 1989).

Social events were also greeted with enthusiasm by the cadets. There was an informal dance in the gym every Friday night, with music performed by an orchestra made up of cadets (Beebe, 1989). These dances were attended by girls from Wenonah and surrounding towns (1989). But the big events were the two gala dances - the Mid-Year Drill and Dance, and the Senior Prom at the end of the year. Cadets spent a week cleaning, dusting, shining, and decorating the gym with real trees and plants (Holton, 1989), and draping the room with flags. They wore white cotton gloves with their uniforms (Bayuk, 1989), and the girls wore floor length formal gowns (Knight, 1989). Propriety ensured that partners danced with at least six inches between them (Bayuk, 1989). There was no charge for these galas, but the guests had to be invited by a cadet to attend (1989).

To start the affair, the gymnasium doors, which took up an entire wall, were fully opened (Knight, 1989). It was an impressive sight, as the Cadet Drill Team then came out onto the floor and went through their drill, with the sounds of gun butts resounding as they hit the floor when the cadets came to attention (Scott, 1989). For the Senior Prom, the final event was "always a military parade or exhibition, or

sometimes a sham battle on the athletic field" (Hinckle, 1989).

Cadets also actively participated in several clubs at the Academy, such as the Dramatic Society, the Adelpic Literary Society, and the Radio Club which worked on the theory and building of radio receiving sets (The Sabre, June, 1923). Another club, the Sabre Club, put on plays, such as "Nothing But the Truth" (Scott, 1989), "That's That", a musical comedy, and even staged a scene with cadets performing a Tango (1989). The cadets also published their own yearbook, The Sabre, complete with a Class Poem, Class Prophecy, Last Will and Testament, Y's Cracks (humor), and highlights of the year's sporting events.

In addition to the sports, clubs, and dances, the cadets organized their own bands. According to a letter by Win Shewell, two cadets, Minor McGeorge and Henry LeCour, organized a jazz band in 1932 called the "Wenonians" (May 13, 1974, private letter to anonymous person). This band was made up of eight talented boys who, amazingly, played eighteen instruments; two trombones, a baritone horn, piano, two trumpets, slide cornet, two clarinets, three alto saxophones, tenor sax, C-melody sax, musette, piccolo, drums, and bass horn (1974).

Some of the stories related to me by former cadets help to illustrate the comraderie of the boys at the WMA. For example, Edward Bayuk said that the "cadets living on the second floor would climb out onto their window, and walk along the roof to visit other cadets," and risk disciplinary action. Mr. Bayuk explained that it wasn't really dangerous, but that it was considered adventurous by the boys (1989). Also, Richard S. Beebe said that some of the cadets who wanted to sneak a cigarette in their rooms would pry up the wood planks in the floor, to provide a draft that would dissipate the smoke (1989). According to Beebe, cadets

managed to keep this secret from their superiors, and so didn't get caught very often (1989).

The cadets also liked to band together to pull pranks on their teachers and each other. For example, Robert Q. Hinckle told of the time that Captain Gulden, the English teacher, found his false teeth posted on the bulletin board (1989). Another time, at night after the lights were out, one of the boys closed the two gates of the driveway after one of the teachers drove into town (1989). When the unsuspecting teacher "returned, he made a wide sweep to come through the stone pillars" on either side of the driveway, and was surprised "when the head lights picked up the black iron gates. It left quite an impression on his front bumper" (1989).

Even the rigidity of the Military Drills wasn't immune to the imagination of the cadets. The Military Drills were a formal display, held at graduation, and judged by a Marine Officer from Philadelphia (Scott, 1989). One year, Captain Swartz of South America was in charge of the drill (1989). That year, one of Capt. Swartz's cadets always went right when he was supposed to go left, and went left when the order was to go right. For the drill, the captain locked this cadet in his room, and told the rest of his group, "We're now going to win!", and they did (1989)!

The cadets of the WMA were close knit, motivated, highly competitive, active, and imaginative. How did the Academy achieve these goals in its student body? The emblem associated with the Academy, "Vincit Qui Se Vincit," which means "He conquers, who conquers self" (Beebe, 1989) gives an idea of the type of school this was. The school gave its cadets, not only an excellent education in scholastics, but also an education

in themselves. The school motto "Send us the boy and we will return to you the man" (Beebe, 1989) illustrates that one of the primary motives of the school encompassed the education of the whole boy. It pushed them to their limits, both physically and mentally. In 1921, when Dr. Charles H. Lorence became president of the Academy, he expressed that "the purpose of education was to teach the pupil 'how to live'" (O'Neill, 1963). The "Academy placed great emphasis on training for high intellectual achievement, but with equal consideration to the development of a sound body and superior ideals" (1963).

The WMA was successful in achieving these ideals, in that all aspects of life at the Academy seemed to encourage development of physical and mental high standards. For example, the Academy being in a secluded community, and the typically busy day, left no room for socializing outside of the Academy. As a result, the cadets turned to each other for friendship, and healthy competition. Further, the military training, and the military form of self government also helped the cadets develop a respect for each other, along with authority figures. In addition to learning Math, Science and English, the boys learned the value of discipline, obedience, leadership, and judgment (Beebe, 1989). Also, the highly respected faculty and grading system made the cadets competitive, yet respectful of each other. Last, the high activity level in sports, clubs, and social activities, which indicates the strong bonds felt by the cadets for each other, was effective in developing high standards.

After graduating, many cadets went on to various universities (Bayuk, 1989, Scott, 1989). Some cadets were inducted into the U.S. Army, where they excelled as Commissioned Officers (DiLemmo, 1989). Other cadets went on to become influential, successful businessmen (Bayuk, 1989).

Life at the Academy clearly made a profound impact on the cadets' lives, and successfully prepared them for their place in society.

All that is left of this fine institution is a part of the stone wall that once surrounded the campus, and the vivid memories that the former cadets cherish of their days at the Academy. Since 1954, when the Wenonah Military Academy Alumni Association first met to honor Captain Lammert on his 70th birthday, some of the former cadets have met to reminisce about those days, and to catch up on the events going on in their lives now. They have never missed a year, and "although the troops are thinning, there is always an enthusiastic turn-out" (DiLemmo, 1989). These men are proud to have attended the WMA, and although the building is long gone, the institution continues to live on in their hearts.