

# The Engineer School

*By First Lieutenant Thomas A. Pedersen, Corps of Engineers*

**N**estled on the peaceful banks of the Potomac River in the verdant countryside of old Virginia, on the historic Fairfax estate of 18th Century fame, is situated the world-famous Engineer School, the seat of learning for the Corps of Engineers. Recent investigation has disclosed this to be the oldest Service school in the army, whose roots extend through the pages of history for over 150 years. West Point, New York, Willetts Point, New York, and Washington Barracks, D.C., were former homes of the school.\*

From a humble beginning on the Hudson to its present establishment on the Potomac, and throughout each succeeding war, the Engineer School was to demonstrate the wisdom of its founders and the excellence of its teaching. The Civil War proved for the first time the vital significance of the Corps of Engineers and it is not surprising that many of the famous generals of that war, including Meade and Robert E. Lee, were Engineer officers. It was in the Virginian campaign that the federal Engineers, on the night of June 14, 1864, built the longest ponton bridge in history, over 2,000 feet, across the James River. By midnight, June 15, Grant's entire army with all its artillery had crossed the river. The Rhine crossing was still 80 years away. It was near the James River crossing that hundreds of engineer officers, students at the Engineer School, received their instruction in modern river crossing operations in preparation for the hardest school of applications—actual warfare.

But it took World War II to convince the world that modern war is an engineer's war. The miracles performed on every beachhead, river, harbor, and airfield throughout the globe, are tributes to the glorious tradition of the Corps

of Engineers. It was not a mere coincidence that the atom bomb project was entrusted to these same Engineers. Since the war began, over 23,000 Engineer officers were taught modern military engineering at the Engineer Officer Candidate School; over 20,000 Engineer officers were given additional training in specialized military subjects; and over 22,000 enlisted specialists were trained in its modern shops and classrooms. Among the many subjects taught are included mines and booby traps; bridges; camouflage; water purification and supply; airdrome construction; roads; demolitions; map reproduction; surveying; photography; and Engineer heavy equipment, including bulldozers, graders, scrapers, shovels, and pile drivers. The battle importance of the subjects taught and the high standard of instruction have attracted Engineer officers and enlisted men from over thirty allied nations to come and study or visit at the school.

The teachings at the school include only proven doctrine: lessons learned and tested in battle. Intelligence reports from all the theaters are received, studied, and evaluated for their military significance. These reports are supplemented by first-hand reports of overseas observers who are constantly on the alert for new ideas, techniques, and enemy material. The cream of this sifting process is incorporated at once into the instruction at the Engineer School and published in the many engineer manuals which are prepared and written by its Research and Training Publications Department. These manuals are written and edited by a skilled staff of professional writers with literary and editorial experience, and are illustrated by a group of artists many of whom were nationally known in civilian life. These publications are then printed and bound by the school's \$350,000 reproduction



**Abbot Hall, Headquarters Building, The Engineer School**



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plant operated by an expert staff of experienced technicians. This is one of the finest plants of its kind in the nation and is capable of turning out all varieties of printing, lithography, and photography.

As described briefly by Lt. Gen. Raymond A. Wheeler, the present Chief of Engineers, in his article in this issue, many Engineer officers held high commands during World War II.

But now the Engineer School turns to peacetime instruction and training. And in the quiet countryside of Virginia, on land bombarded by British war ships in the War of 1812, and where Lee once established his headquarters

in the Civil War, the Engineer School begins a new chapter in its illustrious history.

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"See *What You Should Know About the Army Engineers*, by Lt. Col. (now Brig. Gen.) Paul W. Thompson. 

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