

Anti-Aircraft Artillery OCS Camp Davis, North Carolina 1941-1944

Sharp, staccato barks of “Whut! Twwhoop! Thrheep! Fourp!” split the crisp morning air of Camp Davis and fir themselves into the rhythmic ring of many heels striking the pavement in unison, as a platoon of khaki-clad young men is seen swinging by in perfect cadence., their arched chests and tucked-in chins, and their perfect marching point out, even more than the text-laden field bags slung from their shoulders, and the proudly borne red and gold guidon emblazoned “O.C.S..” that this is a platoon of officer candidates -the potential junior officers of our tremendously expanding army.

“But what about these officer candidates?” everyone wants to know. Surely, they can march, and a fine job of it they do, too; but it takes more than marching ability to be a good, commissioned officer. Can they lead men? Can the shoulder responsibility and be relied upon under all conditions? Do they have the intelligence and training to tackle the highly technical problems that will confront them as officers of Antiaircraft Artillery?

The answer is emphatically “Yes!” School officers, anxious to know how their neophyte lieutenants would fare under the acid test of service conditions, were most pleased by the consistently commendatory reports on graduate candidates that come rolling in from every corner of the continent after the first graduation. Doubts and prejudices as to the kind of officer that could be produced in only three months were completely dispelled. Many unit commanders, expecting raw, half-baked shavetails from the Officer Candidate School, were so pleased by the military, aggressive, and self-confident looking lieutenants who reported for duty that they wrote enthusiastic congratulations to the Commandant on the fine work being done. The most common plaudit is that graduates of the Officer Candidate School are able to step right into their jobs and make themselves useful immediately, without the period of bewildered orientation which many new officers go through before actually becoming assets to their organization. The combination of inherent capability, previous education, enlisted service, and intensive military and technical training at an Officer Candidate School seems to be an excellent formula for producing good, well-rounded junior officers.

Conceived and formulated in the calm, unhurried, peace-time years by the best military minds, and included in the constantly renovated mobilization regulations, the plan for producing the thousands of trained men needed to fill out the junior officer ranks of a tremendously expanded army bears none of the marks of excited, last-minute, wartime preparation. When the world situation reached a state of affairs that told Uncle he had better start rolling up his sleeves for action, all that had to be done was to take the plan out of the files and put it in effect.

And so, after a short period of local planning and assembling of personnel, a new offspring, the Office Candidate Camp, was born on July 1, 1941, to the Cost

Artillery School, a wise parent ideally suited through a century of experience to the rearing of this fast-growing youngster. Few had any idea of the staggering scope of the accelerated expansion that the school would ultimately be called upon to perform. Original quotas called for groups of 200 candidates entering every three months for three-month courses; but that was before Pearl Harbor. Plans had already been laid for an expansion to double size, with staggered, overlapping courses; but drawing up new local plans seemed only to invite their being thrown aside, as the proposed size of the school sky-rocketed from its original peak load of 200, to a staggering present requirement. The breath-taking scope of the program can be realized when it is recalled that the entire Coast Artillery Corps receives only about eighty officers a year from the United States Military Academy.

Even before the plan for separating antiaircraft and seacoast artillery officer candidate had crystalized, it was realized that facilities at Fort Monroe would fall hopelessly short of meeting the new expansion program. Accordingly, the Officer Candidate School was moved to Camp Davis, North Carolina, on February 24th (1942). The subsequent separation of the antiaircraft and seacoast artillery education resulted in the incorporation of the Officer Candidate School as a division of the Antiaircraft Artillery School which was established at Camp Davis. Commanding the Officer Candidate Division is Colonel Harold R. Jackson, who was designated as Commandant of the Officer Candidate School, upon its activation. The Seacoast Artillery Department of the Officer Candidate School was moved back to Fort Monroe to form the nucleus of a separate officer candidate school for seacoast artillery officers.

So phenomenal a growth has naturally been accomplished by a certain amount of growing pains; but so well were plans laid that the many concomitant changes and reorganizations have caused very little confusion. The new remodeled officer machine is already running smoothly and turning out officers at a remarkable rate per week and will soon speed up about 100% additional. Really mass production!

From the instant the incoming candidate salutes and reports in at his battery office until twelve weeks later, when he is handed his commission, every minute of his time is accounted for in a schedule that is all work and very little play. The average day includes seven hours of instruction, one hour of drill, athletics, or calisthenics, and two hours of supervised study. Eating, marching to and from classes, and policing of barracks and personal equipment take up most of the little remaining time. With the sounding of taps at 11 pm, all candidates, regardless of rank or marital status, are required to be in bed. Occasional bed checks by the Officer in Charge discourage candidates from burning out their eyes as well as the mid-night oil in after-taps studying, or from seeking gayer nocturnal environment.

