



THE U.S. ARMY ENGINEER SCHOOL

By Dr. Larry Roberts

As with the Corps of Engineers, the Engineer School traces its roots to the American Revolution. General Headquarters Orders, Valley Forge, dated 9 June 1778, read, "Three captains and nine lieutenants are wanted to officer the Company of Sappers. As the Corps will be a school of engineering, it opens a prospect to such gentlemen as enter it...." Shortly after the publishing of the order, the "school" moved to the river fortifications at West Point, New York. With the end of the war and the mustering out of the Army, the school closed. However, the Regiment of Artillerists and Engineers was constituted as a military school and was reopened at the same location in 1794. For four years it constituted a school of application for new engineers and artillerists. Closing in 1798, due to a fire that destroyed many facilities, the engineers were without a school for three years.

In 1801, the War Department revived the school, and Major Jonathan Williams became its superintendent. Less than a year later, Congress authorized the Corps of Engineers and constituted it at West Point as a Military Academy. For the next 64 years, the Academy was under the supervision of the Corps. Although the curriculum was heavily laced with engineering subjects, the Academy commissioned officers into all branches of the

service. Following the Civil War, supervision of the Academy passed to the War Department.

When the Engineer Battalion took station at Willetts Point, New York (see photo above), in 1866, engineer leaders saw the opportunity to develop a school oriented exclusively to engineers. From 1868 to 1885, an informal School of Application existed. Part of this effort involved the creation of the Essayons Club, an informal group that met during the winter months and presented professional engineer papers. In 1885, the School of Application received formal recognition by the War Department. In 1890, the name was changed to United States Engineer School.

In 1901, the school moved from Willetts Point (later called Fort Totten) to Washington Barracks in Washington, D.C., and was renamed the Engineer School of Application. Ironically, this name lasted only a few years. In 1904, the name was changed back to Engineer School. The school remained at Washington Barracks for the next 19 years, although it closed from time to time because of a shortage of officers or national emergencies.

In 1909, certain courses associated with the field army moved to Fort

Leavenworth, and the Army Field Engineer School opened in 1910. That school, a part of the Army Service Schools, closed in 1916. The First World War forced a closing of the Engineer School because the instructors and students were needed to officer the expanding engineer force. The school resumed its instruction in 1920 but at a different location. Washington Barracks was transferred to the General Staff College, and the Engineer School moved to Camp A.A. Humphreys, south of Mount Vernon, Virginia. This was a World War I camp built on land acquired by the War Department in 1912. The original name for the tract was Belvoir.

For 68 years, Fort Belvoir was the home of the Engineer School. It produced thousands of officers, NCOs, and enlisted engineers who saw action in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Thousands more passed through the Engineer School during the peacetime years. In 1988, the Engineer School and Center moved to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Here the traditions of engineering schooling, begun in the snows of Valley Forge, continue.



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