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Along The Potomac, An Exclusive School For War

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WASHINGTON

One of the most exclusive schools in the world is tucked against a broad curve in the Potomac, only minutes from the Capitol.

The setting is the Army's famous Fort McNair, home of the "Old Guard." The broad parade ground, an abbreviated golf course and a busy swimming pool add a campus touch.

But this isn't an ordinary school. Its subject is war — how to avoid it, if possible; how to win if it becomes inevitable.

Fort McNair is the home of the National War College. Each September since 1946 approximately 135 men of promise in the military and government report here. For a year they study America's position in the complex postwar world.

Vice Adm. Fitzhugh Lee, commandant, outlines two major objectives:

"Greater understanding between the civilian and military components of government and greater understanding among the military services."

Each class is selected equally from four sources — Army, Air Force, Navy-Marine Corps and the executive branch of government. The military men are largely career officers with 15-20 years experience. They usually fall in the 38-42 age bracket and most have reached the rank of lieutenant colonel or commander.

The civilians generally fit into the same age and experience range, although there have been exceptions. This year's class included men from the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the State, Defense, Treasury and Commerce departments.

All members of the present Joint Chiefs of Staff, and all deputies, with the exception of Air Force chief Gen. John P. McConnell are graduates of the college. McConnell had reached general rank before the school went into operation.

Adm. Lee, a descendent of one of the nation's proudest families with roots in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, became commandant in 1964. He

was a student here in 1949-50. His deputies are Ambassador Samuel Berger, former envoy to South Korea, and Army Maj. Gen. Sidney Wooten.

The faculty and staff totals 45, one for every three students.

The library, Lee pointed out during a tour of the college, is perhaps the world's finest collection of works on modern military and international affairs. A large section of the library is marked "classified." Its books and papers are stored in huge vaults.

The faculty is a mixture of civilian and military instructors.

The civilians are top-flight professors from American universities. They usually serve for 12 months at the National War College, either on loan or on sabbatical years.

They are divided into four categories: national strategy, military affairs, political affairs and educational development.

The faculty's work is augmented by a steady stream of guest lecturers who reflect the broadest spectrum of political philosophy and experience.

President Johnson and Vice President Humphrey addressed the 1964-65 class. Presidential adviser McGeorge Bundy and Chicago University Prof. Hans Morgenthau, opponents in the recent TV "teach-in" on Viet Nam, addressed the group.

The class has also heard from scores of senators, congressmen, cabinet officers, college professors, diplomats and military experts.

"Many of the speakers we invite are chosen deliberately because of their controversial views," said Adm. Lee. "We want our students to appreciate the broadest range of argument."

And to insure free exchange with the speakers, all such appearances are "off the record." The speakers are never quoted. Their remarks are not published.

The National War College was founded on the recommendations of President Eisenhower and Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, now supreme Allied commander, Europe.

In handling Allied staffs in Britain and in the Mediterranean, Eisenhower and Lemnitzer found that British officers were frequently better equipped to inject diplomatic and political elements into military decisions. They traced this ability to training at London's Imperial War College. When World War II ended, the two American generals immediately recommended a similar American institution.

The curriculum of the college indicates the intensive training that its students undergo. After introductory review of the world situation, they study:

Factors of national power; formulation of national security policy; strategy and warfare; the Communist states; free Europe and the Western Hemisphere; Africa and free Asia; overseas studies; and counterinsurgency.

The last subject underlines the growing concern with the problems of "wars of national liberation."

The overseas studies section sees each class broken into units. Each unit visits a different part of the world for a firsthand view of problems confronting the United States.

Gen. Wooten took one such group to Moscow last year. For three days the group was a guest of the Red Army and heard presentations by military men and some Soviet agency chiefs.

"They even took us to the Red tank school for captains and sub-majors," Wooten recalled. "You should have seen the students jump when we walked into the classroom. They had been studying tank tactics and all of a sudden there was the 'enemy,' right in the same room."

Russia refused to accept a visit by a similar this year. It said the time was "not propitious."

The Soviets have been invited to send similar groups to Washington but after a long period of hesitation they declined.

The National War College is not to be confused with the separate Army, Navy and Air Force war colleges that concern themselves primarily with

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tactical and strategic problems confronting their particular service.

The installation at Fort McNair also includes the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. Courses are conducted here for military men and representatives of industry on such problems as design, research, manufacture, supply and logistics. The programs emphasize military-industry coordination in time of war. The school also sponsors seminars throughout the United States for reserve officers and businessmen.

Fort McNair is also the scene of a summer seminar for reserve officers. One now in progress presents a condensed version of the National War College courses.

"In all these classes," Adm. Lee said, "we have top talent. The ferment of ideas in such groups of men is perhaps our best educational tool."

"This is no center for military domination or centralization," emphasized another officer. "It's just the opposite. It trains men to appreciate the intricacies of the world and to better contribute to an understanding of international problems."

Lee's role as commandant emphasizes the college's inter-service understanding. The tall, graying admiral looks right at home as he walks through the fortress-like old brick archways of his headquarters, a building raised in 1903 as the Army War College and dedicated to Elihu Root, who as secretary of war, formalized the practices and operations of the Army's general staff.

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