“In the Officer Candidate School, here is but one standard—that of PERFECTION,” That statement, one of the first to be heard by candidates, is not mere wishful

thinking. In every member of the School, from the Commandant to K.P, there is indoctrinated the attitude that nothing less than perfection will do' only to newcomers does the short-lived idea of "just getting by" ever occur. Even a "good" job is not sufficient; if it is at all possible to do a better job, then that is the way it *will* be done.

The life of a candidate is necessarily a hard and exacting one, because twelve weeks is a very short time in which to cram a modicum of the knowledge and training a capable Antiaircraft Artillery Officer should have. However, the strain under which candidates are placed also has a useful purpose. In meeting the rigid academic requirements, in constantly facing new situations, in adapting themselves to standards possibly surpassing anything they have ever known before, candidates are naturally under a certain amount of pressure, which has the effect of stripping away their superficial demeanors and enabling their battery officers to see their basic characteristics and true makeup. The routine is severe, but it must be remembered that a man who cracks or weakens under a hard and fast military and academic routine, however trying, is not the type of man to be responsible for the lives and safety of a group of men under the much harder and more demoralizing stress of battle conditions.

Neatness, military bearing, and precision in all things are stressed even to the point of exaggeration, to straighten out a curved steel spring, it is necessary to bend it past the straight position, so that when pressure is released, it springs back straight and remains that way. Accordingly, great stress is placed upon posture throughout the course. High standards of neatness and precision in barracks are insisted upon. There is a place for everything, and rigid daily inspections insure that everything is in its place. Saturday afternoons find the candidates lined up on the parade ground for a detailed inspection in ranks for which arms, clothing, and equipment must be meticulously neat and clean. It is not expected that these future officers necessarily will require their organizations to attain the standards of the Officer Candidate School; but having known the meaning of perfection, they will never tolerate unsatisfactory conditions. Reports have been received indicating the effectiveness of this phase of the candidate's training when applied in the field.

For the purposes of administration and discipline, candidates are grouped into batteries of five sixty-eight man platoons. A cadre of enlisted men is assigned organically to each battery to carry out the usual battery functions of mess, supply, administration and police. So that every individual may be given the opportunity to exercise responsibility and leadership as often as practicable during the course, candidates are assigned to positions as acting officers and non-commissioned officers and changed semi-weekly. Except for these rotated responsibilities, there is absolute equality among candidates.

No distinction is made because of rank, age or experience; chevrons are removed immediately upon entrance, and thereafter candidates are known officially only as "candidate," and are addressed as "mister."

Candidates come into contact with two groups of officers—those who instruct in technical antiaircraft artillery subjects, and the battery officers, whose positions correspond to those of tactical officers at the United States Military Academy. Battery officers teach the basic, "what every officer should know" subjects, such as mess management, supply, and administration and are also responsible for the administration, military training, and discipline of the units to which they have been assigned. Their primary, most important function, however, is the moral and psychological development of their men into officer material. Constantly under the eagle-eyed supervision of their battery officers from the day they report until the day they graduate, candidates probably never realize how closely they are being observed or how much their officers know about them. Even into the mess hall, the molding of enlisted men into officers is extended, where the man at the entrance door may be, instead of the mess sergeant with his whistle, an officer with a pencil and pad making notes and raking corrective action where unsatisfactory appearance or conduct at mess is observed.

However, there is nothing suggestive of the Gestapo in this close, continuous observation. Criticism, correction, and advice are given on the spot as needed, and delinquencies are listed on a "skin sheet" which is posted daily on the bulletin board for observation and initialing. Consistently delinquent candidates are called in by their unit commanders, whose loaded buck-up talks are usually capable of bringing wayward sinners to repentance before more severe disciplinary action is necessary.

Efficiency reports are made out weekly on every candidate by platoon commanders, and those rating "Us" in any item are interviewed by their platoon, battery, battalion or regimental commander, depending upon how long they have received an unsatisfactory rating. Apparent misfits are given individual attention, criticism and advice in an effort to straighten them out. If, after ample opportunity to improve, a candidate still evidences a lack of military aptitude and leadership, it is the painful duty of his unit commander to recommend him for relief. No candidate is dismissed, however, until the Faculty Board, including the Commandant, has considered all angles of the case and has come to a decision.

Casualties average around fifteen per cent, most of which are due to academic deficiencies. In rating a candidate, academics and military aptitude are given equal weight so that a slight deficiency in one does not necessarily mean dismissal, if heavily outweighed by the other. More detailed information is shown in statistics quoted at the end of this article.

The curriculum of the Officer Candidate School is as shown on the accompanying table of Subjects. It may be noted that a total of two and a half weeks is devoted to gun, automatic weapons, and small arms firing. Wherever possible theoretical instruction is augmented by practical application. It is believed that the course as now outlined gives the graduate a well-balanced theoretical and practical background which will qualify him quite adequately as an officer in a battery of Antiaircraft Artillery.

After three hard months of academic and disciplinary rigors, the long anticipated day arrives when those who have successfully passed the course are assembled in the theatre for graduation exercises. The thrill of graduation felt by candidates is shared to almost as great an extent by all members of the Staff and Faculty through the arduous course to its completion. Seeing their charges proudly march up on the stage in their new smartly tailored uniforms and shiny gold bars to receive commissions as temporary second lieutenants in the Army of the United States, it is almost impossible to believe that they are the same men who had reported in only three months before. Any slight misgivings as to particular candidates which may have obtained heretofore have now disappeared. They not only look like good officers—they are good officers.

Orders assigning the newly commissioned officers to their new stations are received at the same time as the commissions. An effort is made to assign graduates to the stations of their choice, men with highest class standing receiving priority. In general, graduates are sent to posts, camps or stations in accordance with vacancies as reported by army or field force commanders. How long they will serve under active duty orders and what experiences they will encounter in their military service one can only guess; but, however long the struggle and whatever the trials that lie ahead, one reassuring thing of which we can be certain is that America's new legions will not want for skilled and competent leadership.

***Officers by Mass Production (Antiaircraft Artillery OCS at Camp Davis)
by Lieutenant John Edward Aber Coast Artillery Journal May-June 1942***

***Coast Artillery OCS - Fort Monroe, Virginia (1941-1942)
Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) OCS - Camp Davis, North Carolina (1942-1944)***

The first two classes (designated Coast Artillery OCS) started and graduated at Fort Monroe, Virginia during 1941. The OCS program was rapidly expanded and soon outgrew the facilities at Fort Monroe. The school was re-located to Camp Davis, North Carolina in February 1942. Five classes were in session at the time and completed their training at Camp Davis. In March 1942, the Coast Artillery Branch split into Anti-Aircraft Artillery and Seacoast Artillery and the Camp Davis OCS program became the Anti-Aircraft Artillery OCS. A Seacoast Artillery OCS was subsequently formed at Fort Monroe.

AAA OCS graduated a total of 25,191 (25,109 by some accounts) out of 33,195 candidates. There were 100 classes (including the two classes that graduated at Fort Monroe in 1941). Class #1 started on July 7, 1941 and graduated on October 3, 1941. Class #100 started on February 22, 1944 and graduated on June 15, 1944.

The course was originally 12 weeks, was later lengthened to 13 weeks and was the first OCS in the Army to be extended to 17 weeks in March 1943. The candidates were trained specifically in Guns, Searchlights or Automatic weapons.

AAA OCS graduated as many as 1,800 per month at its peak and by the spring of 1944 a huge surplus of AAA officers existed. The weekly graduation numbers dropped to between 30 and 40 and 5,668 AAA officers transferred to other branches by March 1944.

SEACOAST ARTLLERY OCS - Fort Monroe, Virginia (1942-1944)

The Coast Artillery branch reorganization took place in 1942, creating the Seacoast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Artillery. The Seacoast Artillery Department of the Officer Candidate School was established at Fort Monroe and formed the nucleus of a separate OCS known as the Seacoast Artillery OCS.

The Seacoast Artillery OCS at Fort Monroe commissioned 1,964 lieutenants in 31 classes. Class # 1 started on April 20, 1942 and Class # 31 graduated on March 17, 1944.

During World War II, Two Coast Artillery Officer Candidate Schools were established on foreign soil. The first was in England and the second was in Australia. Little information is available concerning the number of graduates from either of the schools.

Coast Artillery OCS (Fort Monroe) [July 1941-February 1942].

Anti-Aircraft Artillery OCS (Camp Davis) [March 1942-June 1944].

Seacoast Artillery OCS (Fort Monroe) [April 1942-March 1944].

All graduates of the Seacoast Artillery OCS at Fort Monroe and the AAA OCS at Camp Davis were commissioned in the Coast Artillery Branch.

